



First 5 Kings County UCP Parent & Me Program

Highlights from the Fiscal Year 2012–13 Evaluation

What is the UCP Parent & Me Program?

The Parent & Me program is a curriculum-based, early education program for parents and their young children. The program offers weekly sessions in a classroom setting where parents and children engage in interactive activities that are developmentally appropriate for the child. Parents are given the tools to promote early learning in the home and to optimize growth and development through play. Children's developmental needs are assessed using the Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP) to guide curriculum development. Parent & Me is implemented by United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of Hanford with funding support from First 5 Kings County.

Program Highlights

- Parent & Me programs reached 241 children and their families in the 2012–13 fiscal year. Seventy-one percent of children were 0–3 years old and 29 percent were preschool-age.
- About 63 percent of enrolled children were assessed with special needs based on UCP assessment criteria. Eleven percent of children entered the program with a known disability.
- More than 90 percent of parents who attended the program indicated that their child's needs were met through participation, and 99 percent highly valued their program experience.
- Parents reported increased frequency of reading with their children while enrolled in the program, with more than 80 percent of parents reporting reading three or more days per week.
- Ninety-two percent of children who exited the program demonstrated age-appropriate development on each of three key measures of development outcomes.

Evaluation Design

First 5 Kings County partnered with EMT Associates, Inc. to conduct an external evaluation of the UCP Parent & Me program. The purpose of the evaluation was to document program implementation and developmental outcomes for participating children across the five First 5 Kings County supported programs and to offer recommendations for future program enhancements. The evaluation included multiple data sources, including intake and utilization records, parent and staff surveys, classroom observation, and group interviews with program instructors. The limited scope evaluation was designed to produce findings at the initiative level based on program records and parent and staff feedback.

First 5 Kings County

First 5 Kings County supported 20 community-based UCP Parent & Me classes in FY 2012–13 across five Kings County communities:

Avenal Parent & Me is located on the Tamarack Elementary School campus, and enrolled 37 children, or 15 percent of all children enrolled countywide. The program predominantly served children 0–3 years of age (86%). About a quarter of children were identified with special developmental needs.

Corcoran Parent & Me is co-located at the Corcoran Family Resource Center, and enrolled 60 children, or 25 percent all children served countywide. About two-thirds of children were 0–3 years of age, and about one-quarter were identified with special developmental needs.

Hanford Parent & Me is located on the Jefferson Elementary School campus in Hanford, enrolling 58 children, or 24 percent of all children served countywide. Three-quarters of children (76%) were 0–3 years old, and more than half (52%) were identified with special developmental needs.

Kettleman City Parent & Me is located at the Kettleman City community site, enrolling 28 children, or 12 percent of all children served countywide. About 61 percent of children were 0–3 years old, and 32 percent were identified with special developmental needs.

Lemoore Parent & Me is located at the UCP site in downtown Lemoore, and enrolled 58 children, or about 24 percent of all children served. More than two-thirds (69%) of children were 0–3 years old, and 45 percent were identified with special developmental needs.

What were the characteristics of children and families served?

The UCP Parent & Me program is a universal early learning program that predominantly targets parents with infants and toddlers 0–3 years of age who reside in Kings County. The program also accommodates preschool-aged children 3–5 years of age who are continuing in the program or whose younger siblings are enrolled. UCP teachers are bilingual and deliver instruction in both Spanish and in English to meet families' language preferences.

The Parent & Me program fills a gap in early childhood systems of care for children with mild to moderate disabilities who are ineligible for state-funded Early Start programs, and who are most likely to benefit from early intervention services. To address special developmental needs of identified children, UCP specialists provide support to Parent & Me instructors within the classroom setting.

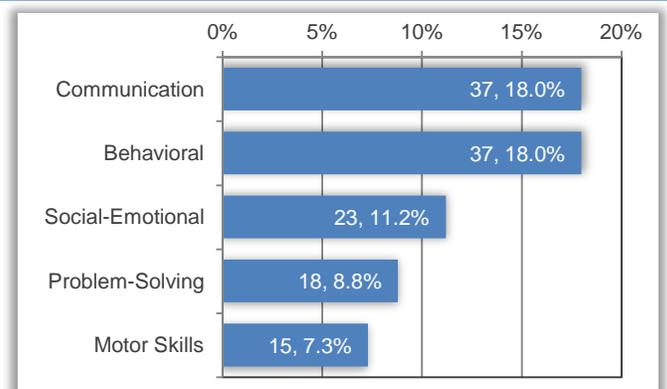
Within the 2012–13 fiscal year:

- Parent & Me served 241 children and their families across five First 5 Kings County community locations. Twenty percent of children served were newly enrolled.
- Nearly two-thirds of children served were infants or toddlers (0–3 years) and the other 29 percent were preschool age. These percentages align with contracting guidelines that set limits on the percentage of preschool-age participants.
- The majority of children (86%) served were Hispanic or Latino and about two-thirds spoke Spanish as their primary language in the home.
- More than 60 percent of children received a special needs designation based on UCP established criteria. Eleven percent of children entered the program with a previously identified disability. The programs operating in larger communities (Hanford, Lemoore, and Corcoran) reached a higher percentage of special needs children, presumably by drawing from a larger pool of prospective participants.
- Parents of nearly half of all children served by the program (45%) expressed concerns about their children's development. The most frequently reported concerns were related to communication (18%) or behavior (18%).
- Among children who exited the program in FY 2012–13, 63 percent were preschool-age (three and a half years or above) at the time of exit. Nineteen

percent were between three and a half and four years, 23 percent were between four and four and a half years, and 21 percent were older than four and a half years. The average age at the time of exit was 43.6 months.

Age (at start of FY2012–13)		
0–35 Months	170	71.1%
36–71 Months	69	28.9%
Gender		
Male	126	55.0%
Female	103	45.0%
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	2.2%
African American	1	0.4%
Hispanic/Latino	196	86.0%
White/Non-Hispanic	15	6.6%
Other/Multi	11	4.8%
Primary Language		
English	69	31.7%
Spanish	149	68.3%
Child Disability		
Yes	25	11.0%
Needs		
Special	151	62.7%
Typical	90	37.3%

Parent Identified Developmental Concerns



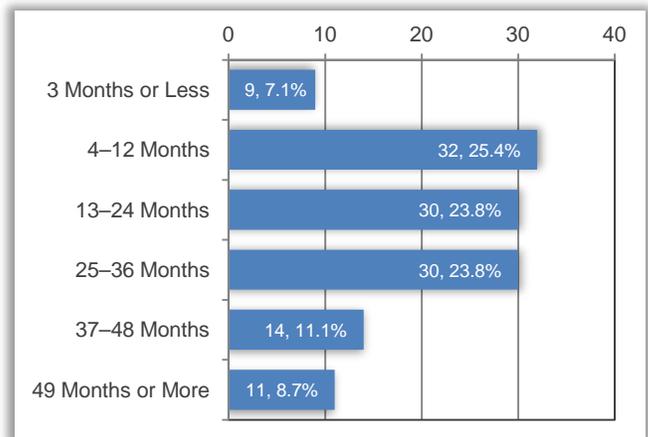
How did families utilize services?

The Parent & Me curriculum uses developmentally appropriate materials and group activities to create opportunities for peer interaction and socialization, art and dramatic play, language and music, and fine and gross motor activity. The program emphasis is on teaching parents the skills they need to support their children's development at home, and providing opportunities to apply skills in a classroom setting. Parent & Me classes are offered one time per week in one-and-a-half hour class sessions. Teachers indicate that the average class size is around six child participants attending with their parents. Teachers in Hanford, Corcoran, and Lemoore perceive that the demand for services exceeds the number of available spaces.

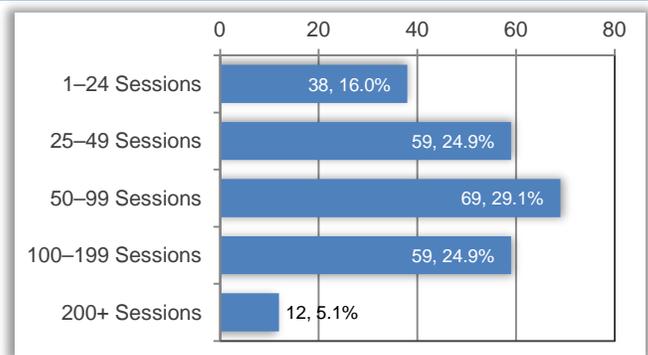
Program records documenting participation indicate that families are highly committed to the program and remain enrolled for a significant duration. Specifically:

- Forty-four percent of children were enrolled for three or more years, 24 percent were enrolled from one to two years, and another quarter were enrolled from four months to one year. Only 7 percent of children attended for three months or fewer.
- Families attended an average of 76.7 classes over the course of their enrollment, and 30 percent attended 100 classes or more.
- More than one-quarter of families (29%) served enrolled multiple children.

Length of Parent & Me Enrollment



Average Number of Sessions Attended



What were staff member perceptions about their role and the program's impact?

To understand more about how Parent & Me teachers work with enrolled families, staff were asked to complete a brief survey and to participate in a focus group interview. Nine staff members were surveyed, three-quarters of whom had been employed by the program for five years or more. When asked about their roles as teachers in Parent & Me:

- Eighty-eight percent of staff agreed that they enjoyed teaching the program and felt like they had the right amount of training and preparation to do their job well.
- Eighty-eight percent also felt that their work schedule was a good fit for them, although staff did identify challenges related to their level of compensation.
- Seventy-five percent of staff felt they received the support they needed from UCP to do their job well.

When asked for their perceptions about the impact of the program on children and families:

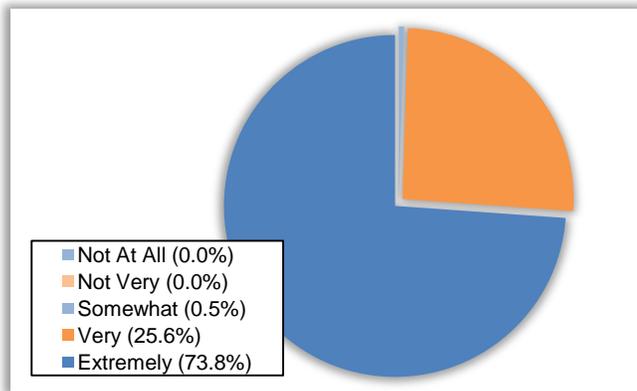
- All teachers 'very much' agreed that Parent & Me helped children learn and develop new skills and to get along well with other children.
- All teachers also 'very much' agreed that the program provided parents with books to read with their children and help parents provide healthy food choices.
- Eighty-seven percent "very much" agreed that the program helped parents feel more confident in their parenting and 75 percent felt the program had taught parents about their child's growth and development.

When asked about needs for additional training related to planning program curriculum, conducting developmental assessments, or communicating with families about children's development, teachers perceived very few professional development needs.

How did families rate the quality of Parent & Me?

Parent surveys were used to document parent perceptions about the overall quality of classroom instruction and their interactions with Parent & Me staff. Parent satisfaction surveys specifically focused on the perceived quality of staffing and perceived effects on child outcomes, as well as overall satisfaction with the service experience. Parents rated Parent & Me services very highly overall as evidenced by the following findings.

How valuable was your experience? (n=195)



Perceived Program Effects on Child Outcomes

- Seventy-two percent of parents “strongly agreed” that their child was learning how to get along well with other children;
- Seventy-two percent of parents “strongly agreed” that they are more confident in their parenting;

- Eighty-two percent of parents “strongly agreed” that they better understood the importance of reading with their child;
- Seventy-five percent of parents “strongly agreed” that they understand more about their child’s growth and development;
- Eighty percent of parents “strongly agreed” that they are more knowledgeable about activities they can do at home;
- Seventy-one percent of parents “strongly agreed” that they have access to more books to read with their child;
- Eighty percent of parents “strongly agreed” that their child has developed new skills;
- Seventy-four percent of parents “strongly agreed” that they are more aware of how to provide their child with healthy food choices;

Satisfaction with Staff

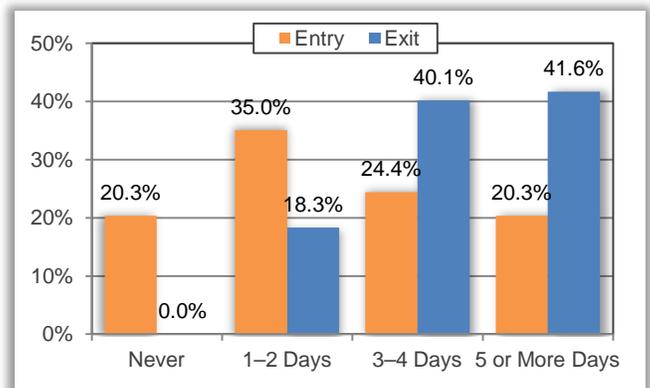
- Seventy-six percent of parents “strongly agreed” that staff were courteous and professional;
- Seventy-two percent of parents “strongly agreed” that staff presented information in a way that is easy to understand;
- Seventy-seven percent of parents “strongly agreed” that staff members made them feel comfortable; and,
- Eighty-one percent of parents “strongly agreed” that staff members interacted with them and their children in a positive and supportive way.

How did the program influence early literacy activities?

Parent & Me aims to strengthen parents in their roles as their child’s first teachers, for example, by encouraging them to engage in literacy and early learning activities at home, such as daily reading and storytelling. Parents participate in model book sharing and reading activities with their children on a weekly basis as part of structured sessions and all children are provided with a book to take home every week. Results of parent surveys found that:

- **Before** their participation in Parent and Me, one in every five parents ‘never’ read with their children.
- **After** enrolling in Parent & Me, all parents read at least one or two times a week and four out of five parents read three days or more (83%).

First 5 Kings County (n=197)



Did children show progress in their development?

Children who enroll in Parent & Me receive a developmental assessment at the time of enrollment. UCP uses the Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP) as an assessment tool to structure observations of children's behavior, to identify children with special needs and to guide the curriculum for each child. The HELP is composed of age-specific skills or "strands" that are developmentally sequenced. The HELP Strands can be translated into a seven-point functional rating on three Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) outcomes, which include: 1) positive social emotional skills, 2) acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, and 3) use of appropriate behaviors. Comparisons of intake and exit ratings show significant gains in children's development. over their time of enrollment. Specifically:

- At the time of intake, 63 percent of children demonstrated age-appropriate development (i.e., rating=7) on measures of positive social relationships, 19 percent were assessed as borderline (6), 13 percent demonstrated a mix of age-appropriate and delayed behaviors (5), and 5 percent performed below age-appropriate functioning (4 or less). Children demonstrated significant improvement with, 95 percent demonstrating age-appropriate social skills at exit.
- At intake, 48 percent of children demonstrated age-appropriate development on measures of acquiring and using skills, 31 percent were assessed as borderline, 13 percent were assessed as showing a

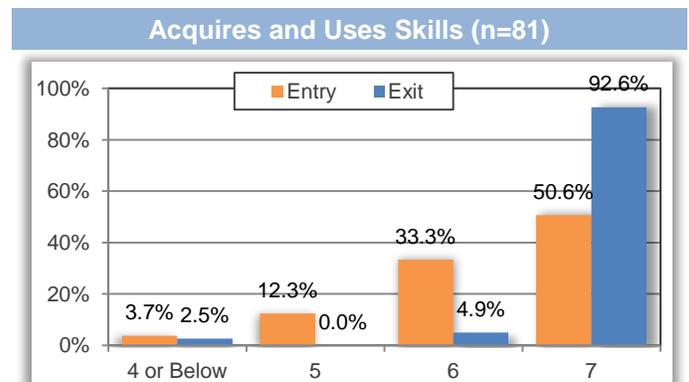
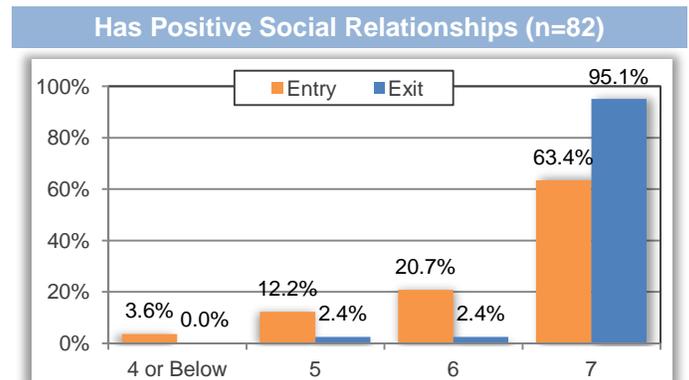
mix of age-appropriate and delayed behaviors, and 9 percent were performing below age-appropriate functioning. By the time of exit, 93 percent of children were demonstrating age-appropriate development.

- At the time of intake, 58 percent of children demonstrated age-appropriate development in taking appropriate action to meet personal needs, 29 percent were assessed as borderline, 10 percent showed a mix of age-appropriate and delayed development, and 3 percent were functioning below expected age level. Children again demonstrated significant improvement in developmental outcomes, with 95 percent achieving age-appropriate functioning at exit.

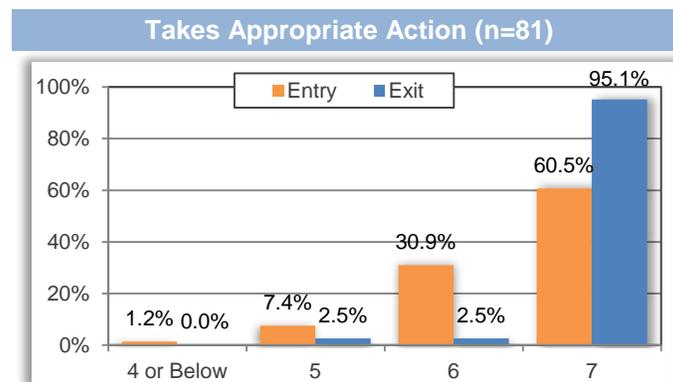
For children who entered Parent & Me with any delays in social development, the largest gains occurred between intake and the first progress assessment (+20%) followed by smaller gains from progress to exit (+2.8%). This pattern was similar for measures of acquiring and using skills (i.e., +16.8% average gains from entry to progress and +2.5% from progress to exit) and measures of taking action to meet personal needs (i.e., +14.9% average gain from entry to progress and +2.6% gain from progress to exit). The average length of time between the first and second assessments was 10.8 months, and the average length of time between the second assessment and exit was 20.0 months.

Positive Social Relationships	Entry	Exit
Total (n=82)	6.40	6.93
0–35 Months (n=30)	6.43	6.87
Special Needs (n=19)	6.45	6.73
Typical Needs (n=11)	6.42	6.95
36–71 Months (n=52)	6.38	6.96
Special Needs (n=22)	6.18	6.91
Typical Needs (n=30)	6.53	7.00

Acquires and Uses Skills	Entry	Exit
Total (n=81)	6.30	6.88
0–35 Months (n=30)	6.20	6.83
Special Needs (n=19)	6.00	6.64
Typical Needs (n=11)	6.32	6.95
36–71 Months (n=51)	6.35	6.90
Special Needs (n=22)	5.91	6.77
Typical Needs (n=29)	6.69	7.00



Takes Appropriate Action	Entry	Exit
Total (n=81)	6.51	6.93
0–35 Months (n=29)	6.59	6.86
Special Needs (n=19)	6.50	6.70
Typical Needs (n=10)	6.63	6.95
36–71 Months (n=52)	6.46	6.96
Special Needs (n=22)	6.41	6.77
Typical Needs (n=30)	6.50	7.00



Summary and Conclusions

Why is there a need for Parent & Me?

Children in the first years of life are rapidly acquiring new skills and reaching important developmental milestones. However, for some children, normal development is affected by delays or disabilities that impact how they learn and grow. The optimal time to address these concerns is in the first few years of life when early identification and access to intervention can improve developmental outcomes and prevent further progression of delays. Yet despite the benefits of early intervention, early childhood systems are often fragmented, under-resourced, and lack capacity to monitor children's progress and detect issues or concerns early on. As a consequence, many delays remain undiagnosed until children reach school-age, when eligibility is more restricted and the optimal window for intervention is closing. A strategic priority for First 5 Kings County has been to fund programs that help to identify children with developmental concerns and to give parents the tools to more effectively address concerns in their role as their child's first teacher. Parent & Me provides families with these opportunities.

What was learned through evaluation?

The Parent & Me evaluation demonstrates UCP's successes in several key areas, notably, that programs are implemented at capacity, staff successfully engage children at risk for educational disparities, and parents highly value their participation. Importantly, Parent & Me teachers also report high levels of satisfaction in their roles, as evidenced by the low level of turnover among teaching staff. The evaluation also shows that after a period of enrollment, families are promoting early learning in the home through increased frequency of reading, and children are demonstrating significant gains toward achieving age-appropriate functioning.

One consideration raised through the evaluation relates not to the quality of implementation, but rather, to how UCP can optimally allocate scarce resources. Although

Parent & Me is a universal program, its core strength is that it creates access to specialized resources to support families who are struggling to meet children's special developmental needs. A key priority is to ensure that all children who would benefit from these supports are aware of the program and have access to enrollment. UCP can achieve this, in part, by continuing to prioritize enrollment for children whose parents identify concerns, and by strengthening outreach and referral networks among early childhood programs and providers.

UCP might also explore ways to further optimize children's involvement. Parent & Me is designed to teach parents strategies to use at home to support their children's learning. Children appear to achieve the largest developmental gains early on in participation, although many families are engaged in the program long-term, often beyond the targeted 0–3 age range. This is in part, due to a lack of affordable preschool options for transitioning children that would benefit them by providing more intensive learning opportunities (more than once per week). This suggests that children may remain in the program beyond an optimal point, particularly when demand exceeds available spaces (i.e., new children may benefit more than continuing children). UCP might consider ways to graduate children who achieve age-appropriate development and whose families are 'ready' to transition, to make room for new families. However, the potential benefits of enrolling new children must be balanced against the potential cost of disengaging families, or of children losing ground if families exit too early and there are no alternatives available to them. This suggests a need within the larger early childhood system for a coordinated approach to resource development and service delivery that differentiates program purposes and audiences (e.g., reaching children with special needs), addresses gaps in services, and systematically links children with age-appropriate programs that are best suited to their individual needs.