

San Mateo County Office of Education
San Mateo Early Childhood Quality Improvement Project (EQuIP)
Summary of Proposed Activities for Year 1 (FY 2009-10)

A. INTRODUCTION

The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) is pleased to present this summary of the San Mateo Early Childhood Quality Improvement Project (EQuIP), a comprehensive, countywide quality improvement initiative. Using lessons learned from the Preschool for All demonstration project, and the strong background that the SMCOE has developed in facilitating program change for early childhood education (ECE) programs, EQuIP will offer a menu of evidence-based strategies sure to appeal to all types of programs (family child care, infant-toddler, preschool, and exempt care). The program model described below directly addresses First 5 San Mateo's (F5SMC) 2009-2015 Strategic Plan, responds to documented community needs, and uses evaluation findings to strengthen proposed activities.

The SMCOE will serve as the lead agency for the project. The early childhood programs funded at the SMCOE and housed in the Child, Youth and Family Services Department, comprise a constellation of skill, knowledge and resources for ECE public policy, direct services and quality supports that will enhance and maximize the delivery of EQuIP services.

B. BACKGROUND

Preschool for All (PFA) San Mateo County, launched in 2004, has been a multi-year demonstration project designed to support the implementation of high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year olds in San Mateo County. As the recipient of an early implementation grant from First 5 California, San Mateo County was the first California county to implement a PoP/PFA program, and its first preschool classrooms opened in March 2005. San Mateo PFA was highlighted in a national RAND report released last year, which found that PFA classrooms in San Mateo outperformed classrooms statewide on all measures of quality assessed¹. The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) has served as the lead agency responsible for administering the project. Now in its fifth year of operation, FY 08-09 represents the final year that direct classroom spaces will be funded as part of PFA. As this chapter of PFA closes, a new chapter begins as PFA transforms itself into a quality support initiative for early childhood education (ECE) programs throughout San Mateo County.

Over the past four years, the goal of PFA in San Mateo County has been to increase capacity and improve the quality of preschool for all four-year-old children, regardless of income, in the two target communities within the Redwood City and East Palo Alto School Districts. PFA has accomplished this goal by working with a network of partner agencies that are contracted to the SMCOE to deliver resources and supports to providers, such as technical assistance (TA), training, outreach and enrollment support, career counseling, early literacy supports, early childhood mental health consultation, evaluation, assessments, and monitoring.

As PFA transitions into EQuIP, some of the components of PFA that have proven successful in enhancing quality will continue, but the initiative will also expand beyond its current strategies to provide a much broader array of quality interventions. Importantly, the new initiative will no longer be limited to the school district boundary areas of Redwood City and East Palo Alto nor

¹ Lynn A. Karoly, Bonnie Ghosh-Dastidar, Gail L. Zellman, Michal Perlman, Lynda Fernyhough, *Prepared to Learn: The Nature and Quality of Early Care and Education for Preschool-Age Children in California* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008).

to center-based preschool settings, but will expand to serve early childhood education (ECE) programs countywide, including infant-toddler and family child care programs.

C. HOW EQUIP STRATEGIES WERE SELECTED

Three major sources of information, in addition to a set of Guiding Principles (Table 1), drove the selection of EQUIP strategies.

First 5 San Mateo Strategic Plan. F5SMC’s revised Strategic Plan for 2009-15 served as the blueprint for determining major areas of focus. Within the goal areas outlined by the F5SMC Strategic Plan, SMCOE staff brainstormed potential strategies, using insight from lessons learned from PFA, available community needs assessment data, and research. All EQUIP strategies map to F5SMC Strategic Plan strategies and indicators in the Early Learning, Family Support and Communication and Systems Change Focus Areas.

Community Input. SMCOE organized 5 different community input sessions, receiving input from the following groups: The SMC Consortium of State Preschool Directors, Child Care Partnership Council (Quality Committee), San Mateo County Community College District students enrolled in ECE Administration class, Preschool for All Partners’ Meeting (PFA classroom and support service partners), and a Learning Circle of state preschool teachers and directors. The SMCOE presented participants with the core strategies under consideration and asked them to rank them in terms of their importance. In total, responses from 79 individuals were collected and tabulated. The strategies described below garnered widespread support across respondents.

PFA Evaluation Findings. Over the past four years, San Mateo has collaborated with San Francisco on a joint process evaluation of PFA conducted by the American Institutes of Research (AIR). The process evaluation generated a wealth of information about how to work with early childhood programs on quality improvement. The following table highlights a few of the lessons learned, and how EQUIP strategies incorporate these lessons.

Table 2: How EQUIP Strategies Address Evaluation Findings

Evaluation Finding	How EQUIP Addresses Finding
PFA teachers found support services extremely helpful, but requested that these services be better aligned to meet individual program needs.	Teachers and classrooms will have a much wider array of supports to choose from, ranging from broad-based TA to specific TA targeting particular domains of quality. Teachers and classrooms will be able to select the type of support that best meets their needs.
There was variation in the extent to which PFA programs involved parents in programs, and programs cited limited resources as a barrier to parent involvement. PFA parents were particularly enthusiastic about programs that gave them knowledge, tools, and strategies to support their children at home.	Virtual Pre-K, Raising a Reader, and Early Childhood Language Development Institute services will provide concrete strategies and materials for increasing parental involvement in children’s learning both in the classroom and at home, with a special emphasis on English Language Learners.

Evaluation Finding	How EQuIP Addresses Finding
PFA teachers in San Mateo County report high rates of reading, language and math activities, but lower rates of science activities.	Curriculum materials to enhance science and math instruction will be made available through SMCOE Curriculum Services and RAFT. Raising a Reader will be expanded to continue successful literacy supports.
PFA programs need more support to effectively address children's special needs, including behavior problems.	Devereux trainings will build teacher skill and capacity to address children's social-emotional development in the classroom.
PFA programs emphasized the benefits of funding for equipment and materials and the independent Gateway to Quality ECERS-R assessments.	Independent environmental assessments and follow-up technical assistance will continue and be expanded to infant-toddler programs and family child care homes. Mini-grants will be available to help address materials and equipment needs identified on assessments.
PFA classrooms scored lower on <i>Concept Development</i> on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which involves teachers providing feedback to children that expand their learning and understanding.	The PFA Technical Assistance Coordinator will become trained in administering the CLASS and will provide technical assistance to classrooms focused on improving teacher-child interactions related to Concept Development.

D. EQUIP GOALS

The following goals summarize what EQuIP hopes to accomplish through coordinated training, technical assistance, and supports to early childhood providers and programs. All goals are reflected in the Scope of Work.

1. Promote the educational and career progress of ECE professionals towards completing ECE Certificates, Child Development Permits and Degrees.
2. ECE programs will provide high quality learning *environments* for children 0-5 years old.
3. Teachers and providers will have the *knowledge and skills* to provide high quality early care and education services to children ages 0-5.
4. Child care center directors will have the knowledge and skills they need to effectively *lead and manage* high quality early care and education programs for children ages 0-5.
5. SMCOE will provide high quality management of the EQuIP Project Scope of Work and Budget.
6. Advance F5SMC's Communications and Systems Change efforts to promote optimal early childhood development for children 0-5 in San Mateo County.
7. Demonstrate the effectiveness of project strategies through participation in an independently administered process and outcome evaluation.
8. Ensure the general public is aware of the benefit of Proposition 10 tax dollars.

E. EQUIP STRATEGIES

The following narrative summarizes the vision and rationale proposed for the first year of EQuIP. Some program components will be ready for implementation as of July 1, 2009, while others will take time and planning to launch. Still others will require a phased-in approach whereby initial training is provided in Year 1, followed by more intensive technical assistance and mentoring in Years 2 and 3 in order to promote actual implementation of concepts learned in trainings.

1. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The objectives of EQuIP Workforce Development activities are to ensure that a qualified workforce is available to meet the needs of all children enrolled in early childhood education (ECE) programs serving children 0-5 in San Mateo County and that teachers move toward parity in qualifications with teachers in the K-12 system.

Workforce and career supports provided by the San Mateo County Community College District and the Child Care Coordinating Council (4Cs), including textbook loans, supports to Spanish-speaking students and career and academic advising, have served as critical stepping stones to progress along the early childhood education career pathway for professionals in this county, and will continue under EQuIP.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Environmental assessments and follow-up technical assistance were central quality enhancement strategies for Preschool for All, and through EQuIP will be expanded to serve family child care homes and center-based infant-toddler classrooms. In addition, local capacity to administer reliable ECERS-R, FCCERS and ITERS assessments will be increased.

EQuIP staff will develop capacity to use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), with its emphasis on teacher-child interaction, as a complementary observation, assessment and technical assistance tool.

3. BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH

When surveyed about their greatest challenges and training needs, early childhood teachers and providers consistently place the behavioral and social-emotional health of children in their care as their first priority.

EQuIP will respond to this demand by training providers in the Devereux Early Childhood Initiative's *"Facing the Challenge: Working with Children who use Challenging Behaviors"* training module, which gives ECE teachers the skills they need to assess children's social and emotional strengths and use the assessment results to create plans to enhance children's resilience and build skills for success in school and life.

Each EQuIP Devereux training session will be co-facilitated by a child development specialist and an early childhood mental health consultant. Subsequent to the trainings, participants will have continued access to individualized consultation from an early childhood mental health specialist.

Given the multi-faceted nature of this issue, EQuIP will explore partnerships with Watch Me Grow, Jewish Family & Children's Services, Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, Children's Health Initiative, Community Gatepath and UCSF Parent Infant Program to address and promote policies related to children's social-emotional health.

4. INFANT AND TODDLER CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

In alignment with First 5 San Mateo County's Strategic Plan, EQuIP is committed to providing supports for programs serving children from birth to 3 years old.

The WestEd Program for Infant/Toddler Care's (PITC) philosophy of responsive, respectful and relationship-based care promotes the highest quality of care for infants and toddlers and was a natural choice for SMCOE in the development of the EQuIP plan.

Through EQuIP, PITC will offer a unique combination of unit-bearing trainings, coaching and mentoring to infant-toddler caregivers throughout the county. In addition, EQuIP will contract with SFSU's Gateway to Quality Initiative and 4Cs to assess programs and provide TA based on the Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS).

5. CURRICULUM SUPPORTS

5a. Virtual Pre-K

Virtual Pre-K (VPK), developed in 2001 by the Chicago Public Schools, is a unique program that strengthens classroom curriculum while promoting parents' engagement in their children's education. Based upon the belief that learning happens "virtually everywhere", VPK provides curriculum resources for teachers and take-home materials for parents, including Teacher Edition Kids, videos, CDs, Parent Edition Kits, and a website with additional downloadable resources. In addition, a bilingual online community-based calendar offers learning activities beyond the home and school.

By partnering with Virtual Pre-K, San Mateo County will be joining four states, four California counties and the California Association of Bilingual Educators (CABE) to offer a relatively low-cost, multi-dimensional, lesson-based program that has the potential to bridge the digital divide and reach an unlimited number of teachers and families in San Mateo County.

5b. Early Childhood Language Development Institute (ECLDI)

The goal of the Early Childhood Language Development Institute (ECLDI), established at the SMCOE in 2003, is to create early childhood settings and home environments that promote and support dual language/culture development for children learning English.

Preschool teachers and parents participating in ECLDI trainings learn about research-based strategies that enhance children's sense of identity and self-esteem, support children's home- and second-language acquisition, develop partnerships between teachers and families and support the transition to kindergarten.

Building on the success of ECLDI in PFA, EQuIP will support the expansion of this award-winning program to parents and providers throughout the county.

5c. Raising a Reader®

One in three children entering kindergarten lacks basic pre-reading skills, which are proven to be a key factor in determining high-school graduation and lifelong success. By encouraging parent-child bonding and early literacy skills through a routine of daily "book cuddling" with their children from birth to age five, the Raising A Reader (RAR) Book Bag Program addresses this challenge head on.

Building on the success of the Raising a Reader Book Bag early literacy program in PFA classrooms, EQuIP will support the expansion of RAR to 150 classrooms serving 3,700 children throughout the county.

6. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND PEER MENTORING FOR CHILD CARE ADMINISTRATORS

Strong leadership and management skills of child care directors and administrators are the key to making lasting improvements in child care quality. Without strong leaders, few of the strategies outlined thus far will be successful. Given the importance of this strategy, and the variety of approaches to addressing it, SMCOE plans to convene directors and administrators in Year 1 to gather their input about the supports and trainings that would benefit them the most.

Potential strategies include: Facilitative Leadership training, Cognitive Coaching, training and assessment in the Program Administration Scale (PAS) and the Aim 4 Excellence (on-line) Director Credential. EQuIP will collaborate with other organizations providing supports to directors in SMC, such as the Early Childhood Mentor-Director Project, PACE, 4Cs, SMCOE and the San Mateo Consortium of Quality Programs, to ensure maximum coordination of resources.

7. COMMUNICATIONS AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

In order for EQuIP to achieve its goal of raising the bar of quality for ECE programs countywide, systems change must be part and parcel of everything it does. Given limited resources, EQuIP services cannot reach every single child care program, ECE student/teacher, or exempt provider in the county. As a result, policies and collaboration that extend the reach of EQuIP services to a wider array of programs will be a paramount focus of the EQuIP effort. Specific strategies include the following:

- Collaborate with major efforts funded by F5SMC, specifically Watch Me Grow, and the School Readiness Initiative, and potentially the UCSF Parent Infant Project.
- Collaborate closely with the School Readiness Initiative to enhance Pre-K to K transition and strengthen articulation activities and supports to preschools and school districts.
- Share lessons learned about how to promote inclusive early childhood programs that can then be shared by each initiative with their partner programs.
- Coordinate and co-facilitate ECE Learning Circles with teachers/directors in publicly-funded programs. Learning Circles provide an opportunity for classroom teachers to receive training and peer support on self-identified areas of need.
- Collaborate with SMCOE Curriculum Services Program to develop and incorporate a preschool strand in conferences and workshops typically offered to K-12 programs.
- Collaborate with RAFT (Resource Area for Teaching), newly housed at SMCOE, to develop a preschool strand of workshops, materials and activities, and coordinate these efforts with SMCOE Curriculum Services Program.

In addition to the systems change activities described above, there will be a dedicated effort to integrate early screening promotion activities and support across major EQuIP strategies. EQuIP intends to build upon and sustain many of the changes in practice in PFA classrooms relating to children with special needs, while also promoting broader adoption of these policies and practices by new teachers/classrooms served. The major early screening strategies are as follows:

- Strengthen linkages between early childhood mental health consultants and early screening efforts in order to encourage continued universal screening of children in former PFA classrooms (F5SMC will have primary responsibility for implementing and monitoring this component, in partnership with EQuIP, since it will be contracting directly with Jewish Children and Family Services). In addition, make ASQ trainings available to these classrooms to support sustainability of screening efforts.
- Encourage adoption of the ASQ and ASQ:SE by other classrooms in the community. This will be done by building an ASQ and ASQ:SE training component into the PITC and

Devereux training modules, and providing ASQ and ASQ:SE screening materials to participants should they decide to implement screenings in their classrooms.

- Devereux trainers will meet with staff from Watch Me Grow and the UCSF Parent-Infant programs to learn about each others projects / services and to share information about best practices for early identification and intervention. Potential for additional trainings or collaboration will be explored.

F. DATA COLLECTION

Evaluation of EQuIP will be critical to the refinement of project strategies over time and to determining which quality improvement services are most successful. EQuIP is committed to documenting the impact of funded services by tracking individual client level data and through participation in the F5SMC external evaluation. EQuIP will continue to track individual client level data using the highly successful PFA database. Individual level demographic and service data will continue to be entered for any teacher/provider/professional or classroom served by EQuIP services.

In addition to tracking individual descriptive and service data on providers, EQuIP will collect data as required for the F5SMC external evaluation. Data collection forms will be modified or added as necessary to meet the external evaluation requirements. EQuIP is excited to collaborate with F5SMC staff and the external evaluator to finalize evaluation plans and jointly determine the best methods for looking at the impact of EQuIP strategies. As instructed by F5SMC staff, EQuIP has reserved funds in its budget for a possible in-depth evaluation of services as part of F5SMC's integrated evaluation design.

Finally, EQuIP plans to partner with the John W. Gardner Center at Stanford University to explore a possible longitudinal evaluation of PFA children served through FY 08-09. A small amount of funds have been allocated in the budget to allow for planning of a longitudinal study. The implementation of any longitudinal study would occur in partnership with F5SMC and would be subject to the availability of resources.

G. ROLE OF SAN MATEO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION AS LEAD AGENCY FOR PROJECT

The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) is a pioneer and recognized leader in California in the provision of early childhood education services. The SMCOE will administer EQuIP and work in partnership with First 5 San Mateo and the community to implement the program. SMCOE will have responsibility for the legal, fiscal, and daily management of the project. SMCOE will build on its successful working relationships with a vast network of early childhood programs and providers, as well as the expertise it developed managing PFA classroom services, to both recruit and retain providers into EQuIP. The SMCOE will convene meetings at least quarterly to seek input from partners, subcontractors, and other interested parties.

- Four staff at the SMCOE will work together to manage this project.
- The Project Director will oversee all aspects of project administration, provide countywide leadership to promote quality improvement, monitor the project budget, develop and manage subcontractor agreements, and meet state and local reporting requirements.
- The Technical Assistance Coordinator will help coordinate and provide technical assistance for project activities, with a special emphasis on environmental/program assessments and follow-up technical assistance to ECE programs.
- Two assistants will conduct the significant administrative work that will be associated with the greatly increased number of contracted providers and services, as well as support database implementation. A part-time consultant will oversee and implement data collection, analysis, reporting and evaluation related activities.