

Summary:

Collaborative Name: THRIVE Santa Barbara County (SBC) and First 5

Initiative: Determining critical activities for early childhood results

Issue: Not enough students entering kindergarten ready to learn.

Method Applied: Promoting common assessment and data-driven decision making.

Results: The kindergarten readiness assessment developed to meet the community's needs now shows a 12 percentage point increase over a three-year period of time with children performing above the desired results trajectory.

Take-away for Practice:

Use data to help drive focus in your work. Start simple with the data you have and think creatively about how to get the data you need. Dig deep into the data and engage partners in its analysis. Use data to frame the future action plans. Scale practices that work.

Taking Action and Getting Results in Early Childhood

Background and Project Initiation:

In 1998 California voters passed Proposition 10 which imposed a tax on tobacco products and devoted those funds to support 0-5 year olds and their families. Proposition 10 established a commission in each of California's 58 counties to oversee how these funds are spent. Santa Barbara County's First 5 Commission (First 5) has become a critical leader of new and innovative strategies to address Kindergarten readiness. First 5 serves as a funder, a convener and an advocate for evidence based strategies that ensure that children are born healthy and raised in nurturing homes and communities and that each child has the support they need to succeed in school and reach their full potential. The primary measure of success for this initiative was determined to be the readiness of children to enter Kindergarten.

But there was a problem: no consistent way existed to measure the readiness of children when they entered school. First 5 had funded school readiness efforts for many years, but in 2008 First 5 leaders recognized the innovative work of one of its funded partners, the Santa Maria Bonita School District, in creating a tool to assess Kindergarten readiness. Together with the district and the University of California Santa Barbara which had long served as First 5's evaluation partner an effort was launched to develop an assessment, ensure its rigor and effectiveness and develop a model which could be easily implemented throughout the county. The result was the Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (KSEP). The assessment looked at developmental milestones both academically and social emotionally, providing a rich data source to assess impact of programs and practices and make improvements over time.

In 2011, recognizing the value of focusing on specific outcomes and how data and evaluation can inform best practices, leaders in Santa Barbara County developed THRIVE SBC. THRIVE SBC is a cradle to career partnership representing the education, government,



nonprofit, philanthropic, business and civic sectors. The focus is on ensuring the success of every child through some form of college and into a career.

Building on What Works: Scaling Practices that Get Results

After the first release KSEP data in 2009-10 the baseline report found that only 15 percent of children in Santa Barbara County were “Ready-to-Go” upon entry into kindergarten. While this news was shocking, the community was determined to act. The decision was made to focus the efforts of First 5 in early childhood and THRIVE SBC as a whole on five geographically defined “Community Collaboratives” in the communities which showed the most need and also indicated their willingness to try new models to improve student outcomes. Specifically, THRIVE SBC focused on the communities of:

- Carpinteria
- Santa Barbara’s West Side
- Isla Vista
- Santa Maria
- Guadalupe

First 5 worked to ensure all the key partners and practitioners in each Community Collaborative were working together effectively on the 0-5 arena and THRIVE helped continue the work beyond into the K-12 system. The goal was to develop a concrete action plan in each area based on what the data showed actually gets results for children. Over the years, several key steps have been taken in each of the five sites:

- Connecting Pre-K to K-3 – First 5 has worked to analyze the data about what programs are getting the best results. To support this analysis, the leaders in the pre-k community work with the K-3 leaders in each of the districts to ensure their work is aligned.
- One example of the systemic change that comes from a focus on outcomes and strategies that work includes the Carpinteria Early Childhood Educators Network. The Network was formed as a collaborative between center-based Preschool programs serving children in Carpinteria and includes Kindergarten teachers. The Network meets on a monthly basis and works together to evaluate data and identify strategies that support Kindergarten readiness, high quality programming, and articulation with Kindergarten teachers. The Network developed a universal parent handbook titled “Ready for K” in both English and Spanish that was distributed to all families during Kindergarten registration. The Network also co-hosts a joint staff in-service with preschool and Kindergarten teachers which previously had very limited direct interaction and few opportunities to plan, collaborate or identify best practices and improvements in articulation.
- School districts have invested significant professional development resources in learning how to both administer and assess the results of the KSEP so teachers are able to individualize learning to their students based on the results.

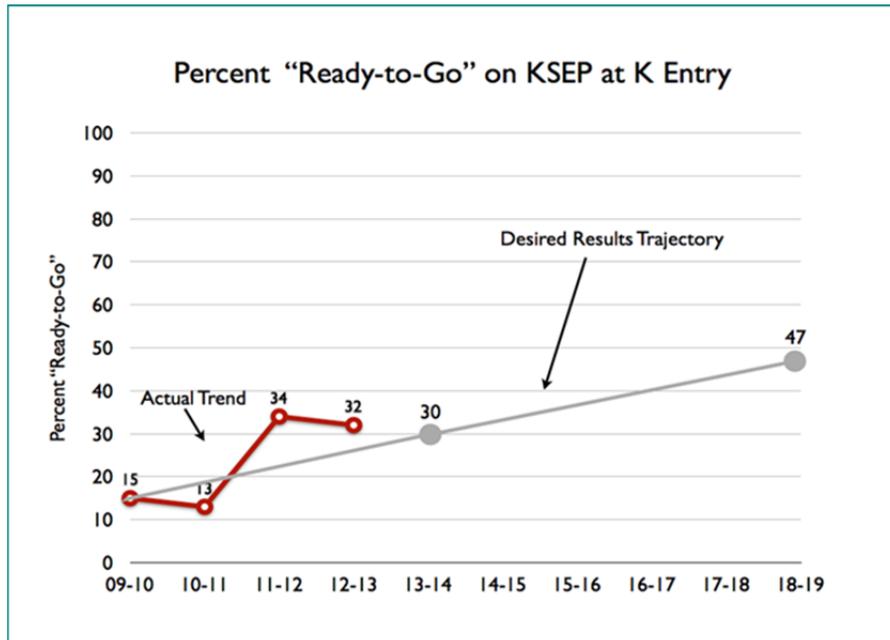
“Now we have clarity. We know where we are and where we want to go.”

Adrianna Foss,
Orfalea Foundation



- Funders are now using the data to better understand how their investments are connected to improved outcomes and they too have joined together around THRIVE to make decisions with more complete information and with common goals and expected outcomes. In addition to First 5, the Santa Barbara Foundation, James S. Bower Foundation, Orfalea Foundation and many others in the philanthropic sector are now using results to better inform their strategies and challenging practitioners to develop plans around those practices that hold the most promise.

As a result of this purposeful work to develop an innovative assessment – one that is now being considered by communities across the country – and to use data to make improvements in program and service delivery, the KSEP scores have continually improved over the last three years. The chart below highlights the 12 percentage point increase over this period of time with THRIVE Carpinteria children performing above the desired results trajectory.



Overall, the progress is impressive as the Carpinteria community looks to ensure every child gets to the school doors starting from a fundamentally sound place. There are many lessons to be learned in this process to improve outcomes at scale.

Use Data to Guide Continuous Improvement:

Upon reviewing KSEP scores for Carpinteria two years ago, the collaborative action network partners identified the need to create an early childhood education group charged with looking at coordination and data. Their goal was to see what was happening in pre-Kindergarten in relation to school readiness as a coordinated effort. The first step was to create the Carpinteria Early Childhood Educators Network in THRIVE Carpinteria and this group developed an action plan aimed at implementing strategies and changes that would result in higher KSEP scores. The action plan included the following actions:

- Increase articulation between pre-k & K teacher through tri-annual meetings around shared practices



- Set monthly meetings with preschool (center based) directors to align curriculum, review data and progress, including accreditation & high quality programming benchmarks.
- Develop and distribute a universal parent handbook titled “Ready for Kindergarten” in both English and Spanish for all Carpinteria families during Kindergarten registration.
- Co-host a joint staff in-service with preschool and Kindergarten teachers which previously had very limited direct interaction and few opportunities to plan, collaborate, or identify best practices and improvements in articulation.

In addition, all the THRIVE Community Collaborative groups met at a Learning Community during Fall 2012 after the KSEP scores are released for the 5 sites. Having met for 3 years in a row to review the data and the 12 items in the KSEP, trends in individual items in the KSEP are emerging. Since the data shows that item 8 in the KSEP, which is verbal expression, hasn't improved for 3 years in a row across the board, sites have all agreed to come together over the summer to create an action plan to move that item.

Carmen Lozano, Community Collaborative Specialist from First 5, probably captured it best in saying, "Things take longer than expected. Be patient, and remember to include everyone - even with huge groups of partners including community members, business leaders, and parents...keep adding - it creates excitement!"

