



— SAN DIEGO —
QUALITY
PRESCHOOL INITIATIVE

Helping Youngsters Thrive



THE JOURNEY BEGINS



The First 5 Commission of San Diego (F5SD) has been committed to ensuring that all children in San Diego County enter kindergarten ready to learn. This bold vision has led to key investments in supporting the development of a quality early learning initiative that is known as the Quality Preschool Initiative (QPI). The quality early learning journey began for First 5 San Diego in 2006, with the creation of the Preschool for All (PFA) and Power of Preschool (PoP) projects. Both PFA and PoP invited key early education partners to participate in an effort to improve the access to high-quality early education for preschool aged children.

Nearly 14 years later, QPI has grown into a comprehensive system that aims to continue improving the overall quality of all early care and education through the county. Over the years, through partner and family engagement and valuable data collection much has been learned as to what is most critical to continue supporting the needs of our early care and education providers, and the families they serve.

Additionally, F5SD has also focused on the broader systems-change needs and ensuring that this foundational work will continue for years to come.

In this report you will learn about our QPI journey, key highlights, what it takes to be successful, lessons learned, and next steps.

This work would not have been possible without the tremendous support of our many partnering agencies that trusted in the process and became QPI agencies. It is because of their tireless efforts and active engagement over the years that we are able to share this journey with you.

3,297 preschoolers were provided access to a quality preschool program, fully funded by First 5, totaling
\$12,882,379

Thank you to the First 5 San Diego Commissioners for their ongoing support and foresight, as well as the leadership team at the San Diego County Office of Education for making this vision a reality.

We look forward to the emerging future as we continue our collective efforts in bringing high-quality early care and education to all our children throughout San Diego County.

Alethea Arguilez, Executive Director

First 5 Commission of San Diego
County of San Diego
Health & Human Services Agency

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I have seen my son reach a new level of potential in the program. It has helped him socially and certainly academically. The teachers and aides are an incredible extended family for us. We do not have other family members in San Diego, so this type of consistent support is huge! My husband and I both work full time, and knowing our son is in a safe, enriching, and fun place gives us peace of mind to meet our potential at work to make our family stronger.

– A Parent

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THE QPI STORY



The Quality Preschool Initiative's (QPI) mission was to **positively impact the growth and development of preschool age children to ensure they have the foundation they need to transition to kindergarten, experience success in school, and become life-long learners.** It promoted uniformly high standards for preschool program services and learning environments, based on state and nationally recognized best practices and the elements of the San Diego Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which includes seven key elements of quality.

Built upon the First 5 Preschool For All (PFA) demonstration and the Power of Preschool (PoP) projects, QPI's major focus was to ensure access to a quality preschool experience in high-need communities throughout San Diego County. Over the last eight years, 105,299 children ages 3-5 were served in state and federally funded preschool programs participating in QPI, representing an investment of more than \$130 million.

In its first few years, QPI focused on access, providing full tuition, or fully-funded slots, to preschool students. But as funding shifted, the effort also shifted to fully fund children who had individualized education programs and those whose parents were in the military or missed the eligibility requirements for Head Start and State Preschool. First 5 fully funded slots provided access to a quality preschool program to 3,297 preschoolers, totaling nearly \$13 million over eight years.

The continual focus on high standards centered on supporting preschool program provider staff in offering children a variety of quality learning experiences that promote school readiness as well as later success in life. Central to this effort were developmental screenings and referrals, and participation in professional development and coaching. More than 92,000 developmental screenings were completed over the last eight years, with nearly 50,000 children receiving a secondary screening for social emotional development. As a result, more than 20,000 children were identified as having developmental or social emotional concerns, with approximately 75% being referred for intervention.

In addition, all teachers participating in QPI engaged in training and implemented the California Department of Education's preschool observation tool, Desired Results Developmental Profile. Based on the classroom results from these profiles, teachers were coached in their ability to develop learning opportunities and provide high-

\$130+ million invested in QPI

quality environments within their classrooms that promote learning and maximal development. To maintain focus on quality for each group of children, staff completed a quality assurance checklist with their coach, which included data review and analysis of results from select standardized tools. Staff were encouraged to continue participating in professional development, as compensation increased with a higher level of education and professional licensure. Nearly 9,000 stipends totalling nearly \$18 million were given to staff working at QPI sites over the last eight years.

Maintaining quality improvement in settings where high-needs preschoolers were enrolled was made possible through First 5 fiscal supports to participating programs. In eight years, more than \$43 million was paid to providers, as QPI agency reimbursements, to assist with the costs associated with increasing quality in the learning environments. Mini-grants totaling more than \$3.6 million provided an additional opportunity to improve sites and purchase materials, while nearly \$2.7 million in Maintenance of Effort supplementary funding was provided to full-day, full-year, state-funded preschool programs that maintained continuous participation from PFA through QPI.

Successful collaboration among early care lead agencies enabled QPI to leverage additional state funding to increase access to quality early learning and care settings for children, while local partnerships changed the way agencies rely on each other to support children, their families, and their early learning and care providers.

For San Diego County, this level of partnership and collaboration indicates a sustainable focus on every child having access to quality early learning experiences, particularly those young children who are most likely to achieve a successful school trajectory. As we look forward, QPI will continue to build on this foundation and continue creating opportunities for all early learners in San Diego County to thrive.



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Children who are dual language learners benefited from QPI by having a focus on the benefits of dual language development and bi-literacy training provided to their teachers and parents. As one parent stated regarding the quality of preschool her child received, "I am grateful for this program. I don't know what I would do without it. Being a single mother is not easy and this program not only helps me keep a roof over my son's head but also helps him receive the education he deserves."

- A Parent

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QPI IMPACT: HIGHLIGHTS FROM EIGHT YEARS OF SERVICE

92,689

Ages and Stages Questionnaires, Third Edition (ASQ-3) developmental screenings were completed in QPI and **49,479** children also received a secondary screening for social emotional development and using the ASQ-SE screening tool.

1,806

identified as having social emotional development concerns

12,234

referrals resulting in intervention

23,918

parents completed a First 5-approved parent education class or series

71,437

hours of one-on-one coaching were provided to site administrators and teachers



\$43,450,077

was paid to providers,
as QPI agency
reimbursements, to assist
with the costs associated
with increasing quality in the
learning environments

\$3,646,217

in mini-grants provided
additional opportunity
to improve sites and
purchase materials

\$2,664,621

in Maintenance of Effort (MOE)
supplementary funding was
provided to full-day, full-
year, state-funded preschool
programs that maintained
continuous participation from
Preschool For All through QPI

8,925

stipends totaling

\$17,639,326

were given to staff
working at QPI sites



*I just want to let you know
that the parents who
attended the workshops
have been raving about
it. They thought it was
informative and one parent
that attended only one class
went home that night and
used what she learned with
her children. She said it
worked and made her think
differently about reading
with her children. She
enjoyed the evening with
her kiddos. Thank you again
for being a great trainer to
our parents. We definitely
will be using this workshop
in the future.*

-QPI Provider

*July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2020

PAVING THE WAY TO SUCCESS



QPI created a global picture of quality early learning for San Diego County. Leaders from participating agencies describe it as “a roadmap that while providing flexibility for individual agency, site, session, staff, and child needs, it was an effort that made sure we continued the quality work needed to move forward.”

A variety of factors contributed to QPI’s overall success, driven by several key components that include coaching and training; First 5 funding support a long-term commitment to cultural and systemic change; and; and QPI’s effort to bridge the data gap between early education and K-12.

Coaching And Training

Coaching has been highlighted by preschool agency leaders as having been an essential component of the initiative. They are grateful for the QPI coaches, workshops, and for receiving trainings they describe as being “very robust.” The level of quality and professional development of the coaches has been continually recognized by providers and the state Quality Counts California (QCC) team. Agency leaders express that quality coaching was key to their ability to support great results in continuous quality improvement of staff, resulting in better learning experiences for children. Investing in the continuous professional development of QPI coaches and in their skills to address adult learning, content knowledge, and certifications was essential to the provision of coaching and workshops at a quality level that assured changes in practices at the classroom level, where children flourish.

Fiscal Support

Providing fiscal supports to the agencies and stipends for workforce members were also key components of successful implementation because the field does not compensate providers adequately and funding for program operations had been reduced in years of economic hardship. Staffing patterns, environmental, and other program structure improvements would not have been possible without QPI funding. Although state and Head Start programs already had required provision of family engagement activities within their government-funded contract requirements, they report the addition of parent education and family engagement activities provided by QPI enhanced their ability to engage parents in a more meaningful manner.

105,299

children ages 3-5 served in state and federally funded preschool programs participating in QPI

Long-term Commitment to Change

For programs that had been participating since PFA, going deeper into a specific approach to better support children's development, was a highlight of QPI. It takes 7 years for systems change. Some QPI agencies adopted the Teaching Pyramid and over the 8-year QPI period, were able to create a culture and systems change in their agency to support the social and emotional development of young children and reduce challenging behaviors, with a focus on the environment and the adults' role and actions.

Bridge Between Early Education And K-12

QPI successfully managed to develop an internal protocol to match QRIS preschool records with the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). This accomplishment enables the Early Education team at SDCOE to find children who participated in a QPI preschool in the CALPADS system, after they enroll in kindergarten, with a match rate of over 90%. SDCOE created data charts for school districts and early education providers to inform each other about children they both serve and to start creating a bridge between the birth to 5 and the K-12 systems, something no other county in California has accomplished.



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I really liked working with my coach. I learned a lot from her. This year I got the Early Childhood Education Rating Scale (ECERS) and she really helped me look in the "All About ECERS" book and understand it more, which helped my score. She was a great resource. Anytime I needed something she would provide me with resources to use. The time I spent with her in coaching was of great benefit to me."

-Program Teacher

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OVERCOMING ROADBLOCKS TO PROVIDE QUALITY LEARNING AND CARE



Every initiative faces challenges as it develops and grows, especially one as robust and complex as improving the quality of early learning and care. As we teach early learners, it's not as much about the issues, but how you overcome them. Over the last eight years, QPI faced a number of challenges involving data collection, provider engagement, and administrative burden, but with expertise and diligence, was able to create long-lasting solutions still being utilized today.

Challenge: Data Collection and Usage

Solution: Change Perception and Create Web-based Data System

Providers initially feared and lacked understanding about data collection and how to use the data effectively, but over the years, began to realize that the use of technology was beneficial for analyzing ways to improve. Data entry was challenging in the beginning because QPI providers (directors and teachers) thought it would be used as an auditing tool. However, through careful explanation and using data during coaching sessions to inform practices in a collaborative manner, significant improvement in data entry and use of data was reported. Additionally, when it came to ratings, we changed the perception of rating as a score to one of a process of reflection and continuous improvement, which helped provider staff understand the Early Childhood Education Rating Scale (ECERS) and CLASS assessment more deeply. Furthermore, developing a web-based data system to collect all of the First 5 required data, and later on to include the QRIS rating data, was a key component during QPI, as it was key to QPI's ability to expand. Challenges in the rollout and then ongoing use of the system were addressed by providing technology to providers who didn't have it, and by training and frequently providing individual technical assistance by the SDCOE QPI Operations team.

Challenge: Provider Engagement

Solution: Provider Resource Guide

Provider engagement was difficult because some providers did not want to collect all of the required data points, which resulted in some agencies joining QPI for one or two years then retreating. For agencies with continuous participation, the subcontracts with providers included many specific requirements to maintain contract compliance

71,437 hours of one-on-one coaching were provided to site administrators and teachers

and their ability to receive their agency reimbursement. SDCOE staff developed a Provider Resource Guide to streamline the technical assistance providers needed to comply with the contract. The Provider Resource Guide also provided a uniform process for the SDCOE QPI team to support providers. Even though QPI experienced little turnover in agency and SDCOE leadership in eight years, the Provider Resource Guide represented a stable, critical document for the QPI team that was continuously improved each year.

Challenge: Administrative Burden

Solution: Contract Monitoring and Supports

The administrative burden on providers was distracting them from focusing on improvement-centric practices, so SDCOE staff decided to provide QPI contract monitoring and supports to each agency leader, while coaching was provided to teachers and site leaders or other leaders in charge of supporting teachers and teachers' practices. The separation of these two levels of support was successful since the agency's top administrators were either too far removed from teaching practices in classrooms, or were non-cooperative with coaching because they did not see it as necessary. Contract monitoring was administrative coaching, and it was in these sessions that fiscal and personnel issues and their relation to supporting quality were discussed, but were not labeled as coaching.

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An agency administrator wrote to QPI that her staff had felt isolated from peers and other programs prior to the advent of the Quality Preschool Initiative. They now collaborate with other private non-profits, with state and federal programs like Head Start, and the surrounding school district programs.

-Agency Administrator

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SOLID FOUNDATION, BRIGHT FUTURE FOR EARLY EDUCATION IN SAN DIEGO



The level of interagency collaboration that grew over the last eight years between SDCOE, First 5, and YMCA Child Resource Services, and in the last four years also the required representatives of the San Diego QCC Consortium, has resulted in a change to the county's infrastructure and collaboration regarding access to quality early learning and care settings for children.

During this journey, we learned that a centrally funded and guided effort on quality was necessary for San Diego State Preschool (CSPP) and Head Start providers to evolve into a collaborative leadership community with all of us together becoming better over time. Together, we learned that the one-size fits all QPI approach was not necessary to support quality improvements. What was critical were many of the other elements of site-based individualized and evidence-based supports that were provided, specifically tailored to address providers' needs and barriers. We also discovered that the interagency collaboration of the Quality Counts California (QCC) San Diego Consortium, required to leverage state level funds, also enriched our county's early learning and care infrastructure

Leveraging partnerships was also critical to funding and ensuring QPI's sustainability. SDCOE partnered with First 5 to implement all state level QRIS elements to the extent possible, in order to leverage QRIS funding beyond First 5. From 2012 through 2020, First 5 received nearly \$25 million in funds from First 5 California and the CDE to incorporate into the QPI effort with SDCOE. In addition, because of QPI's alignment to Quality Counts California (QCC), SDCOE was able to apply for and receive an additional \$29.7 million in QRIS funding from CDE.

For QPI

- \$24,626,805 from First 5 California and CDE
- \$29,668,356 QRIS funding from CDE

As we look forward, First 5 and SDCOE are embarking on the Learn Well Initiative that will continue building the early care and education systems and supports providers need to serve preschool-age children, in addition to those ages 0-3. The Learn Well initiative's focus and funding is encompassed within the QPI, a countywide

\$53+ million in state funding for QPI

effort, aligning and implementing the local quality rating and improvement system to the state's Quality Counts California's available funding. Because of SDCOE's ability to leverage state-level funding sources, First 5 contracted with the county office as a sole source entity through the next funding cycle, a "first" for First 5, to ensure future funding for the program.

Through the Learn Well Initiative, QPI will expand its network of providers and utilize the Multi-tiered Systems of Support framework to provide quality improvement strategies and supports based on providers' needs. Emphasis will remain on continually improving the quality of the learning environment and adult-child interactions, while providers receive support in the form of technical assistance, instructional support, coaching, and ongoing professional development.



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During QPI, 10,660 staff from QPI participating sites attended professional development trainings and 71,437 hours of one-on-one coaching were provided to site administrators and teachers. Each staff member developed a quality improvement or professional development plan upon which their coaching and professional development workshop attendance was based.

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