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## Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

### For First 5 Commission of San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative

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## **Introduction**

Since March 15, 2011, the American Institutes for Research has been assisting the First 5 Commission of San Diego in conducting research to support the development of a Statement of Work for the Quality Preschool Initiative (QPI) in San Diego.

### Key activities to date include:

- Identification of best practices for quality preschool using the following methods:
  - National/state literature review;
  - Review of state/local evaluations of First 5 Power of Preschool projects;
  - Key informant interviews in other counties regarding Power of Preschool experiences;
  - Attendance at the California Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) meetings to identify practices that meet ELAC criteria;
  - Efforts to address a list of questions provided by First 5 Commission staff regarding 12 focus areas, including selection of communities for the initiative, targeted participation rate, child development outcomes, screenings and referrals, reduction of expulsions, kindergarten transition, parent engagement, provider coaching and mentoring, curriculum, teacher stipends, program quality measurement, and program finance.
- Conduct a Community Forum on May 11, 2011 to obtain input from stakeholders on design of the Quality Preschool Initiative;
- Presentation of preliminary findings to the First 5 San Diego Technical and Professional Advisory Committee (TPAC) and facilitation of discussion on May 23, 2011 to obtain TPAC feedback related to the Quality Preschool Initiative; and
- Initial work on a QPI cost estimate to help inform AIR recommendations to the First 5 Commission of San Diego.

### Remaining tasks to be completed include:

- Completion of cost estimate;
- Preparation of presentation to the Commission on June 13, 2011;
- Finalization of this report to include complete cost estimate;
- Development of an early draft Scope of Work incorporating feedback from the First 5 Commission of San Diego.

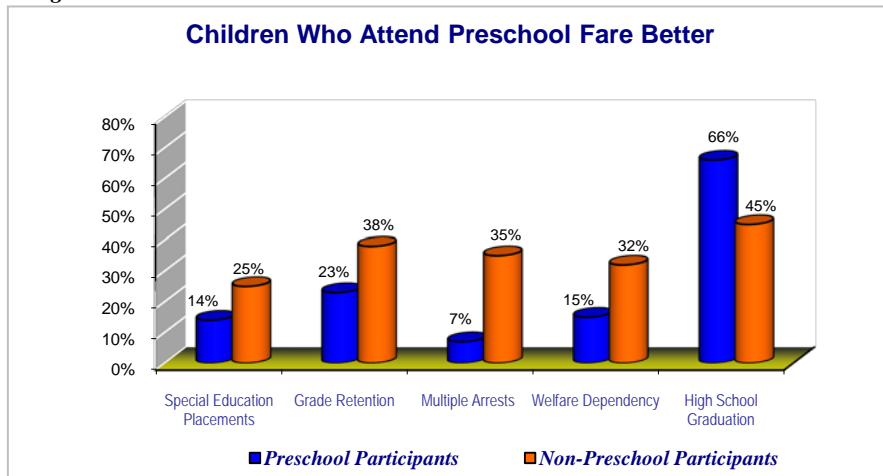
## **Review of Best Practices in Preschool**

### Promise of Preschool

There is abundant evidence that quality preschool programs can help improve children's readiness for school and success in school and life, with higher test scores, better school attendance, reduced grade retention, higher rates of school completion, greater likelihood of attending college, and higher lifetime earnings (Reynolds et al, 2007; Karoly & Bigelow, 2005; Ramey et al, 2000).

By reducing grade retention, use of special education, dependence on cash assistance, and involvement in crime, quality preschool programs are estimated to save taxpayers from \$4 to \$17 for every dollar invested (Reynolds et al., 2007; Schweinhart, 2004; Karoly & Bigelow, 2005).

Figure 1



Of particular interest, given the demographics of San Diego County where an estimated 81% of the participants in the Power of Preschool program are Latino and 61%<sup>1</sup> are English Language Learners, is that high-quality preschool programs have been found to benefit especially those Latino children whose mothers have little education, have low incomes, and who speak little English (Karoly et al, 2008; Gormley et al, 2005).

While the benefits are most dramatic for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, attendance at a quality program is correlated with higher achievement in elementary school for children in all income groups (Gormley et al, 2005).

### Only Quality Programs Fulfill the Preschool Promise

Unfortunately, only quality preschool programs have been found to produce the kind of dramatic child outcomes described above. There is no evidence that preschool programs of average quality improve school readiness, raise school achievement, or enhance school completion (Pianta et al, 2009). Poor quality programs may actually leave already disadvantaged children further behind, and thus increase the achievement gap (Phillips, 2010; National Institute of Child Health and Development, 2002).

<sup>1</sup> 82% were Latino and 61% were English Language Learners in FY 2007-08, according the *Power of Preschool Program Evaluation Report* (First 5 California, September, 2009).

## Key Features of Quality Programs

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has established the following Preschool Quality Benchmarks:

### NIEER PRESCHOOL QUALITY BENCHMARKS

- Comprehensive early learning standards
  - Physical Well-Being and Motor Development
  - Social and Emotional Development
  - Approaches toward Learning
  - Language Development
  - Cognition and General Knowledge
- Lead Teacher with a BA, at a minimum
- Lead Teacher must have specialized training in pre-K or early education
- Assistant Teacher must have Child Development Associate (CDA) or equivalent, at a minimum
- Teachers must have in-service training of at least 15 hours per year
- Maximum class size of 20 or lower
- Staff-child ratio of 1:10 or better
- Vision, hearing, health screening/referral and at least one support service for families
- At least 1 meal must be provided daily
- Site visits to monitor program must demonstrate adherence to state program standards

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research (2010). *The State of Preschool 2010. State Preschool Yearbook*, supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts. Rutgers Graduate School of Education.

Based on syntheses of more than 40 years of research (Zigler, Gilliam & Jones, 2006; Jacobson, 2004; Peisner-Feinberg et al, 2000; Jorde-Bloom, 1988), the California Early Learning Quality Advisory Committee (2010) identified the following key components of high-quality early learning and care programs:

### KEY PRESCHOOL QUALITY FEATURES

- Intensive education (e.g., small classes, low ratios, regular attendance), which ensures that children receive consistent, individualized attention over an extended period of time.
- A learning environment with adequate physical space, equipment and materials in which teachers interact responsively with children and help develop their social-emotional, thinking and language skills.
- Family involvement and services provided in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner.
- Adequate numbers of well-trained, qualified staff, with salaries and benefits sufficient to limit staff turnover
- Commitment to continuous quality improvement based on measures of teacher performance and children's progress
- Program directors who understand child development; provide leadership and recruit, train, and support staff; and manage the fiscal and legal responsibilities

Source: California Early Learning Quality Improvement Advisory Committee (2010). *Dream Big for Our Youngest Children*. Final Report.

## How California's Programs for Preschool-Age Children Rank Nationally

California has two main sets of state standards governing programs for preschool-age children – Title 22 licensing requirements, and Title 5 standards for state-contracted programs. In addition, there are federal standards for Head Start, and a publicly funded “non-system” of license-exempt care (California Early Learning Quality Improvement Advisory Committee, 2010).

Based on a recent national study of oversight and regulation, California's Title 22 licensing system ranks very low -- 46<sup>th</sup> in the nation (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2009). Only 30 percent of programs are required to be inspected annually in California, as compared to 50 to 100 percent in most states. In addition, California's licensing requirements are lenient in several important areas. The center requirements allow considerably larger-than-recommended staff-child ratios (1 adult for 12 four-year-olds), do not require staff to complete any annual training, and do not require any post-secondary degree for lead teachers (NACCRRA, 2011).

Title 5 programs for state-contracted child development programs, such as California's State Preschool Program, are required to meet substantially higher standards. However, while 15 state-supported programs across the nation meet 9-10 of the NIEER benchmarks, NIEER credits California's State Preschool Program with meeting only four – requirements for specialized training in Pre-K, at least 15 hours of in-service training, staff-child ratio of 1:10 or better, and site visits to monitor quality (NIEER, 2010). It seems likely that the implementation of the state's *Early Learning Foundations* will eventually qualify the state for meeting the benchmark for comprehensive early education standards.

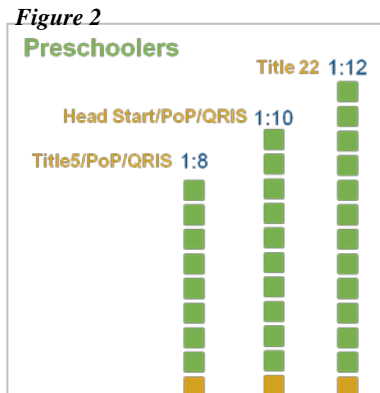
NIEER also ranks state-supported prekindergarten programs based on the percentage of eligible children enrolled, and on the level of expenditure per child. On these criteria, California's State Preschool Program ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> nationally in percentage of eligible children served, and 12<sup>th</sup> in level of state money spent on the program per child (NIEER, 2010).

The RAND Corporation looked at a broader range of programs, including private fee-based as well as publicly subsidized programs, serving preschool-age children in California. Based on visits to 250 center-based programs across the state, researchers concluded that programs were most successful in meeting benchmarks for staff-child ratios and providing social and emotional support. The largest shortfall was the extent to which programs provided the kind of instruction in thinking and language skills that are most closely linked to school readiness. Other shortfalls were in the level of teacher education and in the use of research-based curricula (Karloly, Ghosh-Dastidar, Zellman, Perlman, & Fernyhough, 2008).

## The Contribution of First 5 Power of Preschool and the Recently Proposed Early Learning Quality Improvement System

It is against this background on the overall status of programs serving preschool-age children in California that the contribution of First 5 Power of Preschool is best appreciated.

As shown in Figure 2, the PoP requirements are considerably more stringent than the Title 22 licensing requirements for staff-child ratios.



In addition, as shown in Figure 3, the PoP requirements are more stringent than the Title 22 licensing standards or the Title 5 State Preschool requirements for teacher education qualifications. On both these dimensions, the PoP criteria meet the NIEER Preschool Quality Benchmarks. However, the PoP criteria for teacher education are still slightly less than those proposed for the top tier of the California Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) (California Department of Education, 2010).



The First 5 Power of Preschool Demonstration Project requirements and California’s recently proposed QRIS criteria also address program quality assessment. The PoP requires outside assessments of program quality using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and a score of 5 in order to be considered a “full quality” program. The proposed California Early Learning QRIS adds a requirement for external assessments using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) in order for a program to be considered for the top two tiers. In focusing on assessment of teacher-student interaction, the CLASS places more weight on the process features of quality considered most important for enhancing children’s school readiness.

The following table compares the top tier requirements for First 5 PoP and California’s proposed QRIS with the 10 NIEER Preschool Quality Benchmarks:

## Comparison of NIEER Quality Benchmarks, First 5 PoP Grant Criteria and Proposed CAEL QRIS Quality Elements

Policy	NIEER Preschool Quality Benchmark	First 5 California PoP Bridge Requirements for Top Tier	CAEL QRIS Elements for Top Tier
Early learning Standards	Standards must be comprehensive across 5 developmental domains identified by the National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical well-being &amp; motor devel</li> <li>Social &amp; emotional development</li> <li>Approaches to learning</li> <li>Communicative skills</li> <li>Cognition &amp; general knowledge</li> </ul>	Preschool content and curriculum standards articulated with Kindergarten-grade 3; Children’s readiness for school as measured by the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) includes NEGP dimensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health &amp; physical development</li> <li>Emotional well-being &amp; social competence</li> <li>Approaches to general learning</li> <li>Communicative skills</li> <li>Cognition &amp; general knowledge</li> </ul>	Fully integrate social, emotional, cognitive & physical domains of Early Learning <i>Foundations &amp; Frameworks</i> in lesson plans linked to developmentally, culturally, linguistically appropriate curriculum
Lead Teacher degree	Lead teacher must have a BA, at a minimum	Lead teacher must have a BA	Lead teacher must have a BA degree or master’s degree
Specialized Training	Lead teacher must have specialized training in ECE	Lead teacher must have at least 24 units in ECE (including core) or ECE or Multiple Subject Teaching credential, or Child Development Permit Matrix Program Director	Lead teacher must have a BA in ECE or a closely related field with 48+ units of ECE OR a master’s degree in ECE
Assistant teacher education qualification	Assistant teacher must have a CDA or the equivalent, at a minimum	Assistant teacher must have Associate’s degree (or equivalent coursework in BA program) with appropriate ECE credits (recommend 24 units)	Not specified
Teacher In-Service Training	Teachers must have at least 15 hours of in-service training annually	Staff will participate in professional development to educate children with varied language and cultures, and children with disabilities and ther special needs.	Teachers (in all 5 tiers of the proposed QRIS) must have 21 hours of professional development annually
Class Size	Maximum class size of 20	Class size of 20 for 4-year-olds, or 24 (depending on the staff-child ratio)	Class size of 20 or 24 (depending on the staff-child ratio)

<b>Policy</b>	<b>NIEER Preschool Quality Benchmark</b>	<b>First 5 California PoP Bridge Requirements for Top Tier</b>	<b>CAEL QRIS Elements for Top Tier</b>
<b>Staff-Child Ratio</b>	Staff-child ratio of 1:10 or better	1:8 for class size of 24; 1:10 for class size of 20	1:8 for class size of 24; 1:10 for class size of 20
<b>Screening, Referral</b>	Vision, hearing, health/screening and referral	PoP sites must perform periodic health and developmental screenings. Most programs use ASQ. In addition, all programs use DRDP-R.	Developmentally, culturally, linguistically appropriate child assessments.
<b>Food</b>	At least one meal per day provided	Nutritious meals and snacks using USDA Child & Adult Food Program standards	Not specified, although to obtain a score of “5” or better on ECERS-R dimension of meals and snacks, meals must meet USDA guidelines, and most staff sit with children during meals and snacks.
<b>Monitoring</b>	Site visits to ensure program complies with standards must be conducted.	School- or center-based programs must receive a global score of “5” or better on ECERS-R as verified by an external monitor, and family childcare homes must receive same on FDCRS/FCCERS	Programs must have overall score of “6” on ECERS-R based on an independent assessment, and all subscales must be completed. In addition, CLASS is required to measure teacher-child interactions in alternate periods.
<b>Family Involvement</b>	No separate benchmark for family involvement, but benchmark for screening/referral includes requirement for at least one support service for families	Implement family outreach and involvement, and connect with wrap around child care and other family supports as needed. Also, to obtain a score of “5” on subscale relating to provisions for parents in ECERS-R, program must urge parents to observe children in group prior to enrollment, share child-related information, and use variety of alternatives to encourage family involvement	Programs must partner and advocate with parents; program must receive an average score of “6” on ECERS-with a quality improvement plan required if receive less than “6” on any subscale
<b>Program Leadership</b>	None specified.	No degree requirements specified for directors; PAS or BAS assessment of each program is required for each program at entry into PoP. .	Director must have master’s degree with 30 units core ECE including specialized courses, 21 units’ management, or Administrative Credential. Continuous improvement through a PAS or BAS action plan.



## How San Diego's PoP Program Criteria Compare with NIEER Benchmarks, First 5 California PoP Requirements, and CAEL QRIS Elements:

- The First 5 Commission of San Diego's PoP program is in compliance with all of the First 5 PoP criteria, which in turn are well aligned with the NIEER Preschool Benchmarks.
- For 2011-12, San Diego's PoP program is moving toward the proposed higher number of ECE units for the lead teacher for the top tier.
- In order to fully align with the QRIS elements, San Diego might also consider establishing director educational qualifications for the top tier, and determining how to use the PAS or BAS as a more regular part of continuous program improvement.

### **Preliminary Findings**

Based on our literature review, interviews with key informants in other counties administering First 5 PoP projects, and feedback from the recent Community Forum and TPAC meeting, we offer the following preliminary findings re: 12 focus areas to be addressed in the RFP for new Quality Preschool Initiative:

#### **1. Target Population: What communities should PFA be in? How were communities selected in other PoP counties, and what are other models?**

- With more than 6,000 children enrolled in 2010-11, San Diego's PoP program ranks second in size only to that in Los Angeles, which serves 8,600 children (Ayala, May 2011).
- San Diego's PoP program also serves a higher percentage of Latino children and English Language Learners than in all but three other PoP programs-- Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Ventura counties (First 5 California, 2009). The First 5 Commission of San Diego County selected communities to participate in PFA based on the First 5 California PFA demonstration grant criteria. To be eligible, a county had to commit to serving at least 70% of four-year-olds within the geographic boundaries of a county, city, or school district. While services were to be made available to all children regardless of family income within the boundaries of the selected geographic area(s), First 5 California PFA/PoP criteria gave priority to phasing in preschool services in areas with a high percentage of low API schools, English language learners, and low-income families.
- In keeping with these grant criteria and its San Diego County Preschool for All Master Plan, the First 5 Commission of San Diego initially selected six communities – National City, Lemon Grove, San Ysidro, South Bay, Escondido and Valley Center/Pauma.
  - Five of the six clearly met one if not all of the criteria for high need.
  - While Valley Center/Pauma had only two low API schools, there is a large pocket of poverty and very few preschool options available to low income families in Pauma.

- In subsequent years the Commission has expanded the program to five more communities: Borrego Springs, Chula Vista, El Cajon, Mountain Empire, and Vista.
- One area of high need not currently served in San Diego's PoP program is in central San Diego, where there about 2,000 children residing in neighborhoods with low-performing schools and relatively high rates of poverty within the boundaries of the San Diego Unified School District. This community was not selected initially because of the First 5 California requirement to serve 70% of the children in the entire school district catchment. Not only is the school district catchment very large but also it is diverse, with families ranging from very low-income to quite affluent. Serving the whole district area would have absorbed the bulk of the PoP budget and precluded the implementation of a county-wide demonstration project, which had been recommended by the San Diego Preschool Master Plan. (Note: A table ranking the zip codes in San Diego County by percentage of children in neighborhoods with API 1-5 schools, percentage of kindergartners eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch, and percentage of ELL is being prepared.) In the final report, AIR will also identify any other potential high-need areas in San Diego County that are not currently participating in the PoP program.
- AIR is preparing a cost estimate to determine the cost of expanding the PoP program to include 70% of the four-year-olds in all of the Central San Diego zip codes. We will also prepare an estimate focusing on the four highest need zip codes (92102, 92105, 92113, and 92114) within Central San Diego, based on API school scores 1-5 and percentage of children living in low-income families. The estimates will assume a mixture of fully funded and enhanced slots, and will include not only the cost of per-child reimbursements, but also of teacher stipends, program quality assessments, coaching and mentoring, and parent engagement.
- If other high-need areas emerge from our analysis, AIR will also attempt to estimate the cost of expanding the QPI to include these areas. It is important to note that we are developing this cost analysis in a constantly changing budget climate.

## **2. Participation Rate: Should the 70% target be maintained?**

- The 70% target was based on First 5 California PoP requirements, as well as experience in the few states where free preschool is available to all four-year-olds. For example, in Oklahoma, where preschool has been free and available for nearly a decade, 70.7% of all four-year-olds participate in the state-funded prekindergarten program; the percentage rises to 85% when enrollment in Head Start and pre-k special education is included (NIEER, 2010). Similarly, in Florida, where there is also a universal free preschool program, 68.1% of four-year-olds participate in the state-funded program, with the percentage rising to 77.8 % when Head Start and pre-k special education are factored in.
- In a program like San Diego's, which is free to all children but only located in communities which demonstrate a high need for preschool, the argument can be made

that even more than 70% of four-year-olds need to participate in order to result in a community-wide improvement in school readiness.

- However, in the course of its interviews of key informants on PoP projects in other counties, AIR learned that participation rates tend to vary somewhat across the communities served. For example, the First 5 Ventura County PoP program serves approximately 82% of the four-year-olds in one school district catchment area, but only 32% in the other community served (Puls,2011; Murphy, 2011). ).
- One of the strengths of the PoP program in San Diego County that has enhanced its participation rate is the inclusion of a diverse group of providers, In 2010-11, 40 providers are participating: 8 school district preschool programs, 1 faith-based preschool, 2 college-based preschool, 2 Head Starts (MAAC Project & Episcopal Community Services); 2 for-profit and 6 private, non-profit agencies; and 19 family child care providers (Preschool for All Program Summary, 2011).
- In summary, the answer to the above question is “it depends”.
  - To promote school readiness, it seems important to aim to serve at least 70% of the four-year-olds in the highest need zip codes.
  - The current First 5 California PoP Bridge requirements describe the target population as “universal in API 1-5 attendance areas”. To meet the requirements to draw down First 5 PoP Bridge matching funds, the First 5 Commission’s quality preschool initiative should probably continue to aim to serve 70% of four-year-olds, in communities with low API schools.
  - But in the zip codes participating in PoP with few low API schools, setting a lower participation rate might be appropriate and justifiable.
- As indicated in the table below, three of the 11 communities participating in PoP – National, San Ysidro, and South Bay--already serve more than 70% of the four-year-olds in the community. These were among the original programs participating in San Diego’s PoP program. With the exception of Lemon Grove, where a 43 percent participation rate is estimated, the other two communities—Borrego and Valley-Center – which have a much lower participation rate joined the program substantially later.
- For the final report, AIR is preparing a cost estimate for increasing the participation rate to 70% in the remaining communities currently participating in the PoP program. The chart below shows the estimated participation rate in the various communities.

Participation Rates in 11 PoP Communities								
Community	Percent of four-year-olds currently served	Projected number of four-year-olds in this community in 2012-13	Percent of four-year-olds served in 2012-13 with existing slots	Number of additional children needed to get to 70%	Number of new enhanced part-day State Preschool slots	Number of new enhanced full-day State Preschool slots	Number of new enhanced Head Start slots	Number of new fully-funded slots
Borrego Springs	0%	43	47%	10	0	0	0	10
Cajon Valley	3%	575	121%	0	0	0	0	0
Chula Vista	55%	1648	54%	269	149	0	120	0
Escondido	31%	1453	67%	44	0	0	0	44
Lemon Grove	44%	514	43%	137	94	43	0	0
Mtn. Empire	60%	84	57%	11	0	0	0	11
National	80%	875	80%	0	0	0	0	0
San Ysidro	90%	557	85%	0	0	0	0	0
South Bay	79%	998	80%	0	0	0	0	0
Valley Center/ Pauma Vista	37%	351	35%	122	0	0	0	122
TOTAL								

### 3. Child Development: Is the “dosage” sufficient? Should PFA be more hours, year round, multi-year?

- First 5 Power of Preschool Bridge requirements, like the initial PoP Program criteria, continue to require at least three hours per day, for 175-180 days.
- The Chicago Child-Parent Centers, a program which has demonstrated long-term benefits for participants up to age 21 (Reynolds et al, 2002), provides a structured half-day program (three hours per day ) during the school year. While children who participated in the CPC program for two years had higher academic readiness scores than children who had been in the program for one year, the marginal advantage of the additional year was considerably smaller than the first (Karoly and Bigelow, 2005).
- The length of the program year may also be important. When preschool was in recess during the summer months, children in Georgia’s prekindergarten program were found to lose a portion of what they had learned (Henry et al, 2003).
- The Educare program has found that age of entry into quality early learning and care programs is a key determinant of the child outcomes. Children from very disadvantaged families entering the full-day, full-year, high-quality program in Tulsa,

Oklahoma as infants were found to meet the national average in language skills at school entry. While children entering at age three or four still showed considerable progress, the gains were less dramatic (Reference and more specifics to be supplied in next version of this draft report).

- At issue, of course, is not only the impact of the length of the program day and year on school readiness and school achievement, but also the impact on the ability of children of working parents to participate. As pointed out by the San Diego County Child Care and Development Council, the need for full-time care by working families remains high with 85% of calls to the San Diego Resource and Referral Agency requesting full-time services for three- to four-year-olds. (California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, 2009). The Council therefore recommends placing more of the First 5 PoP spaces in programs that have successfully braided funding streams to provide full-day care and education, and that provide flexible hours/days of service to meet the needs of families.
- The answer to the question of “dosage” again depends: For the very most disadvantaged children, there is evidence that entry into a quality program at an early age, and for a full-day and year, has greater benefits than part-day, part-year program. It is also important to have some programs in settings that accommodate the needs of children of working parents for full-day, full-year care. But for a large-scale program serving low-income children, as in Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers, there is also evidence that a part-day program beginning with preschool-age children can have substantial long-term benefits.

#### **4. Parents: What are best practices for parent engagement, parent empowerment, and parent education in ECE settings?**

- There is substantial evidence that family involvement is one of the keys to a successful preschool program. The Chicago Child-Parent Centers found that family engagement is an essential component of a high-quality child care program and that family engagement during the early years, which was related to positive student outcomes in elementary school (Meidel and Reynolds, 1998). Family participation in education is twice as predictive of students’ academic success as family socio-economic status (Silverman et al, 2010).
- While most program directors recognize the importance of family involvement, many programs also find it difficult to achieve. The final version of this report will include an assessment of the current status of the parent engagement, empowerment, and education activities in San Diego County’s PoP programs, and recommendations for approaches designed to welcome families – including fathers and grandparents as well as mothers-- from a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Consideration will also be given to training for teachers in how to be more successful in including families in preschool programs.
- One of the AIR recommendations is likely to include giving consideration to joining the Virtual Pre-K National Network. Developed by Chicago Public Schools, Virtual Pre-K is a teacher-created resource for parents and teachers that is designed to connect

classroom, home and community. The program includes take-home lessons, videos, and a website. Materials can be customized to the locality. First 5 San Mateo County has implemented this program in its preschool programs, and the materials and approach have proved extremely popular with parents. (McLoughlin, 2011). Engaging parents and encouraging the use of technology in preschool were two of the strategies recommended by the participants at the Community Forum on May 11, 2011 and at the First 5 San Diego's Technical and Professional Advisory Committee (TPAC) at its May 23, 2011 meeting.

**5. PFA Quality – Curriculum: What does the research say on the importance of different curricula on program quality and child outcomes? Should the RFP require specific curricula?**

- The First 5 PoP Bridge program requirements continue to require a curriculum articulated with Kindergarten through third grade standards. Similarly, the CAEL QRIS calls for curricula aligned with the Early Learning *Foundations* and *Frameworks*, and for including all domains of learning in lesson plans linked to a developmentally, culturally, linguistically appropriate curriculum.
- The National Research Council found that “while no single curriculum or pedagogical approach can be identified as best, children who attend well-planned, high-quality early childhood programs in which curriculum aims are specified and integrated across domains tend to learn more and are better prepared” for school (Bowman et al, 2001).
- In AIR's interviews with the eight other First 5 county commissions which have had PoP programs, we found none that recommended endorsing a single curriculum. First 5 San Francisco requires a “research-based curriculum” (Wang, 2011). First 5 LA requires that 95% of LAUP providers adopt a formal curriculum (Ayala, 2011). LAUP offers a list of 13 curricula that their providers can choose from. Some of the more prevalent choices are Creative Curriculum, High Scope and school district curricula linked to the k-6 curriculum, such as Open Court, High Reach, Imagine It, Early Childhood Express, Higher Reach, and Scholastic Early Childhood Program. Four PoP programs in Los Angeles are Montessori and another four are Reggio Emilia. The Los Angeles USD invested in Open Court and is now going to use a different curriculum. No less than 95% of LAUP providers must have an adopted curriculum.
- Asked whether any particular program worked particularly well with children who are ELL or dual language learners, Celia Ayala (2011) said the most important factor was to require teachers to obtain training in working with this group of preschool children.

**6. Quality: How successful is the current process for measuring program quality? How has the measurement system contributed to quality improvement?**

- The First 5 Commission of San Diego PFA/PoP program has implemented annual ECERS-R assessments in every classroom participating in the PFA Demonstration Project. Assessments are conducted by outside assessors employed by the YMCA; assessors have been trained by Dr. Thelma Harms of the University of North Carolina,

Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. It will be important to ensure that the team of assessors is rated periodically to ensure reliability.

- The PFA/PoP program in San Diego, with an average global score of 6.1 on a scale of 1 to 7, has the highest ECERS-R scores of all nine PoP counties (First 5 California, 2009). The high scores result not only from the commitment to coaching and continuous program quality improvement, but also to the design of the teacher stipend program. As described in more detail below, the amount of each teacher stipend is determined by the teacher's education level and the ECERS-R score. According to program staff, the stipends have been an important factor in motivating improvements in program quality (First 5 California, 2009).
- The new (FY 11/12) requirements for PFA/PoP providers in San Diego have already been aligned with the CAEL QRIS requirements in terms of requiring an average score of 6 on the ECERS-R at the top Tier.
- The PFA/PoP program in San Diego is also aligned with the proposed CAEL QRIS requirement for top tier programs to have an independent assessment using the CLASS tool. As a cost-saving measure, next year (FY 11/12) the San Diego First 5 Commission plans to alternate ECERS-R and CLASS assessments. This strategy is also aligned with CAEL QRIS proposed requirements.
- San Diego's PFA/PoP program also exceeds all state program standards by requiring annual health and safety checks. Given the stress on the state's child care licensing system, this is a practice that may be important to preserve if and until the state restores annual licensing inspections of centers and biannual inspections of family child care homes.

## **7. Per-Child Reimbursements and Teacher Stipends: How do they compare with practices in other PoP counties?**

- The PFA/PoP per-child reimbursements in San Diego are lower than those in other PoP counties.
- PoP maximum reimbursement rates for a full-quality, part-day PoP space vary considerably – from \$4,119 in San Diego for a fully funded, top tier space, to \$6,470 in Santa Clara. However, First 5 San Diego also has a teacher stipend program which rewards teachers for advancing both their educational qualifications and ECERS-R scores. When the value of these teacher stipends is factored into the per-child reimbursement rates, the reimbursement rate for a top tier space in San Diego rises to about \$4,695 per child, which is still one of the lower PoP reimbursement rates.
- One of the initial goals of the First 5 California PoP program match grants was to improve the quality of preschool by improving the educational qualifications of preschool teachers, and by providing compensation for preschool teachers who have qualifications commensurate with those of kindergarten teachers. Even preschool teachers with BA degrees have been found to earn, on average, substantially less than

their elementary school teacher counterparts (Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2006). The low rates of teacher compensation contribute to a rate of turnover three times higher than that of K-12 teachers (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003).

- After the failure of Proposition 82, which would have provided funds for preschool for all four-year-olds in California, the First 5 Commission of San Diego and the San Diego County Office of Education determined that it would not be possible to make a commitment to raise teacher salaries; with union contracts involved, the county could have, as occurred in other PoP counties, lawsuits on its hands. Hence, the county wisely embarked on a stipend program that has promoted improvements in teacher education and, even more dramatically, improvements in program quality.
- That said, at the Community Forum on May 11, 2011 some providers noted that the per-child reimbursement rate is too low and does not take into account the administrative costs of the program. They also voiced concern that programs may be facing reductions in state-funded programs such as State Preschool. Thus, First 5 Commission staff is prudent in attempting in next year's reimbursement rate (FY 11/12) to compensate for an anticipated 15 to 25% reduction in state-funded programs.

#### **8. Provider Support: What are the best practices for provider coaching in ECE settings?**

- While teacher education qualifications are important to the quality of a preschool program, researchers are increasingly focusing ongoing direct observation and coaching and mentoring as keys to quality (Pianta et al, 2009).
- Evaluations in other counties, including one conducted by AIR in San Mateo and San Francisco, have emphasized the importance of coaching, particularly when it is based on classroom scores on ECERS-R and the CLASS (American Institutes for Research, 2007).
- AIR is working on this section of the report based on forthcoming information from Harder+ Company.

Note: The final version of this report will also include findings in the additional areas of: measurement of child outcomes, kindergarten transition, practices to assist English language/dual language learners; providing universal Developmental Screenings and the subsequent identification and support for children with Special Needs; and, the consideration of various measures to help sustain the financing of the Quality Preschool Initiative.

### **Suggested General Principles for Scope of Work**

To guide the development of the Scope of Work for the First 5 Commission's Quality Preschool Initiative, AIR offers several general principles:



- **Maintain adherence to the First 5 California PoP Bridge requirements in order to ensure the eligibility to draw down those funds in the future.**
  - a. Focus any expansion first on children in API 1-5 school neighborhoods.
  - b. Aim to serve 70% of children in those neighborhoods.
  - c. Provide free part-day service, although the Commission could explore possibility of advocating for a parent investment fee for children in more affluent zip codes.
- **Make sure the SOW aligns with California’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and position the county to participate in a pilot of the QRIS.**
  - a. Make sure SOW aligns with QRIS criteria.
    - i. Add lead teacher requirements for top tier (make sure that the San Diego requirements are for at least 48 additional units as opposed to 24 units).
    - ii. Add Program Director qualification requirements.
  - b. Include infant/toddler programs in at least one community.
  - c. Respond to the State RFP and determine what portion of funding may be available to the San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative Program.
- **Track the implementation of the new Transitional Kindergarten Program, and consider how San Diego County might participate.**
  - a. This state-mandated program could ultimately provide school district funding for one-quarter of the county’s four-year-olds which would have a direct effect on the funding available to increase program capacity in the new San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative.
- **Continue the focus on quality outcomes for children, and maintain the emphasis on workforce development and family engagement.**
- **Pursue expansion cautiously.**
  - a. Depending on available funding, San Diego may need to limit Quality Preschool Initiative program expansion to neediest children in a few targeted communities.

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