



Learning for a Lifetime of Success: Investing in Early Childhood

Longitudinal Parent Interview Report 2010-2012
October 2012



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Key Findings

The following report presents findings from the 2011-12 Parent Interview Study, part of a larger evaluation portfolio for First 5 Monterey County (*F5MC*). The study is a longitudinal survey of Monterey County parents with children age 5 or younger. In the first stage (2010-11), the evaluation team interviewed 206 parents; one year later (2011-2012), 172 of the same parents were interviewed. Notable findings from the study include:

Reaching High-Need Families

- ***F5MC* targets its investments where the need is greatest: at-risk families with young children.** All children benefit from effective early childhood programs that support long-term success, but at-risk families with young children—particularly those with low incomes, limited education, and living in poverty—are least likely to have access to such programs.
- ***F5MC* is succeeding at reaching the children and families most in need**
 - Fifty-seven percent of families interviewed are living at or below the federal poverty line.
 - Sixty percent of parents served by *F5MC* programs and services have less than a high school education. Fewer than 10 percent have any education after high school.
 - More than 90 percent of the children and families served by *F5MC*-funded agencies reported their ethnicity as Hispanic which mirrors the percent of Medi-Cal births in Monterey County.
 - Among families served by *F5MC* programs and services, 91 percent speak Spanish, 61 percent speak only Spanish and 39 percent speak two languages at home with their children.

Investing in Early Childhood

- **As *F5MC*-funded programs make services more accessible, more families are using them.** The 2009-10 Parent Interview showed that only 33 percent of families participated in *F5MC*-funded services for a full year. In 2011-12, that number increased to 56 percent. Engagement in *F5MC*-funded services for a longer duration is important, because consistent participation in early childhood programs—particularly for at-risk children—reduces the need for remediation services over time and helps to promote long-term community and economic benefits.

Promoting School Readiness

- **More children are attending early education programs.** In 2010-11, just 29 percent of children between ages 3 and 5 were enrolled in pre-school, a child care center, pre-kindergarten, or a Head Start program. In 2011-12, that number grew to 42 percent.
- **Access to health care for young children is increasing.** In 2011-12, 98 percent of children were covered by health insurance, 90 percent of young children had dental insurance, and 83 percent had visited their dentist or dental hygienist in the past year—all of which were increases from the previous year.
- **More parents are reading to and playing with their children frequently.** Eighty-six percent of parents read to their young children three or more times per week in 2011-2012 (compared to 77 percent in 2010-11).
- **Parents using *F5MC*-funded services report feeling greater levels of emotional support.** In the 2011-12 survey, parents who participated in a *F5MC*-funded service or program for a year or more reported greater levels of emotional support than they had when first starting to use that service or program.

Key Findings (cont)

F5MC is Helping to Narrow the Gap

- ***F5MC* is helping all families, even those with high needs, to engage their children in school readiness activities.** By targeting its investments to where the need is greatest, at-risk families with young children, *F5MC* is helping to alter and improve the developmental growth of Monterey County's youngest children. Evaluation findings strongly suggest that participation in *F5MC*-funded programs and services has played a large part in mitigating the socio-economic disadvantages that prevent at-risk families from supporting the cognitive and character skills that allow children to be successful.



Overview

Parents and other adults who are raising young children play a vital role in providing the necessary supports for early childhood development—physically, mentally and emotionally. The cognitive and character skills so important to success in school and in life are formed between birth and age 5, yet many parents lack the educational, social, and economic resources to provide the support that their children need to develop such skills. As the only local funding source dedicated exclusively to funding services for children ages 0 to 5 and their families, First 5 Monterey County (*F5MC*) is invested in ensuring that our County’s young children and their families have access to the services they need for healthy development. Each year, *F5MC* invests approximately \$7.5 million in local programs, services, and community events that serve young children and families. To document the impact of these investments, *F5MC* conducts several evaluation projects each year. Among them is this Parent Interview Study, which follows parents across two points in time, gathering information that sheds light on family characteristics, changes in use of *F5MC*-funded services, and outcomes that reflect child well-being.

This most recent Parent Interview Study achieved a response rate of 83 percent, notably high for a longitudinal study. As with the previous years’ surveys, the questions from this Parent Interview focused on *F5MC*’s cross-cutting outcome indicators (See Exhibit 1) while also gathering information about family characteristics. This report presents findings from (a) the first round of data collected from 206 parents in 2010-11, and (b) a subsequent round of data collected from 172 of the same parents one year later, in 2011-12. When applicable, the report compares findings with parent interviews conducted in 2009-10.

Exhibit 1. Indicators Addressed in Parent Interviews

Themes	Outcome Indicators
Parent Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge about child development and parenting ▪ Utilization of knowledge about child development and parenting ▪ Engagement with children in play and educational activities ▪ Parental attitudes towards child rearing ▪ Awareness and utilization of community resources ▪ Reading or showing books to children three or more times a week ▪ Parental stress and access of community resources
Child Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children with medical and dental insurance ▪ Children with access to routine medical and dental care
Early Care and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parental awareness of quality early care standards ▪ Quality of child care provided at centers and in homes
Social Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connections to formal and informal social networks ▪ Access to and utilization of community resources ▪ Feeling connected to the local community
Essential Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services ▪ Access to community-based services ▪ Access to family-centered/centric services ▪ Access to programs with flexible hours ▪ Access to programs that are coordinated and connected

Reaching High-Need Families

F5MC is succeeding at reaching the County’s disadvantaged children and families.

A primary goal of F5MC is to reduce gaps in child achievement, well-being and developmental outcomes by providing Monterey County’s families with access to the resources they need to parent effectively. In Monterey County—as in the entire state of California—social and economic inequality are on the rise. More than half of the parents interviewed in 2011-2012 for this report never graduated from high school. (See Exhibit 2 for these and related findings.) Although the financial status of the participating families has improved slightly since 2009-10, more than half of families (57 percent) interviewed in 2011-12 were living at or below the poverty line. These factors not only affect parents’ ability to provide financial support for their families, they also directly impact the degree to which parents are able to build bonds and impart skills to their young children. The frequency and quality of interactions between parents and their young children have an enormous impact on each child’s ability to develop the skills and character they need to succeed in school and in life.

Exhibit 2. Parent Characteristics, 2011-2012

Education	%
Less than high school	59%
High school or equivalent	34%
More than high school	7%
Poverty	%
At or below federal poverty level	57%
Above federal poverty level	43%
Language(s) Spoken at Home	%
Spanish	91%
English	46%
Indigenous Mexican	2%
Other	1%

The 2011-12 parent interviews revealed that more than 90 percent of the children and families served by F5MC-funded agencies are Hispanic/Latino, which exactly mirrors the percentage of Medi-Cal births in Monterey County that are to Hispanic/Latino parents. The direct correlation between these two indicators is another reflection of how F5MC and its funded agencies are reaching Monterey County families who have the highest need. The ethnic makeup of Monterey County can also be seen in the languages spoken by parents and children in their homes. The 2011-12 parent interviews revealed that a majority of families (61 percent) speak just one language at home—typically Spanish—while 39 percent of families speak two languages, most often Spanish and English equally.

Needs are Greater in 2011-12

When we compare findings in the 2009-10 Parent Interview Report with those of the 2011-12 Report, it is clear that the needs of Monterey County parents have increased:

- **Less Education.** In the previous report, 57 percent of mothers had less than a high school education. In this report, that number rose to 68 percent.
- **More Poverty.** In 2009-10, 51 percent of families were living at or below the Federal Poverty Level. In 2011-12, that number is 57 percent.
- **Lower Incomes.** In the earlier report, 66 percent of families had an annual income of \$30,000 or less. In 2011-12, 70 percent of families reported that same income level.
- **Larger Households.** In 2009-10, parents reported a household size of five; 2011-12 data show it is six.

Investing in Early Childhood

F5MC targets its investments where the need is greatest: At-risk families with young children.

Family characteristics and other social factors directly impact a child's ability to develop the skills she or he will need to be a productive member of society. Vital opportunities to influence that productivity occur between birth and age 5, when the brain develops critical connections that shape lifelong learning. This window of opportunity is exactly where F5MC targets its investments in early childhood and family programs. By funding early intervention programs that serve Monterey County's youngest children and their families, F5MC is helping to ensure the long-term prosperity of the community. National and local research demonstrates that all children benefit from effective early childhood programs that support long-term success. However, at-risk families with young children—particularly those who have low incomes and limited education, and are living in poverty—are least likely to have access to such programs. These are the very families that most need support to provide their children with the ability to be physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually prepared before they enter school.

As F5MC-funded programs make services more accessible, more families are using them.

The prevention and early intervention services and programs funded by F5MC provide much-needed resources for Monterey County's children and families. Service providers offer vital health screenings for early identification of special needs, conduct home visits to assess the family environment and improve family functioning, and provide a full range of other services to benefit parents and their young children.

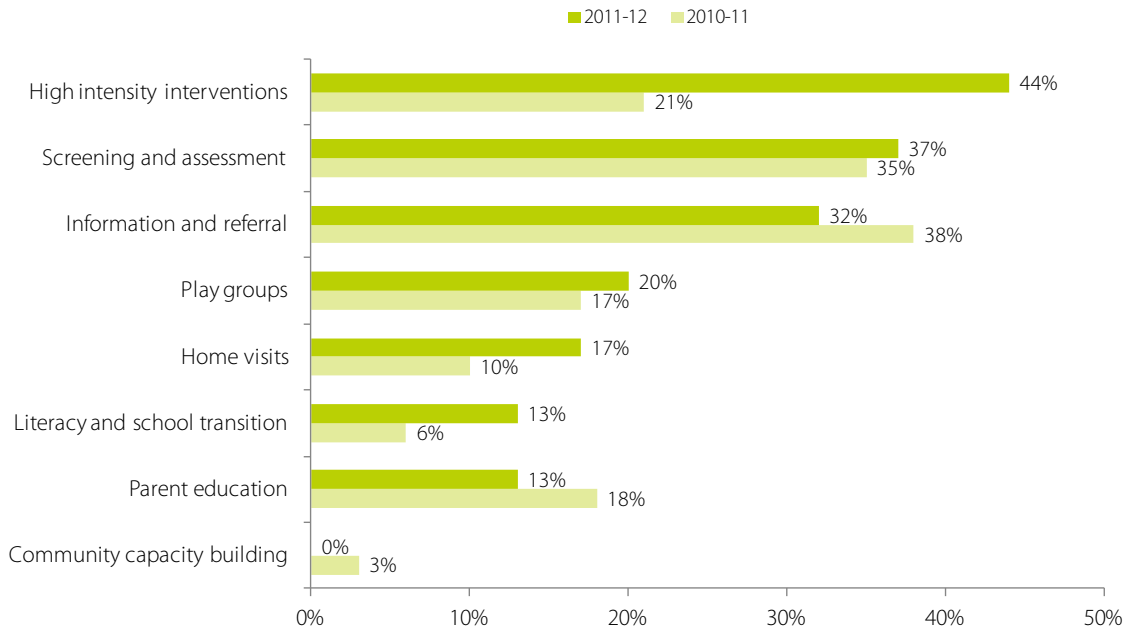
The 2011-12 parent interview data indicated that more families are taking advantage of the F5MC-funded services and programs available to them. Among families who utilized F5MC-funded services, there was an increase in the reported use of services such as high-intensity consultations and interventions, playgroups and home visits between 2010-11 and 2011-12 (See Exhibit 3). Additionally, at the time of the 2009-10 Parent Interview, only 33 percent of families participated in F5MC-funded services for a full year. Two years later, in the 2011-12 survey, that number increased to 56 percent. Family engagement in F5MC-funded services for a longer duration is important, because consistent participation in early childhood programs—particularly for at-risk children—reduces the need for remediation services over time and helps to promote long-term community and economic benefits.

Family are Very Satisfied with F5MC Services

All of F5MC's funded agencies strive to provide services that are high quality, accessible, coordinated, and culturally appropriate. The 2011-2012 survey asked parents to rate the services they received from F5MC services and programs on a scale from 1 to 3 (with 3 being the highest level of satisfaction). On average, respondents ranked their level of satisfaction at 2.9, nearly a perfect score.

Because families are using services throughout the year at a greater rate than before, and are taking advantage of more different types of services, this tells us that F5MC's essential program characteristics defined in the Early Learning Opportunities strategic plan are increasingly important. This finding also indicates that parents are doing what they can to give their young children more opportunities for a good start in life.

Exhibit 3. Percent of Families Using Services by Category, 2010-11 vs. 2011-12



An opportunity to improve program access and increase follow-up by agencies.

While more families are participating in more *F5MC*-funded services for a longer duration, it should also be noted that 21 percent of families reported that they stopped receiving services due a lack of access or follow-up from referring agencies. At a time when the majority of families served by *F5MC* are facing economic hardship, the location and hours of programs and services is a key factor. By focusing more attention on follow-up with parents who have initiated services, *F5MC*-funded agencies can take important strides toward ensuring that families under strain will be able to take full advantage of the services they most need.



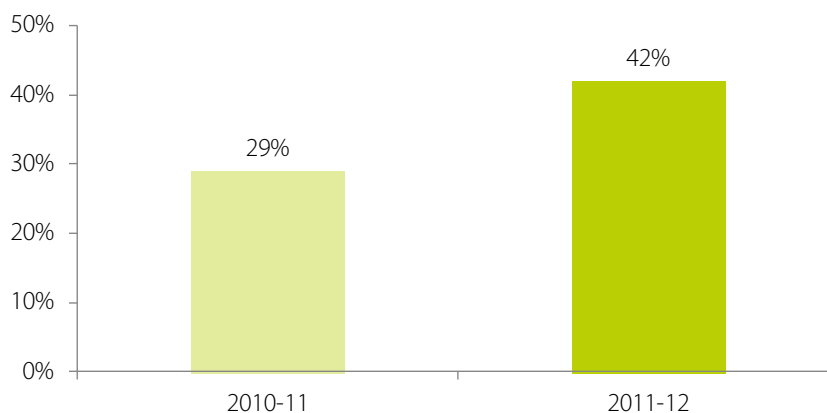
Promoting School Readiness

As mentioned in the overview section of this report, the 2011-12 Parent Interview Report represents data collected from 206 parents in 2010-11, and from 172 of the same parents one year later, 2011-12. Given these sample sizes, it is useful to compare findings between one year and the next to better understand outcomes enabled by *F5MC*-funded agencies.

F5MC services are making a difference: More children are in early education programs.

National, local and county data validate the fact that preschool is one of the best investments that parents can make in their child's future. And we know that preschool attendance in particular has a direct influence on a child's success in school. In 2011-12, 42 percent of parents reported that their child age 3 or older attended a preschool, child care center, pre-kindergarten or Head Start program—an increase of 13 percent over the previous year.

Exhibit 4. Percent of Children Attending Preschool, 2010-11 and 2011-12



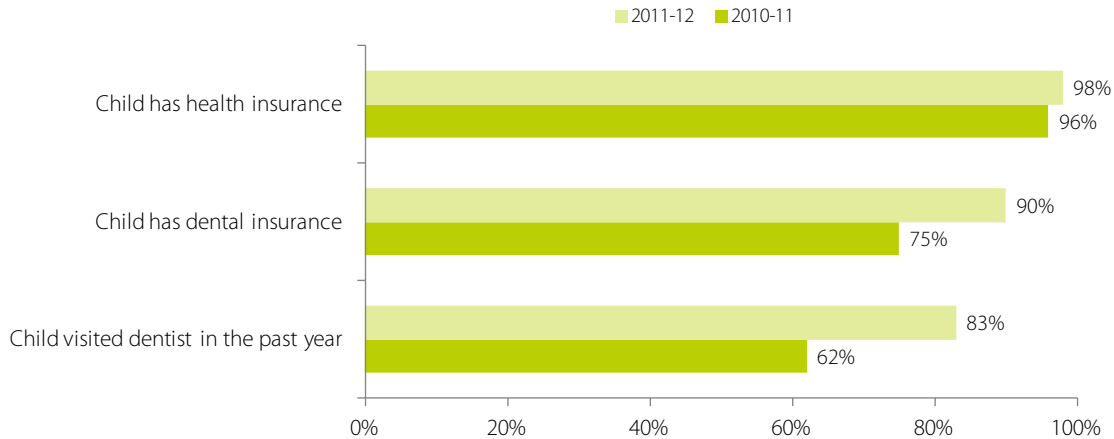
The County's youngest children have greater access to health care and dental care.

For children in the formative years between birth and age 5, access to health care and dental care is crucial. Lack of care can compromise a child's ability to build skills, succeed in school, and grow into adulthood to become a productive member of the community. In 2011-12, parent responses indicated that 98 percent of children had received a medical check-up at least once in the past year. In addition, 90 percent of young children had dental insurance, and most (83 percent) had visited their dentist or hygienist in the past year.

***F5MC* Programs are Making a Difference**

- **Assistance with health insurance.** 49 percent of parents said that an *F5MC*-funded program or agency helped them to enroll their child in a health insurance plan;
- **Assistance with dental insurance.** 50 percent of parents said that an *F5MC*-funded program or agency helped them to enroll their child in a dental insurance plan.

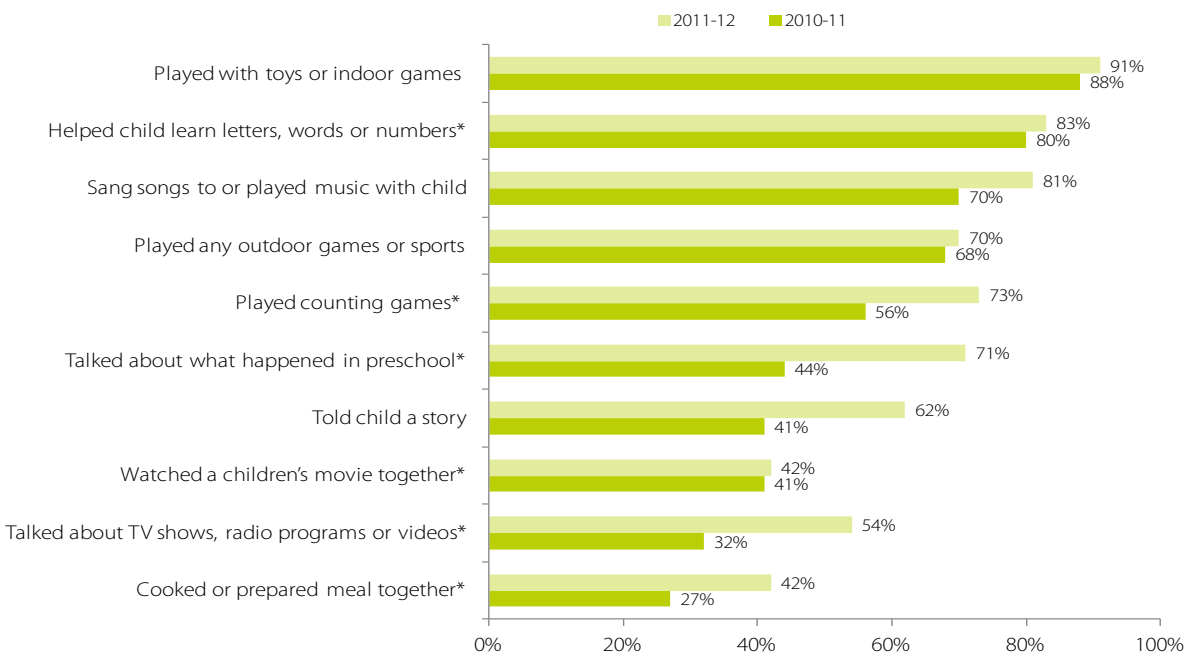
Exhibit 5. Child Access to Health Insurance and Dental Care



More parents are reading to and playing with their children every week.

When parents take the time to engage in activities with their young children—particularly by reading to them—they set the stage for their child’s long-term success in school and in life. Shared activities between children and parents increase child confidence, improve communication skills and foster stronger, more trusting relationships. Data from the 2011-12 Parent Interview show that parents are participating in more activities, more often. This includes engaging their children in playing with toys, learning letters, words and numbers, and—most importantly—reading. In 2012, 86 percent of parents reported reading to their child three or more times a week, up from 77 percent the year before. Additionally, in 2011-12, parents reported participating in an average of five activities with their child, three or more times a week. (See Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6. Parent-Child Activities Engaged in 3+ Times Per Week



*These questions were asked only if child was two years or older

Parents who use *F5MC*-funded services experience more emotional support.

The job of raising children from birth to age 5 can be stressful for any parent, regardless of their education or income. Having access to a strong emotional support network, such as extended family, friends, or neighbors, helps parents to feel less isolated and better able to help their child. For this report, parents were asked to assess the level of emotional support available to them. Their responses indicated that parents who had participated in *F5MC*-funded services or programs for a year or longer experienced greater levels of emotional support than they had a year earlier. Exhibit 7 describes how the level of support has changed on seven items related to emotional support over the course of one year.

Exhibit 7. Availability of Emotional Support for Parents

		Percent of Parents That Have Support...	
		None of the time	All of the time
...to turn to for suggestions on dealing with a personal problem?	FY2010-11	9	37
	FY 2011-12	6	43
...who understands your problems?	FY2010-11	8	42
	FY 2011-12	13	33
...to give you information to help you to understand a situation?	FY2010-11	10	31
	FY 2011-12	2	42
...whose advice you really want?	FY2010-11	11	27
	FY 2011-12	6	34
...that you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk?	FY2010-11	7	24
	FY 2011-12	2	36
...to share your most private worries or fears with?	FY2010-11	12	23
	FY 2011-12	5	37
...to confide in or talk to about yourself or your problems?	FY2010-11	14	23
	FY 2011-12	7	32

F5MC is Helping to Narrow the Gap

F5MC is helping all families, even those with high needs, to engage their children in school readiness activities.

By targeting its investments to where the need is greatest, at-risk families with young children, *F5MC* is helping to alter and improve the developmental growth of Monterey County's youngest children. Baseline parent interviews conducted in 2010-11 clearly revealed that parents with limited education and/or families with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 were less likely to read regularly to their children when compared to families with higher levels of education and higher incomes. The 2010-11 interviews also revealed that parents with limited education (e.g., less than a high school education) and parents whose primary language was other than English were less likely to engage regularly in parent-child activities at home when compared to families with higher levels of education and who primarily speak English. However, just one year later, the 2011-12 parent interviews shows that these demographic and socio-economic factors are no longer significant in determining how frequently parents read to, or engage with, their young children in activities known to positively impact school readiness and long-term academic success.

This is important because it appears that participation in *F5MC*-funded programs and services has played a large part in mitigating the socio-demographic disadvantages that prevent at-risk families from supporting the cognitive and character skills that allow children to be successful. In other words, *F5MC* may be helping to narrow the gap. For example, after one year of regular participation in *F5MC*-funded programs and services, parents with limited education were just as likely to read to their young children three or more times per week as those parents with higher levels of education. These findings provide important evidence to suggest that, by targeting its services to families with the highest needs *F5MC* may very well be succeeding at changing trajectories previously taken at face value. Listed below is a visual representation of parent interview findings, including the relationship between family characteristics and baseline participation in activities known to impact school readiness, and the mitigating role *F5MC* appears to play helping bridge



the divide that help all families, including high-risk families, participate in activities that prepare the children for school.

- Parents with less than a high school education
- Family income of <30K
- Parents who speak a primary language other than English

Baseline: Upon enrollment in F5MC-funded services

- Are less likely to read 3 or more times per week to their child
- Are less likely to engage in parent-child activities 3 or more times per week

Time 2: After one year in F5MC-funded services

- Reads 3 or more times per week to child
- Parent-child activities done 3 or more times per week



Action Items

The 2011-12 Parent Interview Report contains valuable insights into how well *F5MC*-funded programs and services are meeting the needs of Monterey County parents with children age 5 or younger. While the findings are revealing and often thought provoking, their real value lies in whether they inspire action. Recognizing that the mission of *F5MC* is to “*serve as a catalyst to create sustainable change in systems, policies and practices that enrich the development of children in their first 5 years of life,*” we offer the following recommendations to guide the *F5MC* Commission in putting the findings of this report into practice:

Increase outreach to the families in Monterey County who have the highest need.

As Professor James Heckman wrote, “To foster the skills of American children, we must help troubled American families.” Research has proven that the family plays a central role in building skills and forming values. With 57 percent of the families served by *F5MC* living below the poverty line, and 60 percent of parents with less than a high school education, it is incumbent on *F5MC* to provide programs and services that demonstrate to parents that, despite limited education and income, they play a powerful role in helping their children develop into healthy, productive members of the community.

Continue to fund quality programs that elevate the importance of early childhood and reach the families in Monterey County that need it the most.

Current research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parents play a critical role in their child’s development. The frequency and quality of the parent-child interactions are central to this role. With this in mind, *F5MC* should continue to fund programs that educate parents and provide guidance in how to engage in activities that promote healthy development and school readiness. This is especially true for parents whose life circumstances—such as lower levels of education, lower family incomes, and language barriers—may make it harder for them to access quality programs. Data over the last several years demonstrate that *F5MC* provides culturally and linguistically appropriate programs that engage families with young children and lead to positive and desired outcomes in the areas of early literacy and parent engagement.

Highlight the importance of investing and participating in quality early childhood programs.

National and local research demonstrates that all children benefit from effective early childhood programs that support long-term success. However, at-risk families of young children—particularly those who have low incomes, limited education, and are living in poverty—are least likely to have access to such programs. These are the very families that most need support to provide their children with the ability to be physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually prepared before they enter school. *F5MC*, through its emergent policy platform, could highlight the importance of families taking part in *F5MC*-funded services for a longer duration because we know that consistent participation in early childhood programs—particularly for at-risk children—reduces the need for remediation services over time and helps to promote long-term community and economic benefits.

Methods

For this report, parents who were newly enrolled in an *F5MC*-funded program were randomly selected to participate in a 30-minute telephone interview at baseline (2010-11) and another interview conducted approximately one year later (2011-12). Interviews were conducted in Spanish and English to represent the primary languages spoken by parents served by *F5MC*-funded programs. Similar to the parent interviews conducted in previous years, questions focused on *F5MC*'s cross-cutting outcome indicators and family characteristics. Data related to program participation and level of involvement with funded agencies was matched with data collected in *Persimmony*, *F5MC*'s client management database.

Limitations

As with similar longitudinal studies, there are limitations to this report and thus findings should be read with some caution. Careful measures were taken to limit the potential biases, such as randomly selecting study participants, using standardized scales and measures, repeated measures, accounting for attrition in the sampling, and conducting training for data collection. Limitations include the following:

- Although parents were told that there were no right or wrong answers, that their responses were confidential and to be as honest as possible, we cannot completely eliminate *response bias* which sometimes occurs when respondents provide a socially desirable response or a response that they thought was favorable or “correct.”
- Items asking respondents to remember events that occurred up to one year in the past may be subject to poor memory or selective *recall bias*, i.e., recalling more favorable events.
- The parent interview study is correlational in nature, meaning that it cannot definitively link observed changes over time to the efforts of *F5MC*-funded agencies; however, client-level service data, high-quality survey items, repeated measurement, and the linkage of outcomes with service provision allow for strong evidence that changes over time are linked to the impact of *F5MC*-funded services.



F5MC Vision: All children reach their full potential in a family and community that values and respects childhood.

F5MC Mission: To serve as a catalyst to create sustainable change in systems, policies and practices that enrich the development of children in their FIRST 5 years of life.

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