

**Agenda Item 10
December 3, 2014**

DATE: November 13, 2014
TO: Children and Families Commission of Orange County
FROM: Christina Altmayer, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Early Learning Program Report

SUMMARY:

The Children and Families Commission received a presentation at the June 2014 planning meeting on the current investments in early literacy and math programs, as well as the efforts to build and sustain the Commission's investment. At that time, the Commission requested a summary report of the early learning program investments to show the systems and services supported against targeted outcomes. This agenda item provides an overview of the early learning programs.

DISCUSSION:

The Commission's early learning portfolio includes three funding categories; Early Learning Specialists, School District Programs, and Countywide Programs. Within these categories, there are eight distinct program areas. The Early Learning Program Summaries Report (Attachment 1) includes a brief program description, linkage to the Strategic Plan, investment and current funding, program status, and evaluation results or planned evaluations.

Early Learning Specialists & School District Programs Categories

The Early Learning Specialists are the positions the Commission funds at the 24 school districts that have a kindergarten program. The majority of the Early Learning budget funds these positions that are critical to preparing young children for school. The School District Programs Category includes eight school districts that are performing below the county average in math and/or reading based on second grade proficiency scores. These districts received a one-time allocation to provide additional resources to improve proficiency.

Through the Early Learning Specialists, the Learning Link program was developed. The first phase of a two-phased evaluation of the Learning Link program is currently being completed. The evaluation documented the different programs and services provided through the Learning Link sites, providing a greater understanding of the individual programs. The second phase will evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Countywide Program Category

The Countywide Program Category includes early learning programs that are not provided by a school district. Programs in this category are the THINK Together's Early Literacy and Math Program, the Boy & Girls Clubs of Garden Grove's Readiness on the Road Program, Orange County Department of Education's Early Learning Training Programs, the OC STEM Initiative, Providence Speech & Hearing's Building Blocks of Communication Program, and MIND Research Institute's Early Math Program.

The Early Learning Program Summaries Report is intended as communications tool to advocate school districts to include early learning in their Local Control Funding Plans (LCAP), and leverage support from foundations interested in investing and sustaining effective programs. The report will be included in the school district briefings that are scheduled this year.

STRATEGIC PLAN & FISCAL SUMMARY:

The recommended action has been specifically reviewed in relation to the Commission's Strategic Plan and is consistent with the Early Learning goal area. There is no funding request associated with this agenda item.

PRIOR COMMISSION ACTIONS:

- October 2014 – Received Executive Officer's Report on the Early Learning Program Summary
- July 2014 – Received the Annual Planning Meeting report and follow-up actions
- June 2014 – Received report on the progress and sustainability of Early Literacy and Math Programs

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Receive Early Learning Program Report

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Early Learning Program Summary Report

Contact: Kelly Pijl

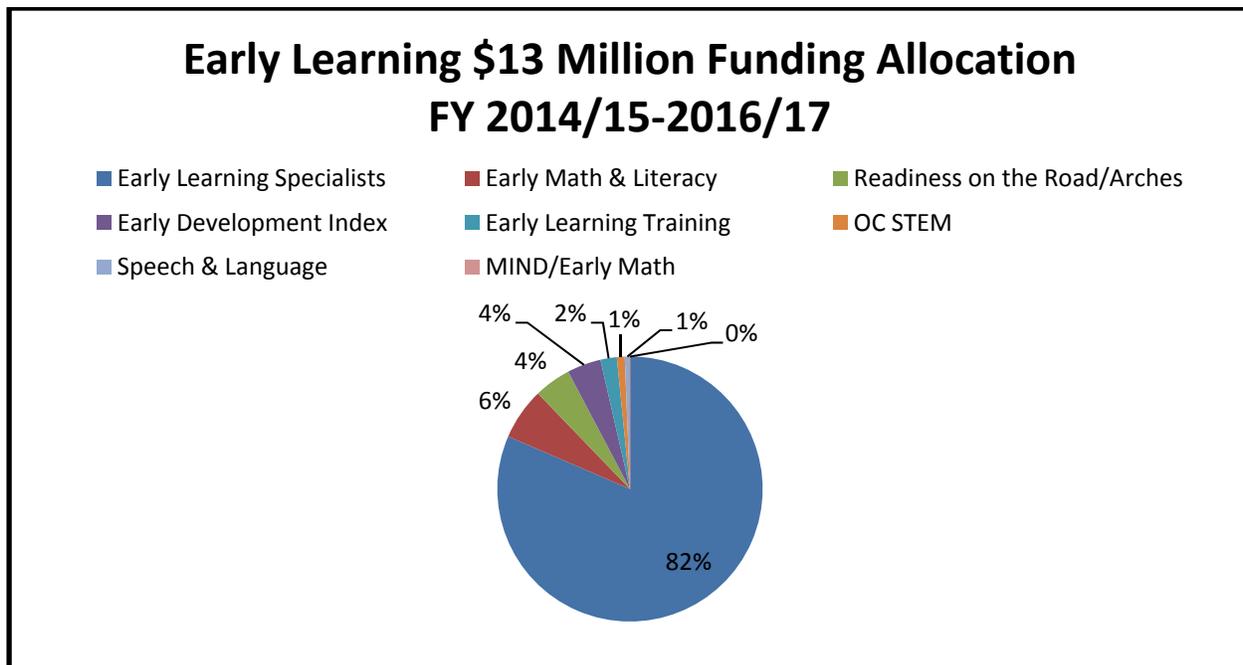
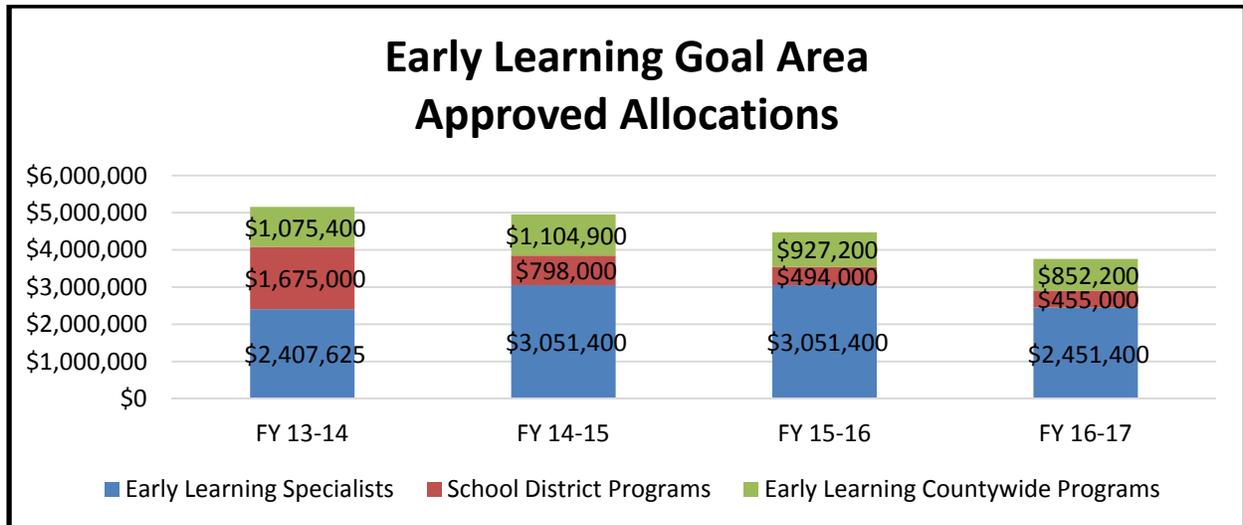


EARLY LEARNING
PROGRAM SUMMARIES
REPORT - DRAFT

Early Learning Program Summary

The Commission approved three-year funding agreements for early learning programs. The three year allocation totals more than \$13 million excluding the catalytic investment for the Early Literacy and Math program. Early Learning represents 33 percent of the Commission’s total three-year funding.

This report provides a summary on the eight early learning programs. The summary includes a program description, how the program links to the Strategic Plan outcomes, the Commission’s investment, current funding, the program status, and the program evaluation status.



Early Learning Specialists/Learning Link

Provider: 24 Orange County School Districts

Description

Since 2000, the Children and Families Commission has partnered with 24 school districts that provide kindergarten to fund and hire Early Learning Specialists (formerly known as School Readiness Coordinators). School Districts receive funding based on their kindergarten population to support up to two ELS positions. The Early Learning Specialists provide early care and education opportunities to meet the unique early childhood development needs of the children in their school district, and they connect families with community resources. The overall goal is to maximize the child's potential for success in school. The Learning Link program is funded under this program.

The Early Learning Specialists also develop strategies for program sustainability including multi-faceted approaches ranging from internal cost reductions and program efficiencies, implementation of fee-for-service models, as well as active exploration of federal and state revenue sources such as the new Local Control Funding Formula and including early learning in their school districts Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP).

Participating School Districts:

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Anaheim City | 9. Garden Grove | 17. Ocean View |
| 2. Brea Olinda | 10. Huntington Beach City | 18. Orange |
| 3. Buena Park | 11. Irvine | 19. Placentia-Yorba Linda |
| 4. Capistrano | 12. Laguna Beach | 20. Saddleback Valley |
| 5. Centralia | 13. La Habra/Lowell Joint | 21. Santa Ana |
| 6. Cypress | 14. Los Alamitos | 22. Savanna |
| 7. Fountain Valley | 15. Magnolia | 23. Tustin |
| 8. Fullerton | 16. Newport Mesa | 24. Westminster |

Strategic Plan Outcomes

The Early Learning Specialists and Learning Link program supports the strategic plan outcomes to:

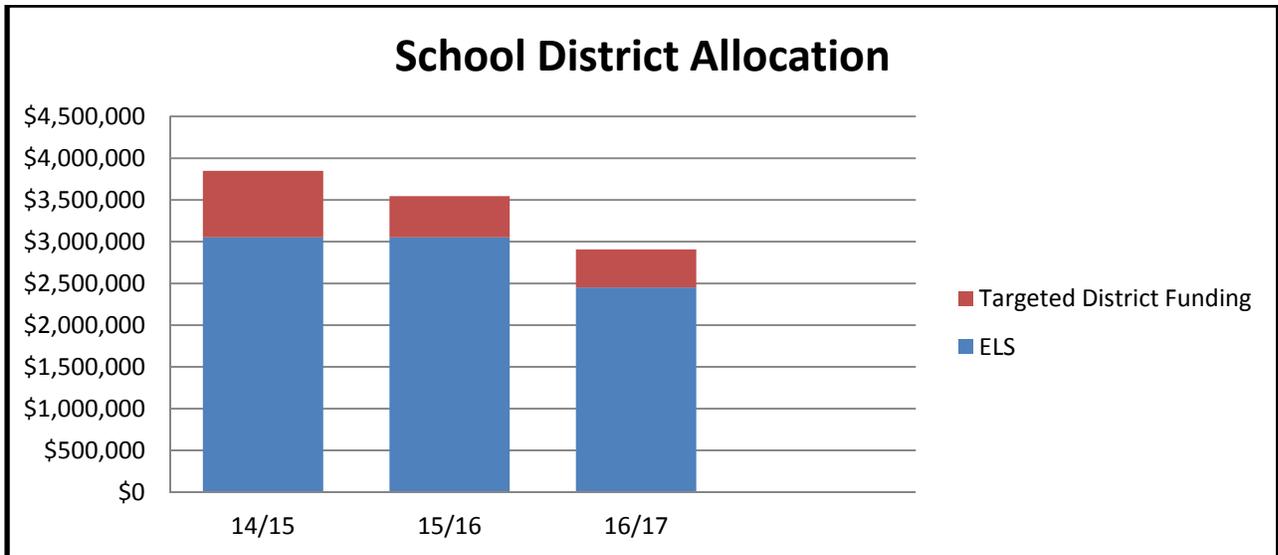
- Increased availability and access to quality early care and education
- Increased school readiness of children with special needs
- Increased caregiver (parent and provider) knowledge and skills to promote children's readiness for school
- Improved transitions of children from preschool to kindergarten

Commission Investment

School district based early learning programs have received Commission funding from the beginning. Since FY 2000/01, over \$86 million has been invested in school readiness programs through the Early Learning Specialists, Capacity Building Programs, and competitive funding cycles.

Current Funding & Term

A three year agreement to fund school districts with a kindergarten population through June 2017 was approved in February 2014. The 24 eligible school districts received funding for a part-time, full-time or two full-time Early Learning Specialist positions, based on kindergarten enrollment. A full-time equivalent position is funded at \$87,500. Eight school districts that are performing below the county average in math and/or reading based on second grade proficiency scores received an additional one-time allocation of \$150,000 to meet unique district needs for early learning expansion.



Program Status

The Early Learning Specialists continue to receive level funding to encourage the continuance of early learning programs at all school districts. The Learning Link program is implemented through the Early Learning Specialist program funding.

Learning Link

The Learning Link program was initially developed in 2002 by the Capistrano Unified School District’s Early Learning Specialists. There are now 22 Learning Link program sites at 16 school districts and two community based agencies. The goal of the program is to provide an accessible and creative learning environment that helps young children to be better prepared for kindergarten and guides parents in their role as their children’s first teachers. Learning Link programs offer an interactive place for parents to bond with their children and support their growth across a range of disciplines: early education, language development, health and wellness, and family support.

Evaluation

An evaluation of the *Learning Link* program is currently in process. The evaluation is being done in two phases. The first phase documented the different programs and services provided to gain a stronger understanding of the individual Learning Link programs. The second phase will evaluate the effectiveness of the Learning Link as a strategy to improve school readiness and parent engagement. The ultimate outcome of the evaluation process is to assess the program’s effectiveness in order to ensure the ability to communicate the results and impacts of the Commission’s investments; and to provide documentation on the programs benefits for the purpose of expanding the number of sites and to engage funders for long-term sustainability.

Early Development Index (EDI)

Provider: 24 Orange County School Districts

Description

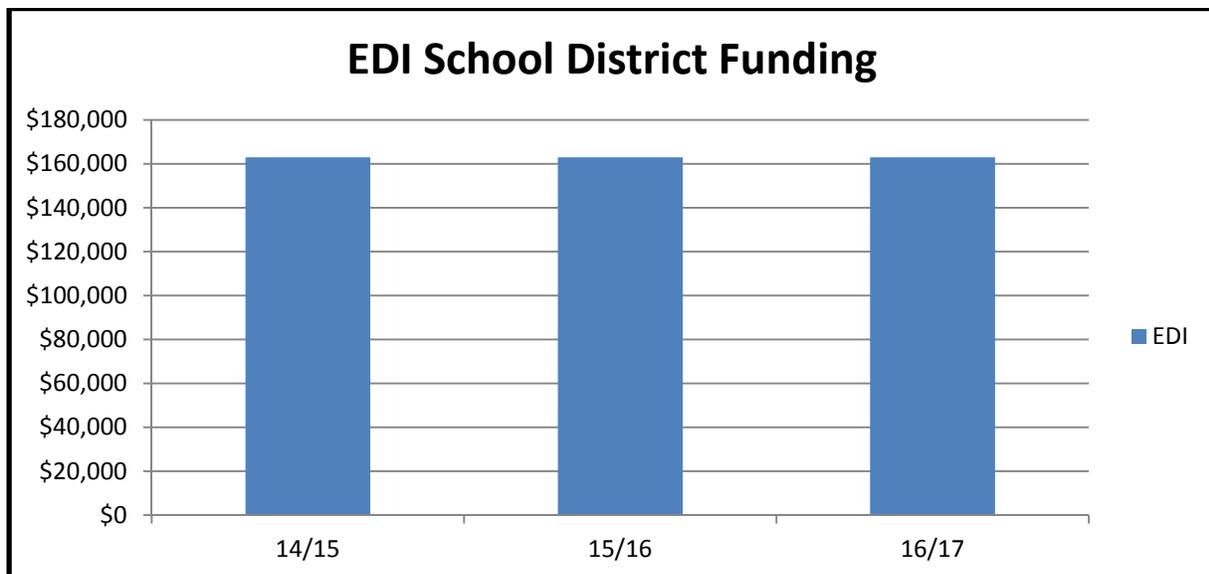
School Districts receive a funding allocation to implement the Early Development Index. The EDI is a reliable and validated tool to measure the status of children’s development when they enter school. The EDI was designed to track population trends in school readiness across geographic communities in order to guide local child development programs and strategies. The Commission began implementing the EDI in 2008 and has expanded each year to new school districts and schools.

Strategic Plan Outcomes

The Early Development Index program supports the Commission’s Strategic Plan outcomes to:

- Increased caregiver (parent and provider) knowledge and skills to promote children’s readiness for school
- Improved transitions of children from preschool to kindergarten.

Commission Investment



Current Funding & Term

An annual three-year allocation of \$163,000 is available to school districts participating in the Early Development Index. The funding is available through June 2017 to cover the school districts costs to implement the evaluation.

Program Status

With completion of the 2013/14 data collection period, all 24 Orange County school districts have participated, representing 284 schools and 70 percent of the kindergarten population in Orange County. With the data collection activities planned for FY 2014/15, 100 percent participation of schools is anticipated. Individual school district profile reports of EDI data collected between 2012 and 2014 have been prepared and distributed to the Early Learning Specialists and school district administrators. A Young Children’s Summit is planned for fall 2015 to present the data to city, school, and community leaders.

Evaluation

The *Early Development Index* data are combined across three years as the data does not change too substantially in any given year. The EDI includes five key domain areas: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication skills and general knowledge.

The data is used to produce community-level measures of childhood development during the kindergarten year. The EDI identifies the percentage of children who are vulnerable and on track by developmental domain and compares this information by target community. The EDI can be used to monitor populations of children over time, report on populations of children in different communities, predict how groups of children will do in elementary school, and inform policies concerning young children and their families.

Early Literacy and Math Program

Provider: THINK Together

Description

The Early Literacy and Math Program supports young children’s early learning and school readiness through direct services to children, parent engagement and education, and provider training. Key program elements include:

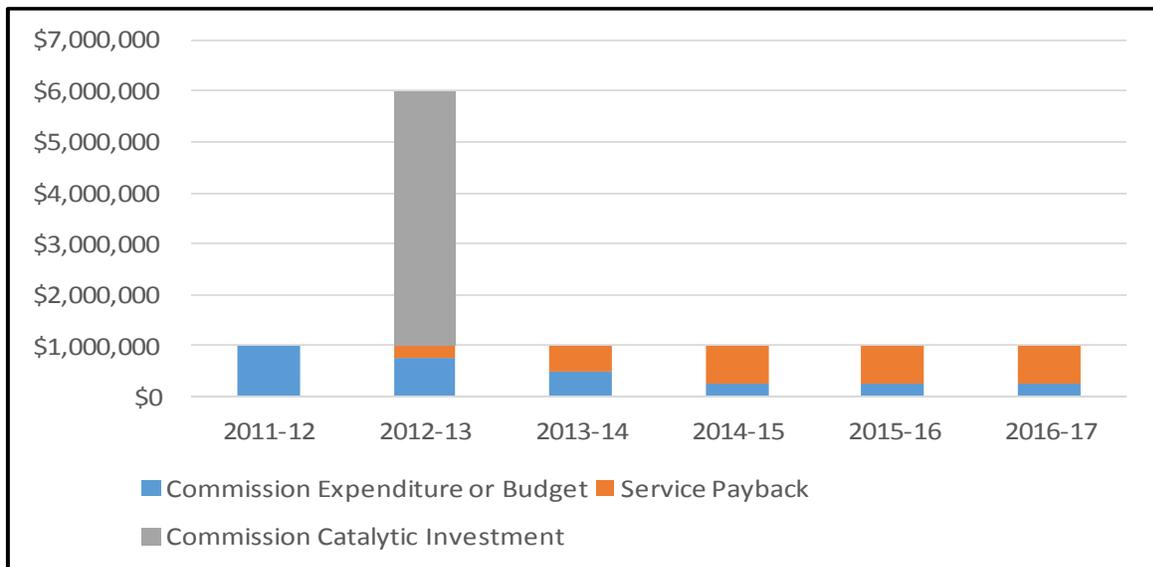
- A center-based early literacy and math program where children and their parents attend twice a week for 15 weeks; uses evidence based curriculum (High Scope)
- Raising a Reader book bags
- Waiting room readers/gently used books to support Reach Out and Read
- Read for the Record and other community events
- Book Bank (gently used book collection and distribution)
- Early Childhood STEM conference for early educators’ professional development

Strategic Plan Outcomes

The Early Literacy and Math Program support these Strategic Plan outcomes:

- Increased availability and access to quality early care and education
- Increased school readiness
- Increased caregiver (parent and provider) knowledge and skills to promote children’s readiness for school
- Improved transitions of children from preschool to kindergarten

Commission Investment



Current Funding & Term

\$250,000 Commission operating expenditure; \$750,000 service\$ payback for a total program budget of \$1,000,000 annually for three years (FY 2014/15 through FY 2016/17)

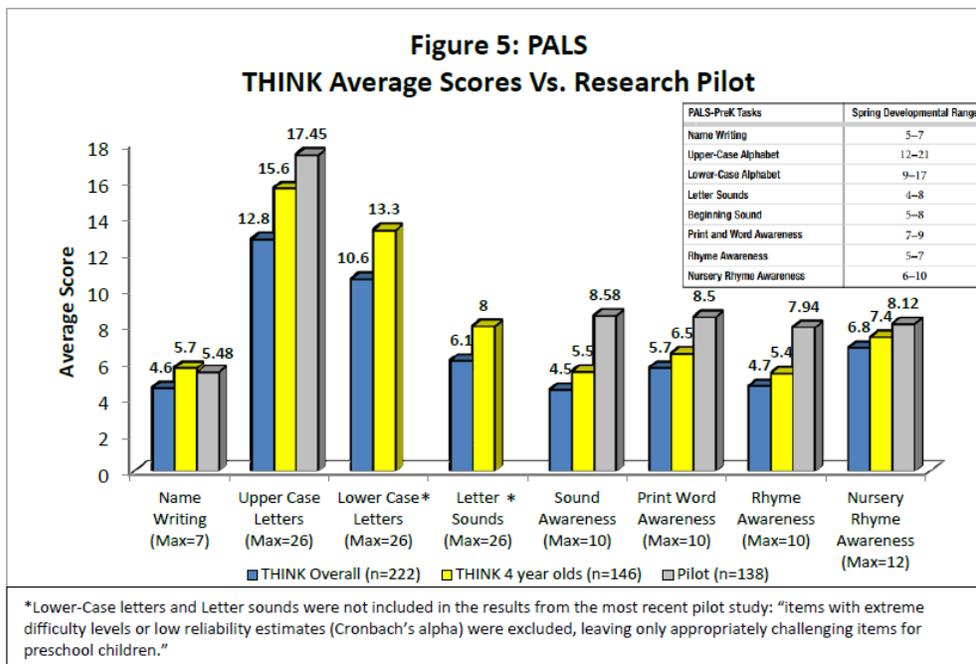
Program Status

In FY 2011/12, THINK Together began managing the Early Literacy Program. Prior to this, the Commission supported these programs in-house and with consultant support. In FY 2012/13, the program was expanded to include mathematics in addition to literacy, and THINK Together received a \$5 million catalytic grant from the Commission. Their service payback also began in FY 2012/13, with Commission direct operating funds decreasing each year until FY 2014/15, when the Commission’s contribution rests at \$250,000 (total program budget remains at \$1 million). The service payback goes through 2022, with the Commission’s operational support of \$250,000/year dependent on renewal of agreements over that time frame. THINK Together has recently completed a visioning/strategic plan process to ensure the program is not only continued beyond the Commission’s investment, but also expands.

Evaluation

A comprehensive independent evaluation has not been completed for the Early Literacy and Math Program. As part of the recent strategic planning process, THINK Together identified the need for and plans to have an external evaluation completed in this funding term (by FY 2016/17).

The center-based program, which is the most intensive of services provided and tracks individual child outcomes, completed an evaluation for FY 2013/14 using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS). The evaluation measured the percentage of children that were considered “on-track” compared to a pilot sample. Since THINK Together’s program serves 3 and 4 year olds, the results are broken out by children overall (3 and 4 year olds) and 4 year olds alone (important for school readiness). It should also be noted that THINK Together’s program is 15 weeks compared to the pilot study’s year-long program. Therefore, “growth” from beginning to end of program was not assessed, but rather the child’s “on-track” status. Nearly 500 children participated in the center-based program in FY 2013/14; the evaluation was completed for 222 children in the second 15-week session. While THINK Together’s program scored slightly lower on average than the pilot sample, the majority of students in the program were considered “on-track” for early literacy success, despite the lower dosage of services.



Notes

Eleven AmeriCorps members are placed at THINK Together, working primarily in the center-based early learning program.

Early Learning Services and ARCHES

Provider: Boys and Girls Club of Garden Grove

Description

The Boys and Girls Club of Garden Grove (BGCGG) provides early learning services as well as health services.

The early learning portion of the contract includes the following key elements:

- A mobile school readiness program (Readiness on the Road) which rotates among participating Boys and Girls Club sites
- Developmental screenings, referrals and follow up
- Parent education classes
- Professional development classes for early care providers
- Support for Learning Links

The health component, known as Access to Resources for Children’s Health, Education, and Support, or ARCHES, provides the following key services:

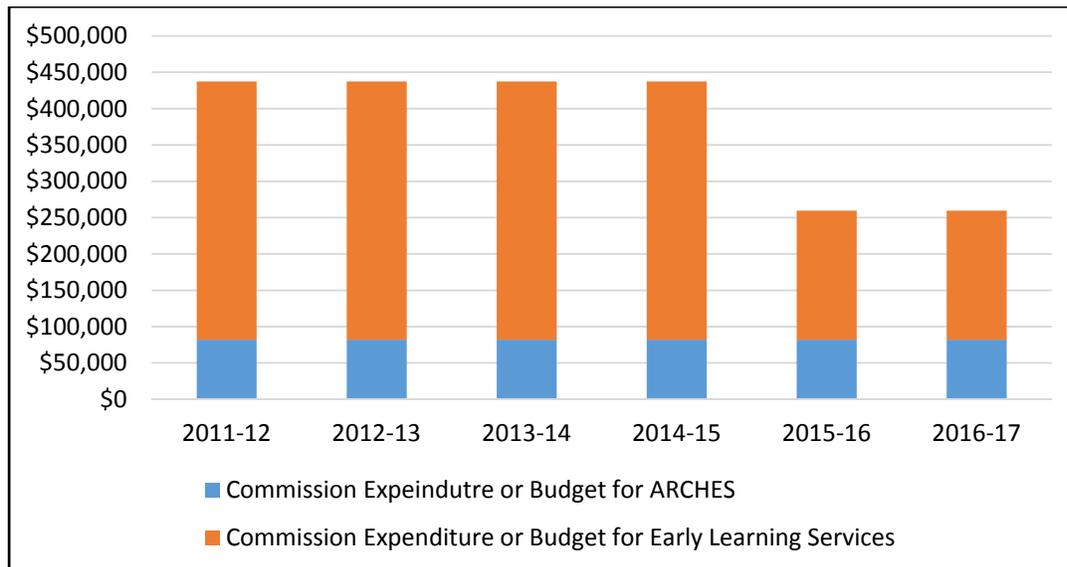
- Links families with young children with health services at the Garden Grove Health Center, including referrals and follow up for general health, dental, vision and family support
- Assists with insurance enrollment
- Provides outreach to homeless families for health services

Strategic Plan Outcomes

The Early Learning Services and ARCHES Program supports these Strategic Plan outcomes:

- Increased availability and access to quality early care and education
- Increased school readiness
- Increased caregiver (parent and provider) knowledge and skills to promote children’s readiness for school
- Improved transitions of children from preschool to kindergarten

Commission Investment



Current Funding & Term

The Commission invested \$437,400 annually from FY 2011/12 through FY 2013/14. The current Commission investment is \$437,400 for FY 2013/14, with a reduction to \$259,700 for years FY 2015/16 and FY 2016/17, with the caveat that the outer two year funding amounts may be increased if BGCGG is successful drawing federal TCM and MAA reimbursement and could increase the reimbursement amount with additional Commission investment.

Program Status

The early learning services and ARCHES program have not changed substantially since the Commission began providing funding support. In FY 2013/14, BGCGG began the process to seek federal TCM and MAA reimbursement funds. They secured approximately \$10,000 in TCM funds in FY 2013/14, and anticipate a total of \$30,000 in TCM/MAA reimbursement in FY 2014/15. BGCGG is working to implement an evidence-based curriculum in their mobile early learning program, they are currently researching the High Scope model, and they operate a Learning Link on the MOMs Orange County campus.

Evaluation

No formal evaluation has been completed to date. In FY 2013/14, the Readiness on the Road program provided 275 children with school readiness services. More than 200 parents participated in a program designed to increase the frequency of reading at home and 177 parents participated in classes related to healthy child development. The Learning Link operated by Boys and Girls Club at MOMS Orange County had a total of 818 visits by children and their families during this fiscal year.

Notes

Six AmeriCorps members are placed at BGCGG, and assist primarily with the Readiness on the Road program.

Early Learning Training and Support

Provider: Orange County Department of Education (OCDE)

Description

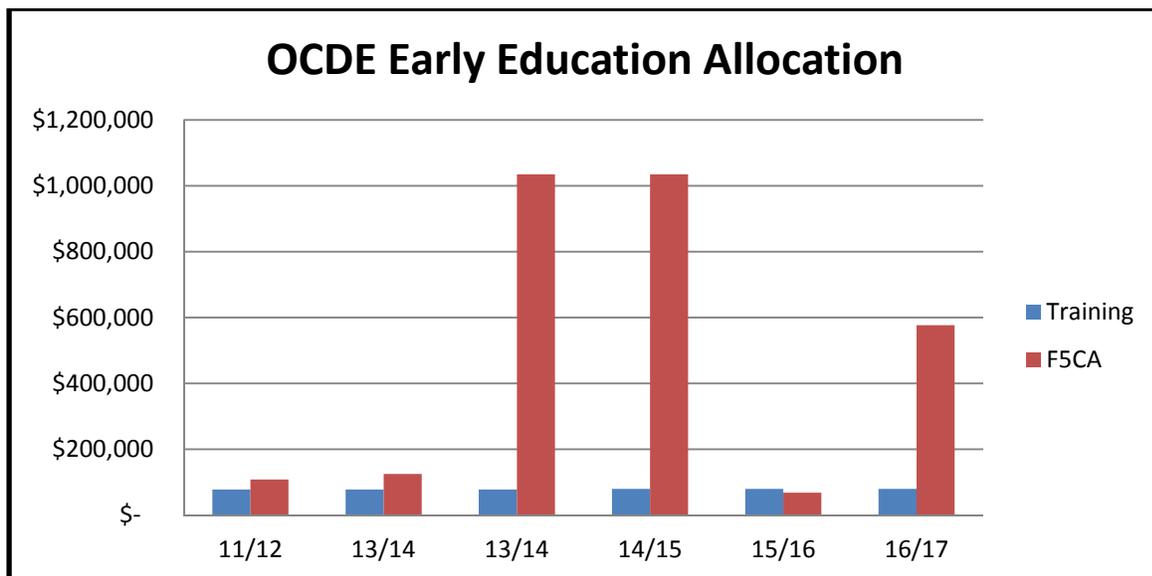
The Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) provides training and technical assistance support to the Early Learning Specialists at 24 school districts that provide kindergarten. The training includes, but is not limited to speech and language; early science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); and early literacy. The OCDE also assists with the implementation of the First 5 California professional development programs; the Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards (CARES) Plus program, and the Child Signature Programs (CSP).

Strategic Plan Outcomes

The Speech and Language Development Services program supports the Commission's Strategic Plan outcomes to:

- Increased availability and access to quality early care and education
- Increased caregiver (parent and provider) knowledge and skills to promote children's readiness for school
- Improved transitions of children from preschool to kindergarten

Commission Investment



Current Funding & Term

A three year funding agreement through June 2017 was approved in February 2014. The funding included a \$1,500 annual increase for speech and language training. The First 5 California CARES Plus program ends on June 30, 2016. The First 5 California Child Signature Program (CSP) ends on June 30, 2015. The CSP program requires matching funds at \$1.1 million for FY 2013/14 and \$1.3 million for FY 2014/15. Total program funding from the Children and Families Commission for FY 2011/12 to FY 2016/17 is \$472,500 for Early Learning Specialists training.

Program Status

The Orange County Department of Education continues to provide countywide support and training opportunities to the Early Learning Specialists. The OCDE is sponsoring the 2015 Early Childhood STEM Conference at \$10,000 and representatives serve on the planning committee for the event scheduled for February. The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) was developed by OCDE with the federal Race to the Top grant. The QRIS is used to rate the early childcare programs including those that participate in the CARES and CSP programs. The QRIS rating is a determinate for eligibility for the State's annual QRIS block grant funding.

Evaluation

The First 5 California CSP program funds a local evaluator position housed at OCDE. The local evaluator is required to develop and implement an evaluation plan to assess program quality characteristics and child outcomes. The evaluator is also required to develop a plan to assess data to determine which data are appropriate at the program, classroom, staff and family-child levels.

STEM Programs

Provider: OC STEM Initiative (OneOC Fiscal Agent)

Description

The Commission and the Samueli Foundation are the founding members of the OC STEM Initiative. Members include over 15 business foundations and content experts that are committed to improving science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education. The overarching goals are to ensure that Orange County students are college and career ready in the STEM fields, and developing a skilled and continuous workforce to meet the scientific and technological needs of the employer base in Orange County. The OC STEM Initiative focuses on the full continuum of learning from preschool through college.

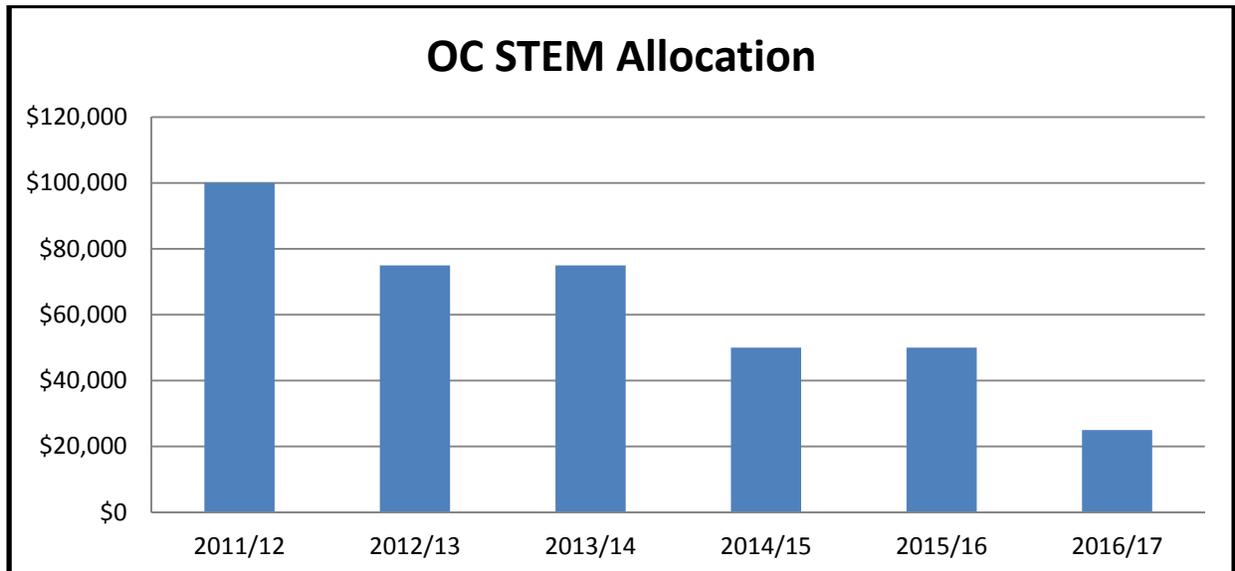
Strategic Plan Outcomes

Early STEM is specifically identified as a programmatic initiative supported by the Commission in reaching the early learning goal. The OC STEM Initiative supports this Strategic Plan outcome:

- Increased caregiver (parent and provider) knowledge and skills to promote children’s readiness for school

Commission Investment

The Commission and the Samueli Foundation are the founding members of the OC STEM Initiative. In FY 2011/12, the Commission allocated \$375,000 over three years to develop a strategic plan, launch the program and secure other funding partners.



Current Funding & Term

July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2017 - \$125,000

Program Status

The initial investment supported the development of a strategic plan that was completed in the first year of the program. The funding continues to support the implementation of the five goal areas of the strategic plan:

1. Organizational Structure – build a sustainable structure to support the ongoing implementation of successful STEM programs. A new Executive Director was hired in October 2014 and the office is currently located with the Samueli Foundation.
2. Communications – promote awareness of STEM competencies and why they are important.
3. STEM Learning – create interest among students, preschool through college, to pursue the development of their STEM knowledge, skills and abilities.
4. Professional Development – promote educators’ STEM knowledge, competencies, and pedagogy. Sponsored the Early Childhood STEM Conference in 2014 and 2015, and planning the OC STEM Institute for school district teams to begin in spring 2014.
5. Workforce Development – bridge the gap between a STEM-educated workforce and Orange County businesses’ demands. Partnered with the Orange County Business Council to include a supplemental report on the importance of STEM in the Orange County economy in the annual Workforce Development Indicators report and convened a panel presentation for an audience of business and government leaders to discuss opportunities to commit to specific projects promoting STEM education.
6. Research and Evaluation – promote rigorous research-based approaches to STEM teaching and learning

Evaluation

A process to research and evaluate STEM activities in Orange County is specific goal area in the strategic plan. Deliverables include developing a database of STEM programs in the county and a metrics tool for assessing outcomes and programs.

Speech and Language Development Services

Provider: Providence Speech and Hearing Center

Description

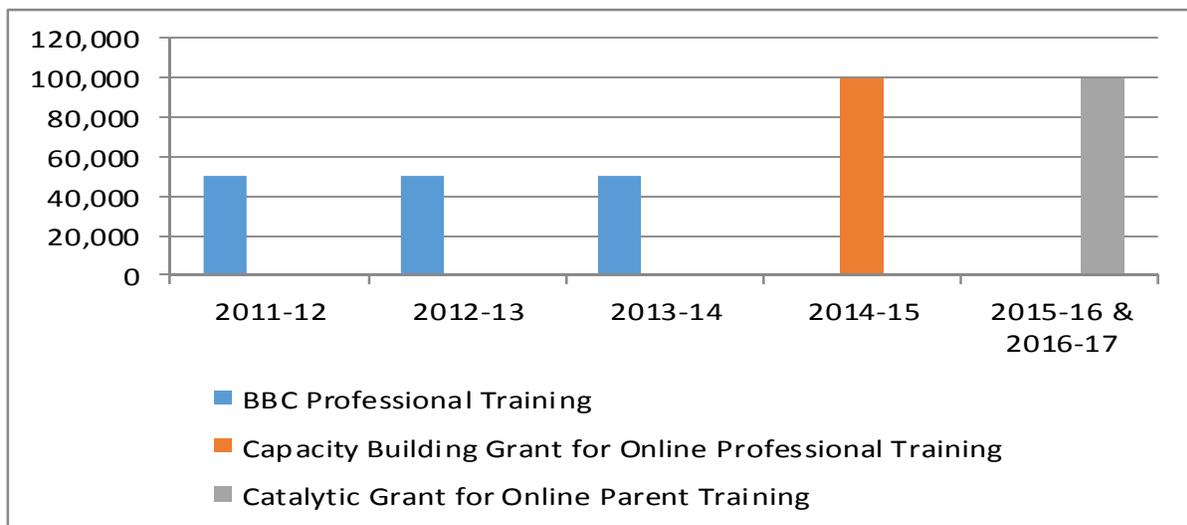
Providence Speech and Hearing Center developed the Building Blocks of Communication™ (BBC), a group therapy model for children with mild to moderate speech delays. Providence implements this model, conducting classes with parents and young children. The Commission funded Providence to train early learning professionals in Orange County to conduct the classes with parents, in order to expand the BBC's reach. In FY 2013/14, the Commission gave Providence a capacity-building grant to create an online portal for this training.

Strategic Plan Outcomes

The Speech and Language Development Services program supports the Commission's Strategic Plan outcome:

- Increased caregiver (parent and provider) knowledge and skills to promote children's readiness for school

Commission Investment



Current Funding & Term

\$100,000 Commission catalytic investment (FY 2014/15 through FY 2015/16)

Program Status

The Commission funded Providence Speech and Hearing Center to conduct in-person training of professionals (e.g., Early Learning Specialists) so they could, in turn, conduct classes for parents of young children to assist with speech and language development using BBC. In FY 2013/14, Providence received a capacity building grant from the Commission to help fund an online portal to train early childhood educators and paraprofessionals to use BBC. The online portal supports the sustainability of the program by increasing access and convenience for providers. For FY 2014/15 and FY 2015/16, the Commission provided a one-time catalytic grant to further the expansion of the existing online platform to target parents and caregivers.

Evaluation

Providence conducts pre-and post-surveys of the professionals who participate in the trainings. Overall, the program was well received by professionals. Participants were asked to rate their training experience on various questions, with the following results in FY 2013/14:

How well do you understand the implications of and impact of language development in a bilingual environment?

95% scored excellent or good with a 149% increase from pre to post

How well do you rate yourself in understanding why a child is communicating?

90% scored excellent or good with a 42% increase from pre to post

How comfortable are you in understanding when a child is communicating (verbally and/ or non verbally)?

100% scored excellent or good with a 29% increase from pre to post

How do you rate yourself in understanding the connection between pretend and play?

100% scored excellent or good with a 120% increase from pre to post

How well do you understand the importance of establishing the home language?

100% scored excellent or good with a 50% increase from pre to post

How do you rate your ability to use daily routines as a format for parent implemented intervention?

100% scored excellent or good with a 50% increase from pre to post

How well do you understand the difference between simultaneous and sequential language development?

95% scored excellent or good with a 233% increase from pre to post

Additionally, in 2012, the Commission conducted an evaluation of the in-person professional training.

Math Early Learning Program

Provider: MIND Research Institute

Description

From 2009 to 2012, the Commission funded the MIND Research Institute to adapt their kindergarten games for preschool, creating a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching mathematics to improve the math proficiency and problem solving skills of pre-kindergarten children. The pilot program targeted preschool-aged children in schools of lower academic performance. The interactive math instructional software program was developed to engage and train students at varying levels of academic and language proficiency.

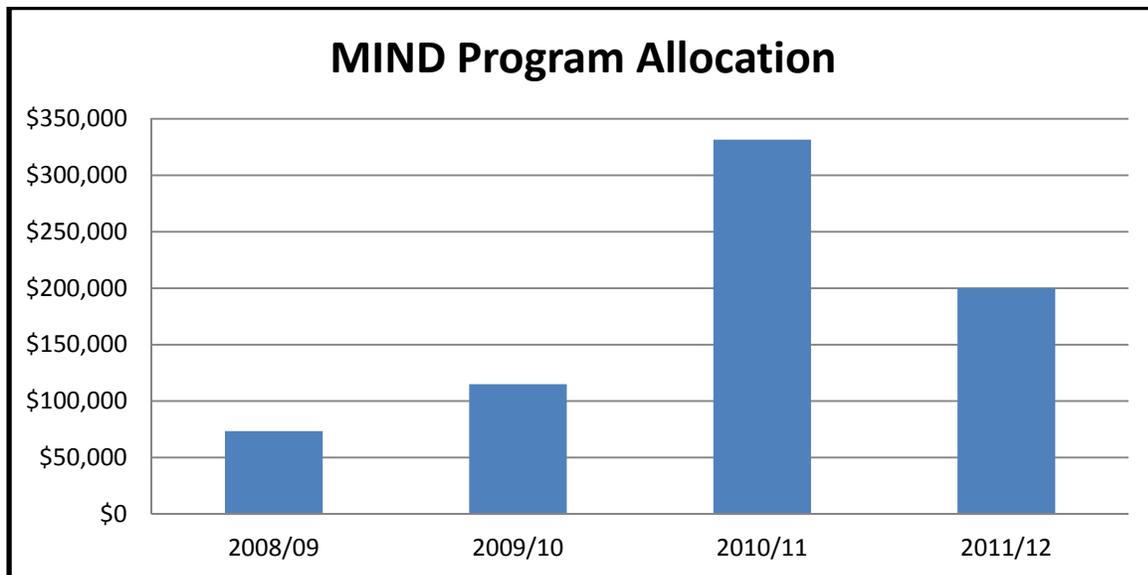
Strategic Plan Outcomes

The MIND Research Institute Program supports these Strategic Plan outcomes:

- Increased school readiness
- Improved transitions of children from preschool to kindergarten

Commission Investment

From January 2009 to October 2012, the Commission invested \$720,000 in four phases of program development that resulted in the Math Early Learning Program.



Current Funding & Term

The MIND Research Institute signed a four-year (FY 2012/13 – FY 2015/16) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to implement the program at 40 new school sites, 10 per year. MIND agreed to support the start-up costs for new school sites valued at \$13,000, and \$2,000 of the renewal fee per site for a total value of \$640,000. The MOU includes co-funding a third-party longitudinal evaluation on the effectiveness of the program at \$75,000 for a total evaluation budget of \$150,000. Total program funding for FY 2008/09 to FY 2011/12 is \$720,000.

Program Status

The Math Early Learning Program was completed in 2012. The interactive instructional software program was developed to improve math proficiency and problem solving skills of pre-kindergarten children, specifically targeting schools in the lower three deciles of California's Academic Performance Index. The program is designed to help reduce early achievement gaps and prepare children from all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds for success in elementary and middle school math. The Program is closely aligned to the California Department of Education Preschool Learning Foundations for Early Childhood Education, with emphasis on preparing children for the Common Core Standards in kindergarten.

Evaluation

A five-year longitudinal evaluation plan was developed in coordination with the Commission's Evaluation Manager. MIND has been unsuccessful in recruiting new school sites, which has stalled the implementation of the evaluation plan. A third party evaluation firm has not been selected at this time.

Notes

The Orange County Department of Education received a \$30,000 allocation to fund the remaining \$500 of the renewal fees. To date, no funds have been expended.