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Evaluation of Preschool for All Implementation in San Mateo and San Francisco Counties

Year 2 Report
Executive Summary for San Francisco County

Submitted to:

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First 5 San Mateo County
First 5 San Francisco

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Executive Summary

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) is conducting a three-year joint process evaluation, which began in December of 2005, to assess the implementation of Preschool for All (PFA) in San Francisco and San Mateo Counties. The goal of PFA in San Francisco and San Mateo Counties is to make high-quality preschool available to all four-year-old children by building upon the current early care and education system of public and private providers. PFA is a voluntary part-day program for four-year-old children provided at no cost to families, regardless of income. PFA funds are used to create new preschool spaces and to upgrade classrooms in existing programs. First 5 San Francisco and the San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) are serving as the PFA administrating body in their respective counties. The *PFA Process Evaluation* is designed to investigate and document the implementation and the preliminary impacts of PFA on children, families, providers, and the community.

This report reflects the findings from Year 2 (2006-2007) of the evaluation.[1] The Year 2 evaluation approach examined two major areas: 1) PFA implementation issues, from the perspectives of PFA program directors and PFA parents, and 2) PFA classroom quality. Three major research activities were designed and carried out for the Year 2 evaluation:

- **Program Director Implementation Survey.** To address PFA implementation, a survey was distributed to PFA program directors in each county. The tool was designed to gather feedback from PFA directors on the activities, successes, and challenges of PFA implementation.

- **Parent Focus Groups.** To gather information regarding parents' level of satisfaction, attitudes, and knowledge of PFA, AIR hosted parent focus groups at three PFA programs in San Mateo County and three programs in San Francisco County. Focus groups were held in English, Spanish, and Cantonese.

- **Observations of a Random Stratified Sample of PFA Classrooms.** To gather data on program quality, AIR conducted observations on a sample of classrooms operated by center-based PFA programs in both counties. Two tools were used: the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, R., La Paro, K., & Hamre, B., in press) and the literacy subscale of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Expanded (ECERS-E; Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B., 2006).

This executive summary summarizes the findings for San Francisco County only.

Survey Findings

The implementation survey for both counties gathered information regarding the successes and challenges of PFA implementation, including the PFA application process, PFA support services, services to children with special needs, impacts of PFA on various program areas, family

[1] A full copy of the Year 1 evaluation report can be found at http://www.smcoe.k12.ca.us/cyfs/pfa.html.

partnerships, strategies used to help children and families transition to kindergarten, and providers' recommendations for improving the PFA system.

San Francisco Survey Findings

Thirty-two implementation surveys were completed in San Francisco County, representing 21 of the 24 contracted PFA agencies.[2] Based on survey responses, PFA has strongly affected preschool quality among San Francisco providers. Most programs reported that PFA has had either a "strong" or a "very strong and significant" positive impact on teacher-child interactions, and science, arts, and literacy instruction. The majority of PFA programs (72%) also anticipate increased levels of quality in the future, expecting that they will receive higher scores on their next ECERS-R or Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) assessment due to specific improvements they have made to their classroom environments as a result of their initial program assessments. In general, San Francisco providers characterized the supports provided through PFA as helpful or very helpful. Tree Frog Treks, Quality Improvement Grants, mental health consultation, and the Raising a Reader book bag program were among the resources rated as the most helpful.

Survey responses indicated that the majority of programs are sharing DRDP-R results with parents and using the DRDP-R results to develop and discuss Individual Learning Plans for children. As also seen in San Mateo County, a smaller number of programs reported that activities are developed for individual children for parents to use at home.

Programs provided mixed feedback on the use of the ASQ. Over half of responding programs reported they would not use the ASQ if it was not required by PFA, yet almost half of the programs stated that the tool was an effective strategy to partner with families. It is important to note that 44% of responding programs reported that teachers were not adequately trained to use the ASQ. In addition, 81% of programs reported that "Providing time for staff to complete the DRDP-Rs and ASQs" is either a "moderate" or a "very big" challenge. Other challenges identified by programs include supporting the professional development of staff and finding time to report on programs' progress toward implementing Quality Improvement Plans. Taking a broad view of survey responses, many of these findings suggest that staff are still feeling burdened by PFA reporting requirements, especially when these are viewed as duplicative of requirements associated with their other funding streams.

In terms of family partnerships, approximately three-quarters of programs consider "parents as true partners with program staff in supporting their children's development." Parents are actively involved in most program activities according to 38% of responding programs. Seven programs reported that parent involvement is limited and five programs indicated that it is challenging to identify ways to meaningfully involve parents in the program.

PFA providers were also asked to report how they are supporting children and families in the transition to kindergarten. Survey responses suggest that most programs are implementing a

[2] Given the size of the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) program, which encompasses 15 sites, the survey was administered at the site level. Twelve SFUSD sites responded to the survey. Eighteen of the 20 non-school district PFA programs completed a survey, as did two PFA family child care providers.

range of strategies, such as discussing children's school readiness with parents, providing kindergarten enrollment information to parents, and involving parents in transition planning. However, only a third of PFA programs employ strategies that involve collaboration with public schools (e.g., 38% of programs facilitate kindergarten visits for children, 34% facilitate kindergarten tours for parents, and 13% of programs participate in joint professional development for preschool and kindergarten teachers regarding transition issues), although school-district PFA sites reported using a greater variety of kindergarten transition strategies.

Based on the Year 2 survey responses, First 5 San Francisco might consider the following recommendations:

- Solicit feedback from providers to identify ways of making the Learning Circles more helpful and accessible to staff.
- Provide technical assistance to programs to develop activities for individual children for parents to use at home.
- Offer more training opportunities on the ASQ to staff.
- Offer more training opportunities to help teachers effectively serve children with special needs.
- Support PFA sites in establishing partnerships with elementary schools to facilitate the transition of children and families to the K-12 system.
- Raise awareness among San Francisco parents regarding what PFA means (e.g., high-quality preschool services).
- Collaborate with community and state college instructors regarding the connections between coursework and practice, given that approximately one third of program directors did not agree that the one-unit required courses have changed classroom practices in the areas of language and literacy and serving children with special needs.
- Provide training and technical assistance to programs around family partnerships and finding ways to meaningfully involve parents; consider parent training on how to support their child's learning and development.
- Continue to examine how reporting requirements can be streamlined or coordinated across funding sources.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were conducted in a sample of PFA classrooms in San Mateo and San Francisco counties using two tools, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System and the literacy subscale of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Expanded. A sample of eight classrooms was selected for each county, per the Year 2 scope of work. First 5 San Francisco contracted with AIR to conduct observations in an expanded sample for San Francisco county (32 classrooms in total), in order to analyze differences between groups of classrooms based on funding type.

The CLASS is based on developmental theory and research indicating that interactions between children and adults are the primary mechanism for children's learning and development. The CLASS addresses four domains, each consisting of one or more dimensions: 1) *Emotional Support* (Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, and Regard for Student

Perspectives), *Classroom Management* (Behavior Management, Productivity, and Instructional Learning Formats), *Instructional Support* (Concept Development, Quality of Feedback, and Language Modeling), and *Student Engagement* (Student Engagement). The CLASS requires the observer to select a score for each of the 11 dimensions, based upon the degree to which behavioral, emotional, and physical markers are present and indicative of the extent to which each dimension characterizes the classroom, rated from 1 (minimally characteristic) to 7 (highly characteristic). Scores of 1 and 2 are considered in the low range of the CLASS rating system. Scores of 3, 4, and 5 fall into the mid range, and scores of 6 and 7 fall into the high range.

In addition to the CLASS, AIR completed the literacy subscale of the ECERS-E during each of the classroom observations. The ECERS-E is an extension of the ECERS – Revised, the tool widely used by early childhood education researchers and programs to measure classroom quality. The ECERS-E is a relatively new tool, published in 2003, and developed by researchers in England as an instrument to measure quality in four areas: 1) literacy, 2) numeracy, 3) science, and 4) diversity in preschool settings. The literacy subscale of the ECERS-E includes 6 items: 1) environmental print, 2) book and literacy areas, 3) adult-child book reading, 4) exploration of sounds in words, 5) emergent writing, and 6) talking and listening activities. The ECERS-E is scored using the same system as the ECERS-R, based on a seven-point scale for each item, from which an average score is derived for each subscale.

San Francisco CLASS Findings

Overall, most of the 32 sampled PFA classrooms in San Francisco scored in the mid to high ranges on the CLASS dimensions. As shown in Exhibit 1, 7 of the 11 dimensions received an average rating of 4 or higher. The highest average domain score across San Francisco classrooms was 6.0 for *Emotional Support*, followed by *Student Engagement* (5.9), *Classroom Management* (5.2), and *Instructional Support* (3.7).

Exhibit 1. San Francisco Average Dimension and Domain CLASS Scores

Domains	Dimensions	Overall Average	Average Domain Scores
Emotional Support	Positive Climate	**6.19**	**Emotional Support 6.0**
	Negative Climate	**1.24**	
	Teacher Sensitivity	**5.48**	
	Regard for Student Perspectives	**5.64**	
Classroom Management	Behavior Management	**5.90**	**Classroom Management 5.2**
	Productivity	**5.64**	
	Instructional Learning Formats	**3.90**	
Instructional Support	Concept Development	**2.88**	**Instructional Support 3.7**
	Quality of Feedback	**3.40**	
	Language Modeling	**4.70**	
Student Engagement	Student Engagement	**5.95**	**Student Engagement 5.9**

As noted earlier, the descriptions of low, mid, and high-range classrooms for each dimension, presented below, are excerpted verbatim from the CLASS Preschool Manual (Pianta, La Paro, and Hamre, in press). Given the nature of the CLASS scoring continuum, verbatim descriptors from the CLASS manual were used to ensure the explanations for the San Francisco ratings accurately reflected the intent of the CLASS tool.

Emotional Support. In general, the vast majority of PFA classrooms in San Francisco (94% scored in the high range for *Positive Climate*) are characterized by teachers that enjoy warm, supportive relationships with students. There is frequent joint smiling and laugher, genuine praise, and/or physical affection among the teachers and students. Teachers consistently demonstrate respect for the students and students are clearly positively connected to one another.

The majority of classrooms (72% scored in the high range for *Regard for Student Perspectives*) are characterized by teachers who are flexible in their plans and organize their instruction around students' interests. They make an effort to maximize children's abilities to be autonomous, and

there are many opportunities for children's talk and expressions. Children have clear and real responsibilities and roles, and the teachers actively encourage children to interact with each other. In the mid-range *Regard for Student Perspectives* classroom, these strategies are not consistently implemented – for example, teachers may follow the children's lead during some periods and be more controlling during others. The teachers sometimes provide support for children's autonomy but at other times fail to do so. For instance, there may be cases in which the teacher conducts whole-group instruction, asking occasionally for children's input and providing roles for one or two children, but most of the lesson is teacher driven and children are simply asked to respond to questions rather than having a more formative role.

In regard to *Teacher Sensitivity*, 44% of the sampled PFA classrooms scored in the mid range and 56% in the high range. The classrooms in the high range typically include teachers who are consistently responsive to students, consistently notice when children need extra support or assistance, provide activities or speak at levels consistent with children's needs and abilities, and are consistently effective in addressing children's questions, concerns, and problems. Children also appear comfortable approaching teachers for support or guidance, sharing ideas, and responding to teacher questions. In the mid-range classroom, typically these strategies are not implemented consistently. For example, a teacher may seem very attuned to students' academic needs, giving them appropriate tasks, supporting their learning, etc., but less aware of their emotional functioning. Or, a teacher may demonstrate the elements of responsiveness, but at times ignore children's bids or fail to elaborate upon them. For example, during a book reading the teacher ignores several comments that children make, such as "I have a dog like that" and "I see a big red balloon", but then during a group discussion following the book reading she is more responsive.

Student Engagement. The *Student Engagement* domain focuses on the degree to which all children in the class are focused and participating in the learning activity presented or facilitated by the teacher. Ninety-one percent of classrooms fell into the high range for this domain, with only 9% scoring in the mid range. Classrooms with a high score on *Student Engagement* are those in which children are actively engaged – frequently volunteering information or insights, responding to teacher prompts, and/or actively manipulating materials. High engagement is sustained throughout different activities and lessons. For example, children are clearly interested in what the teacher is saying or the current activity, as evidenced by their active participation, asking questions, and responding to prompts. While there may be one or two children who are disengaged or a short period of time when engagement is just passive, during the preponderance of time children in the classroom appear interested and involved in the activities that the teacher has planned.

Classroom Management. The *Classroom Management* domain reflects the effectiveness of teachers' behavior management strategies, the extent to which children have opportunities to learn through the preschool session, and what the teachers do to maximize children's engagement and ability to learn. Most of the sampled PFA classrooms fell into the high range for the dimensions of *Behavior Management* and *Productivity*. According to the high-range CLASS descriptors for *Behavior Management*, teachers consistently take a proactive stance to behavior management issues (e.g., teachers appear to be one step ahead of problems in the classroom, anticipating and preventing misbehavior). The teachers monitor the classroom and intervene

before problems occur. Teachers consistently use effective strategies to redirect minor misbehavior, and rules are clearly stated or understood by all members of the classroom community. Behavior management does not take away time from other activities and teachers use praise that increases the chances that desirable behavior will be repeated and undesirable behavior is eliminated. There are few, if any, instances of student misbehavior.

In regard to high-range *Productivity*, there are consistently clear activities provided for children and time for learning is maximized. The classroom resembles a "well-oiled machine" where everybody knows what is expected of them and how to go about doing it. Transitions are quick and efficient and the teachers are fully prepared for activities and lessons. The teachers do not allow disruptions to compete with time for learning. No more time than is necessary is spent on managerial tasks.

The vast majority of classrooms (91%) scored in the mid range for *Instructional Learning Formats.* Based on the CLASS descriptors, the teachers in a mid-range classroom for *Instructional Learning Formats* sometimes facilitate awareness, exploration, inquiry, and utilization of materials and information but do not consistently do so. As a function of teachers' efforts, children may be engaged and/or volunteering during periods of time, but at other times their interest wanes and they are not focused on the activity or lesson. At times the teachers are active facilitators of activities but at other times they merely provide activities and materials for the children. Finally, the teachers may use a variety of materials and present through a variety of modalities, but their use of them is not consistently effective or interesting to the students.

Instructional Support. The lowest average domain score across PFA classrooms is *Instructional Support*; however, it is important to note that the average total score for this domain falls into the mid category on the CLASS rating scale. *Instructional Support* reflects the teachers' use of discussions and activities to promote children's higher-order thinking skills and cognition, the degree to which teacher feedback to children is focused on expanding learning, rather than "correctness," and the quality and amount of teachers' use of language-stimulation and language-facilitation techniques with children. The majority of classrooms received mid-range scores for the dimensions of *Language Modeling*, *Quality of Feedback*, and *Concept Development*.

According to the CLASS descriptors, in mid-range *Language Modeling* classrooms, teachers sometime converse with students. For example, teachers talk with children and appear genuinely interested in children. However, these exchanges do not consistently aid the children's language acquisition. Conversations between teachers and children are sometimes teacher-controlled and sometimes more child initiated. Teachers ask a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions and sometimes repeat or extend children's responses. The teachers occasionally map their own actions and the children's actions through language and descriptions. Finally, teachers sometimes use advanced language with students. Twenty-five percent of programs scored in the high range for *Language Modeling*. In these classrooms, there is a high quality and amount of teachers' use of language-stimulation and language-facilitation techniques, such as self and parallel talk, open-ended questions, repetition, expansion/extension, and use of advanced language.

Almost all of the sampled San Francisco classrooms (97%) fell in the mid range for *Quality of Feedback*. In a mid-range *Quality of Feedback* classroom, teachers sometimes focus on the process of learning but at other times focus much more on correctness when providing feedback to children. There are occasional feedback loops (back and forth exchanges between the teacher and children), but at other times feedback is more perfunctory. Teachers' comments and praise are sometimes specific and other times much more general (e.g., sometimes the teacher appears to individualize feedback to specific children or contexts of learning, but at other times relies on global statements such as "nice work").

Seventy-two percent of San Francisco PFA classrooms fell into the mid range of *Concept Development*. In the mid-range classroom for *Concept Development*, activities and discussions sometimes focus on getting children to give the right answer and other times on developing high-order thinking skills and cognition. Teachers occasionally use discussions and activities that encourage analysis and reasoning, such as sequencing, compare/contrast, and problem solving. For example, when reading a book, the teacher asks children what they think may come next, but she does not consistently ask follow up questions about why children think that or how they made their decisions about what could happen next in the story. Opportunities for analysis and reasoning are either interspersed with more rote learning or these opportunities do not require complex thinking or follow-up. The teachers occasionally use discussions and activities that promote prediction, experimentation, and brainstorming. Teachers sometimes link current activities to previous concepts or activities and at other times present concepts independent of children's previous learning. Teachers make some attempts to relate concepts to the real world of children's lives. Approximately a quarter of programs received a low-range score for *Concept Development*, indicating that typically activities and discussions in these classrooms focus on getting children to give the correct answer or other forms of rote learning or recitation, rather than on developing higher-order thinking skills and cognition.

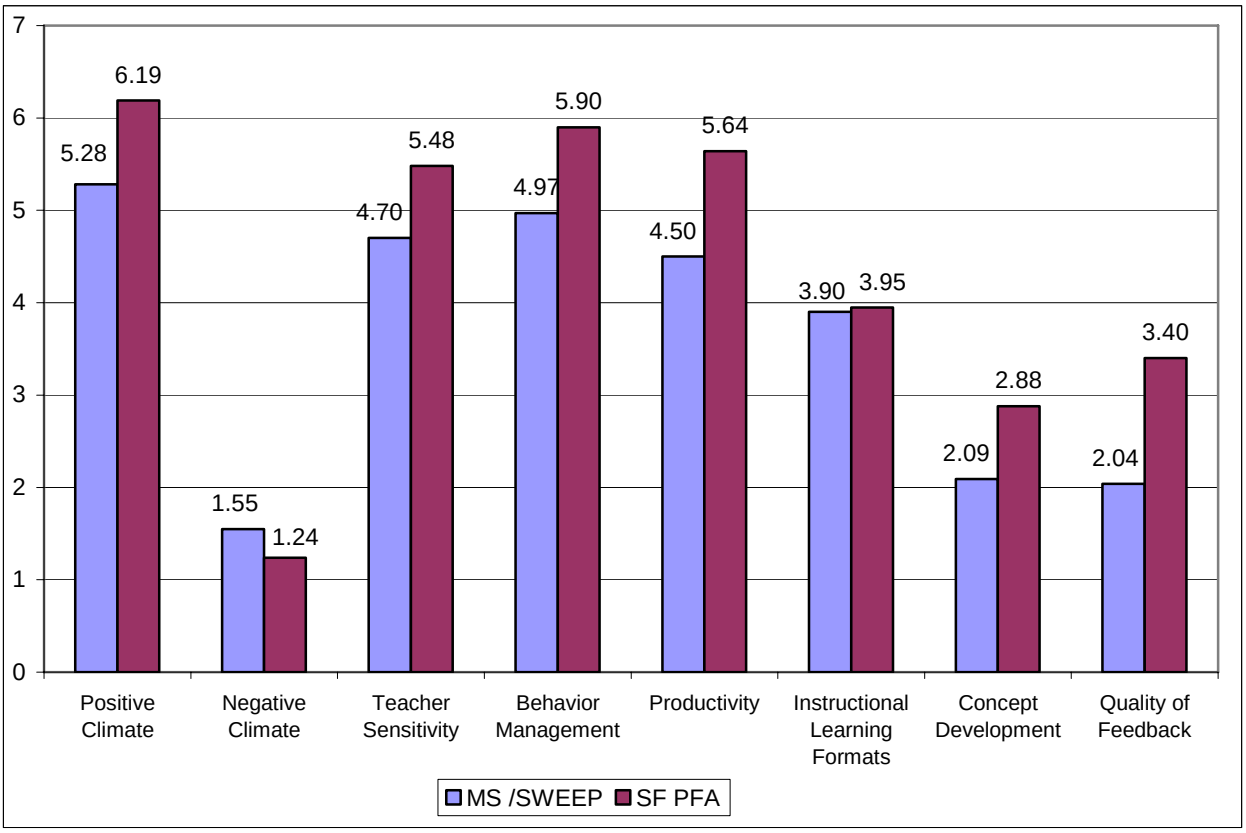
Comparison Data

The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) has conducted two major studies of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs: the Multi-State (MS) Study of Pre-Kindergarten (which included California) and the State-Wide Early Education Programs (SWEEP) Study[3] that used the CLASS as one of their measures. Among the families served by the preschool programs in the studies, most (55%) had an annual income less than or equal to 150% of the federal poverty guidelines for their family's size. Families were asked what language(s) were spoken at home; in some case more than one language was spoken. English was the most frequently reported home language (86%), followed by Spanish (26%). Thirty-five percent of the children were White, 28% Latino, and 22% African American. Among the teachers, 73% had a bachelor's degree or above. In comparison, 75% of participating PFA children in San Francisco received a state or federal child care subsidy (State Preschool, General Child Care, Alternative Payment, or Head Start), meaning they belong to low-income families earning no more than 75% of the state median income, or in the case of Head Start, 100% of the federal poverty level. The number of low-income children participating in PFA is likely even higher, however, as PFA children in Title I or solely PFA-funded programs are not subject to means testing.

[3] The eleven states included across both studies included: California, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

The data in Exhibit 2 include the average CLASS scores from the combined MS and SWEEP studies (n=694), compared to the average scores for San Francisco observations (n=32). Only 8 of the 11 CLASS dimensions are listed – the MS and SWEEP studies used an older version of the CLASS that did not include the dimensions for *Regard for Student Perspectives*, *Language Modeling*, and *Student Engagement*.

Exhibit 2. MS/SWEEP and San Francisco PFA CLASS Scores



In every dimension listed in Exhibit 2, San Francisco PFA classrooms received higher ratings compared to the MS/SWEEP data (with the exception of *Negative Climate*, in which San Francisco classrooms received a lower score, indicating greater quality). San Francisco ratings ranged from 0.05 points (*Instructional Learning Formats*) to 1.36 points (*Quality of Feedback*) higher than the MS/SWEEP data. In regard to the one dimension that received an average score in the low range, *Concept Development*, San Francisco classrooms were rated at 2.88, compared to 2.09 in the MS/SWEEP studies.

San Francisco ECERS-E Literacy Subscale Findings

The total average score for the literacy subscale for the sampled San Francisco classrooms was 4.44. Based on the ECERS-E average item scores, the sampled classrooms are generally characterized by high-quality book and literacy areas, with a wide variety of books. Children are encouraged to use books. In addition, most classrooms have areas for emergent writing, and staff

write down what children say. The extent to which adults read with children varied somewhat across classrooms – about a third of the classrooms received relatively lower scores (2), whereas about a third received high scores (6 or 7). Ninety-one percent of classrooms received a rating of 4 to 7 on the *Talking and Listening* item, with 50% of classrooms showing evidence that interesting experiences are planned by adults to encourage talk and the sharing of ideas, children are encouraged to ask questions, adults provide scaffolding for children's conversations, and children are often encouraged to talk in small groups and listen to their peers. In about a third of the sampled classrooms (those that received a rating of 3 for *Environmental Print*) there are labeled pictures visible to children, children can see some printed words such as labels on shelves or their own names on coat pegs, and printed words are prominently displayed. In 50% of classrooms, additional evidence of environmental print and encouragement of children to recognize printed words is also present. The lowest scoring item on the ECERS-E literacy subscale was *Sounds in Words* – 78% of the classrooms received a score of 1, 2 or 3 for this item. In these classrooms, the extent to which rhymes are spoken or sung by adults and children are encouraged to speak and/or sing rhymes varies. Less attention is paid to the rhyming components of songs and alliteration.

Recommendations and Implications for Practice

CLASS findings. San Mateo and San Francisco PFA classrooms received very similar CLASS scores. In both counties, each of the dimension scores fell into the same category on the CLASS rating scale (low, mid, high). Differences in overall scores between the counties did not vary significantly; on a 7-point scale they ranged from a .01 point difference for *Positive Climate* to .39 for *Instructional Learning Formats*. In both counties, the lowest scoring dimensions were *Concept Development* and *Quality of Feedback*. This pattern mirrors available national data from the Multi-State (MS) Study of Pre-Kindergarten (which included California) and the State-Wide Early Education Programs (SWEEP) Study, in which these two CLASS dimensions also received the lowest average scores. While it is difficult to explain precisely why *Concept Development* and *Quality of Feedback* tend to receive lower scores, it is likely that a combination of factors are involved, including limited attention to these areas in pre-service education programs and professional development opportunities. Moreover, the CLASS holds teachers to a high standard – for example, the strategies embedded within *Concept Development* (e.g., promotion of higher-order thinking skills and cognition, analysis and reasoning, hypothesis testing) are likely the most challenging practices to implement in the classroom, particularly if teachers have not been trained to do so.

Based on the CLASS scores, both San Mateo and San Francisco PFA administrators may wish to review the lowest scoring dimensions (*Concept Development* and *Quality of Feedback*) to identify ways to integrate these content areas into existing training and coaching efforts or new professional development opportunities. In addition, the authors of the CLASS at the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL), University of Virginia, offer several professional development opportunities. Teachers can access the CLASS website (http://classobservation.com/) to view video clips of teachers demonstrating strategies that are embedded in the CLASS framework. In addition, CASTL offers a web-based program known as MyTeacherPartner (MTP) (http://www.myteachingpartner.net/) where teachers have access to a library of videos in which teachers demonstrate strategies linked to the CLASS, MTP activities for use in the classroom, and online training modules. In addition, MTP offers an intensive four-

step individualized consulting process in which: 1) teachers videotape themselves implementing a MTP activity twice a month, 2) a MTP consultant edits the classroom video to draw attention to CLASS dimensions, which is then posted on a secured website for the teacher, with written comments and questions, 3) the teacher reviews the video and responds to the consultant's comments, which are intended to help the teacher reflect on their teaching practices, and 4) the teacher and the MTP consultant participate in a video conference to discuss the process and identify goals and next steps.

Other states are currently using the CLASS in their preschool and professional development efforts. The Wyoming Department of Education is piloting the CLASS with 35 preschool teachers in the state as part of its *Quality Rating System* initiative. The Massachusetts Department of Education is using the CLASS in conjunction with its *Building Careers* project, designed to support teachers in obtaining a college degree. As a part of this project, CASTL trained college faculty on the CLASS for use with their students.

ECERS-E findings. ECERS-E literacy item scores were also similar in San Mateo and San Francisco counties. Across the six items, differences between San Mateo and San Francisco scores (as noted earlier, items are scored on a 7-point scale) ranged from .09 (*Sounds in Words*) to .94 (*Adult Reading with the Children*). The lowest scoring items for San Mateo and San Francisco were *Environmental Print* and *Sounds in Words*. In regard to *Environmental Print*, some of the indicators refer specifically to the classroom environment (e.g., pictures with printed labels, labels on shelves), which could be addressed by reviewing the nature of the environmental print in the classroom setting and upgrading as needed. Other indicators for this item focus on the extent to which teachers encourage children to recognize letters and printed words, as well as discuss environmental print with children and the relationship between the spoken and printed word. Given the nature of these items, targeted training or coaching to support teachers may be beneficial.

Similarly, professional development regarding the indicators included in *Sounds in Words* (e.g., rhymes are often spoken or sung by adults to children, rhyming components of songs and nursery rhymes are brought to the attention of the children, attention to initial sounds/alliteration, syllabification, and linking sounds to letters) would likely best be addressed through in-person training or coaching, with particular attention to blending and segmenting sounds in words more generally, which are the precursors to being able to apply the decoding skills necessary for reading. While research to date is inconclusive with regard to the particular instructional benefits of rhyming activities with preschool children, blending and segmenting of sounds in words has been associated with early literacy success. These activities can be taught and practiced by teachers to enhance instruction in this area.

A review of curriculum used by PFA sites may help identify areas in which to enhance instruction in this area, such as new books, instruments, or audio CDs aligned with activities to promote the types of indicators included in *Sounds in Words*. In addition, the California Preschool Instructional Networks (CPIN), a professional development network, has focused on language and literacy in its 2007 training series, including the following topics: oral language development, concepts of print, developing vocabulary through books, alphabetic knowledge,

phonological awareness, early writing, and supporting language and literacy for children with disabilities and for English Language Learners.

In regard to interventions that target child outcomes, it is more difficult to identify practices or curricula that have been proven through rigorous research studies to specifically promote the outcomes embedded in the CLASS dimensions of *Concept Development* and *Quality of Feedback*, or the ECERS-E *Environmental Print* and *Sounds in Words* items. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/), established in 2002 by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, is designed to provide educators, policymakers, researchers, and the public with an analysis of the scientific evidence of effective education strategies. The Clearinghouse conducts rigorous reviews of the effectiveness of educational interventions, including a focus on early childhood education. In particular, the WWC reviews empirical studies that meet specific criteria (e.g., randomized controlled trials and well-controlled quasi-experimental designs, and other studies that meet rigorous research standards). As of October 2007, the WWC has reviewed research on 16 preschool interventions to determine if they have a proven impact on oral language, print knowledge, phonological awareness, early reading/writing, cognition, and math outcomes for children. The 16 WWC intervention reports were reviewed, with a focus on the child outcomes related to the CLASS dimensions of *Concept Development* and *Quality of Feedback* and the ECERS-E *Environmental Print* and *Sounds in Words* items. The WWC did not detect any discernible effects or affirmative evidence of effects for any of the 16 curricular models for the outcome of cognition. Research on one intervention – dialogic reading – found strong evidence of a positive effect for oral language outcomes and the Literacy Express curriculum found potentially positive effects.

The lack of significant research findings for specific interventions may be due to the limitations of the current research literature. According to Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), in Neurons to Neighborhoods, a "fundamental barrier to comparisons across studies, however, is the considerable variability among intervention programs on a number of important dimensions, such as the age of the children at time of entry, the characteristics of the target population, the nature of the program components, the intensity and duration of service delivery, issues regarding comparison or control conditions, and the nature of the staff and their training. Consequently, it is not possible to be certain that differences in outcomes, when they are found, are due to any one (or a combination) of these factors." However, the researchers do suggest that programs that have been the most effective are those that are targeted at high-risk children, are intensive in nature, and are inclusive of both children and parents.

Research regarding the effectiveness of preschool curricula may soon be available. In 2002, the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences funded a four-year project, Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research (PCER). Given the lack of rigorous studies of preschool interventions, IES funded 12 grantees nationwide to implement and evaluate preschool curricula, using randomized field trials. The study will address the following questions:

- What are the impacts of each intervention on important dimensions of children's development, including cognitive and social-emotional domains?
- How do the curricula change the prevailing classroom environments?

- How do the impacts vary for subgroups of children, classrooms, teachers, or communities? What works for whom?
- What are the patterns of impacts over time, as children progress through preschool and kindergarten?

Findings from the PCER are expected to be released in 2008.

Parent Focus Groups

Three parent focus groups were held in each county, offered in Spanish, English, and Cantonese. Overall, parents were enthusiastic and appreciative of PFA. One parent said the PFA program gave children "the foundation of education, like the roots of a tree." Parents felt comfortable with the level of parent involvement and communication with PFA teaching staff. One of the specific themes that emerged in conversations in both counties was how PFA staff provide parents with knowledge, tools, and strategies to support their children in the home. A parent said, "They [the teachers] tell you about how to help your child with areas of their development. They offer a lot of advice; the teachers give you a lot of suggestions of what to do. My teacher told me about my child needing to learn more about shapes, and how to introduce him to shapes in the home."

Parents in both counties described their PFA programs as warm communities where they felt welcome and accepted. In particular, they commented on the love and respect PFA teachers have shown their children. Parents at one program emphasized the experience and qualifications of the teachers, reporting they were of "a different caliber." The majority of parents felt that their children are prepared to enter kindergarten and identified a range of positive outcomes they have observed among their children since enrolling in PFA. One parent said, "[The preschool teachers] gave us information about applying to kindergarten, and helped us get [my son] into the program. Everything is ready for my child to go."

The only challenge that emerged across both counties was related to communication – in one program in each county, some parents described the difficulties of working with some teachers who only spoke English, although there was a bilingual teacher at each program. In general, conversations with PFA parents suggest the program is a critical factor in supporting children's development and promoting positive parenting strategies in the home. Parents described how enthusiastic their children are about PFA, with one mother emphasizing, "My daughter gets up in the morning and is throwing her clothes on as fast as she can because she wants to go to school. She talks about it afterwards all day." Another parent reported, "This program allows you to be a better parent. You can focus on what you need to do to take care of your family. You can focus on getting your job done, because you know your child is not only safe, but she is also getting the best education."

Conclusion

The findings from the Year 2 study build on those from the Year 1 evaluation, an intensive qualitative study in which over 100 individuals involved with PFA in both counties were interviewed. The Year 1 evaluation indicated that PFA funding has had far-reaching impacts across participating programs that include benefits for children, families, and providers. Tangible outcomes of PFA funding, in the form of upgrades to classroom facilities, new materials and

equipment, and instructional supports and enhancements for teachers were also observed. In addition, teachers reported more subtle benefits, such as increased professional pride, better teamwork, and improved morale.

The Year 2 evaluation revealed that PFA classrooms generally are of high quality, with a few specific areas in which providers would benefit from training and technical assistance. Survey responses in both counties indicated areas of additional training needs, such as the ASQ, inclusion of children with special needs, family partnerships, and transition strategies to kindergarten. In both counties, new policy changes and technical assistance efforts for the 2007-2008 program year will address some of the issues that were identified in the Year 2 evaluation.

San Francisco County

In the 2007-2008 program year, First 5 San Francisco is implementing a number of policy changes related to enrollment, technical assistance, and kindergarten transition. Beginning with the 2007-2008 program year, First 5 San Francisco is funding all San Francisco four-year-old children participating at a PFA site, regardless of their zip code. This policy change lifts a requirement from the previous two years, under which only children residing in target zip codes were eligible for PFA, with additional zip codes added each year. Participating PFA programs must still operate within the target zip codes (now covering about 60 percent of the city), but they may enroll and receive a PFA reimbursement for any child who is 4-years-old and a San Francisco resident.

First 5 San Francisco is launching a technical assistance system for early care and education programs that will also benefit PFA programs. Two technical assistance providers will provide peer mentoring, one specifically dedicated to supporting family child care providers and the other focusing on center-based teachers and directors. Three technical assistance providers will provide coaching to early childhood education (ECE) sites, with an emphasis on four content areas: inclusion of children with special needs, business development and fiscal supports, language and early literacy, and health and safety issues. In addition, Gateway to Quality will continue to provide environmental assessments for ECE sites, and will expand its services to provide coaching before and after the ECERS/FDCRS visits. Finally, the technical assistance system will include a clearinghouse that will provide early childhood educators with information on professional development opportunities and other resources.

In 2007-2008, First 5 San Francisco also is focusing on transition from preschool to kindergarten. The agency is helping to connect PFA directors, as well as staff from family resource centers, to training on kindergarten enrollment procedures, in order to support parents through San Francisco's unique school enrollment process. The school district implements an open enrollment process which means there are no designated neighborhood schools. As part of the application process parents list their preferred schools and the district uses a modified lottery to determine placement. First 5 San Francisco is also collaborating with the school district and other organizations to plan events across the city for parents to get to know local schools and learn about the enrollment process. The goal is to have all PFA parents meet the first-round application deadline, to maximize the chances that children will be placed in their preferred schools. In addition, First 5 San Francisco is planning and implementing a series of pilot

programs to test various transition strategies, including joint staff development opportunities for PFA preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers who plan to meet several times a year.

For 2008-2009, the fourth year of PFA implementation, First 5 San Francisco has accelerated PFA rollout. Rather than just expanding to Year 4 zip codes, the Commission elected to proceed with full implementation a year earlier than planned to enable all four-year-olds and all preschool programs in the county to participate in PFA. Therefore, First 5 San Francisco is reaching out to prospective centers and family child care homes in both Year 4 and Year 5 zip codes, providing them with information about participating in PFA and assisting them in the application process.

Year 3 Process Evaluation

The evaluation team will continue to solicit feedback from PFA participants and partners, and will monitor implementation, expansion, and quality improvement activities and their impacts on staff and families. The third year of the process evaluation will focus on reviewing administrative data collected from PFA sites, including family and child service data, staff qualifications and compensation, professional development activities, and other evaluation activities to be determined. In addition, AIR will help SMCOE and First 5 San Francisco identify design options for a rigorous longitudinal evaluation that focuses on PFA program outcomes for children and families.