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

Year 4 San Francisco Report

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First 5 San Francisco

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Introduction

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted a four-year joint process evaluation, which began in December of 2005, to assess the implementation of Preschool for All (PFA) in San Francisco and San Mateo Counties. First 5 San Francisco and the San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) are serving as the PFA administrating body in each county, respectively. The process evaluation was designed to investigate and document the implementation and the preliminary impacts of PFA on children, families, providers, and the community.

The Year 4 report for San Francisco County summarizes the evaluation activities conducted in the last year of the process evaluation, which included interviews with a random sample of PFA providers. This final report also offers a cumulative look at the major findings that emerged over the course of the four-year study.

Overview of PFA in San Francisco County

The long-term goal of PFA in San Francisco County is to make high quality preschool available to all four-year-old children by building upon the current early care and education system of public and private providers. PFA is a voluntary part-day program for four-year-old children provided at no cost to families, regardless of income. PFA funds are used to create new preschool spaces and to upgrade classrooms in existing programs.

PFA funds are meant to enhance program quality and must supplement (not supplant) costs already covered by other public funds. PFA must consist of at least 3 hours of preschool experience for 175 days or at least 2.14 hours for 245 days. Allowable expenditures are those ordinary and necessary expenses directly benefiting or resulting from the PFA program operations, including, but not limited to:

- Parent fee offset;
- Compensation for staff in PFA classrooms (including salary and benefits);
- Substitute pay;
- Staff training/professional development related to the PFA program (including tuition and expenses for college courses);
- Equipment, supplies and other materials for the PFA program, including some facility upgrades to meet some Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)/Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) requirements;
- Field trips; and
- Enrichment activities (e.g., music, dance, science, computer education)

In March 2004, San Francisco voters passed Proposition H, a Charter Amendment, which declared: “It shall be the policy of the City and County of San Francisco to provide all four-year-old children who are City residents the opportunity to attend preschool, and it shall be the goal of

the people in adopting this measure to do so no later than September 1, 2009.”¹ Approved by 71% of the electorate, the measure reserved \$3.3 million for Year 1 (2005-2006) with funding increasing annually until appropriations reach \$20 million annually between 2009-2010 and 2014-2015, from the City General Fund’s Public Education Enrichment Fund. Proposition H designated First 5 San Francisco as the body responsible for planning and implementation of the PFA initiative. First 5 San Francisco formed a Planning Advisory Committee to develop a plan for the design of PFA and its implementation. Based on an assessment of preschool need and capacity, four zip codes were selected in San Francisco to begin PFA implementation in 2005-2006. Additional neighborhoods have been added each year until PFA becomes universal in 2009.² An overview of the PFA program of San Francisco County is provided in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1. San Francisco PFA Implementation Details

San Francisco	
Lead Agency	First 5 San Francisco
Funding Base	Local county tax funds (Prop H); First 5 California.
Program Quality	The point of entry-level score on the Environment Rating Scale for providers is a rating of "4.5," which is obtained by averaging all 43 indicators of the ECERS or averaging all 40 indicators of the FDCRS.
Teacher Qualifications	Lead teachers must have a Child Development Teacher Permit or be eligible and have an application pending, with the goal of BA by 2010.
Target Programs	Primarily focused on existing programs, though some new spaces have been created.
Type of Demonstration Sites	Licensed, publicly funded (federal Head Start, state Title V State Preschool, and General Child Care) and private centers and family child care homes.
Reimbursement Rate	Maximum reimbursement: \$5,450/per child per year (for unsubsidized programs with a BA/24 ECE unit lead teacher); free to families.
Launch Date for Services	September 2005
Age Cut-Off for Enrollment in Preschool	4-year-olds by December 2, exceptions for older children with special needs.
Existing School Readiness Assessment at Kindergarten Entry	Brigance used at kindergarten entry in San Francisco Unified School District. Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF) used in the fall of 2007 on a random sample of children throughout San Francisco at kindergarten entry. KOF will be administered again in the fall of 2009.

In 2008-2009, First 5 San Francisco contracted with 41 agencies to administer PFA, serving approximately 2,400 children in 177 classrooms at 101 different sites. Overall, San Francisco’s PFA delivery system includes family child care providers, private, tuition-based programs, and

¹ San Francisco City Charter SEC. 16.123-2. Public Education Enrichment Fund.

² Prior to 2008-09, family eligibility for PFA was dependent on zip code of residence, and only providers primarily serving children from the target zip codes participated in the program. In 2008-09, zip code restrictions were lifted, and any eligible San Francisco child and qualifying San Francisco provider could participate in the PFA system.

programs supported with public funds. In addition, PFA offers resources and supports to providers, such as technical assistance, training, outreach and enrollment support, career counseling, and monitoring.

PFA Funding Criteria

PFA programs must adhere to specific criteria in order to receive funds.³ The following list provides an overview of the major funding criteria. In general, San Francisco PFA programs must:

- Be in compliance with California Community Care Licensing regulations,
- Meet PFA teacher qualifications,
- Meet a minimum score on the ECERS-R or FDCRS, as evaluated by San Francisco State University – Gateway to Quality,
- Implement a curriculum that meets PFA criteria,
- Offer a family involvement and support program that meets PFA criteria,
- Meet group size requirements and staff-child ratios,
- Use the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R), from the California Department of Education, twice per year to assess children’s progress, and
- Comply with other reporting requirements, including collecting and submitting data on PFA children and families.

Process Evaluation Approach

AIR’s conceptual framework for the design of the process evaluation is a “research to practice continuous feedback loop,” in which emerging findings are shared first with First 5 San Francisco, SMCOE and First 5 San Mateo, and then disseminated to PFA sites and other key stakeholders to help continuously improve aspects of PFA implementation and program quality. Specifically, the four-year project addressed ten major research questions:

1. How accessible is PFA to children and families (especially those that are low income) and providers?
2. What PFA services are children and families using?
3. What is the frequency, intensity, and duration of services? Who is being served?
4. How does PFA implementation vary across sites? What are the strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement for PFA implementation?
5. Are existing systems (e.g., public schools, community-based organizations, and other community institutions/agencies) and funding leveraged and enhanced?
6. What are the relationships among and the roles of PFA partners? How effective are these relationships in managing PFA?
7. Is program quality improved among PFA providers?

³ The complete list of funding criteria can be found at <http://www.first5sf.org/pfa.htm>

8. How is the PFA early childhood workforce changing (e.g., education, salary, diversity)?
9. Are parents satisfied with PFA?
10. Are children in PFA ready for kindergarten?

Overview of the Evaluation Approach: Years 1 through 4

In Year 1 of the four-year evaluation, AIR conducted a qualitative study to document the implementation of PFA in each county in its first full program year, identify factors that facilitated implementation and challenges faced by PFA program administrators, providers, and partner agencies, and make recommendations to enhance the PFA system as the initiative was expanded. Qualitative information was gathered from three respondent groups: 1) PFA providers, 2) representatives from PFA partner agencies, and 3) directors of “non-PFA” preschool programs (potentially eligible programs that did not participate in PFA during the 2005-2006 program year).

The Year 2 study included a continued investigation of PFA implementation issues based on the perspectives of PFA program directors and other staff, and, for the first time in the process evaluation, input from PFA parents. In addition, measurements of PFA classroom quality were conducted to augment the ECERS-R data. Three major research activities were designed and carried out: 1) a program director survey, 2) parent focus groups in English, Spanish, and Cantonese, and 3) observations of PFA classrooms using two tools: the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, R., La Paro, K., & Hamre, B., 2008) and the literacy subscale of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Expanded (ECERS-E; Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B., 2003).

Year 3 of the evaluation was designed to explore PFA program implementation from the perspectives of teachers, as well as investigate county-specific issues. A teacher survey was administered to all lead teachers in San Francisco County to gather information regarding PFA teachers’ job satisfaction, professional development, classroom activities and routines, instructional planning, services for children with special needs, parent education activities, family involvement activities, linguistically and culturally responsive practices, transition to kindergarten, PFA support services, the perceived impact of PFA, and providers’ recommendations for improving the PFA system.

In addition to the Year 3 teacher survey, separate activities were carried out in each county. In San Francisco, AIR conducted classroom observations using the CLASS in a random sample of all PFA programs and a sample of classrooms that were assessed in Year 2, in order to detect change over time. In addition, AIR administered the LISn, the Language Interaction Snapshot, in conjunction with the CLASS. The LISn is designed to capture the frequency and type of talk among teachers and other adults in the classroom and English language learners.

Year 4 of the study was designed to gather information regarding the significant impacts of PFA over the course of the initiative. To this end, AIR conducted phone interviews with a random sample of PFA providers in San Francisco County.

Exhibit 2. Overview of PFA Process Evaluation Approach

Evaluation Year	Evaluation Activities
Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews with PFA program directors, partner agencies, and directors of “non-PFA” programs
Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program Director Survey• Classroom observations using the CLASS and ECERS-E• Parent Focus Groups
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher Survey• Classroom observations using the CLASS and the LISn
Year 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews with PFA program directors, site supervisors, and family child care providers

Year 4 Evaluation Methodology

AIR staff conducted interviews in the spring of 2009. A random sample of 29 PFA providers, at the site level, was selected to participate in the interviews. Four family child care (FCC) providers, 18 site supervisors, and 7 program directors participated in the conversations with AIR staff. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and qualitative analysis was conducted to identify common themes across provider responses.

Discussions with providers began with broad questions regarding the global impact of PFA on programs, followed by more focused conversations related to how the initiative has influenced various aspects of programming, including adult-child interactions, teaching strategies, teacher turnover, and classroom quality. In addition, feedback from providers on the various components of the PFA system, including the Gateway to Quality assessment process, the PFA funding enhancement, and PFA-funded support services and technical assistance (TA) was gathered. Providers also offered recommendations for the future of PFA in the county. This report summarizes the information from the Year 4 interviews, in the context of findings from previous years of the study.

Impacts of PFA Participation

Interviewers asked PFA providers to reflect on the most significant changes to their program as a result of participating in the PFA system. The most common responses included access to professional development opportunities, enhanced classroom settings, PFA support services, offset of parent fees, and additional classroom staff.

Access to Professional Development Opportunities. The most common response – from about half of the 29 providers interviewed – focused on increased access to high-quality professional

development opportunities sponsored by PFA. One director said, “I think one of the biggest changes [due to PFA] is the teachers – we have more opportunities for training. PFA offers a variety of trainings, almost monthly. And not just the master teacher, but the assistant teacher can also go. The assistants feel empowered because they feel they are learning and teaching children, too.” Another director reported, “All that professional development, planning time...when I say professional development, it is in-house as well as on weekends and offered to all my staff available. It’s really changed my school, and helped us meet the high standards to move towards the 21st century.”

On a similar note, several providers discussed the benefit of PFA funding to support staff participation in training, such as money for substitutes and stipends, and on-site team meetings. For example, a site supervisor noted, “We have a lot more staff development opportunities because funds are available to pay for them and [we are] also able to fund classroom team meetings. [In the past] the morning staff and afternoon staff were not able to come together that much for meetings about the children and curriculum. Now we can pay the afternoon person to come early so the whole classroom team is able to meet together. They can also pay for substitutes so somebody is watching the class while team meetings occur.”

First 5 San Francisco has increasingly expanded its training offerings to PFA staff. This growth has been reflected in the comments of providers across the four-year study. For example, in Year 1 a common theme across many PFA providers was the need for site-specific training. Staff from one program talked at length about trainings that were duplicative of previous workshops in which they had participated or were not applicable to their particular needs. A site supervisor recommended that sites have local control over the use of TA funds to hire consultants based on their unique circumstances. Another provider suggested that training should be centered on a set of themes, such as art or literacy, in order for participants to select topics that are most interesting and/or relevant to their programs. In Year 3, about a fifth of providers (21%) who provided responses to a survey question regarding the benefits of PFA described increased training opportunities as a result of the initiative. By Year 4, the vast majority of providers who participated in interviews spoke very positively about PFA’s training offerings, including the ability to use funds for site-specific needs.

Enhanced Classroom Settings. Another common response among providers in the Year 4 interviews regarding the most significant impacts of PFA focused on funding to improve the quality of classroom settings, including new or repaired furniture, materials, and resources, as well as more significant renovations (e.g., installing a new sink). About a third of the providers discussed the ways in which PFA funding has raised the quality of preschool environments. One site supervisor said, “of course, the financial resources are tremendous compared to the last year that I worked in a preschool program [before PFA]. I had \$200 for the whole year. So, that didn’t even buy papers or pencils.” Another site supervisor reflected on the emotional relief PFA funding provides, in addition to tangible improvements to the classroom: “I think the biggest impact – it is not the wonderful furniture I’ve been able to buy, not the great resources from First

5, all [of that is] really positive and helpful – it’s the idea I can relax and don’t have to pay as much from my own pocket as I used to. I don’t have to hoard materials. I can let go and relax and say ‘yes’; I can plan my curriculum and make choices about what to do and not be confined to what is available and what I can afford. I have a lot of leeway. It’s like having a weight lifted off your shoulders.” A few providers –three – specifically tied the improved classroom settings not only to funding, but to the ECERS-R assessments, conducted by Gateway to Quality to provide guidance regarding the elements of a high-quality preschool setting. As one site supervisor stated, the ECERS-R assessment “raised the bar” for the quality of their classroom environments.

Upgrades to PFA classrooms have consistently been one of the most significant and tangible results of PFA participation, based on feedback from providers. This was particularly true in Year 1 of the study, when providers received funding for the first time to purchase new materials, resources, and furniture, and remained true in Year 4, especially for those programs relatively new to the PFA system.

Access to PFA Support Services. About a fourth of the providers who were interviewed talked about the impact of PFA in terms of the support services it brought into the classroom. PFA funds Tree Frog Treks, a science enhancement program; a creative arts program known as Performing Arts Workshops; Raising a Reader, a parent/child reading program; and early childhood mental health consultants who work with PFA children and staff on a weekly basis. A site supervisor commented, “We have been exposed to a lot of outside resources that we weren’t even aware were there.” Other comments included: “Having the Raising a Reader, Tree Frog Treks and the Creative Movement program has been a wonderful opportunity for my kids. We have money and resources to do field trips now and to pay outside people with different specialties to come in – that has been really great.” Providers discussed how the classroom enhancements have “brought the curriculum to life” for children, and described how they were able to afford, for the first time, to bring speakers and presenters into the classroom to enrich the daily program.

A site supervisor said, “What I mainly see from PFA is Performing Arts and Tree Frog Treks. Those two programs coming to my site has great impact on children’s learning. Kids enjoy it very much. It’s nice for the kids to be able to experience expressing through body movement. For the teaching staff, they observe what’s going on and see the reactions kids have and they take pieces of those lessons and implement it in their teaching. For Tree Frog Treks, I took pictures of the whole process, how children engaged in the activity. I had a slide show and discussion with my teachers so they can see what’s happening. The main point was that when children are engaged there are no behavioral issues, when the lesson is well planned there are more learning opportunities and everybody gets more out of it.” Detailed feedback regarding specific PFA-funded support services, including Tree Frog Treks, is provided in subsequent sections of this report. In general, providers have reported a high level of satisfaction with PFA support services throughout the four-year study.

Reduced Parent Fees. Staff from five programs that included a parent fee talked specifically about the financial benefit of PFA for parents. One site supervisor reported, “We have always tried to provide low-cost or affordable preschool for our families and we have done a lot of fundraising for scholarships. One of the biggest changes for us is the ability to provide services without having to do a lot of fundraising for families.” Similarly, in the Year 3 teacher survey, in an open-ended question regarding the biggest impacts of PFA for parents, 32% of teachers emphasized how PFA has provided more families access to preschool. As one teacher noted, “This is seen as a huge advantage – the availability of quality care and education for children.”

Additional Classroom Staff. A handful of providers – four – indicated that one of the most significant impacts of PFA has been their ability to hire more teachers in the classroom: “The biggest difference is that we’re able to have extra staff on board in our older PFA classrooms, which has been helped by PFA funds. So we have been able to lower our number of kids per staff in that space.”

Benefits for Family Child Care Providers. Responses from family child care providers – four were interviewed in Year 4 – were not significantly different from those of center-based providers, although there was more of an emphasis on how PFA has helped “professionalize” their business. One family child care provider said, “What immediately comes to mind is being able to officially call myself a preschool, which I guess makes me seem more professional.” Family child care providers offered similar feedback throughout the PFA evaluation, beginning in Year 1, in which many FCC providers expressed pride regarding their participation in PFA. For example, in a Year 1 interview, a family child care provider commented, “I am proud that I am part of the program. I passed all the requirements. I feel good.” Another family child care provider said, “I think that PFA has made me be more established. Now I can say I have a preschool. I can say I am a PFA site and I can identify myself that way. Before I could only say that I had a day care or that I took care of kids. I didn’t like when people called me a babysitter. I feel like more of a professional working with PFA.”

PFA Impacts on Classroom Quality

One of the goals of PFA is to improve and maintain the quality of preschool services among the programs participating in the system. In the Year 4 interviews, respondents were asked specifically whether PFA has impacted classroom quality; virtually all of the providers indicated that it had increased the quality of their programming, although several staff emphasized that their program was already of high quality prior to participating in PFA. When asked to explain how PFA has improved classroom quality, the responses echoed comments regarding the most significant impacts of PFA. Namely, that PFA is influencing classroom quality through professional development opportunities for staff (12 of the 29 providers interviewed), followed by enhanced classroom settings (12 providers), and the provision of support services (7 providers). In general, these comments echo those heard in previous years of the evaluation, particularly the emphasis on PFA’s support of classroom upgrades. In Year 4, however,

providers focused more strongly on PFA-sponsored professional development, which reflects First 5 San Francisco's increasing investment in workforce development in the county.

A program director summarized the comments of many other providers, explaining how PFA has contributed to classroom quality improvement: "I think curriculum has improved in quality. The training has increased the skills of the teachers and the environment by accessing money and being able to make the actual physical changes [to the classroom]." A family child care provider said, "The area that I am most grateful for is the Performing Arts, Raising a Reader, the mental health consultants, and the Tree Frog Trek visits. Those are the best. I could never do or afford those classes on my own." A site supervisor said, "Teachers really try to implement what they learn in the trainings in the classroom. Especially what I've seen is science and art. There are more experiments going on than just science things on the shelves where you put a bunch of stuff and then just let the children play. I actually see science activities where someone comes in with animals – they have stories about them and pictures. The projects are longer and ongoing." Similar comments were made by a site supervisor: "It's easier to buy materials that are related to the theme that we're studying. We're supposed to be able to buy the stuff we need to properly use the theme – instead of just talking about caterpillars and butterflies we are able to buy them. It has created deeper educational opportunities for my students."

The impact of PFA on classroom quality appeared to vary by program characteristics. Smaller programs with fewer funding streams (as opposed to sites with multiple funding sources, such as Head Start, State Preschool, and/or foundation support), or those with recent staff changes, particularly turnover in the management, were more likely to cite significant impacts of PFA on their programming, compared to more established programs. For example, one provider talked about how PFA provided a support system for her and the staff to significantly overhaul the classroom environments, document curriculum and policies, and provide resources. She noted, "PFA has been really instrumental in helping us find our vision." In contrast, one program on the other end of the spectrum noted, "We always felt we were a high quality program [before joining PFA]. We feel PFA has acknowledged that. We have been used as a model for other programs to observe. We have been around 30 years...one of our concerns has been – would we still be able to do the things we wanted to do, and not be restricted? We don't feel restricted [because of PFA]. We have been given the freedom to continue [our program the way we want]."

Provider comments regarding the impact of PFA on classroom quality have been positive and consistent over the life for the evaluation. For example, in Year 3 of the study, in which a survey was distributed to all lead PFA teachers in the county, 80% or more of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that participation in PFA has improved the quality of their classroom environment, science instruction, and language and literacy instruction.

PFA Impacts on Adult-Child Interactions

The quality of adult-child interactions has been a focus of the PFA process evaluation through structured classroom observations conducted by AIR. Researchers have found that teacher-child relationships are positively related to children's language skills and reading competence (Mashburn, Pianta, Hamre, Downer, Barbarin, Bryant, Burchinal, & Early, 2008; Burchinal, Peisner-Feinburg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002) and children's social competence (Mitchell-Copeland, 1997). The Cost, Quality & Outcomes Study (1999) indicated that children's cognitive development was positively related to the quality of classroom practices and that close teacher-child relationships were associated with better behavior and social skills through early elementary school. Hamre and Pianta (2005) found that students at risk of school failure who were enrolled in classrooms characterized by strong instructional and emotional support had higher achievement scores and lower levels of child-teacher conflict compared to children in less supportive environments. First 5 San Francisco has targeted professional development efforts, particularly in the 2008-2009 program year, in the area of adult-child interactions.

When asked if PFA has improved adult-child interactions, a little more than half of the respondents in the Year 4 interviews indicated that it had, due to a variety of factors. Approximately a quarter of the respondents reported that adult-child interactions have been enriched in their program, although not necessarily due to PFA, but rather to the program's own focus in this area. Only three providers specifically stated that PFA has had no impact on the nature of interactions between staff and children in their programs.

Among those providers who reported that PFA had contributed to an improvement among child-staff interactions in their programs, the majority indicated that it was due to PFA-sponsored professional development. One site supervisor said, "I think some of the trainings we have participated in really show the importance [of adult-child interactions]. Teachers are trying to have individual conversations with each child, build on the child's interests, and build a learning experience around that. They form a relationship with children and realize the importance of it [the relationship]." Another site supervisor reported, "The professional development enhances the way we interact with our students because we are better informed on how to ask questions, talk about things, and use language in a way that encourages oral language development and conflict management." A program director was enthusiastic about the training provided in the area of adult-child interactions: "The quality of the interactions with children...is very different than 4 years ago. I am learning new concepts and new methods every day. I am looking at children in a very different way today than 4 years ago [before we joined PFA]." Similar comments were voiced by others: "Teachers are talking to children more, listening to children more – that is as a result from the in-service workshops. We have the money to have the trainers come in for workshops. It is teaching teachers to interact with the children in a different way."

Other, less common responses regarding factors which have influenced adult-child interactions pointed to improved staff-child ratios, providing staff with more time to interact with children,

and Tree Frog Treks (which has prompted teachers to use new vocabulary with children). Two providers referred to the ECERS-R, with one emphasizing how teachers adjusted their practices in order to receive a high score on the staff-child interactions scale on the tool, and the other mentioning that rearrangement of the classroom facilitated more frequent interactions among staff and children. In addition, one provider discussed how the use of the DRDP-R and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), which they had not used prior to PFA, had helped them work with and interact with children on a more individualized basis.

As noted earlier, examining the nature of adult-child interactions in PFA classrooms has been a central component of the PFA process evaluation. Classroom observations were conducted by bilingual AIR staff (English/Spanish and English/Cantonese) in a random sample of classrooms in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation using a tool known as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Underpinning the entire CLASS tool is the theory that the “primary mechanisms through which children acquire readiness-related competencies are social relationships children form with peers, parents, and teachers” (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). The CLASS was selected because it gathers rich information about teacher-child interactions, beyond what has been gathered by the ECERS-R that is used as part of the Gateway to Quality assessment process for all center-based PFA sites. The CLASS builds on a broad body of research that highlights the critical nature of adult-child interactions in supporting children’s learning and development.

The CLASS framework measures adult-child interactions across several domains, including emotional and instructional support and classroom organization, drawing from the varied research base on teacher-child relationships, children’s language and cognitive development, emotional and social functioning, self-regulatory skills, and classroom management practices. Specifically, the CLASS addresses three domains, *Emotional Support*, *Classroom Organization*, and *Instructional Support*, each consisting of one or more dimensions, as shown in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3. CLASS Domains and Dimensions

Emotional Support

Positive Climate. Positive Climate reflects the emotional connection between the teacher and students and among students and the warmth, respect, and enjoyment communicated by verbal and nonverbal interactions.

Negative Climate. Negative Climate reflects the overall level of expressed negativity in the classroom; the frequency, quality, and intensity of teacher and peer negativity are key to this scale.

Teacher Sensitivity. Teacher Sensitivity encompasses the teacher's awareness of and responsivity to students' academic and emotional needs; high levels of sensitivity facilitate students' ability to actively explore and learn because the teacher consistently provides comfort, reassurance and encouragement.

Regard for Student Perspectives. Regard for Student Perspectives captures the degree to which the teacher's interactions with students and classroom activities place an emphasis on students' interests, motivations, and points of view and encourage student responsibility and autonomy.

Classroom Organization

Behavior Management. Behavior Management encompasses the teacher's ability to provide clear behavioral expectations and use effective methods to prevent and redirect misbehavior.

Productivity. Productivity considers how well the teacher manages instructional time and routines and provides activities for students so that they have the opportunity to be involved in learning activities.

Instructional Learning Formats. Instructional Learning Formats focuses on the ways in which the teacher maximizes students' interest, engagement, and ability to learn from lessons and activities.

Instructional Support

Concept Development. Concept Development measures the teacher's use of instructional discussions and activities to promote students' higher-order thinking skills and cognition and the teacher's focus on understanding rather than on rote instruction.

Quality of Feedback. Quality of Feedback assesses the degree to which the teacher provides feedback that expands learning and understanding and encourages continued participation.

Language Modeling. Language Modeling captures the quality and amount of the teacher's use of language-stimulation and language-facilitation techniques.

*Source: CLASS Manual, Preschool Version (2008)

The Year 2 and 3 CLASS observations conducted by AIR indicate that PFA classrooms in San Francisco typically offer warm and emotionally supportive teacher-child interactions. In addition, PFA teachers generally implement effective behavior and instructional management strategies to maximize learning opportunities for children. However, based on the random sample of classrooms selected for CLASS observations, PFA teachers appear to be less effective in promoting children's higher-order thinking skills and cognition and providing feedback to expand learning and understanding⁴.

⁴ The Year 2 and Year 3 CLASS reports can be found on First 5 San Francisco's website at <http://first5sf.org>

To address the CLASS findings, First 5 San Francisco hosted a year-long training series for PFA program directors and other management staff (e.g., Head Start education specialists) in 2008-2009. The training began with a retreat in the fall of 2008 to help staff become more familiar with the CLASS tool and reflect on the PFA CLASS scores. Program staff have participated in monthly learning sessions on the CLASS, and First 5 San Francisco technical assistance specialists have provided on-site coaching throughout the year.

PFA Impacts on Teaching Strategies

The process evaluation focused on teaching strategies used in PFA classrooms in Years 3 and 4 of the study. In Year 3, a teacher survey administered to all lead teachers gathered data on the nature and frequency of various reading, math, and science activities offered in classrooms. The survey data indicate that there are some areas in which teachers may need additional support in engaging children in reading and language activities – for the 12 reading and language activities listed in the survey, 75% of the teachers reported that children engage in only five of them three times a week or more frequently. In addition, survey responses reflected variation across classrooms in terms of how often PFA children engage in math-related activities. For example, about a third of teachers indicated that they play math-related games with the children one or two times a week, about a third of teachers said three or four times a week, and about a third said every day. In regard to science, it appears that the frequency of science instruction in PFA classrooms could be increased to the benefit of children. For example, a fourth of teachers indicated that children engage in activities related to the scientific process (e.g., hypothesis, prediction, observation) only two or three times a month, and another 11% reported that they do so once a month or less. Though these data are self-reported, they provide First 5 San Francisco with some information to guide technical assistance efforts in the future.

In Year 4, staff were asked to reflect on if and how participation in PFA had influenced the teaching strategies used in the classroom. The majority of providers – 20 of the 29 interviewed – indicated that PFA had resulted in changes in the strategies teachers utilized. As with adult-child interactions, the majority of staff attributed changes in teaching strategies to the professional development sponsored by PFA. One site supervisor said, “We have had workshops and some technical assistance that has really improved the program. Working with children individually and in small groups and getting away from the large group instruction has been the biggest impact on teaching strategies.” Some providers talked about a variety of other changes they have made, including using more play and scaffolding as a result of participating in the Learning Circles, and more effective transitions and routines due to training in this area (“Teachers had more workshops on how to smoothly transition, now there’s singing and lights – 2 kids go to the bathroom at a time instead of 19 standing in line waiting.”).

Four of the 29 providers interviewed in Year 4 talked about how PFA-funded support services, speakers, and field trips have had a positive impact on teaching strategies. According to one site supervisor, “PFA adds the ‘reality element’ to the curriculum that we are using...when you have

the ducks and the goats come into the classroom, that's a big difference. Kids can touch and giggle at the animals." Similarly, a program director discussed how Tree Frog Treks have impacted classroom teaching strategies in science. "They left ideas with the teachers to continue the science when they left." A site supervisor credited the early childhood mental health consultants with changes to the strategies used by teachers: "The mental health consultant being here [changes my approach] because she and I confer, and I have to think and plan with her about certain children." One director had this to say about Raising a Reader: "Raising a Reader helped enhance the literacy component this year. That helped me learn more ways of introducing and focusing on the importance of literacy in the classroom." A site supervisor credited PFA with helping the site adopt a structured and documented curriculum, moving away from a loose, homegrown way of doing things that was in place only "because that's the way we always did it."

Based on provider reports, PFA has provided valuable support to sites in regard to teaching strategies, both through professional development and classroom enhancements. In the Year 4 interviews, providers identified a range of changes in the teaching practices they employ, although it was difficult for staff to provide concrete examples that are a direct result of PFA. The Year 3 teacher survey provided baseline data regarding the frequency of reading, language, math, and science activities in PFA classrooms, which could be administered to the PFA community in the future to more accurately assess changes in teaching practices over time.

Teacher Turnover

PFA provides a variety of supports to teachers and family child care providers that may impact the rate of turnover among the teacher workforce. In addition to access to training and classroom resources, PFA funds can be used to increase compensation and pay for continuing education. In Year 4, PFA providers were asked to indicate if PFA has had an impact – positive or negative – on teacher turnover. The majority of respondents felt that PFA has not had an impact on teacher turnover – not because of the scope or quality of PFA services, but because the vast majority of programs indicated they have a long-standing staff team. Site supervisors and directors were hesitant to directly link staff retention to PFA.

Some providers in Year 4 – six of the 29 interviewed – did report that PFA has had a positive impact on staff retention, due a range of factors, including teacher supports, the First 5 San Francisco bachelor's degree bonus, and the way teachers are treated as valued professionals within the PFA system. One provider referenced the benefits of PFA-sponsored training, "I think [PFA has] had a positive impact because the more we can provide teachers with concrete specific tools that are research driven, the more they can see [successful] outcomes. And so they're going to stay in a program where they can see value added." Three providers pointed to the \$5,000 bonus provided to teachers with a B.A. by First 5 San Francisco as an incentive to remain in the ECE workforce. Two other providers discussed the nature of the PFA system, describing it as being inclusive, which has helped to create buy-in among staff in the center.

One site supervisor noted that PFA funding enables her to hire young enthusiastic teachers with bachelor's degrees in child development, support staff development, and provide teachers with supports to plan and “really reflect and think about critically what they're doing, why they're doing it. And to not feel that this is all coming from supervision... but more about quality and what they want to have happen in their classroom and their vision of what their work is.” A site supervisor talked broadly about PFA, calling it a “stabilizing force” for the program, enabling her to hire quality staff with decent compensation, thus contributing to staff retention.

Gateway to Quality and the Environment Rating Scale Assessment Process

In order to be eligible for PFA funding in San Francisco County, preschool programs must have an external ECERS-R or Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) observation conducted by San Francisco State University – Gateway to Quality. Gateway to Quality is a collaborative effort among city agencies in San Francisco, community-based organizations, institutions of higher learning, and private foundations. Gateway to Quality's trained and reliable assessors are available to conduct ITERS-R (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition), ECERS-R, or FDCRS observations, and offer technical assistance to programs. In addition to qualifying for PFA funding with a baseline score, all programs that undergo ECERS-R/FDCRS assessment are eligible for a Quality Improvement Grant through the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF).

As in previous years of the evaluation, general feedback regarding the Gateway to Quality assessments characterized the process as positive, albeit somewhat anxiety-producing for some providers. In Year 4, one provider characterized the review process the following way: “It was a big help, because even when I think I am doing the right thing, having a couple of extra eyes is helpful so they can tell me the areas where I need help.” Another provider described the assessment process as “raising the bar for my teachers, for our classrooms, making sure that we meet the standards. My teachers worked really hard to ensure that we received that score.” A handful of providers in Year 4 reported that the assessment process was somewhat worrying. For example, a provider reported, “I get a little stressed, to be honest. It does get them to focus on every aspect of the classroom and what kind of materials and what kind of choices are there for children. All of that is really good and it sets up guidelines of what ought to be in the classroom. [But] the pass/fail part of ECERS can cause some stress.”

As noted earlier, feedback from providers regarding the Gateway to Quality assessments has remained fairly consistent over the evaluation. For example, in Year 3, 59% of teachers rated the Gateway to Quality ECERS-R or FDCRS assessments as “very helpful.” These findings echo those that emerged in Year 1 focus groups, in which teachers described the ECERS-R assessments – and the process of preparing for the assessments – as challenging, but ultimately rewarding and a key driver in improving the quality of the classroom environment.

In Year 4, providers described the changes made to their classroom settings as a result of the ECERS-R and FDCRS assessment process. Improvements to the classrooms were varied, and included the following:

- Changing the art and display in the classroom (“We tend to display a lot of art and materials available to kids. For some kids it was overstimulating and with some really inexpensive simple solutions we were able to tone down the classroom but still maintain our art displays like we wanted”).
- Improving teachers’ ability to supervise the classroom by re-arranging furniture and installing mirrors.
- Accessing new materials, furniture, and resources that were previously unaffordable due to a lack of funding, particularly in regard to science.
- Upgrading the classroom and facility – for example, installing a bathroom, adding a new sink in the classroom, and renovating a classroom to use a movable wall in order to more efficiently structure the room for small-group and whole-group activities.
- Improving outdoor play space with appropriate materials and toys to promote learning opportunities.
- Improving the “quiet” areas of the classroom, to ensure children have privacy and space to work and play alone.
- Ensuring children nap at least three feet apart, as required by the ECERS-R.
- Creating more opportunities for small group and individualized time with children, and reducing whole-group time.

In Year 4 and in previous years of the evaluation, providers identified improvements at the classroom level as a result of the ECERS-R and FDCRS assessments, and impacts on the program as a whole, including benefits for staff. For example, a site supervisor said in Year 4, “It has aligned the look of the environment of various classrooms. The end result, the overall effect, is that the various sites [across the program] were made consistent.” The Gateway to Quality assessment process also has resulted in benefits that extend beyond the physical classroom among PFA sites. Particularly in the first year of the evaluation, staff talked extensively about how the ECERS process “jump started” their team to be more thoughtful about quality improvement, improved the collaboration among teachers, and reduced isolation and a “my classroom” mentality among staff. For example, a Year 1 focus group at one PFA site, staff talked at length about the impact of PFA on teamwork among staff. A management-level staff member said, “Once we got back the scores, it motivated staff after getting scores from assessors. We had lots of meetings around scores. What were we doing well? What were we doing that we needed to expand on?” Teachers began to meet regularly to discuss ways of improving their classrooms; one teacher reported, “We can see that we are having much better communication.” The site director added, “PFA pushed everyone because everyone has different expectations, everyone thinks differently. The energy and the effort that was put into it was amazing.” In a Year 4 interview, one provider cited teachers’ involvement in analyzing the ECERS-R data. The teachers were “looking at those data and making decisions as a team. It was

driven by the classroom staff.” In general, these types of comments focusing on the benefits of the Gateway assessments for staff became less prominent by the last year of the evaluation – perhaps because the assessment process had become more familiar to providers, because providers had gone through multiple assessments, and/or because Gateway to Quality had offered more extensive preparation to sites before the assessment was conducted (as well as providing individualized coaching and TA to some PFA sites).

The Gateway to Quality assessment process is not without its challenges for providers. In addition to the general level of anxiety some providers experience preparing for the assessment, concerns were voiced by three of the providers interviewed in Year 4 regarding the health and safety scale of the ECERS-R, which is traditionally challenging for programs (the criteria include specific hand-washing and cleaning procedures related to mealtimes, use of the restrooms, and transitions from outdoors to inside). This has been particularly true for providers who refer to the physical limitations of their site (e.g., “There are building constraints like bathrooms in the classrooms and some classrooms with sinks. Your building layout makes it easier to do certain things than others.”).

Other critiques of the assessment process focused more broadly on the appropriateness of the ECERS-R or FDCRS as a measure of program quality. Providers cited challenges of aligning the ECERS-R and the program’s unique philosophy or curriculum, the strong focus of the ECERS-R on the classroom’s physical environment at the expense of other factors such as child-adult interactions, and family child care providers’ lack of familiarity and comfort level with the FDCRS.

A small, yet vocal, number of providers saw the ECERS-R as an inappropriate tool to measure program quality in the PFA system. However, based on provider feedback over the course of the four-year evaluation, the assessment process has resulted in significant physical improvements in classroom settings. It is also important to note that First 5 San Francisco has used the CLASS to examine the nature of staff-child interactions in PFA classrooms, to help inform training and technical assistance plans and ultimately impact these areas, which are not the strongest focus of the ECERS-R or FDCRS. The combination of the two tools provides important information for PFA sites for quality improvement, both in terms of the physical classroom environment and adult-child interactions, and guides First 5 San Francisco’s technical assistance efforts.

Interactions with Gateway to Quality Staff

Feedback regarding interactions with Gateway to Quality staff has generally become more positive over the course of the evaluation, as compared to Year 1, in which many providers expressed concern regarding communication with the organization. First 5 San Francisco worked with the agency in the spring of 2006 to resolve issues raised by providers. In Year 2 of the evaluation, in a survey of program directors, the majority of respondents reported that Gateway to Quality staff were responsive and that, prior to the assessment, they had a good

understanding of what the process entailed. In the Year 4 interviews, a family child care provider reported, “Under the new leadership, Gateway is a lot better; before they seemed disorganized. It’s a lot better than it has been.” The majority of comments by providers in the Year 4 interviews were positive in regard to Gateway staff. For example, a site supervisor said, “We have a positive relationship with Gateway to Quality. They give great suggestions and when they talk to me it’s negotiable. So it becomes a very good relationship where we can actually dialogue.” Critiques of Gateway to Quality assessors were few – they tended to refer to a desire for more willingness among some assessors to learn about their unique program/classrooms, or a perception of the ECERS-R as an inflexible tool. (It is important to note that to conduct valid and independent observations, Gateway assessors must strictly adhere to the ECERS-R criteria.)

PFA Funding Enhancement

Programs may use PFA funds for:

- Parent fee offset (to reduce the tuition or fees that parents pay for the PFA portion of the day)
- Compensation for staff in PFA classrooms (including salary and benefits)
- Substitute pay
- Training/professional development related to the PFA program (including tuition and expenses for college courses)
- Equipment, supplies, and other materials for the PFA program
- Field trips
- Enrichment activities (music, dance, computer, etc.)

When asked to describe how the PFA funding enhancement was used, the most common responses among providers in the Year 4 interviews included classroom enhancements and support of professional development (about half of the providers interviewed mentioned each of these areas). PFA staff talked about using funds to “buy more quality materials and not having to take whatever is on sale.” A site supervisor said, “I have been trying to vary the kinds of things we have to make it more accessible to different kinds of learners.” One site supervisor’s comment (similar to those of many others) was that the funding allowed her to be “able to buy more supplies, materials, equipment for outdoors, teacher trainings...having enough money to have team meetings, having teachers being paid to come on Saturdays or stay late in the evenings.” A family child care provider said, “I purchase materials and professional development and use it for things like facility repairs. It has enabled me to expand a lot of areas in my home...the dramatic play area, where so much language evolves in young children, and the block area. I send new staff to conferences and workshops. Even some parents...there was a nutrition class where one parent was concerned about the health of their child, a full day class for \$20, but she could not afford it; I sent her to the class.” A site supervisor explained, “We send staff to the training, professional growth, workshops, conferences, and then we also hire other agencies to come in and train them in-house. Training is provided [on an] ongoing [basis].”

Providers talked how the PFA funding supported training costs as well as substitute coverage so that staff could participate in professional development opportunities.

Several providers emphasized that PFA funds enabled them to expose children to experiences they might never otherwise have, such as field trips to new parts of the city or outside the county (e.g., an organic farm in Marin). A site supervisor said, “Field trips tend to be too expensive for most public school students, especially Head Start students. Most of them had never been across the bridge. It was nice to be able to give them a more equitable access to opportunities that are usually reserved for private schools and kids with more money. “

Eight providers talked about the use of PFA funds to offset parent fees. One site supervisor said, “To qualify for Head Start and many other programs you have to be below the poverty line [in terms of] annual income. PFA is the only program that families can get into regardless of income. It is a much-needed break for the working class.” Another benefit of the parent fee offset was having to spend less time on fundraising.

Support Services

As noted earlier, PFA provides a variety of supports to PFA programs, which include Raising a Reader, Performing Arts Workshops, Tree Frog Treks, and early childhood mental health consultants. Providers were asked to provide feedback regarding the various support programs, identifying which supports were particularly critical to maintaining a high-quality program. Provider feedback specific to each service is provided below:

Raising a Reader. Fourteen of the 29 providers interviewed in Year 4 offered feedback on the Raising a Reader program, which is designed to foster healthy brain development, parent-child bonding, and early literacy skills critical for school success by engaging parents in a routine of daily reading with their children from birth to age five. The program supplies PFA sites with lending libraries for families, a book bag for each PFA child at year end, and early literacy training to PFA classrooms and staff. All of the Year 4 PFA respondents were strongly supportive of RAR. One site supervisor said, “Raising a Reader is a fabulous program and would be high on my list [of critical supports]. Parents *love* Raising a Reader, above and beyond everything else. Kind of something we had already done...letting kids check out books from our school, but this is so much better. The questions for the parents to get kids talking about the books, the fact that kids are sitting down with parents reading at night. Kids have been eating it up.” Another site supervisor emphasized that many of the families of the children enrolled in her program do not own books and that there simply would not be any books in the home without RAR. RAR also is viewed as an effective parent outreach and involvement strategy (e.g., “A lot of parents won’t take advantage of going to the library, so that way it brings the library to them.”) One program director simply said, “Raising a Reader has been the highest impact program,” referring to changes she has viewed in parent behavior over the course of the program year.

Feedback from providers regarding Raising a Reader has been highly positive throughout the course of the evaluation. For example, in the Year 2 program director/site supervisor survey, the majority of respondents (52%) rated the service as “very helpful.” In Year 3, 94% of PFA lead teacher survey respondents reported they were aware of the RAR service, and 91% indicated they had used the program. Of those that had used it, 75% rated it as “very helpful,” with another 20% characterizing it as “helpful.”

Tree Frog Treks. Eighteen providers offered comments regarding Tree Frog Treks (TFT), with 13 of the respondents characterizing the support service as positive, and 5 providers offering a strong critique of the program. Tree Frog Treks is a hands-on science enhancement program in which TFT staff visit PFA programs with live animals and activities about science and the natural world. One director described TFT as follows: “Tree Frog Treks is the most valuable [among the support services]. Tree Frogs Trek was totally new to us and to bring it into the classroom... for the teachers to learn from it... that has been really valuable.” Several providers commented that they involve parents when Tree Frog Treks visits the classroom.

In contrast, five providers in Year 4 indicated that Tree Frog Treks was not as effective as it might be, either because it was more of a “show and tell” than a lesson that engaged preschoolers actively in learning, it was not developmentally appropriate, and/or it was a “one-shot deal.” Providers commented that they have seasoned teachers who may not benefit from Tree Frog Treks as much as less-experienced staff or programs. “It’s great for new programs that are coming on. It would be nice to see something developed for older, more seasoned programs. For our type of program, we could use individualized support... if we could use the funds to do our own in-service...” A program director felt that TFT was not “not really an appropriate program, it was more entertainment than really helping with curriculum. It was very much over the children’s heads and a lot of the activities weren’t so relevant to our kids and neighborhood – but mostly it was way over their heads. It was much more entertaining than useful. More geared towards elementary school kids.” A site supervisor echoed these thoughts, noting that for the program to “be effective it would have had to be more than just one session.” One provider said, “I think we still have a little bit of a gap with the training of the enrichment people who come in from the Performing Arts Workshop and Tree Frog Treks. I think they are still more oriented toward the elementary school child. I think they could be better trained to work with 4-year-olds and with nonverbal children.”

These critiques echo comments from previous years of the evaluation, with a small but vocal minority of providers voicing concerns regarding Tree Frog Treks, particularly in Year 1 of the program. During Year 1 interviews and focus groups, several PFA staff members (administrators and teachers) commented that the activities conducted by Tree Frog Treks in the classroom were not developmentally appropriate for preschool children. Following Year 1, Tree Frog Treks made some modifications to better meet the needs of preschool settings. Despite strong support from a majority of providers, the continued presence of concerns regarding the program in Year 4 warrants investigation by First 5 San Francisco.

Mental Health Consultants. Sixteen providers commented on the mental health consultants supported through PFA, with the vast majority (14 providers) giving positive feedback. Mental health consultants provide assistance, staff training, and prevention and early intervention services to PFA sites. The consultants establish relationships with preschool program staff to discuss and address issues related to children’s behavior and social-emotional well-being. This work can include facilitating communication between teachers, developing behavior management plans for a child or groups of children, and providing guidance on referrals for children who may have special needs.

Many providers talked about how the consultants are skilled at becoming part of the “fabric” of the program and making children, their parents, and staff comfortable. One site supervisor’s comments reflected the feedback from many other providers: “We love the mental health consultants. We had mental health consultants in our program for awhile before but I know PFA funding has helped to keep them in place. This has been most valuable because somebody is coming [to the program] every week. They are working with us and helping us with children we are having difficulties with, interpersonal relationships between staff, helping with the shy/quiet child, noticing things about children in the program and helping to work on strategies to support them. They are my number one support.”

Another site supervisor said, “If I were to point to which systems are of critical value to us given who we serve, I would say the mental health consultant is critical to sustainability of anything that we are going to do for the children because it’s the social/emotional foundation, the relationship, the bonding, that is primary.” She went on to praise the consultants in helping staff more effectively partner with families. The consultant “helps to keep folks reflective rather than prescriptive in how they see the family.” The consultants also support program staff, working with teams of teachers to relieve stress, brainstorm ideas, and help them address children’s challenging behaviors.

One program director talked about how the mental health consultants keep children from “slipping through the cracks.” She emphasized the importance of consultants visiting the program on a weekly basis through PFA. “It’s so much easier when they come in once a week. I know how the program was run before and there was one mental health consultant for the whole program, so a lot of children were getting missed, kind of overlooked and not paid so much attention to because they weren’t too problematic – like quiet children. Since we had PFA and the consultants come at least once a week to each of our sites, we’ve been able to address the children more. We developed a strategy about who is going to work on a particular child, we share concerns about children, and we keep updating [the plan] on a weekly basis.”

Providers used strong language to describe the benefits of the mental health consultants to their program staff, families, and children – more so than when commenting on any of the other support services funded through PFA. One program director explained how critical the mental health services were to her programming. “They have a lot of experience in case management,

resource referrals, and observations, and it adds another extended level of services to our families and teachers. Mental health [consultation] is really an essential service that we can provide for our families. I can live without the science, my teachers can substitute, we'll go to the museums – we'll survive. But [taking away the] mental health consultants would be a very big hole in our services.” A site supervisor described the consultants as “one of the most valuable assets from PFA.”

Positive feedback regarding the mental health consultants has been consistent over the course of the evaluation. In Year 2 of the study, mental health consultation was rated as helpful or very helpful by 71% of respondents. Programs stated that the resource was a “great support to staff and families,” describing it as “essential.” One program director wrote, “she [the mental health consultant] provides powerful consultation to our teachers – never cut this!” High ratings of the mental health consultation continued in Year 3 of the evaluation, in which 86% of lead teachers rated the service as helpful or very helpful.

Negative comments regarding mental health supports in the Year 4 interviews were very few – only two providers offered feedback that focused primarily on challenges related to the mental health services. One site supervisor emphasized that the success of the service was dependent on the personality of the consultant, referring to one consultant who was not a good “fit” for her program. A program director said, “The mental health consultancy has had several issues: lack of ability to coordinate meetings because of scheduling conflicts between staff time and consultant, constraints of confidentiality issues, and extensive time commitment [for staff] towards meetings with not so many productive concrete results for staff for the time invested.”

Performing Arts Workshops. Eight of the 29 providers commented on the Performing Arts Workshops (PAW), which is a creative arts program. Staff felt the workshops were an added value to the program, bringing fresh energy and ideas into the classroom. “The children are moving and dancing, which is great.” A site supervisor said, “Mainly because that’s the area of professional development that we were the most lacking in. We do an inclusion with a special day class, so for those students especially, doing movement related to curriculum is really important. Besides the fact that we learn so much and we are able to pass it along to our students and it creates opportunities for peer interaction between my students and the special day class.” The remaining provider feedback was somewhat broad – staff felt the PAW was an added bonus to the program, but it was difficult for them to offer details as to its specific impact on the children or staff.

Impact of PFA on School Readiness

In Year 4 of the evaluation, PFA providers were asked to reflect on how the initiative may have impacted children’s school readiness. The majority of providers interviewed – 17 of the 22 providers who responded to the question – reported that PFA has supported children’s school

readiness. Only one provider felt PFA did not, with the others who disagreed arguing that increases in children's school readiness were not necessarily attributable to PFA.

Providers offered a range of reasons why PFA has supported their program in getting children ready to succeed in school. The most common factor cited was the professional development sponsored through PFA (six providers), followed by enhanced literacy and language environments for children (4 providers). In fact, the two responses are intertwined, as First 5 San Francisco has placed an emphasis on training in language and literacy. One site supervisor said, "The fact that we've had so much teacher training – the better trained the teachers are, the more they know how to promote language and literacy, the more they know how to work with math experiences and activities, the better results for the kids." Another site supervisor said, "Activities have now been changed through all the professional development. Teachers are more aware of oral language. Oral language has played the biggest part [given how many second language learners there are in the program]. The awareness of the need for more oral language throughout the complete day will prepare them for kindergarten." A program director reported, "We have a much higher reading readiness in our pre-K program. Several children are reading and others are highly acquainted and successful with phonics. Math skills, verbal skills, science information, and retention are all higher than in last years." A site supervisor PFA provider credited RAR with engaging parents more, and thus supporting children's language and school readiness.

Lower adult-child ratios, due to PFA funding, were also cited as a factor impacting children's school readiness. "[In the preschool classrooms] the ratio went from 1:8 to 1:6. There is now more individual attention for each child. In those ways it's definitely impacted [school readiness] in a positive way. You also get time with teachers – more time assessing children. More time to be able to look at curriculum for the next activity and look at where children are individually. It gives teachers the ability to be more intentional, and in that way kids are able to be more ready for school because teachers are able to [support] in-depth, specific, progress for each child."

One family child care provider emphasized the importance of children's social-emotional development in regard to school readiness, indicating that the PFA system was supportive of the "whole child" and did not "push academics" too much. For example, "PFA has tried really hard to show that school readiness is not just A, B, Cs. That's been a positive for the program." On a similar note, two providers talked about how PFA has supported developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for children. "Curriculum-wise, PFA did boost our writing center area. We're able to have money for the onsite training so that teachers were able to develop the writing centers a lot more, which in turn supports children more." A site supervisor reported, "What I see in the classroom [as a result of] PFA is real age-appropriate kinds of problem-solving, pre-math, estimating, graphing that's appropriate age-wise, and engagement with teachers and scaffolding [children's learning]."

Other responses regarding PFA's impact on school readiness were varied. Staff talked about the benefit of enhanced classroom materials, a curricular focus on school readiness, increased intentionality regarding the types of teaching strategies used, and increased parent involvement. In general, it was difficult for providers to "tease out" the extent to which participation in PFA specifically promoted children's school readiness versus their program as a whole.

The PFA process evaluation was not designed to measure the extent to which PFA impacts children's skills related to school readiness or their performance once they enter kindergarten and beyond. However, First 5 San Francisco has future plans to design and implement an evaluation of the outcomes achieved by children who participate in PFA, including potentially tracking children through early elementary school.

Serving Children with Special Needs

PFA programs are expected to serve children of all skill and ability levels to fully comply with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and other federal and state civil rights laws. PFA sites are supported by mental health consultants in identifying, referring, and serving children with special needs and their families. In addition, First 5 San Francisco requires that programs screen children for developmental delays, using a tool of their choice. Originally, programs were required to use the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, although this was eliminated beginning in the 2008-2009 program year.

The issue of identifying, referring, and serving children with special needs has been a focus of the evaluation throughout its four years. For example, in the Year 2 survey, 78% of responding program directors and site supervisors either agreed or strongly agreed that children with special needs were effectively included in their PFA classrooms. A somewhat smaller proportion of programs, just over two-thirds, agreed (58%) or strongly agreed (6%) that teachers had the skills to effectively meet the needs of children with special needs. Almost a third of the responding programs either strongly disagreed (6%) or disagreed (26%) that teachers had these necessary skills. In the Year 3 teacher survey, 63% of responding lead teachers agreed or strongly agreed that PFA helped them better work with children with special needs.

In the Year 4 interviews, providers were asked to indicate if participation in PFA has changed how they identify or serve children with special needs – 18 providers indicated it had, and 10 said the initiative has had no impact. The most common response among providers who attributed changes to their work with children with special needs to PFA pointed to the support of the mental health consultants. One site supervisor said, "I think that teachers are far less reticent to refer [children for further assessment] because I think there's much more engagement and conversation [among teachers due to the] the conferencing process with the mental health consultants; they have become [used to talking] about issues as they are presented through their observation systems. So rather than teachers thinking, 'oh, maybe it's just me,' they are actually talking about it sooner [with other staff]. If I were to look at our child findings, I would say

there's probably a 6-month increase in terms of pushing referrals forward... I see the mental health consultant bringing different levels of expertise to the table in terms of making referrals for children who have or may have disabilities. [As a result] children are found eligible for services through the district more frequently in the first round of referral rather than the second or third round." In addition, the mental health consultants offer another voice or perspective to parents – teachers are not alone when they approach parents with concerns regarding their children.

Similarly, a family child care provider explained, "The mental health consultant that I work with helps me observe the children, look over their ASQs and talk with parents about their concerns. Together we work on a plan that helps the child and family with those concerns." A provider reported, "It's [PFA has] made a big difference. By myself, I wouldn't be able to provide in-house or easy access to services...it was more me and the parents writing a letter requesting an evaluation." Staff also indicated that they feel supported in identifying children who may need further assessment, and that observations of children are more integrated into teachers' regular practice as a result of PFA.

A site supervisor said, "If we see a child with specific issues, they [the mental health consultants] will help us identify and find resources for the parent, or help us do IEPs or assist us in IEPs, or lead us to the right person. Before the mental health consultants, it was either sink or swim, trying to find your own way. We called people and asked, 'So and so is having a problem. What do you suggest we do?' [The mental health consultants have] really helped us in providing those resources."

Other explanations of how PFA has impacted practices in regard to identifying or screening children with special needs were varied. They included taking courses on inclusion (per the First 5 San Francisco requirement), learning about special needs inclusion practices from a mentor program, participating in the First 5 San Francisco inclusion project, and using the DRDP-R and ASQ.

Ten of the 29 providers interviewed in Year 4 specifically stated that PFA has impacted how their program screens children for special needs, pointing to their use of the ASQ, despite the fact that First 5 San Francisco no longer requires programs to use this tool. One family child care provider made this comment: "The ASQ is a good jumping off point to focus parents on anything that they might have overlooked. Parents know their children and if they have a concern, it is usually reliable." A site supervisor said, "We were required to use the ASQ when we first started and we had not used it before. We just had our mental health consultant do whatever they do typically. We like it, and in fact, we are implementing that entire screening system for our whole agency, across the board." Another provider said, "The ASQ has been helpful in getting parent feedback. It's so tough in preschool because so few children are diagnosed yet – there are some children that we feel strongly are special needs children. The ASQ has given us a more structured way to address that with parents. Whereas before we might

have had feelings that a child might need to be tested and would share that with parents during conferences. But there's a big difference between that and looking at a survey, which holds more weight for parents. [The ASQ] doesn't change identification, I think we were identifying before. It's more of a tool that's been more effective for parents. And parents are less defensive [as a result]." In regard to the DRDP-R, a family child care provider talked about using it for the first time – while it was time-consuming, she found it a helpful process that increased her understanding of children's individual progress and potential needs.

PFA Impact on Community Partnerships

Sixteen of the 29 providers interviewed in the Year 4 evaluation indicated that PFA has had an impact regarding the nature of their community partnerships, with the most common impact noted being access to new services (11 providers), including Tree Frog Treks, the Performing Arts Workshops, and/or the early childhood mental health consultants, as discussed earlier. Seven providers discussed PFA support of networking within the PFA community. For example, a site supervisor indicated that PFA brings "people together who share the same vision and desire but who may or may not have the financial bandwidth to provide the service. So, I personally think that's of great value to the city and county of San Francisco – they [programs] are so diverse, they're so dispersed, it's of great value. I think also it helps to inform us in terms of how I might strengthen RFPs through our partnerships versus each little group and each little agency going for something. I think it has done a great deal in formalizing the partnerships in terms of providing a platform to think more collaboratively, and it's been cost-free."

Providers emphasized the benefits of networking with other PFA sites, many of whom face the same challenges as they do. One site supervisor's comments echoed those of many others providers: "Knowing people out there are doing the same things I'm doing and facing the same challenges – raising morale, knowing support is out there. PFA definitely brings the community closer together." A program director said, "The network is larger. There is more communication with centers now that we are PFA. The roundtables are great for networking and connecting with other centers and getting new ideas."

Professional Development

First 5 San Francisco sponsors trainings and workshops for PFA staff, and PFA programs are required to provide staff with paid release time to attend professional development activities, pay teachers for preparation time as part of their work schedule, and maintain a plan for ongoing staff development. Professional development is available for PFA staff at all levels, from assistant and associate teachers to program directors. In addition, First 5 San Francisco requires that at least one PFA classroom staff per site must take a college-level unit-bearing course (or equivalent experience) on literacy and language development, and a one unit/credit-bearing training or course on literacy/language acquisition, during each PFA program year.

Based on Year 3 lead teacher survey data, PFA teachers are actively advancing their education. Between July of 2007 and June of 2008, more than half (57%) of responding teachers reported having taken ECE or child development unit-bearing courses, earning an average of seven units per teacher over the year-long period. About a third of teachers took general education courses during that same time, also earning an average of seven units. Comparatively, a greater proportion of teachers (88%) indicated that they had participated in professional development opportunities, for an average of 29 hours each during the 12-month period. It is important to note that these are self-reported data and thus are likely not a completely reliable depiction of the number of units and professional development hours earned by PFA staff. However, it is clear that the majority of lead teachers (assistant teachers were not surveyed) are active in pursuing additional training and education, with the support of PFA.

In the Year 4 interviews, providers commented on the impact of participation in PFA-sponsored professional development, including any changes in classroom practices that resulted from the training. As noted throughout this report, virtually all of the providers described PFA training as high-quality. Access to professional development was identified as one of the most significant outcomes of participation in the PFA system.

While praise for PFA-sponsored professional development was widespread among providers, their comments regarding *why* the training has been valuable to them or their staff were varied. The most common feedback from providers (five providers) emphasized the benefit to staff from participating in training as a team. A program director explained, “One of the most valuable parts of the training is that I tried to get all the teachers to go as a team, so it’s been very valuable for us as a teambuilding [exercise]. We get all the information at the same time and strengthen our knowledge together...it’s not something being told [to staff] secondhand.” On a related note, another provider discussed the benefits of sending assistant teachers to training in addition to lead teachers.

Other staff emphasized the networking benefits of participating in training with other PFA sites: “I think you get fresh ideas, you connect with your peers. It is kind of isolating to be in a child care situation as the adult. [In the trainings] you get out with other adults and see what they are doing and chat about different ways to try things...that has always been exciting for me.”

Feedback indicated that training has been relevant to PFA staff. Three providers focused on the nature of the PFA training, appreciating that it was “hands on,” in contrast to more traditional coursework. A site supervisor said, “PFA has a Saturday training series regarding math and early childhood development. I saw teachers who were shy English language learners come to the series on fire, and they could care less what administrators were in the room. They really wanted to get hands-on, nuts-and-bolts kinds of experiences, play with the materials, interact with them....” This aspect of training – the ability to effectively translate professional development into classroom practice – was also noted in regard to the Learning Circles, with comments such as: “One of the great things for teachers are the Learning Circles...they come

back all refreshed with ideas and materials to the classroom,” and “The Learning Circles have been huge, because they are so hands on – things that can be implemented right away.”

Another three providers appreciated the use of PFA funds to support site-specific professional development. One site supervisor stated, “I really appreciate being able to look at my own practices and decide what I’m lacking. That has made professional development more meaningful. I have more buy-in to what I’m attending.” Somewhat similar comments were made in regard to the use of the PFA funding enhancement, and participation in PFA in general – providers expressed an appreciation for PFA’s flexibility in using the funds to support site-specific needs identified by program staff.

Other comments regarding professional development were more varied across providers – one site supervisor discussed the benefits of leadership training offered to directors and site supervisors. “[We] are a little more isolated from the classroom and other co-workers; it’s been beneficial to have professional growth through the program, given that most [training] is geared towards teachers and less toward administration.” Another site supervisor emphasized the importance of professional development in terms of the opportunity it provided staff to reflect on their practices and consider how they wanted to grow as individuals and a team. She explained, “An important impact from professional development is that you get time to talk to one another without kids, to talk about how to improve the program. Teachers [typically] don’t get to sit down and relax and focus on what is needed to make the program better. People need that time to discuss and reflect as adults. [The PFA trainings] have really provided that.”

It was challenging for providers to identify specific changes they had made in their classrooms, as a direct result of participating in PFA-sponsored training. PFA staff talked generally about “new ideas” brought to the classroom by staff. Other outcomes described by staff included enhanced science areas in the classroom, a stronger focus on observation and documentation of children, enhanced adult-child interactions, and a stronger emphasis on how to utilize materials with children in a developmentally appropriate manner.

There were minimal critiques of PFA professional development – two providers indicated that time constraints prevented some staff from participating in training. Another two providers commented on the language and literacy and inclusion training requirements (coursework required by First 5 San Francisco), characterizing them as redundant, particularly for more experienced staff. First 5 San Francisco has reported that there has been some confusion among providers regarding this requirement, with staff interpreting it to mean that the same teacher must complete the same coursework each year. In reality, the requirement is meant to encourage a different staff member from the site to take the required courses each year, with the intent of training all staff within a PFA site over time. First 5 San Francisco has revised the language describing this requirement in an effort to clarify it for the PFA provider community.

In addition to feedback regarding PFA-sponsored professional development in the Year 4 interviews, providers shared their experiences with individualized TA and coaching from First 5 San Francisco or their consultants. Ten of the 29 PFA providers interviewed in Year 4 indicated that they had received such support. Staff characterized the TA and coaching team as supportive and responsive to individualized needs. “Because [the TA is] so individualized, we can ask someone about what our site really needs. Their ability to come in and look at the positives [of our site] and also look at the challenges and see what we can do [to address them]. There’s some flexibility there; if it were just a cookie cutter thing, it might not make sense for every site. It’s really important to have a vision, and they are very good at looking at the big picture and how long it takes to implement that.” Several providers reported that the TA they received in regard to using the DRDP-R was particularly useful. Throughout many of the provider comments, there was a sense that the individualized TA was helpful in developing a plan of action for PFA sites. As one site supervisor stated, “They’re looking at the whole picture to help move us forward.”

Challenges to Program Implementation

Throughout the PFA process evaluation, providers have identified challenges to program implementation. Comments regarding reporting requirements in the Year 4 interviews echoed feedback gathered in previous years, with most concerns related to time constraints that providers face. PFA reporting requirements felt burdensome to six of the 29 providers interviewed, with four of those providers specifically focusing on the fiscal reporting they are required to do. Other providers reflected on the challenges of meeting all the PFA requirements with the time they had available, particularly completing the DRDP-R (4 providers). However, compared to the Year 1 evaluation, comments regarding reporting burden were fewer by Year 4, likely reflecting First 5 San Francisco’s efforts to streamline their requirements. In addition, in the 2009-2010 program year, First 5 San Francisco will implement a web-based data reporting system.

Two providers commented on training – one felt her staff were becoming “burnt out” attending training sessions on Saturdays, another provider indicated it was hard to attend trainings in the evenings or weekends. Family child care providers did not cite challenges that were particularly different from center-based providers – one FCC provider indicated it was difficult to recruit four-year-old children each year, particularly because many parents desired full-day care, and another FCC provider noted it was difficult to find the time to complete the DRDP-Rs. Two providers noted that balancing all the requirements of multiple funding streams was difficult – namely Head Start, State Preschool, and PFA.

Four providers identified challenges associated with the ECERS-R, although they found the tool problematic for different reasons (the tool is too narrowly focused on the physical environment of the classroom, the hygiene subscale of the tool is unrealistic for programs, it is difficult to offer all the activities as required by the ECERS-R within a half day preschool session, and issues regarding the alignment between the ECERS-R and the Montessori approach).

Other challenges identified by providers have varied throughout the four-year process evaluation. For example, in the Year 1 study, conversations with San Francisco PFA program directors highlighted several issues, including the need for significant funding to address facility upgrade issues among center-based and family child care programs, and recruiting, training, and maintaining a high-quality workforce. While these areas remain as continuing challenges for PFA providers and the ECE field in general, a surprisingly high proportion of responding providers (32%) reported that renovating existing classrooms and facilities for PFA use was “not a challenge” in the Year 2 survey. Similarly, 40% of responding providers in Year 2 indicated that recruiting qualified PFA staff was “not a challenge.” In Year 2, 48% of program directors indicated that supporting the professional development of staff was a “very big challenge”, whereas by Year 4 access to high-quality training opportunities was one of the most significant positive reported impacts of participation in PFA.

Recommendations from PFA Providers

As in previous years, in Year 4 of the evaluation, providers gave recommendations for improvements to PFA. It is important to note that these recommendations were gathered from a relatively small number of providers and are not attributable to the entire community of PFA programs. Specific comments from PFA providers echoed the feedback they provided to other Year 4 interview questions, and included the following:

- **Ensure that Classroom Enhancement Services Are Developmentally Appropriate.** Most providers spoke positively about the enrichment activities offered through PFA, although 6 of the 29 providers interviewed suggested that the enrichment activities, such as Tree Frog Treks could be more varied and/or extended in length and reviewed to ensure they are developmentally appropriate.
- **Introduce Flexible Attendance Requirements.** Five of the 29 providers discussed parents’ desire for preschool services on a part-time basis rather than five days a week (e.g., three days a week) or moving from a part-day to full-day schedule. It was suggested by providers that the reimbursement rate could vary, depending on the level of participation by the child. Additionally, providers would like to expand PFA so that it includes three-year-old children, in addition to four-year-olds. One program director stated, “My biggest recommendation is that they expand PFA to three-year-olds. Right now, it really isn’t Preschool for *All*.”
- **Add More Staff or More Staff Prep Time.** Four of the 29 providers mentioned the need for an increase in support for staff, either through hiring additional staff or providing more paid preparation time for teachers. One site supervisor suggested that hiring more site management staff would be beneficial, given some supervisors oversee a number of PFA sites.

- **Clarify Inclusion and Literacy Coursework Requirements.** The most specific request from three of the 29 providers was to change the requirement for staff to participate in language and special needs classes each year. A family child care provider said, “We’re supposed to be repeating these professional classes every year in literacy and special needs. To do that every year, I find it a little redundant.” First 5 San Francisco has emphasized that only one staff person per PFA site must attend the courses each year, with the intent of having all staff at that site trained over multiple years. They have clarified the language of the requirement to address confusion among providers, yet there still appears to be some uncertainty among a small number of staff.
- **Improve Communication between Providers and First 5 San Francisco.** An increase in communication by PFA was called for by three of the 29 providers. One family child care provider recommended that additional meetings on PFA might quell any anxiety potential providers might have, because “some people are afraid of the requirements and [it’s important to] let them know that it’s not that hard.” A site supervisor requested better communication on the timing of meetings and trainings, suggesting that a schedule provided at the beginning of the program year would be helpful. Also, a program director recommended that PFA implement a communication strategy for the public at large to increase the visibility of PFA to potential parents.
- **Streamline PFA Reporting Requirements.** As noted earlier, six of the 29 providers described the PFA reporting requirements as challenging. In addition, when asked to provide recommendations regarding the future of PFA, two of these providers (one family child care provider and one center-based provider) suggested that First 5 San Francisco streamline PFA’s reporting requirements. This is a significant decrease in reported concerns compared to previous years of the evaluation, particularly Year 1, when many PFA staff raised concerns regarding the amount of paperwork they were required to complete for PFA. (It is important to note that the comments of some providers regarding reporting throughout the evaluation have reflected the total burden that providers face in completing reporting requirements for multiple funding streams, such as Head Start and State Preschool, in addition to PFA). Family child care providers have also raised concerns about reporting requirements throughout the four-year evaluation, given they are not part of a large administrative team whose members could share the reporting burden.
- **Reconsider the use of the ECERS-R.** As noted earlier in the report, a small number of providers recommended that First 5 San Francisco reconsider the use of the ECERS-R as part of the assessment process, given its strong focus on the physical environment of the

classroom at the perceived expense of other aspects of the program, such as adult-child interactions or other more nuanced attributes of program quality.

Summary

Providers indicated that the most significant changes to their program as a result of participating in PFA included access to professional development opportunities, enhanced classroom settings, PFA support services, offset of parent fees, and the ability to hire additional classroom staff. These benefits have been voiced by providers throughout the course of the four-year process evaluation, with an increasing appreciation of PFA professional development opportunities. Teachers, family child care providers, site supervisors, and directors were strongly supportive of the training opportunities available to them through PFA, indicating it was high-quality and relevant to their work with children and families.

PFA providers offered examples of how PFA has positively impacted adult-child interactions and teaching strategies in their classrooms. The process evaluation also included structured observations of PFA classrooms in Years 2 and 3 of the study, using the CLASS, which indicated that PFA teachers offer warm and supportive environments for children and are generally skilled in managing behavior and organizing instructional time. As noted earlier, they are somewhat less effective in promoting children's higher-order thinking skills and cognition. First 5 San Francisco has initiated intensive professional development in the area of adult-child interactions, including a training series to help program directors and site supervisors become more familiar with the CLASS tool.

The Gateway to Quality assessment process has been explored throughout the four-year evaluation, with providers consistently indicating that the independent observations, coupled with funding for enhancements, has resulted in significant improvements in classroom quality. While providers were often anxious about the observation process, it was ultimately a positive experience that not only enhanced the classroom environments, but contributed to a sense of teamwork among staff as they worked together to improve their program settings. A small but vocal group of providers have expressed concern about the ECERS-R tool and its perceived narrow focus on the physical environment of the classroom, and they encouraged the use of alternative methods of assessing classroom quality. Interactions with Gateway to Quality staff appear to have improved over the last several years, with providers appreciating increased communication with the agency and demonstrating a greater understanding of the assessment process.

In general, PFA classroom enhancements – Raising a Reader, Tree Frog Treks, Performing Arts workshops, and the early childhood mental health consultants – have received high marks by providers over the course of the four-year evaluation. In particular, PFA providers singled out the early childhood mental health consultants as providing critical support to children, families, and staff. The consultants facilitate referrals for children who may have special needs, help staff

work effectively with parents, and provide support in dealing with challenges in the classroom and among staff teams. In addition, providers were appreciative of Raising a Reader, viewing it as a highly effective strategy to promote child-adult shared reading. A handful of providers expressed concern about Tree Frog Treks, noting the program was not developmentally appropriate for preschool-age children and suggesting it did not result in long-term changes in how staff integrate science into the curriculum.

Many providers emphasized that PFA has provided an effective forum to network with other preschool programs in the county. PFA has “brought the community close together” and offered a vehicle by which staff can share, learn from one another, and develop solutions to common challenges. Professional development was highly valued both in terms of its content, as well as the networking it provided to PFA staff.

Challenges to program implementation, documented in each year of the process evaluation, have focused on concerns related to time constraints that providers face. Common themes included complaints about PFA reporting requirements, in addition to those that programs already face in regard to other funding streams (e.g., Head Start, State Preschool, etc.) and limited time to complete the DRDP-Rs and other PFA reports. However, over the course of the four-year study, these comments have reduced in number, reflecting First 5 San Francisco’s efforts to streamline their reporting system.

Implications for Practice

The PFA process evaluation deliberately employed a flexible study design that addressed shifting areas of interest for First 5 San Francisco and built on findings that emerged in each year of the study. Focusing on the information gathered through the Year 4 interviews, in the context of the findings across the four-year evaluation, First 5 San Francisco should consider the following implications for practice:

- **Continue to invest in professional development for PFA staff.** Feedback from staff in Year 4 reflected a strong level of satisfaction with PFA-sponsored trainings, and appreciation for the autonomy to use PFA funds for site-specific training. In previous years of the evaluation, staff had requested training in a variety of areas or suggested modifications to the existing professional development activities offered. For example, in Year 2, program directors and site supervisors recommended that First 5 San Francisco identify ways of making the Learning Circles more helpful and accessible to staff. Training on the ASQ, working with children with special needs, and partnering with families were all identified as training needs. By Year 4, providers were clearly invested in the PFA-sponsored training system, and suggested that it had positively influenced teaching practices in the classroom, motivated staff, and offered valuable networking opportunities across the provider community. As First 5 San Francisco continues to offer professional development to the existing cohort of PFA providers and as more providers participate in the system, they may consider designing and targeting training and networking opportunities to programs at various levels of program implementation and quality.
- **Continue to focus training and technical assistance to promote quality adult-child interactions.** Observations of PFA classrooms using the CLASS, conducted during Years 2 and 3 of the study, indicate that PFA programs currently operating in San Francisco County typically offer warm and emotionally supportive teacher-child interactions. In addition, PFA teachers generally implement effective behavior and instructional management strategies to maximize learning opportunities for children. However, PFA teachers appear to be less effective in promoting children’s higher-order thinking skills and cognition and providing feedback to expand learning and understanding. In 2008-2009, First 5 San Francisco has emphasized adult-child interactions as part of its training offered to PFA staff, and should continue to do so, including targeted and ongoing support to sites through technical assistance and mentoring.
- **Use the CLASS in conjunction with the ECERS-R to assess program quality.** A small but vocal group of providers have voiced concerns regarding the ECESR-R throughout the four-year process evaluation – specifically the tool’s focus on the physical

environment of the classroom. Despite this feedback – and the anxiety that many providers have felt about the assessment process – it is clear that upgraded classrooms, guided by the ECERS-R (and FDCRS), reflect a significant improvement in quality among preschool settings in San Francisco. The use of the CLASS in a random sample of classrooms on a periodic basis would provide First 5 San Francisco with valuable information to supplement the ECERS-R/FDCRS data, particularly given the growing body of research demonstrating the importance of quality adult-child interactions for children’s learning and development. In particular, the relatively low scores on some dimensions of the CLASS focusing on concept development and language modeling suggest that there is significant room for improvement among PFA classrooms, which should continue to be tracked through periodic structured observations.

- **Continue to focus attention and professional development regarding identifying, referring, and serving children with special needs** – both at the program level and at the systems level (e.g., closer coordination with agencies that provide special education services). This might include continued use of mental health consulting services along with ongoing attention to systems-level issues that delay receipt of early intervening services for children and families who could benefit from them.
- **Track teaching strategies and curriculum at the classroom level to determine if they are changing in response to training and professional teachers receive.** Specifically, are teaching strategies becoming more individualized, aligned with children’s needs, and encouraging of higher-order thinking skills across the curriculum? This is especially critical due to the diverse language abilities of PFA children and the high proportion of dual language learners.
- **Review science instruction in PFA classrooms and the extent to which classroom enhancement services are developmentally appropriate.** As noted in the provider recommendations, a small number of PFA staff throughout the evaluation have raised concerns about Tree Frog Treks, indicating it was more appropriate for elementary school students and was limited in its ability to create long-term changes in science instruction and teaching practices in the classroom. On a related note, the Year 3 teacher survey indicated the frequency of science instruction in PFA classrooms could be increased to the benefit of children. For example, a fourth of teachers indicated that children engage in activities related to the scientific process (e.g., hypothesis, prediction, observation) only two or three times a month and another 11% reported they do so once a month or less. Given some concerns regarding the long-term benefit of Tree Frog Treks and the Year 3 survey findings, First 5 San Francisco should examine the developmental appropriateness of Tree Frog Treks for PFA classrooms and based on the findings, explore strategies to make Tree Frog Treks more relevant in PFA settings and potentially

seek alternative avenues to enhance science instruction in PFA classrooms. First 5 San Francisco may wish to explore how science is currently integrated into PFA classrooms and how training enhancements could ensure science concepts are included as part of everyday learning activities.

In addition to raising the quality of classroom environments in the county, PFA has invested significant resources in professional development, including an increasingly strong focus on improving the quality of relationships between children and staff, a primary driver in children's learning and development. The challenges facing PFA are also those that impact the early care and education field more generally and will continue to require a broad-based effort to address, including recruiting, training, and maintaining a high-quality workforce. Throughout the evaluation, providers have expressed their support for the initiative and applauded the efforts of First 5 San Francisco in planning and implementing PFA's implementation so effectively. As one PFA provider reported, "PFA has given us something new to reach for."

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