



RESEARCH BRIEF

**Summary of Findings from the ASPIRE Evaluation,
FY 2012-13**

Julia Love, Ph.D., Tanee Hudgens, Ph.D. & Lydia Dong, MA

November 2013

The Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Education Standards (CARES) Plus program for Los Angeles County has been funded through grants from First 5 California and First 5 LA and administered by Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) since 2011. Renamed ASPIRE, this program provides on-line CLASS training, professional advisement, and financial incentives to early childhood educators and assists in the completion of coursework, transfers, degrees, and permits, and the implementation of quality teacher-child interactions in the classroom. The main findings of the evaluation of the program in FY 2012-13 include:

- The ASPIRE program met or exceeded all 2012-13 program objectives.
- Participants reported that the ASPIRE program positively impacted the quality of their practices.
- Participants attributed their recent educational and professional progress to the assistance they received from ASPIRE.
- Participants demonstrated increased and sustained knowledge of high quality teacher-child interactions.

Overview

First 5 California created the Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Education Standards (CARES) Plus program to support the education and professional development of the early care and education (ECE) workforce in California. The Los Angeles Universal Preschool ASPIRE program is the CARES Plus program for Los Angeles County. This professional development program for early childhood educators provides free on-line CLASS training, academic and career advisement, and a stipend upon successful completion of the program requirements.

The five long-term impacts and corresponding ASPIRE objectives are displayed below.

Long-Term Impact	ASPIRE Objective
Expanded ECE workforce.	Recruit 1000 early educators who represent the diversity of Los Angeles.
Better qualified ECE workforce.	Increase the preparation of the ECE workforce through the completion of coursework, permit, and degree requirements.
Increased retention and advancement of the ECE workforce.	Increase the incentives for early educators to pursue educational and professional advancement.
Increased quality of ECE practices and programs.	Increase the effectiveness of teaching practices and quality teacher-child interactions.
More effective ECE professional development system in L.A. County.	Structural change in institutions of higher education and organizations serving the needs of early educators, leading to the development of more seamless educational pathways.

The ASPIRE program met the goal of recruiting over 1,000 culturally and linguistically diverse early childhood educators.

During the 2012-13 program year, 1,755 applications were received. A total of 1,166 qualified participants were initially enrolled, but one participant was recruited to serve as an ASPIRE advisor at the start of the program year. Of these participants, 793 successfully completed the ASPIRE program. A detailed table of demographic information is included in the Appendix.

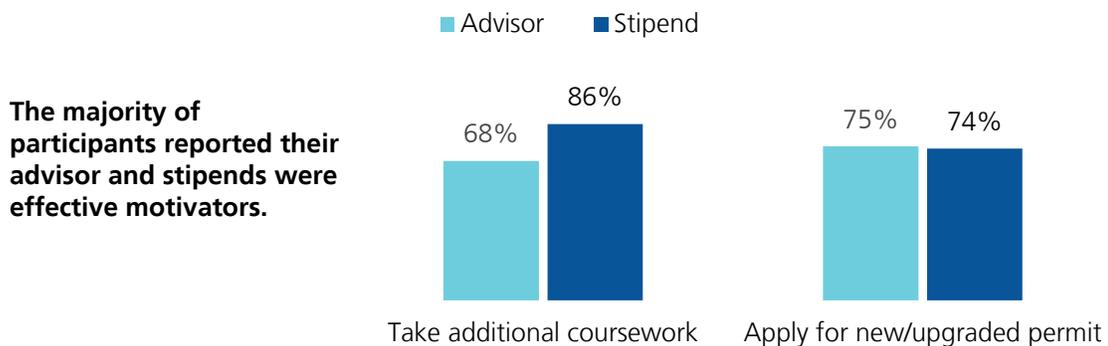
In addition to being culturally and linguistically diverse, the ASPIRE participants worked in a variety of child care settings. More than two-thirds of participants (69.1%) worked in a center, while 22.8% worked in family child care homes. Additionally, the majority of participants were teachers (28.5%) or assistant teachers (26.2%).

The ASPIRE program contributed to a better qualified ECE workforce by providing coursework, permit, and degree requirement assistance.

More than two-thirds of participants who completed ASPIRE passed required coursework with a “C” or better. Approximately 6% of participants earned a degree and 19% obtained a permit. The ASPIRE program also increased participant familiarity with the Child Development Permit Matrix and the CLASS observation tool.

The ASPIRE program increased the incentives for early educators to pursue educational and professional advancement and continue working in the ECE field.

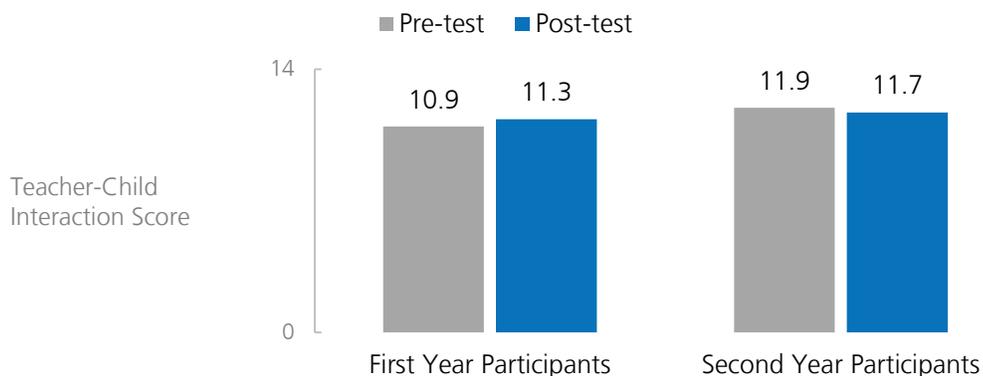
A total of 793 participants met all program requirements and received the ASPIRE stipend, and 84% of survey respondents reported that this stipend encouraged them to stay in the field of early care and education. Bonuses were also awarded for participating in a CLASS observation component, obtaining a degree, receiving a new or upgraded permit, and successfully completing the ASPIRE program two years in a row. The majority of survey respondents indicated that the ASPIRE stipend and their ASPIRE advisor served as motivators for accomplishing academic and professional milestones.



There is some evidence that the ASPIRE program improved the quality of participants’ ECE practices.

The ASPIRE program influenced the quality of participant ECE practices. Participants also reported that the ASPIRE program increased their knowledge of CLASS-related classroom strategies (93%) and improved the effectiveness of their teaching (95%).

First year participants were required to complete the on-line CLASS training during the 2012-13 program year. Second year participants were required to complete the on-line CLASS training during the 2011-12 program year. As measured by the “Teachers’ Knowledge of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions” scale (Hamre, Pianta, Burchinal, Field, Locasale-Crouch, Downer, Howes, LaParo, Scott-Little, 2012), first year participants showed a significant increase in knowledge of teacher-child interactions from the beginning to the end of the 2012-13 program year. Examination of second year participants’ knowledge scores showed no change from the beginning to the end of the 2012-13 program year, suggesting a maintenance of the knowledge gained during the first year of ASPIRE participation.



Note: * denotes statistical significance at the $p < .01$ level.

defined educational pathway, and resources to help them surmount barriers to succeeding in their courses, these CDWFI community college members were able to transfer within 1.5 years and attain degrees within two years, on average, from their entry into the program. In a context where many community college members waste time taking units without a clear path of study, the speed at which the CDWFI projects are able to move students through to degree and transfers once they enter the program is remarkable. The 2012 Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges (ARCC) report's indicators for transfer within six years determined that 58.3% of the cohort studied did not transfer within six years from intent to transfer. More research needs to be done to determine the total time taken for CDWFI members to reach transfers and degrees, and to determine the total time to transfer and degree for all CDWFI members with intent to reach those goals, not only for those students achieving transfer and degree.

CDWFI members experienced a pass rate of 82.6% of classes with a grade of C or better. This rate is higher than the reference indicators in the statewide 2012 ARCC Report, which indicated a pass rate of 62.0% for basic skills courses with a C or better, and a pass rate of 76.7% of vocational courses with a C or better. The evaluation found that, in the projects where high school members could take college-level CD courses, students passed their courses with a C or better at a high rate (88.3% of courses).

This year, 15.1% of CDWFI college members were documented as obtaining a state-issued Child Development Permit. The majority of these permits were awarded to first-time permit holders. Out of the members who did not earn a permit this year, 41.5% already possessed a permit. Additionally, 21.8% of community college members received at least one college-issued certificate.

There is some evidence that the program assists members with securing jobs.

Of those college members who were employed in ECE at the time of the end-of-year survey, 33.4% credited the program with helping them to secure jobs. Looking only at college members who gained a job in ECE after applying to the program, the majority (50.6%) felt that the CDWFI program helped them secure that position.

There is some evidence that the program supports increased quality of ECE practices and programs.

Since most CDWFI members were not employed in the ECE field, the impact area of increasing the quality of ECE practices and programs was assessed on the intermediary goal of increasing members' knowledge of quality ECE practices. Without a common definition and theoretical orientation to define quality ECE practices, the evaluation relied on the assessments of members' instructors in ECE and related degree programs, and on members' self-assessment, to judge growth in knowledge. As discussed earlier, college members passed their courses at a high rate, 82.6%, with a C or better, while high school members passed college-level CD courses at a rate of 88.3% with a C or better.

Furthermore, college members reported that they had increased their knowledge about quality ECE practices as a result of participating in the program.

Area of Quality ECE Practice	% College Respondents
Children's emotional and social development	91.3%
Teaching literacy skills	89.9%
Teaching numeracy skills	89.2%
Caring for and teaching English language learners	86.2%
Caring for and teaching children with special needs	87.5%
Working with parents and families	90.2%

Recommendations

The CDWFI program staff implemented academic, professional, financial, and social supports which defined academic and professional pathways for advancement in the ECE workforce. CDWFI members found these services valuable for reaching key milestones, such as education plan completion, course completion, and achieving degrees, transfers, and permits. There is also some evidence suggesting that participation in the CDWFI program assisted some members with securing ECE jobs. The key recommendations and lessons learned for future implementation include:

- Continue to create partnerships with high school faculty to recruit interested and prepared students, and direct CDWFI staff to engage in face-to-face recruitment/outreach with high school students.
- Improve data collection through the implementation of a new on-line database for faster and more accurate reporting, and for expansion of student services tracked.
- Collect data on employment related outcomes on a sample of members who leave the program due to goal completion.

References

Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. (2012). *Pathways to success: Integrating learning with life and work to increase national college completion. A report to the U.S. Congress and Secretary of Education*. Retrieved from: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acfsa/ptsreport2.pdf>

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2012). *Focus on results: Accountability reporting for the California community colleges. A report to the legislature, pursuant to AB 1417*. Retrieved from: <http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/TRIS/Research/Accountability/ARCC/ARCC%202012%20March%20Final.pdf>

Herzenberg, S., Price, M. & Bradley, D. (2005). *Losing Ground in Early Childhood Education: Declining Workforce Qualifications in an Expanding Industry, 1979-2004*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

Los Angeles Community College District. (2012). *Spring 2012 Student Survey*. Retrieved from: <http://www.laccd.edu/Departments/Research/Pages/Student-Surveys.aspx>

U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2002). *The Condition of Education*. Retrieved from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002025>.

United States Government Accountability Office. (2012). *Early child care and education: HHS and education are taking steps to improve workforce data and enhance worker quality* (GAO-12-248). Retrieved from <http://gao.gov/assets/590/588577.pdf>

Appendix

Evaluation Approach

The purpose of this evaluation was to understand the extent to which the program met its objectives. This evaluation also described participant characteristics, examined participant outcomes, and explored programmatic successes and challenges in order to make suggestions for future implementation.

The following questions guided the evaluation of the 2012-13 ASPIRE program year:

1. To what extent did the ASPIRE program meet its objectives?
2. What were the perceived benefits of participating in ASPIRE?
3. What were the programmatic successes and challenges of the ASPIRE program?
4. What are the recommendations for future program implementation?

The data collection methods for the 2012-13 ASPIRE program included surveys of participants and advisors and hard copies of transcripts and permits.

Detailed Tables

Demographic information for FY 2012-13 ASPIRE participants is included in the table below.

Characteristic	%
Gender	
Female	94.7%
Male	1.4%
Decline to state	3.9%
Ethnicity	
Asian	5.8%
Black/African American	14.8%
Hispanic/Latino	56.0%
Pacific Islander	0.2%
White/Caucasian	12.0%
Multiracial	4.6%
Other	4.3%
Decline to state	2.5%
Primary Language	
English	63.5%
Spanish	28.6%
Other	5.2%
Chinese	1.8%
Tagalog	0.6%
Korean	0.3%
Japanese	0.1%

For more information about this evaluation please contact researchmail@laup.net.