In May 2000, First 5 Los Angeles (LA) made its first program allocation of $12 million, to be spent over three years to improve services to children under 6 years old and their families in the service categories of literacy, health, quality care/training, and special needs. Using a competitive proposal submission process, 18 large grants were awarded to organizations in Los Angeles County (referred to as Child Care I grantees). In January 2001, the First 5 LA Commission recommended a second three-year allocation of $59.1 million, which funded an additional 35 agencies (referred to as Child Care II grantees) to implement programs with similar foci. As part of Child Care II, the Commission also allocated $2.9 million to support child care providers who cared for fewer than 50 children to improve the quality of their care with one-year grants of up to $25,000; 110 small-grant applicants received funding. In the fall of 2001, the Commission began a two-phase process to evaluate both cohorts of the Child Care Initiative.

Phase I

At the time Phase I evaluation data were compiled, Child Care I was completing its first 18 of 36 months and Child Care II had been in existence for 6 months. Using information gathered from grantee proposals, reports, contracts, site visit interviews, and focus groups, the Evaluation, Assessment & Policy Connections (EvAP) evaluation team aggregated large grantee profiles into a countywide profile that reflected the types and locations of the child care services provided. A comprehensive report of the Phase I findings was submitted to First 5 LA in April 2002 and can be found on their website (http://www.first5.org).

Phase II

Phase II of the Child Care Initiative evaluation occurred from August 2002 through January 2005. During Phase II the EvAP evaluation team focused on four areas: Process Evaluation, Outcome Evaluation, Policy Indicators, and Evaluation Capacity Building. Initiative evaluation activities collected information to answer the evaluation questions listed on the following page. As data were collected and reports were generated, they were shared with First 5 LA staff and grantees. The full final report, therefore, does not answer all of the evaluation questions but rather highlights the cumulative findings from the initiative evaluation data collected in the final year of Child Care II grants. This executive summary presents a synopsis of that final report. Key data sources used to gather this information include the web-based Performance Measure Tracking System, 2004 grantee site visits, focus groups, capacity-building efforts, and a meta-evaluation. The EvAP team also reviewed First 5 LA documents, met regularly with First 5 LA staff, and attended Commission and other meetings as indicated.
The Phase II evaluation questions addressed the following:

**Process Evaluation:**
- To what extent has First 5 LA facilitated the work of the grantees?
- What barriers or challenges have been encountered in the implementation of grantee programs, projects, or services?
- How, if at all, have these implementation barriers or challenges been addressed?
- In what ways can First 5 LA improve their support of grantee efforts?
- In what ways are grantees moving toward sustainable programming?
- To what extent are the Commission’s capacity-strengthening efforts effective?
- To what extent has the evaluation of the Child Care Initiative been effective?

**Outcome Evaluation:**
- To what extent have grantees met their intended objectives?
- What outcomes have grantees accomplished?
- What is the value added of grantee programs to child care in Los Angeles County (e.g., additional child care spaces, enhanced training)?

**Policy Indicators:**
- Which grantee-specific performance measures are most relevant to First 5 LA School Readiness Indicators?
- How have SPA and county-level indicators of school readiness changed in Los Angeles County?
- What is the link between changes in children’s welfare indicators and grantee efforts?
- What can the experiences of First 5 LA grantees teach us about the county’s future child care needs?

**Evaluation Capacity Building:**
- To what extent have First 5 LA staff, grantees, and Commissioners enhanced their capacity to understand and apply sound evaluation practices?
- To what extent has First 5 LA expanded its utilization of evaluation findings?
The following tools were used to address the Phase II evaluation questions:

**Web-Based Performance Measure Tracking System**

A web-based reporting system was collaboratively created with First 5 LA staff and grantees to allow the Child Care II grantees, First 5 LA, and the EvAP evaluation team to better monitor and track the progress of the programs. It also was used as a prototype to explore and learn from the logistics of developing a web-based reporting system.

**2004 Grantee Site Visit Interviews**

In addition to site visits that occurred earlier in Phase II, the EvAP evaluation team conducted final site visits with 33 of the 34 Child Care II grantees in the spring of 2004, which was the final fourth quarter of their three-year grants. These site visits were intended as a summative reflection of grantees about their grant experience. The interview protocol addressed several different levels of agency involvement and impact: organization, program, evaluation, and client.

**Focus Groups**

Several focus groups were held to gather feedback about the funding process and grantees’ interactions with First 5 LA. The feedback gathered was often related to communication, quarterly reports, and sustainability. In addition to gathering feedback about the funding process, focus groups were used to provide information about the web-based reporting system, to identify possibilities for policy studies, and to gather grantee recommendations for future programs.

**Capacity-Building Activities**

The EvAP evaluation team conducted several capacity-building activities intended to enhance the evaluation knowledge of the grantees. Evaluation Institutes provided two and five-day training opportunities for grantees and First 5 LA staff to expand their evaluation expertise. Evaluator Exchanges, held in the spring 2003 and 2004, convened Child Care internal and external evaluators to share evaluation tools, techniques, and quandaries. Grantees were invited to three Evaluation Fairs and asked to share their annual evaluation findings using posters and presentations.

**Meta-Evaluation**

The EvAP evaluation team commissioned a meta-evaluation with Dr. Marvin Alkin and Kara Davis Crohn from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) to provide third-party feedback about the Phase II evaluation efforts. The meta-evaluators conducted interviews, distributed surveys, and participated in many of EvAP’s evaluation events (e.g., Evaluation Fair, Evaluation Institute) with grantees.
During the final site visits, 33 of 34 Child Care II grantees were asked to reflect on their experiences as First 5 LA grantees. The following is a summary from these grantee interviews.

Program & Organizational Changes Resulting from the Grant:

- 26 reported the need to train additional staff;
- 25 made changes to the physical space that housed the organization;
- 22 added additional program staff;
- 21 indicated that the Child Care grant created changes to their organization;
- 16 reported that they added services to their programs;
- 12 modified their program services as a result of the Child Care Grant;
- 13 expanded their client focus; and
- 8 modified their client focus.

Evaluation:

- 21 grantees indicated that evaluation decisions were made collaboratively;
- 21 grantees reported that evaluation findings were used to make program modifications and enhance internal program awareness; and
- 10 grantees observed that program evaluators most often assisted programs in data collection training, 9 said they helped with instrument design, and 8 indicated that evaluators helped with technology changes involving data collection.

Sustainability:

- 19 grantees reported that their programs would continue with reduced services;
- 10 grantees indicated their programs would continue at the same level of service;
- 2 grantees said that their programs were ending with the grant; and
- 2 grantees chose not to discuss the future of their program.
As part of First 5 LA’s results-based accountability framework, grantees reported on performance measures related to program-level outcomes. Grantees were allowed to generate performance measures that reflected their individual programs, rather than being required to report on a more finite set of common measures across programs. For the purposes of highlighting grantee accomplishments, performance measures most commonly used across grantees were compiled and collapsed. The following section represents aggregated evaluation results for 22 of the 33 Child Care II grantees. The 11 remaining grantees reported less-commonly occurring performance measure achievements and thus, were not included in this summary:

“Grantees were allowed to generate performance measures that reflected their individual programs.”

**Literacy:** Increased child literacy through direct service programs and parent education.

Ten grantees provided clear evaluation evidence through pre/post parent surveys, standardized observation instruments, focus groups, grantee databases/records, and/or workshop evaluations that children’s literacy had increased.

**Health:** Improved access to dental and health care, including immunizations and increased parent knowledge about health and safety.

Eight grantees provided clear evaluation evidence through databases, screening data, surveys, and pre/post parent assessments, that thousands of children had been screened and immunizations provided as needed; data also showed improvement in parents’ knowledge of health and safety.

**Quality Care/Training:** Increased parent and provider knowledge and interactions with young children.

Eight grantees provided clear evaluation evidence through pre/post parent surveys, standardized observation instruments, focus groups, and/or workshop evaluations that parents and providers increased knowledge and interactions with young children.

**Special Needs:** Increased access to screening, referrals, and services for special needs children.

Three grantees provided clear evaluation evidence through psychological evaluations, therapy, observations, telephone assessments, and standardized child development assessments that children had increased access to special needs services.
County-wide policy indicators were included in the Child Care Initiative evaluation to examine the program impact at the county level. To accomplish this, the EvAP evaluation team and grantees reviewed the Child Care Initiative performance measures in an effort to group them within the 15 Los Angeles County School Readiness Goals. These school readiness goals were identified in 2003 and adopted by both the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and First 5 LA. Of the 15 School Readiness Goals, 11 were linked to Child Care grantees’ performance measures; the other four goals addressed outcomes related to poverty. Below are the school readiness goals with the number of grantees that reported performance measure accomplishments linked to the goal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Los Angeles County School Readiness Goals</th>
<th>Number of Grantees Reporting Positive Program Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Children are born at healthy birth weights.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Children receive preventive health care.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Children are free from abuse and neglect and thrive in permanent homes.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.* Families ensure that kids are safe from unintentional injuries.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Families have supportive networks and are able to find information and assistance.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Families have access to quality child care.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Communities encourage educational attainment for families.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Families and caregivers interact with children in ways that promote cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional, and physical development.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Schools and child care programs promote an environment that is conducive to learning.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Schools, families, and caregivers work together to ensure a positive transition to K-6 education.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Communities support families and children with special needs.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Goals 5 - 8 address poverty issues beyond the scope of the Child Care II programs.

“County-wide policy indicators were included in the Child Care Initiative evaluation to examine the program impact at the county level.”
Child Care I and Child Care II were among the very earliest attempts by First 5 LA, through initiative grants, to promote school readiness among children under 6 years of age in Los Angeles County. The 18 Child Care I grantees and the 35 Child Care II grantees focused their efforts on the service categories of literacy, health, quality care/training, and special needs.

During the 3 years of the Child Care Initiative Evaluation, the EvAP evaluation team collected information about the process, outcome, and policy impacts of grantees' programs. To accomplish this, EvAP worked collaboratively with First 5 LA staff, a database designer, and grantees to build a web-based performance measure reporting system that allowed better monitoring of grants.

This system permitted the reporting and aggregation of performance measures for all Child Care II grantees, which demonstrated grantees' successful achievement of program-level outcomes. Additionally, the evaluation used the web-based system to demonstrate policy accomplishments by grouping performance measure attainment at the program level by the Los Angeles County School Readiness Goals. Finally, the Initiative Evaluation consistently operated from a collaborative evaluation stance, engaging stakeholders in the evaluation process whenever possible.

This approach also contributed to high levels of grantee participation in instrument validation and data collection. EvAP also worked with grantees and First 5 LA staff to directly enhance evaluation capacity through Evaluation Institutes, Evaluation Fairs, and Evaluator Exchanges. Thus, the Phase II Child Care Initiative Evaluation successfully explored a number of evaluation strategies, gathered convincing evidence that the Child Care II grantees accomplished their program outcomes, and summarized the most important of these accomplishments across grantees. Hopefully, subsequent evaluation efforts can build on these lessons learned.

“...The Phase II Child Care Initiative evaluation successfully gathered convincing evidence that the Child Care II grantees accomplished their program outcomes..."