

Evaluation and Accountability for School Readiness Initiatives in States and Cities: The Cases of First 5 California and the Kids Integrated Data System in Philadelphia

Chair: Ruth Hubbell McKey

Discussant: Donna Bryant

Presenters: Patricia Skelton, Shari Golan, W. Carl Sumi, Sandra K. Machida, John W. Fantuzzo, Heather L. Rouse

Hubbell McKey: This symposium presented findings from the First 5 California evaluation and Philadelphia's Kids Integrated Data System. First 5 California is a statewide, collaborative program to ensure that all young children in California are healthy, learning, and ready to achieve their greatest potential in school. In addition, the development and use of an innovative, integrated, citywide data system in Philadelphia was described. A developmental-epidemiological model provided a population-based and child-centered approach to early childhood research.

- **History, Strategic Goals, and Use of an Outcome-Based Accountability System for First 5 California**

Patricia Skelton, Shari Golan

Created through the passage of a ballot initiative (Proposition 10) and funded through a tobacco tax, the California Children and Families Commission (known as First 5 California), was established in 1999 in response to a need for additional funding and better coordination of existing early care and education services. The overarching goal of First 5 California is school readiness for all of the state's children. Guiding the initiative were seven principles: a family focus, a commitment to accessibility among California's diverse and special needs populations, a pursuit of public support, a fostering of public policy supportive of school readiness, the incorporation of high standards and best practices, the use of results-based evaluations and the promotion of public and private partnerships building on existing early childhood systems.

The accomplishments of First 5 California were numerous. Programs have succeeded in reaching culturally and linguistically diverse populations, as well as families with children with disabilities and other special needs. Over 2 million Kits for New Parents have been distributed, over \$155 million has been spent to address retention and education of child care providers, \$200 million has been focused on a school readiness initiative, and over \$46 million has been committed to provide health coverage to young children.

- **Results From the First 5 School Readiness Initiative Evaluation: Kindergarten Entry Profiles**

Donna K. Spiker, Shari Golan, W. Carl Sumi

The First 5 School Readiness (SR) Initiative directed funds to communities with high-priority schools to help children succeed when they begin school, as well as throughout school and life. One component of the SR Initiative Evaluation, the Kindergarten Entry Profiles (KEP) provides a snapshot of incoming kindergarten cohorts in high-priority schools where the SR Initiative was implemented. The 2004 KEP sample included 10,178 kindergarteners in 133 schools.

The evaluation found that children with higher levels of developmental mastery had easier transitions to kindergarten than those with lower levels of mastery. However, relatively few children had full or almost full mastery of skills known to be important for school success and for successful transition to kindergarten. Child and family characteristics were related to developmental competency levels. Children in poorer health had more difficulty successfully transitioning to kindergarten. Mastery was lower for children who were non-White racially or ethnically, spoke a primary language other than English and whose mothers had low educational attainment. Children who participated regularly in preschool and were read to regularly had significantly better mastery of key developmental competencies.

- **A County Commissioner's Perspective on First 5 California**

Sandra K. Machida

Poverty, unemployment and geographic and linguistic isolation were major issues for Butte County's children and families. Butte County is predominantly rural, 50% non-White and ranked the 13th poorest county in California. Over 28% of children live in poverty. Within this context, the Butte County First 5 Commission worked to improve children and families, systems strengthening activities, infrastructure, and provider capacity.

Financing for Butte County First 5 comes from state funds, matching state funds for special initiatives, supplemental funds for rural county status and trust fund interest. The significant infusion of money in this small, rural county changed the focus on early development. Eighty percent of funds were directed to programs, 10% to administration, and 10% to evaluation. The evaluation examined changes in the kindergarten entry profile from Year 1 (2003-2004) to Year 2 (2004-2005), family patterns linked to school readiness, and system changes. Butte County found an increase in the percentage of kindergarteners rated ready for school by their teachers on the kindergarten entry profile. Family patterns linked to school readiness were daily literacy activities, a smoke-free home, and a mother with at least a high school education. School systems changed from year 1 to year 2 and partners collaborated with other agencies on new projects.

- **Kids Integrated Data System: A Citywide Interagency Data Collaboration to Enhance Early School Success**

John Fantuzzo, Dennis Culhane, Heather Rouse, Faith Sproul

The Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS) is an innovative administrative system established across multiple city agencies in Philadelphia serving children and youth from

birth to age 21. It utilized integrated data for community planning, program evaluation, and research to better serve the local population. Participating municipal agencies include the Department of Human Services (child maltreatment, foster care, and juvenile delinquency); Department of Public Health (Medicaid behavioral health, birth records, and lead registry); Behavioral Health System (mental health and early intervention); the Office of Emergency Shelter and Services (homelessness); and the School District. This multi-agency system enabled the identification of multiple risk and protective factors faced by families simultaneously involved in multiple systems, and facilitates a strategic, targeted response based on the information provided by key community sentinels.

The utility of KIDS was demonstrated through a population-based study of known risk and protective factors related to academic and behavioral outcomes at kindergarten entry and the end of second grade for an entire cohort of kindergarten children. This longitudinal study illustrated the value of integrating municipal administrative data to examine (a) the prevalence of known risk factors, (b) the unique impact of risks on early school success, and (c) and the unique protective role of preschool learning experiences.

- **Discussion**

Donna Bryant

California's evaluation of First 5 is a useful model to the early childhood field of what can be accomplished by a comprehensive evaluation. The evaluation showed a commendable focus on child health which is often neglected in evaluations and there are major needs in this areas. Like many initiatives, there was difficulty in linking children to services, especially diffuse First 5 services. Sandra Machida provided a good example of how collaborative a local and state evaluation could be. John Fantuzzo presented a major feat to obtain permission and cooperation across so many agencies to integrate the database. There were multiple uses (observational, longitudinal, geographic based, etc.) that should meet the needs of multiple agencies and therefore increase support for continued collaboration and improvement.