

**Riverside County**  
**PRESCHOOL IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY:  
A ROADMAP TO PRESCHOOL FOR ALL**  
*Executive Summary*



**Developed for  
First 5 Riverside County**

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# **Preschool in Riverside County: A Roadmap to Preschool for All**

## **Executive Summary**

Access to quality preschool is increasingly viewed as a critical tool to promote school readiness and education reform. Thirty-eight states now help localities finance pre-K. Several states, such as Georgia, Oklahoma, New York, Florida, Illinois, West Virginia, and New Jersey are committed to universal preschool while others, such as Maryland and North Carolina, are beginning to consider a commitment to make preschool available to all. In addition, several major municipalities, such as San Francisco and Denver, have adopted local initiatives to make preschool available to all four-year-olds, and nine First 5 commissions in California have made commitments to make preschool accessible to all four-year-olds within the boundaries of at least one school district.

This report by American Institutes for Research (AIR) analyzes the potential benefits and the current status of preschool in Riverside County. We then outline five potential pathways or scenarios that would help build toward a countywide improved system, review the various potential finance mechanisms for phasing in broader access to enriched preschool, and conclude with ten recommendations for the specific role of First 5 Riverside County and its partners in the development of a Roadmap to Preschool for All.

In the absence of a new, statewide funding stream dedicated for preschool – and in the midst of what may be a protracted state budget crisis – there is no magic solution to the shortage of early care and education for preschool children in Riverside County, one of the fastest growing counties in the state and nation. At the same time, Riverside County is well-positioned to begin incremental, strategic investments that can be scaled up to a major expansion of preschool as more resources become available.

## **Potential Benefits of Preschool in Riverside County**

The primary impetus for expanding and enriching preschool programs is to promote school readiness, improve child development, and narrow the achievement gap. Based on demographics, there is reason to believe that preschool could be an especially effective tool for addressing these goals in Riverside County.

## Benefits for Disadvantaged Children

Several longitudinal studies have shown that disadvantaged children who attended quality preschool programs fare significantly better in school and life than their peers who did not attend preschool. An evaluation of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, a half-day, publicly funded program with well-qualified teachers serving low-income minority children, found the following:

- Advantages in reading achievement scores as late as age 14;
- Lower likelihood of grade retention by age 15;
- Lower incidence of child abuse and neglect from ages 4 to 17;
- Reduced use of special education through age 18;
- Lower likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system by age 18; and
- Greater likelihood of high school completion by age 20.

As a result, the study estimated that for every \$1 invested in the CPC program, the public eventually saved \$7 because of reduced public expenditures for grade repetition, special education, welfare and crime.

Similarly, by age 40, according to a well-known study by the High Scope Foundation, minority children from poor, single parent families who attended the high-quality Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan were more likely to:

- Have graduated from high school (65 percent versus 45 percent);
- Be employed (76 percent versus 62 percent);
- Own a home (37 percent versus 28 percent);
- Have a savings account (76 percent versus 36 percent); and
- Have far fewer arrests.

Based on this study, researchers estimated the economic return as \$17 for every \$1 invested in the preschool program (Schweinhart et al, 2005).

## Benefits for All Children

More recent studies show that quality preschool also benefits more advantaged children.

In the National Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, preschool participants showed higher school readiness and kindergarten performance than non-participants, although the effects were more pronounced for more disadvantaged children – whether defined by low maternal education, poverty status, single-parent status, or mothers who do not speak English.

In a study of the universal preschool program in Tulsa, Oklahoma (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips & Dawson, 2004), all socio-economic groups were found to benefit. Children eligible for free lunch scored better on all three sections of the Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test, and children from more affluent families experienced statistically significant gains on two of the three sections.

Of particular interest in Riverside County, where 60 percent of public school kindergartners were Latino in school year 2006-07, it was the Latino children who benefited most from the Tulsa pre-K program. Latino children showed striking gains:

- 79 percent increase in pre-reading scores;
- 39 percent increase in pre-writing scores; and
- 54 percent increase in pre-math scores.

### California-Specific and Projected Riverside-Specific Benefits

Taking into account that a universal preschool program would include many more-advantaged children, for whom the benefits of preschool are likely to be less pronounced, the RAND Corporation conservatively estimated that a one-year high-quality preschool program in California would result in long-term savings of \$2.62 for every \$1 invested, based on projected reductions in grade retention, special education, and crime.

In Riverside County, however, a universally available, high-quality preschool program is likely to result in a somewhat higher-than-average rate of return on investments in preschool because the county has:

- A slightly higher rate of poverty (50 percent of kindergartners in Riverside County are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch, as compared to 49 percent statewide);
- A higher percentage of children enrolled in low-performing schools (50 percent in Academic Performance Index (API) 1-5 schools in Riverside County, as compared to 45 percent statewide); and
- A high percentage (60 percent) of Latino children and at least 28 percent of kindergartners who are English learners.

In short, based on demographics, expanding access to quality preschool may be an especially effective tool for education reform in Riverside County.

### **Status of Preschool in Riverside County**

Despite the potential benefits, there are a number of special challenges to expanding access to quality preschool in Riverside County:

- ***Rapid population growth*** – the second highest increase in the state in 2005, according to the Child Care Portfolio. Riverside County had the fourth largest kindergarten enrollment in the state in 2006-7, with enrollment increasing by approximately 1,500 children, thereby reducing the opportunity that exists in many counties to house preschool programs in classrooms vacated by declining school enrollment;
- ***Acute shortage of licensed center- or school-based programs*** –Riverside County has a substantial shortage of preschool programs. According to AIR’s own analysis, fewer than half (45 percent) of the estimated 26,557 four-year-olds in the county are enrolled in any formal school- or center-based program. The percentage served would be even lower

if we did not include children enrolled in self-contained special education programs that are not required to be licensed.

- ***Uneven distribution of programs*** – There is a wide variation in preschool enrollment rates and access to preschool across the county, which covers 7,207 square miles. In 23 school district attendance areas, the percentage of children served ranges from as low as zero in the Desert Center Unified neighborhood to as high as 88 percent in the Nuvview attendance area. Enrollment in preschool programs tends to be lower in some neighborhoods where the children have the greatest risk factors associated with school failure. For example, in the Coachella Valley Unified school attendance area, where 100 percent of the kindergartners attend low-performing schools (Academic Performance Index 1-5), only 41 percent of four-year-olds are estimated to be enrolled in any type of school- or center-based program.
- ***Under-enrollment of Disadvantaged Populations in Publicly Contracted Programs.*** A smaller percentage of income-eligible children appear to be enrolled in publicly contracted preschool programs, especially Title 5 General Child Care and to a lesser degree in Head Start, in Riverside County than is true statewide. Statewide, according to a recent report by the RAND Corporation (2007), 53 percent of the children whose families meet the income eligibility requirements for State Preschool are enrolled in a publicly contracted program (e.g., Head Start, State Preschool, or General Child Care). In Riverside County, only an estimated 44 percent of the income-eligible four-year-olds attends one of these three programs.
- ***Range in Program Quality*** – A recurring theme in the research on the benefits of preschool programs is that quality matters. In programs such as the Perry Preschool, Chicago Parent-Child Centers, and the Oklahoma universal preschool program, all classes are staffed by a teacher with at least a Bachelor’s degree, special training in early childhood education, and compensation and benefits similar to those of elementary school teachers. In California, the teacher education requirements for State Preschool are substantially lower, and most early care and education programs in Riverside County do not have sufficient funds to meet the above criteria.
- ***Missing Piece in Program Monitoring*** – Little is known about the status of some of the other indicators of program quality in Riverside County. For example, there is no countywide system for independently assessing how many programs in Riverside County could meet the First 5 California Power of Preschool Demonstration Grant requirement of a score of 4 or higher on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, or how well programs would do on other recommended measures of classroom quality, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).
- ***Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Population*** – Recent studies (Calderon, 2005; Tabors et al, 2003) suggest that for preschool Spanish-speaking English Language Learners, providing access to bilingual teachers may enhance school readiness outcomes. While a recent poll reveals strong support among Latino families for early education, 81 percent think programs should be provided in both English and the child’s home language (New American Media, 2006). Providing programs in both languages may be essential to promote family involvement in early education. Members of the Workforce Subcommittee in Riverside County identified lack of training for monolingual individuals in Spanish, and the need for more coursework that offers strategies for teaching children who are monolingual in Spanish.

- ***More Need for Full-Day Child Care***—According to the *California Child Care Portfolio*, in 2004, 48 percent of the four-year-olds in Riverside County lived either in a home where both parents worked, or with a single parent who worked. Thus, it is important to explore the possibility of embedding some new preschool programs in the existing full-day center-based programs, as well as to create new full-day/full-year programs. Equally important, family child care offers an important resource for full-day programs and/or wraparound care.

At the same time, Riverside County has many assets to build upon in expanding access to preschool. The following is only a partial list:

- First 5 Riverside County has invested in one district-wide program that meets nationally recommended standards for preschool quality, and that is available to all four-year-old children, regardless of family income. The David and Lucile Packard Foundation recognized this program as a model or “flagship”.
- The Riverside County Office of Education and several school districts administer programs that meet or come close to meeting nationally recommended standards.
- First 5 Riverside has just completed its third year of participating in the Constructing Connections (ABCD) facilities project administered by the Low Income Investment Fund. The special project has been effective in streamlining the process of facility development, identifying areas where new programs are opening, and encouraging and supporting the development of new facilities.
- At least 75 percent of the licensed center spaces serving four-year-olds in Riverside County may meet the entry level requirements for teacher qualifications (24 units in ECE and 16 units in General Education) in the First 5 Power or Preschool projects.
- Riverside County has some innovative approaches to workforce development that take into account the unique characteristics of its population, such as bringing university classes to teachers working on degrees in the Nuvview Union and Palm Springs Unified School Districts. The Innovative Teaching & Learning Center at La Sierra is a joint educational partnership between the Alvord Unified School District and the Riverside Community College District that will open in the fall of 2008.
- The Riverside County Office of Education has broad experience in administering State Preschool, Head Start, General Child Care, Migrant Child Care, the Alternative Payment Program, the Centralized Eligibility List, and Child Care Resource and Referral.
- Riverside County has a higher proportion of full-day slots in licensed centers than does the state as a whole, according to the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network. According to the 2007 *Portfolio*, only 14 percent of centers currently offer only part-time care, as compared with 19 percent statewide.
- The Riverside Child Care Consortium provides child care worker reimbursements for education costs.
- The Consortium has a pool of 20 validated assessors to conduct Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale assessments.
- Riverside County has two recognized family child care networks, including a model program in the desert where more than half of the providers are nationally accredited, and the providers are on track to complete their Associate’s degrees.

## Criteria for Program Quality and Phase-In

To identify the desired program elements or criteria for program quality, the cost of implementing these program elements, and the areas of the county in greatest need for new and upgraded preschool programs, AIR obtained guidance from the Advisory Committee and subcommittees on Needs Assessment, Program and Workforce, and Budget and Finance.

One of the key dilemmas in developing a preschool plan is that only high quality programs have been found to produce the kind of effects identified in the longitudinal studies summarized above. Programs found to result in reduced grade retention and special education meet or exceed the quality benchmarks identified by the National Institute for Early Education Research:

- Comprehensive early learning standards;
- Teacher has a bachelor's degree;
- Teacher has specialized training in pre-K;
- Assistant teacher has at least a CDA;
- At least 15 clock hours per year of in-service;
- Maximum class size is 20 or fewer children;
- Staff-child ratio 1:10 or better;
- Vision, hearing, health screening/referral and family support are provided;
- At least one meal a day is provided; and
- Site visits are conducted.

The First 5 California Power of Preschool Demonstration Grant criteria are the closest California equivalent to the NIEER benchmarks, and we therefore used these criteria as the basis for estimating costs. The PoP criteria are as follows:

- At least 3 hours /day of services for school year;
- Mixed delivery system;
- Build on existing State Preschool, Head Start and other publicly and privately funded settings;
- Staff-child ratio of 3:24 or 2:20;
- Master teacher with BA & 24 early care and education units within five years and ECE credential within 10 years;
- Assistant teacher with AA degree;
- Compensation for BA level teacher comparable to that of public school teacher.

Using the above program elements as a starting point, and reviewing program budgets for programs that approach these standards in Riverside County, we calculated the per-child expenditure for a preschool program meeting these standards at approximately \$5,700 for a program providing the beginning teacher salary and approximately \$6,900 for a program paying average teacher salaries. Upgrading existing publicly contracted spaces in State Preschool and Head Start was estimated to cost approximately \$1,900 per child.

To help determine areas of the county that might be candidates for the first wave of new investment in preschool, we looked at factors by zip code indicating need, ability to provide

matching funds, and availability of facilities. We also analyzed these factors by school district attendance area. The intent is not to indicate that preschool programs should necessarily be located in school settings, but simply to find an analytical framework that could ultimately be linked to evaluating the impact of the expansion of quality preschool on school readiness and performance.

We found that there are pockets of high need in more than half of the school district attendance areas in Riverside County:

- In more than half (14) of the school district attendance areas in Riverside County, more than one-quarter of the kindergartners in at least one zip code attend API 1-3 schools.
- In five school district attendance areas, more than half of the children in at least one zip code are English Language Learners.
- Finally, 12 school district attendance areas have preschool enrollment rates that are substantially below the countywide average of 45 percent.

With respect to projected capacity to match potential new funds for preschool and house new programs, fewer candidates emerged:

- Four school district attendance areas obtained Assembly Bill 172 for the establishment of new preschool and family literacy programs, and the largest recipient of the funds was the community-based Family Services Association;
- Six school districts reserved Title I funds for preschool;
- At least seven districts received First 5 School Readiness funds.
- New facilities are developing in several school district attendance areas in both school- and community-based settings.

## **Five Scenarios for Phasing in Preschool Expansion and Improvement**

Using the above cost estimate for a quality program and taking into account factors of need and capacity, AIR then analyzed the cost of five different potential scenarios for phasing in expanded access to quality preschool in Riverside County. Each of the scenarios assumes a mixed delivery system of private and school-based settings, includes both new and upgraded spaces, and is based on an 80 percent participation rate at full implementation.

**Scenario 1** would make quality preschool available countywide at full implementation at an estimated cost of \$88 million for 21,434 spaces, including about one-third in upgraded spaces in existing publicly contracted programs, and the remaining children in programs that already meet recommended standards or in new or newly publicly funded spaces.

**Scenario 2** would make quality preschool available for all children living in the school attendance areas of API 1-5 schools in Riverside County by year 5 at an estimated cost of approximately \$50 million for 12,208 children, including one-third in upgraded existing spaces and the remaining children in programs that already meet recommended standards or in new or newly publicly funded spaces.

**Scenario 3** would make quality preschool within five years in all API 1-3 school district attendance areas for approximately \$29 million for 7,060 children, again assuming a combination of upgraded and new and newly publicly funded spaces.

**Scenario 4** would make quality preschool available within five years to all children within a district attendance area that meets the First 5 California Power of Preschool requirement of at least 1,000 four-year-olds. For an existing district with around 1,200 four-year-olds in Riverside County, the estimated cost would be approximately \$5.8 to \$ 7.4 million at full implementation.

**Scenario 5** would sustain the only existing universally accessible preschool program (Nuview) in Riverside County at a cost of approximately \$587,000 per year and could add an additional flagship program in another area of the county for an annual cost of approximately \$230,000.

Using a tool developed by the Low Income Investment Fund, AIR also estimated the cost of facilities associated with several of the above scenarios. Depending upon the percentage of programs that would ultimately operate part- or full-day, the estimate for new and renovated facilities for preschool program in API 1-3 school attendance areas ranged from \$49 to \$90 million. The estimated cost of providing new and upgraded facilities countywide ranged from \$132 to \$243 million.

## **Finance Options**

AIR then examined a number of finance mechanisms that could be used, in the absence of a new statewide funding source dedicated to preschool, to help finance the above scenarios.

One of the most flexible potential finance sources is Title I, which could help finance a significant portion of any scenario targeted to low API school neighborhoods and also could help

finance improvements in the quality of the programs. Currently, only \$582 thousand of the \$83 million in Title I funds Riverside County schools receive is spent on preschool. If all Title I-eligible school districts followed the example of the Palm Springs Unified School District in allocating 4.8 percent of its Title I funds to preschool, that one change could raise an additional \$4 million for preschool in Riverside County. If all eligible school districts followed the example of the Elk Grove School District in Sacramento County, which allocates 18 percent of its Title I funds to preschool, that could generate nearly \$15 million for preschool. Without denying the difficulty school districts would face in redirecting Title I funds from existing programs to preschool, particularly in a tight budget climate, it nevertheless seems prudent to examine how each school district is currently spending its Title I funds. One possibility would be to dedicate any new Title I funds received to preschool.

Another potential finance mechanism requires a combination of state and local action, namely the aggressive pursuit of any new state or federal funds which become available. When we began working on the plan with Riverside County, it appeared likely that the Governor would request at least a doubling of the Preschool Expansion/Family Literacy Program (Assembly Bill 172), which provided \$49.6 million in the first year for State Preschool in API 1-3 school attendance areas. Unfortunately, in view of the projected \$17 billion state deficit, expanded funds for this program are less likely. Nevertheless, for the sake of illustration for future planning, we analyzed the potential impact that even a doubling of this modest program could have in Riverside County.

We also looked at the potential impact of parent fees in helping to cover a portion of the cost of the recommended scenarios. Currently, the Nuvview Unified School District assesses a flat fee of \$1,800 for every child enrolled who is not eligible for the state-funded preschool program.

These three funding sources – 4.8 percent of Title I funds, parent fees at the Nuvview level, and a doubling of a modest program such as AB 172 – could cover more than 30 percent of the total operating cost of serving all children countywide. The three revenue sources, even with an average parent fee of \$100 per child, would have an even greater impact in making preschool available to all children in API 1-3 school attendance areas, addressing about 40 percent of the total operating cost.

In a county the size of Riverside County, the prospect of scaling up to provide sufficient facilities for early care and education for preschool children may seem daunting. One possible approach is for school districts to request support from taxpayers by holding elections for general obligation bonds to help support renovating, reconstructing and building new facilities. In several California counties, bonds have been used to fund child care facilities. As of this writing, there is also a possibility that preschool may be included in a stateside K-12 education bond measure that would raise as much as \$1.5 billion for preschool facilities in economically disadvantaged or low API school neighborhoods.

## **Ten Recommendations**

Our report concludes with ten recommendations intended to help Riverside County make incremental but steady progress toward an eventual goal of countywide implementation of

preschool. Some of the following recommendations relate specifically to the potential role of First 5 Riverside County in promoting greater access to enriched preschool programs. Most of the recommendations, especially those related to financing, relate to the broader planning and implementation process, and would require the cooperation of multiple entities in the county.

### **(1) Build a Program that Will Make a Difference**

One of the key dilemmas in developing a preschool plan in Riverside County is to balance the need for more access with the need for more quality, as defined by the NIEER quality benchmarks and mirrored in the First 5 California Power of Preschool Demonstration Grant criteria:

- Comprehensive Early Learning Standards;
- Teacher has a Bachelor's degree;
- Teacher has specialized training in pre-K;
- Assistant teacher has at least a CDA;
- At least 15 clock hours/year of in-service;
- Staff-child ratio of 1:10 or better;
- Maximum class size of 20 or lower;
- Vision, hearing, health screening/referral & family support provided;
- At least one meal/day is provided; and
- Site visits are conducted.

It could be argued that providing child care of even mediocre quality promotes child development by helping families work and thereby helping to provide for children's most basic needs, food, and shelter. However, from the standpoint of closing the achievement gap, reducing grade retention, and high school dropout rates, the only preschool programs that have been found to be effective are high quality programs that meet or exceed NIEER benchmarks. Therefore, the program and workforce and budget subcommittees strongly recommended investment in high quality preschool programs.

Providing high quality preschool programs is especially important for the children in low API school attendance areas and low to moderate income neighborhoods that are likely to be the first target for expanded preschool programs. As the New American Media poll showed (New American Media, 2006), an overwhelming majority of parents of children of all ethnic groups support having their children attend quality preschool programs, but most do not believe that quality options currently exist in their neighborhoods. In short, improvements in the quality of early education and care may be necessary even to win public support for expanded access.

As indicated in the recent RAND studies, California currently invests substantial resources in early childhood programs to subsidize the care of preschool children. But the dollars are not closely tied to the quality or stability of the care children receive. According to Karoly et al (2007), "this can be viewed as an inefficiency to the extent that the dollars spent are not used in such a way as to have their greatest possible impact on children's developmental trajectories." In short, while most of the public funds spent in California on early education and care for preschool children are being spent on one of three programs (Head Start, State Preschool or Title

5 Center-based Care) designed to promote child development and school readiness, none of these programs sets standards high enough to have a likelihood of achieving desired results.

In order to develop a program likely to have such an impact and to serve as a model for other programs, Riverside County should therefore aim to phase in programs that meet or exceed the NIEER quality benchmarks, as agreed upon by the Advisory Group and mirrored in the First 5 California Power of Preschool Demonstration Project criteria.

## **(2) Focus Investment in Areas of High Need and/or Flagship Sites to Demonstrate Impact on School Readiness**

In the absence of a new statewide dedicated funding source for preschool, we recommend that Riverside focus its local investment on improving the quality and availability of preschool in a few areas likely to demonstrate the greatest impact on school readiness on a school district-wide basis. These are school district attendance areas that exhibit both a high need for and the proven capacity to implement a quality program.

Scenarios 2 and 3 would be consistent with the state-supported AB 172 initiative to focus on preschool expansion in low API schools. Taking on such a project without the promise of a statewide dedicated funding source anytime soon, however, may still be too large an endeavor, unless substantial Title I funds and perhaps a local tax initiative become available to help support the effort.

Scenario 4 would allow the county to meet the criteria for the First 5 California PoP Demonstration projects, by making the program available to at least 1,000 children on a district-wide basis. This approach could eventually be expanded to three different size districts in different parts of the county, where implementers would learn what it takes to implement a program in a variety of settings – some with large distances between family homes and the nearest school, some with many two-working parent households, some with access to family, friend or neighbor care to provide wraparound services; some with a base of existing center-based programs that could provide preschool given some additional funds to enhance the quality and compensation of the teachers.

Within the approximately \$2.5 million in funds specifically available to First 5 Riverside County to support preschool expansion and improvement, Scenario 5 may be the only viable alternative – and that only if the First 5 funds are leveraged (see below). This scenario in effect builds on the concept of “Centers of Excellence”. It has the merit of sustaining a high-quality preschool program that already exists school district-wide in Nuvview Union Elementary District. This program is the only program in the county that both serves virtually all four-year-olds in the district and meets the First 5 California Power of Preschool and NIEER quality benchmarks. Sustaining and evaluating this Packard flagship program, and using it as a model and mentor to school- and community-based providers in the rest of the county, should be a high priority for Riverside County. Depending upon the funds available, Scenario 5 could also be expanded to establish demonstration projects in other classrooms in the county.

### **(3) Leverage Any First 5 Riverside Investments: Give Priority for Early Implementation to Applicants that Provide Matching Funds**

If it decides to invest in *new* demonstration sites, First 5 Riverside County should consider establishing a competition among school district attendance areas for early implementation of Preschool for All in selected areas of the county. First 5 would offer a portion of the funds. First 5 would then select the demonstration projects based in part upon the applicant's commitment to provide matching funds, and could include the following criteria:

- Demonstration of need, as indicated on the checklist in the body of this report;
- Track record to date for securing additional funds to support preschool (e.g., extent to which the district has sought and obtained State Preschool, Head Start, Even Start, Early Reading First, private foundation and other grants to support preschool expansion and improvement);
- Plans to apply, either as a subcontractor or as a direct operator, for new State Preschool, center-based General Child Care, or other public funds for preschool;
- Plans to dedicate Title I funds – or an equivalent amount in other funds – to preschool services.
- Position statement/policy showing school district superintendent's or another relevant public official's commitment to universal preschool;
- Availability of space to expand preschool services;
- Need for additional services; and
- A plan for phasing in educational qualifications and compensation of the teachers that of the district to those districts that have established revenue sources and leadership with a proven interest and commitment to preschool.

The appeal of Title I dollars is that they are flexible; can be used for any child, regardless of income, in a Title I school; can be used for preschool programs in community-based as well as school-based settings; can be used to for workforce development and even wraparound care. Moreover, Title I funds are sustainable. First 5 Merced County adopted such an approach: it offered its own funds as leverage, on the condition that school districts supply matching Title I funds. Five school districts offered between five to ten percent of their Title I funds for preschool.

We are also keenly aware that there are growing demands on existing Title I funds, and that it may be difficult to divert Title I from existing commitments. Therefore, we suggest that First 5 Riverside ask school district applicants either to dedicate five percent of Title I funds or an equivalent amount in other new school support to preschool. In addition, the application could require that schools consider dedicating all of any additional Title I funds the district receives to preschool.

### **4) Assess Quality and Provide Mentorship System and Technical Assistance**

As stated in the body of this report, there is a missing link in the portrait of preschool services in Riverside County. Very little is known about the quality of the learning environments or the interaction between teachers and children in existing preschool classrooms in Riverside County.

Therefore, we recommend that Riverside County begin with an assessment of quality of all preschool programs, starting in the areas of greatest need and in any First 5-supported demonstration projects, and fanning out to be available, at least on a fee basis, to all providers in the county.

We recommend the use of Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) assessments, and suggest that the county also explore the feasibility of using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) as well. The Riverside Child Care Consortium has trained assessors in the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) and could be employed to conduct these assessments. Develop a technical assistance mentor system to assist other participating providers in the target areas and eventually to branch out to additional school district attendance areas that are not official members of the demonstration projects but are nonetheless part of the eventual countywide plan.

Riverside County Office of Education and several school districts that have made great strides in their commitment and devotion to preschool can serve as qualified mentors. Other school districts and private providers could look to these examples of leadership and passion in developing their own plans, providing training and support for teachers, developing new facilities, and even financing programs. A key feature of the county's plan might therefore be the official recognition of several Centers of Excellence that can serve as mentorship hubs for the rest of the county.

#### **(5) Explore Alternative Paths to Bachelor's Degrees**

One of the primary obstacles to improving the quality of preschool programs is the shortage of teachers with Bachelor's degrees. Currently, an estimated 17.8 percent of teachers in licensed centers or school-based programs in Riverside have Bachelor's degrees. Riverside must at least double (or triple) this percentage in order to have one teacher in every classroom with a Bachelor's degree, assuming each teacher works with two groups of children per day. While the primary key to attracting more qualified teachers is to improve the compensation, it must still be recognized that it may take existing teachers many years to progress to that level.

In Sacramento County, the County Office of Education is exploring the feasibility of offering coursework toward a Bachelor's degree. According to Dave Gordon, Sacramento County Office of Education's superintendent, state universities are not equipped to offer classes at hours convenient to preschool teachers. Alternative pathways to degrees and even credentials may be the best way to train an adequate pool of preschool teachers within a relatively short timeframe of five to ten years.

Nuvview Union also has an agreement with La Verne University through which the university sends professors to the school district so preschool teachers can take courses onsite.

#### **(6) Encourage Demonstration Projects in Working with English Learners**

Too little is known about the efficacy of various approaches to working with English Language Learners, although recent publications such as *Preschool English Learners: Principles and*

*Practices to Promote Language, Literacy and Learning* (California Department of Education 2007) provide strategies and techniques. In addition, the California Department of Education will soon publish its *Preschool Learning Foundations*, which contain a section on English Language Learners.

Jay Hoffman, superintendent of Nuview Union, advocates a family-wide approach to working with English learners, noting that there is a tremendous leveraging power when the child's entire family is involved. This technique is supported by the following principle outlined in *Preschool English Learners*: "Engaging in multiple literacy practices, such as reading books, singing songs, and reciting poetry, is part of the daily life of many families." This principle builds upon the advice of Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003), who stress the importance of incorporating the literacy practices used at home to serve as a bridge to those used in the classroom.

A second principle outlined in *Preschool English Learners* is that offering "a variety of opportunities for children to explore written materials and their meanings as well as the sounds of spoken language through rhyme and alliteration builds the language and literacy skills of preschool English learners." The accompanying best practices include the following: "encourage the development of emergent literacy skills in a supportive environment by acknowledging and expanding on the children's efforts", "relate literacy activities to the children's cultures, languages, and experiences to motivate the children's participation", and "use pictures, photographs, and scenes in books as a platform for interaction and discussion."

Riverside County should encourage natural experiments on this issue and evaluate results.

### **(7) Make Provisions for Wraparound Care a Requirement for Demonstration Grant Applications**

Just as there is no magic solution to financing preschool in Riverside County, so, too, there is no one-size-all solution to making preschool accessible to children living in homes with a single parent who works or in dual-income households.

Currently, 48 percent of preschool children in the county live in households where either both parents work or there is a single parent who works. Without attention to the problem of wraparound care, the concern is that these children may not have access to part-day preschool programs. There is a likelihood that some of the children who would most benefit from a quality preschool program may be forced to remain in exclusively exempt care arrangements that meet their parents' need for child care while they work, but which generally have not been found to advance the children's readiness for school.

The following are suggested approaches to making provisions for wraparound care:

*1). Implement a Preschool Bridging Model, similar to Sacramento's Preschool Bridging Model, in existing community-based settings and private child care centers.*

Preschool Bridging services include: 1) 3-hour preschool program, 5 days per week; 2) mentoring of classroom staff or family child care provider; 3) child assessment and referral; and

4) kindergarten transition planning. Services cost about the same as new part-day preschool slot in a center setting, but with the advantage of offering full-day service. However, costs are substantially more in a family child care setting because the staff-child ratio is considerably lower and generally only one group of children can be served per day.

If this model were used in Riverside, the school district could provide a degreed teacher to serve as a mentor to the center teacher for preschool programs. Districts might experiment with several different models, from providing the degreed teacher for the full 3 hours per day per class to serving as a mentor to an existing teacher. Scholarships would also be made available for center staff to pursue a Bachelor's degree.

*2). Invite family child care and exempt providers to bring their children to the preschool part-day program for three hours a day, and to remain in the program as parent volunteers during that time.*

*3). Implement a FCCH Hub Model, similar to that used in Ventura County.*

### **(8) Evaluate Demonstration Program(s) to Determine the Impact**

A key component of any preschool plan in Riverside County should be to provide for an independent evaluation of its preschool demonstration programs. Riverside County is fortunate to have an existing, high quality preschool program already available to virtually all four-year-olds in the Nuview Union Elementary School District. This Nuview preschool program – along with any additional programs the county supports -- would be excellent candidates for evaluation.

The purpose of the evaluation would be to study the process of implementing the program. Given some tuition support, how long does it take teachers to obtain additional education? What is the teacher turnover rate in the Riverside-supported demonstration programs as compared to non-supported programs? What types of mentoring do preschool teachers find most helpful? What is the quality of the programs, and how rapidly do they improve? Finally, once the program is implemented, how do child outcomes in the demonstration preschool programs compare with those in districts with comparable demographics but no access to preschool programs of similar quality?

## **(9) Focus on Enhancing Finances.**

As documented above, Riverside County does not appear to have its share of the statewide enrollment in publicly funded school readiness programs. While Riverside County has six percent of the young children eligible statewide for Free and Reduced Price Lunch, it has only 2.9 percent of the statewide General Child Care four-year-old enrollment and 5 percent of the Head Start four-year-old enrollment. Only an estimated 44 percent of income-eligible four-year-olds are currently enrolled in Riverside County in the three major publicly funded programs (Head Start, State Preschool and General Child Care), as compared with 53 percent of eligible children statewide.

More research would be needed to determine the precise reasons for this under-enrollment, which could include historical inequities in the federal Head Start funds available to the county, decisions not to apply or lack of success in applying for General Child Care funds available to the county, and/or failure of state funding opportunities to keep pace with rapid population growth in Riverside County.

To help position the county to obtain its fair share of funding and enrollment in the future, First 5 Riverside and other partners should consider investing in a grant writing team to assist the Riverside County Office of Education, school districts, and community-based providers in aggressively applying for these funds, as they become available. Preferably, the application process would be coordinated in order to maximize the drawdown of funds. In some counties providers have been successful in drawing down two or three times the county's initial allocation of State Preschool or General Child Care funds, in effect picking up funds that other counties have left on the table.

In addition, the Riverside County Office of Education might consider establishing a Prekindergarten-Grade 16 Council that would look at all of the potential revenue sources for preschool, and help make the case for investing any new Title I funds that come into the county into preschool.

Finally, First 5 Riverside County, in conjunction with the Riverside County Office of Education, might convene a Business Leadership Team and a Business Leaders Summit to make the case for preschool investments and determine possible additional local finance mechanisms. The city of Denver, after several attempts, just enacted a sales tax to help support the expansion of quality preschool, and the city of San Francisco enacted a proposition to improve education generally. The measure reserved \$3.3 million for Year 1 (2005-2006) with funding increasing annually until appropriations reach \$20 million annually between 2009-2010 and 2014-2015, from the City General Fund's Public Education Enrichment Fund.

## **(10) Invest First 5 Riverside Funds in Efforts to Sustain a Model Program and Position the County for Future Expansion**

Given limited funds of approximately \$2.5 million in First 5 funds over five years, First 5 Riverside County's first priority should be to sustain the preschool program in Nuvview Union Elementary School. This program already provides universal quality services, and has been

recognized as a “flagship” by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. There is also a potential to use this program to help provide technical assistance and mentor other preschool programs in the county, and to evaluate the program to demonstrate its impact and position the county for future expansion. Even with First 5 funds, Nuview would still need to raise considerable matching funds in order to sustain the program.

In addition to sustaining this model program, First 5 Riverside might consider:

- Evaluating the Nuview and any other preschool demonstration projects;
- Using the Nuview model to provide technical assistance and mentor other providers in the county;
- Developing a grant-writing team to position the county to position the county to apply for future state and federal funds as they become available;
- Expanding independent ECERS assessments, using the Riverside Child Care Consortium team which has already received training on this instrument;
- Investing in a alternative program to help teachers obtain Bachelor’s degrees; the program might be operated by the Riverside County Office of Education; and they could also investigate the possibility of expanding the approach used by the Palm Springs School District to bring classes to the providers in the district; and
- Establishing a Business Leaders Group and Summit to Support Preschool.

Even the total cost of fully supporting the Nuview preschool program, in one of the smallest school districts in the county, would exceed the \$2.5 million in resources over five years the Commission has specifically available to support preschool. Therefore, we recommend that First 5 Riverside require significant matching funds from Nuview or from any new applicants for preschool demonstration projects. Part of the competition to become the additional flagship would be to demonstrate the capacity to provide matching funds.

## **Areas for Additional Research**

- Further research is needed to determine the extent to which Riverside County might be able to help finance workforce development through funds that may eventually be made available through the recently enacted Head Start Reauthorization Act. A closer look generally is needed to make sure Riverside County accesses any new Head Start funds that become available.
- Once Riverside County determines the neighborhoods where the next preschool investments are to be made, planners should convene providers to determine the availability of space and the need for new and upgraded facilities in those areas. Neighborhood-specific data will be needed on:
  - Vacancy rate/available school space
  - Interest of private providers in participating
  - Assessment of status of existing facilities
  - Additional public buildings
  - Space to house portables
- The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment recommends that counties with more than 100 child care centers conduct a workforce study to obtain more precise data on the qualifications of the existing workforce. Once Riverside selects a phase-in

scenario, the survey might focus on the neighborhoods where preschool will be implemented.

- AIR recommends that Riverside County do a thorough analysis of the neighborhoods in which large, active licensed family child care providers are located. This analysis will provide information on which neighborhoods or zip codes might foster collaboration or partnerships between family child care providers and elementary schools to provide wrap-around care.
- A survey of center-based providers and a larger sample of family child care providers would help provide more precise information on the extent to which these providers are currently serving four-year-olds, and their interest in offering preschool services or wraparound services.