Santa Clara CARES* Plus Program Year 2011-12

* Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards
**Introduction**

Professional development activities and the pursuit of college degrees by early educators are critical components to providing high-quality care to children. Increasing scientific evidence shows that early educators can significantly influence early childhood learning. When early educators are well educated, the children they teach are more successful in school and in life. Not only are well-educated early educators a key component to providing high-quality care to children, but better-educated early educators also contribute to professionalizing the early education field.

The Santa Clara County Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards (CARES) Program was established in 2001 when FIRST 5 Santa Clara County awarded a grant to create the WestEd E3 Institute to administer the county’s CARES program as part of the statewide CARES program. The E3 Institute is a project of the WestEd Center for Child and Family Studies and is funded by FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, First 5 California, and California Department of Education.

The mission of the E3 Institute is to support and strengthen the quality of early education services to children by promoting professional development of early childhood educators to ensure the highest quality early learning experiences for Santa Clara County’s youngest children. E3 accomplishes its goals through two primary programs – CARES and the Child Signature Program (CSP), which evolved from the Power of Preschool (PoP) Program. The CARES program offers financial incentives to early educators for completion of unit-bearing coursework relevant to their work with children. CSP enhances high-quality, preschool opportunities to children in underserved communities and provides additional resources for families and early educators.

**What is CARES?**

The statewide CARES initiative is the product of 20 years of advocacy work in California conducted by educators, community members, child advocates, policy makers, and government leaders. Based on policy and funding changes at the state level, CARES has evolved from:

- **CARES** - Emphasis on *educational* attainment
- **CARES 2.0** – Emphasis on *degree* attainment
- **CARES Plus** – Emphasis on *education, professional development, and coaching*

This report focuses on the first full year of CARES Plus, which spanned July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012. Throughout the different iterations of CARES, the WestEd E3 Institute has continued to focus on supporting college degree attainment.

**Primary Challenges for CARES Participants**

The data collected through CARES has shown that the primary challenges for early educators pursuing a college degree include the following:

- Completing general education courses, especially required math and English courses
- Mastering basic skills to be successful with community college level courses
- Learning English reading, writing, and comprehension skills for English as a Second Language (ESL) students
- Completing the required practicum coursework and lab hours
- Obtaining one-on-one professional development advising

As the CARES program has evolved, specific strategies and program requirements have been implemented to address these challenges, including:

- Supporting students in completing their college-based assessment tests and counselor education plans;
- Requiring all coursework taken for a stipend be pre-approved by a college representative;
- Increasing the stipend amount for general education, basic skills, and ESL coursework;
- Requiring all courses be directly related to obtaining a college degree; and
- Requiring all CARES participants to receive one-on-one advising to develop a professional development plan specific to their goals.

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CARES Plus Program Description

Developed by First 5 California, CARES Plus is a statewide professional development program for early educators to improve the quality of early learning programs by focusing on increasing the quality, effectiveness, and retention of early educators. Its main objectives were to improve both the quality of early learning programs, and ultimately, improve young children’s learning and developmental outcomes. CARES Plus enrollment requirements differed from previous CARES programs in that options for earning a stipend were offered in addition to, or instead of, completing college coursework.

New requirements included completing online professional development in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS™) and a one-hour online learning opportunity on the dangers of second-hand smoke during the program year. Development and updating of a professional development plan at the beginning and end of the program year was also required to earn a stipend.

In addition, CARES Plus participants were required to become computer literate by meeting all requirements online including enrollment, learning sessions, and stipend application. This differed from previous CARES programs, which used printed enrollment forms, requirement verifications, and stipend applications.

CARES Plus participants were required to complete specific required components and then had the option of completing one additional component, as described below, to earn a higher stipend.

CARES Plus Program Components

**Core Component**

Three online professional development learning opportunities were required of all of participants during the first year of the CARES Plus program. These required learning opportunities, known as the Core Requirements, represent the first time First 5 California has required participants to complete requirements online. In addition to needing access to a computer with high-speed internet access, participants were also required to have a valid email address in order to set up the online accounts needed to fulfill the requirements. The cost of these learning opportunities was covered by First 5 California and they were offered in both English and Spanish. The learning opportunities varied in length and are described further on page 6 of this report.

**Optional Components**

**Training Component**

Participants completed 21 hours of professional development, which was certified by the California Department of Education (CDE), and which including the following:

- Infant-Toddler and Preschool Learning and Development Foundations
- Infant-Toddler and Preschool Curriculum Framework
- Preschool English Learners (PEL): Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning
- Early Childhood Educator Competencies
- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)
- WestEd Program for Infant-Toddler Care (PITC)
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)

**OR**

**College Coursework**

The college coursework component was designed to support early educators pursuing a college degree or taking coursework to obtain or upgrade a Child Development Permit or credential. In order to receive a stipend under this component a participant must have completed a minimum of 6 semester or 9 quarter units with a grade of “C” or better. These courses must have begun after July 1, 2011 and must have been completed by June 30, 2012. Participants who choose to complete the college coursework component in addition to the required core component had their coursework pre-approved while they developed a Professional Development and Education Plan (PDEP).

**OR**

**MyTeachingPartner (MTP™) Component (by invitation only)**

This was a unique professional development opportunity offering a new quality improvement program as part of the CARES Plus program. MTP™ was a 10-month, intensive, ongoing coaching program that has been shown to boost effective classroom and program interactions and improve child outcomes. The MTP™ component was available by invitation only with a select number of participants chosen by First 5 California for this statewide pilot.

**Components Completed by 2011-12 CARES Plus Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Only</td>
<td>179 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Plus Coursework</td>
<td>289 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Plus Training</td>
<td>101 (16.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MyTeachingPartner™ (MTP™)</td>
<td>27 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Participants</strong></td>
<td><strong>596</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographics

The CARES Plus program attracted a diverse group of participants who work in a variety of early education settings. Over the last 11 years of CARES, changes in the program’s design have affected the types of early educators who participate and show variations in ethnicity, education level, and position. For example, under CARES 2.0, which focused on degree attainment, there was a higher percentage of assistant teachers. This is consistent with the last California Early Care and Education Workforce Study\(^3\) for Santa Clara County that showed lower levels of educational attainment among this population. A similar effect can be seen in the education levels of participants engaging in different options of CARES Plus. The following charts provide a general overview of all participants in CARES Plus.

Ethnicities reported by participants; N=596

The CARES Plus program included a wide ethnic diversity of participants with the top three groups being Asian, Hispanic/Latino(a) and White.

Highest levels of education earned in the U.S.; N=596

Since its inception, a primary goal of CARES has been to increase education levels. Each iteration of the CARES model has changed the make up of participants. In CARES Plus, there are a significant number of participants (approximately 40%) who have completed a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, while an equal number reported their highest level of U.S. education was a high school diploma or less. With a national trend towards raising early educator qualifications to the Bachelor’s Degree level, the fact that 61% of participants are below this level demonstrates the need for these types of support programs for early educators.

Participants’ positions within their programs; N=596

More than 70% of 2011-12 CARES Plus participants held Master/Lead Teacher, Teacher, and Assistant Teacher positions.

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\(^3\) California Early Care and Education Workforce Study: Licensed Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Providers, Santa Clara County Highlights, August 2006. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Berkeley and California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, San Francisco, CA.
The Majority (87%) of participants worked in center-based programs. Of those working in center-based programs, the majority (76%) worked in a public or private non-profit program. Approximately one quarter (24%) of participants worked in a private for-profit program.

The demographics showed that the CARES Plus program attracted a wide variety of early educators from a variety of program types. The low percentage of educators working in family child care settings remains a challenge and is found in many CARES programs throughout the state. Educators in these settings tend to work non-traditional hours and often report having difficulty engaging in college coursework and professional development. They also report having trouble finding professional development opportunities that are specifically designed for home-based early education. In addition, the lower state standards for working in licensed family child care settings may impact their motivation in participating in professional development programs such as CARES.

Nearly half (47%) of participants identified a language other than English as their primary language. The majority of professional development opportunities, and almost all college level coursework, is taught in English. Early educators who primarily speak a language other than English find it very difficult to find learning opportunities and resource materials in their home language.
Core Component

Participants were required to complete at least two online professional development opportunities to be eligible to receive a stipend. This is the first time the CARES program required participants to complete online learning opportunities, which provided a great opportunity to encourage the field to be more proficient with technology.

The Core online learning opportunities consisted of the following:

1. Introduction to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ CLASS™
   - CLASS™ was a 2-hour online program that introduced the CLASS™ structure, its uses, and the importance of effective early educator-child interactions to learning.

2. Looking at CLASSrooms™
   - Looking at CLASSrooms™ was a 10-20 hour, self-paced, online program. Participants identified and analyzed effective early educator-child interactions with videos and interactive materials.
   - 524 out of the 596 total participants completed this learning opportunity because early educators working with infants and toddlers were exempt from taking the Looking at CLASSrooms™—Preschool version. Looking at CLASSrooms™—Toddler version had not yet been developed.

3. “Kids and Smoke Don’t Mix”
   - “Kids and Smoke Don’t Mix” was a one-hour, self-directed, online activity on the dangers to children of exposure to second-hand smoke.

First 5 California program requirements set different criteria for which participants needed to complete the Core Component online learning opportunities:

- Early Educators working primarily with infants and toddlers were exempt from taking the Looking at CLASSrooms™—Preschool version and they were required to complete either the College Coursework component or Training component to receive a stipend in this CARES Plus program year.

- Participants who were selected for the MyTeachingPartner™ Component had to complete the Introduction to the CLASS™ and “Kids and Smoke Don’t Mix” learning opportunity. They had the option of completing Looking at CLASSrooms™ if they desired.

- All other participants were required to complete all of the Core Component learning opportunities and had the option of also completing the Training or Coursework Component to receive an additional stipend.

Positive aspects of the Core component

- All three learning opportunities were available online, which allowed flexibility for participants to complete the professional development at their own pace.
- All three learning opportunities were available in both English and Spanish languages.
- Technical support was available in multiple languages.

Challenges of the Core component

- A significant number of participants were unable to complete this requirement due to their lack of proficiency with computers.
- Participants needed access to a computer with a high-speed internet connection to complete the learning opportunities.
- Some participants were not experienced using computers; thus CARES program staff members were required to provide a great deal of one-on-one technical support.
- Participants were required to set up multiple online accounts to complete the enrollment and learning opportunities.
- The registration process for the CLASS™ learning opportunities involved a complicated activation process.
- Separate requirements for those who needed to complete which online professional development opportunities often caused confusion among participants.

Issues to consider in the future

- Revise online registration process to be more user friendly.
- Develop better infrastructure to support participants with the registration and online learning processes.
- Provide basic computer education to participants who need it.
- Provide consistent requirements for the Core Component learning opportunities for all participants.

*The Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ (CLASS™) is an observational tool administered by Teachstone that provides a common lens and language focused on interactions that boost student learning. See www.teachstone.org for more information.
Training Component

Participants had the option of participating in person in pre-approved professional development opportunities — those certified by California Department of Education, Child Development Division (CDE-CDD) — to earn an additional stipend. Participants were assigned a CARES specialist who supported them in identifying and registering for the learning opportunities.

The Training component offered a unique option for those early educators who had already reached their educational goals. 62% of the participants who completed this component indicated on their applications that they held a Bachelor’s Degree or higher.

A total of 101 participants attended an average of 21 hours each in 6 different learning areas. Participants reported it was challenging to find local opportunities that aligned with their professional development goals and work schedules. The California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) increased the number and capacity of learning opportunities it offered, which helped to alleviate this problem; however, many participants were interested in other topics such as the Early Childhood Educator Competencies and Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), but none of these were available locally. In addition, some educators were not able to participate in specific professional development opportunities because of the required registration fees.

Positive aspects of the Training component

- Most learning opportunities were available evenings and weekends to accommodate the participants’ full-time employment schedules.
- Participants could use the learning hours to renew their California Child Development Permits.
- All learning opportunities offered were research based and grounded in best practices.

Challenges of the Training component

- A limited number of online professional development opportunities were available requiring in-person attendance.
- Popular topics and schedule times were reserved quickly with many participants placed on a waiting list.
- Participants were required to check email and websites regularly for possible updates or additions to professional development opportunity schedules because there was no universal calendar available.
- Many participants who did not show up to professional development opportunities did not cancel ahead of time, leaving many available spaces open and unused.
- Some learning opportunities required a fee.
- In order to meet demand, a larger number of participants were allowed to attend, which affected the quality of the professional development opportunities being delivered.

Issues to consider in the future

- Develop strategies to maximize attendance.
- Expand professional development opportunities that are accepted by CARES Plus.
- Develop a universal calendar of professional development opportunities that is easily accessible.
- Increase the number of opportunities that include an online option.
Coursework Component

The majority of CARES Plus participants chose the Core Plus Coursework component when they enrolled in the program. A total of 348 participants who selected this combination of components completed their Core requirements; however, 289 (83%) actually completed the minimum 6 semester units required to receive a Coursework component stipend. WestEd E3 Institute has included all 348 of the original Core Plus Coursework component participants in the data analysis below.

75% of participants taking the Coursework component had an education level below a Bachelor's Degree.

The majority of participants in the Coursework component (51%) had an education level below an Associate's Degree.

The majority of participants (60%) who chose the Core Plus Coursework component took courses in early childhood education/child development/human development. 22% of the semester units completed by CARES Plus participants during this program year were general education units. 10% were in basic skill areas such as math, ESL, and writing. These classes prepare students for the general education courses they will need to take to earn a degree or transfer to a 4-year college.

79% of participants who chose the Core Plus Coursework component told E3 Institute their goals were to earn an Associate’s Degree or higher.

Education levels reported by Coursework component participants; N=348

Goals reported by Coursework component participants; N=348

Types of courses chosen for the Coursework component; N=348
Participant Attendance by College; N=348

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cañada College (Out of county)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Anza College</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foothill College</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gavilan College</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission College</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose City College</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Valley College</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotals</strong></td>
<td><strong>79%</strong></td>
<td><strong>274</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4-Year Colleges and Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Hispanic University</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of county (4-year college or university)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose State University</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotals</strong></td>
<td><strong>21%</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>348</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of CARES Plus participants (79%) attended classes at a community college and 21% attended a 4-year college.

**Positive aspects of the Core Plus Coursework component**

- Completing a college degree remained the most popular goal and option for CARES Plus participants.
- Providing higher stipends and enhanced support to students who needed to complete basic skills, ESL, or general education coursework helped participants take challenging yet appropriate coursework.
- Meeting with a college representative was required for participants to develop a Professional Development and Education Plan (PDEP), which outlined the courses needed to complete to reach their educational goals.
- The E3 Institute used its web-based data system, which allowed college representatives, participants, and CARES staff to share information to monitor participants’ progress.

**Challenges of the Core Plus Coursework component**

- Accessing general education, ESL, basic skills, and practicum classes was challenging since they typically are scheduled on weekdays during daytime hours.
- Paying all initial costs associated with taking courses and then waiting until the end of the program year to receive a stipend was often a financial hardship.
- Securing the specific courses needed was challenging because of the high enrollments in these popular courses and the reductions in the numbers of course offerings at the colleges.
- Completing 6 semester units in one year was difficult for early educators who worked full-time and had family obligations. In addition, these obligations resulted in limited opportunities to access college support services, such as tutoring and writing centers.

**Issues to consider in the future**

- Revise the First 5 California requirement that participants who chose the Core Plus Coursework component complete a minimum of 6 semester units in one year.
- Revise the First 5 California requirement that stipends only be issued once at the end of the program year. With early educator wages being so low, it is very difficult for CARES Plus participants to cover the cost of classes and wait up to 7 months to receive their stipend.
- Make more evening and weekend classes available for general education, ESL, and basic skills.
- Develop new models for completing the practicum course.
My Teaching Partner™ (MTP™) Coaching Program

First 5 California piloted the MyTeachingPartner™ (MTP™) Coaching Program, a new quality improvement program as part of CARES Plus. Only a limited number of early educators were randomly selected to be part of this unique program. A total of 27 participants in Santa Clara County participated in the program during the pilot year.

Developed by the University of Virginia, MyTeachingPartner™ (MTP) is a targeted, 10-month, one-on-one coaching program focused on helping early educators interact more effectively with children. MTP early educators and coaches use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ (CLASS™) as a guide. The CLASS™ focuses on the interactions that help children grow academically and socially. The CLASS™ has been so successful as an observational tool for assessing interactions that it is used in federal, state, and local programs.

MTP™ early educators engaged in ongoing, two-week coaching cycles throughout the school year. Early educators spent two to three hours during each two-week cycle on activities related to their MTP™ program. In the first week of each cycle, they 1) learned about one dimension in the CLASS™ guide, and 2) recorded video of themselves interacting with children.

In the second week of each cycle, they 1) watched short videos of their classroom selected by their coach, 2) responded to questions from their coaches about the videos, and 3) talked with their coaches about their observations and next steps.

The MTP model required early educators to videotape in their classrooms every two weeks. An MTP coach viewed these videos and identified and highlighted the strengths of the early educators’ interactions with children. All coaching was conducted remotely, which allowed flexibility for communication by email or telephone.

Education levels of participants selected for MTP™; N=27

The majority (52%) of MTP™ participants reported having completed a Bachelor’s Degree or higher.

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“Positive aspects of the MTP™ coaching program

- Remote coaching allowed flexibility for coaches and early educators to work together via email, online, or over the phone.
- Coaching was provided in participants’ native languages.
- This component was provided free of charge and was valued at $7,000 in professional development.

“Challenges of MTP™

- Participants were required to commit to the entire 10-month period.
- Employers were required to give permission to participants to videotape in the classrooms.
- The system for distributing and collecting forms and camera equipment was often challenging.

“Issues to consider in the future

- Provide mandatory information sessions and orientations.
- Develop a mechanism in which CARES Plus staff members could speak directly with employers regarding this opportunity.
- Design efficient system to distribute and collect forms and camera equipment.

“My experience with MTP™ program was very interactive and I learned how to look at myself interacting with children in all areas of the dimensions in the CLASS™ guide. This experience has helped me to become a more effective early educator by understanding cognitive and social development in young children.”

Master/Lead Teacher, Center-based Program
Final Thoughts

In this report the WestEd E3 Institute has highlighted findings from the first year of CARES Plus in Santa Clara County. CARES is a program that continues to change and evolve to better meet the needs of the early care and education workforce. As new CARES models are implemented, innovative strategies and requirements are tested while proven ones are enhanced and expanded.

CARES has proven to be an effective method to increase the skills and knowledge of the early education workforce; however the program has its limitations. Providing financial incentives and support services can mitigate many challenges faced by the early education field, but incentives and support do not solve the systemic issues that must be addressed at the state level. Inadequate funding, low educational standards, poor compensation, and the lack of a comprehensive professional development infrastructure, make the ultimate goal of a high-quality workforce unreachable without significant regulatory and legislative changes. These changes must address the problems listed above through short- and long-term strategies that support the current workforce and set the foundation for the next generation of early educators.

Policy Recommendations

- Develop and implement a long-term plan to increase compensation and raise educational requirements in conjunction with establishing a universal career pathway and an early childhood education credential.

- Provide funding to the higher education system to establish preparation programs that offer degrees and credential programs specifically for early childhood educators. A feedback loop between employers and higher education institutions must be established to ensure early educator preparation programs are meeting the goals of the community.

- Develop and fund a comprehensive evaluation agenda focused on early childhood education workforce development. This agenda must be reciprocal, with practice in the field guiding research and research guiding practice in the field.

- Coordinate existing data systems and implement a statewide workforce registry.

- Integrate the Early Childhood Educator Competencies into all areas of professional development.

Promising Practices

In addition to program changes designed to better support participants, the WestEd E3 Institute has also developed services and interactive online tools that made it easier for participants to both meet the CARES Program requirements and pursue a college degree. Designed to complement the financial incentives provided through CARES, these supports include the following:

- A web-based Professional Development and Education Plan (PDEP);
- An online Participant Summary document that outlines a participant’s requirements and current status with the program;
- An online enrollment system designed to make it easier to apply for the program;
- International transcript translation and evaluation services;
- California Child Development Permit application services;
- Bachelor’s Degree Cohort Programs in collaboration with San Jose State University.

The WestEd E3 Institute has accomplished this with its data-driven decision making, collaboration with community partners, and continued participant feedback.
The WestEd E3 Institute wishes to express its sincere appreciation for its CARES partners, without whom this program would never have succeeded. Community partners are Provider Connection and P-TRAC. College partners are DeAnza, Foothill, Gavilan, Mission, National Hispanic University, San Jose City, San Jose State University, and West Valley. These partners have been involved with CARES since the program began in 2001 in Santa Clara County, both on the front line assisting students and around the conference table participating in the development of relevant policy.

CARES is made possible by the generous support of First 5 California, FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, the California Department of Education (AB 212), and the Santa Clara County Early Learning Planning Council.

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