

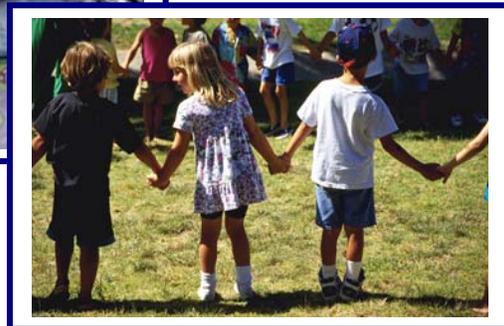


## First 5 Special Study of High-Quality Preschools

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### Case Study Reports

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We also want to give special thanks to the program staff who welcomed us to their sites for interviews, focus groups, and observations of program services. We also are grateful to parents for sharing their insights and opinions with us. We hope this report gives a good summary of the hard work, dedication, and commitment the program staff have aimed at improving the lives of California's young children and their families.

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## 1 Introduction

The First 5 California State Commission and each of the 58 County Commissions are committed to increasing school readiness for all children in California. This report provides information about case studies completed as part of the First 5 Special Study of High-Quality Preschools, conducted by SRI International and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) as part of the statewide evaluation of First 5 California funded programs. This report includes a case study report for each of 12 preschools selected for participation in this study and describes the preschool program including the daily schedule, curriculum and instructional approach, school readiness activities, population served, teaching staff, parent involvement activities, and Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R) assessment score. Also included is a description of the case study design and methodology.

### **Purpose of Case Studies**

The purpose of the First 5 Special Study of High-Quality Preschools is to highlight the attributes of a sample of 12 high-quality early education programs supported by First 5 funding.

Individual case studies provide program staff and administrators with a description of program activities that may be useful in program evaluation, continuous improvement activities, and future grant proposals and funding searches. It is also expected that identifying the attributes and resources, as well as the challenges associated with the provision of high-quality early education programs, will be helpful for informing First 5 California and universal preschool planning and technical assistance efforts. The information gathered from the study also can be used to help other County Commissions and program administrators who may be considering implementing preschool programs.

The case study contains the following sections:

- Overview
- Curriculum and Instructional Approach
- School Readiness
- Serving California's Diverse Population
- About the Program Director and Teachers
- Parent Involvement and Other Family Support
- Conclusion

Also included in this report are:

- Appendix A. Methodology for First 5 Special Study of High-Quality Preschools
- Appendix B. Summary of Observation using Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R)
- References

## **Importance of High-Quality Preschool and Relevance to First 5 California**

Currently in California and across the United States, there is a heightened policy interest in the provision of high-quality early education and preschool programs.<sup>1-3</sup> This growing interest is based on the acknowledgement of how important the early years are for brain development and early learning, with research studies showing that a high-quality preschool experience can improve a child's school readiness.<sup>4-11</sup>

Research has shown consistently that children who attend a high-quality preschool program are more successful, both academically and socially, in kindergarten and beyond. Participation in high-quality preschool has been shown to influence cognitive and communication skills, as well as social competence and a variety of behavioral characteristics related to learning such as curiosity, task persistence and willingness to follow directions.<sup>8, 10-12</sup> These positive developmental outcomes for young children have, in turn, been found to increase young children's school readiness and chances of success in school.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, while a high-quality preschool program experience helps all children, it may be particularly beneficial for young children from low-income families.<sup>5, 7-10, 13-19</sup> Given these benefits, First 5 California has selected the promotion of "Early Childhood Learning & Education" as one of its strategic areas and specifically outlined a goal to increase the quality of and access to early learning and education for young children ages 0-5 in the Strategic Plan: 2003-2006.

A recent policy report about education in California argued strongly for the need for high-quality preschool programs to prepare California's young children for success in school, particularly for those in communities with low-performing schools.<sup>20</sup> Many of the children in low performing schools are English learners from low-income families. As such, this population stands to benefit from high-quality early education programs that First 5 California and the First 5 School Readiness Initiative are supporting, particularly those programs focusing on early literacy and language development.<sup>21</sup>

Many early education program models include activities to enhance children's early literacy, as well as social and physical development. There is no consensus, however, about the relative benefits of one program model over another. Furthermore, California faces additional challenges because many young children in communities with underperforming schools are children who are English-language learners and from low-income families. For this population, there is, likewise, no consensus about what constitutes an optimal approach for promoting early literacy.<sup>22, 23</sup>

Studies clearly show that to achieve positive child outcomes associated with preschool participation, preschool programs must be of high quality. The attributes that contribute to high quality of early childhood education and early care programs have been the subject of much research, and guidelines and recommendations have been established by several national organizations with the goal of informing program standards.<sup>8, 24-29</sup> Attributes identified as critical to the implementation of a high-quality preschool program include having a well-defined curriculum, use of developmentally appropriate activities and materials, teacher credentials, experience and salaries, teacher-child interactions, parent involvement, and health and safety routines and environmental features are described below.<sup>29, 30</sup>

## **Critical Attributes of High-Quality Preschool Programs**

There are several attributes that are critical to a high-quality preschool program. These attributes are described below.

***Well-defined curriculum.*** There are a number of curricula used in early childhood education programs, but there currently are limited data about their relative effectiveness for promoting children's developmental and early literacy skills.<sup>31</sup> However, the consensus in the early childhood education field is that one attribute of a high-quality preschool program is having a planned curriculum that has specific goals to promote children's learning and development in the cognitive, language, physical, and social-emotional domains. Having a well-defined curriculum assists teachers in identifying important concepts and skills necessary for fostering a child's learning and development. A curriculum also guides the teachers in their planning of everyday activities and helps teachers to be more purposeful about deciding on activities that maximize a child's learning experiences.

***Developmentally appropriate activities and materials.*** Research indicates that throughout the day, children should participate in developmentally appropriate activities and have access to developmentally appropriate materials. Developmentally appropriate practices reflect an interactive, constructivist view of learning.<sup>32, 33</sup> Key to this approach is the principle that the child constructs his or her own knowledge through interactions with the social and physical environment. Because the child is viewed as intrinsically motivated and self-directed, effective teaching capitalizes on the child's motivation to explore, experiment, and to make sense of his or her experience. High-quality preschool programs have at least five interest centers that provide children with a variety of learning experiences. Interest centers are clearly defined, have open shelves, and containers for toys are labeled for independent use by children. Materials in the centers include age-appropriate books, props conducive to dramatic play, and manipulatives (e.g., blocks, puzzles, and a water and/or sand station) to improve a child's fine motor skills.

***Characteristics of teachers.*** Professional preparation of teachers focused on child development and early childhood education has been found to be the main influence on quality of preschool centers and positive student outcomes.<sup>8</sup> In addition to professional training for teachers, studies have also shown that teacher salaries and credentialing also influence quality as indicated by children's academic success.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, children who were taught by teachers with bachelor's degrees or associate's degrees had better outcomes on an assessment of early writing skills. Investing in training and retaining early childhood education staff, as well as providing higher salaries, will ensure that children have access to high-quality preschool programs.

***Teacher-child interactions.*** High-quality preschool programs are characterized by frequent warm and responsive teacher-child interactions.<sup>30</sup> Research shows that the teacher-child interactions are critical in promoting children's learning and development. Teacher-child interactions are rich educational opportunities for a teacher to influence a child's development by making comments and asking questions that encourage a child to extend his or her thinking. Developmentally appropriate input by the teacher that is well matched and in tune with the child's ongoing behavior and play provides optimal stimulation, or scaffolding, and forms the basis of most preschool curricula in use today.

***Parent involvement.*** Parents' involvement in their child's education begins at birth and is important for school readiness. Parents act as the child's first teacher. Early parent-child interactions promote a child's early learning, and parents' involvement in the preschool program

lays the foundation that will last throughout the child's academic career. Research shows that parents' involvement in their child's educational development is linked to cognitive gains, early literacy development, and greater academic achievement.<sup>34-39</sup>

***Health and safety routines and environmental features.*** High-quality preschool programs place an emphasis on the health and safety routines as well as the classroom environment, both indoor and outdoor. This emphasis is essential because healthy children have a better ability to focus in school and engage in the learning process.<sup>29, 30</sup> High-quality preschool programs ensure that children are provided with nutritious and well-balanced snacks and meals, and that standard health and safety practices are observed (such as hand washing and proper supervision). Furthermore, high-quality preschool programs ensure that children have ample indoor space allowing free movement around the room and an outdoor space including a variety of surfaces for different types of play that develop gross motor skills.

## **2 Individual Case Study Reports**



## Adams State Preschool San Joaquin County

### Overview

Adams State Preschool is one of 42 State Preschool classrooms operated by the Stockton Unified School District in San Joaquin County. In the 2004–05 program year, 24 children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled in the school-based program. Adams State Preschool is located in a portable building on an elementary school campus. The building houses a Head Start-funded classroom in the morning and the Adams State Preschool program in the afternoon.<sup>1</sup> The average class size is 24 children, with an average teacher-to-child ratio of 1 to 12. Supported by State Preschool funds, the program offers a 10-month (180 days), half-day program that follows the school year calendar and operates from 12:30 to 3:30 in the afternoon.

Children served are primarily Latino (55%), then Asian (20%), African-American (15%), and white (10%). Sixty-five percent of the children have been identified as English learners. In the 2004–05 program year, no children with disabilities and other special needs were enrolled.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	School-based
Funding	State preschool
Part-day/full-day	Part-day, 12:30 – 3:30
Number of sessions	1
Number of classrooms	1
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	24
Classroom size	24 children
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1 to 12
Curriculum	The Letter People
Ethnicity of children	55% Latino, 20% Asian, 15% African-American, 10% white
Language of children	English, Spanish, Hmong, Vietnamese
English-learner population	65%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	No children identified with disabilities in the 2004-05 program year

During the site visit, teachers greeted both the children and parents as they entered the classroom. The program day began with free play. On arrival, children explored interest centers of their choice, such as the block center or reading corner, or played with manipulatives set up on small tables. The program made good use of indoor space, providing several well-defined interest centers, including dramatic play, reading, music, blocks, nature/science, art, and fine motor activity areas. Both the building and furniture were clean and in good repair. Space for privacy also was available (a tent with gauze sides), allowing children to enjoy quiet time alone

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<sup>1</sup> The Head Start program bought the portable building, at no cost to Adams State Preschool. The Head Start program and the Adams program do not share staff, although Adams staff have access to Head Start materials.

while still being observed by the teachers. The classroom was accessible to children with disabilities and other special needs and allowed for easy supervision of the children.

The classroom contained many developmentally appropriate fine motor, math, and art materials, in addition to varied dramatic play materials. A wide selection of books was available to children, many of which related to current classroom themes and activities. Outdoors, the program has made efficient use of limited space, providing a variety of options for gross motor play, including a climbing structure, a scooter, tricycles, and a wagon.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities</b>	
12:25	Arrival/greeting/sign-in
12:30	Individual choice
1:00	Cleanup
1:05	Greeting on carpet/calendar/ladybug helper
1:10	Hand washing/lunch
1:35	Individual reading on carpet
1:45	Outside play time
2:15	Large-group circle time
2:30	Small groups at tables/free flow into free choice
3:10	Cleanup
3:15	Music and movement
3:30	Dismissal

The program day included free play, circle time, and structured small-group work (e.g., art projects, matching games, etc.). Teachers read to children during circle time and free play time (when asked by the children), used music and singing activities, supported math skills by using “number talk” with the children (e.g., asking “how many of our friends are not at school today?” during circle time), and worked individually with children during small-group work time. The mealtime was used as an opportunity for discussion between children and staff. Staff regularly reminded children to wash hands before and after eating and after using the restroom.

Throughout the day, staff were warm, appeared to enjoy being with the children, and modeled good social skills. The children were well supervised during both inside and outside activities. Teachers reinforced children’s positive behaviors. Discipline was provided in a nonpunitive manner, such as by redirection to a different activity.

### **Curriculum and Instructional Approach**

Adams State Preschool uses a curriculum known as The Letter People, an early literacy curriculum developed by Abrams & Company. This curriculum is organized around 26 “letter people” (e.g., Mr. J, Miss M), who are used as focal points to introduce new letters of the alphabet to the children. The curriculum packages each “letter person” with a book, song, and soft toy, as well as a week-long lesson plan including activities in music and movement, reading, math, and other developmental domains.

The Letter People curriculum was adopted by all the State Preschool classrooms operated by the Stockton Unified School District after a careful review of several preschool curricula. The State Preschool program administrator and a team of preschool staff, kindergarten teachers, and an

elementary school principal worked together to review and select the curriculum. According to the director this team received presentations from several curriculum companies and “looked at the [California Department of Education] pre-kindergarten guidelines and the direction of the state, and alignment with what we are doing in kindergarten [to help choose among the various curricula.]” Preschool teachers then piloted two of the top three curricula selected by the review team. In addition, site visits were made to other programs using the curriculum to help inform the decision of which package to secure for the district’s State Preschool program.

The director described The Letter People as a literacy program with a focus on letter, print, and sound recognition. In 2004, the math component of The Letter People was integrated into the existing curriculum. The director stated, “This year, we introduced a math piece into the curriculum. We introduced 10 math books based on math concepts. They are beautiful and have real photographs, and there are activities in the pocket of the book that the teacher can use in conjunction with the theme. The math is more of an enhancement [to the curriculum] now.”

### **The Letter People Curriculum**

The Letter People, a research-based, comprehensive curriculum focusing on language and literacy development, includes oral language, print awareness, phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, word recognition, writing and spelling, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. The Letter People curriculum serves preschool children (ages 3–5) of all backgrounds. Nationally, the program serves children from diverse backgrounds: 35% Latino, 29% white, 19% African-American, 8% Native American, and 7% Asian. LET’S BEGIN, the Letter People curriculum, is used in approximately 7,000 preschool classrooms with approximately 150,000 children.

The Letter People uses 26 inflatable, colorful vinyl characters, each with a distinguishing characteristic and song designed to motivate children to talk and share their feeling and opinions. The sound and song for each Letter Person is designed to help build phonological awareness. The Letter People’s program goals are:

- To develop oral language and early literacy skills through an integrated, thematic core curriculum
- To provide skills necessary for reading and writing
- To help children learn to love reading through literature

More information is available at [http://www.abramsandcompany.com/lets\\_begin\\_lp.cfm?thissection=483](http://www.abramsandcompany.com/lets_begin_lp.cfm?thissection=483)

Assessment contributes to the efforts of staff to get children ready for kindergarten. As a State Preschool, Adams uses the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) for each enrolled child twice per year. The information obtained from the DRDP is used to plan developmentally appropriate activities for each child and for the class as a whole. Teachers use the information from the DRDP to set goals, establish learning objectives, and develop lesson plans. The information gathered through the profile also is shared with parents via formal conferences and with the kindergarten teachers at Adams Elementary School. The State Preschool program administrator said the program is exploring using the DRDP in additional ways. For example, DRDP data for 4-year-old children participating versus not participating in preschool would provide a baseline to help staff understand how their program is supporting preschool-age children. In addition, Stockton Unified School District is exploring the potential use of the assessment tool that accompanies the Letter People curriculum and ways in which it might be combined with the DRDP.



### The Desired Results System

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a “condition of well-being” for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners.
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their children’s learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals.

Child care and early education practitioners use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to evaluate the extent to which children in their care are achieving the desired results for children. Each child is assessed by a trained provider at enrollment and at regular intervals thereafter, creating a picture of how the child’s development is progressing. Each behavior exhibited by the child is rated as “fully mastered,” “almost mastered,” “emerging,” or “not yet.” Teachers use this information to tailor activities to each child’s developmental needs.

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>;  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpinstructions.asp>

### School Readiness

Adams State Preschool works to support children’s readiness for kindergarten in a number of ways. The program administrator emphasized the importance of fostering children’s language and literacy skills. “It is a literacy-focused curriculum—[focusing on] concepts of print and letter sounds—that is what prepares them for kindergarten. There is a systematic approach [in our program] to looking at letters and recognizing them and hearing them that helps [children] with transition to kindergarten [to build] a foundation that they wouldn’t have [had] before.”

Teachers echoed these comments by describing their work in helping children write their own names, increase their print recognition, and expand their vocabulary through stories and pictures. An equally important focus of the program, according to Adams preschool teachers, is the social-emotional development of each child, with an emphasis on helping children learn to share. Finally, Adams State Preschool plays a critical role in helping children prepare for the more structured environment of kindergarten. A teacher stated, “So many kids who [don’t go to preschool] go to kindergarten, and they can’t do it [successfully] because they’ve never learned how to sit down next to a friend and not touch them all the time.”

Parents who were interviewed noted specific school readiness skills they have observed among their children as a result of their participation in the preschool program. Skills observed included increased facility in using scissors, increased interest in reading and writing, enhanced self-esteem, decreases in discipline problems, and more focused attention on tasks. One parent stated, “My son is definitely able to learn [and] to focus himself. He has ADHD. The structure [of the program], it has helped him to focus and apply himself.”

Linkages between the preschool and the local elementary school also promote school readiness. The elementary school principal serves as the preschool site supervisor (at no cost to the State Preschool program). The principal considers the preschool part of the elementary school and maintains ongoing discussions with the lead preschool teacher. Adams preschoolers have access to the elementary school library and are periodically included in kindergarten activities (e.g., assemblies, etc.). The lead preschool teacher reported, “She [the principal] is very pro preschool. It’s great having a principal who’s interested in preschool.”

### **Serving California’s Diverse Population**

***English Learners.*** More than half (55%) of children enrolled in Adams Preschool are Latino, and 65% of all children enrolled are identified as English learners. Neither of the two Adams preschool teachers is bilingual in Spanish, although the lead teacher understands several key phrases and is able to communicate on a basic level with Spanish-speaking children. Staff also provide more one-on-one time with English learners and make use of visual props to facilitate communication.

To assist with English learners, a bilingual aide from the school district helps with parent conferences, and bilingual parents volunteer in the classroom. Parent volunteers or a bilingual aide also helps teachers complete the DRDP.

Overall, parents seemed satisfied with how the needs of their English learner children were being met. “My son, he does not speak English, only Spanish. Now it has taken just a few months [and] he is speaking English. He speaks to neighbors and to the kids on the playground. For a second language, it [the program] has helped open up his speech and language as far as communicating with other kids. He is going to be less timid and more open to his kindergarten teacher.” Another parent reported, “The teacher tries [to speak in] Spanish, and she is very clear when she says something to the kids. She doesn’t say words that the kids would not understand or confuse them. That helps. She repeats the same thing in the same way.”

However, several parents wished that the preschool program taught Spanish as a second language to all children (e.g., “they need it for California”; “for students who only speak Spanish, it would help them and make them feel more comfortable”). One parent emphasized the need for bilingual teachers. “It is working fine with my child. I think it would work better if the teacher knew a little Spanish so she could know the child’s needs, and the parent and the teacher could talk a little more.”

***Children with Disabilities and Other Special Needs.*** Although none of the children enrolled during the 2004-05 school year had been identified as having disabilities or other special needs, Adams State Preschool serves children with disabilities and other special needs primarily by connecting the children and their families with the appropriate services. The district recently implemented a districtwide program of “supportive services” funded by First 5 that serves all the State Preschool classrooms in the district. The program, called Early Care and Intervention Services (ECIS), supplies the preschool with two social services assistants and includes a subcontract for more intensive intervention called Parent-Child Interaction Therapy. In addition, the program funds interns from a local college who are trained in behavioral and other issues to work with children, families, and teachers to resolve identified concerns.

The districtwide ECIS program provides social services, in-class and at-home interventions, and play therapy and counseling for families. When a teacher has concerns about a child, a referral is made to a social worker. If an intervention is requested, Adams Preschool, through an arrangement with University of the Pacific psychology graduate program, has an intern conduct a classroom observation of the child, as well as a home visit. The intern then develops an intervention plan for the child that involves the child's teacher and parents. In addition, the program provides families with services through a counseling clinic, in which the child attends a play therapy session with the parent. In these cases, a therapist sits behind an observation window and provides guidance, via an earpiece, to the parent as he/she interacts with the child during the play session. The First 5 supportive services program also has served as a training opportunity for preschool teachers. According to the program administrator, "We [used to have] 50 or so behavior referrals. Once we implemented this program, this has gone down to 2 or 3 a year. Now our teachers have gotten much better at learning what is a special education issue and what is not."

As a matter of regular instruction, teachers make modifications and accommodations within the classroom, as appropriate for each individual child identified with a disability or other special need. These may include modified types or durations of activities, the use of adaptive equipment, additional assistance or support from a trained professional, and/or a behavior management program. For example, staff may adjust the length of the program day, if it is recommended in the individualized education program (e.g., if a child is overwhelmed by the level of stimulation in a typical day). A school district speech therapist (or psychologist, depending on the type of need) also may work with a child before or after class, rather than interrupt the day. Across the Stockton Unified School District State Preschool classrooms, children with disabilities and other special needs are included in the regular classroom, although the district also operates separate special education preschool classes. An arrangement also is available in which children with disabilities and other special needs spend time in both regular and special education classrooms.

### **About the Program Director and Teachers**

Adams State Preschool is supervised by the Adams Elementary School principal, who serves in this role at no cost to the State Preschool contract. A program administrator provides overall leadership for Adams State Preschool and the other 41 classrooms operated by Stockton Unified School District. The program administrator holds a master's degree, has taught in the early childhood education field for more than 20 years, and has served in her current position for 5 years. Adams State Preschool employs two female teachers—one lead teacher and one assistant, both of whom hold associate's degrees. The lead teacher has 7 years experience in early childhood education and has worked at Adams State Preschool for 4 years. The assistant teacher has 3 years of early childhood education experience and has been at Adams State Preschool for 1 year.

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	2
Gender	100% female
Ethnicity	1 white, 1 African-American
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	0
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0
Some college	0
A.A. degree	2
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	0
Currently working toward degree	1
Years of experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 5 years; range 3 to 7 years
Years spent working in the program (average and range)	Average 2.5 years; range 1 to 4 years

The school district uses in-house training as the primary strategy to promote the professional development of preschool staff. In general, teachers take part in learning and professional development opportunities about once a month. The district program administrator stated that “our office provides trainings. We have a monthly training plan. We have common topics such as school readiness, discipline, and developmentally appropriate practices that we provide training on. We solicit interests from the teachers, and our office also has its own objectives. [For example,] we saw a lot of questions around special education. Our office initiated the special education training.” Teachers are also encouraged to participate in trainings outside the district (the program allots \$200 per year to each teacher to attend such trainings) and to attend major conferences (funds also are available for this purpose). The program makes early childhood education resources available to teachers and posts information about upcoming trainings and workshops. The program also provides staff with paid time off to attend trainings/workshops. Training activities are coordinated at the district office by the program administrator, resource teacher, and parent involvement specialist.

In a survey of teachers’ recent professional development activities, staff reported having participated in trainings focused on behavioral issues, child development, conflict resolution, communication with families, and working with children with disabilities and other special needs. The program administrator underscored the benefits of professional development. The program makes accommodations to staff’s work schedules to enable them to attend college classes. The program administrator said, “Professional growth opportunities—we try to make it as convenient as we can—we build professional growth around them. [We try to] be available to them [and] make them not feel isolated and alone.”

In addition to the training and education of teachers, the program administrator described other staff characteristics that contribute toward implementing a high-quality early care and education program. She believes that the extent to which staff view themselves as professionals is linked to their level of preparation and effort in the classroom. The program administrator stated, “[The lead teacher] is willing to put the personal time and the professional time. She comes in the summer; she put[s] in that extra mile. She sees the connection between her time and [an]

effective classroom, and she includes her assistant in the planning process.” The Stockton Unified School District also provides 2 hours of paid planning time per day for the lead teacher, and the aide is paid for 30 minutes per day of planning time. The program administrator also described how the management team, which is made up of the program administrator, the director of elementary education, the site principal, and the assistant principal, supports the instructional staff at Adams and all other district preschools. “We try as a program to listen [to the teachers].” The program administrator works to include teachers as decision-makers and believes that bolstering “buy-in” from teachers is critical. “We try to give them as much control and authority as we can within our structure.”

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

The parent involvement component of Adams Preschool is articulated to parents the first day they visit the program. Parents are expected to volunteer in the classroom (working with children directly, preparing food, setting up activities, etc.). In addition, parent meetings are held once a month on topics of interest identified by parents early in the program year. A parent recognition dinner is held at the end of the year. Parents also are considered part of the Adams Elementary School community (e.g., parents are included in ballot and voting activities and the PTA). Twice a year, the preschool teachers have conferences with parents to share information about their children, including the results of the Desired Results Developmental Profile. Additional parent-teacher conferences are held as needed.

The preschool program relies on parent volunteer hours to reduce its staff-to-child ratios. In general, parents are asked to volunteer 6 hours per month. To ensure participation, the teacher strongly encourages families to volunteer as classroom aides and keeps a careful record of the hours they have logged in the classroom. The program administrator reported, “Parents can do things from the home. [It is] always a second choice, [but] we never not enroll a child if his/her parents can’t come in. Parents may translate or prep materials or build things at home. Once in a while, parents can’t come into the classroom.” The Letter People curriculum also includes letters sent home to parents (in English and Spanish) that describe each new letter and theme being introduced to children in the classroom, thereby extending classroom learning to the home.

Overall, parents are satisfied with the program and the teaching staff. One parent stated, “The teacher is always happy, and even with a lot going on, she takes 2 seconds and says hello to you.” Parents expressed that the preschool program was helping their children get ready for kindergarten by “getting them off on the right foot.” Parents also were positive about how the program helped them to access social services for their children and families when needed. “My oldest has a hard time with speech, but I didn’t know as a mom. But when someone gives a little extra attention, it is helpful to identify problems with the kids. The teacher is always looking for things we wouldn’t even think about. She presents the situation and ways to deal with it.” While most parents selected Adams Preschool because of the location of the program, some said it was because “they knew kindergarten was hard” and “it is better for [my son] to start learning and learn how school is going to be like, to be mentally prepared for it.” Several parents reported that there was no preschool in their neighborhoods or that the preschools were full.

## Conclusion

Adams State Preschool is characterized by a number of factors that contribute to high-quality preschool and family support services. The preschool offers children a program rich in developmentally appropriate materials and activities, with a strong focus on literacy and language. At the district level, preschool program staff went through a careful review of existing preschool curriculum packages before selecting *The Letter People*, and they are satisfied with their choice. The fact that this curriculum is used in all 42 State Preschool classrooms in the district eases the transition for children who move between programs within the district.

In addition, the district-level preschool staff provide ongoing professional development and support for preschool site staff, which in turn supports high-quality programming in the classroom. In particular, lead teachers are paid for 2 hours of planning time each day, and aides are paid for 30 minutes of planning per day. The paid planning time supports thoughtful lesson planning and allows staff to prepare effectively for the individual needs of each child. In addition, Adams staff are highly committed to their jobs. One teacher commented, “The pay is good. I love the site; I love the activities we get to do with the kids. I love coming to work.”

In addition to supporting children’s learning and development, the district offers a comprehensive “supportive services” program, funded by First 5, which is designed to foster parents’ skills and capacity to assist their children. The supportive services program partners with a local university to allow interns to develop tailored intervention plans for children identified as having disabilities or other special needs. The program also provides financial support for more in-depth counseling for children and their parents.

Adams State Preschool maintains strong linkages with Adams Elementary School. The district-level State Preschool program administrator oversees each of the 42 State Preschool classrooms and is considered part of the management team within the school district. One of her key responsibilities is to maintain partnerships with the principal of the elementary school connected to each of the preschools. In many of these programs, including Adams, the elementary school principal serves as the preschool site supervisor. The program administrator stated, “The [Adams Elementary] principal sees her campus as a preK-6th-grade campus. She has ongoing communication with the [lead] preschool teacher...the teacher is a partner there.”

Comments made by parents reflect their satisfaction with the program. Parents described changes they observed in their children since joining the preschool program, including increased interest and skills in reading and writing, as well as a range of social-emotional benefits. In general, parents also seemed aware of the importance of preschool in preparing their children to succeed in school. When asked to identify strategies to support the implementation of the Preschool for All (PFA) initiative in California, the program administrator emphasized:

- Involve all the stakeholders (e.g., family child care providers, subsidized care, private centers) in the PFA planning process.
- Focus on the facility needs required by PFA (e.g., “In our district, we would love to have a preschool on every campus.”).
- Ensure planning time, given the complexity of creating PFA.
- Link with the elementary schools (e.g., “Introduce kids and parents to the school structure. Get parents used to the school system. It is a mechanism for introducing parents to the schools.”).



## Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove Orange County

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove is a center-based preschool located in Garden Grove (Orange County), California. Supported by Title V and United Way funding, it offers a twelve-month (260 days), full-day (12 hours from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.) program. The program serves children 8 months to 5 years old. In the 2004–05 program year, the total enrollment was 72 children, of which 50 were in the preschool program. The center has three preschool classrooms, each with an average class size of 20. The average teacher-to-child ratio is 1 to 7.

### Overview

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove is a free-standing, large, newly constructed building. The space has several classrooms, a music and movement room, two meeting rooms (for staff and parent trainings), a large kitchen, and office space for administrative staff. Classrooms are filled with light; each has skylights and windows facing the hallways.

Thirty-three percent of the children enrolled in the program are white, 33 percent are Asian, 33 percent are Latino, and the remaining 1 percent are African-American. The languages spoken by children include English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean. Thirty percent of the children are English learners, and seven percent (3 children) have been identified with special needs (speech and hearing impairments).

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	Community-based
Funding	General Child Care (Title V) and United Way funding
Part-day/full-day	Full-day (12 hours, 6:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.)
Full-year/school-year	Full-year (260 days)
Number of sessions	1
Number of classrooms	3
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	50
Classroom size	20 children
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1 to 7
Curriculum	Adapted from: Creative Pre-Kindergarten “Preschool Daily Lesson Plans”
Ethnicity of children	33% Asian, 33% Latino, 33% white and 1% African-American
Language of children	English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean
English-learner population	30%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	Speech impairment (2 children), hearing impairment (1 child)

The walls and ceiling of the classroom displayed children’s art projects. At least five interest centers were clearly defined, with quiet and active areas arranged in ways to avoid interference with one another. Materials were developmentally appropriate, well-organized, easily accessible, labeled to encourage self-help, and offered children different levels of difficulty. All classrooms had access to a spacious outdoor play area that included a large climbing structure and a variety of surfaces and equipment that stimulate a range of skills.

During the site visit, children were able to select their own activities for free play that included playing in the kitchen area, the block area, or the writing and puzzle area. Through these activities, children were able to develop language, fine motor, and social skills.

Circle time was mainly focused around learning an objective chosen by the teacher. This period of the day usually began with a discussion about calendar dates, identifying the day of the week, and using numbers to identify the day. Circle time might also include a story time or sing along where all the children participate. They identified characters in the story or song, talked about the cover of the book, and what they think will happen next.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities</b>	
6:30	Breakfast/play
7:30	Free-choice center play
8:00	Circle time
8:30	Snack and small group work
9:00	Group A outside free play Group B small group inside
9:45	Cleanup
10:00	Group B outside free play Group A small group inside
10:45	Cleanup
11:00	Prepare beds Story time
11:30	Lunch
12:00	Prepare for nap
12:30	Nap
2:30	Hand washing and snack
3:00	Free play
3:45	Circle and recall of free play
4:00	Outside free play
4:45	Cleanup
5:00	Free play

During small group time, the class was divided into two groups where one group went outside. Activities included dancing and movement; filling large alphabet letters with dried pasta, beads, or feathers; and science projects. The science project activities included making grass grow in a small pot or feeding silkworms that eventually changed into caterpillars. Small group activities provided children with the opportunity to improve their skill levels in fine motor activities, cutting, stringing beads, and recognizing numbers and the alphabet. Large group activities involved teachers setting up obstacle courses outside along with having children play on balance beams and tumbling mats to help improve their gross motor skills. The teachers also had children practice catching balls of various shapes and sizes.

Snack time was a period for children to learn to share, practice communication skills, and take responsibility for their actions. Children helped to set up the tables, pass food to others, and clean up. The children learned to communicate with each other and how to express themselves if they spilled or made a mess. Snack time also provided a learning environment for English learners who were still struggling to grasp the English language.

Interactions between teachers and children were generally positive. The program director stated that teachers ask the children often how they are doing throughout the day and what kinds of activities they are involved in outside of preschool. Children were encouraged to speak all day with staff and each other. At snack time, staff promote continuous dialogue among the children. Teachers were supportive and showed appreciation of the children's accomplishments. If a child was having a bad day, they encouraged the child to express his feelings and find ways to solve problems. They were patient and respectful of the individual needs of the children. Children seemed to enjoy each other's company and had many opportunities to work and play together.

### **Curriculum and Instructional Approach**

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove does not use a single commercially available curriculum. Rather, the curriculum is primarily based on the Creative Pre-Kindergarten "Preschool Daily Lesson Plans," four volumes of lesson plans and activities based on the seasons of the year. The program director provides a monthly calendar of classroom themes to the teacher, who develops activities based on the Creative Pre-Kindergarten resources. In addition, other resources used in conjunction that help the teachers plan for the week include The Mailbox, Young Children (the NAEYC Journal), and the school library. The weekly lesson plans show the parents how their children's learning is related to a number of skills: language development, math, discovery science, creative arts, motor skills, and music and movement. The types of activities that promote this learning are: circle time, Messy Table, Cut & Color Table, creative art, and outside games and activities. Activities are designed to be flexible and based on the interests and developmental level of each child. The curriculum is based on giving the children many learning opportunities: to explore, to experience, to ask questions.



#### **Creative Pre-K "Preschool Daily Lesson Plans"**

This package is not a boxed curriculum, but is used as a resource for teachers. Each of the 4 available volumes offers a series of 12 weekly themes with 5 lesson plans per theme. Every lesson plan includes activities for:

- Circle Time – songs and stories to use with a group
- Messy Table – hands-on activities for tactile learning
- Cut & Color Table – activities for fine-motor development
- Creative Art – emphasis on process not product
- Outside games and activities – promotion of group interaction and "movement with purpose"

Source: <http://www.creativeprek.com>

Teachers described a range of activities they conduct to facilitate children's learning. For example, reading and "recall" activities are used to support children's oral language development. Reading is promoted through story time. Recall occurs near the end of the day and allows children to describe their experiences in the classroom. Other activities include art projects to help develop fine motor skills, singing and movement activities to support growth in cognitive and motor areas, and a variety of science lessons that involve observation and experimentation. During circle time, the children learn songs, fingerplays, and flannelboard stories that relate to their weekly themes. Messy Table is a means of exploring through the senses, for example, playing with colored shaving cream or rice or beans at the sensory tables. The program encourages children to mix colors and experiment with different textures. The children made "Goopy Goop" with cornstarch and water. In this activity, the children were given the opportunity to mix in colors.

The Cut & Color Table gives preschoolers the skills they will need before they can learn to read and write. These skills strengthen muscles, reinforce left to right eye movement, and build language skills. For example, the theme one week was people's homes and the children cut out pictures of people's homes from magazines to make collages and then discussed their creations with the class. Creative art activities encourage self-expression. For instance, children drew themselves after looking at themselves in the mirror. Easel painting involved children painting pictures of their homes and family members. Collage art may entail that children find magazine pictures of families and create a collage. These various activities promote language, develop fine and gross motor skills, and encourage creativity.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove preschool also aligns its curricular approach with the state's Desired Results for Children and Families. The skills included in the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) are incorporated into each classroom's daily activity plan.



California Department of  
**EDUCATION**

### **The Desired Results System**

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a "condition of well-being" for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners.
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their children's learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals.

Child care and early education practitioners use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to evaluate the extent to which children in their care are achieving the desired results for children. Each child is assessed by a trained provider at enrollment and at regular intervals thereafter, creating a picture of how the child's development is progressing. Each behavior exhibited by the child is rated as "fully mastered," "almost mastered," "emerging," or "not yet." Teachers use this information to tailor activities to each child's developmental needs.

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>;  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpinstructions.asp>

Staff conduct weekly observations of children and hold discussions with the program director. This information is then used as a basis for lesson planning. In addition, the director conducts classroom observations on a continuous basis to ensure the instructional activities meet the individual needs of the children.

The program also uses the DRDP as an assessment tool, formally administered twice a year, although classroom observations are conducted by the teachers on a weekly basis. The information gathered through the DRDP is used to help plan lessons, support individual children's needs, and identify larger trends within the classroom. Each child's DRDP is shared with parents twice a year via formal conferences. As needed, staff prepare daily reports for parents to share how their child is progressing.

### **School Readiness**

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove preschool program is designed to help prepare children for kindergarten by focusing on their social-emotional, motor, pre-math, and early literacy skills. In particular, teachers work with children to foster their oral language development. As one teacher stated, "I try to encourage the kids to use a lot of language and talk about themselves and I want everyone in the class to celebrate each other. We talk about their lives and home and it makes them comfortable with who they are and those around them. It cuts down on being mean to each other and making fun of each other. [It teaches them to] respect each other." As stated by the program director, "Preparing the children for school goes beyond mastering numbers and letters, but we are concerned and focused on the whole child." The program addresses the basic needs of the child and their family, so that they are ready to learn. Many of the families need extra support in their lives and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove is there to provide the guidance and support. The children are given support and a caring environment. All of the children learn routines such as daily schedules (bathroom time, snack time, and naptime) and social skills (how to say please and thank you, make requests, and apologize). Teachers often refer to the DRDP to monitor children's progress.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove has a direct link to the Garden Grove School District (GGUSD) School Readiness Coordinator who is easily accessible. School District Personnel also observe the preschool program on a regular basis to ensure that children are learning the proper skills and behavior before going to kindergarten. In addition, many of the GGUSD elementary schools offer kindergarten/school readiness during the summer for incoming families. This year the GGUSD is planning to open more State Preschools to better prepare children for school. Similarly, the DRDP is used in both the school district and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove as a way of monitoring the early childhood programs.

Parents remarked on the changes they have observed with their children and the ways in which the preschool program is helping them prepare for success in elementary school. Parents have seen growth in their children's writing (e.g., learning to print first names), math skills (e.g., counting) and social-emotional development. One parent remarked on the social skills the children learn at preschool, "when they have their snack and their lunch and they have table manners, [such as] how to pass the milk properly." Another parent emphasized the help the program provides to families stating, "There's no way you can give them the social skills by yourself at home."

## **Serving California's Diverse Population**

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove serves primarily white, Asian, and Latino children; each group makes up approximately a third of the total preschool enrollment. Thirty percent of the children enrolled in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove preschool are English learners. At enrollment, the program identifies whether the child is an English learner. Parents and teachers communicate on a regular basis to eliminate any communication barriers for the children. The program employs several teachers who are bilingual in Spanish and Vietnamese. Staff work with English-learner children on an individual basis in their primary language, but English is primarily spoken in the classrooms.

During the observation, a teacher who spoke Vietnamese worked closely with a child with limited English skills to help in the child's adjustment. At the completion of circle time, the teacher gave children the option of three choices of activities. She then walked the child who spoke Vietnamese to each activity center and asked him if he would like to do that activity first, asking the question first in Vietnamese and then repeating it in English. Although the child had been here only a month, he already knew the routines of the classroom and was learning English day by day. The program also provides reading materials in a child's primary language. In the classroom environment, however, objects throughout the classroom are labeled in English.

During circle time, all of the children participate by: "becoming the teacher," retelling stories, or pointing to the calendar and topics of the week. Many children benefit from the everyday conversations and activities in the classroom. Children make and label collages, fill in letters with pasta, beans, and other materials. These are some of the ways in which the program bridges the language barriers and promotes learning. Children also listen and read audio books. In all of the preschool classrooms, there are computers with speakers that have educational software. This is another tool that the students can use to practice learning English. Parents were appreciative that the program helped their children to learn English while maintaining their fluency in Spanish.

In the current program year, there are only three children identified with disabilities and other special needs. Typically, the program modifies its structure to accommodate children with special needs. In one classroom, there is a child who frequently uses sign language because both of his parents are deaf. His classmates and teachers are learning sign language to better communicate with him. The teacher also uses this opportunity to help the other children understand differences among them (e.g., "This child's parents cannot hear, so his world is silent").

When parents express concerns about their child's development or the teachers identify potential issues, the program conducts an assessment and adapts the curriculum to meet the child's needs. Parents explained how they felt the program met their children's needs. One parent reported, "I had some concerns here a while back when she [my daughter] started writing words backwards. I brought that up with the teacher and [the director] jumped right in and they had services in the county and they had the teacher sit down with her individually, and in the last 6 months I've seen a tremendous improvement in her."

## About the Program Director and Teachers

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove preschool staff includes the program director, the director of the preschool program, the school readiness coordinator, three lead teachers, and three associate teachers. The preschool director oversees the professional development of the teachers and has taught in the early childhood field for 25 years. She has an associate’s degree in early childhood education and human development, a master teacher child development permit, and a Child Development Associate Credential.

The six teachers at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove have spent an average of 9 years in the early childhood field. Three of them have some college experience, one teacher has an associate degree and two teachers have a bachelor degree or higher. Three teachers have degrees in early childhood education or child development, one in human development and one in psychology. In addition to their degrees, some teachers have permits and credentials that include: CDA permits, a master teacher permit, a site supervisor permit, an adult ESL credential, multiple subjects credential, and assistant/associate permits.

In-house training is the primary strategy used to promote the professional development of staff. On-site monthly workshops are offered by professionals in the community on topics identified by teachers and the program director. In addition, every month, meetings include workshops with the school district school readiness coordinator for the program staff and talks from representatives from social services on topics such as child abuse and appropriate behavior. This year the program has focused a few of their workshops on early literacy from CIRCLE Training.

The director described recent professional development workshops: “We had a workshop on movement [and music]. Or flannel boards—[we] brought a friend who did a workshop on flannel boards. I survey teachers’ needs through constant communication—we have a really good relationship since I was a former teacher and I am their mentor. [I] keep asking what they need.” In the last year, teachers reported participating in training on child development, behavioral issues, conflict resolution, communicating with families, family involvement, strategies for working with English learners, and strategies for working with children with disabilities and other special needs.

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	6
Gender	100% female
Ethnicity	3 Asian, 1 Latino, 1 white, 1 unknown
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	1
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0
Some college	3
A.A. degree	1
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	2
Currently working toward degree	3
Years of experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 9 years; range 2 to 20 years
Years spent working in the program (average and range)	Average 2 years; range 3 months to 4 years

In addition, the program notifies the staff about all trainings that are given in Orange County at the Department of Education. Teachers are given the opportunity to attend workshops during the year and are able to attend the NAEYC Conference when it is in Southern California.

When the director hires new staff, their level of experience and education are two of the most important factors she considers. She explained, “During hiring I like experience [in early childhood]. I also look at their education. When they present themselves I think experience is really important. I look for experience in working with children in different areas, special needs for example. I think teachers can learn from each other.”

Within the classroom, the director tends to pair teachers who complement each other in regard to their areas of strength. In addition, she provides positive feedback to staff on a regular basis, rather than focusing strictly on areas for improvement. “I role model and tell them what they are doing right. You can support them in their needs. When you have teachers that want to be here it makes a big difference.”

The center provides on-site staff development on a continuous basis. Staff receive annual reviews and conduct self-evaluations through out the year. The staff attend lunch meetings twice a month, have access to an on-site library with early childhood education resources, and participate in workshops and conferences when possible.

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

Parents are involved with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove in a number of ways, including working in the classroom, attending social events, and participating in parent education workshops. Staff also hold parent-teacher conferences twice a year to discuss children’s progress, including the data from the DRDP, their needs, and parent concerns when necessary. The preschool serves a large population of working families who require child care for up to twelve hours each day. In order to accommodate the busy lives of parents, the program has an open door policy that encourages families to spend time in the classroom whenever they can. Parent participation is not a mandatory policy. The director and teachers wish there were more parent involvement in the program, as they feel this is one area where the program is lacking. “We have an open door policy, but they don’t take advantage of it.” The director also said, “I wish we could make it a requirement [having people volunteer].”

Social functions include a Mother’s Day tea, Christmas program, spaghetti dinner, and Father’s Day celebration. The program also provides an average of three parenting workshops per month on a variety of topics (e.g., parenting, safety, nutrition). The workshops are led by volunteers in the community (e.g., police officer and fire fighter) or the preschool teachers themselves. The program also advertises workshops being held by other programs that parents might want to attend and seeks out specific workshops for parents as needed. One parent explained, “If they don’t sponsor activities here, they have memos up for where you can go and they also send home monthly parental guides that give you information and parenting skills.”

Initially, staff confidentially conduct the Health & Social Services Assessment in Spanish, English, and Vietnamese. They ask the families to identify topics that may be of interest to them or areas where they could use assistance for the family or child. Throughout the year, children are screened for medical, dental, and mental health issues. If issues are identified, the program can enroll the children in Healthy Families and Medi-Cal Programs immediately. Also, the program may provide families with referrals to the Children's Hospital Mobile Clinics, if

necessary. One of the mobile vans visits the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove location twice a month. The program also provides an on-site Health Outreach coordinator who can schedule appointments for on-site dental care.

In addition, the director helps families that require services in areas such as housing, nutrition, and health insurance by making referrals or providing direct assistance. Because the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove is part of a local collaboration of 20 agencies that include the Orange County Social Services, the program can serve families in a timely manner. For example, a single mother experienced domestic violence at home. Before placing the child, the program made sure that the mother was safe. Several calls were placed to shelters and local community police divisions.

Parents have many opportunities to be involved in the classroom or participate in other activities. The center offers parent education, information about community services, and referrals for family and child services. There are organized family festivals and events on weekends and evenings to accommodate parents' work schedules. The teachers maintain an open-door policy in which parents can help in the classroom any time that is convenient for them.

The director helps parents obtain insurance, Medi-Cal, WIC, and food coupons. During the site visit, parents recalled an instance in which the director "would not give up until she found housing" for a homeless family. A cornerstone of the program's philosophy is the importance of healthy family functioning.

## **Conclusion**

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove is preparing children for kindergarten across a wide range of developmental domains, including early literacy, pre-math, and social emotional areas. The learning centers in the classroom and daily activities introduce and reinforce pre-kindergarten competencies. The director and teachers attempt to make literacy materials available at all times to children. Books are placed in every learning center, the bathroom, and on the playground. In addition, building social skills is an important part of preparing children for kindergarten at this program, with teachers paying special attention to how children socialize with one another.

Weekly observations of children are used to identify their strengths and areas for growth. Teachers use these anecdotal notes to plan their weekly lessons and activities.

Parents reported a high level of satisfaction in regard to how the program is preparing their children for kindergarten. The communication between parents and staff also was appreciated by families. One parent shared, "They keep you updated on how your child is doing and what's going on during the day and they will call you at work and tell you." The parents feel that the program provides a warm and supportive environment for children and families. The parents also expressed a high level of satisfaction with the support they have received from the director regarding social services.

The director suggests high-quality preschool programs require strong financial support. Operating a child care center entails salaries, insurance, and benefits, which are the largest expenses. As a high-quality center, the program is required to have a low ratio of 8 to 1 by Title V regulations.

The director praised charity organizations such as the United Way, which provides funding for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove as well as grant-giving agencies such as “Success by Six.” The “Success by Six” consortium is comprised of more than 350 community and statewide coalitions that help to create awareness, improve access to community services, and advocate for public policies that enhance the lives of children and families.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove have been part of “Success by Six” since 2000. The program helps all children 0–6 in schools and at home with proper health and nutrition. The Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove local “Success by Six” is an Orange County United Way program that provided the resources and funding needed to accredit the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove. For example, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove did not have the permanent shade structures needed for accreditation. The “Success by Six” program provided the funding. In addition, scholarships are available to help families access the Boys and Girls Clubs of Garden Grove’ program. Last year, 95 families received some type of financial assistance at the Family Campus Preschool. The United Way also organized professional trainings for the staff regarding early childhood education. In addition, the participating agencies collaborate together to share ideas, visit schools, and network. The program directors meet monthly and have access to an “Early Childhood Library” that includes videos and books that can be borrowed.

## Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool Siskiyou County

Part-day preschool services are offered at the Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool, located on the Fort Jones Elementary campus in Siskiyou County. The preschool is located in a small rural community in Northern California with a population of 600 people. In the 2004–05 program year, 36 children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled. The program serves families who live in and around the surrounding community.

### Overview

The program is housed in a large classroom on the Fort Jones Elementary campus and operates one preschool classroom. The program environment is designed to support children’s learning and development. The classroom provides ample indoor space for children to explore, play, and learn. The classroom includes learning centers that allow for multiple activities to occur at the same time. The classroom also provides ample developmentally appropriate materials. Because the program is located on the Fort Jones Elementary campus, children have access to outdoor space and equipment. Children can play on various surfaces and equipment, thus developing their gross motor skills. The average class size is 24 children, with an average teacher-to-child ratio of 1 to 8. The program offers a 10-month (180 days), part-day (3.5 hours) program that follows the school calendar and operates from 8:15 until 11:45 in the morning.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	School-based (located on the Fort Jones Elementary campus)
Funding	State Preschool
Part-day/full-day	Part-day (3.5 hours, 8:15 a.m.–11:45 a.m.)
Full-year/school-year	School-year (10 months, or 180 days)
Number of sessions	1
Number of classrooms	1
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	36
Classroom size	24 children
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1 to 8
Curriculum	No formal curriculum used. Learning activities based on: Theme-based curriculum Whole language approach
Ethnicity of children	80% white, 10% Native American, 8% Latino, 2% Asian
Language of children	English and Spanish
English-learner population	3%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	Autism (1 child), learning disability (2 children), speech impairment (7 children), mental retardation (2 children)

The majority (80%) of the children enrolled in the program are white, and the remaining 20% are Native American, Latino, and Asian. The languages spoken by children include English and Spanish. Currently only one child is an English learner. One-third (33%) have been identified as having disabilities and other special needs, including speech impairments, learning disabilities, mental retardation, and autism.

During the site visit, the program day began with free play. Overall, the program offered many opportunities for children to have free choice of activities. At least five interest centers were clearly defined, and quiet and active areas were spatially arranged so as not to interfere with one another. The interest centers had developmentally appropriate materials and provided fun learning experiences. The materials were organized, easily accessible to encourage independent use by children, and offered children different levels of difficulty. The dramatic play area contained a play house complete with a kitchen and plenty of dress-up clothes. There also were provisions for sand and water play outside, including a variety of tools such as containers, scoops, cups, and shovels. The children had access to two computers in the classroom with software programs for literacy, language, math, and drawing.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities</b>	
8:15	Free play
9:15	Cleanup
9:30	Group time/music/movement/story time
9:55	Snack
10:05	Outdoor free play
10:40	Small-group time
11:15	Lunch
11:45	Departure

As children arrived at the program, teachers and other staff warmly greeted them and their parents, and helped children become involved in activities. The lead teacher used this time to share information about the children with families and to listen to parents' comments or concerns. If children appeared shy or hesitant, teachers helped them become acclimated to the environment by inviting them to join an activity in progress. A child might begin coloring at a small table prepared with art materials, while another could decide to read in the reading center or play in the dramatic center. Once most of the children had arrived, the teaching staff brought them together in circle time, a large-group activity during which the teacher played various cultural songs and the children sang and danced.

Following hand washing, children were provided with a snack at small-group tables. Meals were well-balanced and provided an opportunity for pleasant interactions between children and teachers. The staff sat at the tables with children, and discussions were observed both between children, and between teachers and children. Staff then transitioned children to outdoor play time, for which a variety of equipment promoting gross motor development was available (e.g., large climbing structures with swings, tricycles, balls, a large playground where children drew with chalk), as well as a sand box. After outdoor play, the class was divided into three groups that rotated between activities: discussion of the calendar, letter of the week, and sounds and words; flannel board story or small-group reading activity; and table time where pre-writing skills, math skills, early literacy activities, or science experiments were presented. Each group was lead by either the teacher or teaching assistant, and children were placed into groups on the basis of skill-development needs and ability. Later in the school year, children were reassigned to groups based on their skill levels, needs, and behavior in order to keep a balance for modeling and teachability. Following small-group time, children were gathered together for sharing time, which is based on each week's themes and a story. All students then wash their hands and eat

lunch. The meal was used as an opportunity to foster children's self-help skills and encourage interaction. After lunch, the children were prepared for departure.

The classroom observed was rich in developmentally appropriate books, pictures, and communication activities. Throughout the day, teachers conversed individually with children and encouraged them to talk. Ample materials to stimulate communication were also present, including puppets in the reading area, props in the dramatic-play area, and figures in the block area. Staff also talked about logical relationships and encouraged reasoning with the children throughout the day (e.g., the teacher pointing out different sizes and shapes of during the art project, asking children to recall letters and words of the week). Because of the many varied activities, teachers had ample opportunities to interact with children in a supportive manner throughout the day. Staff were observed listening attentively to children and responding sympathetically as appropriate. Discipline, when needed, was provided in a nonpunitive manner, usually in the form of redirection to a different activity.

## Curriculum and Instructional Approach

The Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool uses a curriculum adapted from multiple sources and activities are chosen based on a weekly theme. The program uses a whole language and thematic approach to teaching where children learn and process their world through play. The program also focuses on incorporating appropriate activities in the curriculum to ensure that the skills taught help children master skills from the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP).



### Theme-Based Curriculum Models

Theme-based curriculum has evolved as a result of recent brain research indicating that forming patterns and understanding connections are important in children's learning. Research supports the idea that learning cannot truly be divided into conventional domains or disciplines, as is done for discussion purposes. Theme-based models attempt to incorporate this philosophy by using a central theme to cross disciplines and developmental domains—teaching to the “whole brain.”

Theme-based models use activities for various subject areas that center on the same theme, such as a holiday or kind of animal. This kind of integrated curriculum allows children to explore how different kinds of learning (reading, math, or social studies) fit into the larger picture of the theme. Themes should be:

- Topics or ideas that can be explored in many ways, through literacy, math, music, social studies, and art
- Based on children's shared experiences, daily life, culture, or environment
- Planned with the children's help, and designed to fit the teacher and the needs of the children

Sources: <http://www.michigan.gov/greatstart/0,1607,7-197-27385-83422--,00.html>  
<http://www.earlychildhood.com/Articles/index.cfm?A=112&FuseAction=Article>

Instruction is provided through free play and direct instruction so that children can explore the world around them freely, but also are exposed to teacher-directed activities in which particular skills are introduced. In these activities, children are systematically taught development skills that might be neglected during free play. The program recognizes that children mature at different rates and that most children acquire the necessary skills by the end of the year when they are instructed in this manner. Some children master skills much faster than others, and activities are tiered based on skill level to handle individual differences. Some differentiation is facilitated by the teacher, and sometimes children dictate the direction they are ready for.

Assessment is a critical component of helping to prepare children for kindergarten. Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool staff complete the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) for each child twice per year. In addition to individual child assessments, the program uses the DRDP data to develop a summary of the child's progress, strengths, and areas for continued growth. Teachers conduct regular classroom observations for all children, but increased observations and incidence reporting for children for whom they have special concerns. For these cases, the teachers find new ways to teach and they assess whether these children should be referred for specialized services. All observations are logged in an observation journal. For all children, the DRDP data are used to plan curriculum and individual activities. The program considers the needs of the group and the individual child, and works hard to find a balance that can accommodate both.



California Department of  
**EDUCATION**

### **The Desired Results System**

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a "condition of well-being" for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners.
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their children's learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals.

Child care and early education practitioners use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to evaluate the extent to which children in their care are achieving the desired results for children. Each child is assessed by a trained provider at enrollment and at regular intervals thereafter, creating a picture of how the child's development is progressing. Each behavior exhibited by the child is rated as "fully mastered," "almost mastered," "emerging," or "not yet." Teachers use this information to tailor activities to each child's developmental needs.

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpinstructions.asp>

Lessons are organized according to weekly themes based on the individual needs of the children. For example, President's Day was the Monday of the site visit week, so the theme was presidents. Children participated in activities related to that theme and read a book about George Washington. Another week staff might teach children about medieval times and engage them in art and dress-up activities related to kings and queens. In addition to weekly themes, the program takes into account individual needs of children during free play. For example, if a child needs more help with language skills, teachers work individually with that child and tailor activities to support the child in this area. Through observation, teachers gauge children's interest in and understanding of various topics as a basis for planning and developing future activities. For example, a teacher might observe several children showing an interest in the artwork on the wall, and subsequently direct them to activities related to the artwork. Another example of allowing children to learn and grow at their own pace is the use of patterning exercise. All children are shown a pattern to model. Each student is then given a manipulative to make a pattern. One child randomly orders the manipulative, some children copy the pattern, some make the same pattern

by substituting colors, and others make their own pattern. The program allows for children to explore and expand on their own thoughts without restrictions.

Teachers have flexibility in developing lesson plans and activities within the framework of the program's philosophy and curricular approach. In addition, teaching staff work together during team meetings to discuss ideas and plan developmentally appropriate activities. As a result, children have a variety of developmentally appropriate activities that create an educational and fun learning experience for them.

During the focus group, one of the teachers commented about the support and use of community resources to facilitate children's learning saying, "The community has really come together and is really supportive of all the things we do, and allows us to come out and explore that. We have a great community that comes into our classrooms, but allows us to go out to them too." The teacher is referring to the fact that Fort Jones is located down the street from the town fire station and grocery store, so children are able to go on field trips to these two places by walking to them.

### **School Readiness**

The Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool is committed to supporting children's readiness for school, with an emphasis on fostering their academic, social, and emotional development. Staff are focused on helping children develop positive, trusting relationships with one another and with teachers, increasing their independent skills, and helping them participate in a large group.

With regard to developing academic skill and preparing children for kindergarten, staff emphasize mathematics and early literacy. In addition, the program helps children get ready for school by considering each child's individual needs. The director noted, "I have looked a lot at the kindergarten standards and try to lay a base for these kids to be successful. Like listening and story time and getting them ready for kindergarten. We just look at where they need to be and we just throw it out there and wait for them to pick it up. We expose them to as much as we can. Coming down from being a kindergarten teacher, I know where they need to be, so I look at that." During the site visit, teachers were observed reinforcing reading and questioning skills with children. While reading a story during group time, the following conversation occurred:

Teacher: What do you think George Washington ate for breakfast? (*Referring to the book she was reading about George Washington eating breakfast.*)

Child #1: Waffles (*one of the words of the week that was written on the board.*)

Teacher: That was what I was thinking. (*Looking at the book still.*) You can look at these outfits in a museum, but they are very far away from here.

Child #2: How far?

Teacher: Two or three days driving depending on where the museum is and what airport you go from. Redding airport is 2 hours and Sacramento is 5 hours.

Child #2: How about the one here?

Teacher: Do you have a plane? They only take private planes here.

Child #2: No.

Teacher: Do you have friend with a plane?

Child #2: No.

The program also consults with staff members from the elementary school to ensure that the children are ready both academically and emotionally. A number of activities take place throughout the school year to prepare the children for kindergarten. Three times a year, an Early Identification and Assessment Team meets to discuss at-risk preschoolers and kindergarten students. The team includes the preschool site supervisor, the kindergarten teacher from Fort Jones Elementary, the school administrator, the school nurse, the speech therapist, the intervention specialist, and the Even Start coordinator.

Another activity occurs approximately three times a year when kindergarten children visit the preschool classroom and present skits and songs. In addition, the preschool children visit the kindergarten classroom and present songs and poems. These types of exposure familiarize the preschool children with the different classroom settings, activities, teachers, and students. The preschool children also visit the kindergarten class for one morning at the end of the school year as a way of transitioning to kindergarten. Lastly, in the spring, the preschool and kindergarten registrations are held together so the preschool teacher can assist children and parents in the transition to kindergarten and share information with the kindergarten teacher if necessary.

The kindergarten teacher at the elementary school also observes the preschool classroom at the end of the school year to assess incoming kindergarten students and better prepare for the incoming class. The teacher observes the children's routines and interactions. In addition, informal meetings are held between the preschool site supervisor and the kindergarten teacher on an ongoing basis to discuss curriculum standards, children's strengths and weaknesses, and expectations. The kindergarten teacher sets a number of requirements for incoming students, including potty training, self-discipline in a small group setting, skills for self-direction, and ability to write and cut basic shapes. Essential requirements for all children before transitioning are knowledge and understanding of the alphabet and letter sounds; the ability to write their first names, count to ten, and recognize colors; and the ability to follow oral directions.

Parents commented on how the program provided their children with the skills to succeed in school. Families specifically mentioned how the program was enhancing children's growth in literacy, math, and social and emotional areas. One parent felt that, as a result of having attended Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool, her child was better prepared for kindergarten. "The structure of the activities, there's academics behind it, but they're not forced. It's more personal, they notice what each kid needs, and they focus on that a little bit more for the individual child." Another parent also noted growth in her child's knowledge, "My child didn't know how to count and didn't know his colors, and he only goes two days a week [to preschool] and he [now] knows all of his colors."

In addition to cognitive skills, parents observed social and emotional changes in their children. Parents reported that, since enrolling in the program, their children were learning to control themselves better, make friends, and share with others. One parent said, "Mine had tantrums before preschool, and the structure has really helped his attitude, he's more mellow, and calmer." Another parent described the social growth in her daughters: "I have two painfully shy girls and the program has helped them to relate to other kids. Now they may want to participate instead of just standing and watching."

## **Serving California’s Diverse Population**

Fort Jones serves primarily white children, with a small minority population (20% Native American, Latino, and Asian). With respect to children who are English learners (1 child at this time), the director reported that communicating with a child on an individual basis in English while speaking slowly and clearly is key for literacy development. Materials are provided for children in both English and Spanish. Although none of the teachers is fluent in Spanish, in general, if needed, the lead teacher is able to communicate well enough in Spanish for children to understand.

The program serves a number of children with disabilities and other special needs. For children with language delays or more severe disabilities, the program has made special accommodations, such as offering modified activities, adaptive equipment, or additional assistance or support from a trained professional. Services from an occupational and a speech therapist are also provided once a week to children with speech and physical delays. These professionals supply teachers with specialized skills and techniques to use with the children. In addition, the elementary school offers the assessment services of the school psychologist when needed. One main focus at Fort Jones is to ensure that children are adequately assessed at an early age and provided services for school readiness.

When the teachers at Fort Jones have concerns about a child’s development, the program director or lead teacher observes the situation. If the program director or lead teacher feel the concerns are valid, a meeting is arranged with the family to discuss the issue and request permission to have the child observed by a professional (e.g., therapist or psychologist) associated with the school. Fort Jones sometimes experiences difficulties in providing adequate resources because it is located in a rural community with scarce resources, but despite these limitations, it has been able to hire an aide for the classroom who focuses primarily on children that need additional help with behavior or just moving around the room.

Parents noted that their children are receiving great instruction and proper services. A parent of such a child commented, “They were really good about catching my child’s development and getting her the help that she needed.” Another parent noted about her child, “The structure—my child went from special needs to normal. Just being in a place where they’re learning, doesn’t help them with anything, but going from [activity] center to [activity] center helps them with the structure. When she couldn’t tolerate the third center, they allowed her to do her own thing. She came in mid-year and they were so gracious about working with our daughter, they’re very adaptable.”

## **About the Program Director and Teachers**

The Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool staff include the program director, who also acts as the lead teacher, two additional teaching staff, and one support staff. The program director supervises all staff, has worked at Fort Jones for 3 years, and has an additional 11 years of elementary teaching experience. The program director holds a bachelor’s degree and has completed some graduate school coursework. The two additional teachers have some college education. Both are working towards completing their associate’s degree in early childhood education (ECE) with one teacher only one class short. Combined, the two teachers have 25 years of preschool experience. The support staff has a high-school education.

When asked to describe her role in ensuring that the Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool provides high-quality services, the program director identified a range of responsibilities. The director oversees program funding, ensures that there are adequate staff, and makes certain that rules and regulations of ECE are met. The director also manages orientation and conferences with parents and implementation of the assessment process (DRDP). The director oversees the day-to-day operations including purchasing materials, staff scheduling and management, and staff development and hiring.

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	3
Gender	100% female
Ethnicity	3 white
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	1 speaks Spanish, but not fluently
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0
Some college	2
A.A. degree	0
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	1
Currently working toward degree	2 teachers are working towards an A.A. degree
Years of experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 9.3 years; range 4 to 12 years
Years spent working in the program (average and range)	Average 3 years; range 2 to 4 years

The director articulated the program’s vision for staff saying, “Sharing the responsibility, we all know that there are certain times where we’re busier, and we help out when we can. We rotate and we share, there’s more buy-in, [the teachers] feel more important, valued, and they feel appreciated.” Referring to hiring staff, the director remarked, “When I hired, the most important thing for me was how were these people interacting with the kids. I wanted education, but if they don’t have any natural inclination or desire and energy to work with the kids, it won’t work well. They have to truly be kid people. They leave here and they still care about the kids all day long. They don’t just clock in and out and then are done.”

The program uses in-house training as an important strategy to promote the professional development of its teaching staff. On-site staff development is offered on a continuous basis, including regular staff meetings and trainings. Teachers attend trainings on topics related to child development, behavioral issues, conflict resolution, communication with families, family involvement, strategies for working with English learners, strategies for working with children with disabilities or special needs, and kindergarten standards and curriculum. For example, the most recent trainings teachers attended focused on the DRDP, observation techniques, sensory motor integration and assessment, and brain research.

In addition to in-house training, teachers have paid time off to attend conferences and workshops. In some cases, for teachers who are working toward a degree, the program works around their schedule to enable them to leave early to attend classes. The teachers also have access to ECE resources such as books, magazines, and videos, along with computer access for researching ECE topics. There are some resources for teachers in the school library, but the

majority of resources are housed in the preschool classroom for easy access. Teaching staff also have access to Connections, Young Children, and Parent & Child. The program also subscribes to The Mailbox, and all teachers have access to activities online. Teachers are encouraged to request additional resources if necessary and the program works to obtain them.

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

Parents are involved in the Fort Jones Preschool Program in a number of ways, including working in the classroom or participating in the Parent Advisory Committee, parent education, and other special events (e.g., family nights, holiday celebrations, field trips). The program conducts these special events in the evenings or on weekends, when most families can attend. One teacher commented about parent involvement, “The children whose parents participated in their lives have done really well the whole way through. I’ve worked in Fort Jones for most of the years and see the difference that involving parents makes.” Fort Jones maintains an open-door policy for parents, by inviting parents to visit and volunteer in the program at any time that is convenient for them. The program encourages parents to continue the learning experience at home by providing children with books to take home. One parent summarized the attitude of program staff regarding parent involvement: “They make you feel welcomed when you come in, and they make you feel appreciated by putting your name in the newsletter and thanking you.” In addition to parent involvement in activities, parent conferences are held twice a year and on an as needed basis, if necessary, to inform parents about how their children are doing and what home activities can be done to assist their children’s learning.

Upon enrollment, staff meet with parents to discuss the family’s background, needs, and concerns, and to share information about the types of available resources. As appropriate, professional specialists observe children in the classroom, provide individualized services, or make referrals for families as needed. The preschool site supervisor meets with the speech therapist and school nurse when their services are necessary in the classroom. One parent reflected, “It’s very inclusive and [the teachers] want them to be a part of everything. [The teachers] try to make sure that they can assess the children and make sure to provide the services that can help the child develop.”

Parents are referred to organizations that provide a range of supports that include: counseling services, medical/dental providers, childcare, and community resources. Parents are also encouraged to visit the family resource center and utilize their services. In addition, the program provides information about conferences on positive family communication, other parent resources such as Even Start, and learning materials for families.

During the focus group, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the program, describing ways in which it supported their children and entire family. Several parents explained what attracted them to the Fort Jones program in the first place, mentioning the flexible schedule, connection to the elementary school, location, and cost as key factors in their decision. Another parent praised the Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool teachers’ commitment: “I have called the program director at home before and she’s really open and listen to what I have to say...it doesn’t matter where you run into the staff, we can talk to them.” Overwhelmingly, parents were highly appreciative of the Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool and reported they would recommend the program to others.

## Conclusion

The Fort Jones Elementary State Preschool is characterized by a number of factors that contribute to its high-quality preschool and services. The program has a well-rounded approach to classroom instruction, which focuses on building children's academic skills as well as supporting their social and emotional development. The program director and teachers emphasized the extent to which the program is individualized, both for staff and for children. Value is placed on each teacher's contribution to continuous quality improvement and care is taken in supporting children on the basis of their individual developmental level, strengths, and needs. The Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP) is used to help identify areas for improvement for each child and to plan subsequent activities for students and the group. The program provides services in an effort to support each child within the context of his or her family and better assist them in being ready for school.

In the interview, the program director emphasized the importance of the relationship between the preschool program and the elementary school. Benefits of this relationship include improved communication between staff at the two schools, smoother transitions for children entering kindergarten, and curricular alignment between preschool and kindergarten. The preschool program and elementary school also maintain ongoing, two-way communication. Preschool teachers are aware of the expectations of kindergarten teachers, who in turn, are informed about the incoming children's skill levels and needs. Families also feel more comfortable with the transition into elementary school, given the level of interaction between preschool and kindergarten staff. One parent commented, "I really like the fact that it's [the preschool is] in the school. It gets them excited about kindergarten. It's a preview about where they are going to go, and the principal already knows them."

The comments of parents in the focus groups indicated a high level of satisfaction with the program. They felt that the preschool was helping to prepare their children for success in kindergarten, in addition to providing a safe environment. Family members also praised the individualized approach to classroom activities and program services, emphasized by staff as a key component of their approach to providing a high-quality preschool experience.

When asked to identify strategies to support the implementation of the Preschool for All initiative in California, the director emphasized the need for compensating teachers appropriately, especially given the expectation of higher education. She explained her struggle with the education push and proper compensation. "I think about education level for some of the staff. I think that one of the things that has helped is that I have a teaching credential. I'm encouraging the higher education, but there has to be some reason for them to go on and get their bachelor's [degree]. If my staff didn't like the kids, they would be gone; the pay is just horrible. I make more money teaching sixth grade half-time than [I do teaching] 6.5 hours of preschool." The director also emphasized the importance of a low teacher-to-child ratio and the need to provide adequate funding to support a child with disabilities and other special needs.

## Greenfield Head Start Marin County

Greenfield Head Start is part of the Marin Head Start program, located in Marin County. The Greenfield site houses 3 of the 11 Marin Head Start classes and provides preschool services to sixty 3- and 4-year-old children.

### Overview

This community-based program is housed in a lovely private building that once was a church office building. The building is located on a quiet, tree-lined street in a neighborhood near downtown San Rafael. The two classrooms at Greenfield are well furnished and arranged so that several play activities can take place at the same time. The multiple interest centers, which include areas for blocks, manipulatives, dramatic play materials, art, reading, writing, science, and computer use, include many developmentally appropriate materials, which are organized to allow independent use by the children. Many of the materials in the classrooms depict people of different racial backgrounds, cultures, ages, abilities, and genders in a positive, nonstereotyping way. Individual children's work and age-appropriate materials are displayed throughout the classrooms, making them bright and cheerful. Greenfield also has an attractive, well-supplied outdoor play area that, although modest in size, offers children a variety of gross motor play activities.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	Community-based
Funding	Head Start
Part-day/full-day	Part-day (4 hours, a.m. and p.m. sessions) and full-day (10 hours, 7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.)
Full-year/school-year	School-year (10 months or 136 days; classes held 4 days/week) and full-year (222 days; classes held 5 days/week)
Number of sessions	3 (2 part-day, 1 full-day)
Number of classrooms	2
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	60
Classroom size	20 children
Typical teacher to child ratio	1 to 5 (full-day) and 1 to 7 (part-day)
Curriculum	Creative Curriculum
Ethnicity of children	92% Hispanic, 7% other, 1% white
Language of children	English, Spanish
English-learner population	95%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	Learning disability (2 children), speech and language delays (8 children), mental retardation (1 child), hearing impairment (1 child)

The Greenfield program offers both full-day and part-day classes. One full-day class is held every weekday; two part-day classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, are held Monday through Thursday. The program also offers both full-year and part-year classes. Each class held at Greenfield can accommodate a maximum of 20 children.

Most of the children attending Greenfield Head Start are English learners (95%). The primary language of all the English learners currently attending the program is Spanish. One-fifth (20%) of the children attending have disabilities and other special needs. Most of these children have speech and language delays, and a few have learning disabilities, mental retardation, or hearing impairment.

During the site visit, it was observed that the Greenfield Head Start uses a regular daily schedule that is familiar to the children in attendance. Children were greeted warmly by the teaching staff when they arrived at the program. Many children arrived by school bus, but some parents brought their children to school. When children arrived, they immediately became involved in activities and were kept busy until departure. Children at the program were well supervised at all times, and all areas for children were free of safety hazards.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities</b>	
<b>Schedule – Full-day program</b>	
7:30	Arrive and free time
8:45	Breakfast/teeth brushing
9:15	Circle time
9:30	Outside
10:00	Small groups
10:15	Work time
11:30	Circle/social skills
11:45	Outside
12:10	Lunch/teeth brushing
1:00	Story time
1:15	Nap
3:15	Snack
3:45	Small groups
4:20	Outside
5:00	Free time
5:30	Close

<b>Schedule – Part-day program (morning class)</b>	
8:45	Breakfast
9:15	Brush teeth
9:30	Circle time
9:50	Work time
10:45	Small groups
11:05	Outside
11:30	Social skills
11:45	Lunch/departure

In the full-day class, the day began with free play, followed by breakfast; the morning part-day class began with breakfast. Mealtimes were used as opportunities to engage children in conversation and to foster children's independence by allowing them to serve and cleanup after themselves. The full-day and part-day classes included time for large-circle activities, small groups, outdoor play, free-play or work time, social skills training, and lunch. The full-day class included more time in each of these areas and also included story time and nap time. During the day, most activities were observed to be child-directed, and children with disabilities or other special needs and children who were English learners were fully integrated into all classroom activities.

The teachers at Greenfield were warm and supportive when interacting with the children and really seemed to enjoy being with them. They encouraged the children to communicate and helped the children to develop reasoning skills by asking them questions about their activities. During free play, the teachers moved around the classroom and interacted with the different groups of children, engaging them in conversation and inquiring about their play. The teachers created stimulating activities for the children, which kept them interested. For example, a group of children were drawing on letter-sized paper and were losing interest, so the teacher pulled out some graph paper for them to draw on, which was something new and interesting to the children. In another example, in the dramatic play area, the children were pretending to be cooking, so the teacher came and sat down and pretended to order some food and turned the activity into "restaurant." This interaction extended the children's learning without disrupting their control of the play. The teachers also made good use of the large selection of books in the classrooms by reading to children during free-play time.

The large indoor classroom space allowed for the various interest centers to be arranged so that multiple different activities could occur at the same time without interruption. Centers were well organized, and most open shelves and containers for toys were labeled for independent use by the children. Plenty of space also was set aside for the children to find and create space for privacy. Materials in the various learning centers were rotated, depending on the theme of the month, and children had a variety of fine motor activities and learning materials from which to choose, such as large and small blocks, puzzles both with and without knobs, and play dough.

### **Curriculum and Instructional Approach**

Greenfield Head Start uses The Creative Curriculum, which provides teachers with a strong framework to help guide their instruction. The curriculum is based on current research and theory of early childhood education and is designed to address four broad developmental areas: social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language. The curriculum influences many areas of preschool instruction, such as the types of activities that make up the preschool day and the arrangement of the classrooms. The curriculum includes 11 interest areas for preschool classrooms and describes them as the settings where most of children's learning takes place: blocks, dramatic play, toys and games, art, library, discovery, sand and water, music and movement, cooking, computers, and outdoors. Recommendations are provided for how and what children learn in each of these areas, what materials are needed, and how teachers should interact with children. The curriculum helps teachers plan their class activities and allows them the freedom to tailor the activities to the needs and interests of the children in their class.

The Creative Curriculum includes ongoing observations and assessments of the children. Teachers observe children every day, and formal assessments occur three or four times a year (children in part-day classes are assessed three times a year, children in full-day classes four times). Two children are selected each week for formal observation, and the observations of children are rotated so that all are observed. The curriculum includes *The Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5* which teachers can use to determine where each child is developmentally, to track each child's progress, and to create specific plans for each child. Also included are tie-ins to enrichment activities that address areas of delay.

The Creative Curriculum assessment data are entered into a computer program that charts the information. This software allows the staff to look at the data for an entire class or the whole program. For example, the data showed that the children attending Greenfield were getting low scores in letter name recognition. The program acted on this information by consulting with the Head Start education manager, who brought in materials to address this issue. The staff also used an all-staff meeting as an opportunity for teachers to share ideas on activities that promote letter recognition and phonemic awareness. The computer program also creates a summary page for each child that shows each child's developmental progress and goals. This page can be shared with parents. Finally, teachers collect work samples from the children throughout the year.



### The Creative Curriculum

The Creative Curriculum is a curriculum and assessment system based on developmentally appropriate practices such as child initiation and choice, active learning, play, and hands-on materials. The curriculum is designed to be inclusive of English learners and children with disabilities, as well as children developing typically. It meets the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) criteria for effective curriculum and assessment, and is related directly to elementary school subject curricula.

The Creative Curriculum promotes early literacy skills in the following ways:

- Building a strong foundation in oral language (conversation, vocabulary, and listening skills)
- Providing developmentally appropriate phonological awareness activities (alliteration, rhyming, and letter sounds)
- Employing writing throughout the day (writing center, story dictation)
- Creating a print-rich environment (posters, reading center, labeling)

The assessment component of the Creative Curriculum system allows teachers to link the assessment results to the curriculum goals and guides them in helping each child reach those goals. By creating child progress and planning reports for families, teachers can use assessment information to involve families in their children's development.

Source: [http://www.teachingstrategies.com/pages/page.cfm?pg\\_section=preschool](http://www.teachingstrategies.com/pages/page.cfm?pg_section=preschool)

This program also uses the Early Screening Inventory as an initial screening of developmental and physical abilities and conducts dental, vision, hearing, and social/emotional screenings within the first 45 to 90 days of school. Finally, Marin Head Start sites administer Head Start's National Reporting System assessment two times a year with a focus on early reading and math skills. These data are used to develop a nationwide picture of Head Start children's progress in these two specific areas and is not used to assess the school readiness of individual children. The Head Start teachers learn from the information they gather on each child and the class as a whole through screenings, assessments, and observations to strengthen the classroom experiences for all. The Head Start program, as a whole, uses the same approach of examining all Head Start

information (inventory and assessments from each program) to guide its professional development activities.

The teachers plan class activities that encourage the children to think and that develop their reasoning skills. For example, the following activity was observed during circle time: The teacher leading the circle placed an easel in front of the class with the following headings: Sink, Sink & Float, Float. Each child was given a small item for this activity; items included a sponge, shell, pine cone, tile, plastic caterpillar, plastic bugs, feather, and cork. Children were called up to the front of the group and asked whether their item would sink or float. Then children put their item into a small, clear plastic bowl filled with water and told the teacher whether it sank, floated, or sank and then floated. Once this was determined, the children taped their item onto the easel under the appropriate column heading. This activity was conducted in Spanish.

Teacher: What do you think will happen — the object will float or will sink?

Child: It will float.

Teacher: Which has more — sink or float? Let's count. *Together, the children count the number of items in the Sink and Float columns: eight items are under Sink and six are under Float and two are under Sink & Float.*

Teacher: How many objects are there on the board? Which column is the tallest and which one is the shortest? *Teacher and children count the number of items in each column.*

Teacher: Six is less than eight, and two is less than six, so the column in the middle is the shortest; it has less objects than the other two.

## **School Readiness**

Greenfield Head Start helps its children get ready for school by specifically targeting skills in the four broad developmental areas identified in its curriculum: social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language. The teachers report that the skills this program gives children to help them be ready for school are social skills, independence, self-esteem, and academic skills. The teachers feel more pressure now than in prior years to make sure the children reach certain academic performance standards, as evidenced by the following quote: “We give a lot of content that has to do with new [academic performance standards]. Of course, we can do that stuff, but most important in preschool are the social skills.” The teachers also strive to instill in the children a love of learning and of school. Finally, they educate parents and teach them the importance of school. As one teacher said, “[Some parents] buy [their children] a lot of materials. In parent meetings, we tell them that crayons, a pencil, and lots of love can be worth a lot more.”

The Head Start program includes extensive kindergarten transition activities that include parent meetings about what to expect in kindergarten, visits from kindergarten teachers at the program, and visits to the kindergarten classroom to familiarize the children. The program also provides a parent workbook that incorporates many of the frequently asked questions about transitioning. In addition, Marin Head Start works with the various school districts to align curriculum and early learning standards and, with parent permission, to share information with kindergarten teachers about incoming students.

Parents reported that they were confident their children would be ready for kindergarten because they were learning to speak English, to write, and to count, and they were learning their colors and the letters of the alphabet. They also have noticed behavior changes in their children. One parent reported that before coming to Greenfield, her son fought a lot. After attending this preschool, he stopped fighting because “the teacher taught him that it’s wrong.” Other parents said their children had become more confident, cooperative, and independent since coming to this program. One parent reported that her son told her, “I’m not going to cry when I go to kindergarten, even if I’m in a new class, because I’m ready for kindergarten.”

## **Serving California’s Diverse Population**

**English Learners.** Greenfield Head Start offers a warm, rich environment that supports the learning and development of all of its children. Most (95%) of the children attending Greenfield Head Start are English learners, and the primary language of all the English learners is Spanish. The program uses a variety of methods to meet the needs of English learners, such as having several bilingual teachers and creating an environment that reflects the cultures of the children attending the school. Labels in the classrooms are printed in Spanish and English, and Spanish language materials, like books, are included in the classrooms. The program administration also offers ongoing teacher education on best practices for working with children who are English learners. For example, they had a presentation by Lily Wong Fillmore, a nationally recognized expert on issues related to the education of English learners. In addition, the administration continually discusses ways to improve instruction for this group.

Most of the preschool teachers believe that Greenfield Head Start is doing an excellent job meeting the needs of this population (five of the six teachers surveyed rated the program as excellent in its ability to meet the needs of English learners). Most (five of six teachers also consider themselves very well prepared to work with this population. The teachers at this program work hard to meet the needs of English learners, such as by making sure that classroom content is given in Spanish when needed. Some classes use less Spanish than others, but all classes include at least one Spanish-speaking teacher, so that interpretation can occur when necessary. Teachers believe it is especially important that they foster the establishment of a social/emotional contact between each English learner and one of the teachers. Teachers also expressed a desire to help children retain their primary language.

Many parents of English learners commented that their children were learning English and that they were very pleased with this skill. One parent said her son had learned so much English that now he helps her with her English.

The program makes several accommodations for children who are English learners and their families. It provides reading materials in children’s primary languages and has translators available for parents and children. The program provides English as a second language (ESL) instruction for children and ESL classes for parents. As an activity during a parent meeting at the beginning of the year, the parents made Spanish-to-English dictionaries that they then took home and could use. In addition, all parent meetings are simultaneously translated.

**Children with Disabilities and Other Special Needs.** Of the 60 or so children attending this program, 12 have disabilities and other special needs. Most of these children have speech and language delays, but also in attendance are children with learning disabilities, mental retardation, and hearing impairments. When a child is suspected to have a disability or other special need, the program holds a family success team meeting or a student success team meeting to decide how

the classroom can best support the child's individual development and to develop a plan for the child and family. The team helps each family through the process of assessment and treatment. The Greenfield program has many resources for this population because it is part of the larger Marin Head Start program. For example, the program has access to a disability manager, a health manager and a mental health therapist. The program also has access to an art therapist who works with all the children in the classes on social/emotional issues.

The program is able to offer on-site special education teachers and therapists because it is a co-enrolled site with the County Office of Education (COE). Children with disabilities and other special needs who otherwise would attend the county special needs preschool instead attend preschool at Greenfield, and the COE sends special education teachers and therapists to them there. Children are pulled out of class, either individually or in groups, or are treated in the classroom. In the latter case, the therapist or teacher co-teaches with the regular classroom teacher for a portion of the day. A third of the teachers surveyed rated this program as excellent in its ability to meet the needs of children with disabilities and other special needs; half of the teachers rated the program as average in this area.

The teachers fully integrate children with disabilities and other special needs into all classroom activities. They put out materials based on the special needs of their students. For example, when a child with a hearing impairment attended the program, one of the teachers who knows sign language hung sign language pictures around the classroom so that everyone could communicate with the child. Special materials also were added to the classroom, such as sign language puzzles.

Greenfield makes several types of accommodations for children with disabilities and other special needs. Activities are modified, such as the length of the school day, the duration of some activities, the types of materials available, and the types of gross motor activities. Additional support from trained professionals is available. A teacher mentioned, "We just include children with special needs. We have a developmentally delayed child who is like a toddler but is five. We just keep at it. We could use a little more help. We keep everyone included, and he does the best he can, and we do too. We don't want to isolate anybody and make them feel left out." The program also has a variety of supports for families with children with behavior problems to succeed in the classroom. Marin Head Start uses local family support and mental health agencies to provide counseling opportunities for parents. In addition, it provides families with Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, in-home mentoring, and a variety of parenting classes. The program also connects families with appropriate special education support for their children, if necessary.

### **About the Teachers and Program Director**

The Greenfield Head Start staff includes the site supervisor and nine teaching staff. The site supervisor, who also supervises other sites, is available to support the teaching staff on a regular basis. Greenfield Head Start, as part of the larger Marin Head Start, also has access to other Marin Head Start staff, including the Head Start director, and managers who are specialists in areas such as health, education, disabilities, and family services. Greenfield Head Start also is able to use two consultants, one in nutrition and one in mental health.

Greenfield Head Start employs nine teachers; six of these teachers were surveyed, and their characteristics are described here. Three of the six teachers surveyed are lead teachers, and three are associate teachers or aides. All of the teachers surveyed are female. The teachers are well educated: four of the six surveyed have a bachelor's degree or higher, and two have taken some

college courses. Three teachers are currently working toward some type of degree. A third of the teachers are of Hispanic origin, and two-thirds are white. Two of the three lead teachers speak Spanish. Teachers have taught early childhood education for an average of more than 8 years. The lead teachers have taught for an average of 14 years compared with an average of 2.7 years for the associate teachers and aides. Several of the teachers had experience with Head Start before becoming teachers. One teacher was a Head Start pupil. Another was a parent of children in the program. This teacher described her career change into Head Start as follows: “I was a parent in the program when I started. I had left a nursing program before that and I realized I didn’t want to be a nurse...I started volunteering in the classroom and just knew I belonged here.”

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information*</b>	
Number of teachers	9
Gender	100% female
Ethnicity	Hispanic (2); Caucasian (4)
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	2 of 3 lead teachers speak Spanish 3 of 3 assistant teachers speak Spanish
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0
Some college	2
A.A. degree	0
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	4
Currently working toward a degree	3
Years experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 8.3 years; range 2 to 24 years
Years spent working at this program (average and range)	Average 4.2 years; range 1 to 10 years
*Based on surveys completed by six of the nine teachers.	

The site supervisor believes that the critical characteristics of teaching staff that provide children with a high-quality preschool experience include dedication, education, and teamwork. Also important is having language match between the children and teachers—at least one teacher in each class at Greenfield is fluent in Spanish. Finally, it is important to have staff who understand child development.

The Head Start program director and the site supervisor describe their role as ensuring that Greenfield Head Start provides high-quality services. First, they ensure that Head Start’s significant documentation requirements are met. The program requires documentation of information regarding the curriculum, the facilities, and the children. The administrators monitor this process to constantly find ways to improve it. Second, they support their staff through continuing education and making sure staff have time to meet as a group. They have monthly staff meetings/training sessions which include all Marin Head Start teaching staff. They also provide staff with paid planning time and ensure that staff have input into the program. As the director mentioned, “Staff have to have a real voice in what’s going on.” The Head Start program has just formed a staff advisory committee to facilitate this process.

The continuing education of teachers at Greenfield Head Start is strongly supported by their site supervisor, director, and Marin Head Start. One Friday a month, all the Head Start sites are closed so that all teaching staff can attend a staff meeting and inservice day. Program issues are discussed, and training on specific issues is provided. The inservice training is followed by small-group discussions about the training topic. In addition, the program provides paid and unpaid time off for teachers to attend training sessions, funding to attend training sessions, information about upcoming training sessions, and in-house training. All teachers surveyed reported having received some type of training in the last 12 months. Topics included child development, behavioral issues, conflict resolution, communicating with families, family involvement, strategies for working with English learners, strategies for working with children with disabilities and other special needs, and strategies for working with and addressing the special needs of children who are homeless. Most of the teachers (five of the six) rated this program as excellent for having paid training or professional development opportunities. Finally, teachers have access to early childhood resources and to technology for researching early childhood topics. Teacher job satisfaction is high; as one teacher stated, “When you come to work, you have to be happy. This is a happy place for me.”

When asked about the critical components of maintaining a high-quality staff, the site supervisor named adequate compensation as one critical component. The administrators have found that as teachers get more trained and educated, they leave Greenfield to take public school teaching positions or other higher-paying jobs. One excellent teacher left the school to become a bus driver because the pay was higher.

The administrators work hard to make sure their staff know they are appreciated. For example, the program has two staff wellness days per year, and on these days the management plans activities for the whole staff. Most recently, the group took the ferry into San Francisco, where they had a choice of activities. Another wellness day was spent at a lodge on Mt. Tamalpais, where activities like yoga, nutrition assessments, and ping-pong were available for the teachers. It is very important to the management of Greenfield that staff needs are met and that the work environment is a pleasant one. As the director mentioned, “[We’re] trying to—within all the other confines you have—make the working environment a place that people like to come.”

The teachers at Greenfield reported that they enjoy their work. They appreciate that they get paid planning time and that they have the materials they need for their classrooms. One teacher mentioned that at another preschool, she had to pay for classroom materials herself. Another teacher said, “If we know we need [materials], we can get them through the program. It’s very nice. It makes you feel good.” They are pleased that they get opportunities and support for continuing their education. Also important is making sure that the work environment is pleasant. The teachers enjoy the staff with whom they work and feel like a team. As one teacher said, “I like the people I’m working with the most. It’s the best site to work at—I like this one. They’re good people.” Teachers enjoy the flexibility with scheduling they have at Greenfield and explained that if the Head Start site where one is working doesn’t have the schedule one wants, one can be moved to another site. Teachers also like the site of the preschool: “We’re away from the hustle. It’s homey over here.” Teachers like working with the population they serve and having the opportunity to help people and make a difference in their lives. They feel they are really needed and find that fact rewarding. As one teacher stated, “My goal was to help people—try to get them out of where they are.”

## **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

Most parents chose Greenfield Head Start either because they had another child who attended the program and benefited greatly from it or because a family member, friend, or professional recommended the program to them. Greenfield was the first choice of preschool programs for all parents we spoke with. The parents reported liking this program because it has an excellent teaching staff who respect parents' opinions. The parents described the relationship between the teachers and children as "very good" and were happy that their children liked going to school at Greenfield. As one parent said, "My daughter is lazy when getting up in the morning, but when she is going to the school, she is very happy and gets right up." Parents reported that they feel a sense of trust in the program and don't worry about their children when they're at Greenfield.

Parents also appreciate the help they have received from Greenfield. They appreciate that the program gives them information about other services and supports in the area. One parent said that at the parent meetings, she gets to meet many other parents and learn about child development. Another parent commented that the family advocates are available to help with domestic issues, financial issues, and the transition to kindergarten and provide parents with referrals to other agencies for assistance in procuring employment, clothing, and other necessities.

Parents are kept informed about the program in general through newsletters and about their children's progress at Greenfield through home visits and parent-teacher conferences. The program has two home visits and two parent-teacher conferences per year for sharing information with parents. Parents are expected to participate in these conferences, and they sign a written commitment to meet this expectation. Besides updating parents on their children's progress, these meetings are also used as opportunities to educate parents on how they can help continue their children's learning at home. To this end, Greenfield is participating in the Raising A Reader program, which includes take-home reading book bags for parents and children. The program also gives children backpacks with activities that parents can work on with their children at home, and at the end of the year, gives children kindergarten transition backpacks.

Greenfield Head Start encourages parents to participate in the program, but parent participation is not required. As one parent said, "They don't force you to participate. They're flexible and let you do things that fit with your schedule." For those parents who want to be involved, there are many ways they can participate. They can volunteer in the classrooms or help with field trips, special activities, and fund-raising. Parents can attend the monthly parent meetings. The parents choose the topics for these meetings and also choose the parent officers. All meetings have English/Spanish translations. Fathers can participate in the program's fathers group. Parents can volunteer for the Classroom Parent Committee, which plans the parent club meetings/activities for their class, or they may join the Parent Policy Council, which recommends and approves local Head Start policies, including issues on nutrition, education, and health. The parents of the children who attend Greenfield are very pleased with the program. They feel fortunate that they are able to send their children there, and their only suggestion to improve the program would be to expand it so that more children could benefit.

## Conclusion

Many characteristics contribute to the high quality of the Greenfield Head Start program. First, the program uses a high-quality curriculum and ongoing assessment to support children's learning and growth. Second, the program has a well-trained staff who receive ongoing education and training and have access to experts in the education, development, and health fields. Teachers appreciate the program's emphasis on continuing education. As one teacher said, "Training sessions are invaluable – keeps us current." The program's emphasis on continuing education and availability of assistance from managers with expertise in many areas are effective means of facilitating the professional development of the staff. The administrators also listen to their teachers and respond to their needs by offering training, wellness days, and paid planning time. The teaching staff at Greenfield Head Start enjoy their work and feel that they are part of a team. The support and "perks" that the administration provides play an important role in creating an environment where teachers are happy and able to focus on teaching because they feel supported and heard by the administration.

The program also is able to assist the learning of English learners and children with disabilities and other special needs by creating an environment that reflects the diversity of the children attending the school. For the 95% of the children who are English learners, several of the program staff are bilingual in English and Spanish and therefore able to speak to the children in Spanish when needed. In addition, labels in the classroom are printed in English and Spanish, and books are also available in Spanish. The 12 children in the program who have disabilities or other special needs have access to the proper resources because Greenfield Head Start is part of the larger Marin Head Start program. The children are fully integrated into all the classroom activities, and the County Office of Education sends specialists to the program to work with the children. Finally, not surprisingly, parents are happy with the services their children receive and the support parents receive to help their children at home. This program responds to the needs of the families it serves by providing a full-day program for children whose parents work full-time. They also like that the program gives them information about other local programs. Parents feel that their children are in a learning environment where they receive a lot of individual attention. Parents of children who are English learners are happy that their children are learning to speak English, and parents feel their opinions are respected by the teachers. One parent said, "My daughter is so happy with the school every day. She likes it very much."

When asked to identify strategies to support the implementation of the Preschool for All (PFA) initiative in California, the director and the site supervisor expressed the need first and foremost for adequate funding. They also recommended that the expertise of existing high-quality programs and input from parents be taken into account when designing PFA programs. Since it is likely that initially there will not be enough funding for all families that want to participate in PFA to do so, they suggested the program initially target the areas of greatest need based on access and risk. Another suggestion was to arrange free space for nonprofit PFA sites, which would significantly help with operating costs. They also suggested that support be given to the development of an early childhood degree credential in California. Finally, they emphasized the need for community buy-in when developing PFA programs. They have learned that without community support, it is very difficult to sustain high-quality programs like Greenfield. Head Start works with other community agencies to be able to offer more to children and their families, and PFA should consider following this example. As the Director said, "It takes the whole community to develop these high-quality programs."



## Hands Together—A Center for Children Orange County

Hands Together—A Center for Children is a full-day preschool, located in downtown Santa Ana in Orange County. The center-based program provides care for 91 children, including infants, toddlers, and preschool children. In the 2004–05 program year, 68 children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled. The program serves mostly Latino families in the community.

### Overview

The center is housed in a large building and has three preschool classrooms. Program funds are generated by a number of sources that include the California Department of Education, Child Development Division (CDE/CDD), General Child Care grant, private pay fees, donations, and additional grants and subsidizes. The classrooms provide indoor space for children to explore, play, and learn. Classrooms include learning centers that allow for many activities to occur at the same time. Each classroom has ample developmentally appropriate materials. The entire program environment is designed to support children’s learning and development. The average class size is 24 children, with an average teacher-to-child ratio of 1 to 7. The center offers a 12-month (352 days), full-day (12 hours) program that operates from 6:30 in the morning until 6:30 in the evening.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	Community-based
Funding	Private Not-for-Profit
Part-day/full-day	Full-day (12 hours; 6:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.)
Full-year/school-year	Full-year (12 months, or 352 days)
Number of sessions	1
Number of classrooms	3
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	68
Classroom size	21 children
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1 to 7
Curriculum	Developmental Learning Model developed by National Pediatric Support Services
Ethnicity of children	95%-98% Latino, 2%-5% white
Language of children	English and Spanish
English-learner population	90%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	Learning disability (2 children) and speech impairment (5 children)

The great majority (95%–98%) of the children enrolled in the program are Hispanic, and the remaining 2%–5% are white. The languages spoken by children include English and Spanish, with 90% of the children being English learners. Slightly over one-tenth (11%) have been identified as having disabilities and other special needs, including children with speech impairments and learning disabilities.

During the site visit, when children arrived, they immediately became involved in having breakfast or engaging in classroom activities as needed. Teachers and other staff warmly greeted them and their parents. If children appeared shy or hesitant, teachers helped them become acclimated to the environment by inviting them to join an activity.

When most of the children had arrived, the teaching staff divided them into three groups. One group was directed outside for free play, for which a variety of gross motor equipment was available (e.g., large climbing structures, tricycles, balls). The other two groups remained inside and participated in small-group art activities. Each teacher sat with their group to explain and show the children various art techniques such as cutting, hole punching, and painting. During these activities pleasant interactions between teachers and children occurred.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities</b>	
6:45	Meet/greet
7:45	Breakfast
8:20	Outside free play/Group time
9:00	Indoor small-group time
10:00	Indoor free play
11:00	Outside free play
12:00	Lunch
1:00	Nap/rest
3:10	Snack time
4:00	Group time
4:15	Indoor small-group time
4:30	Outside free play time and departures

The program offered many opportunities for children to have indoor and outdoor free play throughout the day. At least five interest centers were clearly defined, and areas were arranged so as not to interfere with one another. These centers had developmentally appropriate materials and provided fun learning experiences. The materials were well-organized, easily accessible, and labeled to encourage self-help, and offered children different levels of difficulty. Art activities were set up at all times throughout the program day, including during outdoor free-play periods. There were provisions for sand-and-water play outside, including a variety of toys such as containers, scoops, cups, and shovels. Blocks were easily accessible in the classroom. The children had access to one computer in the classroom with software programs for literacy, language, math, and drawing.

After a certain amount of time, the groups rotated to the next activity. Staff then transitioned the entire class to group time where the teaching staff read a book, asking questions and promoting discussion with the children. Following story time, teachers asked children to choose a center to play at and provide a reason why they chose that particular center (e.g., “Johnny, what center do you plan to play at?” “Why?”), promoting independence and reasoning for each child.

Following hand washing, children were provided with lunch at small-group tables. Meals were well-balanced and provided an opportunity for continued interactions between children and teachers. The staff sat at the tables with children, and discussions were observed both between

children, and between teachers and children. The meal was used as an opportunity to foster children’s self-help skills and encourage interaction.

After the afternoon’s activities, which included nap time, additional free play, and small- and large-group activities, children prepared for their departure. Teachers used this time to share information about the children with families and to listen to parents’ comments or concerns as the children were picked up.

The classrooms observed maintained developmentally appropriate books, pictures, and communication activities. Throughout the day, teachers conversed individually with children and encouraged them to talk. Ample materials to stimulate communication were also present, including puppets in the reading area, props in the dramatic-play area, and small animals and figures in the block area. Staff also talked about logical relationships and encouraged reasoning with the children throughout the day. Because of the many activities, teachers had ample opportunities to interact with children in a supportive manner throughout the day. Staff were observed listening attentively to children and responding sympathetically as appropriate. Discipline, when needed, was provided in a nonpunitive manner, usually in the form of a redirection to a different activity.

## Curriculum and Instructional Approach

Hands Together uses the National Pediatric Support Services’ Developmental Learning Model, which is modeled after High/Scope. This curriculum focuses on hands-on learning using various formats of instruction (large-group, small-group, teacher-directed, and child-directed activities.) Language and literacy are key components to structuring the curriculum when the majority of the children’s primary language is not English. Every child is able to experience learning at their own pace. The program director stated, “...the children are able to experience [the] world they live in by—not just hearing it, but touching, seeing, and feeling things as well. A lot of the materials are based on children’s interest—that’s our main focus—the children and what they’re interested in and the things they see in their environment.”

### The High/Scope Curriculum

Created in the early 1960s, the High/Scope curriculum was originally devised as the curriculum that would be used in the now-famous High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, which has demonstrated striking long-term benefits of preschool for young children.

The curriculum has evolved over the years, but is grounded in five principles:

- *Active Learning.* Through active learning—having direct and immediate experiences and deriving meaning from them through reflection—young children construct knowledge that helps them make sense of their world.
- *Adult-Child Interaction.* Active learning depends on positive adult-child interactions.
- *Learning Environment.* The preschool environment should be planned carefully and appropriate materials should be selected.
- *Daily Routine.* Adults should plan a consistent daily routine that supports active learning. This includes a “plan-do-review” process, in which children help decide what they want to do, carry out the plans, and then review them. Small- and large-group activities are a regular part of the day.
- *Assessment.* Staff engage in team-based daily assessment of children, with findings fed back into instructional planning.

Source: Hohmann, M., & Weikart, D.P. (2002). *Educating young children: Active learning practices for preschool and child care programs*. Ypsilanti, MI. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

The children experience the world they live in by learning about different cultures, making different kinds of food, and learning about holidays. The program provides hands-on learning while including the elements of language and math with many activities. During the site visit, the children were learning how to make latkes. Below is a conversation capturing this activity:

Teacher: (*explaining about latkes*) This is what they eat during Hanukkah time.

Children: (*several say this while looking into one of the bowls.*): Huevos.

Teacher: (*to all children*): What are these in English?

Child: Eggs.

Teacher: How many do we have?

Children: 3!

Teacher: We have 3 eggs. (*picks up the salt*): What is this that we have?

Children: Salt!

Teacher: (*picks up flour*): What do we have here?

Children: Cheese!

Teacher: It's not cheese!

Children: Cheese! Flour!

Teacher: Flour! (*picks up milk*): What's in here?

Children: Milk!

Teacher: That's right—milk! (*picks up melted cheese*): What's in here? (*children look inside, but no one responds.*) It's cheese, melted cheese. Children: Let me see! (*Teacher shows bowl to children around the table.*) Everything is white.

Teacher: So what color do you think our latkes are gonna be?

Children: White.

Teacher: That's right, white.

The curriculum includes “work time” beginning with a small-group planning period in which children specify where in the classroom they would like to be and what they plan to do there. Following work time, children regroup with the teachers and discuss their activities. The teachers ask the children: “What area do you want to go play in?” and “What did you do?” These activities provide the children an opportunity to learn to make decisions. In addition, individual needs of children are incorporated into each classroom's daily activity plan. Staff set goals for each child and base lesson plans on individual needs. For example, if a child needs more help with math skills, teachers work individually with that child and tailor activities to support the child in this area.

Assessment is a critical component of helping to prepare children for kindergarten. Hands Together staff complete the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) for each child twice per year. Every child is assessed at the beginning of the year and then a follow-up assessment is completed six months later. The program uses the DRDP data to develop a summary of the child's progress, strengths, and areas for continued growth. They calculate percentages of children's performance to indicate whether they are “not emerging”, “emerging”, “mastered”, or “fully mastered” on certain skills. This information is included in a child's individual portfolio which is shared with parents during conferences held twice a year. In addition, teachers conduct regular classroom observations of children, which they document and include in a child's portfolio as well. For all children and the classroom as a whole, the DRDP data are used to plan

curriculum and individual activities. The program considers the needs of the group and the individual child, and works hard to find a balance that can accommodate both (e.g., often using small groups to help children who need extra support in specific areas or providing activities with cutting as a focus when a child needs more skill in cutting shapes). The teachers endeavor to understand the personality of each child to better serve each child's needs.



California Department of  
**EDUCATION**

### **The Desired Results System**

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a "condition of well-being" for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners.
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their children's learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals.

Child care and early education practitioners use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to evaluate the extent to which children in their care are achieving the desired results for children. Each child is assessed by a trained provider at enrollment and at regular intervals thereafter, creating a picture of how the child's development is progressing. Each behavior exhibited by the child is rated as "fully mastered," "almost mastered," "emerging," or "not yet." Teachers use this information to tailor activities to each child's developmental needs.

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>;  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpinstructions.asp>

## **School Readiness**

Hands Together is committed to supporting children's readiness for school, with an emphasis on exposing children to real life experiences and events. Teachers encourage children to question and participate in learning. The program director noted that children with good self-confidence are able to learn and want to be challenged. Hands Together works at ensuring that every child is given the skills to question and the desire and confidence to learn.

To prepare children for kindergarten, staff also emphasize language acquisition and math skills (graphing, charting, counting, weighing, and so on). According to teachers, the staff are preparing the children for school by exposing the children to activities in science, cooking, language development, math, and writing. The teachers view the hands-on activities and storybook time as important activities for later success in school. The hands-on activities provide real life examples that children to relate to, whereas the reading time assists in promoting language development for both English and Spanish speakers. One teacher commented, "We focus on not just art, but their language experience." During the site visit, teachers were observed reinforcing early literacy with children. While reading a story during group time, one teacher asked the children, "What do you think will happen next?" During small-group time, a teacher helped individual children with their math skills by counting the number of seeds in the pumpkin together.

The program also works with local school-readiness coordinators and elementary schools to prepare the children for kindergarten. In addition, school field trips are prepared for children to local elementary schools along with visits by kindergarten teachers to the preschool program. Being emotionally ready for kindergarten and knowing the basics are necessary standards that local schools convey to Hands Together. School districts provide Hands Together with informational packets and literature for parents in preparing children for transitioning.

Parents commented on how the program provided their children with the skills to succeed in school. Families specifically mentioned how the program was enhancing children's growth in literacy, math, and social and emotional areas. Many of the parents discussed the Raising A Reader program that encourages their children to read in school, but also provides opportunities for parent involvement at home. One father commented about the importance of the program, "[The] beginning reader's program forces us to read to our children and makes them want to read books. My son only wants to read and wants no toys. It has been great." Another parent stated, "[The] beginning readers program—they really want to read. My child guesses what will happen on the next page. It is a great program."

In addition to cognitive skills, parents have observed social and emotional changes in their children. One parent commented about how the program is helping her daughter with self-confidence, "My daughter's self-esteem has increased—positive reinforcement. She is doing activities that she did not want to do, but now wants to do."

### **Serving California's Diverse Population**

Hands Together serves primarily Latino children, with 90% of the children being English learners. For children who are English learners, the director reported that communicating with children in English and supporting in Spanish is a priority. The program director commented on their approach, "We basically teach in English and support in Spanish. A lot of what the teachers do is reiterate when they [children] go to the word in Spanish, they'll say the word to them in English—"Oh, you mean such and such." Since many of the staff are bilingual, this instructional approach is effective. They encourage the children to use English, but do not force them to do so. The program works at the pace of the children and allows them to use the language they are comfortable with. The program incorporates Spanish into many of the daily activities including singing, reading, and counting. Reading materials are provided in the child's primary language. Three out of the four lead teachers are fluent in Spanish and most of the teachers or aids share the cultural background of the children. The program director also noted the importance of staff sharing cultural backgrounds with the children. "We have staff who reflect the cultural background of the children, which helps them not only to speak Spanish with them, but they also live in the same culture, in the same area." One teacher reported about the bilingualism at the program. "I have a little girl in my group, she talks to me in Spanish. If she wants to tell me something, she says it in Spanish, and I talk to her in English. It encourages her to use English more. Most of the teachers speak both English and Spanish."

Parents appreciate that the teachers speak both English and Spanish to their children. They also value that their children are learning both languages. A number of the children did not speak English when they first entered the program, and now they understand and are able to communicate in English. Speaking English is extremely important for their success in kindergarten. Parents provided some examples of how they felt their children's needs were being met. One parent noted, "Learning things here and all the experiences are great. My son likes it

here and he is learning English.” Another parent added, “My son has been here for four months. He knew no English and now he understands and can talk to his teachers.”

Take-home materials are provided in English and Spanish. The program also provides translators for the children and parents.

In addition to serving some English learners, the program serves a few children with disabilities and other special needs that range from learning disabilities to speech impairment. The program includes children that are already identified as having a disability or other special need in all daily activities. Depending on a child’s needs, the teaching staff explain activities more clearly, speak slower, or provide more individual attention. Some of the children also receive one-on-one treatment through the school district. If teachers are not able to provide adequate support for the children, they seek guidance from a trained professional.

When the staff at Hands Together have concerns about the development of a child who has not been identified as having a disability or special need, the program director arranges a meeting with the family to discuss the issue and requests permission to have the child observed by a professional. The child is referred to an outside agency for an individual assessment and any additional services that might be needed. The program refers services to the local school district, The YMCA Care Health Consultation program, CUIDAR, and Western Youth Services. These programs provide a number of services and offer them to Hands Together at no cost. They provide parent education classes, clinical and development assessment, medical and dental screenings, and other services.

### **About the Program Director and Teachers**

Hands Together staff include the program director, the family services coordinator, six teachers, and two support staff members. The program director has 19 years of early childhood education experience and has worked at this program for 4 years. The program director supervises the eight teachers and other support staff. Two of the teachers have a bachelor’s degree, while three have an associate’s degree, two have some college, and one has a high school education. Four of the teachers are currently working towards a degree.

To ensure Hands Together provides high-quality services, the program director oversees program funding, staff hiring, staff development and training, parent education classes, and program operations.

The program director described her hiring selection of staff, “Making sure that it’s the right staff...and it isn’t always education that makes the right staff, it has to be right personality. I think the mesh of personalities is very important, especially when you’re dealing with 20-some-odd staff members, which can be ugly if you’re not careful.” Having motivated teachers is critical to providing a high-quality preschool experience. She also mentioned the importance of furthering their education and “to continue to find out what more is going on because this field is always changing, evolving.”

This program uses in-house training as a strategy to promote the professional development of its teaching staff. Trainings topics cover a wide range of issues including child development, behavioral issues, conflict resolution, communication with families, family involvement, strategies for working with English learners and children with disabilities and other special needs, and curriculum development. On-site staff development is offered on a continuous basis, including weekly staff planning meetings. In addition to in-house training, teachers have paid

time off to attend conferences and workshops. For example, Hands Together staff has attended trainings through the Orange County Department of Education and Santa Ana Unified School District on special needs issues and kindergarten transitioning. They have also attended free workshops through the Children’s Home Society on topics related to child development, health, safety, and interactions.

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	6 teachers and 2 teacher assistants
Gender	100% female
Ethnicity	4 Latino, 2 white, 1 American Indian or Alaska Native, 1 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	6
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	1
Some college	2
A.A. degree	3
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	2
Currently working toward degree	4
Years of experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 7.5 years; range 2 to 13 years
Years spent working in the program (average and range)	Average 2.5 years; range 0 to 5 years

In some cases, when teachers are working toward their bachelor’s degree, the program allows them to leave early for class or rearrange their schedule. The teachers also have access to early childhood education (ECE) resources including books from High/Scope Press and California Department of Education (CADE) publications, magazines, and videos, along with access to technology for researching ECE. In addition, staff have access to online teacher sites such as Perpetual Preschool and other sites where teachers can learn from others.

Overall, the teachers rated their program as “excellent” in areas of class size, teacher-to-child ratio, availability of support staff, the ability to meet the needs of English learners, and the ability to work with parents with differing English proficiency.

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

Parents are involved in the program in a number of ways, including working in the classroom, participating in the Parent Advisory Committee, and attending a range of parent workshops (e.g., training on behavior management, understanding how children learn through play, parenting class) and special events (e.g., family nights, holiday celebrations). The program conducts events and trainings in the evenings or on weekends, when most families can attend. Hands Together maintains an open-door policy for parents, who can visit and volunteer in the program at any time that is convenient for them. The staff members encourage parents to be involved and work to make it convenient for the parents.

In addition, Hands Together supports children and families by providing referrals and in-house services. They provide parenting classes that include how to deal with child behavior and general

parent skills. The program provides services that assist families in finding shelter and even aid families in job searches. In addition they provide hearing, dental, and vision screenings for the children. The program works hard to link families and children to the community and what it has to offer.

Parents also noted the quality of communication between parents and teachers. Most of the parents voiced a high level of appreciation of staff and noted how important they are in making their child's experience a success. One parent remarked, "The level of communication is great. There is a log of what the child did during the day. We also have monthly meetings. I don't feel like I am missing anything. There are notes that go home informing me of activities. I feel that I am informed."

During the focus group, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the program, describing ways in which it supported their children and entire family. Several parents explained what attracted them to Hands Together including the location, quality staff, quality education, and great reviews. One parent stated, "I was on the waiting list. [The] staff members and the relationship that they have with the children—they have great relationship with the children. My daughter looks forward to going to school everyday. I applied to other schools but was happy when they got in here. This program is farther away from my home than other programs."

One parent praised Hands Together with regard to the program's dedication to families, "The teachers are very professional and they expect a lot from the children and parents. They keep me in line for my son's future." Several parents had visited other preschools before enrolling their children in the Hands Together. One mother explained, "At the other program they would just pick my daughter up and do nothing. Now she has much to say about what she is doing with blocks, running, dramatic play. This program has encouraged reporting of what activities they have done during the day." Overwhelmingly, parents were highly appreciative of the Hands Together program and reported they would strongly recommend the program to others. In fact, many felt somewhat guilty that their children were able to attend such a quality program while others were struggling to find a good place for their children.

## **Conclusion**

Hands Together—A Center for Children is characterized by a number of factors that contribute to its high-quality preschool and family support services. The program has a comprehensive approach to classroom instruction, which focuses on building children's interest in learning through a developmentally appropriate curriculum. The program director and the teachers emphasized the extent to which the program is individualized, for each child. Care is taken in supporting children on the basis of their individual developmental level, language proficiency, special needs, and strengths. The program emphasizes English learning while supporting children's understanding and growth in Spanish. The DRDP is used to help identify areas of improvement for each child and plan subsequent activities. Finally, the program employs a family services coordinator who is able to build strong, long-term partnerships with families in an effort to support each child within the context of his or her family.

Overwhelmingly, the comments of parents in the focus groups indicated a high level of satisfaction with the program. They felt strongly that the preschool was helping to prepare their children for success in kindergarten, in addition to providing a warm and safe environment. Family members also praised the staff for their continued dedication to the quality of education for their children.

The program director maintains that “relationships, consistency, and dedication” are the most important elements to maintaining a high-quality program. In addition, having a strong relationship and good communication among staff members is important in providing children what they need to be successful. Also, maintaining a low staff turnover is key for providing consistency for the children. Last, ensuring staff dedication to the work and the children creates a warm and supportive environment.

When asked to identify strategies to support the implementation of the Preschool for All initiative in California, the director emphasized the need for adequate funding to support quality education. She explained that staff are the key to the implementation and quality of education and should be fairly compensated. “Quality staff and low ratios are going to get you a long way—that’s what it’s all about.”

## Marina West Child Development Center Ventura County

Half-day preschool services are provided at the Marina West Child Development Center (CDC) located on Oxnard School District property in Ventura County. Supported by First 5 and parent fees, the center-based program has been in operation for one year. Marina West is one of 150 programs (including infant/toddler, preschool, and school-age care programs) operated by the private, non-profit agency, Continuing Development, Inc. In the 2004–2005 program year, 42 children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled at the Marina West CDC. The Marina West CDC is located in a portable building that includes one classroom and an accompanying room that houses a parent resource center.

### Overview

Marina West CDC operates two 3-hour sessions, serving a total of 42 children each day. With three teachers and a class size of 21 children, the program maintains a teacher-to-child ratio of 1 to 7. The program offers a nine-month (189 days) program that follows the elementary school calendar. The morning session operates from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. and the afternoon session operates from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	School-based
Funding	First 5
Part-day/full-day	Part-day (3 hours; 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.)
Full-year/school-year	School-year (189 days)
Number of sessions	2
Number of classrooms	1
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	42
Classroom size	21
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1 to 7
Curriculum	High/Scope
Ethnicity of children	90% Latino, 10% African-American and white
Language of children	English and Spanish
English-learner population	35%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	speech impairment (2 children), hearing impairment (1 child)

Ninety percent of the children are Latino and the remaining 10% are African-American or white. The languages spoken by children include English and Spanish. Thirty-five percent of the children are English learners, and 7% have been identified with disabilities and other special needs including speech and hearing impairments.

During the site visit, the program day began with staff warmly greeting children and parents as they arrived. After the welcome, children worked in small groups that involved music and movement, reading, and math activities.

After small-group time, children were taken to the outdoor playground for free play. The spacious playground had a large climbing structure, a sand box, and a playhouse. The climbing structure was surrounded by a cement area that could be used for playing with portable equipment such as bikes and balls. In addition to cement, the playground had rubber cushioning under the climbing structure and a grassy area. Children chose manipulatives to bring outside and staff brought out play dough. These were arranged for play on the outdoor tables. Staff provided adequate gross motor supervision to ensure the safety of each child. After outdoor play, children returned to the classroom for a snack. Teachers sat with children during the meal and facilitated communication among the group. Staff and children regularly washed their hands, and staff was vigilant about reminding them to do so.

The remainder of the day involved small-group work time, in which children selected different interest centers in the classroom to play. The dramatic play area included props and dress-up clothes that enabled children to carry out meaningful pretend play in housekeeping and work. The dress-up clothes included outfits and props for mailman, policeman, doctor, and firefighter themes. There were also pants, vests, a blazer, high heels, clogs, purses, and dresses, as well as real cooking utensils, pots and pans, and cups. The nature and science area offered a selection of activities that included a “growing heart” and celery in colored water. Children were encouraged to bring items from home or trips (e.g., rocks and dirt from Sedona) for this center, which also included natural objects for children to explore (e.g., bird’s nest, leaves, and pine cones) and living things (e.g., fish and plants). The manipulative area included peg boards, small cars, puzzles, beading activities, art materials, Lincoln logs, bristle blocks, legos, and gear pieces. The last activity of the day was recall time, when children reviewed their activities with the teachers. The classroom was colorful, filled with children’s individualized work, and organized into well-stocked interest centers. There was a wide selection of developmentally appropriate materials in each of the interest centers. Materials were accessible to children and labeled for independent use.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities–Morning</b>	
6:45	Meet/greet
7:45	Breakfast
8:20	Outside free play/Group time
9:00	Indoor small-group time
10:00	Indoor free play
11:00	Outside free play
12:00	Lunch
1:00	Nap/rest
3:10	Snack time
4:00	Group time
4:15	Indoor small-group time
4:30	Outside free play time and departures

Children were encouraged to talk throughout the day. Staff rotated around the classroom, interacting with children on an individual and small-group basis during free play. Discipline practices and interactions were positive and supportive of children’s needs. For example, some items were in limited supply, given the number of children in the program (i.e. flashlights, thunder sticks, and play dough). The teachers helped children to take turns and redirected those who were having difficulty sharing or waiting patiently for their turn.

Children seemed happy and familiar with the program schedule. The schedule provided for an appropriate amount of free play both indoors and outside. There were adequate amounts of free choice and structured activities for the age group. Children had opportunities to work in small as well as large groups.

## Curriculum and Instructional Approach

Marina West preschool uses the High/Scope curriculum, which is based on children’s interests and goals. Children in High/Scope settings are encouraged to make choices about materials and activities throughout the day. As they pursue their choices and plans, children explore, ask and answer questions, solve problems, and interact with classmates and adults. In this kind of environment, children naturally engage in “key experiences”—activities that foster developmentally important skills and abilities. The 58 “key experiences” are grouped into ten categories: (1) creative representation, (2) language and literacy, (3) initiative and social relations, (4) movement, (5) music, (6) classification, (7) seriation, (8) number, (9) space, and (10) time. In small groups, children plan with the teacher where in the classroom they want to spend their time. After working in that area for about an hour, children regroup and review their activities.

### The High/Scope Curriculum

Created in the early 1960s, the High/Scope curriculum was originally devised as the curriculum that would be used in the now-famous High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, which has demonstrated striking long-term benefits of preschool for young children.

The curriculum has evolved over the years, but is grounded in five principles:

- *Active Learning.* Through active learning—having direct and immediate experiences and deriving meaning from them through reflection—young children construct knowledge that helps them make sense of their world.
- *Adult-Child Interaction.* Active learning depends on positive adult-child interactions.
- *Learning Environment.* The preschool environment should be planned carefully and appropriate materials should be selected.
- *Daily Routine.* Adults should plan a consistent daily routine that supports active learning. This includes a “plan-do-review” process, in which children help decide what they want to do, carry out the plans, and then review them. Small- and large-group activities are a regular part of the day.
- *Assessment.* Staff engage in team-based daily assessment of children, with findings fed back into instructional planning.

Source: Hohmann, M., & Weikart, D.P. (2002). *Educating young children: Active learning practices for preschool and child care programs.* Ypsilanti, MI. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

Staff stressed the hands-on nature of their curricular approach. One teacher stated, “Here we provide them with materials and they do it. [They] touch, feel, taste.” Another teacher expanded by saying, “We believe children deserve an authentic environment—we use real glass and silverware. If you respect children, children will respect you. We try to create a home

environment that is just more academic. Curriculum is driven by children, we just support them...key experiences—social emotional, seriation, active learning where children can learn these things. There are choices. We are a believer of the process instead of processed art. It's about the experience.”

Typical activities conducted in the classroom are based on children's interests and are designed to engage them in a fun, interactive manner. For example, reading time involves asking children open-ended questions about a book or having them make up their own stories. “Math talk” is used throughout the day. For example, children might count how many children want to do a certain activity during small-group planning time. A teacher reported, “Everything in the classroom is open-ended, [there is] not just one way to use it. This kind of environment provides children the opportunity to test and experiment.” Another teacher added, “The kids have input. They can choose what they want. We ask, ‘What do you want?’ We can take it a step further, like choose a recipe according to what they like. Being able to choose makes [the children] feel unique.”

Assessment is a critical part of the program's approach to preparing children for kindergarten. In addition to taking daily observation notes, Marina West preschool teachers complete the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) twice per year for each child. Assessment information is used to tailor activities and better meet the individual needs of each child. The site supervisor explained, “Children are always with one caregiver who is always planning for that child with input from others. We use the DRDP very well. We have an anecdotal note form [that we use to] draw out a map of where the gaps are. Each child has a form. It is then used to plan lesson plans for each week. Say ‘classification,’ for example, to plan for a child who is lacking in that area. We may say we need to put classification items in the art area so that children will develop those skills.” In addition to use in lesson planning, the DRDP profile data is shared with parents and kindergarten teachers.



California Department of  
**EDUCATION**

### The Desired Results System

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a “condition of well-being” for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

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observations and to answer any questions staff had. The coordinator also met with the child’s mother and preschool teacher to discuss the child’s ongoing development.

### About the Program Director and Teachers

The Marina West preschool staff includes the site supervisor and three teachers. The supervisor has some college background, fifteen years of experience in the early childhood field, and has served as the Marina West program site supervisor for the last year. On average, Marina West teachers have spent four and a half years in the early childhood field. The three teachers each hold an associate’s degree and are working toward a bachelor’s degree.

Continuing Development, Inc., has a comprehensive in-house training program that is available to Marina West CDC staff. The agency also employs a staff development specialist to provide training to the preschool programs. Thirty-one training modules have been developed on a range of topics, including child development, behavioral issues, early literacy, math, nutrition, and strategies for working with children with disabilities and other special needs. Some of the modules must be attended by all staff. Once the mandatory trainings have been completed, the remaining modules are used upon request. The program’s administration believes trainings should be intentional and individualized to deal with concerns of the caregivers. Therefore, caregivers can call the trainer and request a module to address a particular concern. For example, a teacher who is having trouble with teacher-child interaction can ask to repeat that module. In the last year, teachers reported they have participated in training on child development, behavioral issues, and strategies for working with children with disabilities and other special needs.

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	3
Gender	100% female
Ethnicity	2 Latino, 1 African-American
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	2
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0
Some college	0
A.A. degree	3
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	0
Currently working toward degree	3
Years of experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 4.5 years; range 4 to 5 years (data reflects 2 teachers, missing data for 1 teacher)
Years spent working in the program (average and range)	Average 1.3 years; range 1 to 2 years

All Marina West staff have Professional Development Plans and goals. When the site supervisor learns of a training that may address a caregiver’s goal, she works to adjust staff schedules to allow that caregiver to attend the training. In addition, teachers are provided with paid time off to attend trainings and they receive financial assistance (e.g., reimbursement for conferences or travel funds) to support participation in professional development. Information is provided about upcoming training events. Staff have access to early childhood resources (e.g., books, videotapes, magazines, and journals) as well as technology for researching topics of interest.

The site supervisor emphasized the importance of supporting staff in their jobs, by providing them with planning time, breaks from the classroom, positive reinforcement, and a pleasant work environment. The program also supports staff by involving them in planning at the center level. At the beginning of the school year, staff set center goals for the upcoming year. In October, staff are surveyed to get a sense of how they are feeling about the program, team work, and their work environment. After the results of that anonymous survey are returned, the center goals are reevaluated and plans are adjusted accordingly. The staff are also given time to meet weekly to review the program and how it is benefitting the children—are the children’s goals being addressed and, if not, how can they be? Referring to the staff, the supervisor explained, “I want them to love it here. I am always asking them ‘What do you need?’ and ‘What can I do to help?’”

The supervisor also described the key characteristics of her staff which contribute to the implementation of a high-quality program. In addition to having a comprehensive understanding of child development, staff are “committed to improving the quality of the program [through] trainings and teamwork.” The team of preschool teachers and the supervisor “collaborate together because they want each other to succeed.” The supervisor went on to describe factors that support teachers in their work such as “high-quality benefits, training, and support for continuing education.”

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

Parents are involved in the Marina West CDC in a number of ways, including volunteering in the classroom, assisting on field trips, sharing cultural traditions, and helping with fund-raising events. For the large events held about every four months, almost 90% of families participate. About half of the families attend the monthly parent meetings. Currently, two parents consistently volunteer in each of the classes, though families of children attending the program fall into the population of dual working parents who are not able to volunteer in the classroom. Parents also participate by donating items for the house area, donating food they have picked, helping to purchase items for fundraisers, and sewing. The program also provides a binder of resources for children to use at home during the evenings or summer time, helping parents to extend their child’s learning activities in the home. Parents attend regular parent meetings and workshops on various topics (e.g., discipline, stress management, and communication with children) and can participate in the Parent Advisory Committee. Social events are held frequently and include activities such as family nights and pizza parties. Staff meet with parents during conferences to share information about their child, including DRDP data.

Parent participation is not required by the program, but is encouraged. The center has an observation booth that parents can use to observe classroom activities. A teacher reported, “You need to make parents feel welcome [and] then you have that response from them. A lot of our parents are involved. A lot of social activities—picnics, fall festival—parents sign up to run a booth or game; it is all run by parents. We have a great parents committee. [We have] a dialogue with parents and ask them their opinion.” The site supervisor emphasized the program’s approach to working with families, “[We have] a real partnership with parents.”

During the focus group, parents were asked why they decided to enroll their children in the Marina West CDC. Several parents indicated that it was because of the location of the program; one parent said, “I wanted to keep him in the same area where he lives.” Some parents responded how comfortable they felt when visiting the center. One parent described his child’s reaction on

his first day, “Our child fell in love with the scenery and the teacher. He felt confident and comfortable.” In addition, some parents choose the program because they heard about it through the program’s parent resource center.

Marina West CDC shares its space with a parent resource center that is convenient for parents. As they drop off their children at the preschool, parents can walk next door to receive services as needed. The parent resource center, located in a room next to the preschool classroom, provides families with comprehensive services, including parent education, intervention services (e.g., for homeless families or, battered parents), counseling, hearing, speech, and vision referrals, clothing assistance, and legal referrals. The center is staffed by two full-time family service liaisons that provide families with information regarding community resources, public assistance, and referrals to services. Because of the wide variety of services offered, all of the parents of the children currently attending this program have used the parent resource center.

## **Conclusion**

The Marina West CDC is characterized by a number of factors that contribute to its high-quality preschool and family support services. The staff’s individualized approach to instruction, and ongoing assessment and planning ensure that each child is supported in a manner that best fits their needs. Teachers are considered part of a team and valued as contributors to the program. The program offers a parent resource center to connect families with the services they need.

Parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the program, particularly how it is helping children learn English through a bilingual approach to instruction. In addition to learning English, parents are happy that their children are being prepared for school in the areas of math and literacy. They have noticed their children can write their names, recognize their letters and numbers, count, and understand simple addition. The parents are satisfied that their children become more independent and social, as well as learn to follow instructions better. Parents also feel that they are aware of what is going on with their children through communication with the site supervisor and teachers. The parents are proud that they are involved in the classroom and help with fundraising efforts. Throughout the year, the parents plan several fundraisers from which they decide how the profits are spent. Parents characterized the preschool center as a warm, inviting environment where they felt part of a family.

The program administrator suggested several strategies for the Preschool for All initiative in California including adequate funding for programs (including compensation for staff) and an educated and trained workforce. The site supervisor added, “You need the tools to be successful and that comes with money. There needs to be enough money for Preschool for All. You can’t [provide] minimal money and judge it [the quality of care]. [It is important to] support [quality preschool programs] with education [for] caregivers. Preschool for All will be more successful if people understand child development and brain development. [It is important to] understand the value of early learning and people are not educated on that. [The] impact of our work with children at this age will go with them for their whole lives. So educate and pay teachers appropriately.”



## McKibben State Preschool Los Angeles County

McKibben State Preschool (McKibben) located in Los Angeles County, is a part of the Option's State Preschool Division, a social service agency funded primarily through California Department of Education's Child Development Division and in part by United Way. Options offers subsidized child development services through direct services (centers) and alternative payment (resource and referral). On a daily basis, Options serves close to 9,000 families. In the 2004–05 program year, 50 children, ages 3 to 5 years, were enrolled at McKibben. The one-room program is located in a portable building on the campus of an elementary school, where many of the children subsequently enroll. The average class size is 25 children, with an average teacher-to-child ratio of 1 to 8. Supported by State Preschool funds the center offers a 10-month (175 days), half-day (3 hour) program that follows the school calendar. The program operates two sessions, from 8:45 to 11:45 in the morning, and 12:15 to 3:15 in the afternoon.

### Overview

The majority of children enrolled at McKibben are Latino and bilingual in English and Spanish, whereas a smaller percentage of the population is white. Twenty-six percent of the children are identified as English learners, with Spanish as their primary language. In the 2004–05 program year, none of the children enrolled in the program had been identified as having disabilities and other special needs.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	School-based
Funding	State preschool
Part-day/full-day	Part-day (3 hours; 8:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. and 12:15 – 3:15 p.m.)
Number of sessions	2
Number of classrooms	1
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	50
Classroom size	25 children
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1 to 8
Curriculum	High/Scope
Ethnicity of children	80% Latino and 20% white
Language of children	English and Spanish
English-learner population	26%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	In the 2004–05 program year, there were no children identified with disabilities and other special needs enrolled

On the day of the site visit (evaluation staff observed the afternoon session), preschool staff greeted children and parents warmly as they arrived. Staff helped children join activities soon after they arrived and kept them meaningfully engaged until snack time. Following snack time, children brushed their teeth and joined together in a circle at the front of the room. The teacher then began the daily routine of asking the children what day of the week it was, whether it was sunny or cloudy outside, and how many boys and girls were present that day (all the boys stood and were counted by the girls, then all the girls stood and were counted by the boys). Overall, the

program operates according to a schedule that children are familiar with, including large- and small-group activities. Children are first divided into two large groups during “planning time” where one group is with the lead teacher and the other group is with the associate teacher. Both groups participate in the same activities, such as counting or learning about shapes and sizes, then children are asked what interest center (small group) they would like to go to for “work time”. Although the program refers to this time as work time, it’s actually free time for children to independently decide what activities they would like to participate in. Children also are encouraged to move from center to center during this time.

The large indoor classroom provided ample space for a variety of interest centers and for the centers to be arranged so that activities at one center did not interrupt activities at another. During the site visit, at least five interest centers were observed, including a dramatic play area, a water table, science and nature center, a center with manipulatives (e.g., puzzles and blocks) for development of fine motor skills, and a center for reading with books of varied reading levels and topics (e.g., fantasy, people, and animals). Examples of the children’s work and other age-appropriate materials were displayed at children’s eye-level throughout the classroom. In addition, the room was organized so that children could independently engage with materials. For example, shelves storing containers of toys and materials were clearly labeled and accessible for independent use. In regard to outdoor space, McKibben operates on a large plot of land that provides children with a variety of surfaces and equipment to promote development of their gross motor skills. Surfaces included a concrete path for riding tricycles, a large grassy area for running and playing games with balls, a poured foam surface surrounding a large climbing structure, and a sand box. Equipment included tricycles with and without pedals, a climbing structure with a slide, and two swings.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities—Afternoon Session</b>	
12:15	Lunch and teeth brushing
12:40	Circle time
1:00	Small-group and cleanup
1:15	Planning time
1:30	Work time
2:15	Recall time
2:30	Outdoor
3:00	Departure

Most of the activities observed during the site visit were child-directed. Children have the opportunity to decide which interest centers they want to go to and what activities they want to participate in. For example, a group of children may decide to go the manipulative table and work with play dough to create an animal or figure. Other children may decide to play house in the dramatic play area or create a race track with blocks. Although the schedule of the day is structured in regard to snack time or indoor and outdoor time, children have a substantial amount of free play in which they chose their own activities. During free play, staff moved around the classroom and interacted with the different groups of children, engaging them in conversation and inquiring about their play. Program staff rotates materials in the interest centers depending on the theme of the month, and children are provided with a variety of fine motor activities and learning materials to choose from. During the site visit, the children were interested in dinosaurs

because they went on a field trip the prior week, and there was a water station filled with different types of dinosaur figures for the children to play with. Snack time was used to engage children in conversation and to support them in learning to serve and clean up after themselves. Staff and children were diligent about washing their hands and demonstrated proper health and safety practices throughout the day.

## Curriculum and Instructional Approach

McKibben Preschool uses the High/Scope curriculum. This curriculum focuses on the provision of 58 “key experiences”—activities that foster developmentally important skills and abilities—grouped into ten categories: (1) creative representation, (2) language and literacy, (3) initiative and social relations, (4) movement, (5) music, (6) classification, (7) seriation, (8) number, (9) space, and (10) time. The curriculum allows children to “learn by doing” at their own pace. The High/Scope curriculum includes “work time” beginning with a small group planning period in which children specify where in the classroom they would like to be and what they plan to do there. Following work time, children regroup with the teachers and discuss the activities they participated in. This “Plan-Do-Review” sequence helps children develop the ability to go beyond their present experience by planning the future, and remembering and articulating the past. It also

### The High/Scope Curriculum

Created in the early 1960s, the High/Scope curriculum was originally devised as the curriculum that would be used in the now-famous High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, which has demonstrated striking long-term benefits of preschool for young children.

The curriculum has evolved over the years, but is grounded in five principles:

- *Active Learning.* Through active learning—having direct and immediate experiences and deriving meaning from them through reflection—young children construct knowledge that helps them make sense of their world.
- *Adult-Child Interaction.* Active learning depends on positive adult-child interactions.
- *Learning Environment.* The preschool environment should be planned carefully and appropriate materials should be selected.
- *Daily Routine.* Adults should plan a consistent daily routine that supports active learning. This includes a “plan-do-review” process, in which children help decide what they want to do, carry out the plans, and then review them. Small- and large-group activities are a regular part of the day.
- *Assessment.* Staff engage in team-based daily assessment of children, with findings fed back into instructional planning.

Source: Hohmann, M., & Weikart, D.P. (2002). *Educating young children: Active learning practices for preschool and child care programs*. Ypsilanti, MI. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

helps children develop the requisite language skills for expressing their new cognitive ability.

Teachers described a wide range of activities they conduct with the children and emphasized hands-on projects. One teacher noted, “I like all kinds [of activities]. I like the arts and painting—the messier the better. I can’t just read [to the kids], I like to touch, feel, smell.” In general, teachers emphasized activities that kept children interested and supported their self-esteem. While McKibben’s approach focuses on helping children “learn their letters and numbers,” it does so by integrating learning into everyday experiences rather than “drilling the children.” Staff weave themes throughout various activities. For example, as mentioned earlier, McKibben preschoolers recently visited a museum to view a dinosaur exhibit. Teachers then extended the topic by making toy dinosaurs available for free play throughout the classroom,

using dinosaurs as part of small-group work, and supporting dinosaurs as a topic of discussion with children. To address the spectrum of developmental levels in the classroom, staff conduct the same basic activity with all children, with slight modifications made to meet the needs of each child. A teacher explained, the “curriculum has a ‘key experience’ such as counting activities, that include extensions with facilitation and questions. But if [the kids] are not ready [for the extension], they are still successful and you can see where they are in the process of learning.” For example, the children participated in an art activity where they glued different shapes to a felt board. Some children still were learning to recognize the various shapes while others knew all the shapes and also could differentiate between larger or smaller shapes. The teachers worked with children at their development level and helped those that did not know a diamond or crescent shape by working individually with them. For those children that did know the different shapes, the teachers asked questions about where they saw the shape in the classroom.

Assessment is a critical component of the process of preparing children for kindergarten. As a State Preschool, McKibben uses the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), as required by the California Department of Education (CDE). The DRDP is conducted for each student twice per year. In addition to this formal assessment, McKibben teachers make observation notes daily while the children participate in the various activities. These notes are then transferred to a master document and are used to track children’s progress over time. Each of the three teachers is specifically assigned a group of children to observe. Staff meet twice a month to discuss children’s progress, and what modifications to activities need to be made to meet the needs of a particular child at his or her developmental stage. Teachers also share information on children’s development and progress with parents informally during pick-up and drop-off, and in two formal parent-teacher conferences held after each DRDP assessment is completed.



California Department of  
**EDUCATION**

### **The Desired Results System**

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a “condition of well-being” for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners.
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their children’s learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals.

Child care and early education practitioners use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to evaluate the extent to which children in their care are achieving the desired results for children. Each child is assessed by a trained provider at enrollment and at regular intervals thereafter, creating a picture of how the child’s development is progressing. Each behavior exhibited by the child is rated as “fully mastered,” “almost mastered,” “emerging,” or “not yet.” Teachers use this information to tailor activities to each child’s developmental needs.

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>;  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpinstructions.asp>

## **School Readiness**

According to the Options State Preschool program administrator, “Every moment is a teachable moment.” The McKibben curriculum (High/Scope) provides a foundation to help children develop key language, literacy, and cognitive skills. In addition, staff believe that an important role of the preschool program is to prepare children for the more structured schedule of kindergarten. A teacher stated, “If they don’t know how to sit down, they are going to have a lot of trouble in kindergarten.” Another teacher added, “In kindergarten, it is different. The 10 to 15 minutes [spent per activity] now, is like an hour in kindergarten. The child is antsy and [does not have the] attention span. We try to get them prepared [for kindergarten] and to not feel stressed out [by the schedule].”

During the focus group, parents emphasized how the preschool program helps to foster the skills their children need for kindergarten, including math, literacy, and social skills. Parents stated:

“He [my son] is thinking about addition. He wants to teach his parents addition.”

“I am very happy because my child knows the meaning of letters, and when we go out, he points out letters. ‘E’ for elephant. He knows the alphabet. He says ‘this is the letter for my name.’”

“I send them here to this school because when [he left] this school, my son knew his A, B, Cs, he was very sure of what he learned...he knew how to [write] sentences, and he was only five years old.”

“They [the children] learn they need to share, they need to take turns. If they get into a fight, they learn how to talk and how to deal with the problem. Let them know it is fine and apologize. They learn how to work together and be together as a group. Know how to solve a problem.”

School readiness efforts also benefit from a strong partnership between McKibben and the local elementary school. The McKibben preschool is located on the campus of the elementary school where many preschoolers will subsequently enroll for kindergarten. To ease children’s entry to kindergarten, the preschool class visits the kindergarten to “get them ready. They walk around and touch toys and the [kindergarten] teacher talks to [the children] and reads them stories. The parents can go on this field trip as well.” The teachers say that after a visit to the kindergarten class, the preschool children become more excited and less nervous about going to kindergarten.

## **Serving California’s Diverse Population**

McKibben State Preschool serves primarily Latino children and families (80%), and 26% of the children attending McKibben are monolingual Spanish speakers. All three McKibben teachers are bilingual in English and Spanish, and Spanish-speaking parents regularly volunteer in the classroom. Most of the classroom instruction is delivered in English, although teachers provide ongoing translation for Spanish-speaking children.

In addition, staff provide reading materials in children’s primary languages and conduct activities, such as cooking special family foods, with the help of Spanish-speaking parents. Teachers also use repetition as a way to familiarize children with new words. As a teacher described, “When they [children] are speaking, [we] don’t tell them ‘you are saying it wrong’. [We] tell parents to just repeat it correctly.” Another teacher stated, “What are the best ways to help them learn English? Repeating all the time. If we are talking about dinosaurs, they need to

play with dinosaurs. We got to do the field trip to the museum [to view a dinosaur exhibit], so now everything connects and [the children] are able to practice what we are teaching and integrate the language into all those things.”

Bilingual staff are able to communicate with most families in their preferred language. Staff is culturally sensitive in regard to the ways families from varying ethnic backgrounds perceive the role of teachers and their own role in relation to the preschool program. For example, staff works hard to make Asian families feel comfortable in the program, many of whom tend to believe “you are the teacher and I don’t want to infringe.”

Parents seemed pleased with how the program supports their children in learning English. They described the teachers as patient and helpful in fostering language development among the preschoolers. Parents also noted how their child’s English vocabulary had increased after participating in the program. As one parent said, “The children didn’t speak any English when they came here. They are already talking and developing English here. They kids are learning fast when they play, or with their friends.”

In the 2004–05 program year, the McKibben preschool did not have any children who were identified with disabilities and other special needs enrolled in the program. In previous years in which such children have participated in the program, staff made modifications as necessary. In addition, Options works with the elementary school and with parents in coordinating assessments and identifying needs. When an individualized education program (IEP) is completed, Options is involved in the meeting to ensure that necessary accommodations are made and recommendations are heard.

### **About the Program Director and Teachers**

McKibben State Preschool is staffed by three teachers (one of whom also serves as the site supervisor) and is supervised by a program administrator who oversees all of the State Preschool classrooms operated by Options. The program administrator has 16 years of experience working at Options, and holds a bachelors degree in human development. The role of the Options program administrator, as mentioned in the interview, is to “set the mission, have staff trained on the curriculum, and infuse staff with passion [for their jobs].” To ensure classroom quality in the McKibben program, as well as the other State Preschool classrooms, the program administrator “makes sure everyone is on the same page with the mission [of the program and that ] everyone is on the same ship, otherwise, it’s not going to work.” The program administrator also is key in maintaining standards for care across all Option sites and ensuring that the curriculum is being implemented correctly.

Each of the three McKibben teachers have some college experience. One teacher serves as the site supervisor and has a Site Supervisor Child Development Permit, a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and has taught early childhood education for 16 years, 8 years with Options. McKibben began its operations in August 2003. One of the two associate teachers also had a CDA credential, and both are working towards their child development permits. One associate has been teaching early childhood education for 22 years and both have been with Options for 3 years.

McKibben uses in-house training as the primary strategy to promote the professional development of staff. McKibben staff receive a three-day training every year before school begins and then attend monthly meetings until June. These are division trainings where all staff

from the various sites meet for staff development learning. McKibben staff also receive individual trainings from the education coordinator during site visits, which are conducted three times a month. In addition, they have site meetings that focus on on-site staff development. The program provides teachers information about outside training opportunities and access to early childhood resources as well. Responding to a survey, teachers reported that they “need additional support or training” on how to work with children with disabilities and other special needs, although currently there are no children at McKibben who have been identified with a disability or other special need. However, staff reported feeling “very well-prepared” to support children who are English learners.

The program administrator emphasized the ways in which the management team at Options supports staff. She stressed the challenges of being understaffed and of helping teachers who are under stress due to the responsibility of working in both the morning and afternoon sessions each day. The program administrator also highlighted the importance of volunteer parents serving as classroom aides. Overall, the program administrator praised the McKibben teachers, stating, “The staff who work in the program are highly qualified and passionate about what they do.”

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	3
Gender	100% female
Ethnicity	100% Latino
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	3
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0
Some college	3
A.A. degree	0
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	0
Currently working toward degree	3
Years of experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 13.7 years; range 3 to 22 years
Years spent working in the program (average and range)	Average 4.7 years; range 3 to 8 years

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

The program provides parents with information about the program and teachers communicate with parents on a regular basis. In addition, parents volunteer in the program in a variety of ways and participate in parent education meetings. Program staff collaborate as a team, and their continued professional growth is encouraged by the program.

At the beginning of each program year, McKibben staff hold a parent orientation meeting to describe how parents can partner with the program and to discuss goals for parents and their children. Staff members also emphasize the value and benefit of parent involvement for the children and the program during this orientation. Generally, parents are asked to volunteer in the classroom 6 hours a month (two 3-hour shifts). According to McKibben teachers and the program administrator, parents are invited to participate in the program in a number of ways, with the primary mode being volunteering in class (which may involve working directly with children; cleaning the classroom, food area, and bathroom; or preparing materials for activities).

With regard to parent involvement, the program administrator stated, “The hardest is [knowing] how to work with parents, sometimes they are the most challenging. There is no right or wrong way, you learn along the way from your mistakes. We offer such a wide range of opportunities—to be in the classroom, field trips, parent advisory group...[we have an] open door and [we tell them] ‘be with your child and be a partner with us in every facet of the program.’” She expanded by saying, “The parents who choose not to participate are those who need us the most. They are the ones that we want here.”

Based on focus group responses, some parents were under the impression that volunteering was a requirement for keeping their child in the program. However, the program administrator reported, “[Volunteering] is not a requirement, but an expectation.” There may be a disconnect between parents and staff’s understanding of volunteering, as some, but not all, parents believed volunteering in class was mandatory in order to keep their children enrolled in the program. In general, however, parents were pleased with the ways they could contribute to the program. One parent stated, “They [the teachers] help us if we have to stay here to do the days [volunteer hours]. They let us switch the days. We can stay 1 hour, we can come late, we can come 2 hours today, we can do it the next day. If we need to go out for 10 minutes, we can go and come back, but we have to do the work. If we fail to do it, we have to do it the next day or the next week. They are flexible, if we don’t do the volunteer days this month, we can do it the next month.” Another parent added, “I clean the tables, we prepare the work [materials for children’s activities]. We don’t want our kids to sit on unclean carpet. Everything is clean and they are going to be in a clean environment, and ready for the next day.”

Staff members also view volunteering as an opportunity to help parents support their children’s development by providing parents with examples of activities they can do at home to extend their child’s learning. One teacher described a mother who “before, she didn’t know what to do with the kids while she did the chores. Then she saw how we put toys out [during transitions]. She would get a piece of orange out while she is sweeping and to put a book out to read after they eat the orange.” Parents are motivated by the program to provide learning opportunities for their children in the home instead of allowing them to watch so much television. This view was also shared with parents, one of whom stated, “The teacher gives me steps, ‘if your son doesn’t want to do this, then try this’. She gives us steps to follow. She is always asking us questions and letting us know what she has been looking for [in the child].”

In addition to involving parents in the classroom, staff work with families to help them access the community services they need. This includes making referrals to medical and dental services and providing logistical information about the city, which is particularly helpful to recent immigrants to the United States. Overall, parents were highly appreciative of the staff and the ways in which the program supported their children. Parents said, “we feel comfortable” and “we are like friends.” One parent explained, “They give us the confidence to come and tell them what we like and don’t like [about the program].” Another parent reported, “The program has helped my family be more united. If we have a job to do, we do it as a family, which we didn’t do before.” The comments of one mother seemed to reflect the thoughts of the parents in general: “We have three patient, wonderful teachers, they are always asking questions about the kids. We are happy with the program.” Monthly parent education meetings are held on topics of interest to parents. For example, last month, the parent education meeting included discussion of kindergarten readiness and registration.

## Conclusion

The McKibben program is characterized by a number of factors that contribute to its high-quality preschool and family support services and that allow the program to provide a safe and supportive environment for preschool children. According to the program administrator, “I think that with some of our children, it’s the safest three hours of their day, because of their home environment and where they live. It’s a big thing.” Staff support children’s learning and development through the use of the High/Scope curriculum and by providing activities that are hands-on, interesting to children, and based on real-life topics. The program administrator described the importance of employing staff who have “the passion to do it, the enthusiasm, and the love for what [they] do. You have to love children [to do this work], it’s not an office job. This is ensuring the safety of the children you care for. Teaching the children what they need to learn, and doing it because you want to. Teachers make your children or break your children.”

Overall, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the McKibben program. Families, as well as children, have benefited from the experience. For example, one parent stated, “Since I’ve been here, I have made new friends. I don’t have family here [in this country]. My kid sees his classmates in the store, we make friends. I feel blessed for that reason.” Through McKibben, parents are able to make a visit to the preschool with their children before starting kindergarten and can become more comfortable with the public school system. Parents also noted positive changes in their children, commenting on increased language and social skills as a result of participation in the program. Additionally, parents benefit from the linkages between the preschool and the local elementary school.

In particular, parents praised the teachers’ commitment to the children. One parent reported, “The teachers work hard and are very professional. They love their job. It makes a big difference. They don’t come here to pass the time, they use the time giving their life doing a really good job teaching.”

The program administrator, reflecting on the lessons she has learned from her experience at McKibben and other State Preschool classrooms, provided several suggestions in regard to the implementation of the Preschool for All (PFA) in California. These included:

- Providing adequate funding to support quality programs, particularly to lower the current staff-to-child ratios.
- Ensuring quality by creating standards across all preschool programs.
- Creating linkages with school districts through ongoing, two-way communication and discussions around instructional strategies to support children’s development in preschool through kindergarten.

In addition, the program administrator offered, “Money is going to be a big issue. They are looking at lower [student] ratios and higher-paid staff. They need to look fiscally at how we can afford to do that, and make sure it is quality. There is a lot of monitoring from CDE on fiscal issues, but in terms of quality—there are no set standards. As a field, we need to come together and [help children] be prepared for kindergarten. As a field, we need to say ‘this is quality.’”



## Merced College Child Development Center Merced County

Full-day preschool services are offered at the Merced College Child Development Center (CDC), located on the Merced College campus in Merced County. The center-based program provides care for 130 children, including infants, toddlers, and preschool children. In the 2004–05 program year, 75 children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled. The program serves families who attend the Merced community college and also functions as a lab school for early childhood education (ECE) community college students.

### Overview

The center is housed in a large, newly constructed building on the Merced College campus and has two preschool classrooms. The spacious classrooms provide plenty of indoor space for children to explore, play, and learn. Classrooms include interest centers that allow for many activities to occur at the same time. Each classroom has ample developmentally appropriate materials. Connected to each classroom is an observation room with one-way glass, which enables parents and laboratory students (Merced College students who are working toward ECE degrees) to observe the classroom activities with anonymity. The entire program environment is designed to support children’s learning and development. The average class size is 24 children, with an average teacher-to-child ratio of 1 to 7. Supported by Title V General Child Care funding, the center offers a 10-month (175 days), full-day (9 hours) program that follows the community college calendar and operates from 7:30 in the morning until 4:30 in the afternoon.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	Community-based (located on the Merced College campus)
Funding	General Child Care (Title V)
Part-day/full-day	Full-day (9 hours, 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)
Full-year/school-year	School-year (10 months, 175 days)
Number of sessions	1
Number of classrooms	2
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	75
Classroom size	24 children
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1 to 7
Curriculum	Adapted from: Scholastic Early Childhood Program Curriculum California Department of Education (CDE) Prekindergarten Learning and Development Guidelines The Desired Results System Developmentally Appropriate Practice
Ethnicity of children	45% white, 40% Latino, 10% African-American, and 5% Hmong
Language of children	English, Spanish, Hmong, and Punjabi
English-learner population	5%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	Autism (2 children), learning disability (5 children), speech impairment (11 children), mental retardation (2 children), hearing impairment (1 child)

Forty-five percent of the children enrolled in the program are white, whereas 40% are Latino, 10% African-American, and 5% Hmong. The languages spoken by children include English, Spanish, Hmong, and Punjabi, with 5% of the children being English learners. About one-fourth (28%) have been identified as having disabilities and other special needs, including children with speech and hearing impairments, learning disabilities, mental retardation, and autism.

During the site visit, the program day began with free play. The program offered many opportunities for children to have free choice. At least five interest centers were clearly defined, and quiet and active areas were arranged so as not to interfere with one another. These centers had developmentally appropriate materials and provided rich, fun learning experiences. The materials were well-organized, easily accessible, and labeled to encourage self-help, and they offered children different levels of difficulty. Art and music activities were set up at all times throughout the program day, including during outdoor free-play periods. Children had opportunities to participate in music and movement activities throughout the day. There were provisions for sand-and-water play outside, including a variety of toys such as containers, scoops, cups, and shovels. In the classroom, the children’s sensory table was filled with beans and rice. Blocks were easily accessible, both in the classroom and outside on the playground. The children had access to three computers in the classroom with software programs for literacy, language, math, and drawing.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities</b>	
7:30	Meet/greet
8:10	Group time
8:30	Snack
9:00	Outdoor/free play
9:50	Story time
10:10	Indoor small-group time
11:00	Group time/music/movement
11:30	Lunch
12:00	Nap/rest
1:00	Indoor and outdoor free play
2:00	Group time
2:30	Snack time
2:45	Indoor and outdoor free play
4:00	Cleanup and departure

As children arrived at the program, teachers and other staff warmly greeted them and their parents, and helped children become involved in activities as needed. Teachers used this time to share information about the children with families and to listen to parents’ comments or concerns. If children appeared shy or hesitant, teachers helped them become acclimated to the environment by inviting them to join an activity in progress.

A child might begin coloring at a small table prepared with art materials, while another could decide to play in the block center or read quietly on his or her own. When most of the children had arrived, the teaching staff brought them together in circle time, a large-group activity in which the teacher reviewed attendance (e.g., “What friend is not here today?”); talked about the

calendar and the weather (e.g., “What day is it?” “Is it rainy or sunny?”); sang, counted, and reviewed the alphabet with the children; and discussed the day’s activities.

Following hand washing, children were provided with a breakfast at small-group tables. Meals were well-balanced and provided an opportunity for pleasant interactions between children and teachers. The staff usually sit at the tables with children, and lively discussions were observed both between children, and between teachers and children. Staff then transitioned children to outdoor play time, for which a variety of gross motor equipment was available (e.g., large climbing structures, tricycles, balls), as well as sand or water tables. After outdoor play, staff read a book, asking questions and promoting discussion with the children. The class then was moved to small tables (three to six children) to work on art projects and fine motor activities, with more individualized attention from teachers. Following small-group time, children were gathered together for a music and movement activity, after which lunch was served. The meal was used as an opportunity to foster children’s self-help skills and encourage interaction. After the afternoon’s activities, which included nap time, additional free play, and small- and large-group activities, children were prepared for their departure.

The observed classrooms were rich in developmentally appropriate books and pictures, and communication activities. Throughout the day, teachers conversed individually with children and encouraged them to talk. Ample materials to stimulate communication were also present, including telephones, puppets in the reading area, props in the dramatic-play area, and small animals and figures in the block area. Staff also talked about logical relationships and encouraged reasoning with the children throughout the day (e.g., the teacher pointed out different sizes and weights of pumpkins or asked children to recall differences between stories). Because of the many activities, teachers had ample opportunities to interact with children in a supportive manner throughout the day. Staff were observed listening attentively to children and responding sympathetically as appropriate. Discipline, when needed, was provided in a nonpunitive manner, usually in the form of a redirection to a different activity.

### **Curriculum and Instructional Approach**

Rather than using a single commercially available curriculum, the Merced CDC program mainly uses developmentally appropriate classroom activities. These activities are aligned with CDE’s Prekindergarten Learning & Development Guidelines and its Desired Results for Children and Families system, which are incorporated into each classroom’s daily activity plan. Staff set goals for each child and base their lesson plans on the individual needs of the children. For example, if a child needs more help with language skills, teachers work individually with that child and tailor activities to support the child in this area. In addition, the center uses an emergent curriculum in which the child takes the lead in choosing activities based on his or her individual interests. According to the program director, “emergent interest is the program’s guiding force.” This curriculum is largely self-developed, that is, based on observation. Through observation, teachers gauge children’s interest in and understanding of various topics as a basis for planning and developing activities. For example, a teacher might observe several children finding a worm as they are digging in the dirt, and subsequently plan activities related to the children’s interest (in this case, the role worms play in preparing the soil for plants to grow). These types of child-initiated activities may last for a day or for several weeks, depending on the extent of the children’s interest.

In addition, the Merced preschool incorporates elements of the Scholastic Curriculum, which the Merced School District adopted for its elementary schools. Curricular materials include theme books, cassettes, and large, read-aloud books. Since the preschool has representation on the school district's advisory board (a group of teachers and school district officials who review policies and curriculum), a Scholastic Curriculum package was purchased for the preschool as a guide for broadening early literacy activities for the preschool children. The Merced CDC is continually examining its curricular approach for consistency with the direction of CDE, the local school district, and local elementary schools. As a result, children have a variety of developmentally appropriate activities that create an educational and fun learning experience for them.

Teachers have flexibility in developing lesson plans and activities within the framework of the program's philosophy and curricular approach. The director and the site supervisor believe that teachers' motivation is increased when they have creative freedom and autonomy within the classroom. One teacher reported, "The director lets us personalize it [the curriculum] to our style and comfort zone." In addition to enjoying a high level of independence, classroom teachers have the opportunity to work together during team meetings to discuss ideas and plan developmentally appropriate activities.

Assessment is a critical component of helping to prepare children for kindergarten. Merced CDC staff complete the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) for each child twice per year. In addition to individual child assessments, the program uses the DRDP data to develop a summary of the child's progress, strengths, and areas for continued growth. Teachers conduct regular classroom observations of children for whom they have special concerns. For all children, the DRDP data are used to plan curriculum and individual activities. The program considers the needs of the group and the individual child, and works hard to find a balance that can accommodate both (e.g., using small groups to support children who need extra support in specific areas). At the end of the school year, the teachers conduct a "Pre-K assessment" in addition to the DRDP. This assessment was developed by the Merced City School District as a prescreening tool for incoming kindergartners. These Pre-K assessments are given to kindergarten teachers so they have a sense of where incoming children are developmentally.



California Department of  
**EDUCATION**

### **Prekindergarten Learning and Development Guidelines**

Created and published by the California Department of Education (CDE), the Prekindergarten Learning and Development Guidelines are a resource to support teachers, administrators, and policy-makers in creating high-quality preschools and child care for California's children. The guidelines discuss the social, cognitive, and physical development of the preschool child, and the role of the teacher and curriculum in children's learning and development, placing this information in the context of program development and the current early childhood education issues in California.

Bringing this information into use in the classroom, the guidelines indicate that the role of the teacher in a high-quality program includes:

- Understanding children's needs and capabilities
- Creating an environment for social and emotional learning
- Accommodating a wide range of abilities and learning styles
- Balancing teacher-initiated and child-initiated activities
- Assessing how well the program meets children's needs
- Developing strong links with families

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/prekguide.asp>;  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/prekcontents.asp>



## Scholastic Early Childhood Program Curriculum

The Scholastic Early Childhood Program curriculum, featuring Clifford the Big Red Dog, immerses children in an environment rich in language and literature. The curriculum includes English and Spanish resources and an ESL component; a parent component with weekly activities for parents and children; professional development for teachers; and child assessments. It focuses on development of language and early reading skills in the four critical areas outlined by the Early Reading First federal initiative:

### Phonological Awareness

- Identifying and making oral rhymes
- Identifying and working with syllables in spoken words through segmenting and blending
- Identifying and working with onsets and rhymes
- Identifying and working with individual sounds in spoken words

### Oral Language

- Developing expressive and receptive spoken language, including vocabulary, the contextual use of speech and syntax, and oral language comprehension

### Print Awareness

- Developing knowledge of the purposes and conventions of print

### Alphabet Knowledge

- Developing knowledge of the names and shapes of the letters of the alphabet

Sources: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/fundingconnection/productalignment/prevention.htm>;  
Gomby, D.S., Goldstein, S. & Goodban, N. (2004) *A Description of Selected Early Literacy Programs in the San Francisco Bay Area*. (Report prepared for the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Bella Vista Foundation, The Silver Giving Foundation, and the San Francisco Children and Families Commission). Available at <http://www.4children.org/pdf/earlyLit.pdf>



## The Desired Results System

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a “condition of well-being” for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners.
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their children’s learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals.

Child care and early education practitioners use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to evaluate the extent to which children in their care are achieving the desired results for children. Each child is assessed by a trained provider at enrollment and at regular intervals thereafter, creating a picture of how the child’s development is progressing. Each behavior exhibited by the child is rated as “fully mastered,” “almost mastered,” “emerging,” or “not yet.” Teachers use this information to tailor activities to each child’s developmental needs.

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>;  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpinstructions.asp>

## School Readiness

The Merced CDC is committed to supporting children's readiness for school, with an emphasis on fostering their social and emotional development. Staff are focused on helping children develop positive, trusting relationships with one another and with teachers, in the belief that children's confidence increases as they learn to solve problems constructively, develop positive peer friendships, and function effectively in a large group.

To prepare children for kindergarten, staff also emphasize early literacy for the children. During the site visit, teachers were observed reinforcing reading and writing skills with children. For instance, while reading a story during group time, one teacher asked the children: "Where is the top of the book?" "Where is the front and back of the book?" "Where is the end of the book?" Comparing the current story to a book read the previous day, the teacher asked: "Was there a bridge like this [referring to the book] in the first story? Was there a river in the first story? How about ice?" During small-group time, a teacher worked individually with children to help them trace and write the letters of their names.

In addition, the program helps children get ready for school by considering each child's individual needs. The director noted, "We are always thinking, 'What can we do to support this child?' We expose the children to learning [by] using their senses. We also introduce them to writing and reading experiences. Although we have a strong interest in introducing children to writing and to identifying numbers and letters, we also want them doing sensory exploration, which [we believe] is also important. We introduce more academics, such as literacy and abstract concepts, as the children develop an interest."

Parents commented on how the program provided their children with the skills to succeed in school. Families specifically mentioned how the program was enhancing children's growth in literacy, math, and social and emotional areas. One mother felt that, as a result of having attended the Merced CDC, her child was better prepared for kindergarten than were children who did not attend the center: "She's reading and writing sentences in kindergarten. Children from CDC excel more than other kids." Another parent said, "We have three boys here—they can say the alphabet, count to 20, and identify alphabet letters. [My] 5-year-old makes me stop at every stop sign. Now that he can read the sign, I must make full stop!" Another parent reported, "My son was 4½ years old when he entered the pre-K class. He did not know letters or writing. Two months later, he could write his name. He could write it because the teacher took the time to work with him."

In addition to cognitive skills, parents have observed social and emotional changes in their children. They reported that, since enrolling in the program, their children were learning to control themselves, make friends, and share with others. Self-regulation was particularly mentioned as a key skill in preparation for the more structured kindergarten classroom. One parent said, "I've seen growth in my son. [Before] he only wanted to play on gross motor structures and could not sit down for any period of time." In the area of self-help, one parent stated, "My kids now pick up after themselves. My boys used to come home and throw their coats on the floor. At school, they have to hang them up. We asked teachers to tell them to hang up coats at home, and now they do!" Another parent described the social growth in her son: "My child has no problems with social interaction now. He has the competence to talk with other children outside of school. He is not afraid to be social. We couldn't give him that at home." Two parents explained that the program helped children to express themselves: "Now my child

says, ‘I don’t like that.’” A second parent said her daughter now says, “Mommy, you are making me sad” when the mother gets upset with her.

School readiness efforts also benefit from a strong partnership between the Merced CDC and the school district. The lead preschool teacher sits on the school district’s advisory board as a way of soliciting support from the school district. Through the advisory board, the preschool learns about kindergarten teachers’ expectations for incoming students, which helps ease the transition to public school for both children and families. To ensure they understand the types of skills that children must master by the time they enter school, the preschool teachers meet with the kindergarten staff at the local elementary schools to discuss expectations.

### **Serving California’s Diverse Population**

The Merced CDC serves primarily white and Latino children, with a small minority population (15% African-American and Hmong). For children who are English learners, the director reported that communicating with children on an individual basis in English and their primary language is a priority. Since many of the staff are bilingual, instruction is delivered primarily in English, with translation to Spanish as needed. In addition to bilingual teachers (English and Spanish), the program uses parents and Merced College lab students who are fluent in Hmong. Staff strive to ensure basic communication with all English learner children by using key phrases as well as nonverbal hand gestures and visuals. Parents provided some examples of how they felt their children’s needs were being met. “We by choice speak [our] mother tongue at home. When our children came here, they did not speak a single word of English. But now, you would never know. They do amazing stuff. You wouldn’t know that Spanish was their first language.”

In addition to serving some English learners, the program serves several children with disabilities and other special needs. For children with language delays, the program has provided speech therapy services. A parent of such a child reported, “The teachers helped my son so much. He wouldn’t speak at 3 [years]; he was not potty trained at first; he has become more confident; the speech therapist worked with him; he has come so far in the last year with the program. I don’t know what I’d do without the program.”

When the teachers at Merced CDC have concerns about a child’s development, the family services coordinator (an internal staff person who connects families with community resources) observes the child in class. If the family services administrator feels the concerns are valid, a meeting is arranged with the family to discuss the issue and request permission to have the child observed by a professional (e.g., a medical doctor, therapist, or psychologist) and to provide support services from the County Office of Education. One parent explained the process that she experienced with her son: “The family services administrator said my son is having trouble interacting with other kids. She said that there is nothing wrong but that she wanted to bring in a child psychologist to observe him and work with him a bit. Nothing is ever done behind your back. Nothing is ever accusatory. You are always included.” If a child is identified as having a special need, the program will provide services through a school psychologist or therapist or connect families to social services, as appropriate.

## About the Program Director and Teachers

The Merced CDC staff include the program director, site supervisor, family services administrator, and nine teaching staff. The program director has 33 years of experience in the early childhood field and has worked at the Merced program for the last 7 years. She holds a master's degree in human development. Five of the nine teachers hold an associate's degree, four teachers have some college experience, and seven teachers are currently working towards a degree.

When asked to describe her role in ensuring that the Merced CDC provides high-quality services, the program director identified a range of responsibilities. The director is in charge of overseeing the program funding, ensuring that there are an adequate number of staff, and handling the program's partnerships with the community college and other community agencies. The director oversees the entire program, including staff development and hiring, while the site director handles the day-to-day operations. The site supervisor's duties include hiring of part-time aids, grant writing, conducting orientation and staff evaluations, intervening with staff that are having difficulty, and providing guidance for staff growth and development on a daily basis. In addition, the site supervisor works with the administration team to coordinate more formal trainings and staff development, and develops and presents some of the staff training workshops.

The director and the site supervisor articulated the program's vision for both staff and children: "Everything comes down to respect. [The program has] individualization; [children and staff have] the freedom to be who they are. [We emphasize] opportunity, autonomy, and support in any aspect of the classroom." Referring to staff, the director remarked, "We nurture and grow [teachers] individually. It has done a lot for their growth and happiness at the job."

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	9
Gender	100% female
Ethnicity	5 white, 2 Latino, 1 American Indian or Alaska Native, 1 African-American
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	1
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0
Some college	4
A.A. degree	5
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	0
Currently working toward degree	7
Years of experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 6.7 years; range 0 to 14 years
Years spent working in the program (average and range)	Average 6.2 years; range 3 to 10 years

This program uses in-house training as the primary strategy to promote the professional development of its teaching staff. On-site staff development is offered on a continuous basis, including regular staff meetings and three staff development days each year. In addition, external trainers are invited four times per year to provide professional development to staff on topics identified by teachers. In the last year, staff have participated in training on child development,

behavioral issues, conflict resolution, communicating with families, family involvement, strategies for working with English learners, and strategies for working with children with disabilities and other special needs.

In addition to in-house training, teachers have paid time off to attend conferences and workshops. If possible, the program attempts to cover the costs of travel and conference fees. In some cases, for teachers who are working toward their bachelor's degree, the program will pay for substitutes to enable them to leave early for class. The teachers also have access to an on-site library of ECE resources, such as books, videotapes, and magazines or journals.

The program director and the site supervisor described an approach to management that is supportive of staff, rather than punitive: “[We do not use] a critical eye but examine strengths and where improvement is needed. Red marks are not our style.” The program director added, “We are not a punitive program. Everything is an opportunity to learn to do something better.” Program management ensures that training opportunities are tied to actual classroom instruction: “Training is only as useful as how it’s put to use.” An example of linking training to classroom practice was demonstrated during a recent special needs training. As teachers learned more about the behaviors of children with autism, they discussed how they would use this new information to improve interactions with children with autism. They identified changes that could be made immediately in room environment and their approach to engaging children.

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

Parents are involved in the program in a number of ways, including working in the classroom, participating in the Parent Advisory Committee, and attending a range of parent workshops (e.g., first aid and CPR, training on behavior management, understanding how children learn through play) and special events (e.g., family nights, holiday celebrations). The program conducts events and trainings in the evenings or on weekend, when most families can attend. Merced CDC maintains an open-door policy for parents, who can visit and volunteer in the program at any time that is convenient for them. One parent summarized the attitude of program staff regarding parent involvement: “You are always welcome, no matter what time.” A formal parent-teacher conference is held once per year (or as-needed), in addition to frequent informal discussions (e.g., during pick-up and drop-off).

The preschool offers what is referred to as the “Family Service Program.” Upon enrollment, staff meet with parents to discuss the family’s background, needs, and concerns, and to share information about the types of available resources, including screenings by doctors, dentists, psychologists, audiologists, and optometrists. As appropriate, professional specialists observe children in the classroom, provide individualized services, or make referrals for families as needed (e.g., for health care, insurance, or housing assistance). The director reported, “This is our fifth year of the Family Service Program. Parents continually seek us out.” Parents were highly appreciative of the social services support provided by the preschool program. One parent said, “Both [of my] kids need glasses. If they had not been screened, we would never have known. Now they love their glasses. The children receive complete dental care three times a year—all completely covered. We don’t qualify for Medi-Cal, and we do not have any insurance.” One parent reflected, “It is way beyond child care. It is family care with small children. The program provides social services to the community and to the families.”

During the focus group, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the program, describing ways in which it supported their children and entire family. Several parents explained what attracted them to the Merced program in the first place, including a warm and welcoming attitude toward families, the professionalism of the teachers, and the high-quality classroom environment. Another parent praised the Merced CDC teachers' enthusiasm: "Here they're not getting paid a lot. But they act like they're getting paid a million dollars." Several parents had visited other preschools before enrolling their children in the Merced CDC. A mother explained, "This was my first time leaving children. It was hard. I had checked other places. At Merced CDC [I] felt comfortable leaving my kids—they'll be OK when I come back." Another parent selected the Merced CDC because of its environment and the freedom children have to explore, play, and learn. He said, "Here they get to explore, and the parents benefit because we don't have to clean up. Here they can smash pumpkins, smash to smithereens." Overwhelmingly, parents were highly appreciative of the Merced CDC and reported they would strongly recommend the program to others.

## **Conclusion**

The Merced Child Development Center is characterized by a number of factors that contribute to its high-quality preschool and family support services. The program has a comprehensive approach to classroom instruction, which focuses on building children's academic skills as well as supporting their social and emotional development. The program director, the site supervisor, and the teachers emphasized the extent to which the program is individualized, both for staff and for children. Value is placed on each teacher's contribution to continuous quality improvement. Care is taken in supporting children on the basis of their individual developmental level, strengths, and needs. The DRDP is used to help identify areas of improvement for each child and plan subsequent activities. Finally, the program employs a family services administrator who is able to build strong, long-term partnerships with families in an effort to support each child within the context of his or her family.

The program director emphasized the importance of the relationship between the preschool program and the school district, which is facilitated by preschool representation on the school district advisory board. The benefits include improved communication, smoother transition for children to kindergarten, and curricular alignment between preschool and kindergarten. The school district and the preschool program maintain ongoing, two-way communication. The preschool teachers are aware of the expectations of kindergarten teachers, who in turn, are made aware of the areas of strength and concern for incoming children. Families also feel more comfortable with the transition into elementary school, given the level of interaction between preschool and kindergarten staff.

Overwhelmingly, the comments of parents in the focus groups indicated a high level of satisfaction with the program. They felt strongly that the preschool was helping to prepare their children for success in kindergarten, in addition to providing a warm and safe environment. Family members also praised the commitment of program staff. One parent explained, "Teachers [are] happy about the children's development, too. They're surrogate parents. [They are] just as excited about milestones as we are." Parents were aware of how future changes in their income status or enrollment at the community college might affect their child's eligibility to attend Merced CDC, and some have made decisions to ensure that their child remained in the program (e.g., continuing enrollment in college classes to meet the program's eligibility requirement.)

When asked to identify strategies to support the implementation of the Preschool for All initiative in California, the director emphasized the need for adequate funding for comprehensive program services that include early intervention for children and families. She explained how she struggled every day to ensure quality: “Anyone can write on paper what children need, but you need the resources to provide it. We need enough money to do the basics well. If preschool is funded the way it’s always been, you’ll continue to get what you’re currently getting.”



**Redwood City School District  
Child Development Center at Roosevelt  
San Mateo County**

The Redwood City School District Child Development Center at Roosevelt (Roosevelt CDC) in San Mateo County, one of six in the district, is a welcoming place for children. The program, which includes a State Preschool and a for-fee program, has been in existence for close to 40 years. The Roosevelt CDC is National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited, receiving its last accreditation in 2003. The program offers three part-day and three full-day classes, each of which can accommodate 24 children. The program also has after-school care for kindergartners and first graders.

**Overview**

Roosevelt CDC is located on the grounds of Roosevelt Elementary School. Two of the six preschool classes are held in elementary school classrooms, and four are held in portables on the elementary school campus. The portables are located in a group at the entrance to the elementary school and are surrounded by beautifully landscaped grounds. Also located on the same campus is a recently opened Preschool for All (PFA) class (San Mateo County is the first county in California to implement PFA) and a special-needs preschool class.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	School-based
Funding	State Preschool and for-fee program
Part-day/full-day	Part-day ( 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p. m.) and full-day (8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m.)
Full-year/school-year	Full-year (245 days per year)
Number of sessions	6 (3 part-day, 3 full-day)
Number of classrooms	6
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	144
Classroom size	24 children
Typical teacher/child ratio	1:8
Curriculum	Adapted from High/Scope
Ethnicity of children	African-American (1%), Asian (1%), white (2%), other (1%), Latino (95%)
Languages of children	English, Spanish, Mayan
English learner population	90%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	Speech impairment or delays (10 children)

The preschool classrooms are clean, bright, and well maintained. The walls of the classrooms are covered with artwork created by or depicting the children in class, much of which reflects current classroom activities (for example, artwork depicting the letter of the week, “my family/yo familia” photos, and Halloween artwork). The rooms are well organized, with several interest centers, including areas for block play, writing, science, reading, dramatic play, math, computer use, and music. The program makes good use of the limited outdoor space immediately adjacent to the portables, where the children have tricycles, balls, and dramatic play materials.

The preschoolers also have access to the elementary school playground for part of the day. This playground includes climbing equipment, swings, and a large sandbox.

Most of the children attending the Roosevelt CDC are Latino (95%), and most are English learners (90%). The primary language of the majority of the children who are English learners is Spanish; a few children are Mayan speaking. About 7% of the children attending this program have disabilities and other special needs. Overall, this program offers a warm, rich environment that supports the learning and development of all its children.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities</b>	
<b>Full-day program</b>	
8:00	Arrival
8:35	Circle time
8:45	Breakfast
9:00	Outdoor play
9:35	Story time
10:00	Small groups
10:20	Free play
10:50	Clean-up
11:00	Outdoor play
12:00	Lunch
12:35	Nap
2:55	Snack
3:30	Indoor activity
4:30	Departure
<b>Part-day program (morning class)</b>	
9:00	Breakfast
9:15	Brush teeth
9:30	Circle time
9:50	Small-group activities
10:45	Free-choice indoor time
11:05	Outside
11:35	Large-group/language and literacy activities
12:00	Departure

This program uses a regular daily schedule that is familiar to the children in attendance. The teachers warmly greeted the children and parents when they arrived at the program and helped the children become involved in activities. In the part-day class, the day began with free play as the children arrived. Once most of the children were present, one of the teachers led the first of two large-group activities. Large groups engaged in activities like print recognition, receptive and expressive language activities, reviewing the days of the week, and color and shape recognition. Group times were well used, and children were engaged in group activities.

Following the circle activity, each child was called to the front of the class and asked where he or she wanted to play during free-play time. Each child had a card with his or her name printed on it. Posted at the front of the class was a chart on which all the different play areas were listed. Once children had told the teacher where they wanted to play, they attached their card to the space beneath their chosen activity and then went to that area for free-play time. Later, the teachers talked to the children about where they had played and what they had done during free play.

Both the full-day and part-day classes at Roosevelt CDC include outdoor play time. When the full-day class was visited, two outdoor play periods were observed. The first took place in the space adjacent to the preschool portables. Children used the paved area for riding tricycles and playing ball, and the teachers introduced materials that interested the children. For example, one teacher brought out colored chalk and began an activity in which the children lay on the blacktop and the teacher traced their bodies. The second outdoor play period was in the elementary school playground, which was well supplied with a large climbing structure, swings, and a sandbox. During both outdoor play periods, the teachers were observed interacting with the children and encouraging them to communicate by asking them questions about their play.

Other activities included in the daily schedules are snack/meal times, small-group activities, and story time. The classrooms contained a large selection of books, and teachers read to children during free-play time. The classrooms had a great variety of materials, especially fine motor manipulatives, art materials, music and musical instruments, dramatic play materials, and blocks. Many of the materials in the classrooms, such as books, pictures, and materials in the dramatic play area, depicted people of different racial backgrounds, cultures, ages, abilities, and genders in positive ways.

The teachers at this preschool successfully used a variety of methods to encourage children to communicate, including linking children's spoken communication with written language. The teachers were warm and supportive when interacting with the children and really enjoyed being with them. In addition, teachers facilitated the children's use of good conflict resolution skills when conflicts arose. For example, when two boys began arguing about a set of construction toys, a teacher said to one boy who was trying to take pieces from the other, "You need to use your words and ask [boy 2] for more pieces." The first boy asked for more pieces, and the second boy shared the pieces with him. The teacher then praised the boys for sharing. Children were observed to be well supervised throughout the day.

## **Curriculum and Instructional Approach**

The Roosevelt CDC does not require that teachers strictly follow a particular curriculum. The focus is on providing a preschool program that is child centered and developmentally appropriate. This program has been in existence for many years and has used the High/Scope curriculum in the past. Some teachers have been with the program for a long time and still use this curriculum; others do not strictly follow the High/Scope model, although they use its components.

According to the High/Scope model, children are active learners who learn best when they are able to choose activities that interest them and when their learning is supported by adults. One of the basic tenets of the curriculum is the "plan-do-review sequence," in which children choose their activities, participate in the activities, and then review what they did with adults and peers. The content to which preschoolers are exposed is guided by 58 key experiences in child

development. The experiences are grouped into 10 categories: creative representation, language and literacy, initiative and social relations, movement, music, classification, seriation, numbers, space, and time. High/Scope also encourages the development of self-help and social skills.

### **The High/Scope Curriculum**

Created in the early 1960s, the High/Scope curriculum was originally devised as the curriculum that would be used in the now-famous High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, which has demonstrated striking long-term benefits of preschool for young children.

The curriculum has evolved over the years, but is grounded in five principles:

- *Active Learning.* Through active learning—having direct and immediate experiences and deriving meaning from them through reflection—young children construct knowledge that helps them make sense of their world.
- *Adult-Child Interaction.* Active learning depends on positive adult-child interactions.
- *Learning Environment.* The preschool environment should be planned carefully and appropriate materials should be selected.
- *Daily Routine.* Adults should plan a consistent daily routine that supports active learning. This includes a “plan-do-review” process, in which children help decide what they want to do, carry out the plans, and then review them. Small- and large-group activities are a regular part of the day.
- *Assessment.* Staff engage in team-based daily assessment of children, with findings fed back into instructional planning.

Source: Hohmann, M., & Weikart, D.P. (2002). *Educating young children: Active learning practices for preschool and child care programs*. Ypsilanti, MI. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

To optimally support children’s development, the High/Scope approach affects the operations of preschools in many areas. The curriculum influences classroom arrangement and materials: classrooms are divided into “interest areas,” and materials are stored so that children can access them independently. High/Scope classrooms use consistent routines, which include small- and large-group activities and time for outdoor play. High/Scope includes training for teachers and caregivers: they are encouraged to be partners in children’s activities, not supervisors. The model also includes suggestions for promoting the acceptance of diversity and for including families in their children’s preschool programs.

The teachers at this preschool incorporate many aspects of the High/Scope model into their teaching. For example, the plan-do-review sequence is used. The educational specialist who oversees multiple Redwood City School District CDCs, reported that this process teaches children how to make choices and also helps develop language skills. Teachers include activities in all the key experience categories and encourage children to become more independent. High/Scope suggestions for promoting the acceptance of diversity are used, such as having labels written in both Spanish and English. Teachers include both large- and small-group activities daily and include outdoor activities whenever possible. The High/Scope model is also reflected in the organization of the classrooms, which include several well-defined interest areas arranged so that children can access materials independently.

The teachers reported that they have flexibility regarding how they implement the curriculum and that they focus on individual children’s needs. They appreciate that they are not forced to use a structured curriculum and are happy that they have the freedom to experiment with their own ideas, be creative, and tailor their classroom instruction to the needs of the children in their classes. For example, the teachers use lesson plans, but they have the flexibility to change them,

based on the interests of the children. As one teacher explained, “We have the lesson plan, and sometimes the kids get interested in something else, like ladybugs. You change your lesson plan for the day or the week to incorporate that. We aren’t restricted to our lesson plan. It can be changed based on what’s going on.”

Another critical component of this program is that each teacher is assigned a small group of children who make up his or her “family.” Teachers have primary responsibility for the children in their “families” and conduct the assessments on those children. Children in the “families” are grouped by age and ability, and these groups meet daily for small-group activities. These small groupings allow teachers to choose activities that are developmentally appropriate for each group of children.

Assessment is a critical component of helping to prepare children for kindergarten. At the Roosevelt CDC, informal assessment occurs throughout the year in the form of notes that teachers record about children’s progress in a Communication Book shared by all teachers. Teachers use the informal assessments to determine what children need to work on in order to be ready for kindergarten and incorporate those findings into the activities they use in class.

The program formally assesses children twice a year with the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP). Because the Roosevelt CDC is a State Preschool, using this instrument is required. The DRDP is administered by the preschool teachers. Children are first assessed within the first 30 days of school if they are new to the program and within the first 60 days if they are returning students. The second assessment occurs in the spring. After each assessment, parent-teacher conferences are held so that teachers can review the results of the assessment with parents. This is the first year the program has conducted a detailed analysis of the DRDP scores (the staff are receiving training on interpreting the DRDP data). The program plans to analyze the DRDP data at the beginning of each year and use that information to influence curriculum development. Teachers also plan to use the data at the child level to help determine when a special education evaluation is indicated and to help with decisions about advancement to kindergarten.



California Department of  
**EDUCATION**

### **The Desired Results System**

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a “condition of well-being” for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners.
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their children’s learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals.

Child care and early education practitioners use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to evaluate the extent to which children in their care are achieving the desired results for children. Each child is assessed by a trained provider at enrollment and at regular intervals thereafter, creating a picture of how the child’s development is progressing. Each behavior exhibited by the child is rated as “fully mastered,” “almost mastered,” “emerging,” or “not yet.” Teachers use this information to tailor activities to each child’s developmental needs.

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>;  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpinstructions.asp>

The final assessment tool used by this program is the Kindergarten Transition Form. This form is completed at the end of the school year on all children slated to go to kindergarten the following school year. The preschool teachers complete this form, which describes children's abilities and accomplishments.

### **School Readiness**

Teachers reported that the most important things they are doing to prepare children for kindergarten are teaching them social skills, basic academic skills, and problem-solving skills, and improving their communication skills. As one teacher said, "As an ECE educator, it's my job to give them all of the skills they need to succeed in kindergarten." Activities like the plan-do-review process help develop children's language skills and also their thought processes. The children learn about classroom rules, such as sharing, not hurting others, and taking turns. As one teacher said, "They need the maturity to be able to sit in a chair or sit at circle for a period of time. And they need to follow the rules because there will only be one kindergarten teacher, while there are three or four of us in a classroom."

The school readiness of the children who attend the Roosevelt CDC is also supported by a strong partnership between the CDC program and the school district. This program works closely with kindergarten teachers to make sure its children are ready for kindergarten. In the spring, the educational specialist meets with the principals and kindergarten teachers of all six schools connected to the program. The educational specialist passes on information on the children's readiness, and they discuss "next steps" for children scheduled to matriculate that year. As one teacher said, "We work as a team with the kindergarten teachers on kindergarten readiness."

### **Serving California's Diverse Population**

The Roosevelt CDC is able to include fully both children who are English learners and children with disabilities and other special needs in its program.

**English Learners.** The majority of children attending this preschool are English learners (90%), and the primary language of most of these children is Spanish. Children who are English learners are fully integrated into all classroom activities. The program addresses the needs of this population by having many bilingual (Spanish/English) staff and by pairing any teachers who do not speak Spanish with Spanish-speaking teachers. Some of the curriculum in the preschool classes is presented in Spanish and English. For example, when reviewing the days of the week, the class says the days in English and Spanish. The program also provides reading materials in Spanish, and classroom labels are written in Spanish and English. The program takes extra steps to help children who are English learners acclimate to the program. For example, a little girl who spoke Mayan was enrolled and had a very difficult time separating from her mother. The program made her a special nametag with a picture of her mother on it. When she would cry, they would say, "Look, there's your Mommy right there."

If children speak a language other than Spanish or English, teachers use other means to communicate with them. For example, when a child from Japan attended the program, the teacher asked the child's mother to write some words in Japanese, such as the words for eat, go to the bathroom, and other important activities, so that they could communicate with the child.

***Children with Disabilities and Other Special Needs.*** About 7% of the children currently attending this program have disabilities and other special needs, and all of these children have speech/language impairments. The preschool meets the needs of these children by having additional support from trained professionals, such as a speech therapist who evaluates and treats the children. If children need services, they are pulled out of class for them once or twice a week. Otherwise, children with disabilities and other special needs are fully integrated into classroom activities. The program also has a mental health consultant, who is available to advise teachers as needed. All preschool classrooms are accessible to children and adults with disabilities. There is also a special education preschool on the same elementary school campus that serves children with more severe disabilities. One of the preschool teachers often invites a few children from the special education class to her classroom. The children are integrated into her class for a portion of the day.

When needed, this program takes extra steps to ensure that children receive the care and attention they need. For example, the program hired an instructional assistant from the special education class to spend the afternoons with and act as the “buddy” of a child who was having language and behavior problems. When the assistant was with the child, the child was better able to control his impulses. The assistant was paid for by the program, but funding extra help like this is a challenge, as voiced by the educational specialist: “We funded that ourselves. It is difficult; it’s quite an expense.”

One of the ways teachers meet the needs of children with disabilities and other special needs is by modifying activities. For example, if a child doesn’t have the attention span to participate in a large-group activity, an aide will act as “buddy” to that child and work with him or her on a small-group activity during large-group time. Another way teachers meet the needs of these children is by taking their abilities into account when deciding which “family” they will be in. Children with delays are put into a “family” that matches their developmental level for some activities. For example, 5-year-old may be placed with 4-year-olds for some parts of the day because their abilities are closer to his or her own.

### **About the Program Director and Teachers**

The staff at Roosevelt CDC includes 18 teachers, a site supervisor, a family advocate, and an educational specialist who oversees multiple Child Development Centers. The program also has a coordinator who oversees the entire Redwood City School District CDC program. Because the site supervisor of the Roosevelt CDC was new to this position, the educational specialist filled the role of “director” for the purposes of this study.

All 18 of the teachers at this program are female, and 15 of them speak Spanish. Nine of the teachers were surveyed, and their responses are described here. The teachers surveyed have varying levels of educational attainment: one teacher has a bachelor’s degree, two have associate of arts degrees, and six have taken some college courses but don’t have a college degree. Six of the teachers are currently working toward a college degree. The teachers surveyed have taught early childhood education for an average of 10 years and have worked for this program for an average of almost 9 years.

The teachers at Roosevelt CDC are supported in many ways to continue their professional development. They receive funding to attend training sessions, information about upcoming training sessions, and in-house training. Teachers receive support and advice regarding their professional development from the educational specialist, who is the professional growth advisor

for the teaching staff. The educational specialist also coordinates teacher trainings, ensures that teachers maintain current credentials, and advises staff on college courses. Teachers at the Roosevelt CDC have access to early childhood resources, such as books, magazines, and videos. Staff are provided with paid and unpaid time off to attend trainings/workshops, and the program reimburses, pays fees, or obtains funds for staff to attend these events.

In the 12 months prior to this evaluation, eight of the nine teachers surveyed attended some type of workshop, conference, or training on early childhood education. The teachers received training on a wide variety of topics. During that time, at least one teacher attended a training on each of the following topics: child development, behavioral issues, conflict resolution, communicating with families, strategies for working with English learners, and strategies for working with children with disabilities and other special needs. As one teacher said, “[the] educational specialist has done a great job over 6 to 7 years in just making us attend these great workshops, and we learn and implement strategies in our classrooms.”

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	18 (9 surveyed)
Gender	All female
Ethnicity	Latino (6); white (3)
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	15 of 18
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0 of 9
Some college	6 of 9
A.A. degree	2 of 9
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	1 of 9
Currently working toward degree	6 of 9
Years experience in the early childhood field	Average 10 years; range 5 to 18 years
Years spent working at this program	Average 8.7 years; range 2 to 13 years

The educational specialist believes that having well-educated teachers is critical to providing a high-quality preschool experience. Also important is having staff who work well together as a team. Finally, it is essential that high-quality programs employ teachers who understand the cultures and speak the languages of the children and families with whom they work. When hiring teachers for the new Preschool for All class, the Roosevelt CDC is considering only candidates with bachelor’s degrees.

The teachers reported that there are many things they like about this program and that they feel respected as individuals. As one teacher noted, “I like the fact that the teachers can be individuals. We have our set standards, but we can incorporate our personalities into the room.” Several teachers commented that they are happy their time is used to focus on the children instead of on paperwork (some staff had worked for programs in the past where they had to do a lot of paperwork). Several teachers also commented on how much they appreciate the support they receive from their site supervisor and the rest of the administration staff. The teachers greatly appreciate the budget they receive to buy classroom materials and realize that the administration worked hard to get them the money they need to supply their classrooms. They

feel they work as a team and like their co-workers. They also enjoy the families with whom they work.

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

Most parents chose to send their children to the Roosevelt CDC because a friend or relative recommended the program or because they had a previous positive experience with the program (e.g., an older child attended the program). Some parents chose the program because of the multiple schedules it offers—specifically, because a full-day program is available.

The Roosevelt CDC keeps parents informed about their children’s progress through parent-teacher conferences. Parent-teacher conferences are held twice a year, following the children’s assessment with the DRDP. Teachers use these conferences to review the results of the assessment with parents.

Although all parents are encouraged to participate in the preschool program, only parents whose children attend the State Preschool class are required to do so. These parents must volunteer 3 hours a month. There are many ways for parents to be involved. When their children enroll in the program, parents are given a “Share the Wealth” list, which describes activities parents can do to help with the program. Parents then can pick activities that match their talents and interests. The parents who attended the parent focus group, which included parents from the State Preschool and from the for-fee program, had volunteered in the classroom, helped with field trips, cooked and decorated for class parties, and helped with fund-raising events. The teachers reported that parents have also helped with the upkeep of the preschool site by cleaning, painting, and gardening, and have prepared class materials at home—for example by cutting out shapes for the teachers. Parents also use their special skills in the classroom: one parent is a chef and occasionally comes to the class to cook for the children; two other parents are teachers and occasionally conduct the large circle activities. Parents who were not able to volunteer cited work and having other young children at home as reasons why they were not able to help out.

The Roosevelt CDC has a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), which meets three to four times a year. The program also holds workshops for parents about six times a year. For example, one parent described a workshop conducted by a nutritionist, who told parents about healthful snacks for their children. The program employs a family advocate from VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), who coordinates the parent workshops and the PAC. Parents also commented about other assistance they and their children had received from Roosevelt CDC, such as when the program staff distributed Healthy Start brochures and when they arranged for a dentist to visit the program.

To encourage the participation of Spanish-speaking families, all materials for families are printed in English and Spanish, and parent workshops are offered in both languages. Translators are available for parents, and English as a second language classes are provided. In addition, the family advocate is bilingual.

## **Conclusion**

One major aspect of the Roosevelt CDC that contributes to its high quality is that it is responsive to the needs of the population it serves. For example, the program offers both part-day and full-day preschool classes, teaches in both Spanish and English, and provides all materials and workshops for parents in both Spanish and English. The program's use of the High/Scope curriculum promotes skill development, and ongoing assessment helps ensure that children achieve those skills. The program supports children with disabilities and other special needs by using district and community resources.

Also contributing to high quality is the dedication of the program's administration which works hard to show staff that they are appreciated. The educational specialist believes it is important that she listen to the teachers and respond quickly to their requests. Ongoing training of the teachers helps them to continually improve their skills and contributes to the quality of the teaching staff.

Overall, parents are pleased with the preschool program. They like that the teachers are bilingual. The program has grown over the years, and the parents are happy about that fact. Parents also are pleased with the progress their children are making in terms of academic achievement and social skills. Several parents commented that they were happy their children were becoming bilingual. One parent of an English-speaking child was happy that he was learning Spanish. All the parents said they would recommend this program to other families and friends.

This program has a close relationship with kindergarten and elementary school. The preschool is located on an elementary school campus, and the elementary school and preschool share a playground. This close relationship has allowed regular communication between preschool and kindergarten staff. In addition, the educational specialist meets with the principals and kindergarten teachers of all six schools into which the Roosevelt CDC feeds.

When asked to identify strategies to support the implementation of the Preschool for All initiative in California, the educational specialist stated that she felt it was important that if staff are going to be required to have higher levels of education, then they be paid higher salaries. The educational specialist also suggested that First 5 should fund the continuing education of current teachers who do not have bachelor's degrees. During the teacher focus group, the teachers at this program who do not have bachelor's degrees expressed concern over their future employment prospects in their chosen field. As one teacher said, "School costs money. It would be nice if teachers could get help paying for their classes." The educational specialist recognizes their concerns and believes that these teachers should receive support to earn their degrees.

## **Redwood Preschool Mendocino County**

### **Overview**

The Redwood Preschool was formed in 1999 when the Redwood State Preschool and the Redwood Elementary Special Education Preschool were blended together to form one unified program. This school-based preschool is located on the grounds of Redwood Elementary School and benefits from this affiliation. For example, the school has a wonderful garden to which the preschoolers have access, and the preschoolers are invited to attend performances and cultural activities at the school such as the Symphony, Fun with Physics, and plays put on by the elementary school students. The program is housed in its own building adjacent to the main school building. The preschool building is large and has ample room for the children to play, learn, and discover in the many, well-defined and well-supplied interest areas. In addition to the spacious main classroom, the building has a few smaller rooms that are used for working with children either individually or in small groups. The classroom walls are covered with children's art work making the space bright and cheerful. The building is fully accessible to children and adults with disabilities. The program has a large playground just for the preschoolers that includes a wonderful variety of gross motor play materials. The playground is also fully accessible to children and adults with disabilities.

One of the most unique aspects of the Redwood Preschool is that it combines a state preschool and a special education preschool, both of which operated independently for many years prior to merging together. The complicated process of merging two very different programs was assisted by the Supporting Early Education Delivery Systems (SEEDS) Project. The SEEDS Project is funded by the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, and offers technical assistance and training to the staff of early childhood education programs that serve children with disabilities and other special needs. With assistance from the SEEDS Project, the teaching staff worked hard to meld the two programs and their philosophies. While this was a challenging process, all staff and the children they serve have benefited greatly from the combination of the two programs as it exposed the teachers to new ways of thinking and teaching. Staff clearly respect their co-workers' views and opinions, even if they do not always agree on best practices in preschool education. As one teacher said, "The way I dealt with children in special ed was different from the ECE. There needed to be lots of discussions about how to work with children." Redwood Preschool is now a SEEDS model inclusion program and is visited by early childhood educators who want a first-hand look at a preschool that is effectively implementing a high-quality program for young children with disabilities and other special needs.

The program offers one morning and one afternoon part-day preschool class every weekday. The morning class can accommodate a maximum of 22 children. The afternoon class is smaller to accommodate the needs of children who perform better in smaller groups; the program tries to limit this class to 12 children. One of the unique aspects of this program is its low teacher-to-child ratio of 3 to 4 children per teacher. Part of the reason for the low ratio is the large number of children with disabilities and other special needs who attend the program.

About half of the children attending Redwood Preschool are English learners. The primary languages of the English learners currently attending the program are Spanish and Mayan. About one-third (32%) of the children attending have disabilities and other special needs. Only five of

these children have individualized education programs (IEPs); the remaining six children participate in the Speech Language Intervention for Kids (SLIK) program. Most of the children with disabilities and other special needs have speech and language delays, and a few children have autism, hearing impairment, and visual impairment. In the past, the program has served children with more severe disabilities, such as children who used wheelchairs or other assistive technology devices for mobility. The program is well equipped to serve children with severe disabilities as needed.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	School-based
Funding	State Preschool/Special Education Preschool
Part-day/full-day	Part-day (8:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.)
Full-year/school-year	School-year (177 days per year)
Number of sessions	2
Number of classrooms	1
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	34
Classroom size	22 children in am session; 12 children in pm session
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1 to 3.5
Curriculum	Adapted with modifications from: Creative Curriculum Desired Results for Children and Families system
Ethnicity of children	Latino 54%, white 40%, African-American 6%
Language of children	English, Spanish, Mayan
English-learner population	50%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	Autism (1 child), hearing impairment (1 child), speech impairment (8 children), visual impairment (1 child)

Redwood Preschool uses a regular daily schedule that is familiar to the children in attendance. The day of the site visit was a regularly scheduled “Garden Day;” once a week, the class schedule is adjusted to include a trip to the elementary school’s garden. For this reason, the activities described below do not exactly match the schedule printed above. The preschool day includes some activities that are child-directed (such as free-choice time) and others that are teacher-directed (such as small groups). About 60% of the day is child-directed.

When children and their parents arrived at the preschool, they were greeted warmly by the teaching staff. Parents and children signed in when they arrived, making a clear transition of responsibility for the children. The day began with free play and the teachers helped involve children in activities as needed. Activities were set up for the children, many of which were based on their interests. For example, the day before the site visit, the children had asked a teacher what a funnel was. Therefore, the teacher planned an activity in which the children made funnels and then used them to transfer colored sand into small bottles.

Following free play, the children were separated into three groups for literary circle. Two of the circles, which were smaller in size than the third group, were lead by teachers who are speech therapists; these groups included the children with disabilities or other special needs and some of their peers without special needs. Literary circles focus on activities that promote print recognition and usually include some story time. In one of the literary circles lead by a speech

therapist, ordinary preschool activities of reviewing the day of the week and, the month, were used to promote the children's expressive and receptive language while they also worked on their print recognition. All the teachers made good use of group time and children were observed to be fully engaged in group activities.

The literary circles were followed by a trip to the school garden. The large, well-kept garden included many different types of plants and a small group of chickens. The children fed the chickens and talked with the teachers about the plants and how they had changed since their last visit. The children really seemed to enjoy the garden. Next, children had time for free play in the classroom. Several teachers were observed reading to the children informally during free play. The teachers were observed redirecting the children when needed. For example, at one point in the day some children were getting rambunctious and a teacher redirected them to a new, more appropriate activity as follows:

Teacher: These look an awful lot like weapons (*talking to boys playing with science wands and pretending to shoot each other with guns*)

Child 1: No, they make me stronger.

Teacher: Can you not use these like weapons?

Child 1: We are saving the day!

Child 2: I know we could be super heroes.

Teacher: We don't play super heroes.

Child 1: Could we go outside?

Child 2: Can I play a super hero outside with this?

Teacher: You could be a fire fighter.

Child 1: We save people!

Teacher: Let's remember not to use these as weapons.

Child 1: OK.

Teacher: (*Children are still pretending to have weapons.*) I don't want to see you pointing these at people. Let's come in the book area and read a book about fire fighters. (*All children scatter away.*)

Teacher: If I set up some bubble blowing in the kitchen, would you like to help me and blow bubbles?

Children: YES! (*Children follow teacher to table in kitchen area and begin new bubble activity.*)

Following free play, children had snack time. During the snack, most of the teachers sat at the tables with the children and it was pleasant time with lots of conversation between the teachers and children. The children's independence was encouraged by the use of small pitchers and bowls so they could serve themselves.

The snack was followed by outdoor play in the preschool playground. The large playground included lots of sturdy playground equipment and other materials to stimulate a variety of gross motor skills. The playground included swings, a large climbing structure, a sandbox, bikes and scooters. Play equipment for children with disabilities and other special needs, such as a bike with hand pedals, were also present. The teachers brought out materials to enhance the children's play. For example, a large box of brightly colored scarves was brought out and the children tied them around their arms and legs and used them in other creative ways.

The final activity of the morning was the closing circle. All the children were brought into one circle where a story was read. Lastly, the children and teachers played with rhythm sticks and sang songs as parents arrived.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities–Morning Class</b>	
8:20	Greetings/sign-in
8:40	Literary circle
9:00	Free choice time/speech groups
9:45	Cleanup/hand washing
9:55	Brunch
10:15	Outdoor free play
10:50	Small groups
11:15	Closing circle
11:30	Departure

Redwood Preschool has a wonderful array of developmentally appropriate materials and activities. The classroom has several interest centers that are well-supplied and organized for independent use by the children. Included are areas for listening to and making music, for doing art projects, for playing with blocks, for dramatic play, and for sand and water play. Many areas include fine motor manipulatives. The program provides a wide selection of books for the children, many of which relate to current classroom themes or activities, and a reading area. The room includes soft, comfortable areas where children can spend quiet time if they so choose. Redwood Preschool includes an excellent selection of nature/science and math/number materials and activities. Many of the class materials depicted people of different races, cultures, ages, abilities, and genders in positive, nonstereotyping ways. For example, the dramatic play materials include an African sarong and food and utensils from different cultures, and there were dolls of various ethnicities and with walkers and wheelchairs.

The teachers at Redwood Preschool are warm and friendly in their interactions with the children and their parents and they have created a rich environment for their students. They introduce activities that give children the opportunity to use their imaginations, to experiment, and be creative. During the visit, the teachers interacted a great deal with the children and used informal conversations with them as opportunities to develop their reasoning skills and encourage them to problem solve. The children at Redwood Preschool were observed to be well-supervised, engaged, and happy throughout the day.

### **Curriculum and Instructional Approach**

Redwood Preschool does not use a standard, commercially available curriculum, although all of the teachers have had some training with the use of the Creative Curriculum which strongly influences their instructional approach. The Desired Results for Children and Families, developed by the California Department of Education, also has an influence as teachers keep the desired results in mind when planning class activities. The experienced group of teachers at Redwood Preschool worked together to choose monthly themes and develop the class schedule.



## The Creative Curriculum

The Creative Curriculum is a curriculum and assessment system based on developmentally appropriate practices such as child initiation and choice, active learning, play, and hands-on materials. The curriculum is designed to be inclusive of English learners and children with disabilities, as well as children developing typically. It meets the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) criteria for effective curriculum and assessment, and is related directly to elementary school subject curricula.

The Creative Curriculum promotes early literacy skills in the following ways:

- Building a strong foundation in oral language (conversation, vocabulary, and listening skills)
- Providing developmentally appropriate phonological awareness activities (alliteration, rhyming, and letter sounds)
- Employing writing throughout the day (writing center, story dictation)
- Creating a print-rich environment (posters, reading center, labeling)

The assessment component of the Creative Curriculum system allows teachers to link the assessment results to the curriculum goals and guides them in helping each child reach those goals. By creating child progress and planning reports for families, teachers can use assessment information to involve families in their children's development.

Source: [http://www.teachingstrategies.com/pages/page.cfm?pg\\_section=preschool](http://www.teachingstrategies.com/pages/page.cfm?pg_section=preschool)

The teachers prefer activities that allow the children to experiment, be creative, and use their imaginations. Literacy activities, which include either print recognition or question and answer activities, occur daily. Story reading also occurs on a daily basis. The teachers use a lot of “number talk” with the children. For example, when children do not want to get off the swings, they count ten more pushes with the children, and then the children get off.

They also encourage the children to think about what they are doing. For example, the following exchange took place during the site visit:

Teacher: (*speaking with children blowing bubbles in bowls of soapy water.*) What makes the bubble puff up, you guys? What are we blowing into them?

Child 1: Air.

Teacher: Air, right. What else [are bubbles made of]?

Child 2: Soap.

Child 3: And water.

Teacher: Right. Air, soap, and water. (*Teacher and children are cleaning up soapy water from the bubble activity. Teacher pours water into a pitcher.*)

Child 1: Fill it up.

Teacher: Do you think it'll all fit in here?

Child 1: Yes.

Teacher: It's an experiment. (*Addresses child 2.*) Do you think it'll all fit in here?

Child 2: Yes.

Teacher: Okay, let's see. (*Teacher pours water into the pitcher.*) Oh, the bubbles are coming up to the top!

Another example of teachers encouraging children to think about what they are learning was described by the director: “I used the book, *Inside, Outside, Upside-down*. [We] started with reading it, then we acted it out and the children had to tell me what was happening. As they told me what was going to happen I had to act it out. We tried to incorporate their thinking.”

When planning class activities, the teachers also incorporate what children will be exposed to in elementary school. As an example, this year Redwood Elementary School introduced a new program called Alpha Friends that will be used with children from kindergarten up to second grade. Each letter of the alphabet has a character, for example, “A” is Andy Apple. The preschool teachers obtained a copy of the Alpha Friends kit and are introducing the preschoolers to the letters, sounds, and characters in the program.

The teachers who are speech therapists have primary responsibility for seeing that the IEP goals or SLIK goals of the children with disabilities and other special needs are met. They use small groups to focus on these goals. They also introduce activities during free-play time to address goals. For example, they use board games as a fun way to encourage receptive and expressive language. The teachers also introduce special activities in which all children can participate but which particularly address the needs of the children in class with disabilities and other special needs. Lastly, the teachers make modifications in the schedule so that children with disabilities can fully participate in program.

The image shows the components of the Alpha Friends educational kit. It includes a large blue box with the title 'Alphafriends' in yellow and red, a smaller blue box, a white poster featuring a character, a white card with a character, a small blue box, and a white manual with a character illustration. The characters are colorful, anthropomorphic animals.

**Alphafriends**

The Alphafriends are 26 colorful alphabet characters designed to teach phonics and phonemic awareness. Published by Houghton Mifflin, the Alphafriends kit includes a set of 26 cards printed with each character and the letter they represent, an Alphafriends poster, audiotapes with a song for each alphabet character, and a teacher manual.

Source:  
[http://www.schooldirect.com/store/ProductCatalogController?cmd=Browse&subcmd=LoadDetail&ID=1000000000000568&frontOrBack=F&sortEntriesBy=SEQ\\_NAME&sortProductsBy=SEQ\\_TITLE&division=S01](http://www.schooldirect.com/store/ProductCatalogController?cmd=Browse&subcmd=LoadDetail&ID=1000000000000568&frontOrBack=F&sortEntriesBy=SEQ_NAME&sortProductsBy=SEQ_TITLE&division=S01)

When children enroll in the Redwood Preschool, the teachers collect general information about their behavior, temperament, and abilities from their parents. Teachers refer to this information if they notice anything unusual in class. For example, a child attended the program who initially did not speak. By looking at the information collected from the parents, the teachers learned that the child was just very shy. In the past, the program asked parents of newly enrolled children to complete an Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). Because parents were not returning the ASQ, the program moved to this alternate method of collecting background information.

The children attending this program are formally assessed by the teachers twice a year with the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP). Throughout the year, teachers make anecdotal records in children's files whenever something of note occurs and take pictures of the children. These anecdotal notes and photos are used to support the DRDP. The teachers also collect children's work during the year and create a portfolio for each child. Twice a year (or more often if requested), the teachers hold conferences with parents during which they review the information on the DRDP, present a photo presentation of what their child has been doing in school, and share the child's portfolio.



### The Desired Results System

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a "condition of well-being" for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners.
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their children's learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals.

Child care and early education practitioners use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to evaluate the extent to which children in their care are achieving the desired results for children. Each child is assessed by a trained provider at enrollment and at regular intervals thereafter, creating a picture of how the child's development is progressing. Each behavior exhibited by the child is rated as "fully mastered," "almost mastered," "emerging," or "not yet." Teachers use this information to tailor activities to each child's developmental needs.

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>;  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpinstructions.asp>

## School Readiness

This program is preparing children for kindergarten by giving them skills in several areas. The children acquire pre-academic skills such as letter and number recognition, and counting. They gain reasoning skills. The children learn about cause and effect and develop excitement about learning. They also learn to follow simple directions and classroom routines. Finally, the program gives children opportunities to practice social skills and teaches them to express their feelings in words.

School readiness efforts benefit from a strong partnership between Redwood Preschool and the school district. The program works closely with the elementary school to ensure the children are prepared for the transition to kindergarten. As one teacher said, "We ask kindergarten teachers, 'What do you need us to do?' We need to know what their expectations are. In talking to kindergarten teachers, we hear from them exactly what they need and then exactly what we are doing to meet those goals." All preschool and kindergarten teachers meet twice a year to discuss kindergarten expectations and preschool activities. For children with disabilities and other special needs, they also discuss with parents and kindergarten teachers what the children are

supposed to be doing according to their IEPs. Finally, the kindergarten requests that preschool teachers complete an assessment on each child prior to entering kindergarten.

The parents feel the skills their children are learning at Redwood Preschool are preparing them for kindergarten. They report that their children are learning to count and to write their names. They are learning the names of the days of the week, colors, and animals, and are developing an interest in books. The children are also learning to follow rules such as those about sharing. Many parents mentioned that their children are more secure and confident since coming to the preschool. Parents of Spanish-speaking children reported that they were happy their children were learning English. Some comments from parents included: "Every day my child comes home, he has a new word that he's learned. And he's very happy." "(My son) knows his colors and he writes the names. It's special for me because he's my child; he's my boy." "The California standards for when kids are entering kindergarten are pretty high and what they're teaching them here I think is really preparing them for kindergarten." When asked for closing comments, one of the parents said, "I want to say thank you to the teachers because they work so hard."

### **Serving California's Diverse Population**

Redwood Preschool serves a diverse population that includes children who are English learners and children who have disabilities and other special needs. As one teacher noted, "The diversity of the children is a wonderful learning opportunity for all of them. Helps lessen the biases they will meet in high school regarding different cultures and special needs children."

***English Learners.*** About half of the children attending Redwood Preschool are English learners and the primary language of the vast majority of these children is Spanish. Most of the preschool teachers feel the program is doing an excellent job meeting the needs of this population (six of the program's seven teachers rated this program excellent in its ability to meet the needs of English learners). To meet these needs, the program uses a variety of methods such as hiring teachers who speak Spanish, providing books and other materials in Spanish, singing songs in Spanish, and including Hispanic cultural activities like making tortillas. At the program level, the policy for instruction for English learners has varied. As one teacher said, "We used to teach in Spanish; now we teach in English. Our goal was to teach kids Spanish and English; now the goal is to teach kids English." Children who are English learners are completely integrated into the program.

All of the teachers at Redwood Preschool incorporate Spanish into their instruction to some degree, but the amount used varies: some use it regularly, reading to and greeting children in Spanish; others use it more sparingly, for example, conducting only part of their circle time in Spanish. All of the teachers allow children to speak English to the degree they are comfortable doing so and then use children's primary languages as needed. "We try to be flexible and meet the needs of the child." In addition, the goal of the teachers at the program is not only to teach children English, but also to show respect for and the value of children's primary languages. The parents of English learners report that their children are learning English and that they are pleased with this skill.

Several parents also reported that their children had learned sign language at the program. The program makes some accommodations for children who are English learners. It provides reading materials in children's primary languages and has translators available for parents and children.

In addition, while the program does not specifically have an ESL program, the teachers do adapt the curriculum to enhance comprehension and learning in English.

***Children with Disabilities and Other Special Needs.*** Eleven of the 34 children attending Redwood Preschool have a disability or other special need; most of these children have speech and language delays. All of the preschool teachers feel the program is doing an excellent job meeting the needs of this population (all seven of the program's teachers rated this program as excellent in its ability to meet the needs of children with disabilities and other special needs). One of the primary ways the program meets the needs of these children is by having two speech therapists as teachers. The program is equipped to accommodate the needs of children with severe disabilities and has been attended by children in wheelchairs and children who required a Hoyer lift for transfers. As with children who are English learners, children with disabilities and other special needs are completely integrated into the program.

The teachers have made several program modifications to meet the needs of children with disabilities and other special needs. One such modification was to the program schedule. The speech therapists felt they were not getting enough time to focus on children's IEP goals. For this reason, a large-group time was changed to small groups and the children with disabilities and other special needs and some of their peers without special needs were placed in smaller groups with the speech therapists. The rest of the children were put in a larger group with the preschool teacher. As one teacher commented, "I don't think that the kids ever felt left out or different. When I call for my speech groups, everybody wants to come. Children with physical disabilities are treated the same way. They are included in everything." The teachers accommodate the needs of this population by modifying the materials used. For example, one child was developmentally delayed and the teachers needed to put away any materials on which the child might choke. "This is contrary to best practices as we knew it, but as a group we needed to compromise on how to make it work for everyone." The teachers have also modified staffing to allow children who need extra attention to be shadowed by a teacher.

Other accommodations made by the program to address the needs of children with disabilities and other special needs include the following: the types of activities are modified (e.g., activities at developmental age instead of chronological age are used); the duration of activities is modified (e.g., circle time is shortened); adaptive equipment is used (e.g., occupational therapy equipment and adaptive chairs are available); additional assistance or support from a trained professional is provided (e.g., two of the teachers are speech therapists, the program has an occupational therapy consultant/provider and a visual handicap consultant); and a behavior management program is available.

### **About the Program Director and Teachers**

The preschool employs seven teachers, three of whom are lead teachers and four who are teaching assistants. One of the unique aspects of this program is the diversity of its staff: of its three lead teachers, one is an early childhood educator and the other two are speech therapists. The three lead teachers share responsibility for many of the preschool management activities, such as making decisions about equipment and supplies for the program and supervising the teaching assistants. One of the lead teachers is also the director of the State Preschool portion of the program and is responsible for ensuring that State Preschool mandates and expectations are met.

All seven teachers employed by this program are female and all are white. The teachers have varying levels of educational attainment: one teacher has a master’s degree, two have bachelor’s degrees, and four have taken some college courses, but do not have degrees. In addition, two of the teachers are currently working towards degrees. Many of the teachers have extensive experience in their field: the average number of years that the teachers have taught early childhood education is more than 17 years. Teachers have also worked for this program or its predecessors (the Redwood State Preschool and the Redwood Elementary Special Education Preschool) for many years: the average number of years that teachers have taught at the site is more than nine years.

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	7
Gender	100% Female
Ethnicity	100% white
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	3
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0
Some college	4
A.A. degree	0
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	3
Currently working toward degree	2
Years of experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 17.3 years; range 2 to 31 years
Years spent working in the program (average and range)	Average 9.3 years; range 2 to 14 years

To ensure that Redwood Preschool provides high-quality services, the director stated that her primary role is to be a high-quality teacher. The other ways she contributes to the quality of the program include ensuring that program paperwork and assessments are completed on time. She is responsible for making sure that the needs of the children in terms of the DRDP are met. The director also makes sure that her staff is well trained. She has developed a relationship with a local college to provide training to the staff. She introduced the California Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC) to the staff and, when possible, arranges CAEYC trainings that all staff can attend together in order to continue the process of creating a common language and set of principles within the program. The director occasionally teaches or facilitates the trainings through the college and CAEYC.

Teachers at this program are supported in many ways to continue their professional development. They receive information about upcoming training sessions, funding to attend, as well as in-house training. The staff are provided with paid and unpaid time off to attend trainings and workshops, and the program reimburses, pays fees, or obtains funds for staff to attend trainings and workshops. Information regarding trainings and workshops is posted at the program, and the program encourages and coordinates staff attendance at workshops.

In the twelve months prior to the site visit, teachers received training on child development, behavioral issues, conflict resolution, communicating with families, strategies for working with English learners, and strategies for working with children with disabilities and other special needs. Teachers at this program also have access to early childhood resources such as books, magazines, and videos, and access to technology for researching early childhood topics.

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

Parents choose to send their children to Redwood Preschool for a variety of reasons including the following: they had older children who attended the same program, the teachers are well-qualified and nurturing, flexibility of the schedule and, for one parent, one of the teachers was her teacher when she was a child. For all parents, Redwood Preschool was their first choice for their child's preschool education.

Parents are not required to volunteer at this program but there are many ways for parents to be involved if they so choose. As one parent said, "You're welcome to be here any time. I just want to come and play." Some options for parents to participate include volunteering in the classrooms, and helping with field trips, special activities, fund-raising, and special celebrations. There are also groups that parents can join such as an all school prekindergarten-second grade parents group and a school site council. The program offers parent workshops two to three times per year including an early literacy workshop, which teaches parents early literacy activities they can do with their children at home. At the end of the year, the program honors parent volunteers.

Teachers hold conferences with parents twice a year. During these conferences, they review the information on DRDP and give parents a summary of their child's progress. They also make a portfolio of each child's class work. This year, the teachers started giving photo presentations of each child. In addition to the biannual conferences, teachers are available to informally conference with parents at their request. Teachers and parents communicate regularly as children are being dropped off and picked up from the program. In addition, the teachers use phone calls and notes when necessary. At the end of the school year, parents are given a written progress report of their child.

The program also connects parents with local agencies. For example, as one parent said, "At Parents' Night, they make you feel so welcome. They have a lot of hand outs and they connect you with a lot of agencies plus they send a lot of stuff home." Parents appreciate the added services the program offers like the dental clinic. Several parents commented about the help and support they had received themselves or heard was given to other parents by the teachers. One parent said, "The teachers see every family—they see their needs and help them."

### **Conclusion**

Several aspects contribute to the high quality of the Redwood Preschool. The program's location, on the grounds of an elementary school, has contributed to the development of a close relationship between the teachers at the preschool and at the kindergarten and elementary school. This relationship may be improving the kindergarten transitions of the preschoolers. Being located on an elementary school campus also imparts other benefits to this program, such as giving the preschoolers access to a large campus garden and to performances and cultural activities at the school.

The teachers at Redwood Preschool are experienced and have broad educational backgrounds, which greatly contribute to the quality of the program. The program has excellent staff retention,

allowing resources to be used for children instead of hiring and training new teachers. The program also gives teachers planning time and provides them with opportunities for professional development.

This program maintains a low teacher-to-child ratio, allowing the program to enroll a high number of children with disabilities and other special needs without overwhelming staff. Finally, Redwood Preschool has done an excellent job of blending two very different programs into one cohesive unit and has a lot to teach the field about fully integrating children with disabilities and other special needs into preschool programs.

The high quality of the Redwood Preschool is recognized by the parents of the children who attend the program. Parents are extremely pleased with the program. They see that their children are learning and are in an environment where they are treated with care.

When asked to identify strategies to support the implementation of the Preschool for All (PFA) initiative in California, the director stated that she felt it was important not to exclude teachers who do not have bachelor's degrees from teaching PFA classes. Many excellent teachers who do not have such degrees feel that getting a degree is out of their reach. In her opinion, teachers without bachelor's degrees, but with many early childhood education (ECE) units should be allowed to teach. The director also hoped that the cost of running high-quality preschool programs will not deter PFA from being offered. Lastly, she stated that teaching preschool needs to be recognized as a viable teaching profession.

## **South Bay Union School District's Very Important Preschoolers' (VIP) Village San Diego County**

Part-day preschool services are offered at South Bay Union School District's VIP (Very Important Preschoolers') Village, located adjacent to one of the district's elementary schools. Serving families from an area that includes Imperial Beach, South San Diego, and San Ysidro, VIP Village provides care for up to 660 preschoolers, including children with disabilities and other special needs. In the 2004-05 program year, 656 children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled in the 4 special education and 26 state-funded classes. Children are taught in English, Spanish, or both languages, according to their language and instructional needs. The average class size is 24 children, with an average teacher-to-child ratio of 1 to 8.

### **Overview**

Supported by Title I and Title VII funding (Title VII funding ends after 2004-05), the center offers a 180-day, part-day program (two 3.3-hour sessions) that aligns with the district bus schedule and operates from 9:30 in the morning until 4:10 in the afternoon. School begins each year in September and continues through June on a single-track modified year-round schedule. April, July, and August are vacation months and are used for intensive staff development and CAMP VIP, a 3-week intersession program that is designed for preschoolers who need extra assistance with cognitive, pre-reading, and auditory skills, as well as with oral language development. It is offered during the 2-month summer break for 4-year-olds who will attend kindergarten in the fall. In addition to CAMP VIP, VIP Village participates in HOSTS (Help One Student To Succeed), a mentoring program that provides one-on-one, skill-specific instruction and activities during both the school year and intersession programs.

The majority (76%) of the children enrolled in the program are Latino, 17% are white, and the remaining 7% are African-American, Asian, or other ethnicities. The languages spoken by children include English, Spanish, Tagalog, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Korean, with 65% of the children being English learners. About one-fifth (23%) have been identified as having disabilities and other special needs. Most of these children have a speech impairment; several have autism and mental retardation, and a few have learning delays or hearing, visual and/or orthopedic impairments.

There are 18 classrooms, all with ample room for children to move comfortably through the various interest centers. The rooms are well ventilated and have a good balance of natural and artificial lighting. In addition to the good indoor space, VIP Village is located on a large plot of land that offers children plenty of outdoor space for development of their gross motor skills. There are swings, two climbing structures, and bike paths for children to ride their tricycles. However, the most distinctive part of VIP Village is its children's garden, "Plant It, Earth!" which recently was awarded the Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association for excellence in a multicategory educational program. The garden has its own entrance through a vine-covered arbor and has two wooden benches, which invite visitors to sit and relax. There are 16 low-to-the-ground plots, 3 by 8 feet, filled with everything from daisies to strawberries, all organic. The garden also has a worm farm, a compost pile, and a dirt "practice" lot, where the children learn to rake, hoe, and dig (all activities that promote their

gross motor development). Children are responsible for maintaining the garden and take turns watering all the plants and vegetables.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	School-based
Funding	State Preschool, Title I and Title VII
Part-day/full-day	Part-day
Full-year/school-year	School-year (180 days)
Number of sessions	2 (9:30 a.m.–12:50 p.m., 12:50 p.m.–4:10 p.m.)
Number of classrooms	18
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	656
Classroom size	24 children
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1:8
Curriculum	Theme-based curriculum Influenced by Piaget's developmental theory
Ethnicity of children	76% Latino, 17% white, 4% African-American, 2% Asian, 1% other
Language of children	English, Spanish, Tagalog, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean
English learner population	65%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	Autism (16 children), learning disability (5 children), speech impairment (107 children), mental retardation (18 children), hearing impairment (4 children), visual impairment (1 child), orthopedic impairment (3 children)

All VIP Village children are offered transportation to and from the program, except those who live within walking distance. The majority of the children at VIP travel to and from VIP Village via the district school bus. The greeting process at VIP Village is unique in that, as children depart the bus, each child is greeted, by name, by the program director, assistant director, and/or resource teacher. Therefore, every day, the program director welcomes more than 300 children to VIP Village in the morning and another 300 children in the afternoon. As the children arrive, they also are greeted by their teachers; then they line up outside according to their classes and are guided to their respective classrooms.

During the site visit (site visitors observed the afternoon session), the program day began with circle time. The children gathered in a large group and recited the Pledge of Allegiance. The children then proceeded to some music and movement activities before lining up for lunch. Every preschooler is provided lunch at no cost, and each classroom has a specified time in the cafeteria. After lunch, children have recess and choose any outdoor activity they prefer. Following recess, they transition back to the classroom, and the teacher reads a book to them. The children then have a choice between various art activities. During the week of the site visit, children were learning about orca whales, and the art activity was drawing and painting their own whales. If children did not want to participate in the whale activity, they could make a groundhog (since it was Groundhog Day) or make up their own art project.

The art session was followed by free play, where children could choose to play in any of the interest centers. VIP Village offers a variety of activities in the areas of art, music, dramatic play, science, reading, and technology (every classroom features the KIDWARE 2+ Millennium computer program). These centers have developmentally appropriate materials (in both English

and Spanish), and the materials are well organized, easily accessible, labeled to encourage self-help, and offer children different levels of difficulty. The materials also are rotated for variety, depending on what the children are learning (e.g., books on whales) or interested in. There were provisions for sand and water play outside, including a variety of toys, such as containers, scoops, cups, and shovels. In the classroom, the children’s sensory table was filled with beans and rice. The children also had access to a variety of manipulatives (for development of their fine motor skills), such as blocks, puzzles with and without knobs, and play dough.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities</b>	
12:50	Bring children to the classroom
1:00	Greetings, songs, Pledge of Allegiance, drink water
1:15	Transition to cafeteria
1:20	Lunch
1:45	Recess, exercise groups, and games
2:15	Drink water, go to bathroom, transition to classroom
2:20	Reading/Story time
2:30	Art hour, 15-min. groups, work of the day
3:20	Explore, play in the different play areas with the teachers
3:45	Clean-up
3:50	Goodbye song, share words or talents
4:00	Transition, walk to the bus
4:10	Get children on the bus

The observed classrooms also were rich in developmentally appropriate books, pictures (located at the children’s eye level), children’s individual artwork, and communication activities. Throughout the day, teachers conversed individually with children and encouraged them to talk. Staff also encouraged children to use logical relationships by reasoning with the children throughout the day, for example, asking the children what kind of teeth a whale has and how that influences a whale’s diet. Because of the many activities, teachers had ample opportunities to interact with the children in a supportive manner throughout the day. Staff were attentive to children. When needed, discipline was provided in a nonpunitive manner. Staff also encouraged children to resolve their own conflicts as much as possible.

VIP Village also has what’s called “The VIP Village Stomp Band (short for “The VIP Village/Home Depot/JC Towing Mini-Me Stomp Band”)”, which is a group of 12-15 preschoolers who play paint buckets, trash cans, washtubs and pails in time to music.

Children are referred for the Stomp Band experience by their teachers, and/or parents/guardians. They require no special musical talent, but rather an enjoyment of rhythm and music. The Stompers practice once or twice a week under the direction of the VIP Village Director, Assistant Director, and/or the HOSTS Learning and Literacy Leader. The Stomp Band has performed on television, at State and local educational conferences, for District and County School Board functions, school assemblies, in parades, at community celebrations, and for retirement and military re-enlistment ceremonies.

The program director stated that, “Participation in the Stomp Band has boosted self-confidence in our “hesitant children”, developed oral language in some of our more quiet preschoolers, and built readiness skills such as directionality, rhythm, patterning, and basic concepts in all of the children who participate.”

## **Curriculum and Instructional Approach**

VIP Village Preschool follows the philosophy that each child is a unique and capable individual, and the program strives to provide an environment that fosters creativity and encourages curiosity and love of learning. Rather than using a commercially available curriculum, VIP Village uses a self-developed, theme-based curriculum that includes flexible activities influenced by principles of Jean Piaget’s theory of development and focuses on the following areas: cognitive skills, social-emotional development, oral language and literacy, motor skills and physical development, and self-help and hygiene. The curriculum builds on Piaget’s theory that children learn by discovery and concrete experiences (e.g., use of manipulatives, working in groups to experience seeing from another’s perspective, and field trips). The curriculum also has units of theme-based activities. Themes reflect topics of children’s interest and general topics in the areas of nature, community, and self. Each week, teachers choose a theme from a standardized list of staff-recommended instructional units (Dinosaurs, Insects and Spiders, and All About Me are popular themes). Teachers do not all teach the same units at the same time, although morning and afternoon session teachers often collaborate so that bulletin boards, art activities, etc., are coordinated. Depending on children’s interests, teachers have the option of extending the unit for 2 weeks or more. There are 4 to 6 weeks during each year when the teacher has the option of developing his or her own theme, according to the teacher’s own interests or talents, or using a theme of the children’s choosing. Eighteen of the theme units have been translated into Spanish and were designed to incorporate Latino cultural components into the activities presented in the primary language classes. In addition, VIP Village’s Lending Library, Children’s Library, and classroom libraries are provided as part of the program’s commitment to the development of early literacy.



### **Theme-Based Curriculum Models**

Theme-based curriculum has evolved as a result of recent brain research indicating that forming patterns and understanding connections are important in children’s learning. Research supports the idea that learning cannot truly be divided into conventional domains or disciplines, as is done for discussion purposes. Theme-based models attempt to incorporate this philosophy by using a central theme to cross disciplines and developmental domains—teaching to the “whole brain.”

Theme-based models use activities for various subject areas that center on the same theme, such as a holiday or kind of animal. This kind of integrated curriculum allows children to explore how different kinds of learning (reading, math, or social studies) fit into the larger picture of the theme. Themes should be:

- Topics or ideas that can be explored in many ways, through literacy, math, music, social studies, and art
- Based on children’s shared experiences, daily life, culture, or environment
- Planned with the children’s help, and designed to fit the teacher and the needs of the children

Sources: <http://www.michigan.gov/greatstart/0,1607,7-197-27385-83422--,00.html>;  
<http://www.earlychildhood.com/Articles/index.cfm?A=112&FuseAction=Article>

During the focus group, teachers mentioned that they have the flexibility in developing and using each activity to “mold it to the child’s needs at the time, for example, cutting samples for 3-year-olds versus [having] 4-year-olds [cut their own pieces].” A favorite activity of both teachers and children is what they call the “Coffee Can Theatre.” The coffee can is filled with props that children use throughout the story time. After teachers read the book to the children several times, the children begin to take the props out and retell the story using the props. Teachers mentioned that this activity has changed story time in the classrooms—the children are more actively involved in the process than when teachers just read to the children. Teachers also attribute the children’s interest to the flexibility and variety of the theme-based curriculum. “We have fun with the kids, and that’s what keeps them interested. The ability to change and be flexible if they’re bored [because] every child is different and every classroom is different [keeps them interested].”

VIP Village is continually examining and revising its curricular approach. There is a curriculum committee (consisting of a group of teachers) that works on just curriculum development. If something is not working, it is revised or removed. Teachers give their ideas to the members of the curriculum committee, and the ideas are discussed at committee meetings. The committee also works on developing the ideas into units that can be used in the classroom. Currently, the curriculum committee is revising all existing units to align them more closely with state prekindergarten standards and the individual needs of children.

### Jean Piaget’s Four Stages of Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist whose observations of children’s thinking led him to develop a four-stage theory of cognitive development. From birth to 2, children are in the Sensorimotor stage, when their thinking involves gathering information through hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and moving. Preschool children are in the Preoperational stage (2 to 7 years). Important developments and features of this stage are:

- *Developing the use of language.* Between the ages of 2 to 4, children’s vocabulary increases from 200 to 2,000 words.
- *Developing the ability to think in symbolic form.* Children can use pictures, gestures, or signs to stand for real objects or ideas.
- *One-way logic.* Children have difficulty “thinking backwards,” or reversing the steps of a task. This leads to difficulty with the idea of conservation of matter—the amount of a substance remains the same despite a change in container or shape.
- *Ego-centrism.* Children in this stage see the world from their own viewpoint and assume that everyone shares their feelings and perspective.

The Preoperational stage is followed by the Concrete Operational stage (7 to 11 years), when children begin to understand conservation and reversibility, and can solve concrete problems. The last stage is Formal Operational (11 years to adult), when the child begins to think more scientifically, is able to solve abstract problems, and develops his identity.

For more information, see: <http://www.piaget.org/links.html>

Source: Woolfolk, A. (2004). *Educational Psychology* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

## **Assessment**

VIP Village Preschool formally assesses every child at the beginning of the year, using a program-developed assessment tool that incorporates the Desired Results Developmental Profile items. The program director stated, “For me, it’s not the instrument, but it’s how you use the assessment.” Assessment results are used to identify individual and group needs, inform parents of strengths and needs of their children, and evaluate program effectiveness. For instance, if a large number of teachers have children not mastering certain skills, the teaching staff try to identify ways to increase effectiveness. Staff consider questions like “Do we need more staff development in that area? More instructional supplies? A different approach? Is it an unrealistic expectation of young children?” At the end of each year, the program does an individual student count of pre-post mastery by classroom. Those results are studied and shared with teachers on an individual basis. The teachers also compare the results among program types—English only vs. Spanish only vs. bilingual—again, to evaluate program effectiveness in all instructional/language settings. Teachers also have a “Class Profile,” which they update and refer to in their daily and weekly planning, and they adjust their lesson plans according to the children’s needs. If children do not progress on their skills after activities have been modified, teachers make referrals for the children to receive additional assessment from the on-site health and developmental specialists. Therefore, children are assessed on a regular basis. Assessment is done pre and post, and on an ongoing basis throughout the year, on a variety of cognitive items, such as ability to match colors, shapes, and objects and demonstrate understanding of size differences.

## **School Readiness**

A strong partnership between VIP Village and the school district exists around school readiness. The district is committed to early childhood education and demonstrates this commitment by providing financial support (\$140,000 per year) to operate the program. A key part of this partnership is the articulation between the VIP Village Preschool program and the K-6 program. Preschool teachers meet with the kindergarten staff at the local elementary schools to discuss expectations, and representatives from VIP Village sit on district curriculum, textbook adoption, and standards committees to ensure that they understand the types of skills that children should have mastered by the time they enter school. Through this collaboration, the preschool teachers learn about kindergarten teachers’ expectations for incoming students; this information helps them prepare the preschool children for a smooth transition to kindergarten. VIP Village also hosts a kindergarten workshop at the end of the year to share information on individual children’s development. Preschool teachers meet with receiving kindergarten teachers and share information. They also put some pre-post samples of work into each child’s cumulative record and also complete a “Cum Card” listing all of VIP Village’s expected student outcomes, with each child’s level of mastery of those skills, which is reviewed by the kindergarten teacher when the child’s record is sent to the receiving school.

Teachers from VIP Village stated that kindergarten teachers report that they can always tell which children came from VIP Village because the children enter kindergarten with good social skills (they know how to share and resolve minor conflicts); able to write their names, count, and understand spatial reasoning; have good pre-reading skills; and are ready to learn.

Parents commented on how the program provided their children with the skills to succeed in school—in particular, how the program was enhancing children’s growth in literacy, math, and social and emotional areas. One parent felt that, as a result of having attended VIP Village, his older child was better prepared for kindergarten than his younger child, who did not attend a preschool program. Another parent said, “It’s a joy to see them go to kindergarten and tell the teacher that they can write their name, cut, and know their shapes.” Another parent reported, “My child has been here 2 years. In the first year, he learned to write his name, numbers, shapes, everything. This is his second year, and he’s already writing words and reading words. He’s more than ready for kindergarten.”

In addition to cognitive skills, parents have observed social and emotional changes in their children. They reported that, since enrolling in the program, their children were learning to express themselves with language, respect other cultures, make friends, and share with others. One parent said about respecting other cultures, “They love it and they love to share. His friend was teaching him Spanish so [they could communicate with each other].” Another parent described the social growth in her daughters: “Our girls have an attachment bond that’s really tight, and they are starting to play with new friends and break away from each other. [One of our girls] was so shy and afraid of her own shadow, and now she sings and talks.” A parent explained that the program helped her child to express himself: “I have a child who did not speak and used a lot of aggressive behavior to communicate. [Now] he’s grown and uses language to communicate.”

### **Serving California’s Diverse Population**

**English Learners.** The majority of children served by VIP Village are Latino; smaller numbers are white, African-American, Asian, and of other ethnic backgrounds. For children who are English learners, the director reported that developing their primary language is a priority. Instruction is delivered through Spanish-only, bilingual, and English-only classrooms. Children are assigned to these classrooms on the basis of their instructional and language needs.

The way in which English is incorporated into the classroom varies by type of class. In the Spanish-only classes, teachers speak only Spanish. However, English is incorporated daily through 20 to 30 minutes of English-only song and music time, and the children in each Spanish-only class have a “Preschool Pal” in an English classroom with whom they visit once a week. Children who speak primarily Spanish but have some understanding of English, or children who are bilingual and/or have a Spanish-speaking parent, attend bilingual classrooms. Teachers in the bilingual classrooms provide most of the instruction in English but communicate with children individually in Spanish as needed (e.g., to explain an activity). Teachers also group children for instruction in Spanish if necessary, and if there are a large number of primarily Spanish-speaking children, they will also group them for circle time. In English-only classrooms, all instruction is provided in English. In a case where a child speaks a language other than English and Spanish, an assistant who speaks the child’s primary language is hired to assist the child whenever possible. Once a week, children from each primary language class and their “Preschool Pals” get together for activities such as making friendship bracelets or eating lunch.

***Children with Disabilities and Other Special Needs.*** The program also serves many children with disabilities and other special needs. There are four special education classrooms on-site, supported 5 days a week by various trained professionals, including speech and occupational therapists, a vision specialist, a psychologist, a nurse, autism assistants, and an adaptive PE teacher. Accommodations made for children with special needs include physical therapy, behavior management programs, modified activities and seating arrangements, smaller groups, and adaptive equipment, such as bikes, chairs, restrooms, pencil grips, and touch boards. The program director reported “We work a lot with community agencies if there is a service that we need and don’t have the resources for.” Parents are appreciative of the special education services, one saying, “We have three 4-year-olds, and one is in special education. When he’s here, he gets all the time he needs. He’s learning to walk, and he’s getting that help here.”

For staff, integrating the special education classes with the rest of the school is an important aspect of the special education program. “We try hard to integrate our special education kids with our normally developed kids. We are happy to share our campus with four special education classes. It’s like another culture that we’ve included.” The special education teachers play a pivotal role in easing the inclusion of their students. The program director reported “Our special education teachers are in the forefront of what’s going on in the special education community, rather than taking the back seat. They’re respected by the rest of the staff, and they’re integrated in the program, and therefore their kids are integrated into the program.” Parents and staff can see how the integration efforts have fostered children’s acceptance of differences. One teacher commented, “The special education kids visit the other classrooms, and they all get along and work with each other to help [the special education students] out. It’s become no big deal.” This year, VIP Village was able to include one child with special needs in the STOMP Band, which the program director describes, “is the ultimate mainstreaming activity for him, and a wonderful learning experience for our other children.”

The teachers at VIP Village track their observations and concerns about individual children’s development through the Red Folder project. When teachers notice a possibility of delay, they discuss and use in-class strategies to assist that child. If the expected improvement is not seen, the child is referred for an assessment by the appropriate professional. This would be one or more of the on-site health and district specialists and any other district specialists needed (such as a behavior specialist, adaptive PE teacher, vision specialist, special programs psychologist), depending on the needs of the child. The HOSTS Learning and Literacy Center leader also assists during the Red Folder process and is quite often asked to attend Child Study Team meetings to offer observations and HOSTS assessment information. The family also is referred to any outside services the child may need. One parent explained the process that she experienced with her daughter: “We weren’t sure she could stay in school. We did the IEP, and it really helped. We got a call from the teacher to let us know that our child was doing OK.” Another parent reported “Even if I’m not aware [that my child may have a problem], the teacher comes up to me, and the child’s best interest is always at heart. My child has a speech problem and got help.”

## About the Program Director and Teachers

The VIP Village Preschool program director has been with VIP Village for 18 years. She holds a master’s degree in education administration. When asked to describe her role in ensuring that VIP Village provides high-quality services, the program director said, “I’m the head cheerleader; I’m also the head disciplinarian. My role is the ‘holder of the vision,’ and I’m a firm believer that attitude flows downward, so I try to set an example for staff and parents.” The program director also raises funds for the program (e.g., she found an initial sponsor for their garden and works with the district to obtain funding and resources for the children).

The program director described her approach to management as team oriented and fun. “There’s a lot of recognition of everyone’s talent. There are always luncheons and celebrations. I really plan things that encourage staff to get to know each other better.” The teachers stated that the program director’s commitment and dedication to VIP Village’s mission and vision are the reasons that teachers stay at the program. The program director is responsible for the daily operations of the program, supervising and training the teachers and the support staff, and working with the school district and the community to ensure that VIP Village is a high-quality preschool program. She stated that she separates the decision-making process into three categories, “my decisions,” “your decisions,” and “our decisions.” There are decisions that affect the program that are nonnegotiable and that the program director makes; then there are those decisions that teachers make for their classrooms and children, and finally decisions that both the program director and the teachers jointly make. Ultimately, the program director acknowledged that “the buck stops with the director. It is very clear that whatever objective or goal that we have set forth, it’s really clear to everyone here as to what those goals are; there are no gray areas. We are going to get there [accomplish our goals], even if there are different approaches.”

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	30
Gender	90% female – may not be true of all 30
Ethnicity	9 white, 19 Latino origin, 2 other ethnicities
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	20
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	
Some college	7
A.A. degree	15
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	8
Currently working toward degree	18
Years experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 14.6 years; range 1 to 39 years
Years spent working at the program (average and range)	Average 11 years; range 1 to 25 years

Of the 30 teachers who teach at VIP Village, 7 have some college education, 15 hold an associate’s degree, and 8 have a bachelor’s degree or higher. The teachers have an average of 14 years experience in early childhood education and have spent an average of 11 years working at VIP Village. Most teachers work part-time at VIP Village, teaching either the morning session or the afternoon session. The program director stated, “Many districts have their teachers teach [both] a.m. and p.m. [sessions], but our expectations of assessment, planning, and attending professional development things [are high], so we shouldn’t expect [teachers] to do so for 48

kids.” The program director attributed less teacher burnout and turnover and more time for professional development opportunities to teachers’ working only part-time.

VIP Village uses in-house training as the primary strategy to promote the professional development of its teaching staff. On-site staff development is offered on a continuous basis, including both professional development training and team/community-building activities. In the last year, staff have participated in training on child development, behavioral issues, conflict resolution, communicating with families, parent involvement, strategies for working with English learners, and strategies for working with children with disabilities and other special needs. In addition to in-house training, teachers have paid time off to attend conferences and workshops. For instance, more than half the teachers attend the Early Years Conference each year, some for half a day and some for a full day. Six teachers attended a brain research all-day session, and another four attended a Working with Difficult Children session. Two resource teachers went to the California Association for Bilingual Education conference, and specialists attend special education training three to four times per year. Eighteen staff members registered to complete their bachelor’s in early childhood education through National University when the program starts on the VIP Village campus in 2005. Teachers mentioned that they enjoy working at VIP Village because the program director is always bringing in specialists for workshops. One teacher stated, “[The program director] has all these different kinds of specialists come in all the time, and sometimes you get stagnant if you always do the same thing, so [the workshops] help you refresh and do new things.” The teachers also have access to on-site early childhood education resources, such as books, videotapes, and magazines or journals. When asked what they liked best about VIP Village, teachers said that one of their favorite things was on-site access to professional development materials and resources.

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

VIP Village requires parents to volunteer twice per month by working in the classroom or garden, taking work home, sharing special skills or talents, participating in the Parent Advisory Committee, or working in the HOSTS learning and literacy center. The program director stresses the importance of parent participation, saying “We want you here because it makes the program better, and it sends a message to the child that you think your child’s learning is important.” VIP Village maintains an open-door policy for parents, who can visit and volunteer in the program at any time that is convenient for them. Working parents can come in on Saturday and help in the garden, or teachers send them things to do at home (like cutting shapes or preparing for other classroom activities).

VIP Village also offers parent education classes based on a needs assessment filled out by parents/guardians during their orientation, and adds “hot topics” if they come up during the year. VIP Village tries to offer at least one parent/family workshop per month. The preschool’s Por La Vida program conducts parenting classes that cover topics such as child development, language development, and positive discipline. Por La Vida classes are voluntary, but so many parents want to attend that class enrollment must be capped. Classes are offered at the times/days that the majority of parents indicate they can attend. For the last several years, most parents have indicated they could attend daytime classes, while their preschooler is in class. Each topic is offered four times, once in the morning and once in the afternoon on two consecutive days, one day in Spanish and the next day in English. Some parent activities are offered in the evening: Transition to Kindergarten meetings, offered in English and Spanish, and Family Reading

Nights, offered in both languages. Attendance at classes and other activities varies widely, averaging 25 to 30 for most sessions, but reading 350 for Family Reading Night.

The preschool also has family service liaisons, who provide families with referrals to outside services. Upon enrollment, parents fill out a survey of their family needs, and the liaisons use it to refer parents to the needed services. In 2003-04, the liaisons made more than 2,000 referrals for services such as food, clothing, shelter, domestic violence support, child care, health needs, and employment. Parents were highly appreciative of the social services support provided by the preschool program. One parent said, "I definitely feel that I've received care for the whole family. The family liaison is always here to help and listen and give the referrals that are needed. Sometimes when families are going through hard times, we get help with food, and the school looks out for the family as a whole." One parent reflected, "It's what the school has to offer for the whole family. It's not only a place where children grow, but parents benefit and the whole family can benefit."

During the focus group, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the program, describing ways in which it supported their children and entire family. Several parents explained what attracted them to VIP Village, including a supportive attitude toward family involvement, high-quality management and staff, on-site nurse, and safe environment. The high level of satisfaction has led several parents to return and send younger siblings through the program. A mother explained, "I've been a parent here for 10 years now, and three kids have come through. The first time I immediately loved the place. Everyone greets well; the director is outstanding." Another parent selected VIP Village because of the supportive staff. She said, "[The children] feel comfortable, and they let their guard down so they can pick up and learn. So when they move on, they'll have the confidence to continue and learn. [The children learn that] someone loves me, someone helps me, and I can keep going, I don't have to stop."

## **Conclusion**

VIP Village preschool is unique in its ability to provide high-quality preschool services to so many children (660) and to such a diverse group of children, including children with many different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds and many children with disabilities and other special needs.

Key to VIP Village's success is its partnership with and support from the South Bay Union School District. Its connection to the school district has provided it with a spacious campus, with both attractive classrooms and exceptional outdoor facilities. The partnership with the district also has provided the children with school buses, so that children from various neighborhoods can have safe, consistent, and free transportation to school.

The partnership between the preschool and the district also affects the quality of instruction. In particular, there has been improved articulation of learning expectations and sharing of information on children between the preschool and kindergarten teachers. Also, the preschool benefits from the services of health and developmental specialists hired as part of the special education preschool classrooms.

As mentioned above, VIP Village serves a large number of children. However, the preschool has developed several strategies to ensure that all children receive a great deal of individual attention. This starts with all children being greeted daily by name as they come to school. Also, the progress of all children is tracked with a progress sheet so that no children are overlooked.

Finally, teachers primarily are assigned to work only a morning or afternoon session, so that they can focus on the progress of fewer children.

Another aspect that distinguishes VIP Village from many other preschools is its commitment to continuous professional development of its teaching staff. The program director has been very successful at bringing in several interesting experts to help train and give the teachers new ideas they can incorporate into their work. Teachers also feel that they have a lot of input on the curriculum. Teachers expressed how this support and involvement added to their high job satisfaction.

Having a shared curriculum that is updated regularly by a curriculum committee has helped teachers to keep their interest centers and large-group activities engaging. By having a shared curriculum, teachers also could more easily share ideas across classrooms. Because teachers could tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of their students, they did not feel that having a curriculum was constraining.

VIP Village also is exceptional in its ability to accommodate the needs of both English learners and children with disabilities and other special needs in a way that all children benefit. For example, the preschool has established activities that encourage children to help each other so they can learn language and other skills from children who are different from themselves. These activities include learning songs in different languages, having “Preschool Pals” whom they visit in other classrooms, and doing other activities that combine children from different classrooms. Both parents and teachers provided examples of how children have learned from each other and feel comfortable helping each other.

Parents expressed great appreciation for the ways the program involves them in the classroom, for the parenting classes, and for all the community resources available to them through the family liaison. Families felt the school supported the family as a whole, and not just children.

When asked to identify strategies to support the implementation of the Preschool for All initiative in California, the program director stated, “First of all, it’s going to take, unfortunately, money.” She emphasized that a well-thought-out plan specific to the county is important, and that a one-size-fits-all approach may not work. She emphasized that each county should be charged with a putting together a comprehensive plan without lowering standards and quality. There also has to be a requirement that strongly links preschools to elementary schools within a community. Finally, she recognized the importance of increased education for teachers, including appropriate compensation.

## Westside Children's Center Los Angeles County

Full-day preschool services are offered at the Westside Children's Center, located in west Los Angeles in Los Angeles County in a high-need community. The center-based program provides care for over 280 children from 3 weeks to 8 years old on a daily basis. In the 2004–05 program year, 69 children ages 3 to 5 were enrolled. The program attempts to ensure that children achieve their optimal growth and development and reach their full potential within the safety of a permanent, nurturing home.

### Overview

The center is housed in a large, newly constructed building in Culver City and has four preschool classrooms. The spacious classrooms provide plenty of indoor space for children to explore, play, and learn. Classrooms include learning centers that allow for many activities to occur at the same time. Each classroom has ample developmentally appropriate materials. The entire program environment is designed to support children's learning and development. The average class size is 17 children, with an average teacher-to-child ratio of 1 to 6. The center offers a 12-month (250 days), full-day (10 hours) program that operates from 7:30 in the morning until 5:30 in the afternoon.

The majority (80%) of the children enrolled in the program are Latino, and the remaining 20% are white, African-American, and other ethnic groups. The languages spoken by children include English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, with 32% of the children being English learners. About 13% have been identified as having disabilities and other special needs, including children with speech impairments and learning disabilities.

<b>Exhibit 1. Program Information</b>	
Affiliation	Community-based
Funding	Private Non-Profit Early Care and Education (Title V)
Part-day/full-day	Full-day (10 hours; 7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.)
Full-year/school-year	Full-year (12 months, or 250 days)
Number of sessions	1
Number of classrooms	4
Total number of children ages 3 to 5	69
Classroom size	17 children
Typical teacher-to-child ratio	1 to 6
Curriculum	Adapted from: High/Scope Creative Curriculum Reggio Emilio
Ethnicity of children	80% Latino, 8% white, 7% other, and 5% African-American
Language of children	English, Spanish, Portuguese, French
English-learner population	32%
Children with disabilities and other special needs	Learning disability (6 children), and speech impairment (3 children)

Children entered the classroom at different times throughout the morning and either ate breakfast or played in the various centers. As children arrived, teachers and other staff warmly greeted them and their parents and helped children become involved in activities as needed. Teachers used this time to share information about the children with families and to listen to parents' comments or concerns. If children appeared shy, hesitant, or unhappy, teachers helped them become acclimated to the environment by inviting them to join in breakfast or an activity.

Once most of the children had arrived, the teaching staff brought them together in circle time, a large-group activity in which the teacher reviewed attendance (e.g., "What friend is missing today?"); talked about the calendar and the weather (e.g., "What day is it?" "Is it rainy or sunny?"); asked how children were feeling (e.g., "Tell me how you feel today?" "Why do you feel happy?"); sang in English and Spanish; counted and reviewed the alphabet; and discussed the day's activities.

<b>Exhibit 2. Schedule and Activities</b>	
7:30	Meet/greet
8:15	Cleanup
8:30	Breakfast
9:00	Group time
9:30	Indoor free play
10:15	Indoor small-group
10:30	Cleanup
10:45	Story time
11:00	Outdoor free play
11:50	Cleanup
12:00	Lunch/cleanup
12:55	Nap time
3:00	Cleanup
3:15	Snack
3:40	Cleanup
3:50	Story time
4:05	Cleanup
4:15	Outside free play
5:30	Departure

At least five interest centers were clearly defined; quiet and active areas were arranged so as not to interfere with one another. These centers had developmentally appropriate materials and provided rich, fun learning experiences. The materials were well organized, easily accessible, and labeled to encourage self-help, and they offered children different levels of difficulty. Art and music activities and blocks were set up at all times throughout the program day, including during outdoor free-play periods.

Children were given the opportunity to explore from a variety of centers (e.g., cutting fruit for a fruit salad, cutting paper at the art table, putting puzzles pieces together, or playing in the dramatic play area). The dramatic play area had many dress-up clothes of various ethnicities and

in nonstereotypic ways, enabling children to carry out meaningful play with roles. The science and nature center had a selection of living things including fish, plants, and caterpillars. The collection of natural objects included insects, pumpkins, bones, and shells. There was a variety of activities, books, games and toys available to the children. The earlier portion of the day focused on child-directed activities, encouraging the children to engage in learning experiences that interested them. A child might begin coloring at a small table prepared with art materials, while another might decide to play in the block center or read quietly.

Staff then directed children to story time, where teachers asked questions and promoted discussion with the children. After story time, children went outdoors for free play, for which a variety of gross motor equipment was available (e.g., large climbing structures, tricycles, balls). The large playground area included the climbing structure area, a large sandbox, a shaded grassy area, and cement areas for bike riding and ball play. The portable equipment included a playhouse, several water tables, different levels of bikes (pedals and push), and balls.

Following hand washing, children were provided with lunch at small-group tables. Meals were well balanced and provided an opportunity for pleasant interactions between children and teachers. The staff sat at the tables with children, and discussions were observed both between children and between teachers and children. The meal was used as an opportunity to encourage interaction. Staff then transitioned children to brushing their teeth.

After the afternoon's activities, which included nap time, additional free play, and small- and large-group activities, children were prepared for their departure.

The observed classrooms were rich in developmentally appropriate books, pictures, and communication activities. The books included a selection of science (animals and insects), facts (the body), culture (Spanish and Hawaiian), classroom activities (pumpkins), and themes (Halloween). In addition, there was a large selection of books available in Spanish. Throughout the day, teachers conversed individually with children and encouraged them to talk. Ample materials to stimulate communication were also present, including puppets in the reading area, props in the dramatic-play area, and small animals and figures in the block area. Staff also talked about logical relationships throughout the day (e.g., the teacher pointed out different sizes and colors of fruits and asked children to recall various activities). Because of the many activities, teachers had ample opportunities to interact with children in a supportive manner throughout the day. Staff were observed listening attentively to children and responding sympathetically as appropriate. Discipline, when needed, was provided in a nonpunitive manner, usually in the form of a redirection to a different activity.

## **Curriculum and Instructional Approach**

Rather than using a single commercially available curriculum, the Westside Children's Center incorporates aspects of several formal curricula, such as High/Scope, Creative Curriculum, and Reggio Emilio, into each classroom's daily activity plan. Staff set goals for each child and base their lesson plans on individual needs. For example, if a child needs more help with language skills, teachers work individually with that child and tailor activities to support the child in that area. According to the program director, "Children learn by getting engaged with materials and by the relationships they develop with their teachers." Through observation, teachers gauge children's interest in and understanding of various topics as a basis for planning and developing activities. For example, a child might ask a question about caterpillars and what they eat during group time. The teacher subsequently plan activities related to this interest (e.g., discussing the

diet of a caterpillar or playing games related to caterpillars). These types of child-initiated themes may last for a day or for several weeks, depending on the extent of the children's interest.

Teachers have flexibility in developing lesson plans and activities, within the framework of the program's philosophy and curricular approach. The teachers use their creative freedom and autonomy in the classroom to implement activities that interest children. One teacher noted that the classroom theme for Christmas was to create ornaments. For her particular class, she decided to include the idea of nature with ornament making. She wanted to go beyond what the classroom could provide. She had the children collect leaves, twigs, and branches from outside. From these materials, the children made angel ornaments. Other teachers used cereal for this activity. This teacher stated, "We all have the same theme, but different approaches. Everyone is different and we can be creative." In addition to enjoying a high level of independence, classroom teachers have the opportunity to work together during weekly team meetings to discuss ideas and plan developmentally appropriate activities.

Assessment is a critical component of helping to prepare children for kindergarten. Westside Children's Center staff complete the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) for each child twice per year. Since 70% of the program funding comes from the State Department of Education Title V, assessments are required. The first assessment is conducted within the first 30 days of enrollment and includes observational notes. Teachers conduct regular classroom observations of children that are incorporated into each individual profile. The individual profiles are shared with parents every six months. The program uses the DRDP data and observations to develop a summary of the child's progress, strengths, and needs for continued growth. The DRDP data also are used to plan curriculum and individual activities. The program considers the needs of the group and the individual child, and works hard to find a balance that can accommodate both (e.g., often using small groups to support children who need extra support in specific areas).

### **The High/Scope Curriculum**

Created in the early 1960s, the High/Scope curriculum was originally devised as the curriculum that would be used in the now-famous High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, which has demonstrated striking long-term benefits of preschool for young children.

The curriculum has evolved over the years, but is grounded in five principles:

- *Active Learning.* Through active learning—having direct and immediate experiences and deriving meaning from them through reflection—young children construct knowledge that helps them make sense of their world.
- *Adult-Child Interaction.* Active learning depends on positive adult-child interactions.
- *Learning Environment.* The preschool environment should be planned carefully and appropriate materials should be selected.
- *Daily Routine.* Adults should plan a consistent daily routine that supports active learning. This includes a "plan-do-review" process, in which children help decide what they want to do, carry out the plans, and then review them. Small- and large-group activities are a regular part of the day.
- *Assessment.* Staff engage in team-based daily assessment of children, with findings fed back into instructional planning.

Source: Hohmann, M., & Weikart, D.P. (2002). *Educating young children: Active learning practices for preschool and child care programs*. Ypsilanti, MI. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation



## The Creative Curriculum

The Creative Curriculum is a curriculum and assessment system based on developmentally appropriate practices such as child initiation and choice, active learning, play, and hands-on materials. The curriculum is designed to be inclusive of English learners and children with disabilities, as well as children developing typically. It meets the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) criteria for effective curriculum and assessment, and is related directly to elementary school subject curricula.

The Creative Curriculum promotes early literacy skills in the following ways:

- Building a strong foundation in oral language (conversation, vocabulary, and listening skills)
- Providing developmentally appropriate phonological awareness activities (alliteration, rhyming, and letter sounds)
- Employing writing throughout the day (writing center, story dictation)
- Creating a print-rich environment (posters, reading center, labeling)

The assessment component of the Creative Curriculum system allows teachers to link the assessment results to the curriculum goals and guides them in helping each child reach those goals. By creating child progress and planning reports for families, teachers can use assessment information to involve families in their children's development.

Source: [http://www.teachingstrategies.com/pages/page.cfm?pg\\_section=preschool](http://www.teachingstrategies.com/pages/page.cfm?pg_section=preschool)

## Reggio Emilia

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood development originated in 1963, when the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy, opened a series of preschools built on popular initiative and community participation. This pedagogical and cultural project has spread across the globe, and is now the subject of much interest, research, and exchange between teachers, administrators, and other parties interested in and affected by early childhood education issues.

The approach is based on certain features that distinguish it from other approaches:

- *The participation of families.* The Community-Early Childhood Council, composed of parents, community members, teachers, staff and pedagogical coordinator, is responsible for promoting family participation.
- *The organization of the staff.* The values of collegiality, relationships, exchange, and coresponsibility are key to staff organization.
- *The importance given to the school environment.* The physical environment is organized to support the relationships and encounters between and among adults and children.
- *The atelier.* The project room offers opportunities for children to encounter to and explore a wide variety of materials and expressive languages.
- *The pedagogical-didactic coordinating team.* This team is composed of the director of education, the director of infant-toddler centers and preschools, and pedagogical coordinators from various centers, including one coordinator specifically responsible for children with special needs and their families. The team establishes the pedagogical guidelines and the organization of services, as well as coordinating staff and professional development initiatives.

Source: <http://www.reggiochildren.it>



## The Desired Results System

The California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Desired Results for Children and Families system as a method of evaluating the child care and development services offered through CDE. The system is designed as a way for practitioners to obtain information to help them improve the services they offer children and families.

A desired result is defined as a “condition of well-being” for families and children. There are six desired results for children and families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners.
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their children’s learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals.

Child care and early education practitioners use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to evaluate the extent to which children in their care are achieving the desired results for children. Each child is assessed by a trained provider at enrollment and at regular intervals thereafter, creating a picture of how the child’s development is progressing. Each behavior exhibited by the child is rated as “fully mastered,” “almost mastered,” “emerging,” or “not yet.” Teachers use this information to tailor activities to each child’s developmental needs.

Sources: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>;  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpinstructions.asp>

## School Readiness

The Westside Children’s Center is committed to supporting children’s readiness for school, with an emphasis on fostering their social and emotional development. Staff are focused on helping children develop positive, trusting relationships with one another and with teachers and the ability to function effectively in large groups as in a classroom setting.

To prepare children for kindergarten, staff also emphasize early literacy and math skills. During the site visit, teachers were observed reinforcing reading and reasoning skills with children. At group time, the children were able to discuss topics of interest openly. During this discussion, one child brought up caterpillars. At this point, the teacher directed children to the book on caterpillars. Below is the conversation during this time that reflects an example of pre-literacy and reasoning skills used between children and staff:

Teacher: Can someone get the caterpillar book and we can see what kind of food the caterpillar eats? (*The book is brought to the teacher in Spanish, and the children request that it be read in English. The teachers tells everyone that they will understand it. One child keeps asking for the book to be read in English. The teacher tells him that he knows Spanish and asks him to come to the front of the class and translate the book for everyone. They go over the book in the following manner.*)

Teacher: What is happening on this page?

Child 1: The caterpillar is going to the sun to get food.

Teacher: What about here?

Child 1: He is starting to go into the sun.

Teacher: So what did the caterpillar eat on Monday?

Child 1: Apples.

Teacher: How many?

Children: One.

Teacher: So what did the caterpillar eat on Tuesday?

Child 2: Pear.

Child 2: How many?

Children: Two. (*This questioning is continued for the rest of the week.*)

Teacher: (*Shows a picture of the caterpillar after he has eaten lots of cakes and pies.*) What do you think the caterpillar will look like after eating all of that food?

Child 1: He will be big...his tummy hurts.

Teacher: Why?

Child 1: Because he ate too much.

Teacher: (*Flips to the next page.*) What is he turning into here?

Child 2: Butterfly.

Teacher: What can you tell me about this butterfly?

Child 2: Colorful.

Teacher: Anything else?

Child 2: It can fly.

In addition, the program helps children get ready for school by considering each child's individual needs. For example, if the children are ready for more advanced math, teachers combine math activities into the song or circle time. The teaching staff incorporate many skills into the daily activities instead of drilling the information into the children. For example, the children are grouped for activities by the shapes they have chosen. The art work displayed in the classroom included shapes, letters, alphabet, colors, names, and dictation about the art in Spanish and English. During free play, a teacher was using playing cards with children that matched colors and shapes. The director noted, "Children develop at different rates...very individualized here. We look at what stages children go through and what level can we introduce concepts."

School readiness efforts also benefit from a partnership between the Westside Children's Center and the local schools. Westside Children's Center works with local schools to ensure that children are ready for kindergarten and to expose them to skills essential for success. According to the program director, "[We] have children ready to transition to kindergarten. [We] talk to teachers in local kindergartens and look at their curriculum. Schools give us a list of what they want and we try to include it in our programs." The preschool learns about kindergarten teachers' expectations for incoming students—knowledge that helps ease the transition to public school for both children and families. The program includes these standards in their curriculum to ensure transitional success.

Parents commented about how the program provided their children with skills to succeed in school. Families specifically mentioned how the program enhanced children's growth in literacy, math, and social and emotional areas. One mother felt that, as a result of having attended Westside Children's Center, her child was better prepared for kindergarten than were children who did not attend the center. "At one school, my daughter was not learning anything. Now

since she is here she has learned colors, shapes, ABC's, and she's very socialized." Another parent said, "My son makes the color connection while driving 'Daddy look at the yellow car!' We play games to see who can find the orange car first. My child is growing and learning." The parents stated that their children are becoming more independent and are willing to do things on their own. Others noted their children are using their excess energy for learning activities and are able to use words instead of getting upset.

### **Serving California's Diverse Population**

The Westside Children's Center serves primarily Latino children, with 20% of the remaining population being white, African-American, and other ethnic groups. For children who are English learners, the staff allow the children to speak the language they are comfortable with, but always reinforce with English so children become familiar with the pronunciation and meaning. The program also provides reading materials in a child's primary language. The director reported that communicating with a child on an individual basis in English and his or her primary language is a priority along with having bilingual staff. Since many of the staff are bilingual, instruction is delivered primarily in English, with translation into Spanish as needed. The program director commented about her staff and their ability to work with English learners, "Eighty percent of my teachers are Latino and are bilingual. They understand their cultural background and try to include [that] in the curriculum. They can speak the same language, can create good relationship with the children, and partnerships with the parents."

By far, most of the children who are English learners are from Spanish speaking families, but there are a number of children whose primary language is other than Spanish. The program calls on parents and volunteers for children whose primary language, such as French, is not spoken by staff. Staff strive to ensure basic communication with all English-learner children by using key phrases as well as nonverbal hand gestures and visuals. They also use translation equipment at parent meetings to conduct simultaneous translation.

Teachers view this type of program as a great model for children's growth. Many of the children who entered the program only speaking Spanish are now speaking English and many other children who entered only speaking English are now speaking Spanish. Children are being exposed to both languages. Parents see their children learning both English and Spanish as beneficial. Parents provided some examples of how they felt their children's needs were being met. "Most kids are bilingual. My son [is] now speaking English, through songs, games. They are learning the names of things like animals. They are helping them to learn English and Spanish."

In addition to serving some English learners, the program serves several children with disabilities and other special needs. For children with language delays or learning disabilities, the program has made special accommodations. The teaching staff work with these children one-on-one and include them in every activity. Depending on their needs, the teachers explain items more clearly or speak more slowly if necessary. When a child needs more assistance, they refer him or her to a specialist or a social worker to help modify the curriculum and provide the staff with guidance. One parent noted that she was informed by a teacher that her child might have a speech delay and referred to a trained professional who could provide more information on assessing the child for services. The parent was very appreciative of the notification and assistance.

A number of accommodations are made for children with disabilities or special needs. For example, Westside Children's Center provides modified types of activities, additional assistance

or support from a trained professional, and behavior management for some of its children. On the day of the site visit, social worker interns were observed working with children at the play dough table, focused on helping children understand feelings of empathy. They helped children share with each other, understand the feelings of others, express their own feelings, and resolve conflicts.

### About the Program Director and Teachers

The Westside Children’s Center staff include the program director, site supervisor, nine teaching staff, and three other support staff. The program director holds a bachelor’s and master’s degree in human development and education administration with six years of early childhood education (ECE) with this program. The program director and the site supervisor supervise the nine teachers; three have a bachelor’s degree, five have an associate’s degree, and one has some college classes. They also supervise the interns from the local college who rotate through the classrooms on a daily basis. The social worker interns work with the children on behavior issues and helping them understand feelings of empathy.

To ensure that the Westside Children’s Center provides high-quality services, the program director oversees program funding so that staff are adequately compensated and given opportunities for professional development. She also encourages program collaborations with community agencies and stays informed about statewide issues in early childhood education.

The program director articulated the importance of having teaching staff with relevant cultural backgrounds and adequate professional development as critical characteristics in providing a high-quality preschool experience. By having similar cultural backgrounds, the teaching staff are able to relate to children and families both in ways of learning and life. Professional development is an important element in motivating staff to remain current with learning styles and approaches. Maintaining a high-quality preschool can be challenging, but according to the program director hiring the right staff and valuing them is key. Most importantly, it is important to encourage all the teachers to be a part of the improvement process and to allow their ideas to be heard.

<b>Exhibit 3. Staff Information</b>	
Number of teachers	9
Gender	100% female
Ethnicity	7 Latino, 1 Asian, and 1 white
Number of Spanish-speaking teachers	5
Highest education level of teachers:	
High school	0
Some college	1
A.A. degree	5
B.A./B.S. degree or higher	3
Currently working toward degree	6
Years of experience in the early childhood field (average and range)	Average 9.5 years; range 2 to 25 years
Years spent working in the program (average and range)	Average 4.4 years; range 1 to 13 years

This program uses in-house training as a strategy to promote the professional development of its teaching staff. Within the past year, staff received trainings on topics covering a wide range of issues including child development, behavioral issues, conflict resolution, communicating with families, family involvement, and strategies for working with children with disabilities or special needs. On site staff development is offered on a continuous basis, including regular staff meetings. Lead teachers receive trainings once a month and other teachers receive trainings quarterly. In addition to in-house training, teachers have paid time off to attend conferences and workshops. The program tries to cover the costs of travel and conference fees depending on budget constraints. In some cases, for teachers who are working toward their bachelor's degree, the program allows them to leave early for class. The teachers also have onsite access to ECE resources including books, magazines, and videos, along with access to technology for researching ECE. Overall, the teachers rated their program as "excellent" in areas of teacher-to-child ratio, quality of indoor and outdoor space, and the ability to work with parents with differing English proficiency.

Creating a friendly and safe environment for the staff has contributed in many ways to the low staff turn over. During the teacher focus group, many of the teachers commented about the relationships they have formed at this program. One teacher commented, "This is my second home. The friendship [is created] between the director and the other teachers. We can talk to other teachers. I feel very happy to be here. I really love this place." Many of the teachers gave is type of response to the question why they chose to work at this program.

### **Parent Involvement and Other Family Support**

Parents are involved in the program in a number of ways, including working in the classroom, participating on the Parent Advisory Committee, and attending or volunteering at special events (e.g., family nights and holiday celebrations). Westside Children's Center maintains an open-door policy for parents, who can visit and volunteer in the program at any time that is convenient for them. One parent summarized the attitude of program staff regarding parent involvement: "I can go to the classroom anytime I want—they have an open door policy." The program conducts events and trainings in the evenings or on weekends, when most families can attend. They also provide an opportunity for parents to be more actively involved in planning and governance by assisting in the teacher hiring process, program evaluation, and strategic planning, and by participating in legislative advocacy.

Parent conferences are held every six months at the center to inform parents about how their children are doing and what activities can be done at home to assist in their learning. Teachers provide parents with appropriate reading materials and at-home activities that will help in promoting growth. At this time, teachers also share assessment data with parents. However, when a teacher has concerns about a child's developmental progress, the teacher contacts the parent(s) immediately rather than waiting until the parent-teacher conference.

During the focus group, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the program, describing ways in which it supported their children and entire family. Several parents explained what attracted them to the Westside Children's Center in the first place, including the low teacher-to-child ratio, the individual instruction, the learning of both English and Spanish, and the high-quality education. Another parent praised the Westside Children's Center's enthusiasm for sharing different cultures with the children. She visited the classroom and explained to the children about Kwanzaa, while another parent talked about Las Posadas. Another parent talked

about the huge celebrations the program offers for families during Thanksgiving. Several parents had attended other preschools before enrolling their children in the Westside Children's Center. One parent explained, "My son was at another school, he didn't learn anything. But here he is learning Spanish. I am Spanish, but do not speak Spanish at home. His social skills are improving so much." Another parent selected the Westside Children's Center because of its environment and the freedom children have to explore, play, and learn. He said, "My stepson is using [his] words, focusing more energy on activities. He goes home and teaches me what he learns at school. Now he is less frustrated and can use words." Overwhelmingly, parents were highly appreciative of the Westside Children's Center and reported they would strongly recommend the program to others.

## **Conclusion**

The Westside Children's Center is characterized by a number of attributes of a high-quality preschool program. First, Westside Children's Center blends three curricula and allows substantial teacher creativity in implementing activities. The program uses interest centers from Creative Curriculum; planning, questioning, and reviewing techniques from High/Scope; and student-direction and experiential learning from Reggio Emilo. The program also uses assessment to create both individualized and group lesson plans. Second, Westside Children's Center works with the local elementary schools to learn what will be expected of their preschoolers at kindergarten entry. The partnership with local schools provides improved communication, smoother transition for children to kindergarten, and curricular alignment between preschool and kindergarten. Families also feel more comfortable with the transition into elementary school, given the interaction between the preschool and kindergarten. Westside Children's Center's approach to English learners encourages use of English while respecting and supporting use of Spanish. Along with working with English learners, the staff are able to accommodate and fully include children with disabilities and other special needs. Fourthly, the teaching staff are from backgrounds similar to those of the children and can relate to and communicate with children and their parents. Several teachers are highly educated and experienced; others are encouraged and supported to continue their education.

Finally, parents are actively involved in classroom, events, and planning and governance decisions. Overwhelmingly, the comments of parents in the focus groups indicated a high level of satisfaction with the program. They felt strongly that the preschool was helping to prepare their children for success in kindergarten, in addition to providing a warm and safe environment. Family members also praised the individualized approach to program services, emphasized by staff as a key component of their approach to quality.

When asked to identify strategies to support the implementation of the Preschool for All initiative in California, the director emphasized the need to spread the word about the importance of providing preschool for all children. She emphasized that when that message is understood, people will be more willing to pay for the cost of providing education and support to our youngest children, our future.



## Appendix A

### Methodology for First 5 Special Study of High-Quality Preschools

Case studies are a particularly good way to explore new programs because they can provide in-depth descriptions of program operations and the history of decision making, highlight some of the conditions that facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of program activities, and suggest directions for future exploration. The case study format includes direct quotes from program directors, teachers, and parents to capture their voices and perspectives, which give life to a simple program description. Case studies are not substitutes for careful quantitative assessments of program effectiveness, but they can help answer some of the questions that inevitably arise about quantitative studies—questions about why certain outcomes emerged or how program operations changed over time.

However, the case study approach also has some limitations. Case studies are selective, often based on a single visit to a site. This means that the activities observed on that day and the opinions expressed by those interviewed may not capture the activities and opinions of all who are involved in the program over the course of a year or more. Further, case studies are filtered through the lens of those conducting the visits, and different visitors might highlight different program activities or reach somewhat different conclusions. Nevertheless, we believe that the case study approach has considerable merit in providing insights into program services, delivery, and strategies, and in helping to bring to life the experiences of children and families in preschool programs.

#### Research Staff

SRI International (SRI) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted the First 5 Special Study of High-Quality Preschools. A total of six individuals participated in the site visits to the preschool programs. In August 2004, all members of the site-visit team participated in a three-day training on the use of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R).<sup>40</sup> Team members also participated in training at SRI which included an overview of the study, site-visit preparation materials, site-visit procedure materials (e.g., interview protocols and best practice checklists), and site-visit follow-up materials (e.g., case study template and issue brief topics). Team meetings and conference calls were conducted with team members throughout the data collection process.

#### Selection of Sites

Twelve preschool programs were selected as case study sites after a careful screening process to assure that programs were of high quality. Sites were nominated for participation in the study by several methods:

- Nominations by County Commissions
- Review of Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP) data
- Review of programs highlighted in First 5 California's Preschool for All: Step-by-Step Planning Guide and Toolkit.

Each nominated site was required to meet at least one of the following criteria for selection:

- Accredited by or applying for accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (NAEYC accreditation criteria include interactions among teachers and children, curriculum, relationships among teachers and families, staff qualifications and professional development, administration, staffing, physical environment, health and safety, nutrition and food services, and evaluation.)
- Funded as a Head Start program.
- Holds a state Title V contract.
- Received a score of 5 or higher on the ECERS-R. Many programs use this instrument to evaluate the quality of their services.
- Set a goal of hiring teachers with at least a bachelor's degree.
- Encourages parent participation explicitly.
- Uses a defined curriculum for early childhood development.
- Serves high-risk children.

A total of twenty-one (21) preschool programs were nominated for participation in the study. Then, each of the 21 nominated sites was carefully screened to ensure it met at least one of the criteria listed above. Following this initial screening, 16 preschool programs were selected for follow-up screening with the ECERS-R to ensure that programs were of high quality. The ECERS-R is described below.

#### **Exhibit A-1. Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R)**

The ECERS-R is a recent revision of the ECERS, which was the first in a series of rating scales development by Harms, Clifford, and Cryer. Widely used for a number of years, the ECERS has become one of the standards in the field, offering useful benchmarks for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. The ECERS has good predictive validity, with studies showing that ECERS scores are related to children's development.<sup>41, 42</sup> The ECERS-R provides an overall picture of the surroundings created for the children and adults who share an early childhood setting and examines the developmental appropriateness of classroom practices, including the activities, materials, equipment, interactions, supervision, organization, and scheduling.

The ECERS-R is designed to be used in classroom-based care settings for children ages 2½ to 5 years. The ECERS-R contains 43 items in seven subscale areas: personal care routines (greeting/departing, meals/snacks, nap/rest, diapering/toileting, health and safety practices); space and furnishing (furnishings for routine care, learning, and relaxation, room arrangement, outdoor space); language-reasoning (understanding language, using language, reasoning, informal language, books and pictures); activities (fine motor activities and supervision, gross motor space, equipment, time, and supervision, creative activities including art, music/movement, blocks, sand/water, dramatic play, schedule, and supervision); interaction (quality of interactions between teachers and children, discipline practices, interactions among children, general supervision) program structure (daily schedule, free play, group time, cultural awareness, tone, provisions for exceptional children and those with disabilities or other special needs); and parents and staff (adult personal area, adults opportunities, adult meeting area, provisions for parents).<sup>43</sup> Each scale has additional subscales, with multiple items that must be passed to achieve a given score. Each subscale is rated on a seven-point scale from inadequate (1) or minimal (3) to good (5) and excellent (7). The ECERS-R is administered by trained observers.

ECERS-R screenings to assess the quality of each of the 16 selected preschool programs were conducted by research team members during one-day site visits between October 2004 and December 2004. The research team reviewed the ECERS-R assessment results and selected the final sample of 12 preschool programs for participation in the First 5 Special Study of High-Quality Preschools.

In order to ensure that sites participating in the study were of high quality, all selected sites were required to receive a score of 5 or higher on six of the seven ECERS-R subscales, an indicator of quality ranging from “Good” to “Excellent.” Half of the selected preschool sites (six of 12) received a score of 5 or higher on all seven ECERS-R subscales.

Although this was not a criterion for selection, the programs selected provide variation in geography (northern, central, and southern California) and population density (rural, suburban, and urban).

### **Data Collection**

Site-visit teams, consisting of two individuals, visited each preschool program for two days. Typically, one staff member acted as the lead and point person for communication during and after the visit with that site, but all researchers took detailed written notes of observations and interviews, using a consistent set of interview, focus group, and observation protocols. When permission was granted, photos were taken to document site and program activities. Site visits were conducted over a 2½ -month period, from December 9, 2004, to February 23, 2005.

Four primary approaches were used to collect data for this report: telephone and in-person interviews before, during, or after site visits; focus groups during site visits; program observations during site visits; and surveys of program directors and teachers.

### **Data Analysis**

After the site visits were completed, team members assembled their notes from the interviews, observations, and focus groups, as well as program director and teacher survey data, and began a series of discussions and conversations designed to elicit the main themes that they felt were present in the individual site visits and across site visits as a whole. Research team members also carefully crafted a written case study for each site. Results of this analysis process are presented in two primary sets of documents:

***Case Study reports.*** Each case study report provides information useful to the preschool program featured in the study as well as to State and County Commissions planning for the Preschool for All initiative. Each case study was reviewed by preschool program staff at the site, and where needed, revisions were made to clarify points or add more information.

***Issue Briefs.*** A set of separate documents highlights topics of interest from this special study. Issue brief topics include the importance of parent involvement, use of preschool curricula, costs of implementing a high-quality preschool program, and implications for the Preschool for All initiative.

For additional information or to obtain copies of Case Study reports or Issue Briefs, contact SRI International via e-mail at [prop10questions@sri.com](mailto:prop10questions@sri.com).



## Appendix B

### Summary of Observation of the with the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R)

The programs were assessed in November and December 2004, with the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R). The ECERS-R score for each category and the total score for the class(es) assessed were calculated and provided to the individual programs. If more than one classroom was assessed, the scores for the classrooms were averaged. It is important to bear in mind that the score for any individual item or category is far less important than the overall score because it is the overall score that is related to positive child development. It is also important to remember that this information is based only on one day of observation; therefore, it may not represent typical conditions or practices of the program.

The original ECERS, published in 1980, has “a long history of research demonstrating that quality as measured by the ECERS has good predictive validity.”<sup>40</sup> The reliability and validity of the revised version used for this evaluation have been extensively tested. The scale’s 43 items are divided into 7 categories, which gather information about key aspects of preschool programs that relate to program quality: (1) Space and Furnishings, (2) Personal Care Routines, (3) Language-Reasoning, (4) Activities, (5) Interaction, (6) Program Structure, and (7) Parents and Staff. Only a subset of the items from the seventh category, Parents and Staff, were used for this assessment. The attributes assessed by the items in each category are summarized below.

*Space and Furnishings.* The items in this category rate the quality of the indoor and outdoor spaces used by the children such as the amount of space, its accessibility to people with disabilities and other special needs, its state of repair, and its cleanliness and comfortableness. This category also assesses the furniture in the room, the arrangement of the room and of the materials available for children, the decoration of the walls, and the equipment available for gross motor play.

*Personal Care Routines.* The items in this category assess issues related to health and safety. Some examples of topics assessed are hand washing, the quality of meals and snacks, staff monitoring of children’s arrival and departure, and the general safety of the spaces accessible to children in the program.

*Language-Reasoning.* This category examines the reading and communication materials available to children and the literacy activities teachers create for the children. Also assessed is how well teachers use their interactions with children as opportunities to expand children’s thinking and develop their reasoning skills.

*Activities.* Items in this category assess the amount, age appropriateness, quality, accessibility, and diversity of the materials available for children to use with specific activities. Several specific types of materials are examined, including those for fine motor activities, art, music/movement, blocks, sand/water, dramatic play, nature/science, math/number, and TV/videos/computers.

*Interaction.* These items rate the quality of the interactions between teachers and children to determine whether interactions are positive, supportive, and used to help children develop skills and learn concepts. Also included in this category are items that assess discipline practices and interactions among children.

*Program Structure.* The items in this category focus primarily on the schedules that programs follow. Included are questions such as the following: Is there a basic daily schedule that is followed? Do children have enough free-play time when they can choose their own activities? How much of the day do children spend in whole-group gatherings? Also included in this category are items regarding special provisions that may be made in the class for children with disabilities and other special needs.

*Parents and Staff.* Items in this category are used to determine the types of support and materials made available by the program for parents of children in the program and for staff members.

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