LOS ANGELES CHILD WELFARE-EARLY EDUCATION PARTNERS INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT: FINAL EVALUATION

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This report describes an evaluation of the Los Angeles Child Welfare-Early Education Partners Infrastructure Project (LACWEEP), which was funded from October 2011 to August 2013 by a U.S. Children’s Bureau “Child Welfare-Early Education Partnerships to Expand Protective Factors for Children with Early Child Welfare Involvement” grant [Award Number: 90C01062]. The overarching goal of LACWEEP was to increase access to high quality early care and education (ECE) services for young children in the child welfare system in Long Beach, California. The University of California, Los Angeles Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities (UCLA-CHCFC) was the primary grantee and administered LACWEEP in close partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Office of Head Start, and the Inter-University Consortium (IUC). Dr. Sacha Klein from Michigan State University School of Social Work oversaw the project evaluation.

Overview of the Problem

LACWEEP was designed in response to mounting evidence that comprehensive and high quality early care and education (ECE) services can benefit children in the child welfare system. A number of studies have documented associations between ECE access and/or program participation and reductions in parents’ use of corporal punishment and in child maltreatment (Klein, 2011; Love et al., 2002; Magnuson Mersky, Topitzes & Reynolds, 2010; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005; Reynolds & Robertson, 2003; Zhai, Waldfogel, & Brooks-Gunn, 2013). Research also provides strong evidence that ECE can improve developmental outcomes for at-risk children, including those who have been abused and/or neglected (Anderson et al., 2003; Dinehart, L.H., Manfra, L., Katz, L.F. & Hartman, S.C. (2012). Guralnick, 1998; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Ramey et al., 2000; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Results from a recent study even suggest that ECE services may help promote placement stability for young children in foster care (Meloy and Phillips, 2012).

Despite this evidence regarding the potential of high quality ECE services to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system, rates of ECE participation for this population appear to be relatively low (Casanueva et al., 2012: Dinehart, Manfra, Katz & Hartman, 2012; Smithgall, Jarpe-Ratner & Walker, 2010; Ward et al., 2009). This
reflects a significant missed opportunity to assist a group of highly vulnerable children. The significance of this 'missed opportunity' is magnified by a steady increase in the numbers of infants and young children entering the U.S. child welfare system during the last two decades (Klein & Harden, 2011). Nearly half (46.7%) of the 676,569 maltreated children identified by U.S. child protection authorities during Federal Fiscal Year 2011 were 0-5 years old (ACF, 2011), and these children are now the largest and fastest growing age cohort in the U.S. foster care system (AFCARS, 2012; Klee & Halfon, 1987; Vig et al., 2005).

This is concerning because infants and young children are more likely than older children to experience serious cognitive and socio-emotional developmental impairment, injury and death as a result of child abuse and neglect (ACF, 2009; Montgomery & Trocme, 2004; Sorenson & Peterson, 1994; Schnitzer & Ewigman, 2005; Straus & Gelles, 1992; Stahmer et al., 2005; Zimmer & Panko, 2006). However, early detection of maltreatment by child welfare authorities also represents an opportunity to intervene in the lives of young victims when their developing brains are most responsive to new experiences and improved environments (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000), thereby maximizing the chances of improving their developmental trajectories, safety and permanency outcomes.

Whether or not this opportunity is realized, however, depends in large part on the extent to which infrastructure is in place to ensure seamless service coordination across child welfare and early developmental service systems. Yet, what research exists, suggests that formal service coordination between the child welfare and ECE sectors remains rare (Ward, Yoon, Atkins et al, 2009).

**Overview of the Target Community & Population**

LACWEEP pilots an infrastructure-building approach to improving child welfare and ECE service coordination. Specifically, it attempts to improve collaboration between the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the ECE service sector as a means of increasing ECE referrals, enrollment and supports for children birth through four-year old with open DCFS cases who are residing in the City of Long Beach. Long Beach is located in Los Angeles County, approximately 20 miles south of downtown Los Angeles. Los Angeles County is home to the nation’s largest child welfare population, including more than 11,000 children under the age of five (DCFS, 2013). Consistent with national trends, infants and young children in Los Angeles County
are over-represented in the child welfare system and disproportionately at risk of experiencing maltreatment. On average, 12.7 out of every 1000 children living in Los Angeles in 2012 were substantiated victims of maltreatment, but the figures were notably higher for infants and young children: 24.2 out every 1000 infants less than a year old, 14.7 out of every 1000 children one to two-years old, and 14.2 out of every 1000 children three- to five-years old (Needell et al., 2013).

The City of Long Beach was selected as the target site for the proposed project largely because of its size, diversity, multiple pockets of poverty, and high rates of child welfare system involvement for families with infants and young children. Long Beach is the second largest city in Los Angeles County and the 36th largest city in the nation, with a population of 462,257, which makes it more than half the size of several states in U.S. It is a racially and ethnically diverse urban community with residents who are 46.1% White, 13.5% African American, 0.7% Native American, 12.9% Asian, 1.1% Pacific Islander, 20.3% from other races, and 5.3% from two or more races. Approximately 41 percent (40.8%) of the residents are Hispanic or Latino of any race. The median income for a family is $40,002. About 19.3% of families and 22.8% of the population are below the poverty line, including 32.7% of children (U.S. Census, 2010).

At the time LACWEEP began, DCFS’ South County Office supervised approximately 867 children birth through four years old, and the City of Long Beach, located within the DCFS South County Region, was home to 523 DCFS-supervised children in this age group. Of these children, 37 percent (n=192) were three- to four-years old, while the remaining 63 percent (n=331) were infants and toddlers. Some of these young children were in traditional foster care placements (21%), but the largest group (48%) was living at home with parents, and 26 percent were placed with relatives. The vast majority were children of color; 34% African American and 44% Latino.

Based on these demographics, LACWEEP decided to focus on increasing ECE access not just for preschoolers in foster care, but for all DCFS-supervised children birth through four-years old regardless of where they were in out-of-home placement or living with their families. Recognizing that cultural factors may affect ECE program preferences, LACWEEP also defined its goal of increasing access to ‘high quality ECE’ broadly to include Head Start, Early Head Start, state preschools, other licensed child care centers, and the Preschool Without Walls program. Preschool Without Walls offers an alternative to formal ECE in which ECE professionals conduct community-based early education classes with groups of parents and their children that are designed to facilitate
developmentally appropriate play and learning activities. This program was developed in part to meet the needs of Latino parents in Los Angeles County, some of whom are reluctant to place their children in formal ECE settings because of cultural beliefs that it is the mother’s responsibility to care for young children at home.

Figure 1 depicts the boundaries of the DCFS South County Regional Office catchment area, which serves the LACWEEP target community of Long Beach, California. It also depicts the locations of early care and education providers in this area in relationship to 2010 child maltreatment referral rates.

Figure 1. Boundary of South County Regional Office Catchment Area and Locations of Early Care and Education Providers

Prior to implementation of the LACWEEP grant, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) took several preliminary steps to address the need for improved child welfare – ECE service coordination. Most notably, they hired an Early Education Manager in 2008 responsible for facilitating access to ECE for DCFS-supervised children. In 2011, they also implemented an electronic Head Start referral system that allowed their caseworkers to refer three- and four-year olds to Head
Start programs administered by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) simply by logging onto their work computers and answering two questions regarding each age-eligible child.

This referral system was well received by caseworkers and appeared to increase Head Start referral rates for DCFS-supervised children, but it also had several limitations. First, only LACOE Head Start programs were included in the system, which meant that it was not very useful for child welfare staff and families residing in parts of Los Angeles County where LACOE does not oversee the local Head Start programs. This includes Long Beach, where Head Start programs are primarily operated by the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD). Secondly, the system solely facilitated referrals to Head Start programs, offering no mechanism for connecting children to other types of ECE programs when Head Start programs were full, not accessible or inappropriate given a family or child’s needs. In addition, DCFS’ electronic Head Start referral system only processed referrals for preschool-aged children, excluding infants and toddlers in need of Early Head Start or another ECE services. Moreover, the referral system was just that, a uni-directional referral system that communicated information to LACOE about DCFS children in need of Head Start services, but that did not routinely transmit information back to DCFS informing caseworkers if/when referred children were actually enrolled in these services and whether they were making developmental progress. Part of the reason for this one-way communication was that both DCFS and Head Start were concerned about violating HIPAA\(^1\) and FERPA\(^2\) privacy laws in the process of sharing child or family information. Lastly, while the electronic referral system made referring children to Head Start programs a quick and easy operational task for DCFS caseworkers, it did not do anything to promote their understanding of why ECE services were valuable for their clients, nor did it increase their capacity to work effectively with ECE providers, parents, caregivers, Court personnel and/or other stakeholders to help young children access high quality ECE programs with the greatest potential to improve their outcomes.

Overview of the Program Model

LACWEEP was designed to address the limitations noted above. It attempted to

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do so by pursuing the following four infrastructure development objectives:

- **Obj 1**: Expand the electronic DCFS-Head Start referral system to include the 23 Head Start/Early Head delegate agencies of the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD).

- **Obj 2**: Implement a system for referring and linking DCFS children birth through four years old living in Long Beach whom LBUSD Head Start/Early Head agencies do not have the capacity to serve in a timely manner to other high-quality ECE providers.

- **Obj 3**: Develop and implement a series of trainings for Long Beach (a) child welfare staff, (b) ECE & other early childhood systems providers, (c) Juvenile Dependency Court personnel, and (d) parents and caregivers of infants and young children on the benefits of ECE for children in the child welfare system and how to navigate relevant systems to obtain services.

- **Obj 4**: Convene an Advisory Committee (composed of representatives from DCFS, ECE and other early childhood service sectors, parents and caregivers of infants and young children) charged with improving service coordination to better meet the developmental and family support needs of children birth through four years old in the child welfare system. This Committee was expected to:
  - **Sub-Obj 4A**: Create and implement an information sharing protocol that enables ECE providers to share developmental screenings and assessments of DCFS children living in Long Beach with DCFS caseworkers and Juvenile Dependency Court personnel.
  - **Sub-Obj 4B**: Develop a data collection infrastructure plan to facilitate ongoing tracking of ECE service utilization by DCFS children in Long Beach and future measurement of impacts on safety, permanency and well-being outcomes, including school readiness and school performance.
  - **Sub-Obj 4C**: Develop a three- to five-year strategic plan for applying lessons learned from child welfare-ECE infrastructure development efforts in Long Beach to inform expansion throughout the rest of DCFS’ South County Region.

Accomplishment of these implementation objectives was then expected to facilitate achievement of the three outcome objectives by the end of the grant award period:

- **Obj 5**: Strengthen collaborative relationships and improve service coordination
among child welfare, ECE, and other early childhood systems in DCFS’ South County Region (principally in Long Beach).

- **Obj 6:** Increase knowledge among South County Region child welfare staff, ECE providers, Juvenile Dependency Court personnel, parents and caregivers regarding the benefits of ECE for infants and young children in the child welfare system and how to navigate relevant service systems.

- **Obj 7:** Increase access to high quality ECE services for DCFS children birth through four years old living in DCFS’ South County Region:
  - **Sub-Obj 7A:** Increase the number and percent of DCFS children birth through four years old living in Long Beach referred to high-quality early education programs.
  - **Sub-Obj 7B:** Increase the number and percent of DCFS children birth through four years old living in Long Beach enrolled in high-quality early education programs.

The LACWEEP leadership team anticipates that accomplishment of these infrastructure and short term outcome objectives will eventually lead to several additional longer term outcomes related to improving child safety, permanency and child/family well-being. These longer term outcomes are included in the Logic Model that follows. However, as noted in the LACWEEP grant proposal, these goals could not realistically be achieved during the relatively brief grant period. Thus, this report focuses on LACWEEP’s accomplishment of the seven initial objectives detailed above.
Roles & Responsibilities of LACWEPP Leadership Team

To accomplish these objectives, LACWEPP relied on a close collaboration between four organizations: 1) The UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities (CHCFC), 2) the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), 3) the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Office of Head Start, and 4) the Inter-University Consortium (IUC). The CHCFC is a multidisciplinary, community-focused research, policy and training center at UCLA whose mission includes increasing the efficiency, effectiveness and distribution of health and social services. As the primary grantee, CHCFC provided administrative and fiscal oversight for LACWEPP under the direction of the Principal Investigator Dr. Todd Franke. CHCFC also provided project management services, including instrumental staff support for the Advisory Committee and workgroups from Ph.D. student Stephanie Benson. Ms. Benson also assisted with the data collection for the LACWEPP evaluation.

DCFS is the public child welfare agency that serves the City of Long Beach as well as the rest of Los Angeles County. Both DCFS’ Education and Mentoring Division and the South Region Office were actively involved in implementing LACWEPP. DCFS’
Early Education Manager Steve Sturm co-led the LACWEEP Advisory Committee, actively participated in the Curriculum Development Committee that was responsible for designing the LACWEEP trainings, helped develop DCFS-ECE information sharing and data tracking protocols, oversaw expansion of the electric Head Start referral system to include infants and toddlers and LBUSD Head Start and Early Head Start providers, and provided the evaluation team with monthly data from the expanded electronic referral system. Frank Ramos, Regional Administrator of DCFS’ South Region during the initial implementation of LACWEEP, actively participated on the LACWEEP Advisory Committee and a member of his management team was part of the Curriculum Development Subcommittee. Additionally, both Mr. Ramos and his replacement, Art Leiras, who took over the role of DCFS’ South Region Administrator part way through implementation of LACWEEP, encouraged and facilitated their staff’s participation in LACWEEP trainings and focus groups.

The LBUSD Office of Head Start operates 21 center-based Head Start sites located throughout Long Beach and two Early Head Start center-based sites. Assistant Director Luanne Mauro-Atkinson co-lead the LACWEEP Advisory Committee with Steve Sturm, was actively involved the Curriculum Development Subcommittee and the development of DCFS-ECE information sharing and data tracking protocols, facilitated several of the LACWEEP trainings, and encouraged and facilitated LBUSD Head Start staff’s participation in LACWEEP trainings and focus groups. In addition, LBUSD Head Start provided a part-time Child Welfare-Early Education Service Coordinator who was responsible for processing ECE referrals from DCFS, accepting referrals when program openings were available, and linking children and families to alternatives to LBUSD’s Head Start and Early Head Start programs when appropriate. This Coordinator also tracked DCFS referral outcomes for the evaluation and developed a system for communicating with DCFS caseworkers regarding the status of ECE referrals.

The IUC is a collaborative of six Los Angeles-based graduate programs of Social Work that provide in-service training for newly hired DCFS staff and specialized pre-service for MSW students preparing for careers in child welfare. IUC oversaw implementation of the LACWEEP trainings, worked closely with DCFS and LBUSD Head Start to help them develop reliable data tracking systems, actively participated in the LACWEEP Steering Committee and Curriculum Development Committee, and helped collect and analyze data for the evaluation.
Overview of the Evaluation

The LACWEEP evaluation described in this report was designed to assess the extent to which the project’s infrastructure development objectives (Objectives 1-4) were successfully implemented, the extent to which LACWEEP accomplished its Short Term Outcomes (Objectives 5-7), and to chronicle key lessons learned along the way about improving child welfare-ECE service coordination to increase access to high quality ECE services for children in the child welfare system. Toward these ends, the evaluation includes both a process and an outcome study.

The process study focused on verifying accomplishment of the project’s infrastructure building activities (Objectives 1-4) via a combination of direct observation, document review, software demonstration, and key informant interviews. The research questions that the process study was designed to answer are: 1) Were the infrastructure deliverables developed and implemented as planned? How/how not? Why/why not?; 2) Are the implemented infrastructure deliverables functioning as intended? How/how not? Why/why not?; 3) What factors contributed to successful implementation of the infrastructure deliverables?; and 4) What barriers to implementation were encountered (if any)?

The outcome study focused on assessing the extent to which the project accomplished Objectives 5-7. Unlike the process study, which is exploratory in nature, the outcome study is explanatory and tests the following hypotheses:

- Implementation of LACWEEP will strengthen collaborative relationships and improve service coordination among child welfare, ECE and other early childhood systems in DCFS’ South County Region.

- Implementation of LACWEEP will increase knowledge among South County Region child welfare staff, ECE providers, Juvenile Dependency Court personnel, parents and caregivers regarding the benefits of ECE for infants and young children in the child welfare system and how to navigate relevant service systems.

- Implementation of LACWEEP will increase access to high quality ECE services for DCFS children birth through four years old living in DCFS’ South County Region.

The outcome evaluation employs a mixed methods approach that primarily relies
on quantitative methods, but also augments this approach with some qualitative methods. To assess Objective 5, we surveyed Advisory Committee members about the strength and types of collaboration occurring between their organizations both at the initial convening of the Advisory Committee meeting in January 2012 and again one year later. Then we used social network analysis to measure whether the presence and strength of organizational ties (collaboration) increased over the course of the project.

To evaluate Objective 6, we administered pre- and post-tests to child welfare staff, ECE staff, and parents/caregivers who participated in the LACWEEP trainings. These surveys measured changes in trainees’ perceived competency in core learning objectives and also their ability to correctly answer a series of content-based questions designed to objectively test their mastery of the training material. We also collected qualitative feedback from training participants about their suggestions for improving the training.

To evaluate Objective 7, we collected monthly data throughout the course of the project on the number of ECE referrals and enrollments for the target population. These numbers were compared to ECE referral rates for the target community in the year preceding the grant. Unfortunately, the baseline data available for comparison purposes was limited to three- and four-year olds, as the DCFS Head Start Referral System did not include infants and toddlers prior to the grant. The baseline data was also restricted to referrals only, as actual ECE enrollment was not tracked prior to grant. During the project period, we also collected data on the characteristics of children in the target population who were and were not referred for ECE services, and, when applicable, the reasons that DCFS caseworkers gave for not making ECE referrals and the reasons that LBUSD gave for why referred children were not successfully enrolled in ECE. We use descriptive statistics to relate these findings.

Lastly, toward the end of the grant period we conducted a series of 10 focus groups with child welfare, ECE staff, and parents and caregivers in Long Beach to gather information about their experiences with the expanded DCFS ECE referral and service linkage system and their perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with accessing and providing ECE services to children in the child welfare system. We report the themes that emerged during these focus group discussions and their implications for facilitating ECE access for young children in the child welfare system.
Organization of This Report

The remainder of this report details the LACWEEP evaluation findings for each of the seven project objectives. For the process objectives (1-4), we describe the extent to which the proposed intervention or activity was implemented, our research/verification methods, key outputs, contextual events and other factors that facilitated implementation, implementation challenges or barriers, and lessons learned about how to deal with these challenges/barriers. For the three outcome objectives (5-7), we describe our research methods, report our findings, and interpret these findings in light of the strengths and limitations of our evaluation methodology. The final chapter of this report discusses the policy and practice implications of these evaluation results and concludes with a list of recommendations for improving child welfare-early education coordination and increasing child welfare-supervised children’s access to high quality early education services based on the evaluation findings.
Evaluation of Objective 1: Expand the electronic DCFS-Head Start referral system to include LBUSD Head Start and Early Head Start agencies

Intervention/Activity

Prior to implementation of LACWEEP, DCFS caseworkers had access to an electronic referral system that alerted them regarding Head Start service eligibility for age-eligible children on their caseloads. This system also enabled them to quickly and easily refer three- and four-year olds to the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Head Start office with just ‘two clicks’ of their computer mouse. When a DCFS caseworker logged into the local intranet and accessed the Head Start Referral System application on his/her computer, a table appeared listing the name of each age-eligible child on their caseload next to a statement indicating whether that child was “Enrolled” or “Not Enrolled” in a Head Start program. If the child was not enrolled, an “Update/Enroll” hyperlink appeared next to the child’s name. By clicking on this link, the DCFS worker was taken to a screen that asked him/her to confirm consent from a parent (for children living at home) or caregiver (for children placed in out-of-home care) to submit an application for enrollment of that child to a Head Start program. If the DCFS worker indicated consent, the child's basic case information would become part of an automated Excel report of “batched” referrals that DCFS’ Early Education Manager generated on a weekly basis and emailed to a primary contact at LACOE Head Start for processing. If the DCFS worker checked “no” consent, s/he was taken to a screen that asked for the reason for not referring the child to Head Start. Possible responses included: a) “Caregiver not interested”; b) “Child is already participating in an early care or education program”; c) “Child has special needs that program cannot accommodate”; d) Program’s hours are not feasible for family”; and e) Parent/Caregiver won’t transport”. If the worker selected the “child is already participating in an ECE program” option, s/he was then asked to indicate the type of ECE program in which the child was already enrolled (See Appendix 1 for a schematic depicting this referral system).

This electronic Head Start referral system was fairly successful in encouraging DCFS caseworkers to refer children to Head Start (personal communication, Steve Sturm, DCFS Early Education Manager, June 29, 2011). However, approximately one out of eight DCFS children under the age of five are supervised by DCFS’ South County
Regional Office and most of the Head Start agencies in this region are delegates of the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Office of Head Start rather than LACOE. Thus, LACWEEP proposed expanding the existing DCFS-LACOE Head Start electronic referral system to include LBUSD’s 21 delegate Head Start agencies and 2 Early Head Start centers.

Based on the large numbers of infants and toddlers supervised by DCFS in Long Beach and evidence that high quality ECE services may also benefit these children and their parents/caregivers (See Introduction chapter), LACWEEP also proposed expanding the electronic referral system to include children birth through two-years old residing in the target community. Previously, this system only identified and facilitated referrals for three- and four-year olds.

LACWEEP also proposed more fully automating DCFS’ electronic Head Start referral system by creating an interface between this system and the ChildPlus case management software used by both LBUSD and LACOE Head Start. This would allow referrals to be transmitted directly to Head Start, bypassing the extra step involved in “batching” (aggregating) referrals for manual submission to Head Start by DCFS’ Early Education Manager. It was hoped that this interface would be replicable for other child welfare agencies partnering with the more than 1,000 Head Start and Early Head Start programs around that country (http://www.childplus.com/ContactUs/aboutus.aspx) that also use ChildPlus.

Research/Verification Methods

To evaluate implementation of the deliverables associated with Objective 1, the evaluation team conducted four in-person interviews with DCFS Early Education Manager Steve Sturm on March 1, 2012; October 3, 2012; March 31, 2013; and June 11, 2013 regarding the status of the proposed expansion of the electronic Head Start referral system. During the final semi-structured interview on June 11, 2013, Mr. Sturm was asked about how the electronic referral system had been updated/improved over the course of the grant period; specific factors that contributed to, as well as impeded, improvements/updates; his perception of the extent to which the changes made through LACWEEP increased the efficacy and efficiency of the referral system, specifically with respect to coordination between DCFS and LBUSD; and his perceptions of lessons learned (good and bad) in terms of how the electronic referral system was operationalized throughout the grant period.
Mr. Sturm also provided a software demonstration for members of the evaluation team on March 1, 2012 that involved: a) walking them through the expanded referral process from the perspective of a DCFS caseworker trying to refer a child living in Long Beach for ECE services, and also b) a demonstration of the ‘batching” procedure used to aggregate and transmit referrals to LBUSD’s Office of Head Start. Verification of the batching procedure consisted of logging onto the electronic referral system, generating and downloading an Excel spreadsheet of all referrals over the course of the previous week made by DCFS child welfare workers, and sending this spreadsheet via email to LBUSD Head Start.

Additionally, Mr. Sturm provided the evaluation team with the referral data (de-identified) for the LACWEEP target population on a monthly basis. He also shared summaries of this data at the bi-monthly LACWEEP Advisory Committee meetings throughout the duration of the project; and the Advisory Committee completed a survey during the final quarter of the grant that included a question asking them to rate how sustainable or ‘actionable’ they believe LACWEEP’s changes to the electronic referral system to be.

Lastly, the evaluation team conducted a series of four focus groups with DCFS caseworkers and supervisors in the South Region Office between November 2012 and February 2013 in order to gather information about their experience accessing ECE services for children on their caseloads and their perceptions of the value of these services for their clients. The interview protocol for these focus groups included a question about DCFS workers’ experience with, and perceptions of, the expanded electronic Head Start/ECE referral system. Responses to this particular question also informed our evaluation of Objective 1.

**Outputs**

Based on the interviews, software demonstration, focus groups and analysis of the referral data, the evaluation team determined that the following outputs related to expansion of DCFS’ electronic Head Start referral system (Objective 1) have been successfully implemented:

- Even before the grant started in October 2011, the ability to refer children to the LBUSD Office of Head Start, and by extension LBUSD’s 23 Head Start and Early Head Start centers, was added to the electronic referral system. Combined, these centers constitute 2,025 Head Start slots and 133 Early Head Start slots.
Specifically, the referral system was successfully modified so that it now accesses address information from DCFS’ Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to identify age-eligible children who are living within Long Beach City boundaries and ‘batches’ referrals for these children separately from other DCFS-supervised children so that they are routed to LBUSD’s Office of Head Start rather than LACOE.

For children residing with parents or placed in out-of-home care in Long Beach, the referral system was also successfully expanded to capture infants and toddlers (in addition to three- and four-years old). To achieve this expansion, DCFS’s Early Education Manager worked with Information Technology (IT) staff to modify the electronic referral system so that when caseworkers log into the application on their computers their birth through two-year old clients living in Long Beach now appear, along with with their three- and four-year old clients, on the menu of ECE-eligible children on their caseload. They can then refer these younger children to LBUSD Early Head Start/ECE services with the same “two-click” referral process already in use for the preschool-aged children. Adding the birth-to-two population to the referral system was a significant component of this grant as it enabled the inclusion of approximately 214 additional DCFS-supervised children living in Long Beach. It was also an important opportunity to pilot test the viability of expanding the electronic referral system throughout the rest of Los Angeles County to include this younger age group.

LACWEEP has not, however, succeeded in fully automating DCFS’ electronic Head Start/ECE referral system, as originally proposed. It was hoped that DCFS IT could develop a computerized interface between DCFS’ electronic Head Start/ECE referral system and LBUSD Head Start’s ChildPlus case management software that would transmit referral information for DCFS-supervised children directly to Head Start, but this interface has yet to be developed. Instead, at the request of the DCFS Early Education Manager, the referral system currently ‘batches’ new referrals for children residing in Long Beach into an Excel report that the Early Education Manager downloads on a weekly basis and then emails to LBUSD Head Start. This process is effective at transmitting ECE referrals for DCFS-supervised children to LBUSD Head Staff, but not as efficient as a 100% automated referral system would be. The DCFS Early Education Manager continues to work with LBUSD (as well as LACOE) Head Start to develop a fully
automated interface between the electronic referral system and these providers’ ChildPlus case management data system.

Facilitators to Implementation of Objective 1

One factor that has been instrumental in facilitating implementation and expansion of the electronic referral system is the existence of a dedicated management level DCFS employee whose primary job responsibility is to increase access to ECE for the county’s child welfare population. As the Early Education Manager of DCFS’ Education and Mentoring Unit and creator of the original (pre-grant) Head Start referral system, Mr. Sturm sees facilitating the expansion of this system as a core component of his job, is personally invested in seeing the system he created continue and be improved, and is therefore very responsive and engaged in grant activities. Additionally, Mr. Sturm had extensive experience managing a variety of DCFS databases and information technology prior to assuming his current position as Early Education Manager. This background has helped equip him to develop the electronic referral system in a manner that would be more easily integrated into mainstream use by DCFS caseworkers and has also helped him partner effectively with DCFS IT staff to facilitate expansion of the system.

Additionally, buy-in and support for LACWEEP’s expansion of the electronic referral system from the management and line supervision staff in DCFS’ South Regional Office has also been critical to achieving Objective 1. In the absence of a specific DCFS policy or mandate directing caseworkers to start using the electronic referral system to begin referring infants and toddlers for ECE, it is unlikely that many caseworkers would have chosen to do so without active encouragement from their superiors.

Challenges/Barriers to Implementation of Objective 1

LACWEEP encountered several challenges while attempting to implement the planned expansion of the electronic Head Start/ECE referral system. Some, but not all, of these challenges have already been addressed. Others will require continued effort post-grant.

- In December 2012, DCFS identified an IT coding error in the referral system that was systematically excluding a subset of the grant target population from the electronic referral system: specifically DCFS-supervised children birth to two-years old who were living with their birth parents (“In-Home”) in Long Beach rather than in out-of-home care. This constitutes approximately 115 children
residing in Long Beach during any given month. Unfortunately, this error decreased the number of children referred to LBUSD Head Start during a significant portion of the grant project period (see evaluation of Objective 7). However, the error was corrected almost immediately upon discovery and this population is now being captured by the referral system.

- Problems with the quality of data captured by the electronic referral system have also impeded LBUSD Head Start’s ability to process some referrals. In May 2012, LBUSD Head Start informed the LACWEEP leadership team that many of the referrals that they were receiving from DCFS contained incorrect or incomplete parent/caregiver contact information, making it impossible for them to follow-up with the family to help them apply for ECE services. This problem affected close to a fifth (n=62) of the referrals LBUSD Head Start received from DCFS during the grant period. Upon investigation, the DCFS Early Education Manager determined that the problem was caused by the fact that the electronic referral system pulls parent/caregiver contact information from DCFS’ Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) and caseworkers often struggle to keep CWS/CMS data up-to-date because of high rates of mobility among DCFS clients and competing demands on caseworkers’ time. In order to address this problem, Mr. Sturm asked DCFS IT to develop a “pop-up” reminder, which now appears when caseworkers make a referral through the electronic Head Start/ECE referral system, prompting them to: 1) refer eligible children on their caseload to Head Start/ECE and to 2) verify that they have input correct/current contact information for parents and caregivers in CWS/CMS so that this information is accurate when the referral is forwarded to Head Start. Since implementing the “pop-up” feature, Mr. Sturm estimates that only one-tenth of the family contact information sent to Head Start is incorrect or incomplete.

- As previously noted, the referral system remains only 80-85% automated at this time. The proposed development of an interface between LBUSD’s case management system (ChildPlus) and DCFS’ Oracle Application Express system (which is the software platform that undergirds the Head Start/ECE electronic referral system) has not yet occurred. Mr. Sturm reports that the DCFS Education and Mentoring Unit remains committed to implementing this system improvement; however, it requires approximately three to six months of dedicated attention from DCFS IT staff to accomplish, and DCFS’ Education and
Mentoring Unit has not been able to leverage the sustained IT resources needed to implement this part of the grant due to some organizational restructuring that occurred shortly after the grant was awarded. Specifically, there was a change in department leadership and concomitant shifts in administrative priorities that have limited the amount of person-power IT has been authorized to dedicate to this project. This means that the current referral system relies on the DCFS Early Education Manager running the necessary queries on a weekly basis to ‘batch’ new Head Start/ECE referrals and then email them to LBUSD Head Start. For the time being this approach works. However, LACWEEP’s leadership team recognizes that this approach is not sustainable without DCFS’ Early Education Manager. To help mitigate this concern, Mr. Sturm took it upon himself in February 2013 to train several administrative-level DCFS staff on the ‘batching’ of the referrals so that he is no longer the only person able to perform this function and so that the process would be sustainable.

- LACWEEP has also identified some barriers to maintaining DCFS caseworkers’ commitment and motivation to use the electronic referral system. Based on feedback provided by DCFS' Early Education Manager, and further corroborated by the focus groups, caseworkers are unlikely to continue using this system after initial referrals are made unless they see evidence that these referrals actually result in their clients being enrolled in ECE programs. Several focus group participants expressed frustration that the electronic referral system did not provide them with any confirmation that their referrals were received by Head Start nor updates regarding the status of their referrals (i.e. whether a child was waitlisted or enrolled in a program and, if enrolled, the identity of the program). While many of the caseworkers in the focus groups spoke positively about the ease of use of the referral system, they also complained that, without this kind of feedback, the follow-up required of them to ensure that ECE enrollment occurs is too time-consuming and becomes a case management burden. It appears that this concern may be exacerbated by a lack of awareness among many DCFS workers that enrollment in ECE programs, and Head Start in particular, is seasonal in nature. Regardless of when a referral is made, most slots only become available at the start of the academic year (i.e. early September). Consequently, there can be a significant lag between the time a caseworker initiates a referral through the electronic referral system and when a child is
actually enrolled in an ECE program, leaving the caseworker with the impression that his/her referral has simply disappeared into a ‘black hole’. LACWEEP has begun to address this issue in three ways. First, awareness of the seasonal nature of Head Start/ECE enrollment has been disseminated through a series of joint DCFS-ECE Provider trainings sponsored by LACWEEP (see evaluation of Objectives 3 and 6). Mr. Sturm reports that these trainings have helped caseworkers better understand why there might be a lag between ECE referral and program enrollment. Additionally, based on focus group feedback, the electronic referral system has been modified so that once a caseworker makes a referral, s/he is sent an email receipt exactly 7 days later indicating that the referral has been received and is being processed. Lastly, the electronic referral system has also been modified so that it now captures email addresses for the caseworkers that initiate referrals and includes this in the information sent to Head Start. With the email address, LBUSD Head Start staff now provide feedback to DCFS caseworkers via email at two critical points in time. First, an initial email is sent to caseworkers within two weeks of receipt of a referral to confirm that the referral has in fact been received. Secondly, a follow-up email is also sent 30 days later to inform the caseworker of the status of the referral (i.e. the family has been contacted to complete the Head Start/ECE application, the application has been completed, the child is on a wait-list, or the child has been enrolled in a program).

**Lessons Learned**

Several lessons can be derived from LACWEEP’s experience implementing Objective 1. These include:

- An automated child welfare-ECE referral system has great potential to facilitate child welfare-supervised children’s access to ECE programs because it reduces the ECE referral process to a simple computerized task that can be accomplished quickly and easily by child welfare caseworkers who have many competing demands on their time.

- However, even minor flaws in the computer coding that undergirds such a system can be catastrophic (e.g. in the case of LACWEEP, making an entire subgroup of the target population effectively disappear from the system). Thus, it is critical that redundancies be embedded into the IT infrastructure of the system.
to ensure that the target population is captured accurately. For instance, DCFS’ Early Education Manager is currently working with IT to develop code for a basic algorithm that would reference the total number of children in the referral system with the total number of children birth through four-years old that are populated in the CWS/CMS system to ensure that all children are accurately accounted for.

- Additionally, automated child welfare-ECE referral systems are only as good as the quality of the data that they capture and transmit. If a child welfare agency is already struggling significantly with keeping the data in its case management system accurate and up-to-date, an automated child welfare-ECE referral system may not be the best strategy for promoting ECE access for supervised children. For agencies with reasonably accurate and up-to-date electronic case management data, however, computer “pop-ups” (of the kind LACWEEP used) reminding caseworkers to update client contact information before submitting ECE referrals can significantly improve the accuracy and completeness of ECE referral data.

- Also, in order to keep caseworkers motivated to refer children to ECE, it is important that they are helped to understand the ‘seasonality’ of ECE program openings so that they do not become discouraged when a referral does not immediately result in the child being enrolled in an ECE program. LACWEEP primarily used joint ECE-child welfare staff trainings to get this message across, but alternative communication methods could also work. For instance, an electronic referral system could be programmed so that, after submitting a referral, caseworkers receive an email confirmation or a pop-up notification that reminds them that there may not be an immediate ECE program opening for the referred child, especially during the Winter and Summer months, but in that case the child will be placed on a waiting list.

- When resources permit, having a dedicated child welfare staff person, such as DCFS’ Early Education Manager, who has explicit responsibility for improving child welfare-supervised children’s access to ECE and sufficient administrative autonomy and authority to implement system changes to achieve this goal, can greatly increase the likelihood that an initiative like LACWEEP will be successful. If an agency wishes to implement an electronic child welfare-ECE referral system, an internal child welfare agency ‘champion’ may, in fact, be essential, as successful implementation of the referral system requires ongoing oversight,
service coordination, and marketing to caseworkers.

- Lastly, because an electronic child welfare-ECE system also requires specialized IT staff resources to develop and maintain, it is important to ensure that a strong commitment exists within a child welfare agency’s IT department and at the highest levels of agency management to guarantee the continued availability of the technological resources needed to maintain the referral system. Because child welfare agencies typically experience high rates of turnover both among line staff and administrators, it is advisable to cultivate multiple ‘champions’ across the agency in order to ensure sustained commitment to the project.
Evaluation of Objective 2: Implement a system for referring & linking DCFS children B-4 in Long Beach whom LBUSD Head Start/Early Head agencies do not have the capacity to serve in a timely manner to other high-quality ECE providers

Intervention/Activity

The second infrastructure component that LACWEEP developed was a system for helping ensure that electronic LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start referrals are processed in a timely manner and that they result in actual linkage to either a LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start program or to an alternative high quality ECE program. Previously, there was no institutionalized process in Los Angeles County for ensuring that when Head Start/Early Head Start programs did not have an immediate or imminent opening for a child referred by DCFS, the social worker and parent/caregiver would be notified and given assistance in finding an alternative ECE program to meet the child’s needs.

To address this gap, LACWEEP proposed funding 0.20 FTE of an experienced LBUSD Head Start Services Community Liaison Worker to assume responsibility for this linkage function. This staff person would follow up on all DCFS referrals to LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start and would also assume responsibility for the following:

- Forwarding these referrals to appropriate LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start centers based on the placement address of the referral;
- Communicating with parents/caregivers and DCFS workers to alert them when immediate enrollment was not possible;
- Providing referrals to alternative high quality ECE programs in the community (e.g. other Head Start providers, Los Angeles Unified Preschool, State Preschool, Preschool Without Walls, and licensed family child care homes) as needed;
- Following-up on referrals to LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start centers and alternative ECE programs to help ensure linkage occurred; and
- Tracking all ECE referrals, contacts with providers, parents/caregivers, and DCFS workers, referral outcomes, and enrollment barriers encountered for evaluation and program quality improvement purposes.
This emphasis on not just making referrals, but tracking referral outcomes to ensure that families are actually linked to services, was based in part on the service coordination and case management literature which provide a strong caution against assuming that service referrals will always, or even frequently, translate into linkage without this extra level of follow-up and support (Dobson & Cook, 1980). It was also informed by a survey of foster parents in Colorado, more than a quarter of whom reported difficulty accessing ECE services and programs for their children, with the most frequently cited problem being waitlists or lack of space and availability (Ward et al., 2009).

To help ensure the sustainability of this function after the grant ended, LACWEEP also proposed developing a Masters in Social Work (MSW) field placement or internship with LBUSD’s Office of Head Start during the second year of the grant. The MSW student was to assist the Head Start Services Community Liaison (LBCW-ECC) in linking DCFS-supervised children to high quality ECE programs and eventually assume her job responsibilities upon completion of the grant. The plan was to make this an ongoing Inter-University Consortium (IUC) MSW field placement/internship in Long Beach and to explore the possibility of scaling up this part of LACWEEP by developing similar field placements/internships with other large Head Start grantees in other parts of Los Angeles County.

Research/Verification Methods

To evaluate implementation of the deliverables associated with Objective 2, the evaluation team reviewed ECE program enrollment data forwarded by the Head Start Services Community Liaison during the grant project period on a monthly basis. Further, we interviewed LBUSD Head Start’s Assistant Director of Family Services and the Head Start Services Community Liaison on February 7, 2012; August 6, 2012; and January 7, 2013 regarding the status of the proposed linkage system. Final, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with LBUSD Head Start’s Assistant Director of Family Services on April 9, 2013 and with the Community Liaison on March 18, 2013 regarding the process being used to link referred DCFS-supervised children to ECE programs in Long Beach at the end of the grant and the respondents’ perceptions of the efficacy and efficiency of this process. To better understand how the referral and linkage process was working for non-LBUSD Head Start providers, the evaluation team also interviewed
administrators from two non-LBUSD Head Start ECE providers involved in LACWEEP, Long Beach Day Nursery and South Bay Center for Counseling’s Preschool Without Walls program, in March and April 2013 (the questioning protocols for these interviews can be found in Appendix 2). Lastly, the evaluation of Objective 2 is also informed by the results of a brief survey administered to the LACWEEP Advisory Committee members in February 2013 that included a question asking them to rate how sustainable or ‘actionable’ they believed the core components of the linkage system to be.

**Outputs for Objective 2**

Based on the interviews, focus groups and analysis of the survey and ECE enrollment data, the evaluation team determined that the following outputs related to Objective 2 were successfully implemented during the grant cycle (October 2011 – August 2013):

- An experienced LBUSD Head Start employee, Cynthia Ruiz, was recruited in October 2011 and funded at 20% FTE to serve as the Community Liaison. Ms. Ruiz has nineteen years of experience working with Head Start, including ten years working as a Family Services Supervisor. Her LACWEEP job responsibilities include managing and monitoring enrollment of DCFS-supervised children in LBUSD Head Start and Early Head Start programs. She is also responsible for building partnerships with other high quality ECE programs throughout the Long Beach region and for linking DCFS-supervised children in these programs when their needs are better met by a non-LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start program.

- Shortly after being hired, the LBUSD Head Start Services Community Liaison implemented an ECE provider screening process to identify a network of high quality ECE programs in Long Beach to which DCFS-supervised could be referred when enrollment in a LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start program was not possible or appropriate, Through contacts with the Long Beach Early Childhood Education Committee, she developed a questionnaire that was given to ECE centers throughout the Long Beach region to ascertain information about program quality (i.e. staff-to-child ratio and whether the program cares for children with special needs), types of service provided, eligibility requirements, fees and payment policies, and hours of operation (Appendix 3). Based on survey responses, Ms. Ruiz then created an informational flyer that contains
contact information for 15 subsidized childcare and preschool options in the Long Beach area (Appendix 4) for distribution to families referred by DCFS. These specific centers were chosen because they represent a range of different funding streams, have strong established partnerships with Head Start, and/or because they participate actively on the Long Beach ECE Committee, which is chaired by the Assistant Director of Family Services at LBUSD Head Start.

- In collaboration with the DCFS Early Education Manager and other members of the LACWEEP Advisory Committee, the LBUSD Head Start Services Community Liaison then developed a four-step process for managing ECE referrals from DCFS.

1. This process begins with the LBUSD-Head Start Community Liaison receiving a list of all new ECE referrals for DCFS-supervised children living in Long Beach from the DCFS Early Education Manager. The referrals are provided every two weeks via an Excel spreadsheet that the DCFS Early Education Manager downloads from DCFS’ electronic Head Start/ECE referral system (see evaluation of Objective 1). This spreadsheet (see Appendix 5) contains contact information and other pertinent data about each referred child (e.g. DCFS Unique Child Identifier number, child’s age in months, current residence, placement type, race/ethnicity, caseworker contact information, and date of referral).

2. Based on the referred child’s address, the LBUSD-Head Start Community Liaison then identifies the nearest, age-appropriate Head Start or Early Head Start center (from the 23 LBUSD centers) and sends the referral information to the Family Services Liaison (FSL) at that center. This FSL is responsible for contacting the family and scheduling an appointment to help the family complete an application for Head Start or Early Head Start. This usually occurs two to four weeks after a child is initially referred. In the cases where families cannot be contacted, either due to incorrect contact information from DCFS or lack of response on the part of the family, the FSL alerts the LBUSD-Head Start Community Liaison, who contacts the child’s DCFS caseworker to either obtain correct contact information or to let him/her know that the family has not been responsive.
3. After the FSL meets with a family and they complete a Head Start/Early Head Start application, the application is then forwarded to the LBUSD-Head Start Community Liaison and processed in the central LBUSD Head Start administrative system that determines slot availability. If a slot in the requested center is not available, the nearest LBUSD Head Start center with an available slot is identified. The LBUSD-Head Start Community Liaison is then responsible for communicating with the family to inform them about this Head Start program availability and for facilitating enrollment.

4. When accessible Head Start slots are not available or it is determined that Head Start/Early Head Start is not appropriate for a family’s needs, the LBUSD Head Start Community Liaison discusses alternative ECE options with families and provides them with an informational flyer (previously described) that contains contact information and program details for 15 subsidized child care and preschool options in the Long Beach area (Appendix 4). She also informs families that they are able to remain on a waitlist for a Head Start or Early Head Start program while their child is enrolled in an alternate program. If a family indicates preference for an alternative ECE program, the Community Liaison follows up with the family and/or provider at a later date to confirm linkage has been made.

- As of February 2013, two additional steps have been added to this process. DCFS caseworker email addresses are now included in the referral information that DCFS shares with LBUSD Head Start, and the Community Liaison uses this information to send a form email to each child’s caseworker within two weeks acknowledging receipt of the referral, as well as a follow-up email approximately 30 days later with an update on the ECE enrollment status of the child.

- Lastly, with the help of the research & evaluation staff for this grant, LBUSD developed a data tracking system for children referred by DCFS that documents the date the ECE referral was received, the date an ECE program application was completed, the availability of LBUSD Head Start programs, length of time involved in enrolling a child in an ECE program, the type of ECE program a child is enrolled in, and, when applicable, reason for service refusal (Appendix 5). For children who enroll in a LBUSD Head Start or Early Head Start program, this
tracking system is also used to document a child’s developmental progress. Three times a year LBUSD Head Start administers the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) to children enrolled in its Head Start programs and the Child Observation Record (COR) for children enrolled in its Early Head Start programs. LBUSD shares a de-identified version of this tracking sheet with the LACWEEP evaluation team on a monthly basis. Based on this data, the average length of time between a DCFS caseworker making an ECE referral and completion of a LBUSD Head Start or Early Head Start center application for that child is 31 days (range: 0 to 86 days). The average length of time between completion of an LBUSD Head Start or Early Head Start application and program enrollment is 26 days (range: 0 to 111 days). Unfortunately, comparable data is not available for children linked to alternative (non-LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start programs), as the Liaison did not begin tracking this data until the final quarter of the grant.

Facilitators to implementation of Objective 2

In many ways, LBUSD Head Start is the ideal organization to implement the ECE linkage system for DCFS-supervised children. It consists of a large grouping of strong, centralized grantees, rather than disparate delegate agencies, as is the case throughout much of the rest of Los Angeles County. LBUSD Head Start also has a longstanding commitment to the child welfare population. This is reflected in its prioritization of DCFS-supervised children living with their parents (not just those placed in foster care) for Head Start services and its willingness to work with DCFS, even prior to implementation of LACWEEP, to document and share data on the child welfare status of the families they serve. The Assistant Director of Family Services at LBUSD Head Start, Luanne Mauro-Atkinson, has been particularly instrumental in facilitating implementation of this system for linking DCFS-supervised children to ECE providers beyond her own program (non-LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start programs). In addition to her role at LBUSD, Ms. Mauro-Atkinson chairs the Long Beach Early Education Committee, which is a diverse coalition of ECE providers throughout the city, and she has strong ties to the Los Angeles Child Care Policy Roundtable. Therefore she has brought to the project, not only her knowledge of what constitutes quality ECE, but also the ability to facilitate enduring partnerships with ECE providers throughout the region.
Challenges/Barriers to Implementation of Objective 2

Nevertheless, LACWEEP encountered some challenges while attempting to implement the proposed process for linking DCFS-supervised children to LBUSD Head Start or other high quality ECE programs.

- The most significant challenge to the linkage system has been (and continues to be) the lack of availability of high quality ECE programs for referred children. LBUSD’s Head Start and Early Head Start programs have remained at 100% enrollment throughout the grant, which means that until a number of children are ready to transition to Kindergarten there is limited space to serve DCFS children in these particular programs. Moreover, due to sequestration, LBUSD Head Start actually lost spaces during the grant project period: 170 Head Start slots totaling five classrooms and eight Early Head Start slots. For example, between 2008 to 2011, California cut funding for ECE programs in the state by $1.2 billion, resulting in the loss of approximately 100,000 slots statewide, 11,200 of which (both preschool and child care) were in Los Angeles county (Advancement Project California, Child Care Resource Center, First 5 LA, Best Start LA, & Healthy City, 2012). Furthermore, according to the Los Angeles Office of Child Care, California’s 2012-2013 budget was projected to cut $160 million in funding for child care and development services resulting in the loss of approximately 19,600 ECE slots (both preschool and child care) in Los Angeles county (First 5 LA, 2013).

- This is a particularly salient issue for the birth-to-two population. LBUSD only operates two Early Head Start programs with a total of 140 slots. While the Community Liaison has been successful in identifying and building partnerships with a number of other quality ECE programs, there is simply an insufficient supply of spaces to meet the demand for infant and toddler care (both for DCFS clients and for the Long Beach Community as a whole). The Los Angeles Office of Child Care estimates that in 2012, fewer than 20% of infants and toddlers residing in the county were able to access affordable, subsidized care (Los Angeles County Child Care Planning Committee, 2012).

- LACWEEP encountered an additional capacity-related challenge having to do with the Preschool Without Walls (PWW) program. The LACWEEP RFP proposed partnering with PWW, which provides a free, bilingual (English-
Spanish) program for children birth through four-years old and their parents that not only engages children in age-appropriate learning activities led by professional educators but also actively engages their parents to learn different ways to interact with their children in the home and continue the learning process. The program is geared toward the specific needs of Hispanic/Latino caregivers who are monolingual Spanish speakers or recent immigrants, immersing parents in shared learning experiences with their children where some traditional preschool programs may inadvertently exacerbate the “acculturation gap” and, therefore, are often underutilized by this particular population. During submission of the LACWEEP RFP, Preschool Without Walls was in the process of pursuing a contract with DCFS that would allow them to expand their capacity to serve an additional 100 children and parents in the Los Angeles child welfare system. However, this contract was delayed considerably longer than anticipated and was only approved by DCFS in late January 2013. Hence, PWW was not a major ECE resource for LACWEEP during most of the grant.

- Additionally, there appears to have been some confusion during the first half of the grant project period regarding the scope of the Community Liaison’s responsibility for linking children to non-LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start programs. Ms. Ruiz referred families whose needs were not well met by LBUSD’s Head Start/Early Head Start programs the previously mentioned list of 15 alternative Long Beach ECE programs, however, she did not understand until well into the grant that she was also responsible for routinely following-up with these families and ECE providers to help make sure families were successfully linked to one of these programs. This oversight has been addressed, and Ms. Ruiz is now tracking if/when families are successfully linked to alternative ECE programs.

- Another challenge related to the implementation of the linkage system did not emerge until the end of the grant funding cycle. Feedback from the final Advisory Committee participant survey suggests that the structure of LACWEEP may be overly ‘Head Start-centric’. A few respondents observed that, although there was considerable participation from other ECE providers at committee meetings, the “Head Start presence and focus at these meetings seemed stronger than other ECE partners.” This emphasis on Head Start is also reflected in how the LACWEEP linkage process was designed and implemented: efforts are first
made to link referred DCFS-supervised children to LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start programs and alternative programs are only discussed with families if/when a family indicates that a LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start is not appropriate for their needs. While having Head Start/Early Head Start be the default ECE option encourages enrollment of DCFS-supervised children in an enriched ECE program that offers not only child development services but also a number of family support services which birth parents and substitute caregivers are likely to benefit from, this ‘Head Start first’ approach is not ecumenical and may result in the under-utilization of other high quality ECE programs.

- As mentioned in our evaluation of Objective 1, another challenge has been how to facilitate effective communication between DCFS and LBUSD regarding the processing of ECE referrals. Initially, there was little communication between DCFS caseworkers and LBUSD Head Start once a referral for Head Start/ECE services was made; and, so caseworkers were left in the dark as to whether the referral had been received or acted upon. This issue emerged as a concern during the focus groups that the evaluators conducted with DCFS caseworkers during the summer of 2013. LBUSD and DCFS have been very responsive in rectifying this challenging since it came to light, and the Community Liaison is now making a concerted effort to engage with caseworkers after referrals are received by: 1) sending them an email acknowledging receipt of their referral, 2) sending out emails to caseworkers that provide updates on the enrollment status of children they referred, and 3) documenting when calls are made to DCFS caseworkers.

- Lastly, as discussed in more detail under Evaluation of Objective 4, the plan to transition responsibilities for the linkage function being performed by the grant-funded Community Liaison to an IUC MSW intern has not been realized. The IUC lost its Director shortly after the LACWEEP began, and it is uncertain whether its contract with DCFS will be continued. Thus, the LACWEEP leadership team is currently exploring alternative sources of post-grant support to continue funding the Community Liaison position.

Lessons Learned of Objective 2

Three clear lessons can be derived from LACWEEP’s experience implementing Objective 2. These include:
• Improving child welfare-ECE service coordination can only do so much to increase child welfare-involved children’s access to ECE when a community does not have a sufficient supply of ECE slots to meet the demand. When this is the case, an initiative like LACWEEP can improve ECE access for maltreated children, but only by better positioning this group to compete with other needy children and families for a scarce resource. This does not negate the importance or potential benefits of improving ECE-child welfare service coordination; but it highlights the need to also pursue policy reform strategies for protecting existing sources of ECE funding and, even better, increasing funding for high quality ECE programs located in communities with large child welfare populations. LACWEEP has begun to move in this direction by inviting the Advancement Project, a civil rights group that advocates for expanded ECE resources for disadvantaged children, to join the Advisory Committee. When members of the Advisory Committee were surveyed in February 2013 about their experience with LACWEEP, this is what the Advancement Project’s representative had to say:

  We were able to make solid connections to a new nice niche issue of serving young children in the child welfare system. As a civil rights organization that does educational advocacy for youth 0-18, our focus on young children has been primarily on low-income and English Language Learners’ need for ECE services. This project allowed us to delve deeper into what we believe to be the most vulnerable sub-group of disadvantaged young children: children in the child welfare system. They represent the greatest need but also the greatest opportunity for impact and investment at the early years. We never would have been able to develop policy and advocacy recommendations (for state and local policy makers) had we not connected to this project. We hope to use our advocacy to bring this and other projects to scale for large systems like LA County (emphasis added).

• Another lesson learned during implementation of the ECE linkage process has to do with the best way to ensure that DCFS families are informed about the full complement of high quality ECE programs available to them. Because of the way in which LACWEEP was structured, DFCS parents/caregivers were informed about their ECE program options by the LBUSD Head Start Services Community Liaison and only after it became evident that an LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start program might not be a good fit for their family. LACWEEP may want to consider ways to elevate the role of its other high quality ECE providers in the future to help create a greater sense of balance. Additionally, other communities seeking to implement routinized processes for linking child welfare clients to ECE
services may want to carefully consider the pros and cons of housing their linkage system within a specific ECE provider versus a more neutral organization (i.e. a resource and referral agency that is tasked with helping parents/caregivers find numerous types of ECE). As one member observed on the final Advisory Committee participant survey:

Because there is not a comprehensive, single-entry [ECE] system for DCFS to understand and plug into, DCFS will have difficulty training its overworked staff to be knowledgeable referral resources and data trackers. Instead, I recommend that DCFS target relationship-building and MOU's with local resource and referral agencies who are experts in working with low-income and non-English speaking parents and caregivers. The R&R's also have greater knowledge and understanding of the ECE system and have relationships with ECE providers. The key will be to education R&Rs on the policy priorities of ECE services for DCFS-supervised children, regardless of placement (in-home or out-of-home supervised care).

- Embedding the linkage function within a Child Care Resource and Referral agency, as opposed to a Head Start or other ECE provider, might also facilitate a different approach to deciding which ECE providers should receive referrals for child welfare-supervised children. LACWEEP’s approach to identifying these providers had the advantage of using LBUSD’s knowledge of the local ECE system to narrow down options to 15 non-LBUSD programs with strong reputations for quality and collaboration. In this way, it included some level of ‘quality control’. However, the process that LBUSD used for selecting these particular 15 programs was not explicitly defined. As LACWEEP continues its work, the Advisory Committee may want to revisit the question of which ECE providers DCFS children should be referred to and build community buy-in by using a more expansive and transparent process for identifying these organizations.
Evaluation of Objective 3: Develop & implement a series of trainings for Long Beach (a) child welfare staff, (b) ECE & other EC systems providers, (c) Court personnel, & (d) parents/caregivers of infants & young children on the benefits of ECE for children in the child welfare system & how to navigate relevant systems to obtain services.

Intervention/Activity

LACWEEP’s third infrastructure objective was the development and piloting of a standardized training on ECE services for children in the child welfare system. Specifically, LACWEEP proposed convening a Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) during the first six months of the grant to create a training curricula that could be customized for each of four target audiences: 1) child welfare staff; 2) ECE and other early childhood service providers; 3) bench officers, attorneys and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) from Juvenile Dependency Court; and 4) parents and caregivers. At a minimum, training elements were to include research evidence regarding the potential of ECE to improve developmental outcomes and school readiness for children in the child welfare system and information about how to work across child welfare, ECE and other service systems to access these services. Final aspects of the curriculum were to be determined by the CDC. Under the direction of a part-time trainer funded by the grant and hired by the Inter-University Consortium (IUC), this training was to be piloted in Long Beach during the second half of the grant with local members of the four target audiences. To facilitate project sustainability, after evaluation and refinement, it was expected that the curricula and associated learning materials would be made publicly available and disseminated to support replication in other communities. In addition, a training-for-trainers course was to be developed, along with an outcomes training for senior DCFS, ECE, and JDC staff.

As proposed, LACWEEP convened a training Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) in February 2012 that consisted of representatives from two Long Beach-based ECE programs, one education/mental health program, one child welfare supervisor, DCFS’ Early Education Manager, and two trainers from the University of California, Los Angeles’ Inter-University Consortium. The Committee was led by DCFS Early Education Manager Steve Sturm and Dr. Ann Reyes, who was hired by IUC to lead
the LACWEEP trainings. Dr. Reyes has both a J.D. and a Ph.D. in Social Work and was hired for this position in part because of her experience working with Los Angeles’ Juvenile Dependency Court. Juvenile Court staff were the only training target audience that lacked an active member on the LACWEEP Advisory Committee to help guide development of a suitable training curriculum and outreach plan for this group.

The CDC met in person three times during the course of the grant (on 3-22-12, 4-26-12, 5-24-12). During its initial meeting, it developed a list of three core learning objectives for training participants that were consistent with the training objectives specified in the project proposal:

1. To develop a clear understanding of how to navigate the early care and education (ECE) system to connect families and children impacted by the child welfare system to developmentally appropriate ECE programs;

2. To develop a clear understanding of the common barriers to enrolling children birth to five years old impacted by the child welfare system in early care and education (ECE) programs; and

3. To develop a clear understanding of the potential of quality early care and education (ECE) programs to improve developmental outcomes and school readiness for children birth to five years old within the child welfare system.

The CDC also reviewed a list, developed by Dr. Reyes and the Committee’s child welfare representatives, of fifteen training elements for potential inclusion in the training curricula. Committee members redacted this list down to eight topic areas, prioritized them, and determined the approximate length of time that the trainings should devote to each. The final list of eight topics encompassed:

1. A brief history of the child welfare system, focused on its philosophical shift from an emphasis on placement to prevention and preservation;

2. An overview of child welfare services in Los Angeles county, with a special emphasis on the city of Long Beach;

3. The five “protective factors” for vulnerable families outlined by the Strengthening Families Program (http://www.strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org/index.html) and how quality ECE programs can promote them;

4. How to identify quality ECE programs that are developmentally appropriate for a child’s needs (i.e. different types of programs and structural and process indicators of quality);

5. Current research evidence regarding how quality ECE can reduce abuse and
neglect and enhance developmental outcomes among at-risk populations;

6. Special considerations for providing ECE to the child welfare population (i.e. the effects of trauma on a child’s development and trauma-informed practice);

7. DCFS’ electronic Head Start/ECE referral process and the linkage system that connects DCFS-supervised children in Long Beach to alternate quality ECE programs when HS/EHS spaces are not available and/or appropriate; and

8. Limitations of the ECE referral and linkage system (i.e. limited availability of programs for infants and toddlers, waitlists for HS/EHS programs, eligibility and prioritization for the child welfare population).

In order to encourage cross-system relationship-building and promote collaboration, the CDC decided to develop a curriculum to train child welfare caseworkers and ECE providers conjointly. This curriculum is structured around the three learning objectives previously described and is designed to be presented in a predominately didactic fashion, with a Powerpoint presentation that lasts approximately 1.5 hours and covers the eight topics detailed above. The presentation is supplemented by two brief videos and a 30-45 minute breakout session. The first video presents a history of the Head Start program and an overview of the services that it provides. The second video consists of a series of short clips from the documentary “Trauma, Brain, and Relationship: Helping Children Heal” by Dr. Bruce Perry and Dr. Daniel Siegel. The breakout session consists of forming small discussion groups with equal numbers of child welfare workers and ECE providers wherein each group is asked to discuss the challenges associated with meeting the ECE needs of children who are part of the child welfare system and to specifically identify the special considerations for ECE providers and child welfare workers. After individual discussions, each group reports out to the entire training seminar key ideas. In total, the conjoint Child Welfare-ECE training is designed to last 2.5 hours with an additional half hour allocated to the training evaluation (a fifteen-minute pretest and fifteen minute posttest survey instruments). The CDC felt that this was an appropriate length of time for this audience since both child welfare and ECE professionals regularly attend required trainings of this length to maintain professional credentials and earn professional growth hours.

The CDC also developed an abbreviated version of this curriculum for parents and caregivers of young children in the child welfare system and for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). These trainings retained the same three core learning
objectives but were shortened to a total of two hours (one hour and forty-five minutes of presentation time with an additional 15 minutes designated for an abbreviated pre- and post-test survey). This redacted curriculum retained the Powerpoint presentation and videos from the three-hour Child Welfare-ECE training, but not the breakout session and associated activities. The CDC decided a shorter version of the training was more appropriate for these nonprofessional audiences because family members and caregivers may not be as accustomed to lengthy trainings as child welfare and ECE professionals are and also because families and CASA volunteers might find it impossible to set aside a three hour block of time for training due to family and work obligations.

Lastly, based on advice from a Juvenile Dependency Court (JDC) Judge and Research Attorney, the CDC developed an even more abbreviated version of the training for presentation at the Los Angeles County Juvenile Dependency Court “Judges’ Lunch”. The Judge’s Lunch is a monthly meeting of Dependency Court judges, commissioners, and research attorneys that convene to listen to presentations from community organizations on a range of issues pertinent to JDC. Given the short nature of this meeting (only 1 hour and 15 minutes), the training presentation slides were further redacted and the CDC decided to forgo evaluating training outcomes for this group. In the interest of time, training content on the history/background of child welfare services, the Strengthening Families Protective Factors, and how to assess ECE quality was removed from the training, while content was added regarding specific ways that court officers can help promote ECE for dependent children (i.e. ensuring that DCFS caseworkers refer children on their caseloads to ECE programs, that families understand the importance of ECE, and that the court orders release of education information to DCFS.

Research/Verification Methods

To evaluate implementation of the training deliverables, a member of the evaluation team observed most of the Curriculum Development Committee meetings and all of the LACWEEP trainings. The evaluators also reviewed relevant documents (i.e. training presentation slides and handouts, training sign-in sheets, and promotional advertising materials and flyers).

Outputs for Objective 3

Based on these evaluation methods, it was determined that the following outputs related to Objective 3 were successfully implemented during the grant cycle (October
A total of 12 joint Child Welfare-ECE Provider trainings were administered by IUC or LBUSD Head Start staff between June and September 2012. IUC staff facilitated eight trainings, and the LBUSD Head Start Family Services Assistant Director facilitated four. These trainings were attended by a total of 243 people, including 124 DCFS staff (accounting for approximately 59% of the child welfare caseworkers from DCFS’s Lakewood Office, which serves the Long Beach community) and 119 ECE staff. The demographic composite of Child Welfare & ECE attendees is described in detail under Objective 6 of this report.

Additionally, seven trainings were provided for parents and caregivers of young children involved in the child welfare system between July 2012 and July 2013, all of which were administered at the LBUSD Head Start administrative offices in Long Beach. A total of 61 parents/caregivers attended these trainings, including 19 peer support specialists for DCFS-supervised families from the Parents in Partnership program, 13 birth parents, 10 relative caregivers/non-relative extended family members’, 14 other substitute caregivers (e.g. foster parents, adoptive parents, legal guardians), and five unidentified participants. The demographic composite of attendees is described in detail under Objective 6 of this report.

A training targeting Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) was administered on October 19, 2012. Twenty-one CASAs attended the training.

On February 21, 2013, the DCFS’ Early Education Manager and LBUSD Head Start’s Assistant Director of Family Services presented an abbreviated one hour fifteen minute version of the LACWEEP training at the Juvenile Dependency Court “Judges Lunch”. There were 16 attendees at this meeting, including 10 of the court’s 13 judges (77%), four of five Commissioners (80%), one referee, and one of three research attorneys (33%).

With respect to the sustainability and dissemination of the LACWEEP training, both the full-length and redacted versions of the training materials (Powerpoint presentation slides and evaluation surveys) are publicly available on the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities website (http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu/ourwork/la-cwee2). To date, the proposed plan to

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3 Do to budget constraints, shortly after this training Los Angeles Juvenile Dependency Court stopped using referees.
train a group of trainers to continue to administer the LACWEEP training after the grant ended has not been realized, however, largely due to the previously mentioned dissolution of IUC’s contract with DCFS. In lieu of this particular approach, LACWEEP decided instead to create an electronic version of the full-length conjoint child welfare-ECE training by embedding voice-over narration in the presentation slides. The IUC is currently in the process of making this version of the training available to DCFS staff as part of an online training course. At this time, it remains unclear how, and even if, the LACWEEP training will continue to be offered to ECE providers, Dependency Court personnel and parents/caregivers.

Facilitators to Implementation of Objective 3

The expertise drawn from the LACWEEP Training Curriculum Development Committee was essential in facilitating curriculum development and strategic decision-making about training format (e.g. determining when a conjoint format was valuable, how long trainings should be for different target audiences, and the best way to present core concepts). The CDC benefitted from diverse representation from ECE, Child Welfare, and Mental Health agencies. Inclusion of a mental health perspective helped highlight the importance of including training content on the ways in which maltreatment and trauma can affect children’s behavior in ECE settings. While not in regular attendance, feedback from a representative from Parents in Partnership also helped the CDC to design the parent/caregiver training curricula to better address the needs of this target audience. Specifically, her feedback helped the Committee recognize the importance of shortening the training for parents/caregivers, providing childcare for participants, and offering the training at a non-stigmatizing location (i.e. not at a DCFS office). Furthermore, the trainer hired by the IUC was a JD/PhD with extensive experience with the Juvenile Dependency Court. Her knowledge of the JDC and relationships with JDC leaders helped the CDC recognize that Court staff had little incentive to, or precedent for, participating in formal professional development trainings and that the Judges Lunch was, therefore, the best forum for educating Court personnel about ECE for child welfare-involved clients.

The broader LACWEEP Advisory Committee was also instrumental in conducting outreach for both the joint DCFS-ECE Provider trainings and the Parent/Caregiver trainings. This was accomplished by Advisory Committee members facilitating distribution of flyers at their respective offices, emailing community stakeholders about the trainings,
including training dates in community and staff calendars, and by directly informing staff within their organizations about the availability and importance of the trainings.

The Inter-University Consortium (IUC)’s active involvement and leadership in implementing this objective was also a key factor in facilitating the joint ECE-DCFS trainings. The IUC is a partnership between the social work programs at six local universities (California State University, Dominguez Hills; California State University, Long Beach; California State University, Los Angeles; California State University, Northridge; University of California, Los Angeles; and University of Southern California) and the public social service agencies in Los Angeles County. As such, the IUC has a long history of providing workforce development trainings for DCFS staff and brought this institutional knowledge to LACWEEP and development of the training curricula. Moreover, the IUC provided both administrative support (e.g. printing training materials, providing staff to facilitate the signing in and out of participants) as well as financial support for the LACWEEP trainings (i.e. covering the location costs for trainings held at hotel conference rooms in Long Beach).

**Challenges/Barriers to Implementation of Objective 3**

LACWEEP encountered some obstacles to implementing the trainings as proposed, but was able to surmount most of them.

- The project, particularly in terms of the training component, experienced significant staff turnover that resulted in a delayed start to implementing trainings. First, Ms. Reyes, the IUC Trainer hired at .50 FTE to facilitate the LACWEEP trainings, left the project after only ten months to accept a full-time, permanent position with the Department of Public Social Services in a neighboring county. This required project leaders to scramble in order to find alternative trainers with the necessary expertise to lead the LACWEEP trainings. Second, during the second quarter of the grant, the Director of the IUC, Dr. Loc Nguyen, accepted a position as the Director of Children and Family Services for San Mateo County, California. A replacement has still not been identified and IUC’s contract with DCFS is now in question, which has made sustaining the trainings at DCFS challenging. Third, DCFS’ South County office experienced multiple leadership changes during the grant. In June 2012, DCFS’ Regional Administrator (RA) of Service Planning Area 8 (South County), Mr. Frank Ramos, was redeployed to a different DCFS office. Mr. Ramos was a champion for LACWEEP and helped
develop the original proposal. Neither of the two RAs who replaced Mr. Ramos have prioritized the LACWEEP training for their DCFS staff to quite the same extent that Mr. Ramos did.

- DCFS staff participation in the LACWEEP training was further impeded by an increase in caseload size and associated work responsibilities. Over the past four months, South Region caseworkers’ caseloads have increased upwards of 11% according to estimates from DCFS’ Early Education Manager. It is likely that the associated increased demand on caseworkers’ time served to discourage some staff from participating in the LACWEEP training, especially given that participation was non-mandatory.

- Also, while there was a unanimous commitment to developing a curriculum that jointly provided training to DCFS and ECE providers, the logistics of having both groups attend the trainings was challenging. For DCFS staff, trainings must be attended during traditional office hours (9am-5pm Monday through Friday). Oppositely, it was very difficult for ECE Providers to attend trainings during these times, as many were not able to leave the classroom or center where they provided ECE services and preferred trainings that were scheduled outside traditional work hours.

- Recruitment for the Parent/Caregiver trainings was especially challenging. One possible limiting factor is the time of year in which they were scheduled. During the summer months, without available childcare, parents and caregivers reported feeling over-burdened and less able to take the time to attend the trainings. In order to meet these challenges, LACWEEP began providing incentives in the form of $15 Gift Cards to help offset the expense of transportation to and from the training as well as time spent attending the training. As participation was continually difficult to garner, incentives were increased to $30 Gift Cards. Onsite childcare and snacks for parents and children was also provided during the trainings and they were scheduled during the Fall on weekends and weekday evenings to limit work conflicts for participants.

- While LACWEEP was able to train several groups of Juvenile Dependency Court stakeholders (i.e. Court Appointed Special Advocates, judges, commissioners, and JDC research attorneys), it did not succeed in training attorneys who represent dependent children and their parents. One of the reasons why Dr.
Reyes was hired by IUC as the LACWEEP trainer was because of her background as a JD and experience with Dependency Court, which she was expected to leverage to garner support for and attendance by attorneys at the trainings. Unfortunately, she left the project at a critical time, before this could be accomplished. Furthermore, according to an interview with JDC Research Attorney June An, the Los Angeles County Juvenile Court experienced serious budget cuts during the grant that resulted in staff reductions of approximately 30% and concommitant increases in caseload sizes. Attorney An noted that Children’s Law Centers lawyers, who represent DCFS children in Court, have taken on upwards of 100 or more cases due to budget cuts and furloughs. This has negatively impacted the degree to which they can afford time to participate in training.

Lessons Learned

LACWEEP learned several lessons about developing and implementing a standardized training on ECE services for children in the child welfare system that may help inform similar efforts in other jurisdictions.

- First, there is value in having a diverse group of stakeholders involved in designing the training curriculum. In particular, LACWEEP found that even though mental health providers were not a target audience for its trainings, their involvement in the Curriculum Development Committee strengthened the trainings. They were able to recognize and articulate the importance of including training content on the trauma many children in the child welfare system experience due to abuse/neglect and foster care removal and how this trauma can affect child development and behavior in ECE settings.

- Second, despite efforts to make trainings accessible to parents/caregivers and to incentivize their participation through the provision of childcare and gift cards, LACWEEP’s experience was that a formal training approach did not work well with this particular audience. Other methods of educating parents/caregivers about the value of ECE for child welfare-involved children and how to access ECE services may have more promise. During focus groups, one idea that emerged was creating a simple one-page document highlighting the benefits of ECE both for children and for their caregivers that also included a brief description of the various types of ECE programs available and their policies.
regarding enrollment and fees for child welfare-involved children. This document could be mailed to parents and caregivers of DCFS-supervised children birth-to-five during every Spring, along with a cover letter encouraging parents/caregivers to talk to their child welfare caseworker about how to enroll their child in an ECE program.

- Lastly, while LACWEEP was able to train more than half of the child welfare caseworkers in the target community and a sizeable portion of ECE providers and Court personnel, many members of the target audiences could not attend the training because they could not afford to take the necessary time off from their day-to-day work responsibilities. This challenge is likely to be ongoing as funding for child welfare, early education and other social services in Los Angeles (and around the country) is cut and staff is increasingly expected to do more with less. LACWEEP is creating online versions of its training in the hope that this will make it easier for staff to participate by not requiring them to travel to an offsite training location and by allowing them to complete the training, if need be, in several short installments that they can fit in more easily between other work responsibilities.
Evaluation of Objective 4: Convene South County Child Welfare – Early Childhood Systems Advisory Committee charged with improving service coordination to better meet the developmental & family support needs of children B-4 in the child welfare system

Intervention/Activity

LACWEFP’s final infrastructure development objective was the convening of a project Advisory Committee responsible for improving early childhood services coordination to better meet the needs of South County children under five years old involved with the child welfare system. The Advisory Committee was to meet on a bi-monthly basis to monitor ECE referrals and enrollments for the grant’s target population and trouble-shoot emerging obstacles to linking this population to high quality ECE and other needed services. It was also responsible for producing three written products:

1) an Information-Sharing Protocol to facilitate communication between DCFS and ECE providers about the needs and developmental progress of shared clients,

2) a Data Infrastructure Development Plan for tracking long term school outcomes for DCFS-supervised children enrolled in LBUSD Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and

3) a 3-5 year Strategic Plan for maximizing ECE enrollment for DCFS-supervised children throughout the South County Region.

The Information-Sharing Protocol was intended to outline a process for ECE providers to share developmental screenings/assessments with DCFS caseworkers and Court officers so that this information could inform case planning. It was also intended to assist in the ‘marketing’ of ECE services to DCFS workers, who would perceive access to this kind of information as an added benefit of referring children to ECE. At a minimum, the Protocol was expected to (a) outline the information sharing process for LBUSD to provide DCFS caseworkers with copies of shared clients’ Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) assessments, which LBUSD Head Start completes three times a year for all enrolled children, and (b) include sample release forms that would satisfy HIPAA, FERPA and other legal requirements related to information privacy.
The *Data Infrastructure Development Plan* was intended to facilitate outcome tracking for DCFS-supervised children receiving ECE services by outlining a process for ultimately linking DCFS and ECE provider data systems. The goal of this Plan was to enable future research on the impacts of ECE services on DCFS-supervised children’s safety, permanency and well-being outcomes, including their school readiness and K-12 academic performance.

Lastly, the purpose of the *Strategic Plan* was to draw on lessons learned from the implementation of LACWEEP in Long Beach during the first year of the grant to create an actionable plan for sustaining and scaling up successful project components to the entire DCFS South County Region.

**Research/Verification Methods**

To evaluate implementation of the deliverables associated with Objective 4, at least one member of the evaluation team observed each of the LACWEEP Advisory Committee meetings and reviewed meeting minutes and attendance logs. The Lead Evaluator also reviewed the final, approved versions of the Committee’s three written deliverables: the *Information-Sharing Protocol*, *Data Infrastructure Development Plan*, and *Strategic (a.k.a. ‘Sustainability’) Plan*. In addition, Advisory Committee members were also surveyed about the perceived ‘actionability’ of the core strategies/approaches outlined in these documents.

**Outputs for Objective 4**

Based on these evaluation methods, it was determined that the following outputs related to Objective 4 were successfully implemented during the grant cycle (October 2011 – August 2013):

- **Convening of the LACWEEP Advisory Committee**

  In keeping with LACWEEP’s proposal, during the first quarter of the grant the LACWEEP leadership team successfully recruited representatives from 16 organizations to serve on the project Advisory Committee, 14 of which remained active during the grant. Additionally, representatives from three other organizations joined the Committee later on. The 19 members represented several different ECE providers located in and near Long Beach, including Head Start/Early Head Start, preschool, and licensed child care providers; three child care planning and policy bodies (the Long Beach Early Education Committee, Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee, and the Los Angeles Policy Roundtable for Child Care); DCFS’ South County Regional Office and its Education &
Mentoring Division; two nonprofit social service agencies that provide foster care and/or child and family mental health services in Long Beach; Project ABC (a SAMHSA-funded system of care initiative focused on young children with behavioral health needs); First 5 LA’s Best Start program (a neighborhood-based approach to improving outcomes for young children), Parents as Partners (a peer support program for parents involved in the child welfare system); the Advancement Project (a civil rights organization that advocates for public policies that support preschool access for disadvantaged populations); Tarzana Treatment Services (which operates a residential treatment program for drug-addicted mothers and their children and other substance abuse treatment services in the target community); and Los Angeles Juvenile Probation. Additionally, the Principal Investigator for LACWEEP and project-funded staff from the Inter-University Consortium and LBUSD (totaling n=5) were active on the Advisory Committee and provided administrative support. The Committee was co-led by the Assistant Director of Family Services at LBUSD Head Start and the Early Education Manager at DCFS.

It should be noted that while Juvenile Probation and Tarzana Treatment Services were part of the LACWEEP Advisory Committee, they did not participate actively. Representatives were also invited from the Los Angeles Juvenile Dependency Court, Part C/Early Intervention, the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health’s Birth to Five program, and the local County Supervisor’s office, but these groups declined to participate.

Throughout the grant, the Advisory Committee met on a bi-monthly basis for a total of nine meetings. Appendix 6 details the organizations that participated on the Advisory Committee as well as the number of meetings that each representative attended. The meetings served to organize and mobilize community stakeholders by reviewing ECE referral and enrollment data, providing updates from DCFS and LBUSD Head Start about emerging enrollment challenges and opportunities encountered, problem-solving challenges, and sharing updates. Additionally, as discussed under the Evaluation of Objective 3, the Advisory Committee was instrumental in conducting outreach for the joint DCFS-ECE Provider and Parent/Caregiver Trainings.

- **Information-Sharing Protocol & Data Infrastructure Development Plan**

  In February 2012, the Advisory Committee established a workgroup responsible for generating both the Information Sharing Protocol and the Data Infrastructure Plan. This workgroup consisted of 1) the Principal Investigator and Co-Director of the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities; 2) DCFS’ Early Education
Manager; 3) LBUSD Head Start’s Assistant Director of Family Services, the project-supported Community Liaison, and a Family Services Liaison; 4) the Executive Director of For the Child, a Long Beach-based nonprofit mental health agency; 5) a counselor and infant mental health specialist from ChildNet, a Long Beach-based nonprofit mental health and foster care agency; and 6) the Chair of the Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee. The workgroup convened three times (3/22/12, 5/24/12, 6/18/12) over the course of the grant and provided updates to, and solicited feedback from, the broader Advisory Committee during two of the nine meetings (4/25/13 and 7/11/13). The Advisory Committee approved the written Information-Sharing Protocol and Data Infrastructure Development Plan, developed by the workgroup on July 11, 2013, which the workgroup combined into a single document (Appendix 7).

The Information-Sharing Protocol described in this document meets, and in several ways exceeds, the expectations outlined in the grant proposal. This document provides a detailed account of the consent procedures and various types of information/documentation (e.g. proof of age, immunization records, current physical exam, letter from caseworker indicating DCFS involvement) that must be exchanged in order for:

- DCFS to refer a child to LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start;
- LBUSD to enroll a DCFS-supervised child in one of its Head Start or Early Head Start programs;
- DCFS to request an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for a child enrolled in a LBUSD Head Start or Early Head Start program;
- An alternative (non-LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start) ECE program to enroll a DCFS-supervised child; and
- An LBUSD or non-LBUSD ECE program to share educational information with DCFS, such as developmental screenings and assessments, attendance records, copies of existing IEPs, mental health referrals and health screenings.

The Protocol even goes so far as to detail the slight variations in consent procedures that are required for children in different types of placements (i.e. foster care, relative caregiver, adoptive parent, or birth parent). It outlines the various types of developmental screenings and assessments administered by LBUSD Head Start as well as several non-Head Start ECE agencies so that DCFS caseworkers can be made aware of the type of information they may want to request. It also explains the concept of
‘educational rights’ and how these rights can be transferred to a non-biological parent when this is necessary to request an IEP. Lastly, the Information-Sharing Protocol explains how the recent passage of the Uninterrupted Scholars Act streamlines the process for DCFS staff to request (early) educational information regarding their clients, but also outlines the more intensive, pre-existing process for requesting this information since not all educational agencies are familiar with the Uninterrupted Scholars Act yet. Copies of release forms required as part of this process are also appended to the Protocol.

The Data Infrastructure Development Plan developed by the Advisory Committee describes the DCFS, LBUSD Head Start, and LBUSD K-12 data management systems currently in place and how data from these systems can be linked to facilitate the tracking of ECE service utilization and associated developmental, school, safety and permanency outcomes for DCFS-supervised children enrolled in LBUSD’s Head Start/Early Head Start programs. This Plan explains that LBUSD Head Start is currently able to access data from its ChildPlus case management program (with appropriate consents) to provide DCFS with individual reports on the developmental progress, attendance records and IEPs of any child that has participated in one of its programs, and so it is at least theoretically possible to aggregate this data for research purposes. Members of the evaluation team hope to do so in the near future so that they can analyze the association between Head Start/Early Head Start program participation and developmental/school readiness outcomes for the grant target population.

Whether it will be possible to similarly measure the association between LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start program participation and K-12 school attendance and academic performance for DCFS-supervised children is not yet clear, however. From a technological standpoint, it is possible to track K-12 school outcomes for DCFS-supervised children who participate in LBUSD Head Start or Early Head Start programs and subsequently attend LBUSD schools because LBUSD’s new Synergy data management system generates a unique pupil identification number for LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start participants that follows them as they enter the School District’s K-12 system. However, LBUSD’s data and research unit is short-staffed and therefore reluctant to commit to performing any non-essential data extractions. This includes extracting the data that the evaluation team would need to examine whether DCFS-supervised children who attend LBUSD’s Head Start/Early Head Start programs fare better in school than DCFS-supervised children who do not receive ECE services. DCFS
and the LACWEEP evaluation team will continue to work with LBUSD in the hope that an acceptable arrangement can ultimately be worked out for accessing the data needed for this analysis.

Evaluation of the relationship between the target population access to ECE services and child welfare outcomes is more readily achieved. LACWEEP succeeded in having the DCFS Head Start/ECE electronic referral system modified so that now all of the referrals that LBUSD receives from DCFS (including those that are eventually routed to non-LBUSD ECE programs) include the referred child’s DCFS Unique Child Identifier Number. Inclusion of this number makes it possible to link a child’s LBUSD Head Start records back to that child’s DCFS Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) records, which include maltreatment and placement history information. This will allow the evaluation team to begin analyzing the relationship between ECE program participation and DCFS-supervised children’s safety and/or permanency outcomes in the near future.

- **Strategic (a.k.a. Sustainability) Plan**

  The Advisory Committee opted not to establish a distinct workgroup to develop its *Strategic Plan* for sustaining and scaling up successful LACWEEP project elements; rather, as a full committee, it spent three meetings (8/12/12, 10/4/12, 4/25/13) discussing potential components of the plan and approved a final version (Appendix 8) on 7/11/13.

  This *Plan* identifies the LACWEEP project collaborators and champions and presents a blueprint for sustaining key project components after the grant ends. It states that LACWEEP’s expansion of the DCFS electronic Head Start/ECE referral system to include LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start programs and infants and toddlers in Long Beach will continue after the grant. The data infrastructure is already in place to facilitate this; the DCFS Early Education Manager is committed to maintaining oversight responsibility for this function; and LBUSD Head Start is committed to continuing to partner with DCFS to enroll child welfare-involved children into its programs and to regularly communicating with DCFS caseworkers about the status of referred children. Additionally, although not mentioned in the *Sustainability Plan*, DCFS’ Early Education Manager has recently begun planning a meeting in early 2014 with a number of providers of ECE for toddlers that operate in other parts of Los Angeles to begin discussions about how to build the infrastructure needed to incorporate younger children into the electronic referral system throughout the entire county.
With respect to the linkage of DCFS-supervised children to alternative ECE programs, it was originally hoped that this grant-funded function could be assumed by one or more IUC Masters in Social Work field internships. However, IUC is currently experiencing a major restructuring and its contract with DCFS to provide Title IV-E child welfare field placements for Masters in Social Work students may not be continued. As a back-up, the *Sustainability Plan* states that LACWEEP will apply for a First 5 LA community investment grant to pay for the LBUSD Community Liaison to continue to perform this function.

To ensure continued access to trainings, the curriculum that was developed for the joint DCFS-ECE Provider training has been recorded in an audio Powerpoint format. The *Sustainability Plan* calls for this training to be uploaded to DCFS’ intranet so that it is accessible, not only to DCFS South Region staff, but to all DCFS staff. It will also be hosted on the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities website ([http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu/ourwork/la-cwee2/](http://www.healthychild.ucla.edu/ourwork/la-cwee2/)), along with the written materials for the redacted versions of the trainings, so that members of the public can access these materials free of charge. Several members of the Advisory Committee have pledged to disseminate the trainings to ECE providers, early childhood mental health specialists, parents/caregivers and other stakeholders in the Long Beach/South County region through their various spheres of influence.

To a large extent, the information-sharing and data infrastructure components of LACWEEP are self-perpetuating. The Uninterrupted Scholars Act has removed the major legal impediments to DCFS and ECE providers exchanging educational information about shared clients and the *Information-Sharing Plan* maps a clear process for initiating this kind of exchange. The decisions to append DCFS’ Unique Child Identifier number to all Head Start/ECE referrals as well as to have LBUSD’s Synergy data management system assign a unique pupil identification number to all children enrolled in LBUSD Head Start programs have created the potential to manually and electronically link data across the DCFS, LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start, and LBUSD K-12 systems. Also, to help ensure that data collection efforts between LBUSD and DCFS are sustained, a LACWEEP research internship has been developed for a Masters of Social Work student from the UCLA School of Social Welfare. This internship can be offered on an ongoing basis to UCLA students and will provide staff support for the evaluators as they fulfill their post-grant goals of analyzing the relationship between ECE participation and developmental/school readiness, safety, permanency, and (hopefully eventually) also K-
12 school performance outcomes for child welfare-supervised children.

While the grant proposal only called for this Plan to address sustaining LACWEEP within DCFS’s South County Region, the Advisory Committee has also begun a discussion about what components of LACWEEP could be scaled up countywide. During the committee meeting held on 8/2/12, Advisory Committee members were provided with handouts that requested that they rank order all of the current grant activities that they would like to sustain in the Long Beach/DCFS South Region, as well as all the grant activities that they would like to see expanded throughout Los Angeles County. It was decided that each member would complete two versions of these forms: a “visionary” version that would prioritize components that are important to sustain or expand, but would require additional funding, and a “practical” version that would prioritize components that are both important and possible to sustain or expand with the limited resources available as the grant funding ends. Grant components that were rank ordered included:

1. Adding infants and toddlers (birth to two years) to the DCFS Head Start/ECE referral system;
2. Referral of children birth to five-years old to non-Head Start agencies when Head Start and Early Head Start do not have the capacity to serve them in a timely manner;
3. Community Liaison position responsible for linking DCFS children to alternative ECE services;
4. The LACWEEP Advisory Committee;
5. Ongoing development of trainings for child welfare staff, ECE & other early childhood systems providers, Juvenile Dependency Court personnel, parents/caregivers on topics pertinent to improving service delivery and coordination to better meet the developmental & family support needs of children B-4 in the child welfare system; and
6. Development and use of a formal ‘passport’ document for ECE providers to record and transmit important information about a child (e.g. physical health, developmental history, involvement with DCFS, and out-of-home placements) that can then be shared with new ECE providers if/when children transition between ECE settings.
The top three results from the ranking exercise are summarized in the table that follows. They highlight a strong interest in, and potential for: (1) expanding the mission and structure of the Advisory Committee to encompass child welfare-ECE coordination for all of Los Angeles county; (2) expanding the grant’s process of using DCFS’ electronic referral system and partnerships with Head Start providers to also facilitate referral to non-Head Start ECE programs when more appropriate for a child/family; and (c) for replicating the grant-funded Community Liaison position (via a paid position or an unpaid MSW internship) in other parts of the county.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LACWEEP Sustainability Priorities (Long Beach/South Region)</th>
<th>Best Opportunities to ‘Scale Up’ LACWEEP (Los Angeles County-wide)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visionary</td>
<td>Practical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding 0-2 year olds to the referral system</td>
<td>Advisory Committee Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to non-Head Start agencies</td>
<td>Referral to non-Head Start agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Liaison</td>
<td>Community Liaison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advisory Committee Structure &amp; Ongoing Trainings (TIED)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These rankings also reflect some ambivalence on the part of Advisory Committee members regarding the expansion of DCFS’s Head Start/ECE referral system to include 0-2 year olds. The Advisory Committee members strongly support the value of helping infants and toddlers in the child welfare system (not just three- and four-year olds) access quality ECE services, as denoted by the top ranking of this element of the grant in both the Long Beach/South Region and Countywide “visionary” lists. However, a number of Committee members had reservations about expanding and even continuing this particular component of LACWEEP because there is such a dearth of affordable infant/toddler slots in the community. They fear that including younger children in the electronic referral system when there is little certainty that they will actually be linked to a program could make caseworkers decide that Head Start/ECE referral system is a waste of their time and end up discouraging them from using it to refer any of their clients, even older children who stand a more reasonable chance of being successfully enrolled in an ECE program.
Facilitators to Implementation of Objective 4

LACWEEP’s core leadership team is comprised of influential, key actors in Los Angeles’ ECE and child welfare systems, which was very helpful in recruiting organizations to participate on the Advisory Committee. It also facilitated the completion of the written deliverables for Objective 4, as members of the leadership team were able to leverage their professional relationships and positional influence to get needed, timely input from entities not represented on the Advisory Committee (e.g. feedback from County Counsel and the Los Angeles County Juvenile Court Presiding Judge’s Office regarding legal issues related to the Information Sharing Protocol).

Additionally, it would not have been possible to complete the Committee’s written deliverables without the invaluable administrative staff support provided by LAWEEP’s grant-funded Project Manager, Stephanie Benson. Given that serving on the Advisory Committee was not a core part of most members’ job responsibilities, having a dedicated LACWEEP Project Manager who could draft and revise the Information-Sharing Protocol, Data Infrastructure Development Plan and Sustainability Plan based on Committee member’s input was essential to completing these tasks.

With respect to the project’s information-sharing and data infrastructure goals, the passage of the Uninterrupted Scholars Act in 2012 has helped overcome legal obstacles to DCFS accessing educational information from LBUSD (and other school districts) regarding it clients’ school attendance and developmental and educational progress. Previously, agencies’ fear of violating FERPA and/or HIPAA privacy protections and the looming possibility of a lawsuit encouraged a culture of non-cooperation between DCFS and some school districts, but this culture is now starting to change.

Lastly, the integration of DCFS’ Unique Child Identifier Number into the electronic Head Start/ECE referral system has been critical in facilitating LACWEEP’s data infrastructure development objective. Inclusion of this unique identifier with all of the referrals to LBUSD Head Start means that it is now possible for DCFS to link children’s ECE utilization data with their child welfare case management data. This will enable future research on the child welfare trajectories of children who do and do not receive ECE services.

Challenges/Barriers to Implementation of Objective 4

The dominant challenge to the development of the Advisory Committee was soliciting sustained participation from key personnel from member organizations who had
sufficient decision-making authority to foment systems level change. While all individuals and organizations that were approached to participate as members of the Committee voiced interest in the project, as well as commented on the project’s importance, several were unable to commit to regularly attending meetings. In some cases, individuals offered support through delegating alternate staff members to participate on the Advisory Committee, but these delegates were not always able to generate sustainable support for LACWEEP and its objectives from their respective organizations. This was particularly salient with respect to the DCFS South Regional Office’s involvement on the Committee. During the course of the grant cycle there was considerable turnover within Los Angeles County DCFS, and particularly in the South County region serving the target community. Specifically, during the grant there have been three Regional Administrators (RAs) presiding over Service Planning Area (SPA) 8, which is directly responsible for the City of Long Beach. At the start of the grant in October 2011, there was considerable buy-in for the LACWEEP project from then RA Frank Ramos, who helped develop the LACWEEP proposal and was instrumental in facilitating his staff’s participation in LACWEEP trainings and prioritizing the importance of the ECE referral system for his staff. However, in June 2012, Mr. Ramos was posted to a new assignment and there have been two subsequent RAs for SPA 8, neither of whom have been as actively involved in the project.

The second challenge was simply that of Advisory Committee members not being able to reliably commit to meetings and workgroup activities because their participation on the committee was an additional responsibility that they have on top of an already very demanding schedule. This was particularly acute for Committee members in the ECE and mental health fields, who experienced significant State budget cuts while the grant was being implemented. These austerity measures impacted LBUSD Head Start staff’s capacity to take on new and/or non-essential activities or operations. At LBUSD Head Start there is only one employee who is responsible for all of the developmental assessment gathering, data entry, and analysis. Furthermore, such data entry and analysis is not the primary responsibility of this employee. Because of this, LBSUD may not be able to continue the robust level of data collection and tracking of DCFS clients that it performed as part of the grant without some restored funding and/or support from a Research Intern.

During the course of the grant, the Inter-University Consortium experienced considerable restructuring as their contract with DCFS started to dissolve. In terms of
sustainability, the IUC was intending to develop a specific, ongoing Title IV-E student placement opportunity at LBUSD Head Start to continue staffing of the Community Liaison position (initially funded by the grant) responsible for tracking DCFS referrals and facilitating enrollment in alternative (non-LBUSD Head Start) ECE programs. Furthermore, the intention was for the IUC to create other similar Title IV-E Masters in Social Work student placements elsewhere in Los Angeles to enable expansion of the project model. Unfortunately, the restructuring of the IUC brought the dissolution of the social work student placement and training components of its contract with DCFS and so developing these IUC students placements is not currently possible.

In terms of the challenges related specifically to the development and implementation of the Data Infrastructure Plan, one of the most significant barriers LACWEEP encountered was generating approval to develop the systems level/computer/technical infrastructure required to securely and safely share confidential information through integrating data management systems. This requires considerable IT resources and raises some legal concerns regarding data privacy, and, so LACWEEP found it more practical to focus on introducing unique identifiers to the relevant data systems that children’s records could at least be linked upon request.

Although the project made considerable progress on its information-sharing sub-objective, one lingering challenge remains: the lack of uniformity and clarity in how the different systems define and respond to children involved in the child welfare system. This is a source of confusion for parents, caregivers, caseworkers, ECE providers, and school personnel that makes the process of enrolling and stabilizing these children in ECE programs overly complex and often disjointed. Currently, it is only children in Foster Care who are categorically eligible for Head Start programs. Those placed with a relative caregiver or living with birth parents are not categorically eligible. LBUSD gives extra points in the Head Start/Early Head Start application process that helps prioritize placement of DCFS-supervised children living at home or with relatives, but other Head Start providers in the county may not. On a similar note, the Uninterrupted Scholars Act allows sharing of educational information with a child welfare agency representative when the agency is “legally responsible” for the child’s “care and protection”. Thus, the Act clearly applies to all DCFS-supervised children in out-of-home placements, but whether it allows DCFS to access (early) education records for children who remain, or have been reunified, with their birth parents is not clear.
Lessons Learned

One lesson learned from LACWEEP’s experience convening an inter-agency collaborative (the Advisory Committee) responsible for increasing DCFS-supervised children’s enrollment in high quality ECE programs, is that for an endeavor of this kind to be successful it requires participation from those with decision-making authority within their own organizations, and preferably also broader influence within their fields. Much of LACWEEP’s success in achieving its objectives can be directly traced to the authority and influence of key members; and, where it was less successful, this often had to do with Committee members not having sufficient authority or influence to carry the LACWEEP message forward in their own organizations.

Additionally, to be successful an Advisory Committee of this type requires at least a part-time dedicated staff person who can organize meetings, help keep leaders and members focused on producing key deliverables, and who can take the lead in producing important written materials associated with the project. If the Committee is successful in recruiting high-level and influential people to participate (see previous Lesson Learned), these individuals will not have the time to handle administrative tasks associated with the Committee themselves.

Another very practical lesson learned through the Advisory’s Committee’s data infrastructure work is that while an integrated child welfare-ECE-K-12 data system may be ideal, there are more practical and feasible ‘fixes’ for tracking children across these systems. Inclusion of a unique child identifier across data management systems can facilitate linkage of records, and, while it may be more ‘clunky’, it is far less resource-intensive to implement than a fully integrated data system.

Another lesson that emerged from discussions regarding the project’s Sustainability Plan is that there is wisdom in not letting a child welfare agency’s capacity to refer children to ECE programs dramatically outpace the capacity of these programs to serve these children. Otherwise, caseworkers may come to the conclusion that the referral system is ineffective and not worth using. This caution is particularly relevant with respect to infant care, which is notoriously under-supplied throughout the United States.

Lastly, the uncertain interpretation and nonalignment of the definitions used by different ECE programs, and by the Uninterrupted Scholars Act, to define the child welfare population should be be addressed. This is particularly true if we believe that ECE stability for children in the child welfare system is just as important as school (K-12)
stability for promoting positive developmental outcomes for this vulnerable population. It would be particularly helpful if the current list of children categorically eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start were expanded to include, not only foster children, but all child welfare-supervised children regardless of placement. Young children in the child welfare system who are placed ‘In Home’ or with relative caregivers also need high quality ECE services. Moreover, children’s participation in these programs and the positive relationships that they develop with their ECE providers should not be disrupted when they are returned to their parents and therefore are no longer in foster care. Similarly, for the same reasons that it is valuable to facilitate schools’ ability to exchange educational information with child welfare agencies about students placed in out-of-home care, it is also valuable to facilitate schools’ ability to exchange educational information regarding child welfare-supervised children who are living at home. Hopefully, the Uninterrupted Scholars Act will be interpreted or eventually amended to include this group of children. Future initiatives aimed at increasing the number of children in the child welfare system who benefit from high quality ECE may want include a policy advocacy strategy that attempts to address these and other related policy issues.
Evaluation of Objective 5: Strengthen collaborative relationships and improve service coordination among child welfare, ECE, and other early childhood systems in Long Beach

Expected Outcome

In addition to its infrastructure development objectives, LACWEEP also had three outcome objectives. The first of these (Objective 5) was to strengthen collaborative relationships and improve service coordination among the child welfare, ECE and other early childhood service organizations in the grant target community of Long Beach. LACWEEP’s principal strategy for achieving this outcome was the convening the LACWEEP Advisory Committee (described in detail in the Evaluation of Objective 4). It was hoped that organizing this local collaborative of ECE, child welfare and other social service agencies, charging them with the collective task of increasing access to high quality ECE for children in the child welfare system, and then providing them with an infrastructure for regular meetings to monitor, problem-solve and conjointly produce materials related to this shared goal would ultimately improve coordination and collaborative relationships amongst these agencies.

Research/Evaluation Methods

The evaluation employed two methods to assess the extent to which Objective 5 was met. First, we used social network analysis to examine changes during the grant project in the distribution and strength of ties between the organizations represented on the LACWEEP Advisory Committee. Second, at the conclusion of the grant we surveyed Advisory Committee members regarding their perceptions of the project’s impact on collaboration and service coordination between member organizations.

Network Analysis

Fourteen organizations actively participated\(^4\) in the Advisory Committee from the time it was initially convened, with three other organizations that joined the Committee later (N=17 at follow-up): The Advancement Project, Children Today and the Los Angeles County Policy Roundtable for Child Care. The member agencies are detailed in Appendix

\(^4\) Two other organizations are also listed as LACWEEP Advisory Committee members in Appendix 6: Tarzana Treatment Services and Los Angeles County Juvenile Probation. They are excluded from the network analysis, however, because they were not active members of the Advisory Committee; although both were invited to participate from the time the Committee was initially convened, neither attended more than one Committee meeting.
To evaluate the extent to which participation in the Advisory Committee enhanced collaboration and service coordination among agencies seeking to meet the early care and education, child and family support needs of families with young children involved in the child welfare system in Long Beach (Objective 5), we used network analysis to assess whether there was:

- an increase in the density of organizational ties between Advisory Committee members from implementation to project completion; and whether there was
- a decrease in network centralization from implementation to project completion.

**Data Collection**

The LACWEEP Advisory Committee was convened in January 2012 and at its initial meeting a survey (see Appendix 9) was distributed to attendees to assess the types of collaboration that were already occurring between participating organizations and the strength of these collaborations prior to implementation of the grant. Follow-up for missing data extended through March 2012. The Advisory Committee initially included 14 active partner organizations, 13 of which were listed on the Baseline Network Survey instrument. Baseline data was successfully collected from 11 of these 13 listed organizations (85% response rate). This survey was then re-administered approximately one year later in February 2013 to help determine whether collaboration had increased and/or strengthened following implementation of the grant project. At this time, the Advisory Committee had expanded to encompass 17 active partner agencies. Follow-up network data was collected for 16 of the 17 partners (94% response rate).

In most cases, Advisory Committee representatives completed the network surveys on behalf of their organizations, as they were generally knowledgeable about their organization’s collaborative activities related to coordinating early care and education, child and/or family support services for young children in the child welfare system. In three instances, Advisory Committee members sought assistance completing the survey from another organizational employee who was more knowledgeable about these activities, such as an Executive Director, to help ensure the accuracy of their responses.

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5 Although Parents in Partnership (PIP) participated in the Advisory Committee from the beginning of the grant project, it was unintentionally left off the list of possible partners on the Baseline Network Survey. Thus, for purposes of our analysis we treat PIP like the three ‘late joining’ organizations previously mentioned and only include information on this organization in follow-up analyses.
In designing our surveys, we followed Provan and colleagues’ (2005) example of using social network analysis to assess multiple dimensions of inter-organizational collaboration. The surveys asked about the following six facets of inter-organizational partnership: 1) sharing information, 2) receiving service referrals, 3) sending service referrals, 4) sharing staff, 5) sharing space or other resources, and 6) pooling funding. Key informant respondents from each organization were asked to review a list of all of the other organizations participating in the Advisory Committee and to indicate the frequency with which their organization engaged in the various types of collaboration with each of the other organizations. Responses were based on a five-point scale with “0” indicating no involvement with the other organization of the type indicated, “1” indicating infrequent involvement (1-4 times a year), “2” indicating occasional involvement (4-11 times a year), “3” indicating monthly involvement (12-24 times a year), and “4” indicating weekly involvement (more than three times a month). Respondents were also asked to assess the overall quality of the partnership between their organization and the other Advisory Committee members (e.g. how responsive an organization was to the needs of the respondent’s organization and its clients). These ratings were also based on a five-point scale with “0” indicating no relationship between the organizations in question, “1” indicating a limited partnership, “2” indicating a fair partnership, “3” indicating a good partnership, and “4” indicating an excellent partnership.

Analytic Approach

The raw data were entered into Excel spreadsheets. The network/relationship data for the 13 organizations actively involved in the Advisory Committee and included on the baseline network survey were recorded as seven network matrices, one for each of the six types of collaboration assessed and one for partnership quality. The data were recorded in two formats. The first format involved value-based matrices that reflected tie strength (i.e. the strength of relationship between each organizational dyad based on the five-point scale previously described). The second format was binary with each potential tie between organizations coded as either present (=1) or not (=0) depending on whether a link of any strength (1-4) was reported. This process was repeated for the follow-up survey data, both for the original 13 organizations and for the complete list of the final 17 organizations, participating in the Advisory Committee one year after it was convened. These matrices were then copied into UCINet version 6, a software program commonly used for analyzing social networks.

We analyzed the data in two ways. First, we used UCINet’s companion software
program NetDraw version 2 to graphically plot each of the seven social networks at baseline and at follow-up. Network relationships represented by these plots or ‘sociograms’ are ‘symmetrized’ to reflect the average tie strength reported by each organizational dyad. For instance, if Organization A described its relationship with Organization B as being a ‘4’, but Organization B described its relationship with Organization A as only being a ‘2’, we used the average (‘3’) to describe the relationship. In instances of missing data, the tie strength reported by the organization that completed the survey was used. For each dimension of collaboration and also partnership quality, we present three sociograms: 1) for the original 13 active organization partners listed on the baseline survey, 2) for these same 13 organizations at follow-up, and 3) for the complete set of 17 organizations listed on the follow-up survey, including ‘late joiners’.

We then used the binary, ‘symmetrized’ data and UCINet to analyze changes in network density and network centralization from baseline to follow-up. This allowed us to determine whether collaborative relationships were strengthened during the project period, as indicated by an increase in density and a decrease in centralization. As with the sociograms, we calculated density and centralization for: 1) the original 13 organizations actively involved in the Advisory Committee that were listed on the baseline survey, 2) these same 13 organizations at follow-up, and 3) the complete set of 17 active members listed on the follow-up survey, including ‘late joiners’.

Network Analysis Findings

For each of the seven types of networks (partnership quality, information sharing, staff sharing, space and other resource sharing, sending referrals, receiving referrals, and pooling funds) we produced baseline and follow-up sociograms using NetDraw. These plots describe graphically what these networks look like and allow the viewer to visually assess how collaborative relationships and partnerships across the network changed over the course of the project. By including follow-up sociograms for the original 13 active partners as well as for the complete 17-member network, readers can assess the extent to which desired changes in network composition resulted from increasing the size of the network and/or strengthening the quality of collaboration between the original actors.

The individual nodes on the sociograms represent Advisory Committee member organizations. They are coded by shape to distinguish the different types of organizations and by color to identify which agencies completed the survey. The lines connecting the
organizations indicate the strength of linkage between organizations. We present the sociograms for overall “Partnership Quality” below. The sociograms for the other six facets of inter-organizational collaboration can be found in Appendix 10.

Baseline Sociogram PARTNERSHIP QUALITY (Original 13 Organizations)

Follow-Up Sociogram PARTNERSHIP QUALITY (Original 13 Organizations)

Follow-Up Sociogram PARTNERSHIP QUALITY (Final 17 Organizations)
The *partnership quality* sociograms depict a positive trajectory, both in terms of an increase in the frequency of organizational ties between Advisory Committee members (represented by the number of lines connecting the various nodes or organizations) and the strength of these ties (with warmer color lines representing stronger ties). This is true when comparing the partnerships between the original 13 active Advisory Committee members at Baseline (i.e. when the Committee was first convened) and one year later (Follow-up), as well as when comparing the original 13 organizations at Baseline to the full set of 17 active members, including ‘late joining’ members, at Follow-up. This same pattern is observed in the sociograms for five of the other six facets of inter-organizational collaboration that we measure (see Appendix 10), with Sharing Staff being the only exception.

Our network density analysis confirms these observations. We assessed changes in network density from baseline to follow-up as an indicator of whether the various types of collaboration measured strengthened over the course of the grant project. Network density refers to the number of connections between network members and is defined as the sum of the ties between network actors (members) divided by the number of possible ties. Density reflects the extent to which the network population as a whole is integrated which is significant because information and resources spread more quickly through better-integrated networks. Dense networks are characterized by a high degree of inter-connectedness or cohesion between members. In our case, network density is indicative of how widespread collaboration is amongst the members of the LACWEEP Advisory Committee.

For ease of interpretation we analyzed density as a binary measure by transforming our data into dichotomous variables with 0 = “0” indicating an absence of collaboration or partnership for a given dimension, and 1 through 4 = “1” indicating some level of collaboration or partnership for a given dimension. The density of a binary network is the proportion of all possible links between network members that actually exist. Figure 2 depicts the results of the binary network density analysis.
Based on the data above, we see that the density of partnerships between Advisory Committee members at baseline was 0.68. That is, 68% of all possible ties (i.e. partnerships between member organizations) were present. This is quite dense to start, however, follow-up data indicates that density of partnerships between Advisory Committee members increased substantially by follow-up when 94% of all possible ties (partnerships) were present amongst the original 13-member network and 83% of all possible ties (partnerships) were present amongst the expanded 17-member network.

We see a similar trend in increased density of ties between the 13 original organizations from pre- to post-project implementation for sharing information (71% to 96% of all possible ties), receiving referrals (28% to 59%), sending referrals (31% to 53%), sharing of space and other resources (37% to 65%), and pooling funds (32% to 45%). Sharing staff is the only type of collaboration for which network density decreased during the project period (23% to 19% amongst the original 13 organizations).

When comparing baseline density to follow-up density for the expanded set of 17 member organizations, these patterns remain consistent. The network density for all types of collaboration except sharing staff increased from baseline to follow-up, however, follow-up density was not quite as strong for the expanded network as for the more constrained network of the original 13 actors. This finding is not surprising. The total
number of possible ties \[ n \times (n-1) \] increased from 156 in the 13-member network to 272 in the expanded network of 17 agencies; but, the expanded network included several agencies that were relatively new to the Advisory Committee when the follow-up data was collected and hence did not have as much time to develop partnerships and increase collaboration with the more established network members. Given this dynamic, it is notable that follow-up density for the expanded network increased as much as it did.

We also assessed changes in network centralization from baseline to follow-up as an indicator of whether the various types of collaboration became more diffused over the course of the grant project. Network centralization reflects the extent to which organizational ties are dependent on (i.e. mediated by) a few highly connected members as opposed to being more diversified. Highly centralized collaborative networks are vulnerable because the loss of a key member can cripple the exchange of resources across the entire network; thus, we assessed the extent to which centralization diminished during the project as a positive indicator of network robustness. As with our density analysis, the centralization analysis was based on the binary, symmetrized network data. Figure 3 depicts the results of the centralization analysis.

**Figure 3. Comparison of Network Centralization from Baseline to Follow-up**

As Figure 3 indicates, network de-centralization was only achieved for inter-organizational partnerships and information sharing; while network centralization
increased from baseline to follow-up for receiving and sending referrals, sharing staff, sharing space and other resources, and for pooling funds. These patterns hold true both for comparisons across time of the constrained 13-member network and comparisons of the original 13-member network to the expanded 17-member network. Thus, inter-organizational partnerships and information sharing between the Advisory Committee members became more diversified over the project period, but other types of collaboration actually became more, rather than less, dependent on a few key actors.

**Interpretation of Network Analysis Findings**

The sizable increases in network density observed for almost all aspects of collaboration measured, and corroborated by the sociograms, is a strong indicator that the LACWEEP Advisory Committee has enhanced collaboration and service coordination among participating agencies seeking to meet the ECE needs of families with young children involved in the child welfare system in Long Beach (Objective 5). Given LACWEEP’s particular interest in increasing ECE referrals (and enrollments) for child welfare-supervised children in Long Beach, it is especially notable that the density of networks for sending and receiving referrals roughly doubled in strength during the Advisory Committee’s first year. Our network centralization findings also suggest that information sharing between member agencies became more de-centralized during the first year of the Advisory Committee. This too is indicative of greater network ‘health’ since more diversified networks are less vulnerable to disruption should a central member organization dissolve or leave the network.

By this same token, however, the remaining network centralization findings may be cause for concern. They indicate that the network of Advisory Committee members actually became slightly more centralized with respect to all other facets of collaboration measured. The dependence on a few central member organizations to mediate these types of collaboration is not inherently negative, nor is it surprising given how young the Advisory Committee is as a formal network. It is, however, something that may warrant further attention as the network of agencies involved in the LACWEEP Advisory Committee becomes more mature.

Overall, the results of the network analysis are quite positive, though. They strongly suggest that collaborative task forces (like the LACWEEP Advisory Committee) organized around improving access to ECE services for children in the child welfare system are a viable means of improving service coordination and strengthening
organizational partnerships to promote this shared goal.

Advisory Committee Member Survey

Toward the end of the grant, members of the Advisory Committee were also surveyed about their experience on the Committee and their perceptions of how it impacted service coordination and collaboration with other represented organizations. These findings are presented below, but should be interpreted cautiously because the survey response rate was low (47%). Of the eight organizations that responded, the majority (five) had attended 5 to 6 out of 9 possible Advisory Committee meetings, while the remaining three organizations reported attending 7 to 9 meetings. This suggests that the respondents were among the Committee’s more active members.

Advisory Committee Member Survey Findings

On a 5-point scale (from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree), seven of the eight respondents strongly agreed that their organization had benefited from being involved in the Advisory Committee, while the remaining respondent slightly agreed with this statement. When invited to comment on the particular ways in which their organization benefitted or did not benefit from participating on the Committee, a single theme emerged; all eight respondents mentioned enhanced ‘collaboration’, ‘networking’, ‘connections’, ‘contacts’, ‘relationships’ and/or ‘partnerships’ with other organizations in response to this question, especially with organizations outside a respondent’s immediate service niche.

When specifically asked whether their participation on the Advisory Committee had strengthened their organization’s commitment to ECE for children involved with the child welfare system, seven of the eight respondents strongly agreed while one respondent slightly agreed. The respondents were also asked to describe what components of the Advisory Committee were most effective at facilitating collaboration. Participation in meetings, including smaller workgroup meetings, was cited most often (by five respondents) in response to this query, while information-sharing and/or cross training opportunities was mentioned by three respondents. One respondent specified that it was the opportunity to share information with “non-traditional collaborators” that s/he found most valuable. Respondents were similarly asked to identify the specific components on the Advisory Committee that were most effective at improving service coordination among participating organizations. Only six respondents answered this question. Two cited the data that was regularly shared during meetings as being most
effective at improving service coordination, and one of these respondents noted “especially the enrollment data about why families refused Head Start”. Two respondents cited participation in the Committee workgroups as most helpful. One respondent mentioned “shared information about processes” and another mentioned “the DCFS/Head Start technology gains – making it easier for DCFS to make the connection and tracking success/increase in referrals.”

Lastly, respondents were queried about their sustained commitment to collaborating with other members of the LACWEEP Advisory Committee after the grant ends. Seven respondents strongly agreed with the statement “I will continue to collaborate with member organizations beyond the timeframe of the [LACWEEP] infrastructure building project”, while the eighth respondent left this question blank.

Interpretation of Advisory Committee Members Findings

Overall, these survey results further support the conclusion that the Advisory Committee structure was an effective way to improve service coordination and inter-organizational collaboration to increase ECE access for children in the child welfare system. Members seemed to particularly benefit from the cross-sector structure of the Committee and the resulting opportunities to build relationships with ‘non-traditional partners’, i.e. agencies with different organizational mandates than their own. These results also suggest that at least two of the ways in which the LACWEEP Advisory Committee structured its work may have been particularly useful in promoting service coordination and therefore many be especially ‘replication worthy’. Engaging Committee members in smaller, interest-based workgroups charged with producing concrete project deliverables (e.g. the LACWEEP Training Curriculum Development Committee or the workgroup responsible for producing the Information Sharing Protocol and Data Infrastructure Development Plan) appears to have not only helped LACWEEP meet its infrastructure development objectives, but to have also enhanced service coordination between workgroup participants. Similarly, LACWEEP’s practice of regularly sharing updates at Advisory Committee meetings regarding ECE enrollment data for DCFS-supervised children and emergent enrollment challenges also appears to have been a particularly effective means of improving coordination between Long Beach’s child welfare and ECE service sectors.
Evaluation of Objective 6: Increase knowledge among Long Beach/South County Region child welfare staff, ECE providers, Juvenile Dependency Court personnel, parents & caregivers regarding the benefits of ECE for infants & young children in the child welfare system and how to navigate relevant service systems

Expected Outcome

The LACWEEP trainings described in the evaluation of Objective 3 were designed to help the project produce its second outcome objective: increased knowledge among child welfare staff, ECE providers, Dependency Court personnel, and parents/caregivers regarding the benefits of ECE for children in the child welfare system and how to navigate relevant service systems to access these services (Objective 6). Standardized trainings were selected as the most promising strategy for achieving this outcome.

Our evaluation of Objective 3 describes the three-hour training curricula that LACWEEP developed for child welfare and ECE professionals and the shortened two-hour curricula that it developed for parents/caregivers and Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). It also details LACWEEP training outputs, i.e. the number of trainings offered for each target audience and the number of people in each group trained. The learning outcomes associated with participation in these trainings are discussed here.

Research/Evaluation Methods

To assess whether the LACWEEP trainings actually increased participants’ knowledge about ECE for children in the child welfare system, we used a single group pre- and post-test evaluation design.

Data Collection

With input from the LACWEEP Curriculum Development Committee, the evaluation team developed pretest and posttest training surveys (see Appendix 11) that included two sets of questions. The first set asked training participants to use a 5-point likert-scale to self-assess their competency in each of the trainings’ three core learning objectives:

1. To develop a clear understanding of how to navigate the early care and education (ECE) system to connect families and children impacted by the child
welfare system to developmentally appropriate ECE programs;

2. To develop a clear understanding of the common barriers to enrolling children birth to five years old impacted by the child welfare system in early care and education (ECE) programs; and

3. To develop a clear understanding of the potential of quality early care and education (ECE) programs to improve developmental outcomes and school readiness for children birth to five years old within the child welfare system.

The second set of questions were knowledge-based and designed to provide an objective assessment of participant’s understanding of vital training content related to the learning objectives. For example, participants were asked to self-assess the extent to which they possessed a ‘clear understanding’ of how high quality ECE programs can improve developmental outcomes and school readiness for children in the child welfare system (Learning Objective 3), and then they were asked a combination of four multiple-choice and true-false questions assessing their actual understanding of key information related to this learning objective (e.g.: “Which factors below are all examples of structural indicators of quality early care and education?”).

The pre and posttest for the conjoint Child Welfare-ECE trainings consisted of three identical self-report questions regarding respondents’ perceived competency in the learning objectives and twelve knowledge-based questions. The pre and posttests for the Parents and Caregivers trainings and the Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) training were slightly redacted. They also included three self-report questions regarding respondents’ perceived competency in the learning objectives but only six knowledge-based questions.

Additionally, the pretest survey contained six questions about participants’ demographics and motivation for participating in the training. The posttest surveys contained eight likert response questions and four open-ended questions to measure training satisfaction and elicit participants’ feedback about ways to improve the trainings.

Survey response rates were strong, with the vast majority of participants completing both the pre and posttest surveys. This includes 108 out of 124 (87%) of child welfare staff and 106 of the 119 (89%) ECE staff who participated in the conjoint Child Welfare-ECE Provider trainings; 56 of the 61 Parents and Caregivers trained (92%); and 18 of the 21 CASAs trained (86%).
Analysis

To determine whether trainees' knowledge regarding the three learning objectives improved significantly after participating in LACWEEP training, pre and post-test data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests with dependent means, and chi-square tests of independence. Additionally, subgroup analyses of the training outcome data were conducted to determine whether any of the outcomes differed by participant group.

Findings Regarding Conjoint Child Welfare-ECE Provider Trainings

Child Welfare-ECE Provider Trainee Demographics

An approximately equal number of child welfare caseworkers (n=108) and ECE providers (n=106) completed surveys for the conjoint Child Welfare-ECE Provider trainings. Emergency Response or “front-line” DCFS staff, who are responsible for initial investigation of child maltreatment referrals, constituted 25% (n=27) of the child welfare caseworkers in attendance. Family Maintenance and Family Reunification “back-end” caseworkers, who are responsible for ongoing case management for families of children supervised in their own homes or placed in out-of-home care, accounted for 60.2% (n=65). Nearly 43% of the ECE providers who participated in these training were affiliated with Head Start programs (n=45) and 29.5% (n=31) were associated with a State Preschool Program.

Both child welfare workers and ECE providers were ethnically and racially similar; however, there were significant gender and educational differences. Child welfare workers had a greater mix of males and females $\chi^2 (1, N=211)=15.851, p<.000$ and were more likely to have both a Bachelor’s Degree and Master’s Degree $\chi^2 (4, N=198)=19.978, p < .000$. ECE providers were more likely to have a post high school degree in Child Development $\chi^2 (2, N=211)=23.324, p < .000$. See Table 1 for a detailed description of the Child Welfare-ECE Provider trainee demographics.
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Conjoint Child Welfare-ECE Provider Trainees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Trainees n = 214</th>
<th>DCFS Trainees n = 108</th>
<th>ECE Trainees n = 106</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DCFS Workers (%)</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Worker</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMR</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCSW</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency Investigator</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE Providers (%)</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Without Walls</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Preschool Program</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Home</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Center-based Care</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)***</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (%)***</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Race</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic/Chicano (%)</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American (%)</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American/Pacific Islander (%)</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/American Indian (%)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian (%)</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (%)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma/GED (%)***</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate's Degree (%)</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree (%)</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree (%)</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate Degree (%)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (%)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post High School Degree in Child Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (%)***</td>
<td>24.26</td>
<td>10.60</td>
<td>38.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2 (1, N=211)=15.851, p<.000\)
\(^2 (4, N=198)=19.978, p < .000\)
\(^2 (2, N=211)=23.324, p < .000\)

Child Welfare-ECE Provider Training Outcomes

As reflected in Table 2, on average, the Child Welfare-ECE Provider trainees’
who completed surveys (n=214) answered just over half (mean=6.45) of the twelve knowledge-based questions correctly on the pretest survey, and, after participating in the training, they did significantly better (mean=8.25).

Subgroup analyses of the knowledge-based questions found that child welfare caseworkers and ECE providers had a similar level of understanding of the training content both before participating in the training (mean pretest scores were 6.55 and 6.35 respectively) and after (mean posttest scores were 8.42 and 8.08 respectively); and, thus, the two groups also showed similar levels of improvement from pretest to posttest, with child welfare caseworkers scoring on average 1.87 points higher and ECE providers scoring 1.73 points higher. In both cases, this improvement was statistically significant albeit moderate. Simply put, both child welfare and ECE trainees answered approximately half of the knowledge-based questions correctly on the pretest and just over two-thirds of the questions correctly on the posttest. Significant improvements were noted for all three knowledge-based question subscales (i.e. 1. navigating ECE, 2. barriers to ECE, and 3. benefits of ECE) for both groups of trainees.

Additionally, both child welfare and ECE trainees reported a statistically significant increase in their self-assessed competence for each of the three training learning objectives. Subgroup analyses of the self-reported competency scores found that child welfare caseworkers reported greater competence than ECE providers on Learning Objective 1 (ability to navigate ECE systems) and Learning Objective 3 (understanding of the benefits of ECE) after completing the training. However, their scores on the knowledge-based questions associated with these two learning objectives were not statistically different from ECE providers’ scores. In other words, even though child welfare caseworkers self-reported that they knew more (than ECE providers) about Learning Objectives 1 and 3, their knowledge-based scores did not reflect this.
Table 2. Conjoint Child Welfare-ECE Provider Training Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge-based Scores</th>
<th>Trainees Mean (SD)</th>
<th>DCFS Trainees Mean (SD)</th>
<th>ECE Trainees Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Knowledge-based Score</td>
<td>6.45 (1.94)</td>
<td>6.55 (1.98)</td>
<td>6.35 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest Knowledge-based Score</td>
<td>8.25 (2.57)</td>
<td>8.42 (2.15)</td>
<td>8.08 (2.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest-Posttest Change</td>
<td>1.8 (2.77)*</td>
<td>1.87 (2.85)*</td>
<td>1.73 (2.7)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subscale #1: Navigating ECE
| Pretest Score | 2.52 (1.06) | 2.58 (1.08) | 2.46 (1.05) |
| Posttest Score | 2.88 (1.14) | 2.94 (1.11) | 2.81 (1.19) |
| Pretest-Posttest Change | .36 (1.37)* | .36 (1.4)* | .35 (1.34)* |

Subscale #2: Barriers Accessing ECE
| Pretest Score | 2.79 (1.24) | 2.83 (1.33) | 2.75 (1.25) |
| Posttest Score | 3.62 (1.29) | 3.62 (1.33) | 3.61 (1.26) |
| Pretest-Posttest Change | .83 (1.53)* | .79 (1.59)* | .86 (1.47)* |

Subscale #3: Benefits of ECE
| Pretest Score | 1.14 (.52) | 1.13 (.57) | 1.14 (.48) |
| Posttest Score | 1.75 (.77) | 1.85 (.7) | 1.65 (.69) |
| Pretest-Posttest Change | .61 (.82)* | .72 (.88)* | .51 (.75)* |

Self-reported Competency Scores

Self-reported Learning Objective #1: Navigating ECE
| Pretest Score | 2.97 (1.09) | 2.68 (1.0) | 3.27 (1.09) |
| Posttest Score | 4.12 (.67) | 3.96 (.67) | 4.28 (.62) |
| Pretest-Posttest Change | 1.15 (1.07)* | 1.28 (1.08)* | 1.01 (1.05)* |

Self-reported Learning Objective #2: Barriers Accessing ECE
| Pretest Score | 3.10 (1.04) | 2.88 (.97) | 3.33 (1.06) |
| Posttest Score | 4.23 (.66) | 4.10 (.67) | 4.37 (.63) |
| Pretest-Posttest Change | 1.13 (1.07)* | 1.22 (1.05)* | 1.04 (1.07)* |

Self-reported Learning Objective #3: Benefits of ECE
| Pretest Score | 3.47 (1.08) | 3.17 (1.0) | 3.77 (1.08) |
| Posttest Score | 4.36 (.67) | 4.23 (1.7) | 4.50 (.64) |
| Pretest-Posttest Change | .89 (1.08)* | 1.06 (1.06)* | .73 (1.07)* |

*p<.05
Findings Regarding Parent/Caregiver Trainings

Parent/Caregiver Trainee Demographics

Approximately 34.5% of the Parent/Caregiver training participants were part of Parents in Partnership (PIP), a group comprised of biological parents of children previously involved with Los Angeles County's child welfare system who now provide peer support and guidance to parents currently supervised by DCFS. The remaining 65.5% of the participants were parents or caregivers unaffiliated with PIP (i.e. birth parents, legal guardians, relative caregivers, non-relative extended family members/NREFM, foster or adoptive parents). The vast majority of Parent/Caregiver trainees were female (89%) and either Latino/Hispanic/Chicana (70%) or African American (20%). Typically they had a high-school level of education (65.5%). The majority (68%) answered the survey in English (%), but almost a third (32%) chose to answer it in Spanish. All of the Spanish surveys were completed by non-PIP trainees. See Table 3 for a detailed description of the Parent/Caregiver trainee demographics.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Parent/Caregiver Trainees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>All Trainees n = 56 (%)</th>
<th>PIP Trainees n = 19 (%)</th>
<th>Non-PIP Trainees n = 37 (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents in Partnership (n=19)</td>
<td>34.5</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biological Parent (n=13)</td>
<td>23.6</td>
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<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Guardian (n=6)</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Caregiver (n=7)</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NREFM (n=3)</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parent (n=6)</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.9</td>
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<td>Adoptive Parent (n=2)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>94.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Race</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic/Chicana</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Indian</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Less Than High School</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma/GED</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language of Test</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>67.9</td>
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<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>32.1*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*: x² (1,N=56)=13.622, p<.000
Parent/Caregiver Training Outcomes

As reflected in Table 4, on average, the Parent/Caregiver trainees’ (n=56) who completed training surveys answered slightly more than half of the six knowledge-based questions correctly on the pretest survey (mean score=3.35), while their average posttest score was 4.13. This improvement (mean=0.78), while modest, was statistically significant. It appears to have been primarily driven by non-PIP training participants’ knowledge gains, as changes in the PIP trainees’ scores from pre to posttest, while positive, were not statistically significant. This may be related to the fact that PIP trainees started out with higher pretest knowledge scores than the other Parent/Caregiver trainees.

Additionally, the Parent/Caregiver trainees as a whole reported statistically significant increases in their self-reported competence for each of the three training learning objectives. The greatest improvement was seen for Learning Objective 1 (navigating ECE) where trainees’ mean scores, on a 5-point scale, were 3.45 at pretest and 4.38 at post-test (mean improvement: 0.93 points). However, similar to the results for the knowledge-based questions, the improvements in self-reported competency were driven by the non-PIP trainees. Sub-group analyses found that PIP trainees did not report statistically significant improvement with respect to their competency in any of the three learning objectives. On the other hand, non-PIP groups reported statistically significant improvement for all three learning objectives.

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6 Because the knowledge-based questions were redacted for this training, sub-scale analyses by learning objective were not conducted.
### Table 4. Parent/Caregiver Training Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge-based Scores</th>
<th>All Trainees (n=56)</th>
<th>PIP (n=19)</th>
<th>Non-PIP (n=37)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Knowledge-based Score</td>
<td>3.35 (1.22)</td>
<td>3.82 (1.16)</td>
<td>3.11 (4.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest Knowledge-based Score</td>
<td>4.13 (1.00)</td>
<td>4.3 (0.88)</td>
<td>4.03 (1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest-Posttest Change</td>
<td>0.78 (1.35)*</td>
<td>0.48 (1.39)</td>
<td>0.92 (1.33)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-reported Competency Scores**

**Self-reported Learning Objective #1: Navigating ECE**
- Pretest Score | 3.45 (1.32) | 4.05 (0.97) | 3.14 (1.34) |
- Posttest Score | 4.38 (1.10) | 4.68 (0.82) | 4.16 (1.91) |
- Pretest-Posttest Change | .93 (1.41)* | .63 (1.46) | 1.02 (1.38)* |

**Self-reported Learning Objective #2: Barriers Accessing ECE**
- Pretest Score | 3.51 (1.32) | 4.05 (1.08) | 3.22 (1.36) |
- Posttest Score | 4.16 (1.24) | 4.58 (0.22) | 3.89 (1.31) |
- Pretest-Posttest Change | .65 (1.52)* | .53 (1.61) | .67 (1.49)* |

**Self-reported Learning Objective #3: Benefits of ECE**
- Pretest Score | 3.71 (1.41) | 4.32 (1.11) | 3.39 (1.46) |
- Posttest Score | 4.32 (1.11) | 4.74 (0.17) | 4.11 (1.22) |
- Pretest-Posttest Change | .61 (1.35)* | .42 (1.39) | .72 (1.33)* |

* p < .05

### Findings Regarding Court-appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Trainings

**CASA Trainee Demographics**

CASA trainees were predominantly Caucasian (78%), well educated (72% had a Bachelor’s degree and 22% had Master’s degrees), and all of them were female. See Table 5 for a detailed description of the CASA trainee demographics.
Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for CASA Trainees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trainees n = 18 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity/Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic/Chicano</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Than High School</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma/GED</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CASA Training Outcomes**

On average, the CASA trainees' (n=18) who completed training surveys were already fairly knowledgeable about ECE for children in the child welfare system, as demonstrated by the fact that they answered two-thirds of the six knowledge-based questions correctly on the pretest survey (mean score=4.06). Nevertheless, their scores improved significantly after participating in the training (mean posttest score = 5.44). In addition, the CASA trainees reported modest, but statistically significant, improvements in self-assessed competency for all three learning objectives, with the largest gains in competency occurring for navigating ECE service systems (Learning Objective 1) and understanding the barriers to enrolling child welfare-supervised children in ECE (Learning Objective 2).
Table 6. CASA Training Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge-based Scores</th>
<th>Trainees (n=16)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Knowledge-based Score</td>
<td>4.06 (1.43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest Knowledge-based Score</td>
<td>5.44 (1.04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest-Posttest Change</td>
<td>1.38 (1.54)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Self-reported Competency Scores | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Self-reported Learning Objective #1: Navigating ECE | | |
| Pretest Score | 2.44 (.86) |
| Posttest Score | 3.28 (.75) |
| Pretest-Posttest Change | .84 (.79)* |
| Self-reported Learning Objective #2: Barriers Accessing ECE | | |
| Pretest Score | 2.50 (.92) |
| Posttest Score | 3.28 (.90) |
| Pretest-Posttest Change | .78 (.89)* |
| Self-reported Learning Objective #3: Benefits of ECE | | |
| Pretest Score | 3.39 (1.04) |
| Posttest Score | 3.83 (.92) |
| Pretest-Posttest Change | .44 (.92)* |

* p<.05

Interpretation of Findings

As a whole, the findings described above suggest that the standardized trainings on ECE services for children in the child welfare system developed by LACWEEP represent a promising strategy for increasing knowledge among child welfare staff, ECE providers, Court-appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), and current parents/caregivers of young children in the child welfare system regarding: 1. the benefits of ECE for infants and young children in the child welfare system, 2. how to navigate relevant service systems to access high quality ECE for this population, and 3. common barriers to service access. The training outcomes for all four LACWEEP target audiences demonstrate significant, albeit modest, improvement in both the trainees’ self-perceived competency in, as well as in their objectively tested content knowledge regarding, this subject matter. However, our evaluation of this outcome did not include any measures of practice change, as the evaluation was based on the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model utilizing only levels one (participant reaction to the training) and two (learning, as
measured by pre to post knowledge change, resulting from the training) (Kirkpatrick, 1996). Ideally, a six month follow up with child welfare workers would allow us to determine whether or not they utilized the electronic Head Start/ECE referral system more frequently after the training to refer children on their caseloads to HS/EHS programs. Similarly, it would be informative to survey ECE about if/how the LACWEEP training has affected the way they interact with child welfare-supervised children and families in their programs, and to survey parents/caregiver and CASA trainees about whether they are now more likely to refer the DCFS-supervised child with whom they interact to ECE programs.

After completing the LACWEEP trainings, participants generally reported the largest gains in their ability to navigate ECE services (Learning Objective 1), followed by their understanding of barriers to accessing ECE for children in the child welfare system (Learning Objective 2), and lastly their familiarity with the benefits of high quality ECE for child welfare-supervised infants and young children (Learning Objective 3). However, for the conjoint Child Welfare-ECE Provider trainings, for which the evaluation surveys were lengthier and included a sufficient number of knowledge-based questions for subscale analysis, the results of this analysis partially contradict the trainees self-report. They indicate that the Child Welfare-ECE Provider trainees actually experienced the greatest improvement in their mastery of training content related the benefits of ECE (Learning Objective 3), followed by barrier to accessing ECE (Learning Objective 2), and lastly navigating ECE (Learning Objective 1). Based on these results, LACWEEP may want to modify the curriculum for this training to bolster the ECE navigation content.

Other suggestions for improving the trainings so that they produce more substantial knowledge gains for participants can be gleaned from qualitative feedback from the training posttest surveys. Several child welfare caseworkers noted that the Child Welfare-ECE Provider training should be tailored to the needs of each type of child welfare worker. For example, training for Emergency Response (ER) workers should emphasize the benefits of ECE as well as content on how to identify quality programs so that these staff are better equipped to educate the families whom they investigate (including those who cases are unsubstantiated and closed) about the importance of ECE as a protective factor that can help strengthen their families, mitigate parenting stress and potentially prevent future child welfare system contact or help expedite reunification for cases that are opened and result in child removal. For “front end” child welfare caseworkers, information about utilizing the electronic Head Start/ECE referral
system and working with an ECE Community Liaison was not viewed as being relevant, as ER workers are unable to access this system for their caseload.

ECE trainee feedback suggests that some of the training content may have been too superficial for this audience, as several respondents commented that the training tried to cover too many topics during the three hours and so ended up failing to cover at least some topics in adequate depth. Also, although not specifically mentioned by the survey respondents, it seems likely that the training content on how to recognize high quality ECE programs and navigate the ECE service system would not be new information for many of the ECE trainees, and so these topics could be eliminated for this audience to allow for other topics to be covered more thoroughly. As a whole, these comments and observations reinforce the need to further tailor the training content to the needs of each unique group of trainees.

However, there is a tension between this theme and the other principal theme that emerged from the Child Welfare-ECE Provider training qualitative survey feedback. Both child welfare and ECE trainees expressed value for the conjoint breakout sessions that were part of this training, during which equal numbers of child welfare and ECE staff engaged in small group discussions about the challenges and special considerations associated with meeting the ECE needs of children who are part of the child welfare system. Respondents from both groups commented on the benefit of improving “communication across agencies [child welfare and LBUSD]” as well as across community agencies in this way. One child welfare worker noted: “It was great meeting staff from Head Start and being able to ask them questions”. Therefore, it appears that, on one hand, many of the participants would have appreciated a training that was more specifically fitted to the mandates of their specific professional roles; but, on the other hand, they also appreciated the chance to interact and build relationships with the other types of professionals who participated in the training. Perhaps these seemingly contradictory values could both be addressed by modifying the conjoint Child Welfare-ECE provider training so that the ECE providers, “front end” child welfare caseworkers, and “back end” child welfare caseworkers can receive separate tailored instruction during the first half of the training, but could then be brought together for the second half to watch and discuss the training videos and participate in the break-out sessions.

With respect to the Parent/Caregiver and CASA trainings, the qualitative feedback was generally positive, but vague (e.g. “is great” or “great speaker”). The one clear theme that emerged came from parent/caregiver responses to an open-ended
question asking them what they considered to be the most valuable part of the training. Most of the parents/caregiver mentioned information about program eligibility and/or child development in their responses, suggesting the importance of retaining this subject matter in curricula targeting this audience.
Evaluation of Objective 7: Increase access to high quality early care and education (ECE) services for child welfare-supervised children birth through four years old living in City of Long Beach/DCFS’ South County Region

Expected Outcome

LACWEEP’s final outcome objective for the grant funding period\(^7\) was to improve access to high quality early care and education (ECE) services for child welfare-supervised children birth through four years old living in Long Beach/DCFS’ South County Region, as demonstrated by:

A) an increase in the target population referred to high-quality ECE programs; and
B) an increase in the target population enrolled in high-quality ECE programs.

All of LACWEEP’s previously described infrastructure objectives (i.e. the expansion of DCFS’ Head Start/ECE electronic referral system; implementation of the alternative ECE linkage system; development of a training curriculum about ECE for children in the child welfare system; and the convening of the LACWEEP Advisory Committee) as well as LACWEEP’s other outcome objectives (i.e. strengthening service coordination and collaboration between child welfare, ECE and other organizations; and increasing stakeholders’ knowledge about ECE for children in the child welfare system) were designed to facilitate this ultimate objective.

Research/Evaluation Methods

Data Collection

To assess whether LACWEEP succeeded in achieving this outcome the evaluators worked with DCFS’ Education and Mentoring Unit and LBUSD Head Start to implement a system for tracking DCFS-supervised children birth through four-years old living in the target community of Long Beach during the project period (October 2011 to August 2013). Specifically, for children in the target population who were referred for

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\(^7\) As depicted in project Logic Model and mentioned in the Introduction to this report, LACWEEP has additional long term outcome objectives related to improving safety, permanency and well-being (particularly school readiness and academic functioning) outcomes for the target population through increased access to high quality ECE. However, it was not expected that these outcomes would be achieved during the relatively short grant funding period (see grant proposal) and so they are not addressed in this report.
Head Start/ECE services via DCFS’ electronic referral system, DCFS’s Education and Mentoring Unit provided LBUSD Head Start with the following information within one week of referral:

- DCFS unique child identifier number
- Date DCFS caseworker referred child for Head Start/ECE
- Child’s name
- Child’s birth date
- Child’s current address
- Child’s placement type
- Primary language spoken in the home
- DCFS caseworker’s contact information

Upon receipt, LBUSD Head Start then entered this data into a spreadsheet that the Community Liaison used to track the enrollment status of all DCFS referrals. The following data elements were added to this spreadsheet by LBUSD and a de-identified copy was forwarded to the evaluators on a monthly basis:

- LBUSD Synergy system unique pupil identifier number
- Date parent/caregiver completed LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start program application
- Reason for non-completion of LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start program application
- Current availability of LBUSD Head Start or Early Head Start program
- Next program year availability of LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start program
- Date alternate ECE program referral was requested
- Date alternate ECE program referral was provided
- Date child was enrolled in ECE program
- Name of ECE program child enrolled in
- Address of ECE program child enrolled in
- Type of Head Start/ECE program child enrolled in
- Whether program is full day or part day
- Reason for service refusal
- Whether child designated as special needs
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) scores & corresponding
test dates (for children enrolled in LBUSD Head Start only)
- Overall development score
- Self & social domain scores
- English (non-native speakers only) score
- Cognitive domain score
- Math domain score
- Physical domain score
- Health domain score
- Whether DRDP results were shared with child welfare caseworker

For children in the target population who were not referred for Head Start/ECE services during the project period through the electronic referral system, DCFS provided the evaluation team with de-identified data that included:

- Child’s age
- Child’s race/ethnicity
- Child’s placement type
- (When applicable) reason child welfare caseworker provided for not referring child to Head Start/ECE, i.e.
  - program hours not feasible
  - child has special needs
  - caregiver not interested
  - child already enrolled in an ECE program
- (When applicable) type of ECE program child already enrolled in, i.e.
  - licensed child care center
  - family child care home
  - community preschool
  - Head Start/Early Head Start

Analysis of ECE Referral Data

To determine whether LACWEEP resulted in increased ECE referrals for the target population, we first present monthly totals of the target population referred to ECE via DCFS’ electronic Head Start/ECE referral system, both during the year preceding the grant (baseline) and also for the timeframe covering the duration of the grant cycle. This trend data is presented in an annotated time series graph (see Figure 3) reflecting monthly referrals for the grant target population as a whole (0-4 year old) and also
disaggregated by child’s age (infants/toddlers 0-2 years old versus preschoolers 3-4 years old).

We then compare the total number of unique children in the target population referred for ECE during the grant (October 2011 through August 2013) versus the year prior to implementation of LACWEEP. This pre/post grant analysis only includes those children whose caseworkers logged into the DCFS Head Start/ECE referral system to either refer them to ECE or to explain their rationale for not doing so (65 percent of the target population during the grant). Unfortunately, there is no way to determine the ECE status of children whose caseworkers did not log into electronic referral system and respond to its prompts to either refer the children on their caseload or indicate their reasoning for not referring them.

Analysis of ECE Enrollment Data

To assess whether LACWEEP increased ECE program enrollments (not just referrals) for the target population, we also present monthly totals, in this case of the number of children in the target population who were enrolled in either a LBUSD Head Start, LBUSD Early Head Start, or an alternative ECE program during the grant funding period. Similar to the trend data for ECE referrals, the monthly enrollment statistics are also presented in an annotated time series graph (Figure 5) that includes monthly enrollments for the grant target population as a whole (0-4 years old) and also disaggregated by child’s age. As with the referrals, this analysis is also restricted to children referred via the DCFS electronic Head Start/ECE referral system.

Prior to LACWEEP, DCFS did not systematically track whether children referred to Head Start (or other ECE programs in Long Beach) actually enrolled in these programs, and so it was not possible to establish a pre-grant baseline for the enrollment data in the way that we were able to establish at least a partial baseline for referrals. Because of this, it was not possible to do a pre/post comparison of the total number of unique children in the target population enrolled in ECE during the grant (October 2011 through August 2013) versus the year prior to the implementation of LACWEEP, as we did with the referrals. Instead, we simply present a descriptive analysis (frequency distributions and percentages) of the children in the target population who were enrolled in Head Start, Early Head Start or an alternative ECE program during the grant funding period, distinguishing between enrollments for children referred via DCFS’ electronic referral system and ‘walk-ins’ to LBUSD Head Start (i.e. children in the target population who were enrolled in ECE because their parents/caregivers initiated contact with LBUSD
Head Start in lieu of their caseworkers referring them through the electronic referral system). For children who were referred to LBUSD through DCFS’ electronic Head Start/ECE referral system but not successfully enrolled in a LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start or alternative ECE program by the end of the grant, we use frequency distributions and percentages to describe the reasons recorded by the LBUSD Head Start Community Liaison for non-enrollment.

Lastly, we present a series of bar graphs to explore whether there were are any systematic differences between children in the target population: a) who were enrolled in ECE during the grant, b) referred but not enrolled, c) not referred, and d) whose referral and enrollment is missing. These bar graphs depict the relative percentages of these four groups of children by child’s sex, age group, race/ethnicity, and placement type.

Findings

ECE Referral Outcomes

Figure 4 below illustrates the monthly trends in referrals to Long Beach Head Start programs beginning one year prior to the implementation of LACWEEP in October 2010 and ending at the close of the grant in August 2013. It notes the point in time when the DCFS electronic referral system was first expanded to include LBUSD Head Start and Early Head Start programs (May 2011) as well as the official start date for the grant (October 2011). There was clearly a dramatic increase in referrals closely following the implementation of the electronic referral system in Long Beach (i.e. the expansion of the pre-existing DCFS Head Start referral system to include LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start programs, not just LACOE Head Start programs). During the grant cycle, the overall magnitude of referrals is even greater. In 2012, the total number of referrals made during any single month was not as great as the three months immediately following implementation of the electronic referral system in Long Beach, but the referrals were spread across a wider range of months (primarily April through September in 2012 versus only June through August in 2011) which resulted in a greater number of referrals in 2012 overall (a total of 86 referrals in 2011 versus 154 in 2012). Although there is only partial data for 2013 since the grant ended that August, the time series graph indicates that there will be even more referrals in 2013 than in 2012. From January 1 through August 31, 2013 there were already 157 DCFS-supervised children birth through four years old in Long Beach referred for ECE, almost all during July and August.

The time series graph also reflects the seasonality of the referral system. DCFS
caseworkers were instructed to make referrals to ensure enrollment prior to the start of the new academic year in mid-September. This is when ECE programs typically have the greatest number of openings since children graduate to classroom or new programs serving older children at this time and consequently parents are also more likely to make lateral ECE program changes at this to minimize disruption for their children. Thus, there are very few children referred during the first six months of the academic year (September through March), and the greatest peaks in referrals tend to occur June through August. In 2012, the referrals peaked slightly earlier in May because DCFS began its messaging campaign to encourage DCFS caseworkers to use the referral system a little earlier that year.

Figure 4. Time Series Graph of Monthly Head Start/ECE Referrals for DCFS-supervised Children Birth through Four Years Old Residing in Long Beach Pre- and Post-Grant

The other finding that is clear from inspection of the time series ECE referral graph is that referrals of infant and toddlers (birth through two years old) increased substantially following the implementation of LACWEEP. In 2011 there were only 17 two-year olds and no younger children referred via the electronic referral system. However, in 2012 there were 36 two-year olds, 26 one-year olds, and 17 infants less than a year old referred. During the first eight months of 2013 (from January 1 to August 2013 when the grant ended), there were already 26 two-year olds, 27 one-year olds, and 25 infants under the age of one referred.

When we examine the aggregated referral data one year pre-grant versus post-grant, it is also clear that there is a significant increase in the total number of ECE
referrals for the target population. Specifically, there was an increase from 82 referrals during October 2010 through September 2011 (in the year prior to the grant) to 316 referrals during the grant (October 2011 through August 2013). Of these 316 post-grant referrals, 154 occurred during the first year of the grant, constituting a nearly 88% increase in aggregate referrals from the previous pre-grant year.

Figure 5 depicts the referral status of the full target population (N=738) during the grant (October 2011 through August 2013). Of the 738 DCFS-supervised children birth through four-years old residing in Long Beach during this time, ECE referral data was only available for 478 (65%) of these children, as caseworkers for the remaining 206 children did not choose to use the electronic Head Start/ECE referral system for reasons unknown. As previously noted, amongst those children whose caseworkers did use the referral system, 316 referrals (43%) were referred for Head Start/ECE. However, 22 percent of these children (n=162) were not appropriate for referral through the electronic system for various reasons; according to their caseworker, either they were already receiving ECE (n=70), they had been previously referred to LBUSD Head Start via a paper referral or to LACOE Head Start prior to moving to Long Beach (n=45), their parent/caregiver refused to consent to the caseworker referring the child to ECE (n=36), their parent/caregiver felt the child had 'special needs” that could not be accommodated by an ECE program (n=7), their parent/caregiver stated that they could not transport the child to ECE (n=3), or their parent/caregiver stated that ECE program hours were not feasible for their schedule. When these children are excluded from the analysis, the 316 children referred to LBUSD for Head Start/ECE services during the grant reflects more than half (55%) of the adjusted target population (N=576).
Figure 5. Distribution of ECE Referral Status of DCFS-supervised Children Birth through Four Years Old Residing in Long Beach (N=738) during Grant

ECE Enrollment Outcomes

Given that there have been no data systematically collected from previous years regarding enrollment of DCFS-supervised children in Head Start or other ECE programs in Long Beach, this evaluation presents post-grant enrollment data only. Figure 6 below illustrates the monthly trends in Head Start/ECE enrollments programs from the inception of LACWEEP in October 2011 to the close of the grant in August 2013. As with the referrals, there appears to be a ‘seasonality’ to the ECE enrollments. Peak enrollments occur in the six months preceding the start of the new school year (in September) and in the month that follows. This makes sense given that year-round programs tend to have the greatest number of program openings in September as children transition to new classrooms and new programs, and ECE programs that close during the summer are
best able to enroll children after the close of their academic year (typically starting in May/June). The smaller rise in enrollments January through March may reflect slots that become available in the start of the year.

**Figure 6. Time Series Graph of Monthly Head Start/ECE Enrollments for DCFS-supervised Children Birth through Four Years Old Residing in Long Beach During Grant**

[Graph showing enrollment trends over time]

As with the referral data, the temporal pattern of enrollments is generally similar for infants/toddlers (0-2 years old) and preschool-aged children (3-4 years old), although there is slightly more variation by age in the enrollment data. Interestingly, while several members of the LACWEEP Advisory Committee expressed reservations about scaling up LACWEEP’s addition of infants/toddlers children to DCFS’ electronic referral system because of the more limited availability of ECE programs in the community serving these younger children (see evaluation of Objective 4), the LACWEEP enrollment outcome data for infants and toddlers is fairly strong. As Figure 5 reflects, the infant/toddler enrollments (n=40) are not notably lower than enrollments for preschool-aged children (n=49).

When we examine the *aggregated* enrollment data for the grant funding period (October 2011 through August 2013), we find that there were a total of 114 children in the target population referred to LBUSD Head Start whom LACWEEP helped enroll in ECE either by placing them in LBUSD Head Start or Early Head Start centers, wait listing them with one of these centers, or by enrolling them in an alternative ECE program. This constitutes 36 percent of the 316 children in the target population that were referred via the electronic Head Start/ECE referral system.
Figure 7 presents a detailed breakdown of the enrollment status of these 316 children at the end of the grant cycle. A substantial number (202 or 64%) could not be enrolled in ECE because of barriers beyond LBUSD Head Start’s control. Either these children were referred at the very end of the grant and so there was not enough time to contact the family and help them complete an ECE program application (n=82); there was no response from the parent/caregiver after multiple attempted contacts (n=33); the parent/caregiver told LBUSD that that they were not interested in ECE, often because they felt the child was too young or they were unwilling to transport the child (n=22); the referred child was already enrolled in ECE (n=21); the referred child had moved outside of the target community (n=16); it was impossible to contact the parent/caregiver because the child welfare caseworker provided incorrect contact information and was not responsive to requests for updated information or the case was closed by DCFS (n=15); the child was not age-eligible because they had already turned five-years old (n=7); or the child had been referred to an alternative (non-LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start program)

8 123 of the 738 children referred via DCFS’ electronic Head Start/ECE referral system as part of LACWEEP were referred during the final month of the grant (August 2013) and so their enrollment outcomes are effectively truncated for purposes of this evaluation.
program) but had not yet been enrolled in this program (n=6). When these 202 children are excluded from the analysis, the 114 children enrolled in or waitlisted for an ECE program during the grant reflects 100 percent of the adjusted target population.

Additionally, during the course of the grant LBUSD Head Start reported processing 34 ‘walk-in’ referrals for DCFS-supervised children whose parents or caregivers traveled to the LBUSD Head Start administrative offices to attempt to enroll their child in a Head Start or Early Head Start program unsolicited, as opposed to being contacted by LBUSD in response to an electronic referral by the child’s DCFS caseworker. The vast majority of these children (29 or 83%) were successfully enrolled in a LBUSD Head Start program and one was enrolled in a LBUSD Early Head Start program. The remaining 4 (14%) were waitlisted for an Early Head Start program and/or referred to an alternative (non-LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start) ECE provider.

**Relationship Between Child Demographics and ECE Referral and Enrollment Outcomes**

Lastly, as part of our analysis of Objective 7 we examined the relationship between ECE referral and enrollment outcomes for the target population and children’s age, sex, race/ethnicity and placement type to see if there were any systematic and instructive differences. For this analysis, we considered four mutually exclusive sub-groups of the target population: 1) *enrolled* children who were either referred to LBUSD via DCFS’ electronic referral system and subsequently enrolled in an ECE program or children who were not referred because they were already in an ECE program; 2) *referred/not enrolled* children who were referred to LBUSD via DCFS’ electronic referral system but were not yet been enrolled in an ECE program at the conclusion of the grant in August 2013, 3) *not referred/not enrolled* children whose DCFS caseworkers declined to refer them for ECE via the electronic referral system and provided a reason for this decision other than that the child was already in an ECE program, and 4) *missing* children whose caseworkers did not refer them to ECE via the electronic referral system nor provide an explanation for this decision. There were a total of 160 children in the *enrolled* category, 271 children in the *referred/not enrolled* category, 47 in the *not enrolled/not referred* category, and 260 in the *missing* category. Figures 8 through 11 depict the results of these analyses.
Both referrals and enrollments are notably lower for infants compared to older children. This is consistent with research suggesting that parents/caregivers are generally more reluctant to put infants in ECE than they are older children (i.e. the demand for infant care is lower) (Fuller et al., 2002; Mensing et al., 2000; Johansen, Leibowitz & Waite, 1996). It is also consistent with evidence that there is typically less care available in Los Angeles County for infants than for older children (i.e. the supply of infant care is inadequate) (Los Angeles County Child Care Planning Committee, 2012). Missing data is also greatest for infants. This may reflect caseworkers’ perception that ECE is inappropriate for infants and a corresponding unwillingness to use the electronic referral system at all for this age group. Understandably, only a few five-year olds were referred and/or enrolled in ECE as part of LACWEEP. This age group was technically too old for inclusion in the target population, but a small number of ‘young fives’ were eligible for Head Start or another ECE program because they were not quite old enough for Kindergarten.
There was a slightly greater concentration of boys than girls in the LACWEEP target population, and this was also true for the sub-categories of children whose data was missing, children who were neither referred nor enrolled in ECE, and who were referred but were not yet enrolled in an ECE program at the conclusion of the grant. However, this pattern reverses for children who were successfully enrolled in ECE. For reasons that are unknown, among this group females are in the majority.
Overall, the distribution of racial/ethnic groups across the four referral/enrollment categories is fairly consistent. However, while the concentration of Hispanic children in the target population is higher overall than any other group, including Black children, a greater percentage of Black children were successfully enrolled in ECE. This finding may be related to the previously mentioned reluctance of some Hispanic/Latino families to use formal ECE and the delays in finalizing DCFS’ contract with Preschool Without Walls, an alternative ECE program that was designed to be more culturally appropriate for Hispanic/Latino families (see evaluation of Objective 2).

**Figure 11. Referral & Enrollment Status by Placement Type (N=737)**

Overall, the distribution of placement type across the four referral/enrollment categories is also fairly consistent. However, there was a somewhat higher concentration of children in out-of-home care and a somewhat lower concentration of children being supervised by DCFS in their own homes amongst the children in the not referred/not enrolled category. It is possible that foster parents are less willing than birth parents to enroll children in ECE.

**Interpretation of Findings**

Overall, the above reported findings suggest that LACWEEP was mostly successful in achieving Objective 7. Based on the available data, there was a clear increase in the number of child welfare-supervised children birth through four years old living in the grant target community who were referred for ECE services following implementation of the grant. Most notably, in the year immediately preceding the implementation of LACWEEP (October 2010-September 2011), there were 82 children in the target population referred for ECE services via DCFS’ electronic referral system, but
in the year immediately following the implementation of LACWEEP (October 2011 through September 2012) this increased by 88% to 154 referrals, and during the first eleven months of the second year of LACWEEP (October 2012 through August 2013) an additional 157 children were referrals. Consistent with LACWEEP’s objective related to expanding DCFS’ electronic referral system to include, not only preschool-aged children, but also infants and toddlers, there was particularly a marked increase in the number of children birth through two referred following implementation of the grant.

Pre-grant baseline data for the number of target children enrolled in ECE is not available, but given the sizable increase in the number of referred children it seems highly likely that LACWEEP resulted in an increase in the number of children enrolled in ECE programs as well. At a minimum, 135 of the 316 target children referred via DCFS’s electronic referral during the grant were successfully enrolled in an ECE program (n=89), waitlisted for a LBUSD Head Start or Early Head Start program (n=25), or determined to already be enrolled in an ECE program (n=21). Moreover, an additional 82 children had only just been referred to LBUSD Head Start during the final month of the grant and so their referrals had not yet been processed. It is likely that a significant portion of these children have since been enrolled in an ECE program.

These conclusions should be interpreted with a couple cautions in mind, however. Not only was a pre-grant ECE enrollment baseline figure unavailable for a pre-to post-grant comparison of enrollments, but our calculations for the referral outcomes is vulnerable to bias due to the large amount of missing data. We cannot be sure of the ECE referral or enrollment status of more than a third (260 or 35%) of the DCFS-supervised children birth through four years old living in the target community during the grant because their caseworkers did not enter any information about them into the electronic referral system. Lastly, our evaluation of Objective 7 does not include a non-LACWEEP comparison group and so it is possible that the observed increases in ECE referrals observed following implementation of the grant could have been caused, at least in part, but something other than LACWEEP. Nevertheless, even with these methodological limitations in mind, the evaluation results for Objective 7 are positive.
CONCLUSION

This report described an evaluation of the Los Angeles Child Welfare-Early Education Partners Infrastructure Project (LACWEEP), which was funded from October 2011 to August 2013 by a U.S. Children’s Bureau “Child Welfare-Early Education Partnerships to Expand Protective Factors for Children with Early Child Welfare Involvement” grant [Award Number: 90C01062]. The overarching goal of LACWEEP was to increase access to high quality early care and education (ECE) services for young children in the child welfare system in Long Beach, California. To achieve this goal, LACWEEP employed a four-pronged strategy that included:

1. Expanding the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)’ electronic Head Start referral system to encompass infants and toddlers (not just preschool-aged children) and also Head Start and Early Head Start centers operated by the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Office of Head Start;

2. Implementing a system for linking child welfare-supervised children in Long Beach under the age of 5 to alternative high quality early care and education (ECE) programs when LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start programs were not appropriate for a families’ needs;

3. Developing and implementing training curricula for educating parents/caregivers of DCFS-supervised children as well as child welfare, ECE, and Juvenile Dependency Court professionals about the benefits of ECE for children in the child welfare system and how to navigate systems to access these services; and

4. Convening an Advisory Committee of child welfare, ECE and other organizations to monitor and troubleshoot barriers to referring and enrolling DCFS-supervised children into high quality ECE programs and to produce written information sharing, data integration and sustainability plans to facilitate project goals.

Implementation of these infrastructure objectives was expected to result in improved service coordination and collaboration amongst the various organizations involved in LACWEEP. They were also expected to increase stakeholders’ knowledge about the importance of ECE for children in the child welfare system and how to link DCFS children to high quality ECE programs. Ultimately, it was hoped that all of these
activities and intermediate outcomes would coalesce in increased referrals to, and enrollments in, high quality ECE programs for child welfare-supervised children in the grant’s target community of Long Beach, California.

Conclusions

Our evaluation of this project found that LACWEEP was largely successful in meeting these infrastructure development and outcome objectives. As proposed, it expanded the existing DCFS electronic referral system to include LBUSD’s 23 Head Start and Early Head Start centers, in fact, accomplishing this objective several months in advance of the official grant start date. The electronic referral system, which had previously only included three- and four-year olds, was also expanded to include younger children living in Long Beach, birth through two years old (Objective 1).

Additionally, LACWEEP implemented the proposed system for routing all ECE referrals for DCFS-supervised children living in Long Beach to LBUSD Head Start, where a grant-supported Community Liaison helped process these referrals, keep child welfare caseworkers apprised about their status, and, when appropriate, referred families to one of 15 alternative (non-LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start programs) high quality ECE programs. However, one component of the proposed ECE linkage system was not fully implemented until the very end of the grant; while the LBUSD Community Liaison was diligent about making referrals to alternative ECE programs upon parents/caregivers’ request, it was not until the final quarter of the grant that she began consistently following up with families and alternative (non-LBUSD) ECE providers to ensure that linkage actually occurred and families were able to enroll their children in these programs (Objective 2).

As proposed, LACWEEP also developed training curricula on the benefits of high quality ECE and how to navigate systems to access ECE services for children in the child welfare system for several stakeholder audiences. Specifically, it developed a conjoint Child Welfare-ECE Provider three-hour training that was administered 12 times during the grant and attended by a total of 124 child welfare and 119 ECE staff. It also developed an abbreviated two-hour version of this training for Parents and Caregivers of young children in the child welfare system, which was administered seven times during the grant and attended by a total of 61 parents/caregivers. A similar two-hour training was developed for Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs). It was offered once during the grant and 21 CASAs participated. To further educate Juvenile Dependency Court
stakeholders about ECE for dependent children, an even more abbreviated one hour fifteen minute version of the LACWEEP training was provided 16 attendees, including 10 of Los Angeles County Juvenile Court’s 13 judges, at the Juvenile Dependency Court “Judges Lunch” (Objective 3).

Pre/posttest training survey results suggest that these trainings were an effective means of increasing participants’ knowledge regarding the benefits of ECE for infants and young children in the child welfare system and how to navigate relevant service systems. All of the training participant groups, except the “Judges Lunch” attendees who did not complete evaluation surveys because of time constraints, reported statistically significant, albeit generally moderate, improvement in self-reported competency regarding the trainings’ core learning objectives. Moreover, their scores on a series of knowledge-based test questions related to these learning objectives corroborated these findings by demonstrating that attendees’ understanding of critical information about ECE for children in the child welfare system increased significantly following participation in the LACWEEP trainings (Objective 6).

LACWEEP also convened the proposed Advisory Committee composed of representatives from 18 child welfare, ECE, mental health, and other family service organizations in Long Beach, as well as a DCFS parent representative. This group meet bi-monthly to monitor ECE referrals and enrollments for the LACWEEP target population, address barriers to ECE access for young children in Long Beach involved in the child welfare system, and, toward the end of the grant, to develop a sustainability plan for the continuation and possible countywide expansion of the most successful components of LACWEEP. The LACWEEP Advisory Committee also completed two other written deliverables: 1) an information-sharing protocol outlining the process for child welfare and ECE staff to share developmental/educational and case information to facilitate ECE referrals, enrollments and child welfare case planning, and 2) a data infrastructure development plan for linking DCFS, LBUSD Head Start, and LBSUD K-12 data systems to enable future evaluation of the impact of ECE services on child welfare-involved children’s long-term safety, permanency and well-being (particularly school readiness and K-12 school performance) outcomes (Objective 4).

Network analyses found evidence that collaboration and service coordination between the organizations that actively participated in the LACWEEP Advisory Committee improved substantially over the course of the project with respect to overall partnership quality, information sharing, sending and receiving of referrals, sharing
space/other resources, and pooling funding, but not sharing staff. Analysis of surveys administered to Advisory Committee members at the end of the grant support this conclusion, although these survey findings should be interpreted cautiously because of a low response rate. Of particular note, seven of the eight Advisory Committee members who completed surveys strongly agreed that their organization had benefited from being involved in the Advisory Committee, while the remaining respondent slightly agreed with this statement. Similarly, when asked whether their participation on the Advisory Committee had strengthened their organization’s commitment to ECE for children involved with the child welfare system, seven of the eight respondents strongly agreed, while one respondent slightly agreed (Objective 5).

Lastly, analyses of ECE referral and enrollment data for the target population generally suggest that LACWEEP was successful in meeting its ultimate objective of increasing ECE access for child welfare-supervised children in the grant target community of Long Beach. Compared to data for the year immediately preceding the grant, ECE referrals for the target population increased 88% during the first year of LACWEEP and even more during the second year. There is no pre-grant baseline ECE enrollment data for the target population; however, given the sizable increase in the number of referred children following implementation of LACWEEP it seems likely that there was a corresponding increase in the number of children actually enrolled in ECE programs. At a minimum, project data indicate that 135 (43%) of the 316 target children who were referred via DCFS’s electronic referral during the grant were either successfully enrolled in an ECE program (n=89), waitlisted for a LBUSD Head Start or Early Head Start program (n=25), or were already be enrolled in an ECE program (n=21). Moreover, an additional 82 children (26%) were referred to LBUSD Head Start during the final month of the grant and so their referrals had not yet been processed. These referrals were made in August, just before the start of the school year, when ECE program openings tend to be most numerous. Therefore it is likely that a significant portion of these children have since been enrolled in an ECE program.

Implications of Results and Recommendations

Several recommendations can be gleaned from LACWEEP’s experience to help guide administrators and funders of future, similar projects focused on increasing ECE access for children in the child welfare system, as well as for the general field. We summarize these recommendations here:
Other jurisdictions interested in increasing ECE access for child welfare-supervised children should **consider developing an automated child welfare-ECE referral system** like the one Los Angeles County DCFS uses. It has great potential to facilitate child welfare-supervised children’s access to ECE programs because it reduces the ECE referral process to a simple computerized task that can be accomplished quickly and easily by child welfare caseworkers, who typically have numerous competing demands on their time. These systems require careful monitoring and maintenance, however, and therefore we do not recommend that child welfare agencies embark on implementing this kind of referral system unless they are prepared to **commit adequate IT resources and identify a management-level employee responsible for managing the referral system.**

Regardless of whether a child welfare agency decides to implement an electronic referral system or use some other approach to facilitate ECE referrals, LACWEEP’s experience is that having an **internal child welfare agency ‘champion’ (like DCFS’ Early Education Manager) with explicit responsibility for increasing ECE access for supervised children** is extremely helpful, as increasing ECE access for child welfare-supervised children requires relationship building with other service sectors, marketing to caseworkers, and ongoing oversight. To be most successful, this individual should be given sufficient authority and autonomy to initiate system change within the child welfare agency and should possess the necessary skills and expertise to inspire needed system change amongst external partners.

**Proper messaging is essential to keeping child welfare staff motivated to refer children on their caseloads to ECE.** LACWEEP found that is was especially important to help child welfare staff understand the ‘seasonality’ of ECE program openings so that they did not become discouraged when referrals did not immediately result in children being enrolled in an ECE program. LACWEEP also found that proper messaging from child welfare management about the reasons that caseworkers should refer children on their caseloads to ECE was critical. During focus group discussions with DCFS caseworkers, several participants lamented that management had made referring children to ECE into a competition between offices, rather than framing it as an opportunity to help children and families, and that this had caused this task to "lose its
meaning”.

- Other projects seeking to increase access to high quality ECE for child welfare-supervised children should carefully consider how they will define ECE “quality”. To help ensure project buy-in, we recommend that this decision be made transparently and collaboratively with input from a wide range of stakeholders. LACWEEP allowed LBUSD Head Start to select the list of alternative (non-LBUSD Head Start) ECE programs to which it would refer child welfare-supervised children. While the evaluators received no explicit complaints about the list of alternative ECE providers that LBUSD created, the inclusion/exclusion criteria that LBUSD used to produce this list were not well defined. This may have contributed to some Advisory Committee members’ feeling that LACWEEP’s approach was too ‘Head Start-centric’.

- Another possibility for why LACWEEP was viewed as too ‘Head Start-centric’ was that the Community Liaison responsible for linking families to both LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start and alternative ECE programs was an experienced LBUSD Head Start program employee. It is hardly surprising then that she was, at least initially, more proactive about linking families to LBUSD Head Start/Early Head Start programs than to alternative ECE programs. Thus, communities seeking to implement routinized processes for linking child welfare clients to ECE services may want to carefully consider the pros and cons of housing their linkage system within a specific ECE provider versus a more neutral organization (i.e. a resource and referral agency that is tasked with helping parents/caregivers find numerous types of ECE).

- LACWEEP found that standardized trainings were an effective way to increase stakeholder’s knowledge regarding the benefits of high quality ECE for child welfare-involved children and families, and so we recommend this approach to other initiatives with similar goals. In particular, we recommend using a conjoint training format and perhaps adapting for local use the publically available curricula that LACWEEP developed for child welfare and ECE providers. While LACWEEP found that parents/caregivers and Court-appointed Special Advocates who attended its trainings also increased their knowledge about ECE for child welfare-involved families, it was much harder to recruit these target audiences to participate in formal trainings. Alternative educational approaches, such as informational flyers and mailings, may be more suitable for
these groups.

- In keeping with the above comment, we encourage other projects and funders to continue exploring best practices for engaging parents and caregivers of young children in the child welfare system around the importance of ECE. LACWEEP was not able to identify a strong strategy for doing this (at least not yet), but feedback from focus groups that LACWEEP conducted with parents/caregivers, child welfare staff and ECE providers underscore the importance of doing so. Even when child welfare workers understand the value of ECE and are willing to refer children, they cannot do so without parent/caregiver consent.

- Creating a collaborative body or bodies composed of high-level representatives from local child welfare, ECE, mental health and other family support organizations charged with shared responsibility for increasing access to high quality ECE for children in the local child welfare system can be a powerful mechanism for improving service coordination and inter-organizational collaboration and, thus, for facilitating efforts to increase the number of child welfare-supervised children enrolled in ECE. However, it requires dedicated staff support to sustain a volunteer group of this sort and to help keep them focused on this particular goal given the myriad other demands on their time.

- Members of LACWEEP’s Advisory Committee reported that there were two ways in which this group structured its work that were particularly useful in promoting service coordination, which may be especially ‘replication worthy’. Engaging Committee members in smaller, interest-based workgroups charged with producing concrete project deliverables (e.g. the LACWEEP Training Curriculum Development Committee or the workgroup responsible for producing the Information Sharing Protocol and Data Infrastructure Development Plan) appears to have not only helped LACWEEP meet its infrastructure development objectives, but to have also enhanced service coordination between workgroup participants. Similarly, the Advisory Committee’s practice of regularly sharing meeting updates regarding ECE enrollment data for DCFS-supervised children and emergent enrollment challenges was also identified as a particularly effective means of improving coordination between the local child welfare and ECE service sectors.
While the importance of engaging child welfare and ECE agencies to participate in this type of collaborative is readily apparent, key informant interview and focus group findings highlight the value of ensuring that mental health agencies are also actively involved in efforts to increase ECE access for children in the child welfare system. Focus group feedback indicated that one of the reasons that some parents, caregivers and child welfare staff do not refer children to ECE is their concern that ECE providers are not sufficiently equipped to understand and respond appropriately to the trauma-related socio-behavioral (mental health) problems that many child welfare-supervised children possess due to the abuse and/or neglect they have experienced.

Based on LACWEEP’s experience with trying to develop an integrated data tracking system to enable measurement of the impact of ECE program participation on child welfare-supervised children’s safety, permanency (e.g. placement stability), early child development, and later school performance outcomes, we further recommend that other initiatives consider using unique child identifiers that can link child-level data from disparate (i.e. child welfare, Head Start/ECE, K-12 school districts) data management systems without requiring a full integration of these systems. The administrative, legal, financial and practical barriers to creating a single, integrated data system are considerable, and inclusion of a single or at linkable set of unique child identifier(s) across data management systems is a more practical means of achieving the same goal.

Our final recommendations pertain to policy issues that affect communities’ capacity to enroll child welfare-supervised children in high quality ECE programs.

While child welfare-ECE service coordination initiatives like LACWEEP can do much to increase child welfare-involved children’s access to ECE, they can only do so much when a community does not have a sufficient supply of high quality ECE slots to meet the resulting increase in demand. Thus, we recommend that other initiatives pursue policy reform strategies for protecting existing sources of ECE funding and increasing funding for high quality ECE programs located in communities with large child welfare populations as part of their approach. LACWEEP did not proactively pursue state or federal policy changes to help achieve its goals until the end of the grant when it invited
a civil rights organization, whose policy agenda includes educational equity reform, to participate on its Advisory Committee. Although only actively involved in the Committee for a short while, this new partnership has already born fruit as this organization has adopted increasing ECE access for child welfare-supervised children as one of its policy reform goals.

- And, lastly, **we recommend a review of federal Head Start regulations with respect to the classes of children who are categorically eligible.** Currently, this list includes children in foster placements, which helps promote access to high quality ECE for this particular subset of child welfare-supervised children, but it excludes children with open child welfare cases who are maintained in or returned to their parent(s)’ home or placed in unlicensed kinship care. Young children in the child welfare system who are placed ‘In Home’ or with relative caregivers also need high quality ECE services, perhaps even more so than those in foster care. Children’s participation in these programs and the positive relationships that they develop with their ECE providers should not be disrupted when they are returned to their parents or replaced with a relative and therefore are no longer in foster care. LACWEEP’s experience is that ECE stability for children in the child welfare system is just as important as school (K-12) stability for promoting positive developmental outcomes for this vulnerable population.
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