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

Year 1 Report

Executive Summary

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*San Mateo County Office of Education
First 5 San Mateo County
First 5 San Francisco*

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Executive Summary

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) is conducting a 3-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. First 5 San Francisco and the San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) are serving as the PFA administrating body in each county, respectively. The process evaluation is designed to investigate and document the implementation and the preliminary impacts of PFA on children, families, providers, and the community. In addition, AIR is working with First 5 San Francisco, SMCOE, and First 5 San Mateo County to establish processes and procedures to collect baseline child outcome data, in anticipation of designing and conducting an outcome study to follow the process evaluation.

This Year 1 report reflects the findings from an initial qualitative study, to gather process information on the first year of PFA implementation (2005-2006) in each county. The study examines factors which facilitated implementation and challenges faced by PFA program administrators, providers, and partner agencies, and includes recommendations to enhance the current PFA system as the initiative is expanded.

The goal of PFA 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.

Data Sources. All of the San Mateo PFA contractors (three publicly-subsidized programs with multiple sites) were included in this study. A sample of PFA providers in San Francisco (eight of the 13 agencies) participated, selected to reflect the mixed delivery system in that county, including private and publicly subsidized center-based programs, as well as family child care providers. Qualitative information was gathered from three respondent groups: (1) PFA providers (program directors, management-level staff, and teaching staff), (2) representatives from PFA partner agencies, and (3) directors of “non-PFA” preschool programs (potentially eligible programs that did not participate in PFA during the 2005-2006 program year). In total, AIR staff gathered feedback from 140 individuals through 89 interviews and focus groups between April and July of 2006.

Summary of Findings

It is important to note that the impacts of PFA presented in this qualitative report are based on feedback from PFA program and partner staff obtained through interviews and focus groups. The process study was not designed to gather quantitative or outcome data on PFA children, families, or providers, but rather to highlight successes and challenges facing the participants in the PFA system in each county in the first full year of program implementation. Although participation in PFA may indeed result in many positive outcomes for children and families, this qualitative examination of process issues is not an appropriate method to detect the subtle changes in teaching and peer relationships in the classroom or quantifiable workforce development progress

that may lead to the desired outcomes. Such child-, family-, and provider-level impacts are better examined using reliable observation tools designed specifically for this purpose. These types of standardized observations and other more objective data collection activities will be included in future phases of the process evaluation.

Other contextual factors to consider when reviewing this report include the design of PFA and the timing of this study. The intent of PFA is to build on the existing diverse system of publicly funded and private programs and upgrade preschool teacher education and quality. The vast majority of program staff interviewed for this study are teachers employed by pre-existing programs that have been “upgraded” by PFA. While a number of these teachers may have been hired specifically to work in PFA programs, PFA does represent a change for upgraded programs, in terms of new requirements for staff qualifications, classroom environments, and other quality standards. Given that PFA implementation has just begun in both counties, feedback from some providers may reflect the “growing pains” associated with the start-up phase of any new comprehensive educational initiative, as the administrating agencies, partners, and the participating providers collaboratively identify and address challenges that emerge.

Motivation to Participate in PFA. In both counties, providers opted to participate in PFA because they viewed it as a mechanism to improve the quality of their programs. Directors also discussed the additional resources they anticipated PFA would provide to the program, in the form of classroom materials and supplies, access to training and technical assistance, and funds to increase staff compensation. For private providers, PFA was also seen as a mechanism to meet enrollment targets.

Application Process and External Assessment of Program Quality. In order to be eligible for PFA funding in both San Francisco and San Mateo Counties, preschool programs must have an external Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition (ECERS-R) or Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) observation conducted by San Francisco State University – Gateway to Quality. Gateway to Quality is a collaborative effort among city agencies in San Francisco, community-based organizations, institutions of higher learning, and private foundations. Gateway to Quality’s trained and reliable assessors are available to conduct ITERS-R (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition), ECERS-R, or FDCRS observations and offer technical assistance to programs.

In general, PFA providers in both San Francisco and San Mateo felt the process of preparing for and participating in an external ECERS-R review of their program was beneficial and resulted in improvements to the quality of the classroom environments. A large majority of the programs across both counties commented on the difference between conducting the ECERS-R internally (e.g., through a self-assessment process) and having an external assessment done by a trained and objective ECERS-R assessor. Despite a certain amount of stress and anxiety involved with preparing for the observation, it was ultimately a positive experience for many staff. The specific outcomes of participating in an external ECERS-R review varied across programs. For example, in some Head Start and State Preschool-funded programs already required to meet standards in excess of licensing requirements, improvements based on the results of the ECERS-R assessment were relatively minor. For other programs, the ECERS-R review served as a vehicle to make significant changes to the classroom environments.

Year 1 Impact of PFA. One of the primary goals of the qualitative study was to investigate the impact of PFA on the first cohort of participating preschool programs. The ultimate goal of PFA is to ensure a high level of quality among participating programs countywide. Given the variation in the level of implementation of PFA quality standards across programs, the Year 1 impact of PFA funds also varied. San Francisco and San Mateo PFA providers discussed the overall impact of PFA in their first year of receiving funds in five major areas:

- **Outreach and Enrollment.** Providers in both counties discussed the challenges of marketing a “universal” program to families that currently is available in a few school districts in San Mateo and an increasing number of zip codes in San Francisco, based on a strategic decision to begin implementation in high-need areas. In regard to enrollment, publicly-subsidized upgraded PFA programs continued to adhere to family eligibility guidelines associated with other funding streams (e.g., Head Start). In San Francisco, programs with a tuition-based component described how PFA enabled them to reduce parent fees and thereby increase access to preschool for families who may not qualify for other types of subsidized care.
- **Global impacts on program quality.** Many of the providers articulated the effect of PFA in terms of its global impact on program quality. San Francisco directors discussed how PFA has promoted systemic change across program components, ensured equity across classrooms supported by different funding streams, and formalized program activities. In San Mateo, program directors made similar comments, focusing on how PFA has helped to infuse quality throughout their programs. A San Mateo program director explained, “being part of PFA is bringing us to a different level, [PFA is] increasing quality. We welcome it.” Providers from both counties also noted the infusion of technical assistance and other resources for program quality improvement.
- **Changes to the physical environments of the classrooms.** Programs described minor and major enhancements to the physical environment of their programs as a result of PFA funding and participation in the ECERS-R review process. In both counties, one of the main impacts of PFA has been a dramatic improvement in the aesthetics of program settings. Enhancements included new or repaired furniture, new materials and toys to enhance learning centers, and more supplies. Overall, reorganization of classrooms was identified as a common result of participating in the external ECERS-R assessment process. Many of the PFA sites described moving furniture and reorganizing interest centers to enhance children’s learning.
- **Impacts on children’s learning and staff-child interactions.** Some PFA staff commented that children’s experiences have been positively affected by the improvements in the classroom environments afforded by PFA. For example, a PFA program noted that it currently devotes more time supporting staff-child interactions through increased training and mentoring, although staff noted this effort was implemented prior to PFA. Another PFA contractor described increased observation and documentation of children over the last year of PFA implementation, for both PFA upgraded classrooms and non-PFA classrooms operated by the program. Feedback from program staff suggests that PFA has supported

children's learning. However, this qualitative study was not designed to rigorously determine the impact of PFA on children's outcomes. An outcome evaluation to examine PFA's effect on children's development is planned for the future.

- **Benefits for staff.** In both counties, the vast majority of programs identified positive outcomes for staff as a direct result of participating in PFA. These benefits included increased professional pride among staff, more effective teamwork, and stronger motivation for program improvement. According to staff, PFA has made them feel recognized as a high-quality preschool provider and appreciated for the important role they play in children's development.

PFA Support Services. San Mateo and San Francisco provide a variety of training and technical assistance resources to PFA contractors. In San Francisco, these support services include Learning Circles, which are quarterly meetings of PFA providers, and arts and science enhancement activities. PFA providers are monitored by Wu Yee Children's Services, a San Francisco Resource & Referral Agency, which also helps conduct outreach to families and providers and connect PFA providers with available resources. In addition, First 5 San Francisco works collaboratively with a number of agencies including the City College of San Francisco (career counseling, professional development), the Low Income Investment Fund (quality improvement grants, facility enhancements, technical assistance), and the High Risk Infant Interagency Council (child screenings). Other partners with First 5 San Francisco include the Children's Council, the Citywide Child Care Administrator, and the Local Planning Council.

San Francisco PFA sites appreciated the support provided to them through PFA. The science program, Tree Frog Treks, was popular with some PFA sites, although some programs had yet to schedule an event with the agency when data were collected for this study. A number of staff who used the resources found it difficult to engage children in the science kit activities provided by the program, and suggested the activities may not be developmentally appropriate for preschoolers. The Learning Circles were appreciated for the information exchange and networking they provided, although some staff found it difficult to attend the meetings during the day. In addition, staff requested more control over the types of training opportunities available, to better align them with their unique needs. Management staff across the PFA programs praised the help they received from First 5 San Francisco.

In San Mateo, PFA providers received training and support from the PFA Technical Assistance Coordinator, the Early Childhood Language Development Institute (ECLDI), the Raising a Reader® book bag program, and mental health consultation/support from Parents Place of the Jewish Family and Children's Services. PFA also provides paid professional development days for staff to participate in training and complete PFA classroom requirements. In addition, SMCOE works with partner agencies on a number of activities to support PFA providers and to address potential obstacles that may hinder the participation of preschool programs in the PFA system. These partners include the San Mateo Child Care Coordinating Council (PFA outreach, career counseling, and facilities), the San Mateo Community College District (academic counseling, curriculum support), the Redwood City Child Care Coordinator (outreach, facilities), the Professional Association for Childhood Education (outreach, information dissemination), the

Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families (school readiness, transition activities), and the San Mateo Human Service Agency (policy guidance, funding).

San Mateo staff were positive about the support services provided to them through PFA. The mental health, ECLDI training, and site-specific TA coordination were well received. The Raising a Reader® program was praised for its benefits and flexibility. Overall, most PFA staff characterized the support of the SMCOE TA coordinator as positive. Some San Mateo PFA contractors emphasized the importance of ongoing dialogue with SMCOE to ensure technical assistance provided is aligned with ongoing efforts that are unique to each program. All of the PFA providers were highly appreciative of the support they have received from SMCOE staff.

Serving PFA Children with Special Needs. PFA programs are expected to serve children of all skill and ability levels to fully comply with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and other federal and state civil rights laws. To screen children for developmental delays, PFA programs are required to administer the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), which is a parent/teacher-completed child-screening tool.

In San Francisco, the primary theme which emerged in regard to the ASQ was that the tool sometimes duplicated existing program screening systems. A PFA program director remarked that the ASQ was helpful, although it replicated the purpose and activities of their established screening and referral system for children with special needs. This was particularly true among PFA school district sites, where staff emphasized that the school district has an existing system in which children are screened and connected to services.

In San Mateo, Head Start classrooms were already using the ASQ prior to PFA. For two of the PFA San Mateo programs, the ASQ was a new requirement. Feedback in San Mateo in regard to the ASQ was generally positive; although staff qualified that the ASQ was a useful tool when they used the paid release time provided by PFA to complete the questionnaire collaboratively with parents. This enabled staff an opportunity early in the school year to get to know both parents and their children better.

San Mateo and San Francisco providers discussed the need to improve the delivery of services to children with special needs. While they appreciated that screening is emphasized through PFA, providers pointed to critical improvements that are necessary in the special education system to ensure children receive appropriate services in a timely manner. Program staff in both counties also expressed a desire for more training, support, and specialized staff to help with serving children with special needs in their classrooms.

PFA Staff Qualifications and Compensation. PFA has impacted a variety of issues related to staffing, including educational requirements, pursuit of higher education, and capacity to increase compensation. In San Francisco, the majority of PFA programs were publicly subsidized prior to PFA, as were all PFA programs in San Mateo. Providers were asked to reflect on the impact of PFA's guidelines or requirements regarding staff qualifications and compensation.

- **San Francisco Staff Qualifications.** Minimum San Francisco PFA staffing requirements are based on the Child Development Permit. As a PFA site, the Lead Teacher, at a

minimum, must hold (or qualify and have applied for) a Child Development Teacher Permit. The Assistant Teacher(s), at a minimum, must hold (or qualify and have applied for) a Child Development Associate Teacher Permit. When there are more than 16 children, a third staff person must hold (or qualify and have applied for) an Assistant Teacher Permit. Programs provided feedback on the PFA staffing qualifications in San Francisco, with at least two programs emphasizing the need for additional or alternative standards to benchmark program quality. Management staff suggested the use of waivers for staff who may hold advanced degrees (e.g., masters degree) but lack the appropriate number of early childhood education units. In addition, when PFA is operated by a school district, PFA staff qualifications must be considered in light of union regulations. With a few exceptions, all of the PFA programs in San Francisco reported that recruiting and maintaining qualified PFA staff were significant challenges. However, program directors reinforced that workforce issues impact the ECE field in general and are not unique to PFA.

- **San Francisco PFA Compensation.** In 2005-2006, PFA programs in San Francisco had to adhere to specific wage rates (First 5 San Francisco has since eliminated the wage requirement policy and instead requires contractors to develop program-level staff compensation plans). For 2005-2006 programs, lead teachers had to be compensated at the PFA wage levels for at least 4 hours per day for 175 days per year, or 3 hours per day for 245 days for programs operating full-year programs. Given that PFA is a part-day program, embedding PFA wage rates within a full-day program posed some administrative challenges for at least two of the providers. A director of a PFA program that received Head Start funds reported that she was not willing to increase salaries only for teachers working in PFA classrooms and not for staff teaching at non-PFA sites. As a result, she increased master and lead teacher salaries across the board, drawing on her Head Start and PFA funds. She emphasized that parity across the program was essential for the morale and professional development of the entire staff. Another program director discussed the undesirable impact of varying wage rates for PFA teachers working in a full-day program, where PFA staff received a higher rate in the morning for the PFA program, compared to the afternoon non-PFA funded session.
- **San Mateo PFA Staff Qualifications.** To receive funding, upgraded PFA programs in San Mateo must meet minimum qualifications and full qualifications by 2010 to receive funds. For lead teachers, the minimum qualifications specify that they must hold an AA or AS degree and 24 early childhood education (ECE) units. By 2010, the lead teacher must hold a BA or BS with a Master Teacher Permit (Option 1). New PFA classrooms (i.e. not existing spaces that are ‘upgraded’) must meet full PFA standards at the outset. In the 2005-2006 program year, two of the three contractors entered the PFA system at the fully qualified level.

One of the three PFA contractors in San Mateo experimented with a specific staffing structure and provided feedback on its effectiveness. In this model, a “traveling teacher” serves as the qualified BA PFA teacher, changing classrooms in the middle of the day (e.g., working in the morning as part of the morning PFA session embedded in a full-day program and switching to a State Preschool session in the afternoon). Several issues emerged as a result of this staffing model, including a purported negative impact on teacher morale, loss of a sense of ownership over their classroom, and a disruption of teamwork among staff

members in full-day classrooms. San Mateo does not plan to use this staffing model in the 2006-2007 program year.

Teaching staff debated the value of having a BA teacher with 32 ECE units in the PFA classrooms. Some staff suggested that the PFA system should consider alternative staff qualifications to the BA, such as tenure in the field. Other staff supported the idea of having a BA and an AA teacher in the classroom, although they pointed to the limitations of the current teacher education system to train qualified staff.

- **San Mateo PFA Compensation Guidelines.** In San Mateo, the goal of PFA is that lead teachers achieve both education and compensation parity with public kindergarten teachers. PFA contractors must demonstrate that salaries for fully qualified teaching staff are within the same ranges as the public school districts and that salaries for less qualified staff are prorated from this standard. PFA programs must reflect these salary costs in their proposed budgets and expenditure reports. At one program, PFA funds are used to broaden the wage scale among staff, although the program director cautioned other programs who might be interested in becoming a PFA site about doing so. She cited concerns about creating inequity among staff working in non-PFA classrooms compared to PFA classrooms. A management-level staff person from another program also talked about the impact of varying wage rates for teachers working in PFA part-day sessions embedded in a full-day program (e.g., teachers who receive higher pay for a PFA morning session and lower pay in the State Preschool afternoon session).

The other theme related to compensation which emerged focused on the parity of preschool teacher pay with kindergarten teacher salaries that may continue to rise, per district policies. Although PFA management and teaching staff appreciate PFA's emphasis on improving teacher compensation, there are still issues to be reconciled in terms of parity with increases in kindergarten teacher salaries over time and inequities for individual teachers who may split their time between PFA and other preschool classrooms that do not include the same teacher compensation requirements.

These issues relating to staff qualifications and compensation are complex and reflect PFA's underlying intent of building upon the diverse system of existing preschool providers, rather than creating new, stand-alone programs. On the whole, administrators and teachers in upgraded PFA sites agreed that higher levels of teacher compensation are key to attracting and retaining a quality workforce, yet they also acknowledged that these changes were not without their challenges, including staff displacements or reassignments, adjustments to new teaching team configurations, and additional pressures placed on staff to obtain higher-level permits or degrees. In addition, as PFA is phased in by building upon the varied array of existing preschool programs, standardized compensation across all settings cannot occur immediately. Although substantial PFA resources have been used to support teacher education and training and to increase compensation, providers suggested that achieving equity within programs and sustaining higher compensation levels into the future would require ongoing flexibility on the part of staff, creativity on the part of administrators, and secure sources of funding over the long-term.

Braiding Funding Streams. For the most part, PFA programs with funding from CDE or Head Start had yet to encounter significant issues in regard to braiding funding streams, although two programs expressed concern that problems may arise in the future. One San Francisco management staff person reflected on the potential confusion for sites funded by State Preschool, Head Start, PFA, a parent fee component, and vouchers. In San Mateo, PFA providers reported they had not experienced any issues related to braiding funds.

PFA Reimbursement Rate. Reimbursement rates vary in San Francisco and San Mateo. PFA funds can be used for staff compensation, substitute pay, training, support staff, equipment and supplies, field trips, accommodations for the inclusion of children with special needs, and enhancement activities. For programs with a parent fee, PFA replaces those fees for the PFA portion of the day.

- **San Francisco PFA Reimbursement Rate.** Feedback on the appropriateness and viability of the PFA reimbursement rate appeared to be related to the level and type of other funding that supported programs. Two private providers felt that the reimbursement rate, while appreciated for being higher than the rate for the State Preschool program or General Child Care, was below the market rate. Other publicly-funded programs reported that PFA provided funds to effectively upgrade program quality.
- **San Mateo PFA Reimbursement Rate.** All of the San Mateo PFA programs reported that the PFA reimbursement rate was satisfactory, particularly as it represented an upgrade to their existing funding levels. For publicly-subsidized programs, PFA funds are not needed to replace parent fees and hence can be used exclusively to enhance program quality. (At the time of the interview, one program had not yet reviewed their year-end budget reports, but estimated that the resources provided by PFA would be adequate, given the expectations of the funding).

State Preschool Contracts. PFA programs funded by the California Department of Education (CDE) for State Preschool were asked if PFA had impacted their ability to meet their State Preschool contract. In both counties, providers had not encountered any issues related to their contract, although at least one provider raised concerns on this topic. A San Francisco management staff person explained, “I am concerned that if a child is subsidized, plus gets PFA—how are we going to meet the [state] contract?” Although the CDE has provided technical assistance on how to submit proper financial reports in order to avoid this problem, it appears there is still some anxiety among PFA providers about how to handle this issue.

Sustainability of PFA. When asked about the sustainability of PFA, the majority of PFA staff emphasized the importance of the funding to remain stable over the long-term. One director recommended that the early childhood education field collaborate with the business community to secure long-term funding.

PFA Reporting Requirements. In general, feedback regarding PFA reporting requirements was similar across San Francisco and San Mateo. In both counties, programs must administer the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and collect demographic, attendance, and other service data for children and families. To varying

degrees, program directors and management-level staff in both counties described the current level of reporting required by PFA as a burden. This frustration reflected concern regarding the cumulative reporting requirements that programs with multiple funding streams faced. Most of the providers emphasized the need to coordinate PFA reporting with the CDE and/or Head Start systems. Concerns about reporting seemed to be related to program auspice, with Head Start and/or CDE-funded programs most comfortable with PFA reporting requirements, compared to their private or other publicly funded counterparts.

Recommendations From PFA Providers

PFA staff offered recommendations to improve the current PFA system and in regard to the expansion of PFA to new zip codes or school districts over time. Their comments are provided below, by county.

Recommendations From San Francisco PFA Providers

- **Improve the Reporting System.** The most common recommendation from San Francisco PFA providers focused on revising the reporting system. Management staff from most PFA sites commented that there was too much paperwork associated with the funding. One program director strongly emphasized the need for the development and implementation of a more efficient system of data collection and reporting. Providers with multiple funding streams recommended that PFA look for ways to coordinate its reporting requirements with those associated with other funding streams. This was particularly true for the school district, where staff emphasized the need to coordinate PFA within existing policies, procedures, and reporting systems.
- **Explore the Alignment Between PFA and the Existing Program’s Unique Philosophy and Practices.** Several PFA programs discussed the need to dialogue with First 5 San Francisco regarding the balance between their own program philosophy and guidance on instructional strategies provided by the PFA system (e.g., through the Learning Circles or through the ECERS-R review process). PFA promotes high-quality preschool programming—staff articulated a need for continued discussion with First 5 San Francisco to define “quality” in terms of the nuts and bolts of implementation. Similar comments were raised in San Mateo, as providers and PFA administrating bodies engage in conversations regarding how PFA and existing preschool programs align.
- **Gradually Implement PFA Expectations Over Time.** A few providers encouraged First 5 San Francisco to take time in requiring full compliance with standards, specifically in regard to staffing requirements and ECERS-R scores. Another provider encouraged First 5 to continue to solicit feedback from providers, in order to ensure that the expectations of First 5 San Francisco align with the current status of the early childhood field. Most PFA staff commented that First 5 San Francisco staff were extremely supportive and receptive to feedback.

Recommendations From San Mateo PFA Providers

- **Support Providers.** Recommendations from San Mateo PFA providers strongly focused on supporting the professional development of teaching staff. A PFA program director

emphasized, “Definitely support the staff and be sensitive to the changes that the staff are going through. I think sometimes too, that when you start to make changes and things are working well, staff will get overwhelmed because people will put more and more on you. You have to be sensitive to the staff.” Other comments around professional development pointed to the need for tuition assistance, additional release time, and more paid prep time (PFA already funds several days of paid release time for staff to fulfill classroom requirements and attend required training).

- **Review the PFA Eligibility Criteria.** Staff from two of the PFA contractors recommended that SMCOE and the PFA community review the current implementation of PFA and consider the future of the program. In particular, several staff—management and teachers—suggested that the San Mateo ECERS-R score requirements be reviewed, recommending that an average across subscales be used, rather than a specific score on each subscale. (Since data collection was conducted for the study, First 5 California has revised the ECERS-R eligibility requirements, due to the advocacy of San Mateo, San Francisco, and Los Angeles)¹.
- **Explore the Alignment Between PFA and the Existing Program’s Unique Philosophy and Practices.** PFA providers raised concerns that PFA may advocate or prescribe specific teaching strategies in the future that may be in conflict with the program’s local practices. PFA providers emphasized the importance of continuing the existing dialogue with SMCOE to explore the interface between PFA and each program’s individual philosophy regarding instruction. It is important to note that PFA programs, to be eligible to receive funds, must already adhere to a certain level of quality. However, in this start-up period of implementation, programs and PFA administering bodies are negotiating how to best integrate the quality standards of PFA with the culture and practices of local providers.
- **Include Providers in Discussions Regarding the Long-term Sustainability of PFA.** A program director talked about the long-term future of PFA, particularly given that the PFA statewide ballot initiative failed. Staff suggested that SMCOE plan strategically (such as a facilities fund, increased funding for SaMCARES) in order to support the growth and improvement of current and future PFA sites.
- **Consider the Goals and Scope of the PFA System to Inform Countywide Policy Planning.** One PFA staff person emphasized that PFA can strengthen, but not replace, the efforts of other initiatives (e.g., mental health support, services for children with disabilities, family support services, infant/toddler care). “PFA has a targeted purpose. PFA cannot do it all. PFA can’t do everything.”

¹ The point of entry-level score on the Environment Rating Scale for providers is now a rating of “4” which is obtained by averaging all 43 indicators of the ECERS or averaging all 40 indicators of the FDCRS. Within a period of 24 months, providers must receive an overall score of “5”, which is obtained by averaging all 43 indicators of the ECERS or averaging all 40 indicators of the FDCRS. At entry-level and throughout their participation, providers must receive, at a minimum, an average of “3” on each of the seven sub-scales for the applicable environment rating scale.

PFA Partner Agencies

Representatives from eighteen PFA partner agencies from both counties were interviewed to gain an understanding of their role within the PFA system, the relationships among partners, factors which facilitated the work of partners, and challenges they have encountered to date. The scope and type of activities conducted by partner agencies varied. Partner agencies included organizations that provided technical assistance with facilities, special needs, the ECERS-R, accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children or National Association for Family Child Care, science, and early literacy and language development. Other functions of partner agencies included career counseling and workforce development, monitoring, and policy and planning. Together, partner agencies form a network of support for PFA providers. Despite the variation among the partner agencies within and across the counties, interviews with staff from these organizations revealed some common themes in San Francisco and San Mateo.

Partner agency staff in both counties discussed the importance of collaboration among key stakeholders in the PFA system and the coordination of PFA with other county-wide initiatives (e.g., mental health, special needs). Partner agencies suggested that they, as a group, continue to identify natural linkages between PFA and other efforts to support providers, children, and families. Staff from partner agencies in both counties also described PFA as an effective vehicle to build the capacity of the early childhood field and increase quality.

PFA partners in San Francisco and San Mateo offered recommendations to support the PFA system. Common themes which emerged in both counties included the following suggestions to:

- Ensure representation from diverse provider groups, including private providers, family child care providers, institutions of higher education, policy groups, training agencies, the business community, and other stakeholders, in the planning and implementation of PFA,
- Consider alternative PFA staff qualifications beyond the BA, such as tenure in the field,
- Focus planning efforts on identifying and removing barriers to the participation of family child care providers in PFA,
- Develop a sustainable fund to support the early care and education community, including low-interest loans or grants to providers to address facility issues,
- Educate the provider community on the role of Gateway to Quality, including the logistics involved with the ECERS-R assessment,
- Link PFA with other county-level initiatives (e.g., mental health, public health, special needs, the Centralized Eligibility List) to collaboratively support quality and timely services for children and families in each county,
- Invest in the assessment and tracking of PFA children through their K-12 school years, to measure their progress and demonstrate the importance of preschool to the public, policy makers, and the business community,
- Invest in the development of a data collection system that is useful for all stakeholders (e.g., informing planning among policy makers and helping providers efficiently comply with multiple reporting requirements),
- Invest in workforce development initiatives,
- Use PFA to strengthen the existing local intermediary agencies, particularly in regard to workforce development,

- Work toward a mixed delivery system for PFA to support parent choice and increased access to full-day care,
- Broaden public support for PFA through an enhanced public relations effort about the program and the importance of early care and education, and
- Ensure periodic review and reflection on what is working with PFA and what is not; revise the PFA system based on emerging findings.

Non-PFA Providers—Why Are Preschool Programs Not Participating in PFA? Twenty-four interviews (18 in San Mateo and 6 in San Francisco) were conducted with preschool program directors who are not currently part of the PFA system (the majority of interviews were conducted prior to the California Preschool for All Proposition 82 ballot initiative). When asked about factors which impacted their decision or capacity to become a PFA site, a number of issues emerged: (1) facility limitations, (2) concern about the scope of PFA criteria, particularly the assessment of children and reporting requirements, (3) concern that the PFA reimbursement rate is too low, (4) difficulties meeting PFA staff qualification requirements, (5) miscommunication with PFA staff about the application process, (6) concerns about PFA impacting the program’s ability to meet their state contract, and (7) hesitation to proceed with local PFA before the outcome of the statewide ballot initiative was known. When asked about the potential of becoming PFA providers within two to three years time, however, the majority of non-PFA program directors who were interviewed indicated they would most likely want to participate in PFA.

Conclusion

PFA funding has had far-reaching impacts across participating programs that include benefits for children, families, and providers. In the first full year of program implementation (2005-2006), PFA has resulted in enhanced programming for children, increased access to high-quality care for families, and professional development and support services for preschool 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.

It is clear that PFA has been an enormous undertaking in both San Francisco and San Mateo counties. First 5 San Francisco and SMCOE/First 5 San Mateo are working to support and monitor the current cohort of PFA providers, coordinate the network of PFA partners, assist non-PFA preschool programs in meeting quality criteria to eventually participate in the system, and plan for a fairly rapid expansion of the initiative in the coming years. First 5 San Francisco and SMCOE/First 5 San Mateo also face the difficulty of marketing a “universal” program that currently is available in a few school districts in San Mateo and an increasing number of zip codes in San Francisco, based on a strategic decision to begin implementation in high-need areas.

Given these complexities and the challenges inherent in the first year of operation for any social service or education initiative, PFA implementation in San Francisco and San Mateo counties has proceeded remarkably well. The reported successes of this first year seem to rest on the strong and collaborative relationships that exist in both counties between and among the PFA administrative agencies, funding agencies, partner agencies, and the provider community. The

network of partner agencies that support the PFA providers is also critical. PFA eligibility requirements are high, and the importance of supporting providers in reaching and maintaining those standards was emphasized by the majority of PFA stakeholders.

Challenges in the PFA system and recommendations for overcoming them were identified by providers and partners, and were relatively similar across these groups and across the two counties. Continuing obstacles for family child care providers and private center-based programs to participate in PFA were mentioned frequently, and providers and partners encouraged First 5 San Francisco and SMCOE to continue to include a diverse group of stakeholders in the planning and periodic review of the PFA system. Comments regarding the PFA staff qualifications reflected a level of division within the field, with some stakeholders supporting the high education standards, and others voicing concerns about the potential loss of effective teachers who may not have or wish to obtain, higher education levels. Continued integration of PFA with existing policies, procedures, and initiatives, such as the Centralized Eligibility List or countywide social service programs, was recommended to ensure that PFA does not become a stand-alone program. Feedback from providers regarding the burden of PFA reporting also illustrates the need to examine how PFA can integrate with data collection, monitoring, and reporting requirements associated with other early care and education funding streams.

PFA has highlighted several issues that impact the early care and education field more generally and which will continue to require a broad-based effort to address. These challenges include the need for significant funding to address facility upgrade issues among center-based and family child care programs, and recruiting, training, and maintaining a high-quality workforce. While these challenges and others were identified by participants in the first year of PFA implementation; overall, providers and partners applauded the efforts of First 5 San Francisco and SMCOE in planning and implementing PFA's initial years so effectively. As one PFA site supervisor reported, "PFA has given us something new to reach for."

Recent Policy Changes and Directions for Future Implementation of PFA

Since data were collected for this study, First 5 San Francisco and SMCOE have addressed many of the challenges that are highlighted in this report and engaged in discussions internally and with partners to address issues that have emerged throughout the initial phase of PFA implementation. Action steps that have been taken include, but are not limited to:

- working with Gateway to Quality to improve communication with PFA sites in both counties,
- more clearly articulating the role of the SMCOE TA Coordinator through increased communication with sites and negotiation regarding the role of the Coordinator in relation to existing program resources, procedures, and preferences,
- eliminating the wage rate requirements in San Francisco,
- reducing the frequency of monitoring site visits to San Francisco programs by Wu Yee Children's Services,
- exploring alternative database systems to be used with PFA sites and streamlining report forms to reduce reporting burden.

First 5 San Francisco, SMCOE, and First 5 San Mateo County plan to focus on a range of activities in 2006-2007 and the coming years. In regard to outreach and enrollment, PFA in San Francisco County is being expanded from four neighborhoods in 2005-2006 to 14 neighborhoods beginning in the fall of 2006. PFA will continue to roll out in additional neighborhoods until it is universal in 2009. In San Mateo County, SMCOE plans to increase PFA services and spaces to approximately 800 children in 2006-2007 and add approximately five new PFA contractors including private, for-profit and family child care providers. In partnership with 4Cs, PFA contractors, and other partner agencies, SMCOE also will increase the scope of outreach efforts to more effectively recruit lower-middle to middle income families to participate in PFA.

In addition to increasing PFA capacity, both counties will expand activities to strengthen PFA services and support providers. In San Francisco County, First 5 San Francisco has established working committees to focus on family engagement and support strategies and enhanced transition activities between preschool and kindergarten. They also plan to design an exempt care pilot to explore how PFA can support children served by exempt providers. In addition, First 5 San Francisco will work to enhance services for children with special needs and support language development efforts for children learning English as a second language. They will also strengthen workforce development strategies, including expansion of the BA completion program to support cohorts of students earning their bachelor's degree through San Francisco State University. First 5 San Francisco will offer citywide technical assistance efforts to support providers, including the provision of site-specific technical assistance to PFA programs. Finally, efforts will be focused on strengthening public awareness about PFA.

In San Mateo County, SMCOE and First 5 San Mateo County are exploring new strategies to support teacher training and degree completion efforts, such as classes and supports to ensure that ECE/CD students are "transfer-ready" (have all the requisite coursework) to smoothly matriculate from the AA/AS into a BA/BS program). Recent surveys in San Mateo County with ECE/CD students and SaMCARES participants have indicated that although a very large number of students indicate an interest in a "AA-to-BA" cohort/fast-track, very few are ready to transfer directly into the San Francisco State University's Child and Adolescent Development program.

In addition, mental health support services, provided through the Jewish Family and Children's Services, will be expanded significantly in 2006-2007 in San Mateo. Training on family engagement and inclusive practices will be offered to PFA providers. SMCOE will coordinate with the Peninsula Partnership to enhance transition strategies between preschool and kindergarten. First 5 San Mateo and SMCOE will continue their focus on quality improvement among the provider community. Capacity-building efforts through the 4Cs Quality Improvement/Accreditation Support Project will be expanded in 2006-2007, as well as technical assistance and informational materials, tools, and processes to address facility needs and barriers among the provider community. Similarly, the long-term sustainability of PFA and strategies to support the PFA infrastructure are being examined.

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 second 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, and professional development activities. The evaluation will focus on classroom-level quality indicators, in addition to the ECERS-R, and gather feedback from families participating in PFA. In addition, AIR will assist with the design of a rigorous longitudinal evaluation that focuses on PFA program outcomes for children and families.