



First 5 San Joaquin – PoP Program Profile

County Background

San Joaquin County's Preschool for All Program (PFA) offers voluntary, free preschool programs to all families with four-year olds living within district boundaries of the Lincoln and Manteca Unified School Districts. These services are provided through a variety of public and private funding sources (State Preschool, First 5 San Joaquin, private preschool providers, and family child care providers). The districts continue to provide, upgrade, and expand preschool services that meet quality standards for all preschool-aged children in the county.

Children Served

As of March 2008, San Joaquin County served more than 900 four-year olds. One of the school districts reported serving more than 160 English Language Learners. Both districts reported serving more than 80 children with special needs. San Joaquin operated 40 sessions for 3-3.5 hours per day, with 22 morning sessions and 18 afternoon sessions. All sessions operated on an academic year and were held in unused K-12 buildings and private facilities.

Providers reported using Reggio Emilia and Houghton Mifflin PRE-K Alphafriends curricula. A total of 28 teachers participated, 25 percent of whom were at quality level and 75 percent at advancing level. A total of 50 assistant teachers participated, 14 percent of whom were at quality level and 86 percent at advancing level. No teachers or assistant teachers were at entry level. All teaching staff had Child Development Permits and participated in the county's CARES program, which supports professional growth and educational attainment.

Partners

First 5 San Joaquin partners with both the Lincoln and Manteca Unified School Districts, San Joaquin County Office of Education Child Care Professional Growth Project (local CARES program), Family Resource and Referral Center Quality Environments for All Children, Health Plan of San Joaquin Healthy Kids Program, Harder + Company Community Research, and Rice, Bonham and Associates (consultation on reimbursement guidelines).

Local Evaluation

First 5 San Joaquin selected Harder + Company Community Research to conduct the evaluation for First 5 San Joaquin's Power of Preschool Demonstration Project as well as the School Readiness Longitudinal Study. The longitudinal study of preschool children started in 2007. It will document changes in school-related development and achievement over time, while the inclusion of a comparison cohort will demonstrate whether a child receiving PoP services has improved levels of comparative development and achievement. Baseline data including DRDP-R, ASQ, ECERS-R, parent survey, teacher child report, and teacher survey were collected in spring 2008. Researchers will collect parent surveys and school reports annually in kindergarten (2008-09), 1st grade (2009-10), 2nd grade (2010-11), and 3rd grade (2011-12). In addition to the parent survey and school reports, researchers will collect standardized test results during the second and third grade periods.

Innovations

The First 5 San Joaquin PFA program in both districts licenses additional kindergarten rooms that can be shared with preschool programs in order to maximize the unused capacity within current public school programs. The districts have been steadily building toward full capacity in the State Preschool Program. The priority of both the state preschools and the First 5 preschools is to first serve four-year olds.

First 5 San Joaquin was one of the first counties in California to implement the use of the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) database. All preschool classrooms were assessed using the ERS assessments and ERS database. The utilization of this database supported increased ERS scores. In 2007-08 the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) overall scores range was 5.56 – 6.69 with an average overall score of 5.92.

Other unique program aspects include:

- Health insurance screening of all children, vision and hearing screening.
- Raising a Reader® book bag program provided in the majority of sessions.
- Articulation with the school districts.
- Inclusion of preschool students into the K-12 school database/tracking system, and the Longitudinal Study.

Local Funding

To fully support the PoP program, it is necessary for significant contributions to be made by the local First 5 county commissions and partners. This funding along with the First 5 California contribution enhances state, federal and/or private funds to fully finance local county PoP programs.

At the end of fiscal year 2006-07, First 5 San Joaquin reported a cumulative expenditure of \$3.2 million from the First 5 San Joaquin Commission for the first two years of program operations. This funding does not include any in-kind contributions from either First 5 San Joaquin or its partners.

In addition to First 5 San Joaquin Commission investment in the PoP program, an additional 347 preschool spaces were funded in FY2006-07 to expand preschool efforts throughout San Joaquin County.



County and State PoP Lessons Learned

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The Power of Preschool (PoP) programs are by design demonstration programs. Consequently, each county developed its program model based upon the required quality criteria, but defined their own methods and strategies of implementation. These programs are evolving based on experiences, challenges encountered and successes achieved. Through this process, both First 5 California and the nine county partners are learning significant lessons during both the planning and implementation stages. The lessons learned will be important considerations for policy development and preschool program implementation on a statewide basis.

County Lessons Learned

At this midway point of PoP program implementation eight counties shared their lessons learned, which are listed below:

- **First 5 LA**
 - ❖ Improving qualifications of the preschool workforce will not necessarily result in increased compensation.
 - ❖ Facility development process takes much longer than originally anticipated. Common delays involve contracting and due diligence, receiving/approving architectural proposals, construction delays, etc.
- **First 5 Commission of San Diego County**
 - ❖ External reviews of preschool sites are more time consuming and more difficult to manage than originally thought.
 - ❖ Recruiting well qualified, bilingual reviewers has been challenging.
 - ❖ Family child care home involvement has been very easy. Family child care home providers are savvy and adapt to change quickly. Use of FCC home providers may be slightly more expensive to embrace.
- **First 5 San Francisco**
 - ❖ Outreach to providers is very important and ongoing communications with stakeholders essential.
 - ❖ Participating sites must be involved and informed to help shape program policies.
 - ❖ Paperwork burden, perceived or real, impacts perspectives of potential and participating sites.
 - ❖ Process evaluation is critical to track the progress of implementation during startup.

- ❖ Investments in infrastructure for the system are important, but balance is critical.
- **First 5 San Joaquin**
 - ❖ The reimbursement method needs to allow for consistent reimbursement and budgetary flexibility for preschool service delivery.
 - ❖ Reimbursement needs to be made timely to providers/sites.
 - ❖ The option of local providers submitting one preschool budget for all spaces (regardless of site or quality level) allows more budgetary flexibility for preschool delivery, provides a separation of fiscal review and quality issues, and reduces paperwork and staff time reporting.
 - ❖ A policy pertaining to the use of long-term substitutes must be developed that maintains the classroom quality level over a long period of time.
- **First 5 San Mateo County**
 - ❖ In order to promote a higher BA completion rate among teachers, and a workforce that has the expertise to create optimal, nurturing learning environments for young children, a more coordinated approach is needed. This approach would involve a partnership between institutions of higher education, funders, early childhood programs and other professional development and mentoring services that research shows have an impact on teacher skills.
 - ❖ Early childhood mental health consultation services have helped some classrooms to better meet the needs of children with special needs, especially those with behavioral concerns, but the need still far outpaces available resources. Moreover, the majority of programs said there is a need for enhanced collaboration between PFA and school district special education staff. Training is needed, specifically on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire.
 - ❖ Resources are not sufficient at the local level to develop and implement evaluations that are truly capable of measuring impact in all the major areas addressed by PoP.
- **FIRST 5 Santa Clara County**
 - ❖ Successfully bringing together organizations across diverse sectors (state- and federally-funded, local non-profit, small business, family child care home) demands thoughtful investments of time, funding, facilitation and other support resources.
 - ❖ Individualized support for quality enhancement at the organizational, site, and teacher level is essential. A Quality Enhancement Support Team (QuEST) that Santa Clara County

established is composed of experts in various domains of early education. These experts work in partnership with preschool administrators and teachers to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for each PoP session, based on teacher and administrator self assessments and observations by the QuEST member.

- **First 5 Ventura County**
 - ❖ The business community was under-represented in the PfA planning process.
 - ❖ A sustained public funding source needs to be obtained. In lieu of that, counties need to carefully determine degree of ramp-up when funding is temporary.
- **First 5 Yolo**
 - ❖ The importance of planning prior to program implementation is critical to successful implementation.
 - ❖ Private funding for PoP has been difficult to obtain. Representatives of private sources convey that preschool should be government-funded as opposed to privately funded.

State Lessons Learned

In reflecting on the development and implementation of the PoP Demonstration Program, First 5 California has identified the following important lessons learned:

- **Program**
 - ❖ To ensure quality preschool environment ratings, there needs to be more trained external reviewers (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised and Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised) across the state.
 - ❖ Evaluation design must be well-developed and incorporated into the Request for Application with the intent of immediate implementation once the application is approved. Evaluation questions should be clear, concise, realistic, and measurable.
 - ❖ Institutions of higher education need to be a primary partner in building the foundation for workforce development.
- **Funding**
 - ❖ A sustainable funding source needs to be secured.
 - ❖ First 5 California reimbursement rates are less than ideal. Rates need to be realistic to encourage local county and site participation.
 - ❖ Invoice methodology should be based on the teacher quality level for a classroom of children rather than a per space

reimbursement to be consistent with the reimbursement structure.

- **State Administration**

- ❖ Program database is needed to collect and compile county and state information.
- ❖ Effective communication channels between state and county programs need to be established to ensure program effectiveness.
- ❖ More resources at the state level need to be identified to provide meaningful technical assistance to county commissions.



Conclusions and Next Steps

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Significant Lessons Learned

In preparing this report, we discovered that counties experienced and identified significant lessons learned that cover a spectrum of challenges and successes. The lessons' breadth and scope lend themselves to both program improvement and policy considerations when presenting recommendations to the legislature and policymakers.

Conclusions

1. Dedicated County Staff

There is a very strong commitment on the part of the county PoP staff to implement high-quality programs in their counties. County PoP staff face many challenges at the local level, both in the planning and implementation stages. County staff work diligently through these challenges to provide quality services to preschool children and their families. The nine First 5 county commissions should be applauded for their willingness to make PoP a priority program within their counties.

2. High Teacher Quality

A majority of the PoP teaching staff are at the advanced or quality education levels. Previously, program developers assumed that the majority would start at the entry level and that it would take the full five years for teachers to reach the higher degree requirements.

3. Reimbursement Linked to Teacher Quality

The link between teacher qualifications and the reimbursement structure is important. However, we still need to study how to maximize this connection. It appears that a pattern is emerging that bases reimbursement rates by classroom depending on the teacher education level rather than by individual spaces filled by children.

4. Partnerships

Recruiting and retaining partners is essential to program success. The counties reported the use of numerous partners assisting them in program delivery. Partnerships vary from local businesses to institutions of higher education to local social service agencies; each is important to the success of meeting children and family needs.

5. Collaboration with Institutions of Higher Education

The counties actively engaged with local colleges and universities show multiple strategies that strengthen the workforce within their counties. The flexibility of institutions of higher education working with

the PoP programs to increase and develop classes for professional development clearly assists PoP teaching staff to achieve higher degrees related to the field of early childhood education.

6. Serving Children in Highest Need Areas

By design, the PoP Demonstration Program required services to begin in areas of high need, as defined by low performing schools with Academic Performance Index scores of one through five. This requirement has been validated by a key finding in the recently released RAND study, *Prepared to Learn: The Nature and Quality of Early Care and Education of Preschool-Age Children in California*. The study finds that children who could benefit most from preschool are least likely to participate. RAND identifies these children, who fall into the following groups: 1) Latinos and African Americans; 2) those with low parental education; 3) English Language Learners; and 4) those from economically disadvantaged families (as defined by the California Department of Education). Specifically, the RAND finding indicates that “Participation in ECE is not uniform, with lower rates for children in disadvantaged socioeconomic groups.”¹⁰ This finding reflects the importance of PoP in continuing to give priority service to children in the highest need areas.

Next Steps

During the remainder of the program, several next steps need attention:

1. Define program recommendations for statewide policy development.
2. Further study of the reimbursement structure process to determine which method to use in reimbursing local programs.
3. Capitalize on the child outcome data of PoP counties’ evaluation efforts.
4. Explore how to use these nine demonstration programs as models to replicate throughout the state.
5. Investigate strategies to secure partnerships that effectively support and enhance preschool program quality. This investigation should also consider how to more effectively engage parents in understanding the importance of preschool and maximizing family participation.

¹⁰ Ibid. 1, 147

6. Continue building uniform messages among all provider types and stakeholders in the field of early education.
7. Seek a sustainable statewide funding source.

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