

First 5 Ventura County

**Parent and Child Together (PACT) Pilot Model
Evaluation:**

**Final Evaluation Report
and Recommendations**

May 2019

Prepared for



Developed by

EVALCORP
Research & Consulting

Introduction

First 5 Ventura County funds a variety of services to families and young children including the Parent and Child Together (PACT) program. PACTs are locally developed, early learning programs that provide an opportunity for parents/caregivers to engage in structured and unstructured play with their young children (ages 0 to 5) with the support of a teacher who models developmentally appropriate parenting techniques and provides education and coaching. PACTs are offered through 11 local, community-focused centers known as Neighborhoods for Learning (NfLs). PACT implementation differs somewhat across NfLs, as sites have been encouraged to develop programming for families that best meets the needs of the communities served. In addition to PACT classes, the NfLs serve a community function, providing developmental screenings and referring families to other services available in the community.

A standardized PACT Pilot Model was implemented at 5 of the 11 NfLs in Fall 2018. The goal of standardization was to allow the PACT programs to operate under a set of cohesive best practices while continuing to incorporate flexible and responsive programming to meet the needs of individual families and communities. The refined Pilot Model was based on extensive document review, a literature review of similar early learning programs, and stakeholder surveys and interviews.

The Pilot Model was designed to help PACTs achieve five overarching goals: promote positive parent/caregiver-interaction and play, parent/caregiver knowledge of child development, parent/caregiver social/community connection and connection to resources, children's social/emotional development, and early literacy and school readiness.

The Pilot Model included guidelines for structural parameters (e.g., class size, frequency of meeting, duration of meeting) and guidelines for planning and facilitating PACT classes. The Pilot Model also required NfLs to conduct developmental screenings, connect families with referrals and supports (as needed), and follow up with parents/caregivers on families' needs.

EVALCORP Research & Consulting was contracted to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the refined PACT Pilot Model. This report summarizes key findings from the evaluation and provides recommendations to support further refinement of the Pilot Model and approaches to future evaluations of the model.

Methods

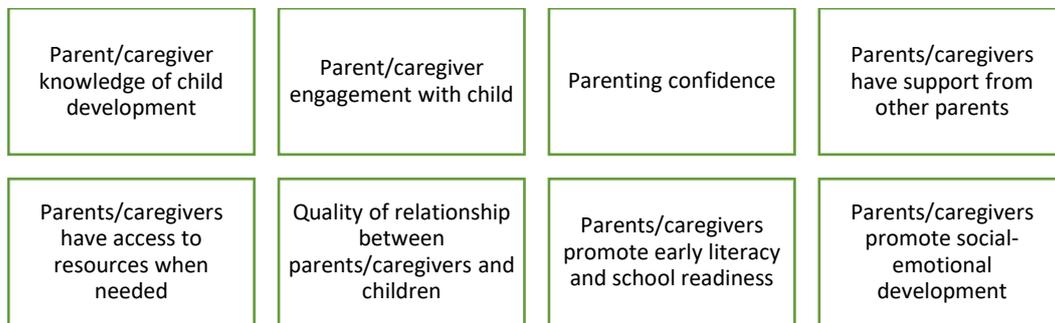
EVALCORP conducted a mixed-methods evaluation using retrospective interviews with NfL directors and PACT teachers, and a pre- and post-survey of parents/caregivers who participated in the PACT Pilot Model. Two prior reports describing the key findings of the implementation and outcome evaluations inform the key findings and recommendations in this report.

Through the interview process, interviewees had the opportunity to provide feedback on the implementation standards they felt were most important to discuss with respect to whether the PACT program was implemented as intended, and to better understand the successes and challenges experienced by the pilot sites during implementation (refer to the Summary of Key Findings Qualitative Implementation Assessment for more information).

The PACT Parent Survey assessed changes in parents'/caregivers' knowledge, skills, level of engagement with their child, and connections to social and community resources. The pre- and post-

survey contain 21 identical items to assess 8 outcomes the PACT program was designed to target (see **Figure 1**; refer to the Summary of Key Findings Outcomes Assessment for more information).

Figure 1. PACT Outcomes Assessed by the PACT Parent Pre- Post-Survey



Key Findings

Several key findings were identified in the evaluation of PACT Pilot Model. For further detail, please see the Summary of Key Findings Qualitative Implementation and Outcomes Assessment reports.

NfLs uniformly described substantial adherence to PACT Pilot Model implementation standards.

The 4 NfLs that participated in interviews reported full adherence to the same 16 of 29 PACT Pilot Model standards. This is noteworthy because the interviews were structured flexibly to allow participants the opportunity to provide feedback on the implementation standards they felt were most important to discuss, meaning that the interviewee chose which standards to discuss in depth. Even still, the participants independently reported cohesively and uniformly on adherence to over half the standards. (See **Figure 1** in the Summary of Key Findings Qualitative Implementation Report.)

NfLs reported experiencing challenges to implementation that may have been related to deviations from the recommended PACT program and class structure. When asked to discuss challenges to implementation, teachers and directors typically reported challenges around balancing the diverse and sometimes unpredictable needs of classes with some of the recommendations of the Pilot Model. For example, teachers and directors described challenges with adhering to lesson plans, incorporating all of the standardized topic areas into lesson plans, finding time to complete lesson plans, and performing lesson plan reflections.

These reported challenges may have been related to deviations from the PACT Pilot Model implementation standards on the structure of the program and classes. For example, one NfL reported having wider age ranges in one group than recommended and also found difficulty in creating and sticking to a lesson plan that was appropriate for the entire class. Additionally, many teachers scheduled PACT groups to meet more often than recommended by the pilot model and also reported facing limited time to complete lesson plans or reflect on lesson plans after classes.

Lack of clarity about certain implementation standards may have contributed to challenges for teachers. Directors and teachers lacked clarity in the PACT Pilot Model standards regarding adhering to lesson plans and covering topic areas, which led to perceived, and possibly unnecessary challenges. For example, in interviews, teachers described experiencing uncertainty about when to follow pre-planned activities developed in their lesson plans and when to diverge from the lesson plan to attend to families' needs during classes. Lesson planning was intended as a tool to ensure

that specific topic areas were addressed, identified needs of children in the PACT were supported, and a class routine was established and followed, but it was not expected that it should override a PACT teacher's professional judgement regarding the needs of the families in her/his PACT. The Pilot Model specifies that PACT classes should be "flexible, responsive and adaptive" to the needs of families; further clarity around these standards may have helped teachers make decisions or given teachers more confidence when deciding in the moment.

Teachers and directors also described difficulty incorporating all of the topic areas into each PACT class. Although the 6 topic areas were required for inclusion in a PACT series as much as possible, each topic area was not required to be covered in each PACT class. Due to the lack of clarity around this activity guideline, teachers may have felt overwhelmed or overburdened during lesson planning, possibly leading them to spend more time planning than necessary.

Teachers built strong relationships with parents/caregivers. Across all NfLs interviewed, teachers described the supportive relationships they developed with families and especially with parents/caregivers in their classes. Through the small class sizes, regularity of meetings, and scheduled free play activity time, teachers were able to observe patterns of behavior in parent/caregiver-child dyads and build effective coaching relationships. Teachers helped parents/caregivers individually during classes by modeling positive parenting skills, especially during unstructured play. Administering the developmental screenings afforded teachers the opportunity to have in depth conversations with parents/caregivers about their child's needs and abilities and assist in making recommendations for additional services. This understanding informed teachers' observations, modeling of parenting behaviors, and coaching, and established a foundational relationship that allowed teachers to follow up with parents/caregivers about their children's needs in subsequent classes.

Families benefitted from the PACT Pilot Model. There is qualitative and quantitative evidence to suggest that families benefitted from the PACT Pilot Model in the expected outcomes areas. Through open ended survey questions completed by parents/caregivers and anecdotes shared by teachers, parents/caregivers described many benefits of participating in PACT classes.

For example, parents/caregivers described improvements in:

- knowledge of developmental milestones
- understanding of and attentiveness to their child
- confidence in their parenting abilities and techniques
- engagement with their child outside PACT classes, including reading and singing,
- relationships with their children.

Regarding their children's development, parents/caregivers reported improvements in:

- social and social-emotional development
- awareness
- activeness
- confidence
- ability to follow routines and directions

Survey data revealed that after participating in the PACT Pilot Model, parents/caregivers reported significantly higher scores on (1) promotion of early literacy and school readiness and (2) access to resources. This suggests that parents/caregivers engaged in more reading, talking, and singing with their children after participating in the PACT Pilot Model. Parents/caregivers also feel better able to get services for their children, when needed, after participating in the PACT Pilot Model

Quantitative and qualitative data were both important to illustrating a more complete picture of program outcomes. As described above, the qualitative and quantitative outcome data revealed a different, but complementary pattern of findings. This may be due to relatively high scores on the some of the outcomes on PACT Pre-Survey (e.g., high quality parent/caregiver-child relationships, engagement with child outside of PACT), which left less room for higher scores/positive change on the PACT Post-Survey. Yet in open-ended responses, parents/caregivers clearly reported increased frequency and quality of interactions with their children, increased parenting knowledge, and numerous positive outcomes for their children after participating in the PACT Pilot Model. The anecdotal responses shared by parents/caregivers documented the success of the PACT Pilot in meeting several goals that did not emerge in the quantitative analysis. This pattern of findings highlights the importance of utilizing both quantitative and qualitative measures to fully understand PACT program outcomes.

Recommendations

Lessons Learned from Piloting the Revised PACT Model

The Fall 2018 pilot of the revised PACT Model demonstrated that NfLs could successfully implement the model and collect survey data to evaluate the program's outcomes for families. The pilot also highlighted opportunities to strengthen training and TA for PACT staff, support staff by providing quality improvement activities and adequate planning time, and further refine the implementation of the PACT Pilot Model.

Provide additional training and technical assistance for the aspects of the PACT Model that teachers found challenging. As noted above, two areas of the PACT Pilot Model were cited by directors and teachers as especially challenging: topics areas/activity guidelines and lesson plans. However, the challenges that PACT staff reported indicated that they may have not fully understood the purpose of and expectations around these aspects of the PACT Pilot Model. Providing PACT staff with additional training and follow-up technical assistance (TA) in these areas of the Pilot Model is an important next step to ensure that the model is adhered to during future PACT series. First 5 Ventura County staff may consider reviewing and revising (if needed) the PACT topics areas and activity guidelines to ensure optimal clarity of the document. Staff may also consider adding instructions to the lesson plan template to ensure that PACT staff are completing the lesson plans as expected.

Provide additional training and technical assistance for the structural aspects of the PACT Model. NfLs reported some deviations from the structural aspects of the implementation standards of the PACT Pilot Model (e.g., weekly PACT classes; class roster based on PACT-defined child ages). Additional training and TA should be provided to ensure that these implementation standards are adhered to in future PACT series. During training and TA, emphasis should be placed on the value of these standards as best practices in the field and on the unintended consequences of deviations from the standards (e.g., less time for administrative tasks due to more frequent classes; difficulty meeting the needs of all children in the series when age-related guidelines are not followed).

Implement the PACT Quality Improvement Rating Matrix on a consistent basis to provide sites/teachers feedback and enhance adherence to the PACT Pilot Model. A Quality Improvement Rating Matrix (Matrix) was developed as part of the refined PACT Pilot Model. The Matrix is a tool to "rate" the successfulness of PACT implementation on a 3-point scale (i.e., Needs Improvement, Meets Expectations, and Exceeds Expectation). As the PACT Pilot Model continues to be implemented, the Matrix should be completed on a regular basis. The ratings will help NfL sites and teachers better understand which aspects of the model are being successfully implemented and how

adherence to the model could be enhanced. Consistent use of the Matrix will facilitate the transition to the refined Pilot Model and ensure that all sites continue to move towards alignment with PACT best practices and implementation standards.

Ensure that PACT Teachers have adequate time for administrative tasks and training activities.

Teachers and directors who participated in the PACT Pilot Model reported inadequate time for administrative tasks such as lesson planning, reflection on successes and challenges of PACT classes, and data entry. However, these activities are critical to PACT program and evaluation success; the PACT Pilot Model is designed to yield increased measurable outcomes for families if teachers are permitted adequate training experiences, time for thoughtful PACT series preparation, and careful data entry. Planning for future PACT series should include adequate time for these administrative tasks. In addition, PACT staff should be provided with time for trainings, TA, and opportunities for reflection and learning with their peers.

Consider enhancing the focus on parent/caregiver social and community connections in the PACT Pilot Model. The PACT Parent Surveys revealed that approximately half of parents/caregivers surveyed lacked social and community connections and that the PACT Pilot Model did not lead to quantifiable changes in this outcome. A review of a small, random sample of lesson plans did *not* identify planned opportunities for interactions among parents/caregivers, potentially explaining the lack of improvement in this outcome variable. First 5 Ventura County many want to consider enhancing the focus on planned activities and opportunities for parent/caregiver interaction in subsequent iterations of the PACT Pilot Model.

Future Evaluations of the PACT Model

Analysis of the data from the PACT Pilot suggests several recommendations for enhancing PACT evaluations. The recommendations are grouped into two categories: (1) Data collection, storage, and entry; and (2) Data analysis and additional measurement approaches. The recommendations in the first category can be implemented immediately and are expected to result in an increased number of matched cases and higher quality data. The recommendations in the second category are longer-term measurement and data analysis augmentations that could enhance understanding of PACT in the future.

Data collection, storage and entry

Develop and implement a standard approach to labeling, recording, and linking PACT Parent Survey and other related information. All PACT Parent surveys should have, at minimum, two identification numbers (ID): A parent/caregiver ID and a child ID. This will ensure that in situations where (a) multiple parents/caregivers from the same family participate in PACT and/or (b) multiple children from the same family participate in a PACT, pre- and post-surveys can be accurately linked and analyzed. In addition, the survey forms should be edited to clarify that *parent/caregiver* names belong in the name field. Staff should also consider adding a field for the target child's date of birth to the post-survey. The date of birth could serve as an additional identification point in the event that multiple children from a single family participate in PACT.

Provide training and technical assistance on data collection, storage, and entry. NfL/PACT staff who are responsible for data collection, storage, and/or entry should receive additional training on these procedures. Interviews with staff revealed some points of confusion surrounding data collection and entry. Additional training and TA for staff should result in higher quality data for analysis.

Perform periodic quality control checks of PACT Parent Survey data. PACT data should be periodically checked for accuracy. Quality control checks will help to identify and resolve data collection and entry issues quickly and will result in better quality data for subsequent analysis.

Data analysis and additional measurement approaches

Conduct additional analyses examining connections between PACT program factors and/or family characteristics and PACT program outcomes. As implementation of the PACT Pilot Model continues and the number of matched pre- and post- PACT Parent surveys increases, additional data analyses may be possible. First 5 Ventura County should consider examining the data for variations in outcomes based on program factors (e.g., NfL/site, program dosage) and family characteristics (e.g., socioeconomic status, child gender, primary language). The results of these analyses may provide useful information about key program elements and for which families the program is most beneficial. This information could then be used to further refine the program and/or target the program to specific populations.

Consider expanding the PACT Parent Survey scale from a 4-point scale to a 5-point scale. Parent/caregiver responses to some of the PACT Pre-Survey items were high, potentially leaving little room to demonstrate improvement in some program outcomes. Expanding the scale on the PACT Parent Survey may help combat this challenge. If First 5 Ventura County chooses to try this approach, a small pilot of the revised survey scale is recommended. Piloting the revised survey scale will help to determine if this will be a successful strategy prior to implementing this change across all PACT Parent Surveys.

Consider including observational measures of parenting behaviors and parent/caregiver-child relationships to document PACT outcomes. The current evaluation relies on a parent/caregiver survey to document program outcomes. This method was chosen because it is a common and cost-effective measurement approach in the field of child development. However, self-reported surveys may be biased (e.g., parents/caregivers may exaggerate the frequency of their parenting behaviors or provide the answers that they think are “correct”). To combat these limitations, First 5 Ventura County may consider supplementing the existing PACT Parent Survey with observational measures of parenting behaviors and parent/caregiver-child relationships. Although observational measures are more resource intensive than survey data, they provide information about parenting that is free from the self-report bias inherent to survey data.

Consider collecting additional follow-up data from parents/caregivers and/or children. The current evaluation captured changes in outcomes through a pre-post parent survey with the post-survey occurring soon after the completion of the PACT program. This measurement approach provides information about immediate program benefits. First 5 Ventura County may want to consider adding a second post-PACT measurement point (e.g., a few weeks or months after PACT completion) to learn more about the longer-term benefits of PACT.

Summary

The PACT Program holds a unique place in the early learning landscape of Ventura County. It focuses on the 0 to 3 population, which is an age group that few other local programs target; flexibly addresses the unique, variable needs of children and families in each PACT series; and has highly committed staff who are valued by their peers, parents/caregivers, and children. The program has a long and rich history filled with consistent praise for its ability to support children and families. The

development of the revised PACT Pilot Model was an initial step in standardizing the PACT model in order to document, measure, and understand the program and its benefits to families.

The evaluation of the PACT Pilot Model found that PACT could be successfully implemented across multiple NfLs with only minor site-reported deviations from the model. The evaluation also documented that the program was beneficial to families in multiple domains of parenting and child development. More specifically, parents/caregivers reported quantifiable improvements in their promotion of early literacy and access to resources for their children. They also reported anecdotal evidence of improved relationships with their children, parenting confidence, knowledge of child development, and numerous child outcomes (e.g., peer relations, social-emotional development).

The evaluation also highlighted opportunities to strengthen the PACT Pilot Model through additional training, TA, and planning time, feedback about model adherence, and increased program focus on supporting interactions/connection among parents/caregivers in PACT. Future evaluations will benefit from training and TA on standardized data collection, especially in tracking participant data over time, and from quality control checks of data entry. Evaluation efforts may also be enhanced through alternative measurement approaches and additional data analysis.