



Strengthening Parenting Practices: Assessing the Impact of Parent Development Programs in Monterey County

September 2015

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Executive Summary

The following report presents findings from an in-depth examination of program-level outcome data collected by 18 First 5

Monterey County (F5MC) funded partners over the past four years. In 2011, F5MC-funded partners agreed to use a common instrument — the locally modified Parenting Ladder Survey, to examine family outcome areas (i.e., parents' knowledge, skills, and practices) across a range of service types. As of May 2015, more than 3,000 surveys were completed and entered into Persimmony, F5MC's management information system.

Findings

Listed below are notable findings from this study, the first of its kind for F5MC:

Data Inventory

Funded partners have developed the capacity to administer and enter the Parenting Ladder Survey data and the tool appears to be a good fit for F5MC families.

- *Parenting Ladder Survey data was available for 53 percent of eligible clients.* This response rate is within the range typically observed in community-based surveys of this type.
- *Overall, parents made use of the entire range of possible scale values across all the questions, which confirmed that the data were suitable for statistical analysis.*

Changes in Parenting Practices and Activities

F5MC families experienced positive changes in parenting practices and activities.

- *Families reported improvement in parenting practices.* Parents reported the largest gains in knowledge (81 percent)

followed by gains in confidence and activities (66 percent each), and connections to other families with children (58 percent each). These changes over time were statistically significant.

- *Families more frequently participated in activities such as reading, cooking, and playing with their children after participating in programs.* Parents reported a 70 percent increase in the frequency of literacy-related activities such as reading to the child, telling the child a story, singing, learning letters, and playing counting games. Parents also increased the frequency of other types of activities by 64 percent.
- *Similar improvements in parenting practices and activities were reported by families who participated in different types of services (group parenting education, home visits, and playgroups).* Parents in group parenting education and home visitation programs reported similar changes in parenting practices, with increases of 74 percent and 76 percent, respectively, followed by playgroups (with an increase of 53 percent). Parents participating in each of the three services also reported statistically significant changes in parenting activities.
- *Associations were apparent between more sessions attended and greater changes in parenting practices and activities.* Parents who participated in seven to 10 group parenting education sessions reported larger improvements in parenting practices and activities than those who participated in four to six sessions. Parents participating in home visitation reported the largest improvements in parenting practices after 25 or more sessions. Parents who participated in four to six

playgroup sessions reported a 47 percent increase in the amount that their parenting practices improved; those who participated in 7 to 10 sessions reported a slightly greater increase, about 60 percent.

Knowledge of Child Development

F5MC families show higher levels of knowledge about child development in some areas relative to a national sample of parents.

- The Parenting Ladder Survey included six items designed to assess parents' understanding of child development. These questions were taken from a national survey of adults to determine what adults know about child development.
- *Results reveal that parents who participated in F5MC parent education programs were correct more frequently than all parents (regardless of education levels) from the national sample for three out of six items, including:*
 - A child aged six months or younger who witnesses violence, such as seeing his father often hit his mother, will not suffer any long term effects from the experiences, because children that age have no long-term memory.
 - Children who are spanked as a regular form of punishment are more likely to deal with their own anger by being physically aggressive.
 - In terms of learning about language, children get an equal benefit from hearing someone talk on TV versus hearing a person in the same room talking to them.

Parent Satisfaction

Families reported high levels of satisfaction with F5MC-funded programs.

- *Most families were highly likely to recommend F5MC-funded programs to other families.*
- Based on Net Promoter Score analysis, a measure of customer loyalty and satisfaction, *84 percent of parents were categorized as promoters, or loyal enthusiasts who would recommend F5MC-funded programs to their friends and family.* That translates into a Net Promoter Score of 80, well above the score of 50, which is considered excellent in the field.

Moving Forward

Listed below are recommendations to enhance the Parenting Ladder Survey and data collection processes to strengthen the ability to report the impact of programs and to better generalize these findings.

- ✦ **Link Parenting Ladder Surveys to specific F5MC clients and families.**
- ✦ **Add a field for program type to the survey.**
- ✦ **Set a common benchmark for response rates and monitor survey completion throughout the program year.**
- ✦ **Align items that come from existing surveys to allow for comparisons with external data.**

These recommendations — and the evaluation results reported here — will be further refined and informed by discussions with funded partners. The results from these discussions will be incorporated into this report via an addendum later in 2015.

Introduction

Why Parenting Matters

First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) is committed to facilitating access to high quality, culturally responsive services that are designed to promote optimal early childhood development. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013-14, F5MC invested approximately \$7.2 million in local programs, services, and community events that service young children and families. This includes a variety of programs focused on parenting development. Parents play a vital role in early childhood development. The cognitive and social skills important to success in school and beyond undergo foundational development between birth and age 5—yet many parents need additional resources and knowledge to fully support their child’s development during this critical period of time.

Research such as the Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework¹ tells us that children are more likely to do well in school and life when parents are:

- Knowledgeable about parenting and child development
- Confident about their own abilities to parent, even when faced with stressors, challenges, or adversity (i.e., parental resilience), and
- Aware of and regularly engage in activities designed to support their child’s development that enable children to form close and secure relationships with peers and adults; foster a parent’s formation of healthy, sustained relationships; and provide concrete support in times of need.

This evaluation report examines the question, “How do parents change as a result of participating in F5MC-funded parenting education and support programs?” The information in this report is based on data collected by funded partners from parents who participated in a diverse set of programs and activities, each of which included components that were designed to strengthen parenting knowledge and skills. The programs included—group parenting education, home visitation services, and playgroups—offer a variety of ways for parents to access parenting information. Programs also varied in duration, from several weeks to multiple months, but all were focused on helping parents strengthen their parenting skills.²

The Parenting Ladder Survey

F5MC and funded partners that provide parent development programs collaborated to develop the Parenting Ladder Survey. The survey was designed to assess changes in knowledge and behavior and consists of items aligned with four broad topic areas:³

1. **Parenting practices.** These include parenting knowledge, confidence, abilities, interactions, and connections to other families. Parents were asked to reflect on their parenting practices before and after participation in F5MC-funded programs using a seven-point scale ranging from 0 (low) to 6 (high) situated on the visual image of a ladder. This allows for comparison between the two points in time using a retrospective pretest approach.⁴ Sample items from the parenting practices scale can be found in Exhibit 1.

2. **Parenting activities.** These include activities to support literacy and other interactive activities such as playing outside or cooking together.⁵ Just as with the parenting practices, survey respondents were asked to reflect on their parenting activities before and after program participation. The scale asked parents to report how many times a week (from zero to seven) they engaged in specific types of activities with their child—such as reading, playing together, and cooking—prior to the program and currently. Exhibit 1 includes sample items from the parenting activities scale.

Exhibit 1. Sample Items from the Parenting Practices and Activities Scales

My knowledge of how my child is growing and developing.

My ability to identify what my child needs.

The amount of activities my child and I do together.

The amount I read to my child.

3. **Parents' knowledge of child development.** These items were answered on a five-point scale ranging from *definitely true* to *definitely false*. Exhibit 2 includes sample items from the child development knowledge scale, which asked about respondents' knowledge at one point in time (i.e., not a retrospective pretest). These items come from a national survey of adults' knowledge of child development.⁶

Exhibit 2. Sample Items for Child Development Knowledge Scale

Children's capacity for learning is pretty much set from birth and cannot be greatly increased or decreased by interactions with them.

Children get an equal benefit from hearing someone talk on TV versus hearing a person in the same room talking to them.

Infants need a lot of time to develop bonds of security with individuals so frequent changes in child care providers has a negative impact.

4. **Net promoter (Parent Satisfaction) score.** The survey also contained one item that asked parents to indicate how likely they would be to recommend the program they participated in to other families. Responses were given on a seven point scale ranging from 0 (not at all likely) to 6 (very likely)

Assessment Purpose

Funded partner agencies began implementing the Parenting Ladder Survey in FY 2011-12. As of May 2015, more than 3,000 surveys were completed and entered into Persimmony, F5MC's management information system, resulting in a final sample of 3,335 surveys eligible for analysis (see the Technical Appendix for a full discussion of the inclusion criteria). This evaluation team examined surveys completed by parents who participated in group parenting education (28%), home visitation programs (36%), and playgroups (36%) at 18

different funded programs. Parents who completed surveys participated in a median of 10 sessions of their respective program. Appendix C includes a list of the agencies that contributed Parenting Ladder Survey data to this evaluation.

This was the largest coordinated funded partner-led outcome data collection effort in F5MC's history. While F5MC has sponsored a number of large scale data collection efforts (such as the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment), this data is typically collected by external evaluation and research staff. Funded partners collect and enter program enrollment and participation data on a regular basis, but the Parenting Ladder Survey represents the first time F5MC employed *standard* outcomes assessment tools across programs. Therefore, a secondary, but important goal of this evaluation was to assess the quality of the data collected in order to determine the feasibility of this approach in future work.

The amount of technical detail has been limited to keep the report concise. Interested readers may find complete tables with means, more detailed information about subscale characteristics, and complete reporting of all statistical tests in the Technical Appendix to this report.

Findings

This section includes the most salient findings of the research team’s statistical analyses of the Parenting Ladder Survey, and is organized into the following sections:

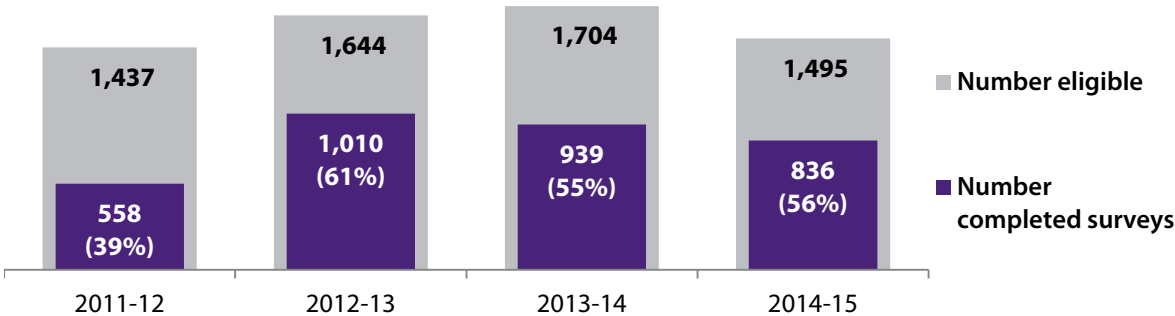
- Data Inventory
- Changes in Parenting Practice and Activities
- Knowledge of Child Development
- Parent Satisfaction

Data Inventory

Funded partners have developed the capacity to administer and enter the Parenting Ladder survey data and the tool appears to be a good fit for F5MC families.

Representativeness refers to the proportion of parents who completed Parenting Ladder Surveys out of the total number of parents who were eligible to do so.⁷ The higher this percentage, the more likely it is that results reflect the experiences and outcomes of all program participants. Program enrollment and participation data from Persimmony was used to determine the total number of parents eligible to complete a survey, defined as those that had participated in at least four program sessions. Overall, Parenting Ladder Survey data was available for 53 percent of eligible clients. This response rate is within the range typically observed in community-based surveys of this type, although it is lower than the target of 70 percent suggested by academic research standards.⁸ Among funded programs, completion rates ranged from 13 to 98 percent, suggesting that effort should be placed on encouraging some programs to improve their data collection practices. As illustrated in Exhibit 3, the response rate increased notably in the second year of data collection, from 39% in FY 2011-12 to 61% in 2012-13. It fell slightly in FY 2013-14 (55%) and stayed at the approximately the same level through April of FY 2014-15⁹.

Exhibit 3. Representativeness: Response Rate by Year



Data quality refers to the degree to which the available data is complete and useable. Overall, missing data was minimal, ranging from 4% to 10% across scales, and appeared random, meaning that there were no items with systematically missing responses. Additionally, parents appeared to use the entire range of possible scale values across all the questions, which confirmed that the data were suitable for further statistical analysis.

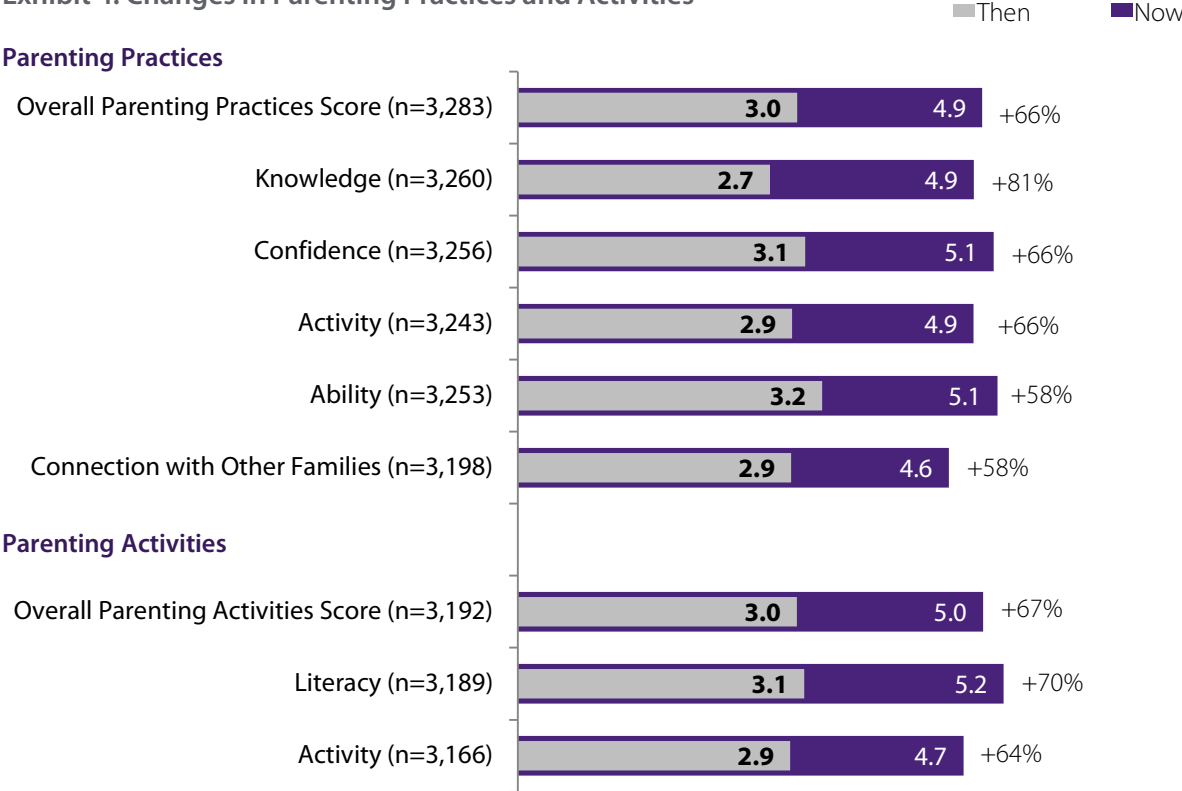
Demographic information was available for the subset of surveys (25 percent) that were linked to program enrollment and participation data in Persimmony. Among those respondents, a majority (65 percent) spoke Spanish as their primary language, 20 percent spoke an indigenous language (i.e., Mixteco, Triqui, or Zapotec), and 15 percent spoke English. The remaining 75 percent of surveys were collected anonymously and therefore could not be linked to parent characteristics. Given the limited nature of this demographic data, it was not used in subsequent analysis because it was unlikely to be representative of the demographics of all parents who completed Parenting Ladder Surveys.

Changes in Parenting Practice and Activities

Families reported improvement in a variety of parenting practices.

The parenting practices scale measures changes in five areas: knowledge, confidence, activities, ability, and connections with other families with children. Families reported meaningful changes in each of these areas from the beginning of their participation in F5MC-funded programs to the time they completed the Parenting Ladder Survey. As seen in Exhibit 4, on average, parents reported the largest gains in knowledge (81%) followed by gains in confidence and activities (66% each), and ability and connections to other families with children (58% each).

Exhibit 4. Changes in Parenting Practices and Activities



In addition to percent change, Exhibit 4, above, includes the mean score reported for each domain area *now* versus *then*. These findings show statistically significant changes over time. Practically speaking, on average, parents moved from about the middle of the scale to close to the top. For example, in the “knowledge” domain, parents reported an average increase of 2.2 points, from a mean score of 2.7 *then* (before the program) to a mean score of 4.9 *now* (since the program). Statistically, the effect sizes associated with these differences fall into the large range.¹⁰

Families more frequently engaged in activities linked to positive developmental outcomes.

The frequency and quality of interactions between parents and their young children have an important impact on the development of skills needed to succeed in school and in life. The parenting activities scale measured how often parents engaged in literacy activities (such as reading, singing, and practicing counting) and other activities (such as playing indoor or outdoor games and sports, talking about the child's day, and preparing a meal together) with their young child. Parents participating in F5MC-funded programs reported increases in the frequency with which they participated in these types of activities with their children (see Exhibit 4 above, Parenting Activities found in the lower section of graph). This included a 70 percent increase in literacy-related activities such as reading to the child, telling the child a story, singing, learning letters, and playing counting games. Parents also increased the frequency of other interaction activities by 64 percent.

Exhibit 4 also shows that the frequency of literacy activities increased from an average of 3.1 times per week to 5.2 times per week, an increase of 2.1 additional experiences per week.¹¹ Other interactions improved from an average of 2.9 times per week to 4.7 times per week, an increase of 1.8 additional activities per week. This translates to an overall 67 percent increase in parent-child interaction activities or an increase of 2.0 additional parent-child interaction activities per week compared to before the F5MC-funded program. These differences were statistically significant and had large effect sizes.

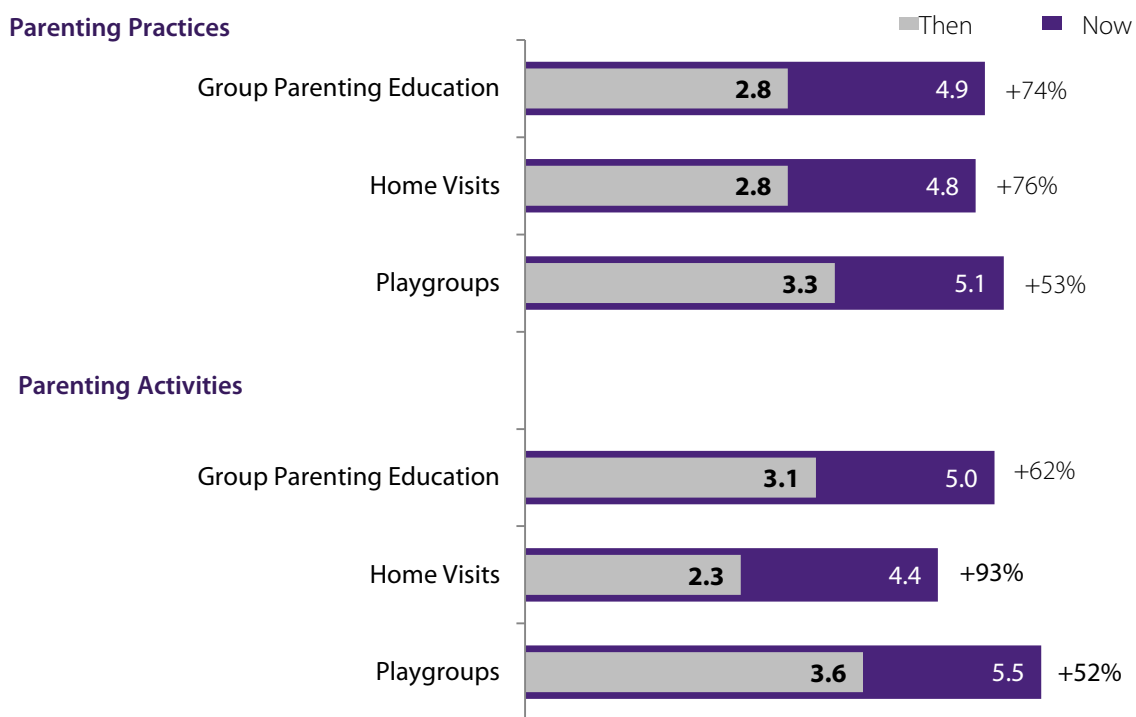
Similar improvements in parenting practices and activities were reported by families who participated in different types of services.

A primary goal of F5MC is to optimize child development, school readiness, and well-being by providing Monterey County's families with access to resources that may support them in feeling more confident, well-informed, and capable of supporting their children. This involves strategically linking families to services best aligned with their needs and receptiveness to receiving information and support. The three service types represented in this evaluation — group parenting education, home visitation, and playgroups — were designed to offer a variety of ways for parents to access parenting information. **Group parenting education** offers didactic and interactive sessions for a limited time period (generally seven to ten class sessions held once a week). These classes support parents in building their understanding of child development and finding new ways to nurture their child. **Home visitation** services provide parents with information that is individualized to the unique development of their children and activities for parent-child engagement in the home environment. Parents tend to receive services for many weeks, with many participating for over six months. **Playgroups** offer opportunities for learning in a social setting that support creation of connections between parent and child as well as among children and parents. Educators facilitate the interactions and share information and resources that help support parenting based on individual family needs. Participation in most playgroups is not time-limited and many parents attend for over six months. Given the differences in the nature and duration of these

programs, this assessment also explored the extent to which changes in parenting practices and activities differed for parents who participated in different types of services.

Parenting practices. Increases in parenting practices and activities were reported by parents who experienced all three service types. Overall, parents in group parenting education and home visitation programs reported similar changes in parenting practices with increases of 74 percent and 76 percent, respectively. In contrast, parents in playgroups reported a 53 percent increase in their parenting practices.¹² Based on *then* (before the program) scores, the evidence suggests that parents participating in playgroups may have entered services with a lower level of need than parents who participated in group parenting education or home visitation — e.g., parents in playgroups had a *then* score of 3.3 and parents in both group parenting education and home visitation had *then* scores of 2.8. Thus while the overall change in scores over time for parents participating in playgroups was not as large as for those in other services, the average *now* score of 5.1 for parents in playgroups was slightly higher than for group parenting (4.9) and home visitation (4.8).¹³

Exhibit 5. Changes in Parenting Practices and Activities by Service Type



The evaluation team examined the pattern of changes in parenting practices to determine the extent to which reported changes aligned with program goals. The largest change reported by parents in both group parenting (89%) and home visitation programs (99%) was in knowledge. This is consistent with the goals of these programs, which work with parents to build their understanding of child development while offering information and modeling strategies to nurture and enjoy their child.

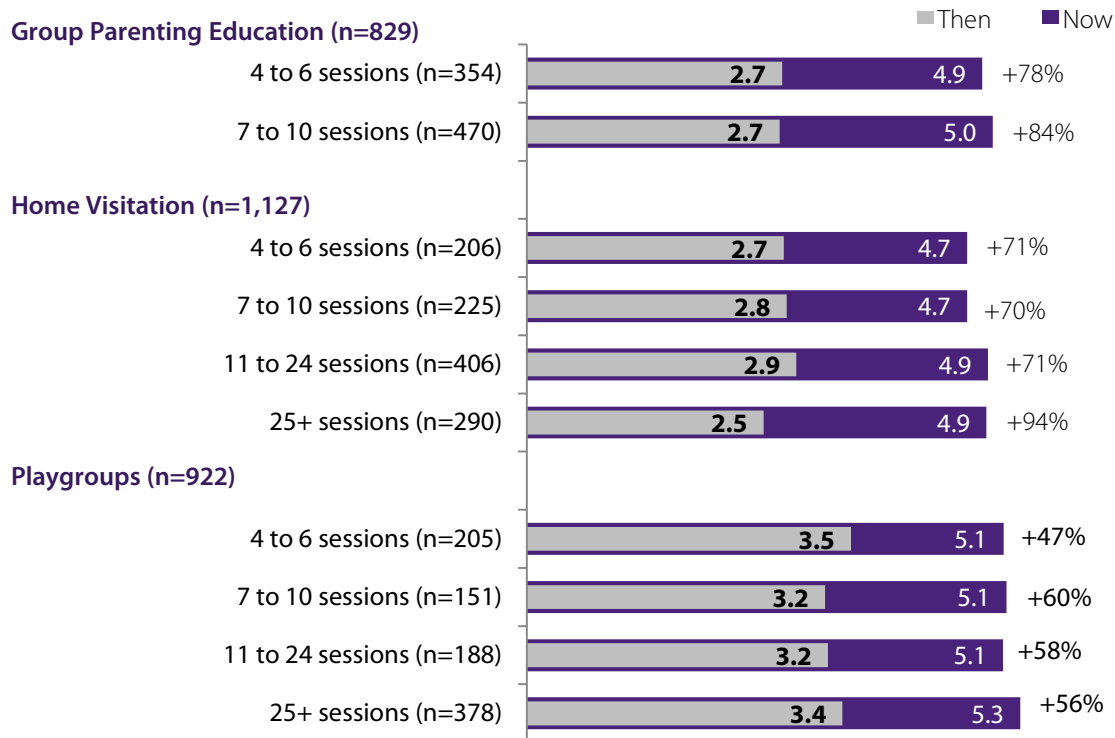
Additionally, one of the unique program goals for playgroups is creation of connection with other families. Parents participating in playgroups reported a 61 percent increase in their connection with other families, which was among the largest changes reported by parents participating in this service. Parents in group parenting education reported similar increases (61 percent) but parents in home visitation reported *less* change in this domain (51 percent). This is consistent with the goals and format of playgroups and group parenting education, both of which provide an opportunity for parents of young children to meet and share information.

Parenting activities. Parents participating in each of the three services also reported statistically significant changes in parenting activities (see Exhibit 5 above). Those in group parenting education and home visitation programs reported the largest increases in the literacy activities. Parents in home visitation programs reported a 100 percent increase in the frequency of these activities before and after the program (from 2.4 times per week before the home visit program to 4.8 times after the program). Parents in playgroups reported increases in literacy and other activities by slightly more than 50 percent (from 3.6 times per week before the playgroup program to 5.5 times per week after the program), increasing, on average two additional activities of each type with their child per week. Note that parents participating in playgroups entered their program already engaging in these activities more frequently than parents in home visitation programs. Differences between parents in group parenting education and playgroups were not statistically significant.

These findings suggest that families may enter different programs with different capacities and strengths. However, these preliminary findings must be interpreted with caution since the majority of surveys cannot be linked to data about parent characteristics. This limits the evaluation team's ability to identify other important relationships in the data that may account for some of these findings (e.g., differences in parent education level, experience parenting, or income). The relationships could be further explored in future evaluations with access to individual client-level data in order to develop more complete demographic profiles of parents.

The number of sessions attended is associated with changes in parenting practices and activities. The Parenting Ladder Survey is intended to be distributed to, and this analysis was limited to, parents who participated in at least four program sessions. This analysis considers intensity separately for each type of program, since the nature and structure of services for each is unique. Most group parenting programs usually consist of eight sessions while home visitation is ongoing (sessions can number in the hundreds). Playgroups vary; some are ongoing while others consist of an eight-session series that can be retaken. This analysis groups service intensity into four categories: lower (4 to 6 sessions), moderate (7 to 10 sessions), higher (11 to 24 sessions), and intense (25+).

Exhibit 6. Changes in Parenting Practices by Service Type and Number of Sessions
Overall Parenting Practices Scores



Exhibits 6 and 7 illustrate changes in parenting practices (Exhibit 6) and activities (Exhibit 7) for each type of program as a function of the number of sessions in which parents participated.

Group parenting education. Parents who participated in 7 to 10 sessions reported larger improvements in parenting practices and activities than those who participated in 4 to 6 sessions. Due to the fact that group parenting education are usually provided in an eight-session series, there were too few parents who participated in more than 10 sessions to conduct analyses of changes among those participant groups.

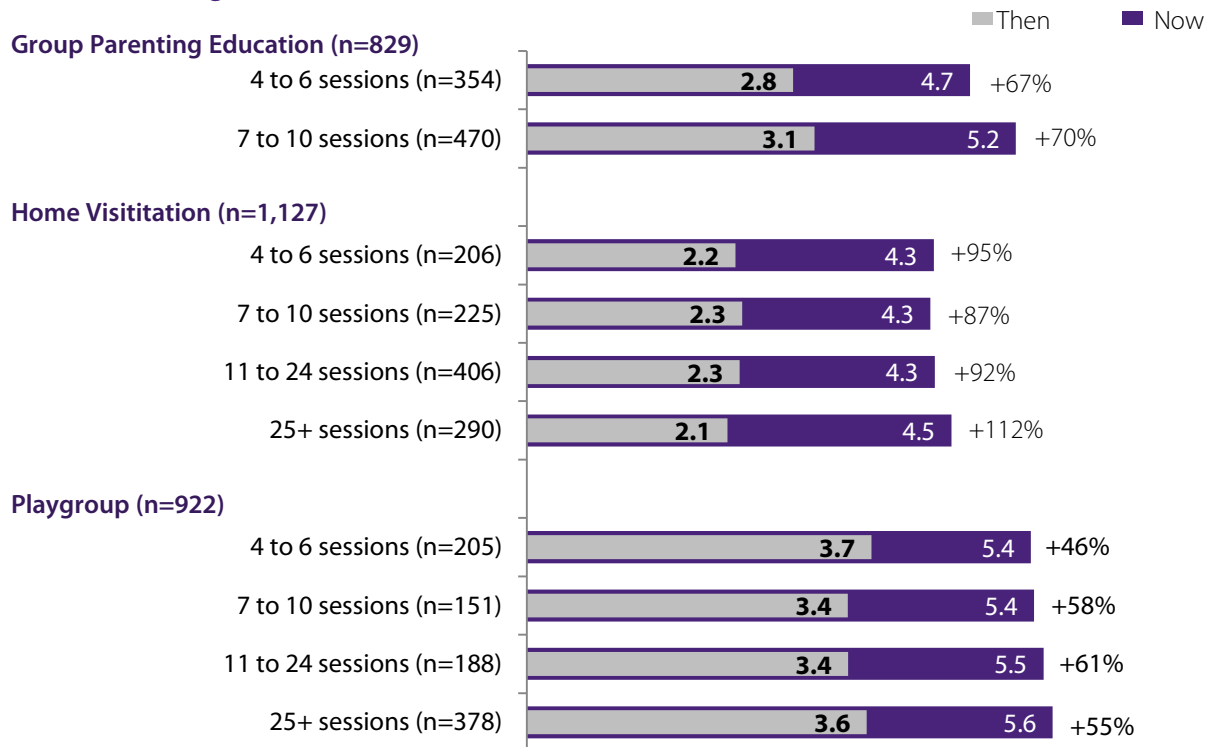
Home visitation. Parents reported the largest improvements in parenting practices after 25 or more sessions: a 94 percent improvement, compared to a 70 to 71 percent change for those with fewer than 25 sessions.

Playgroups. Parents who participated in 4 to 6 sessions reported a 47 percent increase in the amount that their parenting practices improved. Those who participated in 7 to 10 sessions reported a slightly greater increase (about 60 percent), and gains appeared to level off beyond that point. There was no evidence that parents who participated in more than 10 sessions experienced greater gains than the 7 to 10 session group.

These patterns were consistent for data from the parenting activities scale (Exhibit 7). Parents in **group parenting education** who participated in 7 to 10 sessions reported an increase of 2.1 activities per week, while

those parents who participated in 4 to 6 sessions reported an increase of 1.9 activities per week. Parents in **home visitation programs** who had completed less than 25 sessions reported an increase of 2.0 to 2.1 activities per week, while those with 25 sessions or more reported an increase of 2.4 additional activities per week. Parents in **playgroups** tended to show early improvement, which sustained over an increased number of sessions: those with 4 to 6 sessions reported an increase of 1.7 activities per week and those with more than 7 sessions reported an increase of 2 activities per week.

Exhibit 7. Changes in Parenting Activities by Service Type and Number of Sessions
Overall Parenting Activities Scores



These preliminary findings suggest potentially important relationships between service intensity and program outcomes that could have implications for program implementation. However, these findings must be interpreted with caution due to the inability to link Parenting Ladder Survey data to information about the background and composition of families participating in each service type. It is likely that group parenting education, home visitation, and playgroups serve families with different levels of parenting experience.

Knowledge of Child Development

First 5 Monterey County parents show higher levels of knowledge about child development in some areas relative to a national sample of parents.

The Parenting Ladder Survey included six items designed to assess parents' understanding of child development. These questions were taken from a national survey of adults conducted in 2000 to determine

what adults know about child development.¹⁴ The study included over 3,000 American adults, a subset of whom were parents of children aged 0 to 6 years.

Since child development questions were asked only once, it is not possible to compare changes in parents’ knowledge over time. However, it is possible to compare parents’ responses to the national sample of adults that completed the original survey. This evaluation compares the percent of F5MC parents who provided the correct answer to each of the six child development knowledge questions with two groups of parents from the national study: parents with a high school education or less and parents with a college degree or more. Based on other explorations of the characteristics of parents utilizing F5MC-funded services, we know that most parents have a high school education or less, therefore comparisons with the national sample of parents of young children with high school education or less may be the most relevant.

Exhibit 8. Child Development Knowledge of F5MC Parents Compared to a National Sample

Statement	Percent Correct Response		
	F5MC Parents*	National Sample: Parents of children age 0-6 with high school education or less	National Sample: Parents of children age 0-6 with college degree or more
1. Children’s capacity for learning is pretty much set from birth and cannot be greatly increased or decreased by how their parents interact with them.	59%	60%	77%
2. Parents’ emotional closeness with their baby can strongly influence that child’s intellectual development.	81%	81%	83%
3. A child aged six months or younger who witnesses violence, such as seeing his father often hit his mother, will not suffer any long term effects from the experiences, because children that age have no long term memory.	63%	48%	48%
4. Children get an equal benefit from hearing someone talk on TV versus hearing a person in the same room talking to them.	66%	33%	53%
5. Children who are spanked as a regular form of punishment are more likely to deal with their own anger by being physically aggressive.	75%	34%	34%
6. Infants need a lot of time to develop bonds of security with individuals, so frequent changes in care providers has a negative impact.	61%**	68%	84%

***Bolded numbers** indicate that statistically significantly more F5MC parents answered correctly compared to parents in the national sample.

**Significantly fewer F5MC parents answered this question correctly than either group from the national sample.

Exhibit 8 indicates that parents who participated in F5MC parent education programs:

- were correct **more frequently** than all parents (regardless of education levels) from the national sample for three out of six items (50%; items 3-5); for items 4 and 5, F5MC participants were at least twice as likely as parents with a high school education or less to answer correctly);¹⁵ and

- were correct **as frequently** as parents of children aged 0 to 6 with high school education or less from a national sample of parents on two items (33%; items 1 and 2); for both of these items, F5MC parents were correct less frequently than college educated parents from the national sample; and
- were correct **less frequently** than all parents (regardless of education) from the national sample for one question (16.7%; item 6).

On five out of the six items, F5MC parents scored as well as or better than most parents in the national sample, suggesting that program participation may in fact be increasing child development knowledge among participants. It is also important to note that the data from the national sample is fifteen years old and updated figures are not available. Also, attribution cannot be made solely to program participation as media campaigns and other sources of parent education have also occurred.

Parents in home visitation programs got more child development knowledge items correct than parents in other programs, but without baseline data this finding should be interpreted cautiously.

This evaluation also compared the total percent of questions answered correctly by parents from each of the three program types. Parents in **group parenting** answered 65 percent of questions correctly, compared to 70 percent correct among those in **home visitation** programs, and 67 percent correct among **playgroup** parents. While the effect size of these difference is small ($\eta^2 = 0.004$), it may suggest differences among parents who enroll in particular types of services. It is compelling that parents in the service with the longest duration, home visitation, appear to have the highest level of knowledge. But this finding must be interpreted cautiously, as we cannot control for parent characteristics that may also account for the findings, such as parent education level or parenting experience. In future work, it is important to further explore these relationships.

Parent Satisfaction

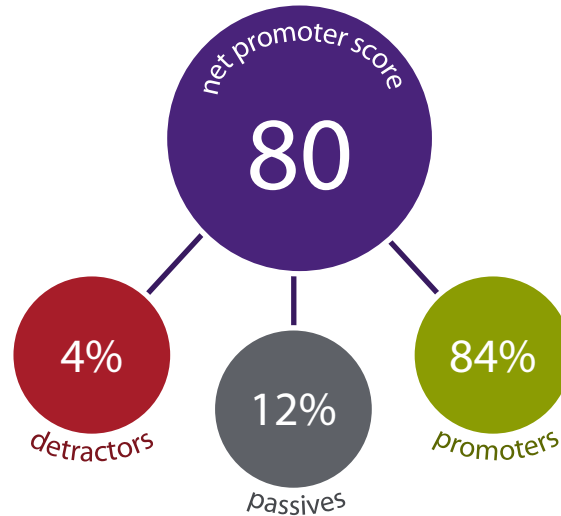
Families reported high levels of satisfaction with F5MC-funded programs.

The services and programs funded by F5MC provide much needed resources for Monterey County's children and families. As such, funded partners strive to provide services that are high quality and that embody F5MC's essential characteristics — that is, services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate, family-centered, community-based, coordinated, and have flexible hours. The Parenting Ladder Survey included a question that asked parents how likely they would be to recommend the program to another family on a 7-point scale from not at all (0) to very likely (6). This question was based on the **Net Promoter Score**, which has gained popularity in business over the past decade as a proxy for measuring customer loyalty and overall satisfaction with a company or product.¹⁶ The developer of this model, Bain & Company's Fred Reichheld, matched survey responses to customer behavior and found that this question was the most effective predictor of loyalty and growth across various industries. Using this question, it is possible to identify three categories of client experience: *detractors* who are unhappy with the program, *passives* who are satisfied but unenthusiastic, and *promoters* who are loyal enthusiasts who will tell their friends.

The Net Promoter Score is calculated by subtracting the percent of detractors from the percent of promoters, and can range from -100 (i.e., all respondents are detractors) to +100 (i.e., all respondents are promoters).

Scores higher than 15 percent are considered above average and 50 percent or above are usually considered excellent. As Exhibit 9 shows, the Parenting Ladder Survey Net Promoter Score was 80, indicating excellent client experiences with F5MC-funded programs.¹⁷ Based on the Parenting Ladder Surveys, 84 percent of parents are promoters of F5MC-funded programs.¹⁸

Exhibit 9. Likelihood of Recommending Program to another Family

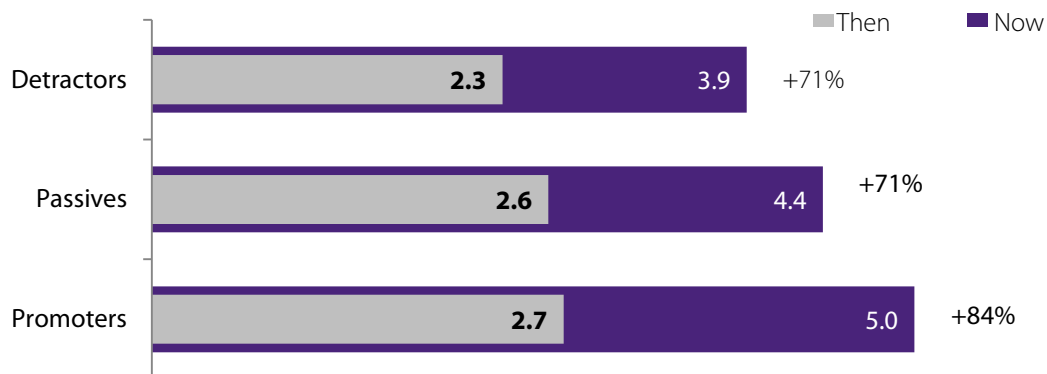


The proportion of promoters increased with number of program sessions: 80 percent of those who participated in 4 to 6 sessions were promoters compared to 89 percent promoters among those who participated in 25 sessions or more.

F5MC program “promoters” were more likely than “detractors” to report improvements in knowledge of child development.

Promoters had a score of 2.7 in the knowledge domain before program participation, while *detractors* rated themselves at a 2.3 and *passives* a 2.6 (see Exhibit 10). Despite this higher baseline level, the improvement reported by *promoters* (i.e., the mean before-after difference) was also higher. In knowledge domain, *promoters* improved an average of 84 percent; *detractors* and *passives* each reported a 71 percent increase.

Exhibit 10. Changes in Knowledge Domain by Net Promoter Score Categories



There was also a relationship between the likelihood of program recommendation and parents' knowledge of child development. *Promoters* answered an average of 70 percent of child development questions correctly, compared to 48 percent correct among the *detractors* and 58 percent correct among the *passives*. These results highlight both the high satisfaction that parents have with F5MC-funded programs as well as the opportunity for these parents to share their positive experiences with other families.

Moving Forward

Analysis of The Parenting Ladder Survey data reported here suggests that F5MC-funded parent education programs are helping parents improve their parenting knowledge, confidence, and abilities. In addition, programs help parents form connections with other families with young children and to more frequently participate in activities with their children to support their cognitive, social and emotional development. Here we offer recommendations to guide the improvement of Parenting Ladder Survey and data collection processes in order to strengthen the ability to report the impact of programs on parents and to better generalize these findings.

Strengthen the Data

- ✦ **Link Parenting Ladder Surveys to specific F5MC clients and families.** Currently, only about a quarter of survey responses can be linked to client/family-level data. This limits the ability to control for or “rule out” alternate explanations for changes in parenting practices and activities and/or to look more closely at how well programs are serving different kinds of parents and families. Alternately, basic demographic information such as age, gender, education, race/ethnicity, and language could be collected using the survey itself. This would provide the ability to assess the effects of programs while controlling for differences in characteristics of the families who participate in them. However, this solution would not provide a full picture of all of the services a family may have received, and asks families to provide information that they may have already submitted on other forms.
- ✦ **Add a field for program type to the survey.** Many agencies offer a number of different programs and services; however the current Parenting Ladder Survey does not include a field to indicate in which program a parent participated. In some cases, this required evaluation team members to go through individual surveys and Persimmony records in order to link the Parenting Ladder Survey with the correct program.
- ✦ **Set a common benchmark for response rates and monitor survey completion throughout the program year.** While the overall response rate is good, there is considerably variability among programs. As a result, it is likely that the data reported here represents some programs better than others. All programs could be asked to achieve a specific threshold (e.g., 70% of eligible participants) and progress towards meeting that threshold could be monitored on an ongoing basis.

Improve Comparability

- ✦ **Align items that come from existing surveys to allow for comparisons with external data.** Some items in the Parenting Ladder Survey were adapted from existing surveys that are administered to comparable populations. However, in instances where the wording of the questions and/or the response categories was conceptually different, the ability to compare findings for F5MC participants with other populations is limited. For example, parent-child activities are based on a survey used as

part of the Head Start Study of Parents' Role in Children's School Readiness.¹⁹ However, the original measure asks parents to report activity frequency in categories (i.e., no, once or twice, three or more times) rather than actual number of times per week. Also, the Net Promoter question is usually asked on an 11-point scale from not at all (0) to extremely likely (10) instead of the 7-point scale used in the Parenting Ladder Survey where 0 is "not at all likely" and 6 is "very likely". The tradeoff with these changes, however, would be that comparison to past F5MC data would be limited.

Adding Perspective from the Field

These recommendations — and the evaluation results reported here — will be further refined and informed by discussions with funded partners. We will also share program-specific findings not included in this report and discuss ways in which these findings might be used for program improvement. The results from these discussions will be incorporated into this report via an addendum later in 2015

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank agency staff for the work they did to collect and enter Parenting Ladder Surveys. We are indebted to the members of the First 5 Monterey County Evaluation Advisory Committee and to Commission Staff who offered expert guidance on the analytic approach and thoughtful comments on a draft this report. Finally, we thank parents for generously sharing their experiences of parenting through the survey.

Notes and References

- ¹ Harper Browne, C. (2014, September). The Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework: Branching out and reaching deeper. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy
- ² See Appendix A for a description of the types and average durations of parent education programs included in this report
- ³ See Appendix B for a copy of the Parenting Ladder Survey
- ⁴ Rather than completing a pretest at the start of the program and a posttest at some later point in time, parents responded for both time points after experiencing the program. Research studies have demonstrated that the retrospective pretest method is as reliable as data collected pre/post test. Pratt CC, McGuigan WM, Katzev AR. Measuring Program Outcomes: Using Retrospective Pretest Methodology. American Journal of Evaluation September 2000 vol. 21 no. 3 341-349. Available at <http://aje.sagepub.com/content/21/3/341.abstract>.
- ⁵ Items for the parenting activities scale were adapted from items used in the FACES study; Head Start Study of Parents' Role in Children's School Readiness. In: DR LaForett. Utilizing a Developmental Psychopathology Approach to Examine Preschoolers' Emergent Literacy and Socioemotional Skills. Temple University, 2008, pp 128-133.
- ⁶ What Grown-Ups Understand about Child Development: A National Benchmark Survey: Comprehensive Report. (2000). Downloaded from <http://www.zerotothree.org>.
- ⁷ F5MC staff determined that the minimum number of sessions that could be expected to create measureable change in parenting practices or activities was four, so parents were considered eligible for inclusion in analyses only if they had participated in four or more sessions of their respective program.
- ⁸ According to published work, response rates for client surveys typically range from 5 to 40 percent; however, academic standards suggest that response rates under 70 percent should be carefully considered for representativeness. Retrieved from <http://www.practicalsurveys.com/respondents/typicalresponserates.php>.
- ⁹ Due to the timing of this project, not all FY14/15 data was available when analysis began.
- ¹⁰ Effect size is based on partial eta squared; interpreted as small: 0.01, medium: 0.06, and large: 0.14 effects.
- ¹¹ This is a composite measure, so in some cases it could be that all literacy activities increased; in others, it could be that changes were larger in one category and smaller in the other.
- ¹² Post hoc comparisons revealed that differences between service modalities were significant such that parents in group parenting education and home visitation had greater amounts of improvement than parents in playgroups. However, the corresponding effect sizes for these comparisons were very small (η^2 ranging from 0.015 to 0.022), which suggests caution in interpretation.

- ¹³ While this difference is statistically significant ($p < .001$), the effect size is very small ($\eta^2 = .02$).
- ¹⁴ What Grown-Ups Understand about Child Development: A National Benchmark Survey: Comprehensive Report. (2000). Downloaded from <http://www.zerotothree.org>.
- ¹⁵ Statistically significant $p < .05$ using the Z test of proportions.
- ¹⁶ Reichheld, Frederick F. (December 2003). "One Number You Need to Grow". Harvard Business Review. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2003/12/the-one-number-you-need-to-grow/ar/1>. NPS®, Net Promoter® & Net Promoter® Score are registered trademarks of Satmetrix Systems, Inc., Bain & Company and Fred Reichheld. <http://www.netpromoter.com/why-net-promoter/know>.
- ¹⁷ Note that Parenting Ladder Surveys were limited to parents who participated in four or more program sessions, which could exclude early dropouts of unsatisfied people. However, based on a study of F5MC-funded program attrition completed in 2014, most families disengaged from services due to logistic issues such as transportation rather than for dissatisfaction with services.
- ¹⁸ Since the use of Net Promoters Scores with social services clients is relatively new, these results should be interpreted with caution.
- ¹⁹ Head Start Study of Parents' Role in Children's School Readiness. In: DR LaForett. Utilizing a Developmental Psychopathology Approach to Examine Preschoolers' Emergent Literacy and Socioemotional Skills. Temple University, 2008, pp 128-133. Available at https://books.google.com/books?id=PQ3cx9ctwyMC&dq=Played+counting+games+like+singing+songs+with+numbers+or+reading+books+with+numbers&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

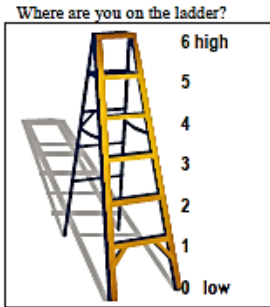
Appendix A

First 5 Monterey County Parent Education Programs

Program	Description	Typical Duration
Group Parenting Education	Classes offer interactive sessions led by experienced educators to support parents in building their understanding of child development and finding new ways to nurture and enjoy their child. Activities and discussion help parents bring ideas to their own real-life experiences. Parents also connect with each other and learn about resources in our local schools and communities.	Eight-session series
Home Visitation	With home visits, a child development specialist, parent educator, or nurse offers activities that help parents enjoy their child while learning about their unique development. Additionally, Ages and Stages© screening provides early identification of any developmental areas which may need particular support. Home visitors also connect families to other community services and resources that will nurture their child's optimal development.	Ongoing
Playgroups	Playgroups provide time for parents to connect with their child and with other families. Facilitators carefully plan activities in locations where young children can safely explore with their families. Facilitators listen to parents, share information and resources, and help guide parent-child interactions that build strong connections and learning opportunities. Parents enjoy interacting with each other and may have opportunities to meet community agencies that offer services to families. While every playgroup routine is unique, most include greeting time, enriched play time, circle time, snack time, a parent education topic, clean up, and a goodbye time.	Eight-session series (re-enrollment possible) or ongoing

Appendix B

Parenting Ladder Survey



PARENTING LADDER SURVEY

This is a survey. It is voluntary. It is confidential. Your opinion helps us.

Look at the Parenting Ladder above. Where are you on the ladder NOW? Fill in the appropriate circle.

Think back to before you participated in this program. Where were you on the Parent Ladder THEN? Fill in the appropriate circle.

	Low	AFTER	High	Low	BEFORE	High								
a. My knowledge of how my child is growing and developing.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. My knowledge of what behavior is typical at this age.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. My knowledge of how my child's brain is growing and developing.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. My confidence in myself as a parent.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. My confidence in setting limits for my child.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. My confidence that I can help my child learn at his age.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. My ability to identify what my child needs.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. My ability to respond effectively when my child is upset.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. My ability to keep my child safe and healthy.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. The amount of activities my child and I do together.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. The amount I read to my child.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. My connection with other families with children.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. How many months have you participated in the program?

3. How many sessions have you participated in?

4. How many times per week have you or someone in your family

	AFTER							BEFORE								
a. Read to your child?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Told (him/her) a story?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. Sung to or with (him/her) songs or music?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Played with toys or indoor games?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Played any game or sport together?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Helped (him/her) learn letters, words, or numbers?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. Played counting games like singing songs with numbers or reading books with numbers?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Talked about what happened in preschool, nursery school or early education program?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. Cooked or prepared a meal together?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. How likely would you recommend this program to another family? **Not at all** 0 1 2 3 4 5 **Very Likely** 6

6. How has the program affected the way you parent?

7. What would you tell a parent who is considering enrolling in this program?

Please tell us the extent to which you think the following statements are true or false.

a. Children's capacity for learning is pretty much set from birth and cannot be greatly increased or decreased by interactions with them.	Definitely True	Probably True	Probably False	Definitely False	Not Sure
b. Children get an equal benefit from hearing someone talk on TV versus hearing a person in the same room talking to them.	Definitely True	Probably True	Probably False	Definitely False	Not Sure
c. Parents' emotional closeness with their baby can strongly influence that child's intellectual development	Definitely True	Probably True	Probably False	Definitely False	Not Sure
d. A child aged six months or younger who witnesses violence such as seeing his father hit his mother, will not suffer any long term effects because children that age have no long term memory.	Definitely True	Probably True	Probably False	Definitely False	Not Sure
e. A child who is spanked as a regular form of punishment is more likely to deal with their own anger by being physically aggressive.	Definitely True	Probably True	Probably False	Definitely False	Not Sure
f. Infants need a lot of time to develop bonds of security with individuals so frequent changes in child care providers has a negative impact.	Definitely True	Probably True	Probably False	Definitely False	Not Sure

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience in the program?

Appendix C

Agencies that Contributed Parenting Ladder Survey Data to the Evaluation

	Number of Surveys	Percent of Sample
Alisal Family Resource Center	354	11%
Castro Plaza Family Resource Center	364	11%
Centro Binacional	175	5%
Dads in Action	198	6%
Easter Seals Central California	34	1%
Family, Friend, and Neighbor Providers (FFN)	110	3%
Home Visiting Program	685	21%
King City Family Resource Center	175	5%
Kinship Center - Parenting	94	3%
Mexican American Opportunity Fund (MAOF) - Parenting	123	4%
MCSTART (Shared)	211	6%
Monterey Peninsula Unified School District Family Resource Center	273	8%
Nursing	66	2%
Pajaro Resource Center	80	2%
Probation Community Action Partnership (CAP) program	66	2%
Salinas Public Library	68	2%
Soledad Adult School	137	4%
Special Needs Initiative	122	4%
TOTAL	3,335	100%