



Santa Clara CARES

Great Expectations

The E3 Institute-San Jose State University
Bachelor's Degree Cohort Program
for CARES Participants in Santa Clara County



Acknowledgments

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Dear Colleagues,

It is with great pride and satisfaction that we present to you this report, *Great Expectations: The E3 Institute-San Jose State University Bachelor's Degree Cohort Program for CARES Participants in Santa Clara County*. For many years, committed individuals and organizations in Santa Clara County have dreamed of helping underserved early childhood educators fulfill their goal of earning a bachelor's degree. E3 Institute supports the research that shows that children are better prepared for school when taught by educators who are equipped with the necessary theoretical knowledge and education to improve the quality of care for the County's youngest children.

WestEd's E3 Institute collaborated with the San Jose State University Department of Child and Adolescent Development to design a program that would accommodate the needs of working early childhood educators. Year-round special course sessions are being held one day per week from 4–7:30 pm at the E3 Institute offices. It is anticipated that in spring 2010 successful members of this cohort will be eligible to graduate.

Planning and candidate screening took place for nearly two years preceding the September 2006 launch of the program. The BA program was created to provide equity and access to higher education for CARES participants who experience barriers to traditional coursework toward a BA. In recognition of the power of a learning community, a program cohort was formed to enable the participating students to support one another through the process. The participants' sincere appreciation is witnessed in their own words on the pages of this report.

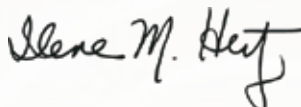
We could applaud ourselves for developing this program, but the real applause goes to the early educators participating in the program who sacrifice personal and professional obligations to accomplish the heartfelt goal of earning a bachelor's degree. We also wish to recognize FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and San Jose State University Department of Child and Adolescent Development, without whom this program would never have come to pass.

This report describes the BA cohort model and includes participants' and instructors' challenges and rewards during the first year of implementation. We hope this report helps others develop bachelor's degree supports in their counties.

Sincerely,



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Introduction

Santa Clara County is at the forefront of California's movement to improve the quality of early childhood education by strengthening retention and financial supports and expanding access to higher education for its early care and education (ECE) workforce. These endeavors are based on a long history of planning and recent initiatives to improve supports for ECE practitioners, with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for the County's youngest children.

Increasing scientific evidence shows that the emotional, physical, and intellectual environment that a child is exposed to in the early years of life has a profound impact on brain development. As such, early educators can significantly influence early childhood learning (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Additionally, research demonstrates that when early childhood educators are well educated and well trained, the children they teach are more successful in school and life (Sammons, Elliot, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). Other studies show that many highly qualified and caring educators leave the field because pay and incentives are low (Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber, & Howes, 2001).

Two major events demonstrate evidence of Santa Clara County's commitment to improving outcomes for its youngest children — the creation of WestEd's E3 Institute-Advancing Excellence in Early Education and the significant investment made in the Santa Clara CARES (Comprehensive Approaches to

Raising Educational Standards) program. E3 Institute supports and strengthens early childhood professional development through education, recruitment, and financial incentives. Santa Clara CARES, administered by the E3 Institute, provides monetary rewards to ECE practitioners based on their current education levels. These financial rewards serve as incentives for participants to continue their education, since stipends are offered each year. Both the E3 Institute and the CARES program were initiated and are funded by FIRST 5 Santa Clara County in collaboration with community colleges, universities, and local community-based organizations. The investment in Santa Clara CARES has paid off in a number of ways. Between 2002 and 2007, about 79 percent of Santa Clara County's estimated number of early educators working in licensed programs qualified for stipends during at least one year of Santa Clara CARES. As a result, the number of California Child Development Permits issued in the County

increased considerably, thus increasing the professionalism in the field. Santa Clara CARES has also brought together the county's community-based early education provider agencies and institutions of higher education for regular meetings, which has vastly increased their communication and understanding of one another's issues.

The E3 Institute leverages data from the CARES program to "put a face to" and understand the needs of the ECE workforce and to provide support where it is needed. For example, early educators can encounter difficulty when attempting to accomplish General Education (GE) courses required for a degree, such as English, math or science, social science, and humanities. These courses may seem impractical to an early educator with competing work/family responsibilities who is required to attend classes at night for coursework unrelated to child development. This difficulty is magnified when they are not counseled at the outset about what coursework is necessary to complete a degree.

Among many higher education initiatives spearheaded by the E3 Institute in Santa Clara County, one is the unique partnership with San Jose State University (SJSU) to adapt its existing BA program in child and adolescent development specifically for a cohort of Santa Clara CARES participants. That is, this program is designed to meet the specific needs of students in the ECE workforce with the same high standards expected of all SJSU students. The BA Cohort Program

was made possible by local and state CARES funding and the partnerships that evolved from that funding. CARES data about the workforce helped to inform the design and trajectory of the BA Cohort Program.

This report describes the unique Bachelor's degree program at SJSU for Santa Clara CARES participants. The report describes the initial progress of the program, launched in fall 2006, and its participants, and points to its multiple goals:

- ✿ Increase the quality of care and education provided to children and families across the County
- ✿ Continue to professionalize the ECE field
- ✿ Provide a highly diverse group of ECE practitioners the opportunity to increase their knowledge of early education practice and theory
- ✿ Provide ECE practitioners the opportunity to become leaders in the field
- ✿ Create a model program for other counties across the state to emulate

Evidence of the program's benefits is found throughout this report in the voices of BA cohort members themselves whose lives have been irrevocably changed by their participation and successes thus far. The report also discusses the challenges that the E3 Institute and SJSU have faced in implementing the program and how these challenges may be used as lessons learned in future years by the E3 Institute and by other counties.

Program Context and Goals

Santa Clara County's plan for enhancing the quality of care for children in ECE settings was based on research demonstrating that training and education for the ECE workforce were strongly linked to high-quality ECE learning experiences for children and families (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The strategic plan for FIRST 5 Santa Clara County — the principal funding source for the E3 Institute and Santa Clara CARES — has consistently emphasized the connection between quality care for young children and a well-educated workforce. The community investment strategy described in the FIRST 5 Santa Clara County Strategic Plan 2006-2011 underscores this connection and lists 14 critical elements necessary for a quality early learning experience, the first being, "A well-educated workforce at a BA degree level."

The publication elaborates FIRST 5 Santa Clara County's vision, mission, core values, and five basic goals. The third goal addresses the BA Cohort Program.

Goal 3: Children enter school fully prepared to succeed academically, emotionally, and socially.

Outcome: Preschools and early childhood teachers are of high quality

Indicator: a. Increased percentage of qualified early educators
b. Increased training of early childhood education (ECE) professionals

State and local First 5's continued integration and support of the field and resulting investment in the CARES program has bolstered the E3 Institute's success in creating an infrastructure for ECE professional development and higher education. Evidence of this success is found in the following accomplishments:

- ✿ High use rate of the CARES program, resulting in increased educational levels of the workforce
- ✿ E3 Institute's monthly Santa Clara CARES Roundtable meetings involving all of the County's institutions of higher education and relevant community-based organizations, resulting in collaborative long-range planning and policy development to address the demand for an educated workforce
- ✿ Strong partnerships that the E3 Institute helped to facilitate between and among ECE professional development stakeholders to provide consistent and accessible services
- ✿ Development and use of professional development tools such as the Professional Development and Education Plan (PDEP).

Development of the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program, therefore, capitalized on the existing relationship between the E3 Institute and SJSU, established through this countywide professional development infrastructure. The E3 Institute and SJSU recruited and selected BA cohort program participants with the help of data collected from the E3 Institute's database and CARES participants' transcripts. When program planners looked at the education and professional histories of CARES participants at the highest levels—or “steps”—of the CARES program (those who had earned many college units), they found the following¹:

- ✿ The vast majority were returning Santa Clara CARES participants
- ✿ Thirty percent had either completed an associate's degree or had taken some college courses
- ✿ Forty percent had completed a bachelor's degree
- ✿ Seventy-six percent had worked in the ECE field for 11 years or more

These data helped move the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program forward by demonstrating that members of the ECE field were committed to increasing their education, capable of attaining a higher degree, and highly experienced in the

field. However, a closer examination of prospective participants' transcripts revealed that their college course units did not necessarily include the right coursework needed for transfer to a four-year institution and participants were clearly in need of guidance about this process. This information steered the program timing and design.

The E3 Institute and SJSU also used lessons learned from their previously launched master's degree program at SJSU for Santa Clara CARES participants. That experience taught them that many students seeking ECE coursework are considered nontraditional (Dukakis, Bellm, Seer, & Lee, 2007). These students have been collectively defined as including low-income students, English language learners, working students, parents (including single parents), immigrants, older students, those in the first generation of their families to attend college, welfare recipients, and those with more than one of these attributes. This means in one way or another they need an enormous amount of academic and personal support if they are to be successful in a BA cohort program.

Finally, recent research on the ECE higher education system and workforce has validated Santa Clara County's commitment to investing in higher education: Results from two statewide reports on higher education in ECE found a lack of upper division programs and coursework, despite a large number of ECE practitioners with associate's degrees or higher (Whitebook, Bellm, Lee, & Sakai, 2005; Whitebook et al., 2006a).

¹ Aggregated data were generated by the E3 Institute in June 2007, which include only Santa Clara CARES participants in Year 3 (2004) and Year 4 (2005)—the planning years for the BA Cohort Program—and at Steps 7 and 8—the highest levels.

Broader Goals

In addition to the previously mentioned goals of the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program, the E3 Institute, SJSU, and their higher education partners across the County have a broader goal: inform the student transfer processes between community colleges and four-year institutions by developing stronger counseling and advising at the community

college level — both systemically and individually. The design and support systems developed for the BA Cohort Program — beginning with the student recruitment process — provides helpful information about how to improve these processes. As such, E3 Institute staff continues to analyze how to modify its approach to the BA Cohort Program in the context of what they learn about student transferability, counseling, and advising.

Professional Development and Education Plan

The Santa Clara CARES PDEP is a comprehensive goal-setting tool that helps students at the six community colleges and two universities to document their educational goals and to pursue a planned course of study. Students meet one-on-one with Child Development Department faculty and counselors to develop and implement their PDEPs.



The Program: Strong Supports, Accessibility, and Carefully Crafted Coursework

In spring 2007, 29 members of the ECE workforce were enrolled in the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program. The program meets the specific needs of students in the ECE workforce with the same high standards expected of all SJSU students. The program also includes a focus on developing future leaders, given that the participating group has significant ECE experience and training.

The program comprises three primary components:

1. Student supports
2. Accessibility
3. A carefully crafted delivery system for coursework

1. Student Supports

The BA Cohort Program includes multiple supports to participating students.

- ✿ Counseling, advising, and transfer assistance
- ✿ A cohort model of learning
- ✿ Assistance with technology skills
- ✿ Academic assistance
- ✿ Outside conferences focused on professional and leadership development
- ✿ Financial assistance

These supports are particularly significant and necessary because many nontraditional students need to become familiar with the systems and expectations of today's four-year institutions. This is especially true for those who have seldom, if ever, taken upper-division classes in the past.

Without question, participating students have found these supports critical to their ability to apply to, matriculate, and remain in the program, and to their feelings of confidence that they will complete it. A brief description of each support follows.

Counseling, Advising, and Transfer Assistance

Counseling and advising are central elements of the BA Cohort Program, and are primarily informed by three factors:

- ✿ E3 Institute's pre-existing commitment to creating a counseling and advising infrastructure in ECE higher education

- ❖ Nontraditional student status of all of the program participants, as stated later in the report
- ❖ Existing inadequacies of the student transfer process between community colleges and four-year institutions, as the transcripts of prospective students for this program demonstrated

As part of the student-selection process for the program and to help them become transfer-ready prior to formally matriculating, the Chair of the Child and Adolescent Development Department at SJSU met multiple times and communicated extensively with each of the prospective students. The focus of these early discussions was on ensuring that students had the required courses to transfer to SJSU and to begin taking upper division courses for the BA degree. This proved to be an intensive and time-consuming task. Although many of the prospective students had earned numerous course units at community colleges, often they were not the lower-division units required for transfer. A maximum of 70 units are allowed for transfer to SJSU and required for participation in the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program; this includes lower division core general education (GE) units and courses for the child and adolescent development major. (See Appendix B for a list of lower division courses required for student transfer and Appendix A for upper division courses required for successful BA completion in the Santa Clara CARES Cohort Program.)

Since those initial meetings, the Department Chair has continued to offer extensive support and guidance to students as they have moved through the program, helping them to develop and follow their PDEPs and answering questions about completion of transfer and University requirements.

Selection of cohort members was determined based on the general undergraduate admissions criteria at SJSU as well as certain criteria that the E3 Institute included in order to form a diverse group. See the section below entitled “The Cohort Student Profile: Broad Diversity and a Shared History in the ECE Field.”

Cohort Model

At the core of the program design is a cohort model of learning in which participating students take all classes together as a group. The model ensures that each participant would not have to compete

Student Perspective on Counseling and Advising

Some students related the reasons they applied to the program to the strong counseling and advising component:

“For me... it was an opportunity for guidance and I think that being in early childhood and trying to figure out where to go...this was... the perfect opportunity for me to just have someone say, ‘OK, these are the classes,’ versus counselors... saying, ‘Take these classes’ and then finding out that... they’re not transferable...”

for space in classes at the University. Furthermore, like many cohort-based programs, it has fostered significant support and camaraderie among students because of their commonalities in professional backgrounds, interests, and shared nontraditional-student status.

Technology Skills

During the first few courses, students participated in technology orientations to become accustomed to the largely technology-based curriculum framework, which is now the norm in most four-year institu-

tions. The orientations were crucial, given that many of the students in the program had never been in a situation in

which technology skills were necessary. The orientations helped students to engage when instructors delivered lectures using PowerPoint software, and to use the University's "Web CT" course management software, which uses email to deliver all materials and papers (with the exception of initial distribution of a printed syllabus). All Santa Clara CARES BA cohort students also participated in a two-hour library information session to prepare them for the requirement to use the University's online library database for their research.

The program also established a Yahoo Group network for students, which they use frequently to communicate with one another about logistical issues and for support and encouragement.

Students now access all of their course assignments online, conduct much of their research using the online SJSU library database, and use email to communicate with professors, the Department Chair (for counseling and advising), and each other. The program has not only taught them technology skills, but has given them a sense of the value of those skills in today's world.

Academic Assistance

Students in the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program have received out-of-class academic assistance largely at the discretion of their instructors. For example, during the first course, the instructor met with students at the SJSU campus library on a

Student Perspective on Cohort Model

Many students in the program have found the cohort model invaluable and cite it as the reason they have remained in the program despite challenges. The model has had the striking effect of fostering cohesion and support among the group members that leads to greater retention in the program:

"...we've all commented on how much we appreciate support that we get from each other, and the idea that we're going to take each step together...I remember going to San Jose State, I felt very alone, and it's such a different experience feeling that there's going to be 27 other people going through the same challenges and they voice those challenges so you don't feel like you're the only one sitting up at 2 o'clock in the morning trying to finish your paper."

few Sundays to provide lengthy exam preparation sessions. The instructor also offered assistance on draft revisions of papers, which resulted in multiple drafts and individual meetings with students. The instructor offered these supports because she felt they were important bridges for many of the students who were taking upper-division college courses for the first time.

Outside Conferences Focused on Professional and Leadership Development

The BA Cohort Program provides participating students with the opportunity and financial support to attend statewide conferences related to professional growth, including the National Association for Bilingual Educators (NABE) and the California Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC).

Financial Assistance

A critical piece of the program is the E3 Institute's commitment to covering all expenses including textbooks and program costs, including instructors' time and advising time from the SJSU Child and Adolescent Department Chair. Perhaps more than any other single aspect of the program, this is what enabled many of the students to participate.

2. Accessibility

The program's accessibility fulfilled an enormous need among participating students given that they all work full time. Classes are offered once per

week in four-hour blocks in the late afternoons/evenings after work.

They are held at the E3 Institute office, which is geographically more convenient for many of the students than the SJSU campus.

There is ample free parking at the E3 office, which lifts a significant logistical and financial barrier that students would face taking classes on campus.

Where appropriate and necessary, the program has also been in contact with participants' employers to ensure regular, adequate release time for classes.

3. A Carefully Crafted Delivery System for Coursework

The course content and requirements of the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program are identical to those of traditional students receiving bachelor's

Student Perspective on Financial Assistance

The enormous financial assistance provided by the program clearly provided a gateway for many students who otherwise would not have been able to participate. But as one student notes below, there is clear symbolic meaning to the financial support for some, which undoubtedly contributes to their motivation and success:

"...there just wouldn't have been a financial way for me as a single human living on a teacher's salary to go back to school..., so I am so grateful to be the benefactor of their money. The fact that they're covering our books [is so important] — that was [previously] such a stress..."

Student Perspective on Accessibility

Increased accessibility on many fronts has made it possible for many students to participate in the program and for the first time to feel confident that they will obtain a BA:

"I felt like...as a working parent there were a lot of obstacles toward completing my education on my own, and this program as it was presented really removed a lot of those obstacles. We're meeting together, it's easy to get to classes, the classes are paid for..."

degrees in child and adolescent development at SJSU.

However, the program uses a different delivery system for coursework to meet the needs of full-time working students and otherwise nontraditional students.

While the instructors teach the same content to the Santa Clara CARES group, those who taught the initial courses to the cohort were carefully selected based on the needs of the group.

Curriculum and Requirements

The program curriculum uses the existing, long-standing Child and Adolescent Development BA curriculum at SJSU as a base, and its content is identical. The length and sequence of classes, however, were designed to accommodate the needs of Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program students in order to obtain a BA, which entails completing 51 upper-division units, including upper division general education units, to fulfill requirements for the major.

These units and requirements are combined with the maximum 70 units students can transfer from a community college (see Appendices A and B). Portions of the required upper-division units included chosen electives. Given the E3 Institute's support of and vested interest in ensuring the best possible preparation, the Chair of the SJSU Department of Child and Adolescent Development specifically selected a number of electives for participating students. The chosen electives are in areas where ECE educators need the most additional knowledge and assistance — language and literacy development and early childhood special needs.

Course Length and Sequence

The program enables participants to complete their degrees within three and a half years, assuming that they are transfer-ready when they begin. The projected date for graduation is May 2010. The Chair of the SJSU Department of Child and Adolescent Development facilitated this arrangement through the use of special sessions, which allow full-semester courses to be completed in 10- or 12-week blocks as opposed to the traditional 16-week blocks.

Within this framework, the course sequence was carefully considered, based on the educational histories and skill sets of the participants. As such, the first course focused on parenting, a topic thought to be somewhat familiar, engaging, and comfortable. The program also emphasized building a skill-based foundation, with a writing course offered as the second course in the sequence.

Instructors

Program instructors for the cohort regularly teach in the SJSU Department of Child and Adolescent Development on campus and are a mix of full professors, assistant professors, and part-time teaching staff. The Department Chair carefully selected those who were seasoned instructors, given the nontraditional status of many of the students in the program. Teaching the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort group has required instructors to make adjustments to the rhythm of the courses, but has not changed the content of their teaching.

The Cohort Student Profile: Broad Diversity and a Shared History in the ECE Field

The cohort group is enormously diverse across a number of categories. While its students generally fall into one general age group (30 years and above), they hail from many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and live and work across the county. They share a common history of participation in the Santa Clara CARES program but their educational experiences and levels vary. They work in both private and publicly funded center-based and family home-based early education programs with a broad age range of children. This diversity has contributed to an intensely rich and supportive environment in which to learn. The following description provides a student profile of the cohort based on three primary

categories: demographics, education information, and professional information.

Demographics

Age: All 29 students that make up the cohort are between the ages of 30 and 59 years. Of those, most are between 30 and 49 years; 13 students (45 percent) are between the ages of 30 and 39, and 11 students (38 percent) are between the ages of 40 and 49 years. The remaining 5 students (17 percent) are between 50 and 59 years.

Student Perspective on Coursework

A number of students have found the coursework overwhelming at times, and have consequently considered giving up on the program altogether. In particular, they struggle with balancing full-time work, families, and multiple life obligations with a demanding and compressed program. But they consistently return to the supportive structure and environment that includes, in their words, “supportive” and “knowledgeable” instructors who have “high expectations” of them. Students consistently report these as factors that help them not only to remain, but to build on their accomplishments and their confidence as they forge ahead:

“...the workload ... does feel overwhelming, it’s tremendous. But with each accomplishment, each step, I feel like my self-esteem has gone up, I feel my self-worth has gone up — that I am important, and I feel that the instructors know we can do it, so they hold these high standards for us, but they’re achievable standards... We’re really learning a lot and I do feel better about myself — I can walk a little taller now.”

Ethnicity: The students represent a broad range of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Eleven of the 29 students (38 percent) identify as White; 6 (21 percent) identify as Hispanic or Latino; 5 students (17 percent) identify as Asian; 5 students (17 percent) identify as biracial or other; and 2 (6.9 percent) identify as Black or African American.

Location of Residence: Cohort students reside throughout Santa Clara County. More than half (15 students, or 52 percent) reside in San Jose; 4 students (or 14 percent) reside in Gilroy; 3 students (10 percent) reside in Santa Clara; and the remainder are scattered across five other communities in the County.

Education Information

Education Level: The majority of participating students (20 students, or 69 percent) completed their AA or AS prior to program entry. Of those, 4 students (or 20 percent) received their degrees in early childhood education/child development. However, as described earlier, attainment of an associate's degree does not necessarily mean that students have completed all necessary course units required for transfer to the SJSU program.

Longevity in the CARES Program: All students participating in the cohort had been and continue to be part of Santa Clara CARES. Potential candidates for the cohort were drawn from E3 Institute's Santa Clara CARES database, which provided critical information to program planners on the candidate pool

even before the formal application process began. Close to half of the students (14, or 48 percent) participated in CARES for five years prior to entry into the BA Cohort Program; 8 students (or 28 percent) were a part of CARES for three years; 6 students (21 percent) were in CARES for four years; and just 1 student was part of CARES for one year.

Professional Development and Educational Plan Status:

All students in the BA cohort completed a Professional Development and Education Plan (PDEP). The PDEP process for any ECE student in the Santa Clara CARES program begins with an initial meeting with a college advisor to create a personalized PDEP, which is followed by ongoing meetings to track and maintain the plan. Santa Clara CARES BA students have been working with the SJSU Chair of Child and Adolescent Development, who has counseled them on their past education paths and professional training experiences, to help determine their future directions, using the PDEP tool. The combination of the uniform, concrete format of the PDEP and the fact that it is now online makes it accessible and highly useful for both student and advisor. For ECE students currently at community colleges in Santa Clara County, the goal is that the PDEP will help improve transferability to four-year institutions.

Types of Permits: Nearly half of the cohort participants (13 students, or 45 percent) are at the Site Supervisor level on the California Child Development



Permit Matrix, which suggests that they satisfy specific education requirements (including an AA or 60 child development college course units) and that they supervise early education staff members at their workplaces. Just 6 students (21 percent) are at the Master Teacher level, and 6 students (21 percent) are at the Teacher level on the matrix. Two of the cohort students (6.9 percent) are at the Associate Teacher level, and data were not specified for the remainder (5 students, or 17 percent).

An ironic aspect of this descriptor is that a number of BA Cohort students who are at the second high-

est level on the permit matrix – the Site Supervisor level – may have received the least amount of formal education in child development. The permit process is not an accurate indicator of an ECE teacher's education levels in child development. The reason for this may be found in the Alternative Qualifications Allowance of the California Child Development Permit Matrix (Leaflet CL-797, 2001), which enables practitioners to reach specific levels on the matrix by substituting work experience and a BA degree in any subject for units of child development coursework.

Professional Information

The diversity of the students in the cohort is also reflected in the types of early education settings where they work, the age groups of children with which they work, and the locations of their workplaces.

Types of Workplace Settings: The vast majority of students (23 students, or 79 percent) work in center-based programs, while 6 students (21 percent of the group) work in family home-based early education settings.

Private versus Public Programs as Workplace:

Of those working in centers, the group is almost evenly divided between private programs and publicly subsidized programs.²

² For the purposes of this report, participating family home-based early education programs are considered private.

Ages of Children Served in Workplaces: Nine students (31 percent) serve infants ages two years of age and younger; 12 students (41 percent) serve toddlers between two and three years of age; 22 students (76 percent) serve preschoolers between three and five years of age; and 7 students (24 percent) serve children after school who are in kindergarten through sixth grade. (Because these categories aren't mutually exclusive — that is, providers can serve multiple age groups at one time — the total number of students is higher than 29 and corresponding percentages are higher than 100 percent.)

Locations of Workplaces: Nearly half of the students work in the Central/Eastern region of the County (14 students, or 48 percent); 8 students (or 28 percent) work in the Northern region; 6 students (21 percent) work in the Southern region; and just 1 student works in the Central/West region of the County.

A Snapshot of Classes and Instructors: Capitalizing on Motivation

The CARES BA Cohort Program began in fall 2006 with the course, Child and Adolescent Development 164: Contemporary Parenting. During the spring 2007 semester, students took Child and Adolescent Development 100W, an advanced writing course required by the University for graduation and by the department for the major.

The course instructors for these initial classes had long histories of teaching in the Department of Child and Adolescent Development at SJSU. Together the assistant professor and long-term lecturer offered students a balance of a strong theoretical foundation in child and adolescent development and decades of practical experience working in early education centers. The instructors said they immensely enjoyed teaching the cohort because of its unique make-up of exclusively nontraditional students and witnessed the cohort members' progress as a group and individually over a relatively brief period of time.

Instructors' Impressions of Students

Overall, the first two instructors of the cohort felt that the students' nontraditional status — as older, working full-time, and with life experience — was a definite benefit. They reported that the group was completely engaged and, because of their life experiences, brought a level of richness and a whole new

dynamic to class discussions that was different from what they saw in classes of predominantly traditional students.

“[WITH TRADITIONAL STUDENTS,] SOMETIMES YOU ASK A QUESTION AND THERE IS SILENCE; THAT NEVER HAPPENED IN THIS CLASS.”

—CARES BA COHORT PROGRAM INSTRUCTOR

Challenges From the Instructors' Perspectives

Instructors also identified a few logistical and skills-based challenges that participating students faced. Although the off-campus location of their classes was a huge boon to students overall, it also meant some initial difficulty with issues such as obtaining a student identification card. These issues were

eventually resolved and will likely be addressed systemically in the future.

The skills-based challenges that the instructors described included an “unevenness” in students’ understanding of technology and in their writing skills. The technology issue was relatively easy to resolve with orientation sessions and the ongoing expectation for students to use the SJSU technology-based system for coursework. Improving students’ writing skills was addressed by placing the advanced writing course early in the course sequence and by offering additional assistance with drafts of papers. According to the instructors, the need for some students to develop a strong foundation in writing remains an ongoing issue, but a new Writing Center on campus (which remains open after work hours) may help.

Instructors noted another challenge: helping students realize that they know this material but they just don’t know it through the lens of historical research. That is, they know it through their own practical application rather than academic learning. Instructors noted that the cohort students actually have the ability to think more critically than traditional students because of their rich professional and

life experiences, and now they need to learn to organize, contextualize, and communicate their thoughts and understanding of academic material. Course instructors emphasize this in their teaching.

Factors Leading to Student Progress and Success

From the instructors’ perspective, the word to capitalize on when analyzing progress and success with the Santa Clara CARES BA cohort is motivation. Specifically, instructors observed that participating students recognized the program as a unique opportunity to better themselves and their lives — an opportunity that they didn’t want to miss. Instructors saw and felt this motivation in many concrete ways — through students’ purchase and use of laptops; near-perfect class attendance by every student every week; immediate and responsible notification and follow-up for a missed class; and numerous individual study sessions with students outside of class, requiring a separate trip to campus to meet with the instructor. Like the students, the instructors credited the cohort model as the means by which the group developed a strong sense of community, which provides deep and long-standing support.

Class Time With the CARES BA Cohort

FEBRUARY 2007 > The Child and Adolescent Development 100W Writing Workshop (advanced level) for the CARES BA Cohort Program is abuzz with activity on a brisk February evening. Eight out of the 29 students have laptops out and humming, and most speak animatedly in small groups about the reading they just completed for homework and the in-class assignment that faces them. The energy level — a clear combination of excitement and anxiety — is palpable.

The instructor, a kind, relaxed-looking man, begins the class by inviting discussion of the assigned reading. He uses a combination of structured teaching and open back-and-forth discourse with and among the students. Relying almost exclusively on a PowerPoint presentation as he guides the group through discussion, he allows the students to weave in their own day-to-day experiences working with children.

The material is heady stuff on this particular evening: a piece of critical thinking about theories behind child and adolescent development. The students interact and respond to the instructor's queries but do not hesitate to ask for clarification on what they have read or what he has explained or expects of them. They are clearly at ease with each other and with him and value a strong grasp on the material they are learning for its own sake.

Part of this comfort level derives from this instructor's frequent comments and compliments to the group about their nontraditional student status and how it enriches their learning (and his teaching). The class is well aware of their nontraditional student status. At one juncture, the instructor begins to reference a recent study, and a student interjects with a joke at the cohort's expense about how old they are. The room breaks up in laughter.

As the instructor moves through the class, he occasionally asks those students with laptops to search the Internet for relevant bits of information. The E3 Institute's classroom enables full Internet access, which significantly enhances class discussions. He also clearly relishes making dated jokes throughout class time about historical trivia that only this class of 30-to-59-year-olds can fully appreciate.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the instructor asks the students to think critically about the article they have read and to take a position on some — or all — aspect(s) of it through their in-class writing assignment. After another series of clarifying questions, they are off and writing.

Challenges With Program Implementation and Response to Student Attrition

Transfer-Readiness

As mentioned earlier, the Chair of the Department of Child and Adolescent Development at SJSU has spent and continues to spend numerous hours meeting, corresponding with, and advising prospective and matriculating students in the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program. In large part, this time has been focused on ensuring that students were ready to transfer to SJSU. Because of the high number of students who had to complete requirements for transfer, the E3 Institute and the Chair of the Department decided to postpone beginning the program from the intended start date of January 2006 to September 2006. In the nine months prior to the first BA course, many students in the program took classes at community colleges to complete these requirements. Some continue such classes concurrent with their participation in the BA Cohort Program.

A separate but related issue involved eligibility of certain participating students to take the previously described course, Child and Adolescent Development 100W (CHAD 100W). This advanced writing course, the second one offered in the program sequence, is both a requirement for the University and for the child and adolescent development major. However, as a prerequisite for enrollment in the course, students must pass the University's Writing Skills Test (WST). Several of the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort students had not met that requirement just before the class began. As a solution, the Chair of SJSU's Child and Adolescent Development De-

partment advised those students to sit in the CHAD 100W (even though they were not eligible to enroll), complete all the assignments, and receive feedback on work from the instructor. The goal was that by auditing this course, the students would be able to pass the WST. Most relevant, students sat in on the course, and after participating — but not formally enrolling — in CHAD 100W, some took and passed the WST during the spring. Those who did not pass the WST by fall 2007 received a waiver to go ahead and enroll in CHAD 100W, but were required to concurrently take English 1B or an equivalent course. The Chair of the Child and Adolescent Development

Department continues to advise them on this process through regular email correspondence and in-person meetings, as needed.

Student Attrition and Response

In spite of the clear and significant contribution that the cohort program has made in retaining students in the program, a small handful of the original 35 students has left, to date. According to a number of perspectives — including those of the instructors — their departures were due to personal issues (such as health and family) and were not at all related to a lack of motivation. Additionally, all students in the cohort have faced challenges with the competing demands of the program's workload, their full-time employment status, and their personal lives. This may have been compounded for students who left the program by unusually stressful personal issues.

To fill these available spaces in the program, the E3 Institute and SJSU decided to accept students close to being transfer-ready using the same criteria that they have used for the program thus far; the only difference is that new students must complete (without E3 support) courses previously completed through the cohort program. As she has with matriculated students in the program, the Chair of the Department of Child and Adolescent Development has spent a great deal of time advising prospective students on their potential entry into the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program to ensure that they are transfer-ready. She also wants to ensure they are aware of the required courses they have missed thus far that they will need to take outside of the cohort for successful BA completion.



Program Impact and Value to Students³

Students consistently identified the three primary aspects of the program design as enormously valuable to them — strong supports, accessibility, and financial assistance. Beyond this, three common themes emerged in a group interview about the program's impact on students more generally:

- ❖ *Their self-identification as role models for others in the field and for their own families*
- ❖ *The reinforcement of their commitment to continue to work with young children*
- ❖ *Their part in professionalizing the field*

Self-Identification as Role Models

Participants in the program identified themselves as role models for their co-workers and colleagues, for the field, and interestingly, for their own families.

When asked how the program has helped them in their current jobs working with children, several cohort members discussed their belief that they were acting as role models to their staff members and co-workers. They felt that their participation in the program was encouraging other ECE practitioners to follow by example, and that their ability to balance work, school, and home life helped demystify the potentially daunting endeavor for others. Cohort participants also made the connection between believing they are role models with their status as emerging leaders in the field, which they see as one of the goals of the cohort program. In this way, their role modeling seemed to extend to the broader ECE field, as well.

Numerous times in response to vastly different questions, cohort participants referred to their families. They described the ways the program had not only made them role models for their own children and grandchildren, but also how it had brought their families closer together. A number of participants spoke of doing homework alongside their children and grandchildren, and regularly encouraging each other, which served as a source of motivation and pride.

Participants discussed the direct and practical application of what they learn in the program to their jobs. They discussed this in the context of actual coursework but also in reference to the cohort, which has provided them with an objective and informed peer group with whom to discuss and resolve issues at work.

³ Information for this section of the report—along with earlier quotes from cohort members—comes from a group interview on February 28, 2007 with approximately half of the students.



Reinforcement to Continue to Work With Young Children

There is a commonly held misconception that bachelor's degrees will lead ECE practitioners to leave the field and/or to use it as a stepping stone to teach K–12. On the contrary, many members of the cohort group stated that the BA program is strongly reinforcing their passion for and commitment to working with young children, although several also expressed their ongoing concern about low compensation. Participants contextualized these comments in different ways, but all talked about the program

and the BA as helping them to feel more certain and stable about their future in the ECE workforce.

Professionalization of the Field

Some participants related the feeling of security and stability that comes with a reinforced commitment to work with young children to a more general professionalization of the field. They spoke of this in the context of improved self-esteem among themselves and among others who attain BAs, and of their belief that a requirement to hold a four-year degree in order to remain in the field is all but inevitable.

Conclusion

The E3 Institute-San Jose State University Bachelor's Degree Cohort Program for CARES Participants in Santa Clara County is one bold strategy in a larger plan to improve the quality of early childhood education in Santa Clara County. The County is among just a handful in the state with emerging or expanded BA cohort programs specifically for the ECE workforce.

This program has been highly successful in many ways. First, the counseling and advising component provided by the Chair of the SJSU Department of Child and Adolescent Development has been essential to the launch and ongoing implementation of the program — most specifically in guiding students on the specific required courses needed to transfer in to SJSU and those needed to complete the program. Second, the cohort model has enabled participants to provide enormous support to one another and has contributed to continuing to work in the field, according to their direct testimony. Third, participating students — all of whom are nontraditional — have learned technology skills that are essential for participation in a four-year degree program and extremely valuable in life outside of school. Fourth, the rapport and mutual appreciation among the students and their first two instructors in the program was nothing short of remarkable, and provided a richness and added value to the experience for both parties. Finally, a positive, poignant, and yet unanticipated

consequence of the program has been to strengthen ties between participating students and their families of origin. Family members have admired and supported their partners, mothers, and grandmothers as they have worked through the program. In turn, students in this program are acting as role models and supports for their families.

The program's existence and success thus far — along with that of the Santa Clara CARES program and related professional development initiatives — are due in large part to the unique flexibility that FIRST 5 Santa Clara County has allowed with its CARES financial allocation. This has enabled the E3 Institute to design a professional development and higher education infrastructure that is particularly responsive to the needs of the field, which the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program represents. The success of the program is also due to the close and trusting working relationship that the E3 Institute and the SJSU Department of Child and Adolescent Development have created together.

A larger contribution of this program is the resulting information that will inform the E3 Institute's continued commitment to strengthen the County's ECE infrastructure. This strengthening includes communication among institutions of higher education, vastly improved counseling and advising systems for students in community colleges and four-year institutions with specific information and guidance about requirements for transfer, and opportunities for growth and leadership in the field.

Along with these successes, there have also been several challenges in implementing the program during its first year: ensuring that students were transfer-ready, assessing and responding to student attrition, and determining the appropriate paths for students who lacked a specific prerequisite.

Fortunately, the E3 Institute and SJSU have worked together to be creative, flexible, and immediately respon-

sive to these challenges. They illustrated this even in the planning process by using their experiences and lessons learned from the master's degree program they had previously supported to help determine the essential elements and shape of the BA Cohort Program. Their responses to challenges and their general approach to the program may be instructive to others throughout California who are establishing BA degree programs for the ECE field in their localities.

The objective impact of the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program has yet to be measured as the program is still in full swing. The E3 Institute is participating in a multi-county longitudinal study of BA cohort programs in ECE, which will include the Santa Clara County CARES BA Cohort Program and will examine the paths graduates take upon completing their degrees.

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APPENDIX A

Upper Division Courses Required for
the Child and Adolescent Development
Major through the E3 Institute-San Jose
State University Bachelor's Degree
Cohort Program

Following are the upper division courses that students participating in the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program are required to successfully complete in order to receive their degree. Note that all course descriptions are those used in the SJSU Course Catalogue.

Upper Division Courses for the Child and Adolescent Development Major

Child and Adolescent Development (CHAD)

CHAD100W – Writing Workshop (advanced)

Development of advanced skills in writing, particularly in the field of child development. Focus on development of a mature writing style and organization of persuasive and analytical prose.

CHAD 160 – Child Development Practicum

Principles, techniques, observation, and participation in the guidance of children.

CHAD 161 – Child Care Administration II

Survey of practices and procedures integral to designing, operating, and assessing high-quality care programs for young children. Focus is on parent and staff development, curriculum design, and hands-on activities designed to develop administrative skills.

CHAD 163 – Critical Issues in Adolescent Development

Relationships among major socialization agents (family, peers, school, media). Understanding ethnicity, primary language, and socioeconomic status as they affect adolescents.

CHAD 164 – Contemporary Parenting

Philosophies and theories of parent-child relationships in a multicultural society.

CHAD 168B – Social and Emotional Development in Childhood and Adolescence

Understanding issues in social and emotional development and processes of development underlying the emergence of self, social behavior, and emotional competence. Study coping and models of resiliency as related to familial and extrafamilial contexts of social and emotional development.

CHAD 169 – Motivating Children and Adolescents in Educational Settings

Perspectives of psychoanalysis, individual psychology, behaviorism, and cognitive psychology as applied to the motivation of children and adolescents in educational settings.

CHAD 170 – Contextual Influences on Cognitive Development

Survey of major topics and issues in cognitive development and the acquisition of communication skills. The influence of family, school, and cultural environment on these developmental changes.

CHAD 195 – Senior Seminar in Child Development

Advanced study of recent and seminal research and writing in the area of child and adolescent development.

Electives

CHAD 150 – Development of Communicative Competence

Survey of major topics in the development of communicative competence (theoretical approaches to understanding language acquisition, contexts for development, language diversity, relationship between language and cognition). Attention given to language acquisition, media influences, and language assessment.

CHAD 151 – Developing Literacy in a Diverse Society

Knowledge of a balanced literacy approach, including an understanding and use of the major descriptors of developing literacy, appropriate assessment methods and instruments, and a developmental and analytical appreciation for writing strategies, conventions, and applications.

Education, Special Education (EDSE) 104 – Atypical Development in Young Children

Historical and philosophical background of intervention theories of learning related to young children with high risk development. Skills and techniques to promote optimal environments and appropriate methods for early intervention and stimulation of young children with special needs.

General Education

CHAD 106 – Concepts of Childhood

Explores the historical diversity in the ways in which childhood has been defined; investigates diverse cultural definitions of childhood; examines the impacts of those beliefs and definitions on human development.

Geology (GEOL) 105 – General Oceanography

Scientific examination of the impact of oceans on global society, and human impacts on the oceans, through classroom discussions, computer exercises, and field trips.

Justice Studies (JS)

JS 136 – Family and Community Violence

Examines abusive relationships and responsive community and justice system policy and preventive interventions. Topics include child abuse, neglect, gang and hate crimes, rape, marital violence, and elderly abuse.

Nutrition & Food Sciences (NUFS)

NUFS 114B – Community and Nutrition

Nutrition problems; public policy, advocacy, and legislation; government programs; needs assessments; management of community services.

Psychology (PSYC)

PSYC142 – Child Psychopathology

Nature, causes, and handling of emotional and personality problems of children.

APPENDIX B

Lower Division Major Courses and Core General Education Areas Required for Transfer to Upper Division Major in Child and Adolescent Development at San Jose State University

The following are lower division major courses and general education areas required for transfer* to the Santa Clara CARES BA Cohort Program.

Lower Division Major Courses

- PSYC 1 – General Psychology
- CHAD 60 – Child Development
- CHAD 67 – Development of Human Potential
- CHAD 101 – Research Methods in Child Development

Lower Division Core General Education Areas

- American Institutions
- Arts
- Critical Thinking
- Comparative Systems, Cultures, and Environments
- Human understanding and development

- Humanities
- Life Science and Lab associated with physical science or life science
- Math Concepts
- Oral Communication
- Physical Education
- Physical Science
- Social Science
- Written Communication

* Some students in the BA cohort have not met all the requirements and are concurrently taking these classes at area community colleges.



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