



Staff Report

February 4, 2008

Item 12.0 & 16.0

ACTION: X

DISCUSSION: _____

TITLE: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STRATEGY RECOMMENDATION TO CONTINUE AUGMENTED FUNDING

BACKGROUND

Since 2001, the Commission's Early Childhood Education strategy has funded stipends for childcare providers through the Professional Development Program (PDP) in order to encourage their participation in training and professional education activities. In 2003, the program was modified to require providers to obtain the Child Development Permit and to move up successive levels on the permit matrix in order to receive a stipend. At the same time, the Commission devoted funding in its Early Childhood Education strategy for a program to facilitate quality improvement in child care centers and family child care homes, a program now known as the Early Learning Demonstration Project (ELDP).

During fiscal year 2004-05, staff worked with the principle ECE strategy contractors, the Contra Costa Child Care Council and the Contra Costa County Office of Education to create a collaborative program, the Early Learning Alliance, to conduct outreach to potential stipend recipients. All these steps were taken to more closely link stipends and other incentives with qualitative improvement in the education of young children. These steps were taken at a funding allocation level of \$1.5 million in First 5 Contra Costa funds with additional matching funds from California First 5 each year (\$263,672 in matching funds were budgeted in FY 04/05).

While the Commission provided stipends to over 2000 providers in the first four years of the strategy, and despite increasing emphasis on outreach to new participants, evaluation results showed that it was still difficult to enroll family child care providers, East County-based providers, and Latino and other providers of color in the program. It was also difficult to determine the degree to which offering stipends after providers achieve a certain level on the Child Development Permit matrix in turn translates to improved quality for children.

In 2005, staff formed an Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee composed of representatives of numerous agencies and constituencies to determine the steps needed to ensure that the Commission's strategy could meet its objectives for a better-trained and diverse child care workforce. The urgency to develop a highly educated workforce was underscored by the likelihood of a statewide universal preschool initiative appearing on the ballot at that time. It was assumed that such an initiative would undoubtedly impose requirements for childcare workers to hold a Child Development Permit and for classrooms to meet minimum staffing for BA- and AA-level teachers. Simultaneously, the

state First 5 Commission announced its requirements for the fourth round of CARES matching grants, which First 5 Contra Costa had participated in for the previous five years (the state CARES funds match local dollars spent for approved professional development activities). California First 5 indicated a similar desire to stress the need for a high-quality and highly diverse workforce.

With input from the Advisory Committee, and after discussion with PEC, staff recommended to the Commission an increase in the funding for the ECE strategy in order to develop a more intensive education and training structure built around the three community colleges. This augmentation was to be carried out in addition to the PDP stipend program and the Early Learning Demonstration Project. This approach would meet the twin objectives of:

- (1) increasing support to childcare providers to attain higher levels of education, particularly a BA degree and the "Master Teacher" level on the Child Development Permit Matrix; and,
- (2) Promoting and supporting the entrance of new, culturally and linguistically diverse providers in areas of highest need and lowest supply.

New activities included:

- Full-time education liaisons at each of the three community college campuses to oversee support activities, link with the Alliance and other countywide activities, and advise childcare workers.
- Mini-grants to students to support tuition, books and field work expenses.
- Tutoring for students, especially those for whom English is their second language.
- Establishment of cohort math classes for child care workers (math is the greatest challenge for child care workers seeking degrees).
- Development of an early childhood education curriculum at Cal State East Bay that would be fully articulated with course offerings at the community college level.
- Additional stipends for participants who complete yearly professional development requirements, and small stipends for "family, friend, and neighbor" providers (unlicensed caregivers) who participate in unit-bearing activities.
- Expanded activities to more fully involve providers in centers and family child care homes.

A Three-Year Plan

To fully fund the proposed program modifications, the Commission approved an additional \$1,416,841 over the following three years (FYs 04/05 – 07/08). In that time, with the additional resources at hand, First 5 and its collaborating institutions have made great headway in meeting the objectives laid out in 2005. Highly successful advising systems are in place at each of the community colleges and the colleges are collaborating more than ever as a result. Cal State East Bay now offers a minor in ECE and is initiating a Masters program as well.

The ECE Strategy Review

The results of the ECE strategy review show that we are reaching the intended population and helping them attain degrees and progress on the Child Development Matrix. The strategy review identified a number of areas that could be refined to make the process more streamlined and more accessible to providers. The strategy review also highlighted a number of areas – such as community college advising and the ELDP program – that could be augmented to reach even more providers, provided there are additional funds to do so. Staff will continue to review the recommendations with providers and will look at ways to make modifications with existing funds.

For the current fiscal year, FY 07/08, the strategy is funded at a base level of \$1,436,320 with \$527,090 in augmentation funds and \$413,407 in California First 5 matching funds, for a total allocation of \$2,376,817. California First 5 has committed to continue its matching grant program for another year until the state Commission completes its review of its funded programs. Given the success of the program and the opportunities for continuing improvement, staff recommend retaining the existing level of First 5 Contra Costa funding by continuing the augmentation level for another three-year period with 3% increases each year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Commission use remaining Special Reserve funds to continue augmenting the base funding of the strategy for another three years at the following augmentation levels: FY 08/09, \$542,903; FY 09/10, \$559,190; and FY10/11, \$575,966, for a total of \$1,678,059.