



## ASPIRE (CARES Plus) Final Evaluation Report, Program Year 2015-16

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## Executive Summary

The Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) ASPIRE program served as the CARES Plus program for Los Angeles County. The ASPIRE program supported the completion of permits, coursework, and degrees, and the increased quality of teaching practices of early childhood education (ECE) professionals. To reach these outcomes, the ASPIRE program offered one-on-one advisement, online Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) trainings, video coaching on classroom practices through My Teaching Partner (MTP), and financial incentives to participants. In addition, the ASPIRE program collaborated with other organizations and institutions of higher education in Los Angeles County through the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium. The collaboration between the ASPIRE program and the Workforce Consortium focused on developing a more coordinated and effective professional development system for early childhood educators. The anticipated long-term impacts of the ASPIRE program, as well as the larger Workforce Consortium, were that early childhood education professionals in Los Angeles County would be better equipped to deliver high-quality services to children and families, and would experience greater rates of career advancement and retention in the field as a result of their qualifications. The ASPIRE program was funded through grants from First 5 California (First 5 CA) and First 5 Los Angeles (First 5 LA).

### Methods

This evaluation summarizes the program and participant outcomes, and poses recommendations for future programs based on information gathered during the 2015-16 program year. The overarching evaluation questions include:

1. To what extent did the ASPIRE program achieve its goals?
2. What were the perceived benefits of participating in ASPIRE?
3. What were ASPIRE's programmatic successes and challenges?
4. What are the recommendations for future programs?

A mixed-methods design was used to collect data for this evaluation. Data was collected from participants using the ASPIRE Application, ASPIRE Employment Verification Form, ASPIRE program database, Participant End-of-Year Survey, participant focus groups, and the Knowledge of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions Assessment (folded into the 2015-16 ASPIRE application and End-of-Year Survey). In addition to these sources and instruments, hard copies of transcripts were requested from ASPIRE participants twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of the program year. Transcripts were requested in order to assist in advisement and to track program compliance and participant outcomes. Hard copies of permits were also requested once at the end of the year to track participant outcomes.

### Findings

Findings from the data collected during the 2015-16 program year are organized according to the joint long-term impact areas shared by the ASPIRE program and the Los Angeles Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium. These impact areas are:

- Expanded and more diverse ECE workforce
- Better qualified ECE workforce
- Greater retention and advancement of the ECE workforce
- Increased quality of ECE practices and programs
- More effective ECE professional development system in LA County

For the 2015-16 program year, the ASPIRE program achieved all program goals aligned with these long-term impact areas.

#### *Expanded and Diverse ECE Workforce*

In 2015-16, the ASPIRE program recruited 1,180 applicants and accepted 1,105 participants (93%). This is relatively consistent with the rates from 2014-15 (96%) and 2013-14 (94%), and an overall increase from the rates in first two years of the program (66% and 64% for 2012-13 and 2011-12, respectively). As the pattern of decreasing numbers of recruited applicants has continued over the five program years, so has the pattern of increased numbers of accepted participants, suggesting a more intentional recruitment approach over the course of the program.

The ASPIRE program continued to maintain racial and ethnic diversity of participants in its fifth year. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the 2015-16 ASPIRE participants mostly mirrored that of both the general adult population and the child population (ages 0-5) in Los Angeles County. Participants were also geographically diverse, living and working across all five supervisorial districts in Los Angeles County.

#### *Better Qualified ECE Workforce*

During the 2015-16 program year, 776 (70%) ASPIRE participants passed relevant coursework with a “C” or better. This rate was slightly lower than 2014-15, which experienced the highest rate across all five program years (73%). Nevertheless, it still represents an increase from both the 2013-14 and 2012-13 years (69% and 68%, respectively). A total of 74 ASPIRE participants achieved a degree, up from 69 in 2014-15. This is the highest number of degree-earning participants per year across the five program years. A total of 246 ASPIRE participants received a new or upgraded permit in 2015-16. This rate of achievement has continued to increase since 2011-12.

ASPIRE participants overwhelmingly attributed their academic and permit progress to the assistance they received from ASPIRE, including the motivation from ASPIRE advisors and the stipends they received. Almost all survey respondents (99%) indicated that the courses they took helped to increase the quality of their practices. Participants also reported that the ASPIRE stipend made it possible to afford the classes needed to complete degrees and permit applications.

#### *Greater Retention and Advancement of the ECE Workforce*

Participants reported that the ASPIRE program motivated them to stay in the ECE field and made it possible for them to pay their summer living expenses. In addition, participants reported that the ASPIRE program contributed to their professional advancement and helped them to clarify their professional and educational goals. Of the participants who reported a pay increase at work during the 2015-16 program year, 44% attributed the pay increase to their participation in the ASPIRE program.

#### *Increased Quality of ECE Practices and Programs*

Knowledge of effective teacher-child interactions significantly increased for both new and returning ASPIRE participants during the 2015-16 program year. This growth is consistent with the previous year’s findings. Participants were also asked if the ASPIRE program, and the completed coursework, had an impact on the quality of their practices. The majority of ASPIRE survey respondents reported that the courses they took helped to increase the quality of their practices (99%). Participants also reported that the ASPIRE program increased their knowledge of CLASS-related classroom strategies (98%) and improved the effectiveness of their teaching (98%).

#### *More Effective ECE Professional Development System in LA County*

The ASPIRE program continued to increase the capacity of ASPIRE advisors to provide support for educational advancement, permit attainment, and the implementation of best practices in the classroom. This sustained increase in capacity was a result of the recruitment, training, and coordination of ASPIRE advisors who also worked for established training agencies or educational institutions across Los Angeles County. The ASPIRE program staff also collaborated with other workforce programs and funders through the Los Angeles Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium to align and coordinate efforts and maximize the services provided to ECE professionals. These collaborative efforts included implementation of recruitment strategies across Workforce Consortium partner agencies to attract qualified ASPIRE advisors and participants; co-enrollment of participants across programs as appropriate; regional meetings for staff networking and collaboration; and coordination of resources in order to offer computer clinics to ASPIRE participants on community college campuses.

### **Recommendations**

The evaluation findings resulted in the following recommendations for future stipend programs serving similar demographics:

- Implement established recruitment strategies and work with partner CSUs and community colleges to recruit eligible working students.
- Provide services in multiple languages and across all supervisorial districts to ensure participant diversity.
- Offer advisement sessions (both required and “extra”) for participant support. Advisors for a new stipend program should be recruited from the 2015-16 ASPIRE program.

- Send out information on available courses and schools to ASPIRE participants.
- Adopt higher thresholds for the coursework completion milestone (e.g., from a letter grade of C to an A or B).
- Develop more customization and individualized components to ensure that participants working in different settings (e.g., FCCs vs. Center-based programs) or those who are in different places in their educational and professional pathways will receive the maximum benefit from their participation.
- Administer stipends and bonuses to participants who achieve academic and professional development milestones through the ASPIRE program.
- Provide online CLASS training and, as an optional resource, access to the CLASS online video library. Acquire additional or updated videos for participant use.
- Provide advisement on the CLASS tool and strategies so that participants intentionally implement CLASS-related strategies or practices in the classroom.
- In collaboration with Teachstone, provide technical assistance, guidance, and troubleshooting for ASPIRE participants working through online CLASS training.
- Provide more resources and tools for working with children who have special needs and/or who demonstrate challenging behavior, as this population may be growing.
- Provide more rigorous and specific development opportunities for participants that include instructional support with subgroups (e.g., language learners) and behavior management.
- Hiring and training of advisors should be modeled after practices adopted in the later years of the ASPIRE program.
- Recruit advisors from the 2015-16 ASPIRE advisor pool, existing professionals working for professional development agencies, and institutions of higher education.
- Work with stakeholders and workforce partners to collaborate and generate ideas for program improvement.

## Introduction

First 5 CA created the Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Education Standards (CARES) Plus program, which aimed to increase the quality of early learning programs by supporting the education and professional development of the early childhood education workforce in California. The Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) ASPIRE program served as the CARES Plus program for Los Angeles County. The ASPIRE program supported the completion of permits, coursework, and degrees, and the increased quality of teaching practices of ECE professionals. To reach these outcomes, the ASPIRE program offered one-on-one advisement, online CLASS trainings and access to the CLASS video library, video coaching on classroom practices through My Teaching Partner (MTP), and financial incentives to participants. Optional clinics and workshops were offered, as well as support from LAUP specialists. In addition, the ASPIRE program collaborated with other organizations and institutions of higher education in Los Angeles County through the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium. The collaboration between the ASPIRE program and the Workforce Consortium focused on developing a more coordinated and effective professional development system for early childhood educators. The anticipated long-term impacts of the ASPIRE program, as well as the larger Workforce Consortium, were that ECE professionals in Los Angeles County would be better equipped to deliver high-quality services to children and families, and would experience greater rates of career advancement and retention in the field as a result of their qualifications.

### Program Goals

The ASPIRE program and the Workforce Consortium worked in tandem toward the same long-term impacts. As shown in Table 1, the ASPIRE program goals aligned with these impacts.

Table 1. ASPIRE Goals and Long-Term Impacts

ASPIRE Goals	Long-Term Impacts
Recruit 1,000 early childhood educators who represent the diversity of Los Angeles.	Expanded ECE workforce.
Increase the preparation of the ECE workforce through the completion of coursework, permit, and degree requirements.	Better qualified ECE workforce.
Increase the incentives for early childhood educators to pursue educational and professional advancement.	Increased retention and advancement of the ECE workforce.
Increase the effectiveness of teaching practices and quality teacher-child interactions.	Increased quality of ECE practices and programs.
Structural change in institutions of higher education and organizations serving the needs of early childhood educators, leading to the development of more seamless educational pathways.	More effective ECE professional development system in LA County.

### Evaluation Overview

The primary purpose of this ASPIRE evaluation is to understand the extent to which the ASPIRE program has achieved its goals. Participant and program outcomes were examined relative to each ASPIRE program goal through guiding evaluation questions and indicators. Because this is the fifth and final year of the ASPIRE program, evaluation results are presented across five years (2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16) for selected outcomes. The evaluation also examines the challenges and barriers that ASPIRE participants faced in completing educational and professional development milestones, the perceived benefits of participating in ASPIRE, and satisfaction with the different components of the ASPIRE program. Finally, the evaluation highlights the successes, challenges, and lessons learned related to program implementation, describes changes in practice, and offers recommendations for future programs.

## Program Description

The CARES Plus program was funded through grants from First 5 California and First 5 Los Angeles, and has been administered in California counties since 2000. LAUP responded to the CARES Plus RFA in 2010 and received funds to create and administer the CARES Plus program for Los Angeles County starting in 2011. LAUP renamed the CARES Plus program "ASPIRE" based on input from the LAUP communications staff and the

CARES Plus Advisory Group. In addition to serving ECE professionals, the ASPIRE program was part of the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium. The Workforce Consortium is a larger workforce effort that brings together organizations and leaders in the field of early care and education to improve the educational and professional development system for ECE professionals in Los Angeles County. ASPIRE was a key project within the Workforce Consortium, as it provided direct support services to professionals working towards education, professional development, and the improvement of teaching practices. Members of the Workforce Consortium composed the CARES Plus Advisory Group.

Professionals in the field of early care and education continue to experience some of the lowest wages and highest turnover rates in the California workforce. They often work without a degree, permit, or other professional credential, and with no incentive to pursue coursework or other professional development opportunities. In light of recent research establishing a link between quality teaching and child outcomes, this lack of professional preparation and growth has serious implications for young children in Los Angeles County. The research has found that early care and education professionals with a bachelor's degree provide higher-quality teacher-child interactions for young children (Barnett, 2011; Bowman, 2011). Research has also found a link between high-quality adult-child interactions and children's acquisition of language, social, and academic skills (Burchinal et al., 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). The high-quality environment that is provided by a skilled and educated early care and education professional is important for all children engaged in early education settings, and is especially critical for children living in poverty or experiencing other risk factors for low academic performance (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Schweinhart et al., 2005).

The ASPIRE program has provided professional advisement and financial incentives meant to minimize the barriers to educational and professional achievement for early childhood educators and assist in the completion of coursework, transfers, degrees, and new or upgraded permits. The ASPIRE program also provided free online CLASS training, access to the online CLASS video library, and advisement in support of the implementation of CLASS practices. The CLASS training is a professional development experience that provides early educators with a framework for understanding the importance of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support in high-quality teaching, and highlights ways to implement these skills in their own practices. The intent of the ASPIRE program in providing the CLASS training and supports was to increase effective teaching practices and quality teacher-child interactions among participants.

During the 2015-16 program year, ASPIRE employed 49 advisors<sup>1</sup> to provide in-person support to participants. Each advisor had a potential caseload of up to 24 participants. Of these 49 advisors, 43 were returning from the previous program year. The number of advisors was lower for this year (there were 52 in 2014-15). This may have been due to the slightly smaller number of participants during this fifth year. Nevertheless, the number of qualified advisors working with ASPIRE participants this year was higher than in previous years (47 in 2013-14, 38 in 2012-13, and 32 in 2011-12). These advisors were strategically recruited from around Los Angeles County in order to provide participants with advisement within a 10-mile radius of their home or workplace. The ASPIRE advisors operated in all five supervisorial districts across Los Angeles County.

The ASPIRE program also employed a program supervisor who created and administered the program, and program staff made up of workforce development specialists. These specialists determined eligibility, collected and tracked program data, and provided technical, programmatic, and professional development support to ASPIRE participants and advisors.

### **Participant Requirements and Program Components**

ASPIRE participants are ECE professionals working in Los Angeles County who are interested in advancing their educational or professional qualifications and increasing the quality of their instructional practices. In order to qualify for the ASPIRE program, participants must:

- Work for pay in a licensed Family Child Care Home, licensed Child Care Facility, or public school-based site

(Continued on next page...)

<sup>1</sup> Three of these 49 were LAUP program specialists whose primary role was to support the advisors. However, in 2015-16, they each carried "mini" caseloads and served in an advisory capacity.

- Work directly with children aged 0 to 5 for at least 15 hours per week
- Be ineligible for the Los Angeles County “Investing in Early Educators Stipend Program” (AB212)
- Be working towards a Child Development permit or ECE degree, OR be taking professional growth coursework (if they already hold a BA/BS and a Site Supervisor permit or higher)
- Earn less than \$60,000 annually in child care or early childhood education salary

In order to be considered for the program, ASPIRE participants were required to submit the following:

- ASPIRE Application
- Employment information
- Child Development Permits held
- Grade reports or transcripts of previous coursework

After being accepted into the program, ASPIRE participants had to submit the following:

- Proof of continuous employment (Employment Verification Form)
- Completed Individualized Professional Development Plan (co-created with advisor)
- Proof that coursework was completed with a “C” or better during the program
- Proof that non-unit bearing ESL courses were completed during the program

ASPIRE participants were routed to one of two “tracks,” depending on the ages of the children they served: toddlers or preschoolers. In addition, participants were enrolled in one of three “components”: CORE, Component B, or Component D (My Teaching Partner (MTP)). Each component had slightly different program requirements, as outlined by First 5 CA. In 2015-16, the 734 ASPIRE participants in the Preschool track took part in the following components: CORE (243), Component B (473), and Component D/MTP (18). The component breakdown of the 372 ASPIRE participants in the Toddler track included CORE (147), Component B (218), and Component D/MTP (6). In order to remain active in the ASPIRE program, all participants had to complete the program requirements associated with their respective component (see Table 2).

Table 2. ASPIRE Components For Preschool and Toddler Tracks

CORE	Component B	Component D - MTP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Advisement Sessions with an ASPIRE advisor</li> <li>• 3 semester units of coursework (Preschool Track)</li> <li>• 6 semester units of coursework (Toddler Track)</li> <li>• Online trainings:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Second Hand Smoke</li> <li>-Introduction to PreK or Toddler CLASS</li> <li>-Looking at PreK or Toddler CLASSrooms</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Advisement Sessions with an ASPIRE advisor</li> <li>• 6 semester units of coursework</li> <li>• 5 hours of Video Library</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Advisement Sessions with an ASPIRE advisor</li> <li>• 2 2-hour videos of classroom practice</li> <li>• 12 cycles of self-video and discussion with an MTP coach regarding classroom practices and opportunities for improvement</li> </ul>

The ASPIRE program provided in-person advisement, online training, and financial incentives for participants to receive the academic, professional, and financial support needed to complete educational and professional development milestones and improve their classroom practices. The ASPIRE advisors were carefully selected professionals from the field of early care and education who had the expertise to guide ASPIRE participants on professional and educational advancement, and on the implementation of quality teaching practices. At the beginning of the program year, LAUP trained the ASPIRE advisors on the program requirements and the expected content of the advisement sessions.

Advisement was offered to participants in English and Spanish. Advisors were scheduled to meet with each participant twice during the program year. They provided the following services during the advisement sessions: a) transcript review, b) permit matrix review, c) general information regarding academic counselors, education

plans, graduation requirements, and financial aid, d) professional development goal creation, e) CLASS review and discussion, and f) classroom practice and strategy goal creation. One extra advisement session was offered as an option to participants if they needed additional one-on-one assistance beyond the required two sessions. There were 380 participants (34%) who opted for an extra advisement session.

Advisement sessions took place one-on-one or in small group sessions. The advisor's role was to provide personalized support to each participant. Although the participants were required to register for the requisite coursework on their own, the ASPIRE advisors and ASPIRE program staff were available to help participants identify appropriate coursework in accredited institutions of higher education throughout the county.

In addition to the advisement sessions, participants received online CLASS training. The CLASS training is a professional development experience that provides early educators with a framework for understanding the importance of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support in high-quality teaching, and how to implement these skills in their own practice. Advisors provided participants with guidance in identifying strategies for incorporating CLASS skills into daily practice. Participants also had access to the online CLASS video library during the program year.

During 2015-16, there were 24 participants who enrolled in and completed the MTP program component. In its first year (2013-14), MTP had 36 participants, and in its second year (2014-15), 49 participants completed the program. This fifth program year saw a smaller number of participants than in previous years, although ASPIRE initially recruited just as many participants as before. ASPIRE had to deny MTP participation to many applicants because of the state's reallocation of slots to smaller counties this year.

Participants involved in MTP received two advisement sessions from an ASPIRE advisor, but were also provided with an "MTP coach" through the Child Development Training Consortium. The MTP coach supported participants in self-videotaping, and reviewed and discussed the participants' actual classroom practice as captured on the video. These coaching sessions occurred by phone or via Skype. Participants were required to complete at least 12 MTP coaching "cycles" of self-videotaping, self-reflection, and discussion with a coach. Participants involved in MTP were not required to complete coursework.

In 2015-16, ASPIRE participants who qualified and fulfilled all program requirements received a base stipend of \$1,125. A total of 776 participants completed their coursework with a "C" or better and received stipends. An additional bonus was given to participants who successfully completed two or more years in the ASPIRE program (\$100), and applied for a new or upgraded permit (\$350), or earned a degree (\$550). Participants were eligible to receive either a permit bonus or a degree bonus, but not both. The CLASS observation bonus, previously awarded by First 5 California, was discontinued in 2014-15. The maximum financial incentive a participant could receive was \$1,775 (Stipend + Retention + Degree).

### **Theory of Change**

A theory of change is a set of "theories" or interlocking assumptions which serve as the base for the changes expected to occur during the course of a program. Explicitly outlining these assumptions helps evaluators and program staff test and explain the changes that are expected to occur during the course of the program. A theory of change provides the "roadmap" for applying, practicing, or realizing ideas in order to bring about change (Bruner, 2004).

In order to give context for the ASPIRE theory of change, a logic model was created (see Appendix C). The logic model linked the target populations involved in the ASPIRE program with the activities in which they participated. It also outlined the short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes expected from the ASPIRE program, as well as the intended long-term impact of the program. The major assumptions (or theories) associated with the ASPIRE program included the following:

1. There is a need within the field of Early Care and Education for an educated and skilled workforce that can deliver high-quality services to children ages 0-5.
2. The field recognizes and rewards degrees and permits, so that there are financial and professional incentives for professionals to work towards academic and professional achievements.

3. There is a need among early care and education professionals for the services provided through ASPIRE. Without the types of services provided through ASPIRE (academic, professional, and financial support), professionals would be significantly less likely to achieve transfers, degrees, permits, or improvements in instructional practices.
4. ASPIRE participants are motivated to achieve the academic and professional milestones outlined in the program.
5. Services provided through ASPIRE are provided in an effective and timely manner, and are provided in the appropriate dosage, to bring about the expected improvement in student achievement and knowledge.
6. ASPIRE advisors are willing and prepared to partner with LAUP to administer the program services. They have the materials, space, administrative support, interest, training, and/or authority to support ASPIRE participants within the scope and goals of the ASPIRE program.
7. ASPIRE participants receive the support they need to navigate and successfully engage in the academic and professional development systems in Los Angeles County.
8. ASPIRE participants receive the support they need to increase the quality of their instructional practices and interactions with children.

## Methods

This evaluation addresses the following overarching questions and specific areas of focus:

- To what extent did the ASPIRE program achieve its goals? Included within this first overarching question are explorations into the following:
  - Advancement of outcomes towards the long-term impact areas of the consortium pertaining to workforce development
  - Characteristics of ASPIRE participants
  - ASPIRE participant demographics in comparison to those of children ages 0-5 in Los Angeles County and the general adult population of Los Angeles County
  - Number of children served by ASPIRE program completers
- What were the benefits of participating in ASPIRE? Included within this second question are explorations into the following:
  - Motivation, inspiration, and achievement of educational and professional development milestones while in the ASPIRE program
  - Perceptions of increased knowledge of career options and educational pathways
  - Changes in educational or professional goals during the course of the program
  - Attribution of positive employment outcomes to ASPIRE participation
  - Completion of all CLASS training components
  - Perceptions of increased instructional quality, care, and support provided to children as a result of ASPIRE participation
  - Differences in self-reported knowledge of effective interactions
- What were ASPIRE's programmatic successes and challenges?
- What are recommendations for future programs?

### Data Collection Instruments and Analysis Plan

Data was collected using a variety of data collection instruments. Table 3 outlines the data collection instruments, timeline, and analyses used for this evaluation and report.

Table 3. Data Collection Matrix

Data Collection Instrument	Participants Involved in Data Collection	N	Data Collection Timeline	Analysis
ASPIRE Application	Potential Participants	1,105	April to September, 2015	Descriptive Statistics
Employment Verification Form	Potential Participants	1,105	April to September, 2015	Descriptive Statistics
ASPIRE Program Database	ASPIRE Participants	1,105	Ongoing	Descriptive Statistics
Knowledge of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions Assessment	ASPIRE Participants	1,105	April to September, 2015 March to June, 2016	Matched-Sample t-test
Participant End-of-Year Survey	ASPIRE Participants who completed the program year	778	March to June, 2016	Descriptive Statistics
Focus Groups	ASPIRE Returning Participants	25 total	Five sessions between February to March, 2016	Qualitative Analysis

The ASPIRE Application and Employment Verification Forms were available in English and Spanish. The application collected demographic, employment, education, and professional qualification information for each applicant. The Employment Verification Form provided verified information that the applicant worked at the documented location and served children ages 0-5. The ASPIRE program staff collected and stored programmatic data in a program database. They used this database to track the services provided to the ASPIRE participants. This database was updated continuously throughout the year. This database contained all program implementation information, including information from individual professional development plans, advisement sessions, compliance issues, and support provided by ASPIRE staff.

Increased knowledge of quality practices was measured using the Teacher’s Knowledge of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions Assessment (Hamre et al., 2012). The scale was included as part of the 2015-16 ASPIRE Application (pre) and again as part of the End-of-Year Survey (post) for those participants who completed the program. The survey, administered online in both English and Spanish, collected information about ASPIRE services, challenges, barriers, and participant satisfaction with the ASPIRE program. In this fifth program year, there was a 100% response rate.

Hard copies of transcripts were requested from ASPIRE participants twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of the program year. Transcripts were requested from participants in order to assist in advisement and to track program compliance and participant outcomes. Hard copies of permits were requested once at the end of the year for the purpose of tracking participant outcomes.

### Finding: Expanded and Diverse ECE Workforce

Recruitment and enrollment of early educators in the ASPIRE program over the past five program years has exceeded 5,000. In 2015-16, the ASPIRE program was once again successful in recruiting over 1,000 early childhood educators who represented the cultural and linguistic diversity of Los Angeles. It was not the objective of the ASPIRE program to attract new professionals to the field. Nevertheless, the ASPIRE program did serve professionals who reported working in the field for less than five years (29% of participants in 2015-16).

In addition to English, the ASPIRE program also provided training and advisement in Spanish, Armenian, Mandarin, and Cantonese, so that professionals who were at risk of marginalization in the traditional education and professional development system had an opportunity to participate in high-quality professional development. This approach encouraged ECE teachers from diverse linguistic and cultural communities to be an active part of the mainstream professional development system, and ensured that there were ECE professionals who reflected the linguistic and cultural diversity of children and families in Los Angeles County.

During the 2015-16 program year, the ASPIRE program received 1,180 applications, and enrolled 1,105

qualified participants (93%). This was relatively consistent with the rates from 2014-15 (96%) and 2013-14 (94%), and an overall increase from the rates in first two years of the program (66% and 64% for 2012-13 and 2011-12, respectively). As the pattern of decreasing numbers of recruited applicants has continued over these five years, so has the pattern of increasing numbers of accepted participants, suggesting a more intentional recruitment approach over the course of the program.

Of the 1,105 participants enrolled in 2015-16, 776 successfully completed the ASPIRE program, and over 15,000 children were served.<sup>2</sup> Table 4 displays the applicant, enrollment, and completion rates across the five years of the ASPIRE program. As shown, the percentage of completers out of accepted participants varied slightly from 68% to 73%. Overall, from 2011 to 2016, 4,000 participants successfully completed the ASPIRE program.

Table 4. Participant Application, Enrollment, and Completion Counts and Rates

Program Year	Number of Applicants	Number Enrolled	Number (%) Completed
2011-12	1,575	1,011	723 (72%)
2012-13	1,755	1,166	793 (68%)
2013-14	1,265	1,190	824 (69%)
2014-15	1,264	1,219	884 (73%)
2015-16	1,180	1,105	776 (70%)
2011 to 2016	7,039	5,691	4,000 (70%)

The ASPIRE staff worked with other professional development programs and agencies to recruit professionals who lived and worked across all five supervisory districts in Los Angeles County. Table 5 shows the distribution of 2015-16 ASPIRE participants across supervisory districts, based on both their home and work addresses.

Table 5. Participant Address Distribution Across Supervisory District

Supervisory District	ASPIRE Participant Facility Addresses (N=725)	ASPIRE Participant Home Addresses (N=1,105)
1	24% (174)	19% (207)
2	28% (201)	27% (294)
3	15% (107)	16% (181)
4	15% (107)	15% (164)
5	18% (132)	18% (198)
Incomplete Address	0% (0)	2% (25)
Out of County Address	.5% (4)	3% (36)

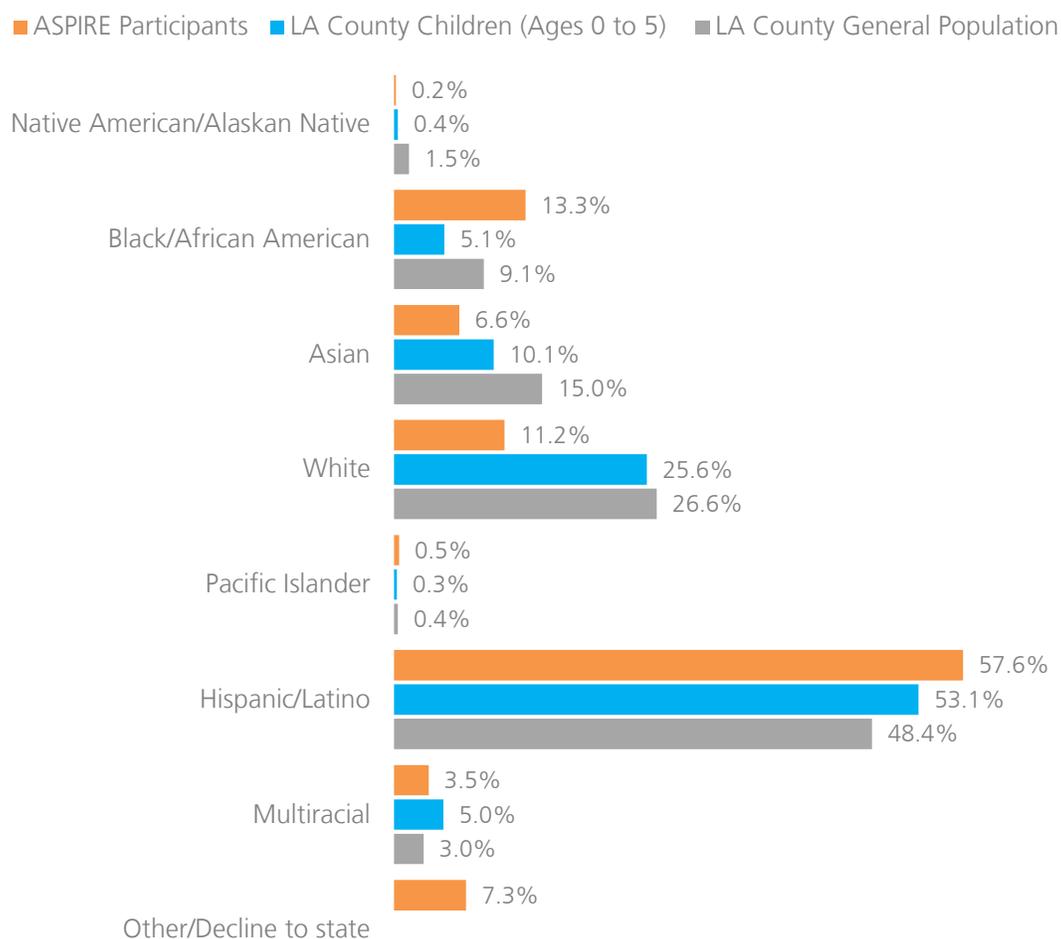
In order to qualify for the ASPIRE program, participants had to be working with children 0-5 years old. Out of the 1,105 ASPIRE participants enrolled in 2015-16, the majority identified "Classroom Teacher" (65%), "FCC Teacher" (11%), or "FCC Owner" (20%) as their primary job titles. The general category of "teacher" included lead or master teachers as well as teacher assistants. The remainder of participants identified as program administrators, program support, field support, or "other."

<sup>2</sup> Based on the self-reported numbers of children served on the 2015-16 ASPIRE Application.

The majority of ASPIRE participants (96%) were women who reported working in the ECE field for an average of 10.8 years (range = 1 to 45 years) and who spoke English (60%) or Spanish (30%) as their primary language. The top three levels of education among participants were: "some college" (37%), a BA or BS degree (25%), or an AA/AS degree (19%). Only 7% of participants held teaching or administrative credentials at the time of the 2015-16 application. The majority of participants reported holding some type of permit (59%), while 40% reported not having a permit at the time of application. The average number of years reported at their current positions was 7.6.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1 presents the races and ethnicities of 2015-16 ASPIRE participants, and compares the participant population to the population of children ages 0-5 in Los Angeles County<sup>4</sup> and the general population in Los Angeles County.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity Breakdown of 2015-16 ASPIRE Participants



The race/ethnicity breakdown of ASPIRE participants mirrored that of the general population in Los Angeles County and the population of children ages 0-5 in Los Angeles County, with the exception of notable disparities between Black/African American and White ASPIRE participants as compared to the children and adults in the county. It is important to note that these differences may be, in part, due to the way in which the Census categorizes race separately from ethnicity.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for participant characteristics by year and in aggregate over the five-year program.

<sup>4</sup> From 2010 Census Summary File, which provide the most detailed counts available so far from the 2010 Census, including cross-tabulations of age, sex, households, families, relationship to householder, housing units, detailed race and Hispanic or Latino origin groups, and group quarters at the census tract level <http://eqis3.lacounty.gov/dataportal/2016/01/26/us-census-summary-file-1-2010/>.

<sup>5</sup> From [www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/LFE305214/06037](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/LFE305214/06037) for 2015.

## Finding: Better Qualified ECE Workforce

During this fifth program year, the ASPIRE program once again met the goal of increasing the preparation of the ECE workforce through the completion of coursework, permit, and degree requirements. ASPIRE participants also attributed these increases in education and professional development to the various types of support they received through the ASPIRE program and services.

Three major milestones were achieved by ASPIRE participants. Table 6 displays these outcomes across each of the five program years as well as cumulatively. The numbers of ASPIRE participants who completed required coursework with a “C” or better has fluctuated slightly across the five program years. The number of ASPIRE participants who earned degrees has also exhibited some variation over time. In 2015-16, the percentage of degree-earning ASPIRE participants increased from 2014-15, bucking the downward trend seen from 2012 to 2014. Based on the ASPIRE Evaluation Report for 2012-13, a phone survey of withdrawn participants revealed that many were not able to find or enroll in appropriate coursework during the 2012-13 program year (Love, Hudgens, & Dong, 2013) which may have contributed to the earlier fluctuations. The number of ASPIRE participants who achieved a permit (either for the first time or upgraded their permit) was highest in 2015-16, although similar fluctuations are visible across the years. Overall, ASPIRE participants consistently achieved one or more important milestones throughout the program.

Table 6. Milestone Achievement Rates Across Program Years

Milestone	2011-2016	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)
Completed Required Coursework with “C” or Better	<b>70%</b> <b>(4,000)</b>	70% (776)	73% (884)	69% (824)	68% (793)	72% (723)
Earned Degree	<b>6%</b> <b>(343)</b>	7% (74)	6% (69)	5% (60)	6% (71)	7% (69)
Achieved Permit (First Time or Upgraded Permit)	<b>20%</b> <b>(1,163)</b>	22% (246)	20% (239)	20% (240)	19% (221)	22% (217)

Participants were asked a series of questions in the End-of-Year Survey related to the support they received in achieving these milestones. Educationally, ASPIRE participants were supported across multiple aspects and topics, from school selection to awareness of financial aid options. Over 95% of ASPIRE participants characterized the program as helping them to clarify their educational goals.

Returning ASPIRE participants who took part in the focus groups ranked the coursework requirements of “C” or better as the second most important component in their experience with the program over the years. One 4<sup>th</sup>-year participant explained the motivation she felt: “That is the top because it keeps me on course and to stay active in school.” Other participants felt that the threshold was too low and aimed for higher grades.

ASPIRE survey respondents who indicated a need for services related to school selection and assistance in selecting coursework found the program to be “very helpful” (61% and 55%, respectively). Respondents (77%) indicated that the ASPIRE program helped them enroll in college courses or English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. ASPIRE support also included increasing participants’ understanding of college and university requirements. Sixty-two percent of participants reported an increase in understanding of transfer requirements, while 65% reported an increased understanding of degree requirements. Increased awareness of financial aid options was also reported by 57% of respondents. Many participants reported that completing a degree or completing and/or submitting a transfer application were “not applicable” outcomes for them during this program year. Of the survey respondents for whom these outcomes were applicable, 84% (342 of 406) attributed completion of their degree, and 80% (266 of 331) attributed completion or submission of transfer applications, to their participation in the ASPIRE program.

In terms of motivation, 77% of respondents indicated that their ASPIRE advisor motivated them to take more coursework than they would have otherwise taken. Further, 46% shared that their ASPIRE advisor motivated them to apply for a transfer to a four-year university. Almost all of the respondents (99.7%) believed that the courses they took helped to increase the quality of their practices. Ninety-four percent reported that they planned to continue taking courses during the 2016-17 year.

Consistent with the survey findings, focus group participants ranked the required advisement sessions as the most important component in their experience with the program over the years. ASPIRE participants spoke highly of the benefits of meeting with their ASPIRE Advisor in the fall and spring of each year. One 5<sup>th</sup>-year participant shared, “My advisor helped me learn about permits that I could obtain through the consortium and also certificates that I can earn at my school, so they were just really helpful just by reviewing my transcripts, giving me an idea of what things I could do with the classes that I took.” Another participant recommended adding a third advisement session to the requirement. Of interest is the fact that many of these returning participants noted that some type of change had taken place over the years in the selection and/or training of the advisors, as their advising experiences had become increasingly positive over time.

The Child Development Permit Matrix, issued by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, explains the requirements, qualifications, and authorizations necessary for each of the six Child Development Permits available. Survey respondents were asked about their familiarity with this matrix prior to participating in the ASPIRE program and after program completion. Twenty-six percent of respondents indicated that they were “not at all familiar” before their participation, while 75% reported that they were “very familiar” with the Child Development Permit Matrix after they completed the ASPIRE program. Moreover, the majority of respondents reported that the ASPIRE program helped them increase their understanding of the Child Development Permit Matrix (90%) and helped them to achieve a new or upgraded permit (78%). Survey respondents also indicated that their ASPIRE advisor (83%) motivated them to apply for a new or upgraded permit. Over 54% of the respondents found the permit application assistance, a service provided through the program, to be “very helpful.”

### Finding: Greater Retention and Advancement of ECE Workforce

The ASPIRE program increased the incentives for early care and education professionals to pursue educational and professional advancement and remain in the field. One of the largest incentives offered by ASPIRE was the stipend awarded upon completion of the program requirements each program year. A total of 776 participants met all program requirements and received the ASPIRE stipend in 2015-16. Additional participants qualified for each available bonus. The degree bonus was awarded to participants who achieved their degree during the program year. The permit bonus was awarded to participants who received a new or upgraded permit during the program year. The retention bonus was awarded to participants who had successfully completed the ASPIRE program for two or more years in a row. During this program year, 54 participants received the maximum award possible (\$1,775). Table 7 displays the distribution of awards for 2015-16.

Table 7. Stipend Awards in 2015-16

Stipend/Bonus Type	Stipend/Bonus Amount	Number of Recipients
ASPIRE Stipend	\$1,125	776
Degree Bonus	\$550	74
Permit Bonus	\$350	246
Retention Bonus	\$100	511

Survey respondents indicated that the stipends (89%) and the stipend bonuses (77%) were “very helpful” in achieving professional and educational milestones. More specifically, the stipends motivated participants to achieve outcomes directly related to these milestones. Respondents reported that the ASPIRE stipends motivated them to take more coursework than they would have otherwise taken (88%), apply for a new or upgraded permit (79%), and apply for transfer to a four-year university (45%). The majority of respondents reported that the ASPIRE stipends encouraged them to stay in the field of early care and education (88%), and

made it possible for them to afford courses (85%) and pay for summer living expenses (69%).

Survey respondents were asked if they had been promoted since they began participating in the ASPIRE program, and if so, if they attributed that promotion to their participation in ASPIRE. Two hundred and forty respondents (31% of total) reported earning a promotion, and 60% of those 240 respondents attributed the promotion to their participation in the ASPIRE program. Respondents were also asked if they had received a pay increase since they began participating in the ASPIRE program, and, if so, whether they attributed that increase to their participation in ASPIRE. Two hundred and thirty-six respondents (30% of total) reported a pay increase, and 44% of these 236 respondents attributed that pay increase to their participation in the ASPIRE program.

## Finding: Increased Quality of ECE Practices and Programs

The ASPIRE program provided free online CLASS training, access to the online CLASS video library, and advisement in support of the implementation of CLASS practices. The CLASS training is a professional development experience that provides early educators with a framework for understanding the importance of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support in high-quality teaching, and helps educators to implement these skills in their own practice. The CLASS training and supports provided by the ASPIRE program were meant to increase effective teaching practices and quality teacher-child interactions among participants and the children they serve. Although the CLASS is used with increasing frequency to train educators and evaluate early care and education programs throughout the state, many ASPIRE participants continued to report that before the ASPIRE program, they had never heard of the CLASS observation tool (58% of survey respondents).

The End-of-Year Survey contained several questions related to components of CLASS training, knowledge increases, and learning outcomes. Over 98% of survey respondents reported an increase in their knowledge of CLASS practices and strategies through their participation in the ASPIRE program. The following CLASS-related services offered through the ASPIRE program were seen as “very helpful” by respondents:

- Intro to CLASS online training (73%)
- Looking at CLASSrooms online training (78%)
- CLASS online video library (81%)
- CLASS dimensions guide (84%)

In the focus groups, the CLASS online video library was ranked by returning ASPIRE participants as the third most important component available to them over their years in the program. Interestingly, while it was ranked third overall, participants’ individual ranks placed the video library either at the top or at the bottom of their lists across all five focus groups. Those who ranked the video library at the end of the list shared that this was largely due to the redundancy of the videos or the “staged” look of the content. The remainder of participants who ranked it highly considered the videos useful in setting up their own classroom environments and handling specific situations with the children. One 2<sup>nd</sup>-year ASPIRE participant shared, “The videos are wonderful. You can see any kind, any time you forget something or you’re stressed, you go to the videos.”

In order to measure participants’ knowledge of effective teacher-child interactions, the Teachers’ Knowledge of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions assessment was administered to new and returning ASPIRE participants. The assessment was created to measure increases in knowledge as a result of the CLASS trainings (Hamre et al., 2012). It consists of 14 multiple-choice items that require a response to a short vignette. Correct answers reflect the CLASS definitions and measures of high-quality teacher-child interactions. The measure has been found to have adequate face validity and discrimination ability (Hamre et al., 2012). A sample item from this measure is: “A child who is always complaining comes to you and says, “Alexa won’t share with me.” The best thing to do is: a. Tell her to find something else to do, b. Ignore her, c. Ask her how you can help her, d. Tell Alexa to start sharing.” In this case, the correct answer is c.

Change in participants’ knowledge of effective teacher-child interactions was measured for participants who took the pre-test (incorporated into the ASPIRE application) at the start of the 2015-16 program year and then took the post-test at the end of the program year (incorporated into the End-of-Year Survey). The pre- and post-test scores were matched, resulting in a total of 683 participant scores for statistical comparison. The results show a significant increase in scores from the beginning to the end of the program year for these

participants (see Table 8). The knowledge gain demonstrated by ASPIRE participants is consistent with the results from previous years of the program.

Table 8. Participants' Knowledge Scores from Pre-test to Post-test, Matched Pairs (N = 683)

	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	<i>p</i>
Knowledge of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions	10.93 (1.98)	11.24 (2.15)	<.001

### Finding: More Effective ECE Professional Development System in LA County

The ASPIRE program increased the capacity of professional and academic advisors to provide support for educational advancement, permit attainment, and the implementation of best practices in the classroom. This increase in capacity was a result of the recruitment, training, and coordination of ASPIRE advisors who also worked for established training agencies or educational institutions across Los Angeles County.

In addition to increasing the capacity of professional and academic advisors throughout Los Angeles County, the ASPIRE program collaborated with other organizations and institutions of higher education in Los Angeles County through the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium. The collaboration between the ASPIRE program and the Workforce Consortium focused on developing a more coordinated and effective professional development system for early childhood educators. The ASPIRE program was represented in the Workforce Consortium Advisory Committee, which drove the focus of the Workforce Consortium work.

Highlights and accomplishments resulting from the ASPIRE program's efforts to improve the ECE professional development system during the 2015-16 program year included:

- The ASPIRE data was successfully uploaded as an XML file to First 5 CA during the 2015-16 program year. This eliminated the need for sending individual Excel spreadsheets, which puts data confidentiality at risk. This also eliminated the need for a full-time data entry staff person.
- The majority of ASPIRE participants agreed to be part of the Los Angeles County Registry for Early Educators. The program submitted transcripts and permits on behalf of the participants.

### Finding: Perceived Benefits of Participating in ASPIRE

ASPIRE survey respondents reported a variety of challenges and barriers that prevented them in the past from reaching their professional and educational goals. Consistent with findings from the 2014-15 program year, the top three most frequent challenges were lack of money to pay tuition or other school expenses (57%), lack of time (46%), and lack of money to pay for a child development permit or other professional accreditation (24%).

After having received services through the ASPIRE program for one year or more, participants reported various professional and academic successes that ASPIRE helped them to achieve. These achievements, documented in earlier sections of this report, include increased understanding of the Child Development Permit Matrix, increased knowledge of CLASS-related practices and strategies, and achievement of milestones such as degrees and/or permits.

Most participants (95%) reported that through the ASPIRE program, they were able to clarify their own professional goals. Many ASPIRE services were deemed "very helpful" toward achieving their professional and educational milestones. The top services were related to CLASS resources and stipends. Additional helpful services included advisement sessions (78%), access to LAUP ASPIRE staff other than their advisor (61%), and the creation of professional development plans or plans of action (60%). The ASPIRE Computer Clinic was also found to be very helpful (36%), as was the phone support for computer and internet issues (43%).

Surveyed participants also reported that the ASPIRE advisors and the ASPIRE stipend motivated their achievement of professional and educational milestones. The majority of participants reported that the ASPIRE advisors and stipend motivated them to take more coursework than they would have otherwise taken, and to

apply for a new or upgraded permit. The ASPIRE advisors and stipend also motivated those participants pursuing transfers to four-year universities. The ASPIRE stipend made it possible for respondents to afford classes, made it possible for them to pay for summer living expenses, and encouraged them to stay in the field of early care and education. The fact that many participants depended on the ASPIRE stipend to cover living expenses highlights the need for a living wage among ECE professionals.

ASPIRE focus group participants also spoke of the benefits of participating in the program and the reasons they returned for two or more years. While many spoke about the stipends and resources available through ASPIRE, others spoke of the personal motivation and sense of personal challenge that the program gave them. One 2<sup>nd</sup>-year participant shared that the motivation and financial incentives led her to complete her degree, adding "... professionally, I feel better as an educator, and as a professional in the field." A sense of professional pride emerged from these discussions as participants shared how much more knowledgeable they had become, and how they had become a resource to others. As one 4<sup>th</sup>-year participant shared, "I have my daycare set up just like a school. I didn't want [parents] thinking we are just coming to daycare and it wasn't educational, it wasn't like that at all. I have everything out there, I had all their domains in teaching the child and I couldn't have done without ASPIRE." Finally, participants shared countless stories with an underlying "can't stop now" theme that revealed how closely ASPIRE was tied to their long-term goals. A 2<sup>nd</sup>-year participant shared, "The first time I enrolled with ASPIRE I said, 'they are only requiring certain units.' That was what they are requiring. But, once you are there, you don't go for the 3 or 6 units. You go for more." For many participants, returning to ASPIRE came hand-in-hand with returning to school, and those who returned after many years of being "done" found additional motivation to continue.

Overall, surveyed ASPIRE participants reported that they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the ASPIRE program (98%) and that they would recommend the ASPIRE program to other ECE providers (99%). Further, 99% of participants noted an improvement in the effectiveness of their teaching in their classroom or family child care, and 96% indicated that they would remain in the field of early childhood education.

## Finding: Programmatic Successes and Challenges

As in previous years, the ASPIRE program staff and participants experienced significant success during the 2015-16 program year. Each of the five ASPIRE program goals were achieved during the program year, which contributed to the intended long-term impacts of the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium. Through the efforts of the ASPIRE program staff and participants, the ASPIRE program was able to:

- Goal 1:** Recruit over 1,000 early childhood educators who represent the diversity of Los Angeles.
- Goal 2:** Increase the preparation of the ECE workforce through the completion of coursework, permits, and degree requirements.
- Goal 3:** Increase the incentives for early childhood educators to pursue educational and professional advancement.
- Goal 4:** Increase the effectiveness of teaching practices and quality teacher-child interactions.
- Goal 5:** Create structural change in institutions of higher education and organizations serving the needs of early childhood educators, leading to the development of more seamless educational pathways.

In addition to achieving the goals for 2015-16, the ASPIRE program received positive feedback from ASPIRE participants regarding the services provided through the program. The majority of ASPIRE participants reported that the program helped them achieve specific professional and academic milestones, and the ASPIRE advisors and stipends motivated them to achieve these milestones despite personal challenges, continuous work obligations, and rigorous program requirements.

One major challenge that was identified as early as 2012-13 and continued during each program year into 2015-16 was the challenge of maintaining a high participant retention rate. In previous years, the most frequent reason for withdrawal was an inability to register for coursework for reasons such as overcrowding, lack of appropriate courses, inability to pay for courses, or conflicting schedules. In this 2015-16 program year, the most frequent reason was a difficulty in meeting deadlines. Of the 323 participants who withdrew from the program, 35% did not complete either the first or second advisement session by the required deadline. Further, a total of 17% did not meet the deadlines for registering for CLASS training (14%) or completing the CLASS introduction (3%).

## Limitations

The chief limitations of this study are as follows:

Measurement of teacher-child interactions and other classroom practices using direct observation were outside the scope of this evaluation of the ASPIRE program. Although First 5 CA collects direct observation data from a small sample of ASPIRE participants, the local ASPIRE program and evaluation staff did not have access to these data.

The findings in this report cannot be generalized to other CARES Plus programs or other stipend programs in Southern California (e.g., the AB212 program).

Participants had the option to skip any question on the End-of-Year Survey. Because of this, not all participants were included in the analyses of survey data. In addition, the matched sample for the t-tests did not include participants who skipped items on the Knowledge of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions assessment, which was included in the End-of-Year Survey.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

During the 2015-16 program year, the ASPIRE program achieved all program goals. The ASPIRE program contributed to the advancement of the ECE workforce, supported participants in achieving academic and professional development milestones, contributed to increases in knowledge of high-quality classroom practices, and increased the capacity of the professionals who coach and advise ECE professionals through workforce development programs. A discussion of the conclusions drawn from this evaluation is presented below, within the framework of the Workforce Consortium impact areas.

As this is the fifth and final year of the ASPIRE program, LAUP will be initiating a smaller stipend program for the coming year. This stipend program will be funded by fund-balance money from First 5 LA; therefore, eligible participants will be among those who receive coaching through LAUP. Recommendations presented in the next sections are based on core components of the ASPIRE program and the current evaluation, and on suggestions from ASPIRE participants who had been in the program for two or more years and participated in the focus groups.

### **Expanded and Diverse ECE Workforce**

The ASPIRE program recruited 1,180 applicants and accepted 1,105 participants for the 2015-16 program year. These numbers were relatively consistent with the past two program years (2014-15, 2013-14) but higher than the first two years (2011-12, 2012-13). Overall, these high numbers were affirming to the ASPIRE staff, who intentionally and continually worked with other Workforce Consortium partners to advertise the ASPIRE program and co-enroll participants who were already participating in other Workforce Consortium programs.

The ASPIRE program maintained the racial and ethnic diversity of the participant group in this fifth year of the program. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the 2015-16 ASPIRE participants mostly mirrored that of both the general adult population and the child population (ages 0-5) in Los Angeles County. Participants were also geographically diverse, living and working across all five supervisorial districts in Los Angeles County.

Although recruiting new ECE professionals to the field was not one of the ASPIRE program goals, the program served a significant number of ECE professionals who were new to the field. Twenty-nine percent reported that they had worked in the field of ECE for less than five years.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

- Implement established recruitment strategies and work with partner CSUs and community colleges to recruit eligible working students.
- Provide services in multiple languages and across all supervisorial districts to ensure participant diversity.

### **Better Qualified ECE Workforce**

The numbers of participants achieving educational milestones have fluctuated slightly over the five program years. Nevertheless, this final year ended in high rates of completion. Specifically, 70% of participants

completed coursework with a “C” or better, 7% earned a degree, and 22% (the highest rate of all years) received a new or upgraded permit.

ASPIRE participants overwhelmingly attributed their academic and permit progress to the assistance and advisement they received from ASPIRE, and the majority reported that the ASPIRE advisors and stipend motivated them to achieve their educational milestones. Participants also reported that the ASPIRE stipend made it possible to afford the classes needed to complete degrees and permit applications. The ECE professionals served by the ASPIRE program over the years continually reported low wages and salaries. It was not surprising that the stipend was reported as a motivating factor in completing coursework and permit applications, which can be costly for individuals who are challenged to make a living wage.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

- Offer advisement sessions (both required and “extra”) for participant support. Advisors for a new stipend program should be recruited from the 2015-16 ASPIRE program.
- Send out information on available courses and schools to ASPIRE participants.
- Adopt higher thresholds for the coursework completion milestone (e.g., from a letter grade of C to an A or B).

#### **Greater Retention and Advancement of the ECE Workforce**

Participants reported that the ASPIRE program motivated them to stay in the ECE field and made it possible for them to pay their summer living expenses. In addition, participants reported that the ASPIRE program contributed to their professional advancement. Of the 236 participants who received a pay increase at work during the 2015-16 program year, 44% attributed the increase to their participation in the ASPIRE program. Of the 240 participants who were promoted during this year, 60% attributed the promotion to their participation in the ASPIRE program. These rates represent an increase from the 2014-15 year.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

- Develop more customization and individualized components to ensure that participants working in different settings (e.g., FCCs vs. center-based programs) or those who are in different stages of their educational and professional pathways can receive the maximum benefit from their participation.
- Award stipends and bonuses to participants who achieve academic and professional development milestones through the ASPIRE program.

#### **Increased Quality of ECE Practices and Programs**

Knowledge of effective teacher-child interactions significantly increased for 2015-16 ASPIRE participants. Further, participants reported that the ASPIRE program and the completed coursework had a positive impact on the quality of their practices. Other positive outcomes as a result of the ASPIRE program reported by participants included increased knowledge of CLASS-related classroom strategies and improved effectiveness of their own teaching. ASPIRE advisement sessions, and ASPIRE-provided services and resources such as the CLASS video library, were described as very helpful and important toward participants’ achievement of educational and professional milestones.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

- Provide online CLASS training and, as an optional resource, access to the CLASS online video library. Acquire additional or updated videos for participant use.
- Provide advisement on the CLASS tool and strategies so that participants can intentionally implement CLASS-related strategies or practices in the classroom.
- In collaboration with Teachstone, provide technical assistance, guidance, and troubleshooting for ASPIRE participants working through the online CLASS training.
- Provide more resources and tools for working with children who have special needs and/or demonstrate challenging behavior, as this population may be growing.
- Provide more rigorous and specific development opportunities for participants that include instructional support with subgroups (e.g., language learners) and behavior management.

#### **More Effective ECE Professional Development System in LA County**

The ASPIRE program contributed to a more effective ECE professional development system by increasing

the capacity of professional and academic advisors to provide support for educational advancement, permit attainment, and implementation of best practices in the classroom. The ASPIRE program collaborated with other organizations and institutions of higher education in Los Angeles County through the Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Workforce Consortium.

Highlights resulting from the ASPIRE program's efforts to improve the ECE professional development system include successful uploads of ASPIRE data to First 5 CA (securing confidentiality and eliminating the need for a full-time data entry staffer), and ASPIRE participants joining the Los Angeles County Registry for Early Educators.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

- Hiring and training of advisors should be modeled after practices adopted in the later years of the ASPIRE program.
- Recruit advisors from the 2015-16 ASPIRE advisor pool, existing professionals working for professional development agencies, and institutions of higher education.
- Work with stakeholders and workforce partners to collaborate and generate ideas for program improvement.

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## Appendix A. ASPIRE Participant Focus Group Methodology, Summary of Findings, and Protocol

### Timeline and Locations

A total of 5 focus groups were conducted between February 20 and March 29, 2016. Focus groups ranged in size from two participants to eight participants.

Focus groups were held throughout Los Angeles County; two were held in Commerce, just east of downtown Los Angeles; one in the Antelope Valley; one at the LAUP headquarters in downtown Los Angeles; and one focus group was held in Pomona.

### Interviewees

There were 25 ASPIRE returners who participated across the five focus groups. For six participants (24%), this was their second year in ASPIRE; for five participants (20%), this was their third year in ASPIRE; for six participants (24%), this was their fourth year in ASPIRE; and for eight participants (32%), this was their fifth year in ASPIRE.

### Ranking of ASPIRE Program Components

ASPIRE participants were asked to rank a total of 14 ASPIRE program components from most to least important, based on participants' personal experience with the ASPIRE program over the years. Participants were instructed to leave out program components that did not apply to them. For example, if participants did not partake in contracted coursework in Spanish, they were instructed to put that program component aside and rank the remaining components only. Rankings from each of the 25 ASPIRE participants were computed and combined to determine the overall ranking of each of the 14 ASPIRE program components.

To determine overall ranking, ASPIRE components were weighted based on the following system: a component was allotted 2 points every time it was ranked of topmost importance by an ASPIRE participant; a component was allotted 1 point every time it was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>- or 3<sup>rd</sup>-most important; and a component was allotted 1 point every time it was ranked least important by an ASPIRE participant. Table 9 shows the overall ranked list of ASPIRE program components, using the point system described above, and computed across all 25 respondents. The table is followed by interview excerpts and summarized findings related to the components which were ranked in the top three positions.

Table 9. Computed Ranks of ASPIRE Components

ASPIRE Component	Rank	ASPIRE Component	Rank
Required Advisement Sessions (2 Sessions)	1	Secondhand Smoke/Tobacco Training	8
Coursework Requirements ("C" or better)	2	Transcript Review	9
CLASS Online Video Library (5 Hours)	3	My Teaching Partner Video Tapings (2)	10
Online CLASS Training	4	Optional Permit Clinics	11
LAUP Specialist Support	5	Permit Webinar	12
My Teaching Partner Coaching (12 Cycles)	6	Optional Computer Clinics	13
Contracted Coursework in Spanish (LACC)	7	Optional Class Workshops	14

### Required Advisement Sessions

ASPIRE participants spoke highly about the benefits of meeting with their ASPIRE advisor two times a year (once in the spring and once in the fall). In discussing the advisement sessions, two ASPIRE participants shared the following:

5<sup>th</sup>-Year ASPIRE Participant: "Mine's kind of a tie, I'll explain why. My first two were the required advisement sessions and the transcript review because when I had my sessions with my advisor they were able to help me go over my transcripts and give me an idea of where I stood permit-wise and things like that, so that's why it's a tie. A lot of my professors at this school that I attend, they weren't necessarily giving the information of take

this class or you can apply for this, you can do that. So I kind of felt like I was just taking classes but I wasn't really knowledgeable of what I could do with those classes other than transfer to somewhere else. My advisor helped me learn about permits that I could obtain through the consortium and also certificates that I can earn at my school, so they were just really helpful just by reviewing my transcripts, giving me an idea of what things I could do with the classes that I took."

4<sup>th</sup>-Year ASPIRE Participant: "I also chose the Required Advisement Sessions and the reason for that is that I like the fact that I get to sit and meet someone to set goals, that I can sit and talk about what are the goals for this year and I also really like my advisor because she has been a teacher, she's been a preschool teacher. She teaches, she's an educator at a community college, so she knows what it's like to teach preschool children, so she's in the field and she also teaches Child Development courses."

One participant felt so strongly about the benefits of her required advisement sessions that she suggested there should be a third required advisement session within the school year. She said, "I know that we have one in the fall and one in the spring. But it would be nice if somewhere in between, there could be like a one-on-one with an advisor. Which is not a problem with my current advisor. All I have to do is email her. I don't know if all the advisors do that? But if we could have that third one-on-one..."

Participants shared both positive and negative experiences with their ASPIRE advisor. Almost all providers who shared negative experiences with an advisor said that the advisor was either difficult or altogether impossible to reach. Typically, these negative advisor stories had taken place during the earlier years of ASPIRE; they were presented as brief stories that appeared to be less important than more recent, positive experiences with ASPIRE advisors. Something has changed, either in the selection and hiring of advisors or in the training that they receive, from the start of ASPIRE to the current year; this change was widely noted by program participants. Recommendations are for advisement to continue to be a program requirement for the future stipend program, and either for advisors to be recruited from the current (2015-16) batch of advisors, or for the hiring and training of any new advisors to be modeled after the practices adopted in the later years of ASPIRE.

### **Coursework Requirements ("C" or better)**

The second most important ASPIRE program component on the ranked list is the coursework requirement that participants pass courses with a "C" letter grade or better. Two participants who selected this as their most important program component had the following to say about the coursework requirement:

2<sup>nd</sup>-Year ASPIRE Participant: "Coursework requirement as well because it gets me going. My goal is to get my masters. So I want to keep on going and going. I would stop before because I didn't have the resources to do it. And now with the ASPIRE, I have that resource there and want to continue to the end. Until my goal is achieved."

4<sup>th</sup>-Year ASPIRE Participant: "For me it was the coursework requirements. That is the topic because it keeps me on course and to stay active in school. And see how valuable it is and for me to have an incentive part through the ASPIRE program. It has been great for me, because you can start just getting lazy and want nothing to do with school, so the coursework."

For a few participants, the coursework requirement of passing courses with a letter "C" grade or better was too low a threshold—these participants typically said "I wouldn't let myself get a C," "I was shooting for the A," or "I am not shooting for a C. I shoot for the top!" Typically, these participants did not place the Coursework Requirement program component at the top of their list because it wasn't a motivating factor for their success in the program. Overall, however, Coursework Requirements ("C" or better) did rank in the top 3 motivating factors; therefore, the recommendation is for the coursework requirement to remain, and to adopt a higher threshold of A or B.

### **CLASS Online Video Library (5 Hours)**

The CLASS online video library was a point of contention in almost every one of the five focus groups that were held. Participants either ranked the CLASS online video library at the top of their list, or they ranked it at the bottom of their list. Those that ranked it at the bottom spoke mostly about the redundancy of the videos. They had seen the very same videos every year that they returned to the ASPIRE program. A few of the videos were

new, but the majority were the same videos, and participants had seen them enough. However, those that ranked CLASS online videos at the top of their list had the following to say:

4<sup>th</sup>-Year ASPIRE Participant: "I chose the CLASS Online Video Library. I've been teaching for a long time but I never get tired of looking at someone else's class even though those are two minutes, three minutes long, it's just very interesting to watch how the teachers interact during activities. It just gives me different ideas and ways to bring it back into my classroom. For me it's just a lot of tips that I can get."

2<sup>nd</sup>-Year ASPIRE Participant: "The videos are wonderful. You can see any kind, any time you forget something or you're stressed, you go to the videos. You see the environments. You have a new boy in the class? You have the video there, you can see it there."

These participants considered the videos a resource for ideas on setting up their classroom environment and for handling specific situations with children. However, according to participants who rated the CLASS online video library at the bottom of their ranked list of importance, these videos appeared "staged," the children in them were "too well behaved," and the videos were hardly seen as a resource in terms of handling difficult situations with children under their care. One participant currently in her 4<sup>th</sup> year with ASPIRE explained, "Those are the best behaved children I've ever seen. Come to my school, I have a lot of children with a lot of behavior challenges and I have children with developmental issues, speech, behavior. I mean it's very challenging. Those kids are really well behaved." Overall, the recommendation would be to keep the online videos as an optional resource for participants who would like to see them, but not to make them a program requirement for success in a future stipend program.

### **Returning to ASPIRE**

Besides being asked to rank the ASPIRE program components and speak about or justify their ranking, program participants were also asked to talk about their reason(s) for returning to the program for multiple years.

Participants spoke about returning for the monetary incentive, for the videos, and for other resources, including the advisement that everyone agreed made it easy for them to return to ASPIRE. Some participants touched on a very personal theme of motivation and the idea of a personal challenge that ASPIRE gave them in terms of deciding to return to school. One participant currently in her 4<sup>th</sup> year with ASPIRE told her story about returning to college after receiving her B.A. "Actually, the first time I heard about ASPIRE I asked myself, do I want to go back to college? I got scared actually. Stepping on the college campus, I felt that it was a culture shock. It is so different. I wondered, can I keep up with these college students? Will I be able to catch up with everything? Now I feel it is a competition inside me. I have to get an A+ you know? I have to perform well. I have to achieve this for my personal growth and for my teaching credentials."

Another participant in her second year with ASPIRE shared a similar story about the sense of motivation that came with participation in ASPIRE: "The first time I enrolled with ASPIRE I said, they are only requiring certain units. That was what they are requiring. But, once you are there, you don't go for the 3 or 6 units. You go for more." Participants shared countless stories with an underlying can't-stop-now-that-I've-started theme and stories that revealed how closely ASPIRE was tied to their long-term goals. For many, returning to ASPIRE came hand-in-hand with returning to school, and those who returned after many years of being "done" were motivated to continue.

### **Unintended Impacts**

During our focus groups, program participants shared several unintended impacts of the ASPIRE program. Two participants talked about the impact of ASPIRE on their own children. One participant revealed a particularly heartfelt story: "In Mexico, I was an accountant. When I came to this country, I kept telling myself, over there I was an accountant but here I am nobody. And now this is my first opportunity to start preparing myself here. I have two sons and they see me in college and I tell them, if I can do it without being born in this country, you can too. I speak English but not fluently and if I can do it you can do it too. And it's a motivation for them too."

Another unintended impact that was shared by more than one participant was an increased desire and ability to help others navigate the coursework requirements in ECE. One participant in her 4<sup>th</sup> year in ASPIRE shared, "I kind of feel bad for those people who are starting to get into the ECE field. Just last week I noticed a girl that was Child Development, she was taking her first class. I felt because I did have the experience of being new and wanted to work on these classes to get this permit. In school, they don't tell you. Not that I was telling her

what to do but I wish I had that in the beginning. I wish I had that right at the beginning so I wouldn't waste my time or my money because I didn't get help in the beginning. Maybe it was too overwhelming for her to take in because she said I'm just taking a class. But I kind of felt like I was a help to her."

### **Recommendations**

In summary, the following recommendations are informed by participants' ranking of ASPIRE program components from most to least important:

- Advisement should continue to be a requirement of the future stipend program. Advisors should be pulled from the current (2015-16) batch of advisors, or hiring and training of any new advisors should be modeled after the practices adopted in the later years of ASPIRE.
- Coursework requirements should adopt a higher threshold of a letter grade of A or B.
- Viewing of CLASS online videos should shift from being a program requirement to being presented as an optional resource for participants who would like to see them.

In addition to the above recommendations informed by participants' ranking of ASPIRE program components, participants were asked two questions to obtain their ideas for recommendations for a future stipend program. Participants were asked: 1) "If you were designing the new stipend program, what would it look like?", and 2) "What changes would you make to the current stipend program to make it better?" Recommendations and ideas from participants were bountiful. Below are the most common themes:

- **New Videos:** Participants liked the idea of having videos as optional resources (vs. program requirements). Participants are tired of the same old videos, and wanted new videos to provide guidance, particularly for handling behavior issues in the classroom.
- **Customization:** The theme of customization spanned multiple ideas, including different stipend program requirements for FCCs and center-based staff; different program requirements for staff with bachelor's degrees vs. those without; different modes of advisement in addition to one-on-one sessions with an advisor (perhaps this would include one traditional one-on-one session and one group advisement session for the sake of networking); and program requirements based on the population participants serve (e.g., a participant working at a site with a high population of language learners should be required to take courses on working with language learners).
- **Series/Longer PD:** Participants expressed a desire for professional development that spanned more than a couple of hours. This was tied to the idea of taking coursework together with other stipend program participants or as a cohort to improve the quality of their work, as opposed to independently watching videos. Participants wanted the series to be mandatory, miss-one-day-and-you're-out requirements. Some ideas for professional development topics were: CLASS (specifically, Instructional Support, an area where they felt lacking), special needs, language learners, and behavior management.
- **Behavior Management & Special Needs Tools:** Many participants with multiple years working in early care and education said that in their experience, the number of children with special needs under their care is growing. They requested more resources and tools for working with special needs children and the behavioral challenges that sometimes accompany them. They also suggested tools and resources for working with the parents of children who are demonstrating challenging behaviors.

### **Focus Group Questions**

The following questions and activities were used in focus groups of ASPIRE participants:

#### *Participant Introductions/Ice Breaker Activity*

- Where do you work?
- How long have you been in ASPIRE?
- Preschool teacher's name? What did you like most about him/her?

#### *Brainstorm*

- Think of your experience in the ASPIRE program. Now think of single words that describe the ASPIRE program based on your personal experience.

### *Activity*

- Everyone gets a bag with flash cards. Flash cards have ASPIRE program components written on them
- Each participant is to arrange the flash cards in order from most important program component to least important program component, based on their personal experience.
- Round robin to describe why they selected first as first
- Round robin to describe why they selected last as last

### *Personal & Professional Growth*

- How has the ASPIRE program helped your professional growth in the ECE field?
- Have you noticed an increase or change in the quality of teacher-child interactions in your classrooms after participating in ASPIRE?
- How has the ASPIRE program helped you personally?
- Has the ASPIRE program improved your knowledge of the ECE field?
- Are there any other benefits, either personal or professional, that you gained from your participation in the ASPIRE program throughout the years? (It could be something that you were never expecting to get from the program that, in retrospect, you would attribute to your continued participation in ASPIRE?)

### *Returning*

- What were some of the reasons why you returned to the program? What kept you coming back?
- Has your experience in the ASPIRE program changed throughout the years? If yes, how so?

### *Training*

- Which trainings provided by ASPIRE did you find most helpful? Why?

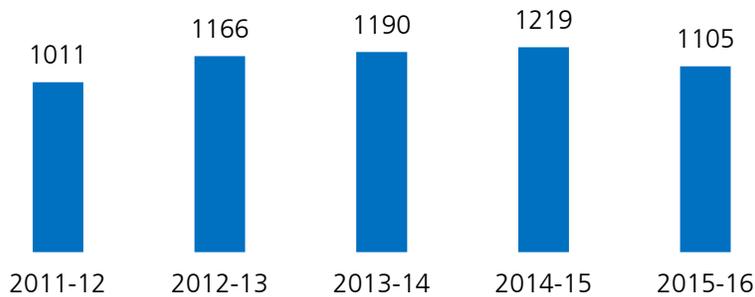
### *Future Stipend Program*

- If given the opportunity to create a new stipend program for people in Early Care and Education, what would your ideal program look like?
- Who would the participants be? What would the program requirements be?
- What would training topics be if any? How big would the stipend be?
- If we were to use the current ASPIRE stipend program as a model for a future stipend program, what would you change about the current stipend program to make it better?

## Appendix B. Characteristics of ASPIRE Participants, by Year and in Aggregate

A total of 5,691 ASPIRE participants were enrolled during the five years of the program (2011-2016).

Figure 2. Number of Enrolled ASPIRE Participants by Year



The median level of education of ASPIRE participants over the five years of the program, at the time of enrollment, was "Some College."

Table 10. Highest Level of Education among ASPIRE Participants

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Aggregate
Less than HS	7%	9%	8%	8%	8%	8%
High School	7%	19%	7%	7%	7%	9%
Some College	34%	26%	34%	37%	37%	33%
AA/AS	24%	20%	22%	20%	19%	21%
BA/BS	24%	22%	24%	24%	25%	24%
Graduate level	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%

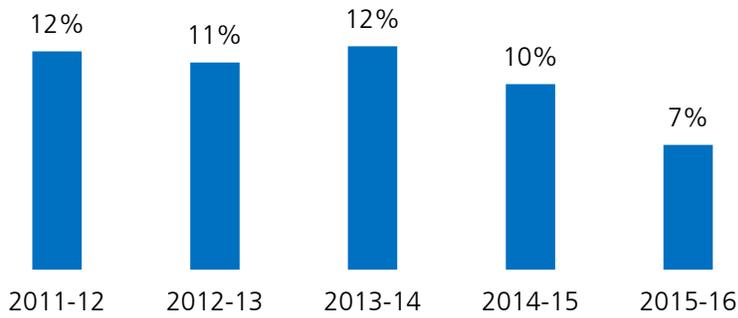
Every year, about one-third of ASPIRE participants entered the program without a permit. It is important to note that in the 2011-12 program year, 27% of ASPIRE participants did not respond to the question regarding permits, which may account for the lower rates in that year.

Table 11. Highest Permit Level among ASPIRE Participants at Enrollment

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Aggregate
Assistant	2%	4%	5%	7%	8%	5%
Associate	11%	13%	15%	14%	17%	14%
Teacher	12%	17%	16%	15%	15%	15%
Master Teacher	4%	6%	6%	4%	5%	5%
Program Director	3%	5%	4%	3%	3%	3%
Site Supervisor	9%	15%	12%	13%	11%	12%
No Permit	31%	39%	41%	44%	40%	39%

Across the five program years (2011-2016), 10% of ASPIRE participants enrolled with teaching or administrative credentials.

Figure 3. Percentage of ASPIRE Participants with Teaching or Administrative Credentials at Enrollment



Overall, across all ASPIRE participants (2011-2016), the average number of years in the field at the time of enrollment was 9.3 years, and the average time participants had been in their current position was 7.0 years.

Figure 4. Average Time (in Years) in the Field and in Current Position as Self-Reported by ASPIRE Participants

