

A Growing Call for Preschool for All

Across the nation school superintendents,¹ law enforcement officials,² business leaders,³ mayors,⁴ and economic development experts⁵ have joined in the call for universal, voluntary pre-kindergarten programs for all four year old children as a proven way to strengthen readiness for success in school.

Community and state leaders increasingly understand the wisdom of investing in high quality early education and are dramatically expanding investment in pre-kindergarten programs. Between 1988 and 2002, combined public investment in pre-kindergarten programs grew from \$190 million⁶ to over \$2.8 billion annually.⁷ The short and long term impacts of pre-kindergarten programs are compelling by any standard. In communities and states with significant pre-kindergarten investment schools are realizing savings through reduced special education and grade retention,⁸ improved student achievement,⁹ and reduced gaps in the achievement of advantaged and at-risk students.¹⁰

Because of the value of improved student achievement and schools' economic efficiency, the public endorse the idea of universal preschool. The vast majority (75%) of California voters support public funding of voluntary preschool programs.¹¹ Public support is even greater among groups historically at-risk for academic success, such as Latinos (86% approval).¹²

School Readiness in Ventura County

Much work must be done in Ventura County before we can reap the benefits other communities are experiencing as a result of their investment in early education. Currently, only one-third of Ventura County's eligible 3 and 4-year-olds have access to a quality, subsidized preschool program. Within the Hueneme pilot Preschool for All site, it is estimated that less than half of the kindergarteners arrive at school with the skills needed to succeed. When children come to school without basic skills school systems must disproportionately focus their limited dollars on remedial efforts to help them gain the social and academic skills needed for success. This drains the resources of teachers and schools and diminishes the ability of all children to reach their

full potential; classroom activities become focused on helping children catch up, rather than helping all children excel.

Concerned about these trends and deeply committed to the future of the county, community leaders from many sectors have volunteered their expertise, time, and energy to develop a plan for providing preschool opportunities for all young children in Ventura County. Supported by grants, Ventura County is one of twelve counties in the state that was competitively selected by First 5 California and the Packard Foundation to be a leader in the Preschool for All movement. Over the last 18 months, the county superintendent of schools, district superintendents, principals, preschool and kindergarten teachers, family child care providers, business leaders, and parents from throughout the county have invested thousands of hours in carefully developing the proposed plan outlined in this report. Forty-two community meetings with over 500 attendees have been held to gain community input and ensure the proposed plan reflects the values, needs and priorities of the communities in the county. Participants had opportunities to provide input and feedback and their ideas, priorities, and passions are reflected in this plan.

A pilot of Preschool for All in the Hueneme school district will introduce new preschool-to-kindergarten transition strategies, improve the quality of existing community center-based and family child care programs to meet the PfA standards outlined below, and increase the number of kindergarten children with preschool experience by 20% annually. If the proposed plan is implemented the Hueneme school district will have the capacity to serve 70% of the prekindergarten students (645 children) high-quality prekindergarten programs designed to promote optimal development and school readiness by the year 2010.

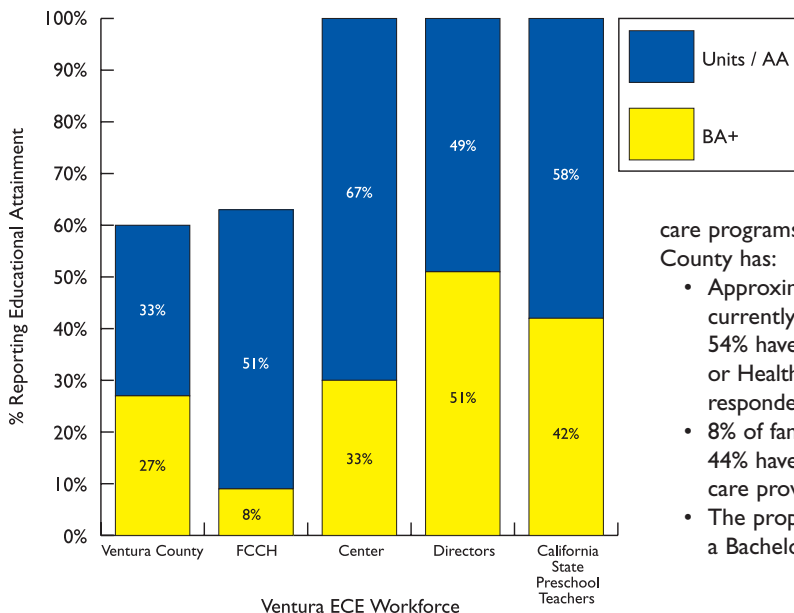


Overview of First 5 Ventura's PFA Criteria

STANDARDS	The PFA committees have developed the following standards that will be required for preschool programs to participate in the Preschool for All program in Ventura County. The criteria below meet or exceed best national practices for prekindergarten programs, as well as the standards developed by the California Department of Education and First 5 California.
TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS	Within 5 years of program implementation, teachers will have a Bachelor's degree in early childhood or child development, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All courses required for the current California Child Development Master Teacher Permit, and • 2 semesters (at least 90 hours) of supervised fieldwork. Associate Teachers/Aides will have at least an Associate's degree in early childhood or child development, including at least one semester (45 hours) of supervised fieldwork.
TEACHER COMPENSATION	PFA compensation will be equivalent to that of kindergarten teacher salaries (assuming similar qualifications).
PROGRAM SETTINGS	PFA will be offered in both licensed early childhood education (ECE) centers and licensed family child care homes (FCCH). The PFA plan calls for use of a combination of existing prekindergarten classes and new prekindergarten classes to create adequate capacity for all parents choosing to enroll their 4-year-old children.
TEACHER-CHILD RATIOS AND GROUP SIZE	To ensure existing early childhood programs that meet all PFA standards may participate in PFA, First 5 Ventura has planned for three class options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center Option 1: Adult-child ratio of 1:8 with 24 children, one teacher, and 2 teacher aides. • Center Option 2: Adult-child ratio of 1:10 with 20 children, including 2 teachers. • Family Child Care Home: FCCH providers will be arranged into PFA pods, with instruction conducted in groups of 9 children with one PFA-certified teacher.
PROGRAM DURATION	<p>Hours per Day: PFA programs will provide at least 3.5 hours of service per day if a meal is served or at least 3 hours of service if a snack is served.</p> <p>Days per Year: PFA programs will meet for at least 175 days per year (assuming 3.5 hours of day per service), to guarantee a minimum of 612.5 program hours per year; other program models will adjust the days per year accordingly to offer at least 612.5 hours of PFA annually.</p> <p>Extended Hours: Extended hours care will be offered either on-site or at a convenient location for parents who elect to pay for full day and/or full year programs.</p>

Preschool for All Workforce Survey Findings

Education of Ventura Residents and ECE Providers



Preschool for All teachers will be required to hold a Bachelor's degree in Child Development or a related field. The qualification requirements will be implemented gradually to ensure current staff have adequate time to achieve the required education and skills. Teacher qualifications are the same for both PFA center-based and family child care programs. Currently the early childhood workforce in Ventura County has:

- Approximately 33% of teachers and 51% of the directors, currently hold BA degrees. Of those who do have BA degrees, 54% have specialized early childhood, developmental psychology, or Health/Human Services training. 82% of Ventura County centers responded to the PFA Workforce Survey.
- 8% of family child care providers hold a BA and 7% hold an AA; 44% have taken some college classes. A total of 876 family child care providers responded to the PFA Work Force Survey.
- The proportion of teachers in early childhood centers who have a Bachelor's degree is similar to that of the county as a whole.

**CURRICULUM
CONTENT
STANDARDS**

PfA instruction in Ventura County will adhere to the current California Prekindergarten Learning Guidelines and the forthcoming Prekindergarten Learning Standards. In keeping with the predominant instruction models in Ventura County Creative Curriculum will be recommended for all PfA sites. Sites may utilize an alternative curriculum by documenting that the curriculum meets state and local criteria

**QUALITY
RATINGS**

Sites must achieve a minimum rating of 5 (Good) on a nationally recognized early childhood environmental rating scale (ECERS/FDCERS) to be accepted as a PfA site. PfA sites will be expected to achieve national accreditation through NAEYC or NAFCC within 5 years of acceptance as a PfA site.

**CHILD
ASSESSMENT**

In keeping with the assessment goals set by the Child Development Division of the California Department of Education, PfA sites will conduct at least two child assessments each year using the nationally recognized California Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP).

**INCLUSION OF
CHILDREN WITH
SPECIAL NEEDS**

PfA will provide appropriate prekindergarten education for all children. While most children will be appropriately accommodated at regular PfA sites, some children with significant special needs may be better served in alternative settings; this decision will be made jointly by the parents, PfA staff, and service providers.

**CULTURALLY &
LINGUISTICALLY
APPROPRIATE
PROGRAMMING**

PfA staff will be trained in strategies for facilitating English-language acquisition while supporting English-language learners' home language. Recruitment and training efforts will endeavor to develop a PfA workforce that matches the demographic characteristics of the PfA clientele.

**COMPREHENSIVE
SERVICES**

Through collaboration with county and community-based services, PfA sites should provide or coordinate the provision of dental, vision, and health screenings for all PfA children who have not already received such services. All PfA sites should have access to developmental screenings for children suspected of having special needs or developmental delays. PfA sites should include comprehensive nutrition programs for children and nutrition education materials for parents.

**FAMILY
INVOLVEMENT**

PfA sites will encourage parent involvement through

- **Home visits:** at least one teacher visit per child per year
- **Parent-teacher conferences:** 3 conferences per year
- **Parent participation in the classroom:** encouraged but not mandatory to accommodate parent work schedules
- **Parent education programs:** at least 4 offered per year



Baseline data on the quality of early childhood programs, teacher education, and the availability of preschool slots in Ventura County has been quantified and is outlined in detail in the full report. From this baseline data a detailed work plan has been developed. The work plan specifies immediate implementation steps for the pilot Hueneme region as well as an expansion plan for county-wide implementation of PFA.

Conclusion

Ventura County is poised to be a leader in creating tremendous opportunity for our youngest citizens and improving the quality of life for all residents. Moving toward investing in voluntary, universal preschool opportunities is not only the right thing to do for our children, but it is a fiscally responsible, proven investment that will have a significant positive return for our community.

Who to Contact for More Information and to Get Involved

First 5 Ventura County
805-648-9990
www.first5ventura.org

Endnotes

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- ⁷ Education Commission of the States (2004). Pre-kindergarten Database. Available: http://www.ecs.org/dbsearches/Search_Info/EarlyLearningReports.asp?tbl=table5
- ⁸ Xiang, X. & Schweinhart, L. J. (2002). Effects five years later: The Michigan school readiness program evaluation through age 10. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation: Ypsilanti, MI. Available: www.highscope.org/Research/MsrpEvaluation/msrpmain.htm
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