



First 5 Kings County Family Resource Center Initiative

Highlights from the Fiscal Year 2011–12 Evaluation

What is the Family Resource Center Initiative?

The First 5 Kings County Family Resource Center Initiative is one of two service initiatives supported by the First 5 Kings County Commission. FRCs are located across five communities and serve as a single point of access for multiple activities and services for children 0 to 5 and their families. FRCs are designed to be community-driven and responsive to the needs of the community they serve. The shared goal of all FRCs is to increase children's readiness for school. Integral to their success is their ability to foster relationships with community and local leaders. FRC's are expected to coordinate services and ensure that they are delivered in an integrated and culturally competent manner.

Program Highlights

- **1,597** children were served through the five First 5 Kings County family resource centers located across communities;
- **15** percent of children in the Kings County 0 to 5 year population were reached through FRC programs and activities;
- **3,229** units of service were delivered to children 3 to 5 years of age to promote school readiness;
- **3,001** units of service were delivered to children and their parents as part of interactive programs for parent and children;
- **3,569** service contacts were provided to families to promote family literacy;
- **104** units of service were delivered to families to address needs for behavioral health and support; and,
- **2,107** units of service were delivered to families to link them to needed resources in their communities

Evaluation Design

First 5 Kings County partnered with an outside research firm to conduct an evaluation of its Family Resource Center initiative. The purpose of the evaluation was to document FRC program implementation and outcomes across five participating FRC locations and to offer recommendations for future program enhancements. The evaluation included multiple data collection components, including documentation of participant utilization, parent surveys and focus group discussion, telephone interviews with non-participating families, and interviews with FRC Coordinators. The limited scope evaluation was designed to produce findings at the initiative level based on parent feedback and data on use of services.

First 5 Kings County FRCs

Avenal Family Connection

The Avenal Family Connection is operated by West Hills College in partnership with the Reef-Sunset School District. The service model specializes in the delivery of quality school readiness activities, including child enrichment, parent child interaction, and parenting education programs.

Corcoran Family Resource Center

The Corcoran Family Resource Center is operated through a partnership with the Corcoran YMCA. The community based family resource center offers integrated school readiness and family support services and linkages to community resources, including preventive health, early childhood education, and parent support.

Hanford Family Connection

The Hanford Family Connection service model specializes in the delivery of quality school readiness activities, including child enrichment, parent child interaction, and parenting education programs.

Kettleman City Family Resource Center

The Kettleman City Family Resource Center (KCFRC) is a community-based family resource center that offers integrated school readiness and family support services and linkages to community resources, including preventive health, early childhood education, and parent support.

Lemoore Family Connection

The Lemoore Family Connection service model specializes in the delivery of quality school readiness activities, including child enrichment, parent child interaction, and parenting education programs.

What were the characteristics of children and families who participated in FRC activities and services?

The First 5 Kings County family resource centers (FRCs) provided services to 1,597 young children and their parents or caregivers in FY 2010–11 across five targeted Kings County communities. This represents about 15 percent of the 0 to 5 population countywide (U.S. Census 2010). The two largest FRCs with respect to the number of children served were the Hanford and Corcoran centers that served 496 and 466 children respectively. The Corcoran FRC reached the largest concentration of children within its targeted population, serving 44 percent of all children 0 to 5 years of age. Other FRCs reached approximately 10 percent of the population residing in their immediate communities within the targeted communities.

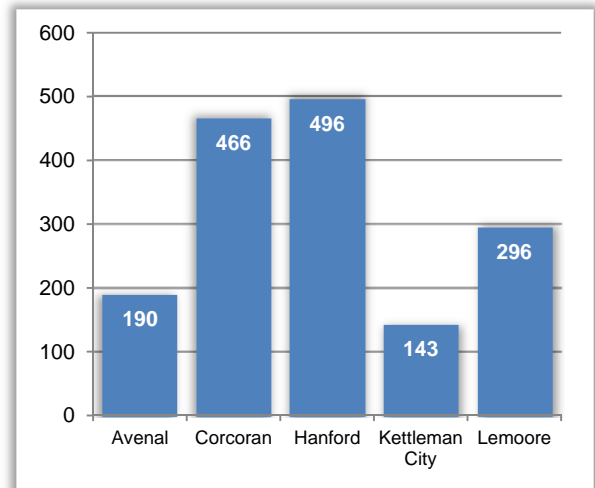
Programs offered through the FRCs targeted services to young children and families to promote child development, early learning and education, and positive parenting. Populations of focus included more under-resourced families with limited access to other early childhood development or preschool opportunities. More than half of children served were infants or toddlers (0-2 years) and the other 48 percent were preschool age. Half of all families who participated in services and activities spoke Spanish as the primary language spoken at home. About 2 percent of children were identified with disabilities at their time of intake into the program. Nearly two-thirds of children (62%) were from lower income families insured through Medical (56%) or Healthy Families (6%), 24 percent were privately insured, and 6 percent had no health insurance coverage. The insurance status of the remaining 7 percent of children was unknown.

How did families learn about family resource center services and activities?

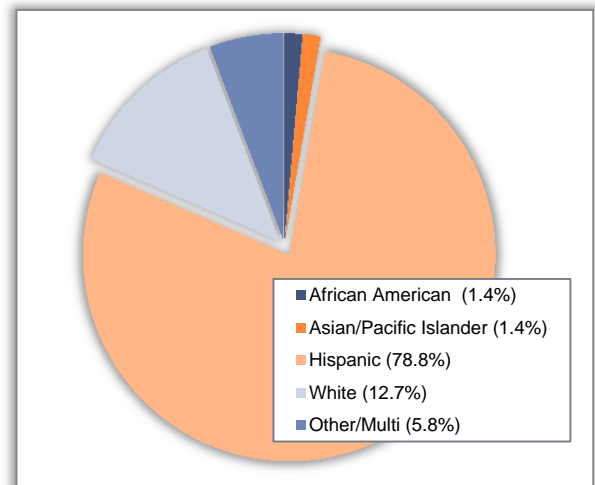
Parent surveys administered by mail to all parents who participated in FRC activities during the fiscal year asked parents how they learned about the resources available through the center in their community. About half of all parents surveyed (53%) reported that their primary source of information was a friend or family member. About 10 percent of parents learned about the FRC through a day care, preschool, or elementary school, or in a flyer or brochure. Less than 2 percent of parents learned about available resources through their doctor or hospital.

To understand more about parent awareness of FRC activities and reasons why parents might chose not to attend available programs, brief telephone surveys (n = 65) were conducted with parents who participated in kindergarten registration events, funded through other First 5 Kings County initiatives, who had not enrolled in any FRC activities in the year prior to their child's school enrollment. About 98 percent of parents contacted for the brief telephone survey had children at home who were of eligible age to participate in FRC programs. Of those respondents, 13 percent had infants (under 1 year of age), 30 percent had toddlers (1-2 year olds) and 83 percent had preschool-age children (3-5 year olds). When asked about their knowledge of the FRC, about 35 percent of parents surveyed had heard of the FRC, 63 percent had not, and 2 percent were unsure. Among those who were aware of FRC resources, the most common source of information was a friend or family member. This supports findings from parent surveys indicating that most parents learn about First 5 FRC activities by word-of-mouth, rather than through more formal outreach strategies. Twelve percent of parents interviewed had actually attended FRC activities at some time in the past. When asked about reasons why parents might not participate, the most frequently mentioned reason was scheduling, particularly for working parents who could not attend programs during the work week or parents with children attending preschool with conflict hours.

Children Served by FRC Location (n = 1,597)



Race/Ethnicity of Children Served (n = 1,597)



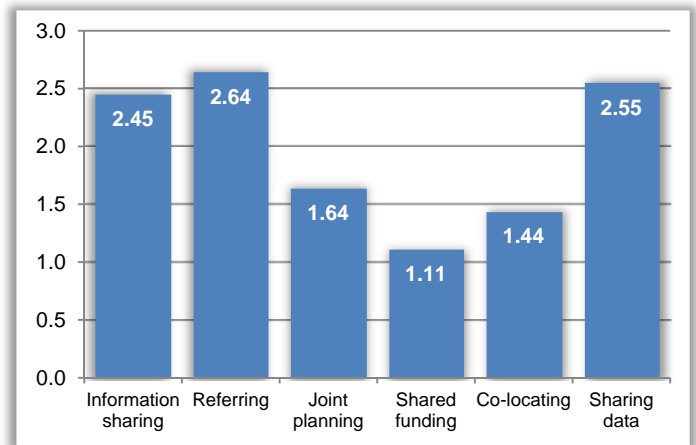
How did family resource centers partner in the delivery of services?

An intent of the FRC initiative was to provide families with a single point of access to multiple programs, activities, and resources, often through partnerships with other community organizations working together to improve family health and well-being and promote children's readiness for school. The importance of these cross-agency partnerships to the vision and mission of each FRC varied based on identified needs and the existing services infrastructure. For example, in smaller, more under-resourced communities, FRCs adopted a family support orientation and integrated service delivery model featuring coordination of child and family support resources that were not widely available in the surrounding community. FRCs in other communities, including Avenal, Hanford, and Lemoore, had a more specialized focus on creating quality early learning and child development opportunities to promote children's readiness for school, with less emphasis on service integration with partner agencies. Regardless of focus, each FRC partnered with at least one external organization to expand the reach of services to children and families.

These collaborating partners were asked to complete a brief questionnaire describing the nature and scope of their interactions and the perceived impact of their collaboration with First 5. Seven community organizations responded to the survey request representing 11 FRC partnerships. These organizations provided a range of services and resources to children and families served through the FRCs, including health education, mental health promotion and therapeutic counseling services for individuals, couples, and families, teen pregnancy prevention, food distribution, and enrichment classes for children. One partner teamed with the FRC to create workforce development opportunities for volunteer staff who supported FRC operations. About half of all partner organizations (55%) had long-standing collaborative relationships with their FRC lasting 6 or more years, while about a third had been partnering in the delivery of services for two years or less. All responding partner organizations offered services to children and families in both English and Spanish.

Surveyed partners were asked to rate the frequency with which they engaged in different types of collaborative activities as a function of their partnership with First 5 Kings County. Responses ranged in value from '1' or 'never', indicating that interactions occurred rarely or not at all, to '4' or 'very often', meaning that interactions occurred weekly or daily.

Frequency of Collaborating Partner Activities
(n = 11)



Survey responses suggest that the most frequent types of collaborative interactions among partners involved sharing information, either through informal networking (mean = 2.45), referring children or families to services across agencies (mean = 2.64), or sharing data about child and family needs (mean = 2.55). Partners were much less likely to engage in joint planning activities or meetings (mean = 1.64), to co-locate their services at FRC locations (mean = 1.44), or to share funding resources or partner in developing proposals for funding (mean = 1.11). Researchers have developed different tools to assess this collaborative capacity, including the five levels of collaboration (Frey, 2006). These levels range from the lowest level—networking—defined by limited communication, loosely defined roles, and independent decision-making among partners, to the highest level—collaboration—defined by sharing of resources, ideas, and key decisions as part of a single collaborative system. Based on partner descriptions of their interactions with First 5 Kings County FRCs, these relationships are best described as having achieved the third collaborative level—coordination—characterized by sharing of information, clearly defined roles, frequent communication, and some shared decision-making.

At this level of coordination, partner organizations perceived that their collaborative relationships with First 5 Kings County were "very important" to achieving specific organizational goals, including expanding the number of children and families served, expanding the types of services available, expanding families' ability to access community-based services, reducing duplication, and increasing efficiency. Partners agreed that their partnerships were "not very important" as a vehicle for leveraging resources, which was consistent with reports that partners rarely shared program funds or worked together to support resource development. More emphasis on shared funding was identified by one partner as a

recommended strategy for how to strengthen collaboration among partners. Other recommended strategies included increasing communication and expanding levels of services. Only three partners identified any specific challenges to collaboration. These challenges included staff turnover at one FRC, limited space to offer classes and activities, and funding constraints that limit services to the 0 to 5 population. Overall, these collaborative relationships offer clear advantages to partner organizations and represent a potential opportunity to build future service delivery capacity and sustainability.

How did actively did families utilize center services and activities and what were the barriers to participation?

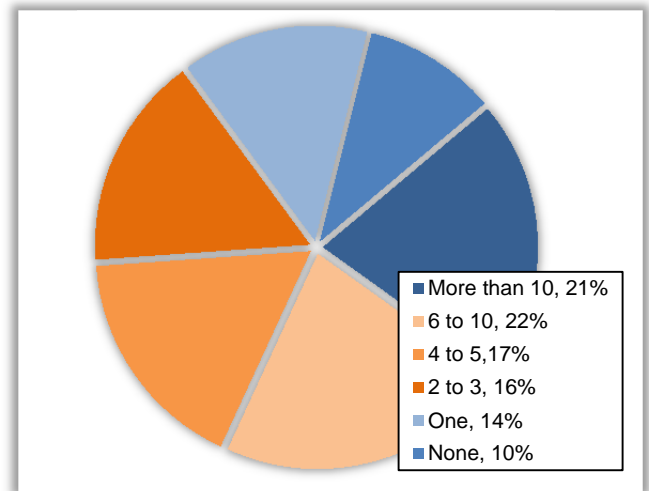
Parents who responded to satisfaction surveys were asked about the number of programs and activities that they had attended as part of their involvement with the FRC in their community. Most responding parents reported attending multiple classes or activities offered through the local center, with nearly a quarter attending 6 to 10 programs or classes (22%), and another 20 percent attending more than 10 over the course of the fiscal year. Although parents who responded to survey requests are likely to represent the most active parent population in terms of attendance, this does suggest that FRCs serve a core set of children and families who are very actively utilizing available services.

Records of service utilization documented the number of children and parents served within each category of activity and the number of service units delivered relative to targeted capacity. The analysis of program data demonstrated that utilization of services by children and families often far exceeded targeted program capacity in nearly all categories of service, most notably child enrichment, parent and child interactive programs, and school readiness activities. Parent feedback from focus group discussions further indicated that programs are often filled to capacity, particularly within the Hanford and Lemoore FRCs. This suggests that most FRCs have been successful in engaging parents and children in services without the need for formal outreach strategies, and that demand for FRC services often exceeds supply. However, less was known about levels of program dosage (i.e., the number of contacts or hours of service received by an individual child), which would help determine whether interventions were of sufficient strength and intensity to produce meaningful outcomes for children.

Of the parents who responded to parent satisfaction surveys, there were approximately 10 percent who responded who were not actively participating in FRC services. To understand more about why parents who were informed about First 5 programs chose not to access them,

the evaluation team relied on a combination of data from mailed satisfaction surveys and feedback from parents in focus group discussions to identify potential barriers to participation. Although most of the parents who were surveyed or who attended focus group discussions did not perceive significant obstacles to participation, some parents did identify participation barriers that prevented them from attending activities or attending as often as preferred.

Number of Activities Children Attended (n = 190)



- **Scheduling.** Parents often noted that having most activities offered on morning week days with fewer on afternoons, evenings, or weekends, limited participation for working parents or parents whose children attended preschool. Parents also noted that the one-time enrollment process used in some FRCs caused parents with work or scheduling conflicts on that date to miss out on opportunities offered throughout the entire month. Parents also mentioned that attending the center for a one hour activity was often challenging and that they would prefer for centers to offer consecutive classes for children within a given age group, or to extend the length of the 45-minute class period. Scheduling challenges specific to one community (e.g., activities scheduled during elementary school release times for older children) had been identified and resolved by FRC staff through their needs assessment process, which highlights the value of regular, structured opportunities for communication between staff and parents to identify and eliminate these types of barriers.
- **Insufficient space.** Parents attending FRCs in the larger communities of Hanford and Lemoore also noted that classes were often filled and that the same group of parents capitalized on available spaces. Parents also expressed frustration that parents frequently enrolled in classes during the monthly enrollment period, but then failed to attend. Parents in Hanford, Lemoore, and

Corcoran all mentioned that there was usually higher demand for class space than supply, placing additional pressure on teaching staff to accommodate larger numbers of parents and children.

“I love the location; the teachers are great and are always available to help. Although I would like to see more classes offered in one day, such as different subjects, like my five senses, art explosion and tool time. That way I could count on a full day of school instead of driving here every day for one class.”

–Lemoore FRC focus group participant

- **Older children and siblings.** Parents across all FRC locations mentioned challenges associated with supervising older children who were ineligible for FRC programs and activities. Although limits on First 5 funding prevent FRCs from offering services to older siblings, this does pose a significant challenge for parent participation. Parents also noted that participation in parent and child interactive programs was difficult when there was no child care available for siblings who fell outside of the targeted age range for scheduled classes.
- **Transportation.** Parents noted on surveys and in focus group discussions that transportation was an occasional barrier to participation, although transportation was less frequently mentioned than other barriers.

How did families rate the quality of family resource center programs and activities?

Parent surveys and focus groups discussions were used to document parent perceptions about the overall quality of programs and activities that were offered through their local centers. Parent satisfaction surveys specifically focused on the perceived quality of staffing and program scheduling and accessibility, as well as overall satisfaction with the service experience. Parents rated FRC services very highly overall as evidenced by the following findings:

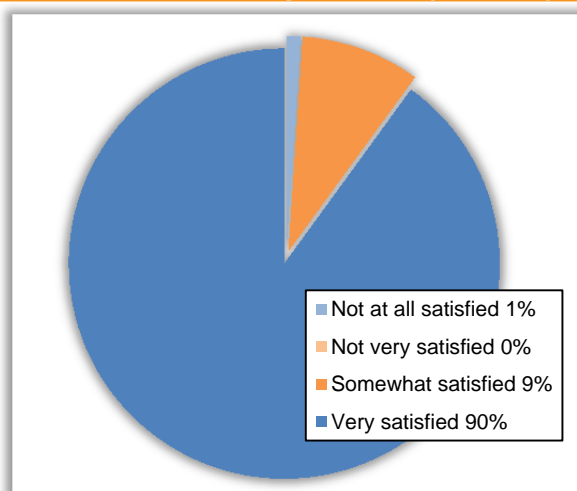
Staffing

- More than 90 percent of parents “strongly agreed” that staff at FRCs were courteous and professional;
- 88 percent of parents “strongly agreed” that staff provided useful information about the services and activities offered;
- 93 percent of parents “strongly agreed” that the classroom teacher interacted with parents and children in a positive and supportive way; and,
- 80 percent of parents “strongly agreed” that staff members made them feel comfortable and welcome at the center.

Scheduling and Accessibility

- 87 percent of parents ‘strongly agreed’ that the center location was convenient;
- 85 percent ‘strongly agreed’ that they did not have to wait long to participate in programs or activities;
- 86 percent ‘strongly agreed’ that the center in their community offered a good selection of programs and activities; and,
- 67 percent ‘strongly agreed’ that programs and activities were offered at times that were convenient for them.

Parents Satisfaction with their FRC Service Experience (n = 190)



Focus groups participants at each of the five FRCs were also asked about the quality of services offered through their local center. The vast majority of participants responded favorably, expressing positive impressions of the program and citing benefits to their children from participating. When asked how services might be improved, the most common recommendation was to increase the number of programs and activities offered, notably, expanding service options for parents and families to address resource needs.

What were the benefits for children and families?

Parents were also asked about the perceived benefits of FRC programs for their children and families that resulted from their participation, and the extent to which they felt that their families' needs had been met through their involvement.

Benefits for Children's Development

Parents who completed written satisfaction surveys were asked about specific impacts of their participation on their children's learning and social development.

- 84 percent of parents surveyed "strongly agreed" that participation in FRC classes and activities had helped to prepare their children for kindergarten; and,
- 80 percent of parents "strongly agreed" that participation in center-based activities had helped to teach their children how to get along with others.

Parents who attend focus group events identified a range of benefits for their children that were linked to school readiness outcomes. Specifically parents reported that participation had helped to teach their children about classroom expectations, such as following instructions, helped them to get along well with other children, and had improved early literacy skills to help prepare them to enter kindergarten.

"The programs and activities have allowed my child to have more interaction with kids his age. They've allowed me to learn more about how I can create activities for my child and can enjoy more quality time with him."

—Hanford FRC focus group participant

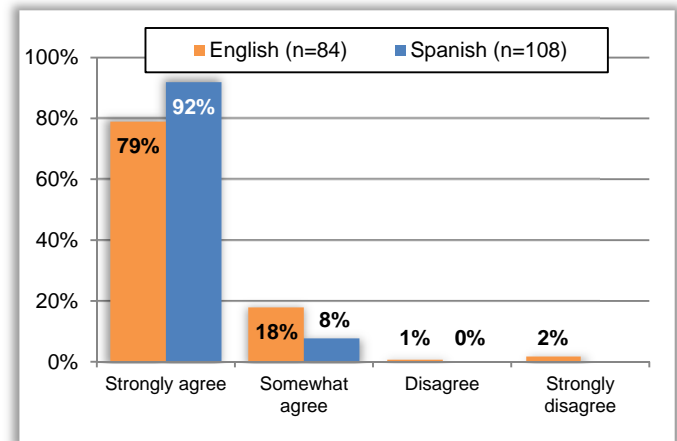
Benefits for Parents and Families

Surveyed parents were also asked about the impact of participation on their own parenting knowledge:

- 77 percent of parents "strongly agreed" that they felt more knowledgeable about activities they could do at home with their children;
- 75 percent "strongly agreed" that they were confident in their parenting as the result of their participation;
- 74 percent of parents "strongly agreed" that they felt more connected to other parents in their community as the result of their participation;
- 71 percent of parents 'strongly agreed' that they had become more aware of services and resources that were available to them in their communities; and,
- 80 percent 'strongly agreed' that the center had provided them with learning materials that supported their child's health and development.

When asked about the extent to which parents believed that their needs had been met through their participation in FRC activities, 86 percent 'strongly agreed' that their needs had been met. Perceptions were most favorable among Spanish speaking participants, 92 percent of whom felt their families' needs had been met by the program, compared to 79 percent of English speaking parents. This finding suggests that programs have been successful in delivering services in a culturally competent manner.

Parents Perception that Family Needs Were Met through FRC Participation



What did we learn?

The First 5 Kings County FRC initiative provided highly valued school readiness and family support resources to a significant portion of Kings County young children and families, many of whom have income or language barriers that may prevent them from accessing more traditional early learning opportunities, such as quality preschool. Parents' feedback shows that services and activities offered through FRCs were perceived as high quality and were providing meaningful benefits to families by supporting parents and helping to prepare children for school. Findings suggest that demand for FRC programs typically exceeds available program resources, reflecting known constraints tied to the First 5 funding environment. This argues the need to further leverage existing collaborating partner relationships to maximize the value of these partnerships, for example, by engaging in joint funding development efforts. Though the current evaluation was limited in its scope (*i.e.*, being informed largely by parent feedback and data on service use, and not structured to measure actual child outcomes or to provide in-depth assessment of FRC operations), in all, findings confirm that FRCs are creating value for a large number of Kings County families and their children, and that support for continuing Commission investments in FRC programs and activities is strongly warranted.