



PACE

**Program Evaluation: Matching Funds for
Retention Incentives for
Early Care and Education Staff**

**Year II Progress Report: 2002-2003
(Executive Summary)**

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Executive Summary

Beginning in early 2001, First 5 California Children and Families Commission (First 5 California) provided matching funds to county First 5 Commissions in support of programs aimed at improving retention and increasing training and professional development among early care and education (ECE) staff. First 5 California contracted with Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) to assess these programs, evaluating the differential effectiveness of child-care retention incentive (CRI) models developed throughout the state.

This 2002-2003 Progress Report highlights findings from the ten CRI programs chosen for in-depth study. Five of these counties (Alameda, Napa, San Luis Obispo, Siskiyou, and Ventura) began their program in the 2000-2001 fiscal year and are referred to as “Phase I” counties. The other counties (Butte, Fresno, Riverside, San Mateo, and Stanislaus) began their programs the following year and are referred to as “Phase II” counties. This report highlights findings from the first two years of implementation within Phase I counties and the first year of implementation within Phase II counties. Data were collected through a phone survey of participants, as well as through site visits to each county. Although the final report will provide the most comprehensive evaluation of CRI programs, this progress report provides initial findings related to: program design and implementation; program participation; training and professional development; and retention. The major findings are summarized below.

CRI Program Design and Implementation

Highlights

- Multiple ECE agencies were involved in designing and implementing CRI programs, including county First 5 commissions, local planning councils, and offices of education.
- Most CRI programs provided graduated stipends to ECE staff based on education level and training in the first year of the program, and on gaining additional training and professional development in subsequent years.
- Although program designs were fairly similar across the state, each of the CRI programs that were studied in-depth offers unique lessons about the implementation process.
- Programs make modifications and improvements over time.
- CRI programs served as the impetus for strengthening existing links among various ECE agencies, as well as forging new collaborations.

When coming together to design and implement CRI programs, county agencies began to collaborate and integrate services in new ways. Resource & Referral networks, First 5 Commissions, community colleges, offices of education and, in some cases, education and training contractors, have worked together to design and implement the program and continue to make modifications in order to meet local needs as well as state-level goals.

Among participating counties, a variety of agencies combined resources, expertise, and information to conduct outreach activities, design and review applications, and disseminate program-related information regarding professional development opportunities in and around the counties.

Program Participation

Highlights

- CRI programs awarded stipends to 12,742 ECE staff members in 2001-2002.
- Participants represented a diverse group of center-based staff and family child-care providers in terms of ethnicity, type of workplace, and experience in the ECE field.
- CRI participants were, on average, a group of relatively low paid workers—54 percent of family child-care providers and 30 percent of center-based staff made less than \$9.00 per hour.
- CRI participants served a large and diverse group of California's children—59 percent of participants served infants and toddlers; 56 percent served children with special needs; and 69 percent served children whose primary language is not English.
- Phase I counties were able to recruit more family child-care and new-to-field staff in the second year of the program.
- Sixty percent of participants in the in-depth, Phase I counties returned to the program in the second year. The most common reason for not returning to the program was having left the child-care field.

Participant Characteristics

According to reports submitted to First 5 California, CRI programs awarded stipends to 12,742 ECE staff members throughout the state during the 2001-2002 fiscal year.¹ CRI participants represent an ethnically diverse group of center-based staff and family child-care providers who vary widely in terms of educational backgrounds and experience in ECE. On average, participants are relatively low paid—54 percent of family child-care providers and 30 percent of center-based staff reported making less than \$9.00 an hour. Almost two-thirds of participants (65%) reported household incomes that fell below the 2001 median household income in California (\$47,262).

Center-based participants appear to be generally representative of the larger population of ECE staff, while family child-care providers participating in the program appear to be a somewhat more educated, highly paid, and experienced group of staff than those in the greater family child-care workforce. This finding regarding the relatively high levels of education, wages, and field tenure among family child-care providers participating in CRI programs is not surprising given that the initial eligibility criteria set a minimum level of education for participation and that one of the goals of many of the CRI programs was to reward ECE staff who had obtained high levels of education. Family child-care providers tend to have lower levels of education than center-based staff and therefore, consistent with this program design feature, some CRI programs draw from the more highly educated (and thus more tenured and well-paid) family-child care provider community. As discussed in greater detail within the body of the report, by reducing the

initial eligibility criteria CRI programs were able to attract family child-care participants with a wider range of educational backgrounds. It should be noted, however, that reducing initial eligibility might not fit with the goals of some programs that emphasize the importance of rewarding staff that have obtained a minimum level of education (typically 6 or 12 units of ECE).

The short amount of time in which staff had to get CRI programs started in the first year limited outreach and recruitment efforts. Nevertheless, findings from the 2001-2002 Progress Report suggested that programs were able to reach a wide range of ECE staff members in the first year.ⁱⁱ The current report provides evidence that programs were successful in reaching an even more diverse population in the second year. Most notable was an increase in the participation of family child-care providers and ECE staff with relatively low levels of tenure in the field.

Across programs staff reported that reaching family child-care providers was more difficult than reaching center-based staff. Several programs were disappointed with the rate of family child-care participation in the first year of the program and identified this as an area of focus for Year II. Administrative data from the four Phase I, in-depth counties (Napa, San Luis Obispo, Siskiyou, Ventura) suggest that these efforts were successful. Among these four programs, family child-care provider participation increased from 19 percent of all participants in the first year to 28 percent of all new participants in the second.

Participation among new-to-the-field ECE staff also increased in the second year of the program. According to administrative data submitted by Phase I, in-depth counties, the percentage of participants with two or fewer years in the field increased from nine percent among Year I participants to 21 percent among new Year II participants. Average field tenure dropped by almost two years for both center-based and family child-care participants—decreasing from 11.6 to 9.7 years among center-based staff and 8.8 to 6.9 years among family child-care providers. Information from the qualitative study suggests that some relatively new ECE staff did not meet initial eligibility in the first year, but worked to gain that eligibility in the second. This may have contributed to the lower field tenure among new Year II participants.

CRI participants serve a large and diverse group of California's children—59 percent of participants serve infants and toddlers; 56 percent serve children with special needs, and 69 percent serve children whose primary language is not English.

Program Retention

CRI programs are designed to be most effective for ECE staff members who remain in the programs over time. Through sustained contact with program staff and other participants, ECE staff members have more time to take advantage of the supports offered by CRI programs. Participants remaining in programs must continue to take ECE coursework and training, perhaps leading to new job opportunities, higher salaries, and the provision of higher quality care for children. Thus, encouraging participants to remain in the program is an important priority.

Within the four Phase I, in-depth counties, 60 percent of participants who received stipends in the first year returned to the program for the second year. Program retention rates did not differ by county, ethnicity, job title, education level, field tenure, wages, or household income. In a positive indication of program attention to the needs of family child-care participants, family child-care providers were as likely as ECE staff working in centers to return for a second year in the program.

The most powerful predictor of whether or not Year I participants returned in the second year was the amount of the stipend they received. Stipend level was a significant predictor of program retention for participants with college degrees (AA and BA), but not for those with some college education or less. Participants with AA degrees were more likely to be retained in the program if they received at least \$500, while participants with BA degrees were much more likely to be retained if they received at least \$1500. Of the 65 BA level participants who received less than \$1500, 43 percent remained in the program; this compares to a program retention rate of 82 percent for BA level participants who received \$1500 or more. These findings are only based on participants in the four Phase I, in-depth counties, and more conclusive statements about the association between stipend level and program retention will be available in the final report. One indication that caution is warranted is that program retention rates in Ventura county, in which all participants received \$500 in the first year, were similar to program retention rates in other counties.

Many program directors have expressed a desire to understand the reasons that people do not return to the program. Survey results provide evidence that the most common reason for which participants reported not reapplying to the program was that they had left the child-care field. Twenty-four percent of those who did not reapply stated that this was a reason for not continuing in the program. The other most common reasons were: it was too hard to enroll in the classes I needed (12%), I stopped working in child care in my county (10%), and the program requirements were too hard to figure out (9%).

Training and Professional Development

Highlights

- Although CRI participants reported many barriers to training, the vast majority (88%) of participants took college coursework or attended a conference, training, or workshop in the first year of the program.
- Of those taking ECE courses, the average participant is taking the equivalent of two and a half three-unit courses each year.
- Many CRI programs are working actively to reduce the barriers to training.
- Latino participants are more likely to take ECE courses than are other participants.
- Initial evidence suggests that continued participation in CRI programs may be associated with greater ECE unit accumulation among relatively new-to-the-field staff.
- CRI programs are encouraging ECE staff to obtain Child Development Permits—within one year, there was a 42 percent increase in the number who had permits.

Barriers to Training and Professional Development

Consistent with other reports, the majority of CRI participants (64%) reported that they faced barriers to participating in training and coursework. Overall, the most commonly reported barrier was that classes were not offered at convenient times. Program directors in many counties reported that they are working actively to reduce these barriers. Several counties have developed close ties with community colleges and are working to make courses available on nights and weekends. Other counties connect participants with staff at community colleges to help them complete professional development plans. These plans lay out the required coursework and available support systems so that these ECE staff members can meet their professional development goals.

Coursework and Training Activities

ECE Coursework. Results indicate that over the first two years of the project almost all participants have engaged in some kind of training or education in ECE. The majority (51%) of all participants took at least one ECE unit-bearing course in the first year of the program and a greater number (76%) had taken at least one ECE course in the first two years of the program. Even after accounting for other factors such as education and experience levels, Latino participants were more likely than other participants to take ECE coursework. Within the Phase I counties, 91 percent of Latino participants took at least one ECE course in the first two years of the program. Reasons for this high rate of ECE coursework among Latino participants are not clear at this time, but will be examined in greater detail in the final report.

Over the course of the first two years, participants in Phase I counties who had taken at least one ECE course took an average of 10.5 ECE units. Relatively new-to-the-field staff (1 to 4 years) who continued in the CRI program for both years tended to take the highest number of units, averaging 19.2 units over the two years.

GE Coursework. Over a quarter (28%) of participants took GE coursework in the first year of the program, increasing to approximately one-third (35%) by the second year of the program. Among those who took a GE course, participants took an average of 10.4 units in the first year, or about three and a half, three-unit courses.

ECE Conferences, Workshops, and Trainings. Over three-quarters of participants (79%) reported taking at least one workshop, conference, or training in ECE during the first year of the program, with participants taking an average of 44 hours of professional development. Almost all Phase I participants (95%) had taken at least one workshop, conference, or training in ECE after the first two years.

Child Development Permits. Another key indicator of the professional development of CRI participants is the increasing number of participants with Child Development Permits. These permits authorize services in the care, development, and instruction of young children and verify the completion of coursework meeting the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing's requirements. Within Phase I counties, there was a 42 percent increase in the number of participants with permits between March 2002 and March 2003. Although some people have expressed concern that obtaining the Child Development Permit may be a barrier to the participation of family child-care providers, preliminary findings indicate that family child-care providers were as likely as center-based staff to apply for and receive permits during this one-year period.

Retention

Retention Highlights

- Field retention is high among CRI participants, with 92 percent remaining in the field 19 months after entering the CRI program.
- Total turnover at centers (including those who left the field) one year after entering the CRI program was approximately 22 percent, somewhat lower than the 30 percent turnover rate estimated in other studies of center-based staff.
- ECE staff from federally funded centers were more likely to have left their centers, although they were just as likely as other ECE staff to remain in the field.

A primary goal of the Matching Funds for Retention program is to encourage skilled ECE staff to remain in the child-care field. The program also seeks to reduce turnover and stabilize the child-care workforce by encouraging ECE staff to remain at their job locations. Preliminary findings related to retention are positive. The vast majority of CRI participants are staying in the field, and turnover within centers is lower than in comparable studies. Estimates indicate that approximately six percent of CRI participants leave the child-care field in the year after receiving a stipend. This compares to other research that has documented yearly field turnover rates of 15 percent.ⁱⁱⁱ Overall, center turnover (including those who left the field) at one year was approximately 22 percent, lower than the 30 percent figure found in other studies.^{iv}

It is important to note, however, that due the lack of a comparison group in the current study, we cannot definitely attribute the high rates of field and center retention to participation in the CRI program. Other factors are likely to contribute to these findings. Most notably, due to eligibility requirements, CRI programs may attract a somewhat more stable group compared to the general population of ECE staff. The findings that field tenure among CRI participants appears to be fairly high and that 87 percent of participants report that they will probably or definitely stay in the child-care field for the next three years support this possibility. Additionally, changes in economic conditions are known to impact job stability—people are less likely to leave jobs when the economy is poor. The economic downturn of the last two years is likely to have increased levels of job stability within the child-care workforce in general. The final report will include an examination of retention among a group ECE staff members in San Mateo county who have not participated in SaMCARES. This comparison will allow for more rigorous tests of the impact of CRI programs on the retention of ECE staff.

Of those who have left the field, the most frequently cited reason (34% of respondents) was to get more education or training. Of those getting more training, a little less than half were getting more training in child care while the rest were getting training in another field. Another frequently cited reason (12% of respondents) participants left the field was to work in a K-12 school. This finding is consistent with a 2001 study, conducted over the previous four years, which found that about 14 percent of ECE staff members who had left the field did so to work in a K-12 school.^v

ⁱ This does not include participants in Los Angeles County. As of September 2, 2003, Los Angeles had not submitted the 2002 Progress Report to First 5 California.

ⁱⁱ Hamre, B., Grove, R., & Louie, J. (2003). Program Evaluation—Matching Funds for Retention for Early Care and Education Providers: Progress Report 2001-2002. UC Berkeley: PACE,. Available online at http://pace.berkeley.edu/pace_eval_matching_funds.html.

ⁱⁱⁱ Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber and Howes (2001) Then & Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994-2000.

^{iv} Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber & Howes. (2001) Then & Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994-2000; Whitebook & Bellm. (1999). Taking on Turnover.

^v Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber and Howes (2001) Then & Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994-2000.