

FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT, Humboldt County Children and Families Commission¹ Response to Grand Jury Report 2010-HESS-02

Findings:

1. *We found no deficiencies in the preparatory backgrounds of any person involved with the First Five organization. We determined that as long as loans were granted and paid for by F5, we found nothing out of line with the requirements of the loan.*

FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT agrees with the finding.

2. *We learned that F5 uses the ECERS system as a way to evaluate the quality of pre-school settings. Its IQ program uses ECERS to determine the viability of a school for a loan or grant.*

FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT agrees with the finding.

3. *We found the reliability and validity of the ECERS/IQ scale to be inadequate. We could not find substantial use of ECERS elsewhere after 2003. Evaluations done by the regular ECERS do not take Montessori school requirements into consideration.*

FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT wholly disagrees with the finding. The Grand Jury offers no citations of academic literature to support their conclusions.

Part 1. In response to questions about the adequacy of the reliability and validity of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, please refer to a 2010 article, “Reliability and Validity of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale” (attached). All references are fully cited.

Reliability: “There are several important types of reliability that are relevant to the Environment Rating Scales including test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and interrater reliability” (Clifford et al, p. 6).

Test-retest reliability

“Test-retest reliability is used as an indicator of the stability of scores on an instrument over time (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2003). Results across studies using the ECERS-R, indicate that the assessment of the global quality of an early childhood care and education setting as measured by the ECERS-R is stable over moderately long periods of time during a given school year where the teacher is stable in the classroom.” (Clifford et al., p. 6).

Internal consistency

“The internal consistency of an instrument refers to the ability of scores from the instrument to provide a measure of a single concept, in this case, the global quality of an environment,” (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2003, p. 8). A chart of interrater internal consistency

¹ First 5 Humboldt, Humboldt County Children and Families Commission is our legal name and we respectfully request the Grand Jury use our legal name in any documents that reference us.

of the seven subscales of the ECERS, ranging from .76 to .92, is shown in Clifford et al., page 9. “A commonly-accepted rule of thumb is that an α of 0.6-0.7 indicates acceptable reliability, and 0.8 or higher indicates good reliability” (Cronbach, 1951, pp. 297–334).

Interrater reliability of the ECERS-R

“Field testing of the ECERS-R suggests that the ECERS-R demonstrates good interrater reliability at the indicator, item, and total scale levels.” (Clifford et al., p. 7).

Validity: “Just as there are several forms of reliability, there are multiple indicators of the validity of scores on an assessment. Those relevant to the Environment Rating Scales include content validity, predictive validity, and concurrent validity.” (Clifford et al., p. 9).

Content validity

“...Content validity is an indicator of how well the items of the instrument represent the overall domain of interest” (Bailey, 2004).

Foxcraft et al. note that by using a panel of experts to review the test specifications and the selection of items the content validity of a test can be improved. The experts will be able to review the items and comment on whether the items cover a representative sample of the behaviour domain. “During the development of the original *ECERS*, the authors contacted seven nationally recognized experts in day care and early childhood (Harms & Clifford, 1980). These experts rated the importance of each item in early childhood programs. Overall, 78 percent of the items were rated as of high importance. The authors then made minor modifications to the scale, which should increase the validity” (Harms & Clifford, 1983, p. 10.)

Concurrent validity

“Concurrent validity is a subset of criterion-related validity, correlation to scores from another instrument” (Bailey, 2004, p. 12).

For example, when the ECERS-R and an additional measure (Caregiver Interaction Scale, CIS, Arnett, 1989) were compared for reliability and validity, this also demonstrates concurrent validity. “Higher scores on the original and revised ECERS were associated with more sensitive (ECERS $r(68)=.60$, $p,.001$; ECERS-R $r(68)=.54$, $p,.001$) and less harsh teachers (ECERS $r(68)=-.56$, $p,.001$; ECERS-R $r(68)=-.52$, $p,.001$),” (Sakai et al., p. 439). (p. 439). These are solid correlations, considering the p values indicate that these results have less than a 1 in 1000 chance of being due to chance. “Classrooms considered high in quality (a score of 5 or above) on the ECERS and the ECERS-R were more likely to have teachers who were more sensitive and less harsh” (Sakai et al., p. 439).

Predictive validity

“Predictive validity, like concurrent validity, is a subset of criterion-related validity, scores are predictive of future scores or events” (Bailey, 2004, p. 10).

“Higher quality scores are related to children’s cognitive development as assessed by the Bailey Scales of Infant Development – Mental Development Index” (Love, et al., 2004, p. 10). Another study looked at relationships between quality of the early care environment, as assessed by the ECERS, and outcomes through second grade. “Children

who experienced higher quality preschool child-care settings demonstrated better skills in their first year of school" (Peisner-Feinberg, et al., p. 1550).

Part 2. Regarding disuse of the ECERS after 2003, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales are currently being used in 11 states, as part of those states' Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) for child care (information compiled by Helen Love, First 5 Humboldt). Currently the ECERS is used in California as a requirement for state-funded centers and family child care programs that participate in the Family Child Care Education Network, as well as by the state's Mentor Teacher Program.

Part 3. Regarding the ECERS and Montessori programs, the creators of the ECERS state in their FAQ, "How compatible are the scales with Montessori philosophy?": "It is not believed that the scales penalize Montessori programs... We have found that quality rests on how well the program meets the three major components of high quality early childhood programs [protection (health and safety)...building relationships...and stimulation through hands-on activities], rather than on the program's philosophy." "Programs that consistently apply the Montessori method often do very well on many of the items on the scales... All programs, no matter what their philosophies emphasize, should meet children's needs in a variety of ways." (see attached for a complete discussion).

4. *We are concerned that F5 emphasizes play groups over preschool activities.*
FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT wholly disagrees with the finding.

Part 1. Per the provisions of the "California Children and Families Act of 1998" and Humboldt County Ordinance 2185 which established the Commission on December 15, 1998, county children and families commissions are "intended to emphasize local decision making" and "to adopt an adequate and complete county strategic plan for the support and improvement of early childhood development within the county." FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT'S Strategic Plan was developed with significant input from parents, providers, and professionals in the county and reflects "local decision making" about how best to utilize tobacco tax funding to enhance optimal early childhood development throughout Humboldt's diverse communities. Improved family functioning has consistently been requested as a priority for funding and is reflected in the Strategic Plan by Goal 2: ***Strengthen connections among parents, families and communities.*** Playgroups have been a popular strategy to address this goal as parents of young children consistently tell us the playgroups are very helpful to them in raising their children, and annual evaluations of the playgroups indicate parents have learned more about parenting and that parents support each other. Given that parents are the primary care providers of their young children, responding to the "voice of parents" has historically been a priority for the Commission.

Part 2. Per the Commission's Strategic Plan, "the need for high quality child care and early education opportunities for children and their families has been a consistent concern for FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT throughout the years of our work," and is reflected in the

Strategic Plan by Goal 3: ***Further quality child care and education for young children.*** Beyond the Child Care IQ Program, the Commission has made a significant investment in supporting the professional development of preschool teachers throughout the county. From 2002 through 2009 the Retention Incentive Program paid \$1,625, 439.00 in monetary incentives to a total of 447 individuals working in the early childhood field. Of the 1,204 incentives paid, 939 were paid to center-based staff, ie preschool teachers plus a few infant-toddler teachers, with 265 incentives paid to providers who work out of their homes (family child care providers). In fiscal year 2009-2010, the Commission has provided 42 scholarships to 21 center-based staff to further their college education with an average of 6 units of coursework completed. Currently, plans are underway to re-establish the Retention Incentive Program in fiscal year 2010-2011 which will allow the Commission to provide academic supports to preschool teachers seeking to improve their skills. The Commission’s consistent focus on building the early childhood education workforce for the provision of quality child care and education is a fundamental strategy to enhance optimal early childhood development throughout the county. The “quality” of care and education a young child receives is directly related to the education and skills of the provider.

Part 3. Per the Commission’s Strategic Plan, “FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT’S focus on children age 0 to 5 and their families is important because recent advances in knowledge about children’s early years show that the period between pregnancy and school entry is a crucial time for human development. A healthy birth and everyday experiences of learning and nurturing from parents and caregivers are a powerful influence on the life of every human being.” With this understanding, the Commission funds programs across the domains of child health, family functioning, and early childhood care and education—but the Commission is more than a funder. Per the Commission’s Strategic Plan, FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT is also a convener, educator, advocate, and partner with others striving to support our young children to reach their highest potential. A good example of the Commission exercising its role other than funder, is the process we initiated in 2005 for the consideration of Proposition 82, The Preschool for All Act a ballot measure voted on in June of 2006. FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT convened key stakeholders to provide an opportunity for education on provisions of Proposition 82 and facilitated discussions on how the implementation of Proposition 82 would impact early childhood educators, parents, and the systems that serve them. Following extensive deliberations on Proposition 82, the Commission endorsed Proposition 82, reaffirming building a relationship with the Humboldt County Office of Education in the implementation of the Proposition, and building on the strengths of the early childhood systems in place in Humboldt County. California voters did not approve Proposition 82, and a potential designated funding source for preschools in California was not realized.

Recommendations:

1. *That Humboldt First 5 use the Montessori ECERS (MECERS) for IQ evaluations that involve Montessori schools.*

FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT will not implement the recommendation because it is not reasonable.

We are not going to implement **Recommendation #1** because it is not reasonable, per Finding #3, Part 3, and because First 5 Humboldt has the authority to select the evaluation tools it deems most suitable to its purposes in carrying out the goals of specific programs, including but not limited to the Child Care I.Q. Program.

2. *That pre-school programs have equal budget considerations with play groups.*
FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT will not implement the recommendation because it is not warranted.

FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT'S budget supports Strategic Plan Goals and it is evident, per our Annual Evaluation Reports, that the Commission funds child health, family functioning, and early childhood care and education programs that are of benefit to young children and their families in the County of Humboldt. Given that county children and families commissions are "intended to emphasize local decision making," the Commission will continue to listen to parents, providers, and professionals in the county as well as consider evaluation results for funded programs in determining budget allocations.

References for the Response to Finding #3:

1. Clifford, R. M., Reszka, S. S., and Rossbach, H-G. (Jan. 2010 version). Reliability and Validity of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale. Frank Porter Graham Institute, University of North Carolina.
2. Kubiszyn, T., & Borich, G. (2003). *Educational testing and measurement: Classroom application and practice* (7th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
3. Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika*, 16(3).
4. Bailey, D. B. (2004). Tests and test development *Assessing infants and preschoolers with special needs* (3rd ed., pp. 22-44). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
5. Foxcroft, C.D., Patterson, H. Le Roux, D., and Herbs, D. (2004). Psychological Assessment in South Africa: A Needs Analysis. Final report of the Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa.
6. Harms, T., & Clifford, R. (1980). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)*. New York: Teachers College Press.
7. Harms, T., & Clifford, R. (1983). Assessing preschool environments with the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 8, 261-269.
8. Sakai, L. M., Whitebook, M., Wishard, A. and Howes, C. Evaluating the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS): Assessing differences between the first and revised edition. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18, 427-445.)
9. Love, J. M., Constantine, J., Paulsell, D., Boller, K., Ross, C., Raikes, H., et al. (2004). The role of Early Head Start programs in addressing the child care needs of low-income families with infants and toddlers: Influences on child care use and quality. In J. Constantine (Ed.): *Mathematica*.
10. Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R. M., Culkin, M.L., Howes, C., Kagan, S.L., and Yazejian, N. (2001). The relation of preschool child-care quality to children's cognitive and social developmental trajectories through second grade. *Child Development*, 72(5), 1534-1553.

References for the Response to Finding #4:

1. California Children and Families Act of 1998.
2. Ordinance 2185, section 571 of Chapter 1 of Division 7 of Title V of the Humboldt County Code, relating to duties of the Children and Families Commission (First 5).
3. FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT Strategic Plan 2009.
4. FIRST 5 HUMBOLDT Evaluation Report, January-December 2009.
5. Proposition 82, The Preschool for All Act: A June 2006 Ballot Measure, A Non-Partisan Summary.