



Building for the Future:
A First Year Evaluation of the ABCD Initiative

Executive Summary



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In 2003, the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) launched the Affordable Buildings for Children’s Development (ABCD) Initiative¹ to promote and support the development of quality child care facilities and spaces throughout the state of California. Drawing on over 20 years of experience as a national nonprofit community development financial institution (CDFI), LIIF is working through the ABCD Initiative to build comprehensive and sustainable financing and systems to support continued, large-scale child care facilities development in California. The ABCD Initiative employs four program components that are designed to reinforce one another—financing, Constructing Connections (local community collaboratives), development assistance and advocacy. Together these components form a framework for assessing and responding to the critical need for child care facilities.

In January of 2006, LIIF entered into a contract with BTW *informing change*, a Berkeley-based research, evaluation and planning firm, to evaluate the ***extent to which the ABCD program elements are collectively and effectively contributing to the creation of quality child care spaces in the state of California***. The evaluation employs multiple methods, including key informant interviews, surveys, case studies, meeting observations and document review, and is organized according to six questions that address the effectiveness of the program elements.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Financing: How and to what extent is the ABCD Initiative leveraging and expanding funding for the development of high quality child care facilities in California?

Development Assistance: How and to what extent is the ABCD Initiative attracting and supporting developers to effectively engage in child care facilities development in California?

¹ ABCD grew out of a planning process sponsored by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The Foundation has continued to be a source of significant support for ABCD’s work, as has the First 5 California Children and Families Commission.

Constructing Connections Sites

First Cohort 2004 - Present

- Kern County
- Los Angeles County
- Riverside County
- Santa Barbara County
- Solano County
- Ventura County

Second Cohort 2005 - Present

- Merced County
- Orange County
- Sacramento County
- Amador/Calaveras Counties

Constructing Connections (local community collaboratives)²: How and to what extent are the Constructing Connections sites influencing positive reform in local/regional systems as well as creating new and sustained community capacity to anticipate and respond to the need for local child care facilities development?

Advocacy: How and to what extent is the ABCD Initiative influencing positive systems reform statewide?

Synergy: How and to what extent are the primary ABCD programmatic elements—Financing, Development Assistance and Constructing Connections—interacting with and employing one another?

Knowledge Building: How and to what extent is the ABCD Initiative systematically learning from its experiences—both accomplishments and challenges—and applying and sharing lessons internally and externally?

KEY FINDINGS

- ABCD financing is leveraging up to \$62.1 million in additional resources for child care facilities development—\$38.5 million from planning grants and \$23.6 million from loans.
- ABCD is supporting the creation or renovation of up to 14,435³ child care spaces, almost reaching the Initiative’s 2010 goal of 15,000 spaces.
- ABCD is building partnerships with, generating new interest among and providing resources and training to community developers to support free-standing child care facilities development as well as the inclusion of child care facilities within health, faith-based, education and housing developments.
- The collaborative model (Constructing Connections) of building community capacity to address local barriers to child care facilities development is building community support and engaging new stakeholders who see their role in the child care facilities development process for the first time.

² ABCD provides funding to ten lead agencies serving eleven California counties in exchange for which the lead agencies convene and lead a local collaborative of child care providers, developers, civic leaders, small business leaders, educators, children’s advocates and other child care stakeholders.

³ There is some overlap in the number of spaces reported by Constructing Connections sites and supported by planning grants and loans. This overlap is counterbalanced by an expected underreporting of the number of spaces created by developer partners.

- ABCD has convened the Child Care Facilities Policy Committee, a statewide coalition of child care advocates, finance experts, community developers and others who are monitoring statewide policy for the purpose of protecting and improving policy and financing for child care programs and services.
- ABCD’s multi-pronged approach—Financing, Development Assistance, Constructing Connections (local community collaboratives) and Advocacy—shows early signs of success. Experience indicates that all four of these program elements affect the creation of child care spaces and affirms that the ABCD model incorporates the key elements needed to have a meaningful impact on the practice of and the systems to support child care facilities development.
- ABCD is a work in progress that requires an ongoing commitment of time, dedication and resources to enable the Initiative to continue to refine and adhere to a path toward comprehensive and sustained systems reform.

REVISITING THE ABCD THEORY OF CHANGE

Between April and August of 2005, LIIF worked to articulate the ABCD Initiative’s Theory of Change.⁴ Facilitated by BTW, a committee of ABCD Initiative staff, funders and a lead staff member from one of the Constructing Connections sites examined and unpacked the assumptions embedded in the ABCD Initiative design and created a roadmap to guide both program implementation and evaluation.

This first-year evaluation provided an opportunity at an early stage of the Initiative to assess whether and to what extent the ABCD Theory of Change is holding up. Evaluation results indicate that by and large this is indeed the case. Across the four Program Strategies articulated in the ABCD Theory of Change, the Initiative is on track with current-year process benchmarks and headed toward achieving 2009 outcome benchmarks in ABCD’s Financing Practice and for most tactics in the Strategy of Building Knowledge and Developing Capacity as well as Developing Materials and Disseminating Lessons Learned. Some adjustments will need to be made to tactics in the Advocacy Strategy if the Initiative intends to meet its outcome benchmarks by 2009.

⁴ A copy of the ABCD Theory of Change is included in the full report as Appendix A.

In light of ABCD's Theory of Change and the Initiative's progress to date, this point in the evaluation process is an opportune moment for Initiative leaders to reflect on the following questions:

- What has been learned about program components that are inherently local and community-based and what can be scaled statewide and potentially nationally to meet the needs for high quality child care facilities across the country?
- What more can and should be done to complete and strengthen the weave between the program elements?
- What new or different tactics should be employed given what has been learned so far?
- How should expectations for outcomes or benchmarks be revised given what has been learned to date?

IN SUM...

The impressive accomplishments to date speak to the power of the ABCD design, the ability of LIIF to leverage its experience and to the talents and dedication of the players involved.

In considering the future, it is clear that beyond meeting the needs of California's children, the ABCD Initiative and LIIF's child care program are positioned to contribute to—if not lead—a national movement for child care facilities development. "We are without a doubt recognized as one of the preeminent child care supporting organizations in the United States," comments a staff member talking about LIIF and the work of ABCD. Building on LIIF's child care work in San Francisco, and now through replication activities in New York, "we put child care facilities development and finance on the map as a strategy for community development and a strategy for capital-led work. That's what our movement is all about—the use of capital to build healthy communities."