

FRESNO COUNTY

Voluntary Preschool Master Plan

Written by Karen Hill-Scott, Ed. D.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Larry L. Powell visits Jefferson Preschool, Fresno Unified School District.

2008 - 2015



MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

In September 2007, the Fresno County Office of Education engaged a cross-section of the community in the design of a comprehensive voluntary preschool plan for children four years of age in Fresno County. With the assistance of consultant Dr. Karen Hill-Scott, more than one hundred community leaders, with representation from parents, elected officials, businesses, civic/ social and governmental agencies and preschool educators from public, private, and faith-based programs, convened in this process. The result of their work is an inclusive, networked and articulated plan of action. Fresno County will reap the rewards of the investment in our children for many years to come. Immediate benefits will be realized as more children enter school ready to learn. The long term reward will be apparent as these same children leave the school system ready to enter the workforce. I believe this report sets the foundation for a system of preschool program delivery that will assist in closing the achievement gap.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Larry L. Powell".

Larry L. Powell
Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

BACKGROUND

Inspired by the leadership of County Superintendent of Schools Larry Powell, the community stakeholders had a clear vision of the value of preschool for children in Fresno County. The seven-year comprehensive plan includes a detailed description of the compelling need to provide high quality preschool and the summative reports of subcommittees in the areas of Program Quality and Monitoring, Articulation and Coordination, Parent and Community Engagement, and Workforce and Professional Development.

The Early Care and Education (ECE) industry is vital to Fresno County's economy. It generates more than \$200 million annually and provides over 8,500 jobs. As of October 2008, approximately 2,385 families and 3,180 income-eligible children are on waiting lists for subsidized ECE in Fresno County. By the year 2020, Fresno's population of children ages 1 – 13 will grow by 25%, totaling 250,000 children. Census data indicates that Fresno County has the second highest rate of poverty in California, with almost 23% of the population living below the poverty level. The plan for voluntary, high-quality preschool is a significant step toward a better educated populace, and potentially a break in the cycle of poverty in Fresno County.

In the view of the planners, preschool has a strategic value for Fresno as a whole. National studies consistently demonstrate that high quality preschool experiences result in significant educational and social benefits for children. Certainly the immediate goal is to serve children who would benefit most from preschool—but that describes the majority of children in the county. In Fresno, preschool has the potential to catalyze education reform and ultimately increase the position of Fresno as a county with a well-prepared citizenry.

The stakeholders worked collaboratively to complete the planning process and reach consensus on a vision and plan of action. The theme for the resulting Master Plan, "Traction Supports Action," refers to the over-arching strategy of connecting units of power together as a force that propels and sustains forward movement.



MISSION STATEMENT

The Voluntary Preschool Master Plan strives to improve the quality of preschool programs and increase access to all four year-olds in Fresno County.

FOCUS AREAS

The Plan is guided by four focus areas:

- **Preparedness:** where Fresno County's ability to develop preschool programs will create the ability to secure funding and promptly deploy new resources as they become available.
- **Centers of Excellence:** where Fresno County develops programs that demonstrate "the art of the possible" in the areas of high quality service delivery, workforce development, parent engagement and curriculum alignment from preschool through third grade.
- **Leveraging Resources:** where Fresno County melds efficient and creative use of existing resources with strategic partnerships and infusions of outside support until increased public investments can be obtained.
- **Strategic Relationships:** ensuring that the traction necessary to stay on path adheres through an ever expanding base of support for preschool in the community.



COMMUNITY ASSETS

The Plan stakeholders identified both community assets and community needs as it related to preschool planning. The assets were as follows:

- **Fresno Energetic Leadership**
The Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE) has outstanding stewardship and has assembled a team that is committed to focusing on preschool implementation. Additionally, the community stakeholders that participated support early education and represent organizations in the fields of local planning, service delivery, higher education, and children's services. These organizations are accustomed to collaboration and they supported this effort with immense commitment.
- **High Talent: Problem Ratio**
There are extraordinary community leaders and agency decision-makers who are willing and able to commit and deploy human resources to the development of preschool. The breadth of expertise ranges across sectors (public, private, faith-based) and content areas (early education, health, social services, K-12).
- **Right Size/Right Scale/Right Location**
Fresno's size and scale are very manageable for developing centers of excellence. Moreover, Fresno has the characteristics of urban, rural, and migrant markets with about 26% English Learners. In addition, Fresno has a stable population with moderate overall growth. These attributes make it possible to explore different models of service delivery unique to each market. The location in the Central Valley is also geographically strategic.
- **Strong Knowledge Base**
Fresno has a rich collection of data and research on local needs and funding requirements. This makes it possible to build on existing systems, and create a centralized database that is shared electronically among the many participants in implementation.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

As a result of the planning process, the quantity of spaces and financing required to mitigate the need for preschool was calculated and mapped at the zip code level. However, the planning process also revealed a broader need for public engagement in the civic and philanthropic sectors of Fresno County.

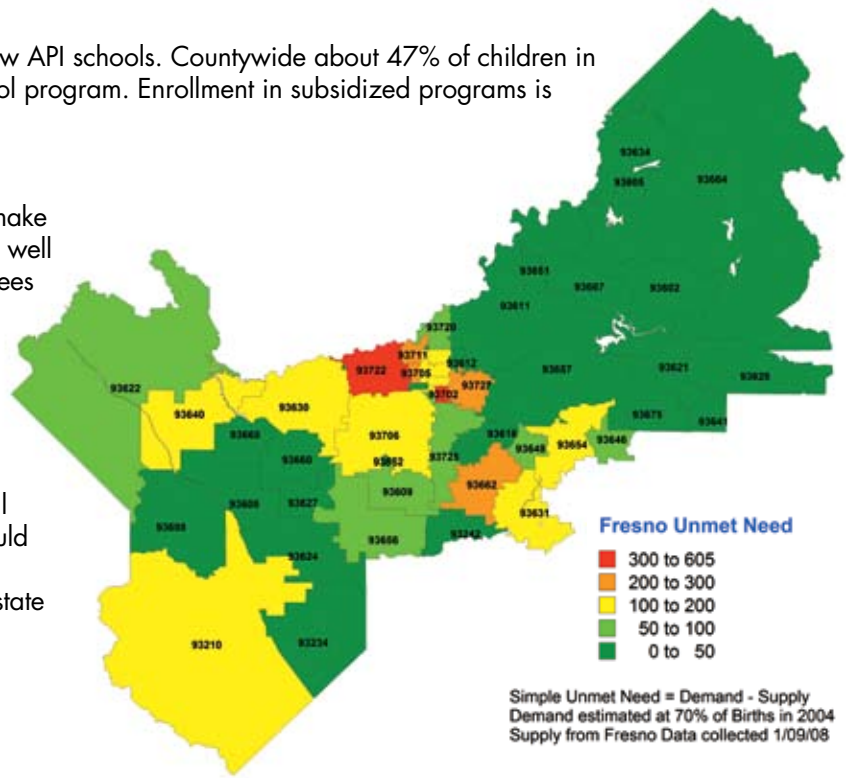
- **Preschool Needs**
The Fresno County Child Care and Development Local Planning Council has identified each zip code with high need for additional licensed preschool spaces, and prioritized them in the order of need. Since the primary goal was to increase school achievement, the focus in setting priorities included creating an overlay of low Academic Performance Index (API 1-3) elementary school communities with the shortage of preschool spaces. The summary findings are that Fresno County has a shortage of about 3,800 preschool spaces, assuming 70% of the County's 15,000 four year-olds would utilize a high quality program. Of the total space shortage, just over 2,000

spaces are needed in communities with very low API schools. Countywide about 47% of children in low API communities have access to a preschool program. Enrollment in subsidized programs is capped and waiting lists are long.

- **Public Engagement**

Fresno is dependent upon public investment to make preschool a reality. With almost 60% of families well below the state median income, neither parent fees nor local taxes would provide enough revenue to mitigate the need.

A strong local public agenda for preschool is necessary to advance state level investments in Fresno. Local school districts, municipal government, the county supervisors, city council members and organized business interests should include preschool on their respective legislative agendas. This would initiate a high priority of state investments in preschool resulting in cascading apportionments to Fresno County.



A NEW VISION FOR FRESNO COUNTY

The visioning process captured one central idea: **through preschool, individual and community benefits would accrue to Fresno County.** Within 15 years (about 8 years after a complete implementation of preschool), Fresno County will:

- Provide all children with access to early education.
- Close the school readiness gap.
- Achieve higher family engagement in children’s education.
- Improve K-12 student performance.
- Build a prepared early care and education workforce throughout the county.
- Rank higher as a favorable city to live and work in California.

2-5-7 YEAR GOALS

This Executive Summary closes with a chart summarizing the 2, 5, and 7-year goals for the major components of the preschool program. Overarching dimensions of these goals are:

- **Program Quality and Monitoring:** to develop both a Quality Rating System and a workforce mentoring system so that the centers of excellence can be expanded countywide.
- **Articulation and Coordination:** to develop a plan that aligns preschool to K-12 institutions by acquiring input from personnel in both sectors of education along with the engagement of parents.
- **Parent and Community Engagement:** to create neighborhood hubs connecting preschools, parents and elementary schools and to engage parents, including increased involvement from fathers in home-based support of children’s learning.
- **Workforce and Professional Development:** to integrate a system of ongoing consultation and mentoring for existing and new personnel entering the early education workforce while coordinating program requirements and transition among post-secondary institutions offering degree and certificate early care and education programs.

Two other components of a sound Master Plan, **Data Management and Facilities**, will be managed administratively during the early implementation phase.



EARLY IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

The planners recognized that to translate the plan into action, some initiatives need immediate organization and attention. Also, for public success the planners considered a number of possible projects that could be implemented early at low cost and mostly within the existing infrastructure.

Statement	Key Responsibility Centers	
1. Conduct an inventory of preschool spaces and facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Planning Council: Centralized Eligibility List Children's Services Network Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission, Head Start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE) Community Care Licensing First 5 Fresno County Supportive Services, Inc.
2. Identify / cultivate new workforce entrants through career planning services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's Services Network Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission, Head Start Fresno Regional Occupational Program (ROP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresno County Office of Education Community Care Licensing First 5 Fresno County Supportive Services, Inc.
3. Encourage movement of the average level of teacher education beyond par (26% with B.A. degrees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleges and Vocational Schools Child Care Center Employers/ Program Directors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresno County Office of Education First 5 Fresno County
4. Have a plan to support the development of EL students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EL Program Staff Adult Education Programs Community Based Organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FCOE Early Care & Education Department California Preschool Instructional Network
5. Develop a plan for increased parent engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading and Beyond Parent Outreach Programs FCOE Parent Services Center Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission, Head Start Child Care Providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First 5 Fresno County School Readiness Program California Preschool Instructional Network FCOE Migrant Education School Districts
6. Document & analyze the typical programmatic content in preschool programs (by funding source)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Colleges, Teachers, Parents and Program Directors Children's Services Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Planning Council FCOE Early Care & Education Department Voluntary Preschool Committees
7. Develop consistent & coherent alignment / articulation processes for every preschool child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Care and Education Program Directors School Districts Private Preschool FCOE Special Education FCOE Migrant Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Care and Education Professionals Fresno County Office of Education All Local Colleges

INCREASE THE TRACTION – ACCELERATE THE ACTION

The following recommendations are made to bridge the gap between mapping the goals and implementing each one of them.

- First, create a transition team to guide and manage overall facilitation of each phase of immediate implementation. This team would be led by the Fresno County Office of Education and include all stakeholders representing high level interest groups and also the key responsibility centers for the decentralized efforts described in the plan. The transition team will also assess additional data needs, review logistics, calendar overall work plans and identify sources of in-kind and direct support for early implementation.
- Second, charge new task forces, one for each content area, with the schematic design of processes and structure for the countywide system component associated with each workgroup. These include the Articulation Process, the Quality Rating System, the Neighborhood Hub System, and Workforce Development Models that will support Fresno's preparedness for comprehensive preschool implementation in the future.
- Third, identify and support localized and neighborhood implementation of "centers of excellence" that parallel each component. These will include high quality preschool sites created from existing programs in the community.

In addition, and just as important, the traction that has held the community stakeholders together for close to four years must be replicated to include three other constituencies who have the positioning to tilt preschool policy support at the state level. These are: K-12 superintendents and other key education administrators, small and large business leaders, and a promising philanthropic sector.

Taken together, the vision, capacity, motivation, and solidarity of Fresno's preschool stakeholders has created a sound plan. This collective energy is extraordinary and in the end this energy will ignite the launching and sustainability of the Fresno County Voluntary Preschool Plan.

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The Fresno County Child Care & Development Local Planning Council is a forum which supports planning and actions countywide to promote a quality child care system that meets the needs of all the children and families of Fresno County. The following Local Planning Council Members dedicated additional time to the planning of the Fresno County Voluntary Preschool Master Plan.

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For more information or for a copy of the full report, contact the Fresno County Office of Education Early Care and Education Department at (559) 497-3808 or visit our website at www.fcoe.org/ece.



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