

Narrowing the Gap: Examining changes in the social and economic gaps among a random sample of participants in programs funded to provide direct services to families

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ABSTRACT

First 5 Monterey County implemented a longitudinal parent interview evaluation study that allowed evaluators to look at how the relationship between social and economic family characteristics and program and child outcomes changed over one year. The study involved the administration of a parent interview with 172 randomly selected newly enrolled families. Baseline data was collected in 2008-09 and again from the same parents one year later.

There were three main findings: 1) intensive interventions were accessed at a significantly ($p < .01$) higher rate than at baseline by Latino families with less than a high school education, families whose primary language is Spanish, and families who have household annual incomes of less than \$30,000, 2) families with those same characteristics were reading and engaging with their children significantly more ($p < .001$), 3) the social and economic disparities gap seen at baseline across program indicators appeared to narrow after one year.

SYNOPSIS AND DATA

There is growing interest in examining and measuring changes in health disparities, achievement gaps, and socio-economic gaps in program participation. The First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) Parent Interview Study was designed to address two main questions: 1) how are families benefitting from being served by F5MC funded programs that provide direct services to families and children? 2) How have families changed after one year of exposure to F5MC services? The data collected for this study allowed evaluators to take that second evaluation question one step further by looking at how the relationship between social and economic family characteristics and program and child outcomes changed over one year.

At baseline the data showed that families entered services with varying socio-economic circumstances which most likely accounted for the stark social and economic disparities across program outcomes (i.e., White, non-Hispanic parents with higher incomes and higher education levels had more positive reading and parent-child activity outcomes and higher service participation rates than other families). After one year it appeared that varying levels of participation in F5MC-funded services may have, in part, mitigated those disparities. The extent to which F5MC services contributed to these changes are unclear, however, the data in this longitudinal study showed that families with the following characteristics i.e., Latino families with less than a high school education whose primary language is Spanish and who have household incomes of less than \$30,000, who have increased their participation in intensive interventions, also showed improved outcomes (increased frequency of reading to child and engaging in home educational activities three or more times per week).

Take early literacy for example (also see supporting data below):

Race/ethnicity: At baseline, non-Hispanic, White parents were more likely to report reading more frequently to their child than Latino or other race/ethnicity parents ($p < .001$). One year later the findings showed that this may no longer be the case among this sample (ns), and there was a

significant increase ($p < .001$) among Latino and other parents who reported reading daily to their child.

Income: At baseline, parents with an annual household income of more than \$50,000 reported reading more frequently to their child compared to families whose incomes were \$30,000 or less ($p < .05$). One year later the data show that this gap was no longer significant. There was a significant increase ($p < .001$) in the percent of families with a household income below \$15,000 who reported reading daily to their child.

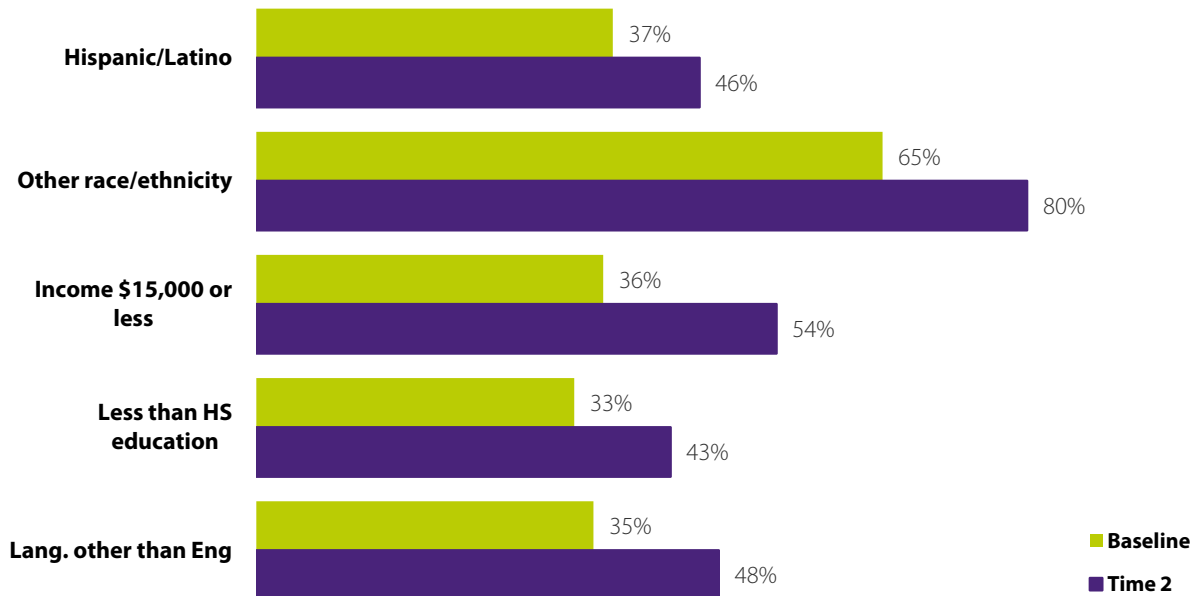
Education: At baseline, parents with a Bachelor's degree or higher reported reading more frequently to their child compared to parents who had a high school education or less ($p < .001$). One year later parents with more than a high school education were slightly more likely to read more frequently to their child ($p < .05$). There was a significant increase among parents with less than a high school education ($p < .001$) who reported reading daily to their child.

These findings are relevant to those engaged in social research and may be applied to different areas including community health and secondary education. We will share and generate ideas with the audience regarding what data to collect, how to analyze and interpret data that is generated from this study, and how to design and replicate such a study.

Exhibit 1. At Time 2, there were fewer demographic and socio-economic factors significantly related to frequency of reading to child

Key Factors	Baseline	Time 2
Child's Ethnicity	p<.001	ns
Family Income	p<.05	ns
Parent Level of Education	p<.001	p<.05
Primary Family Language	p<.001	p<.05

Exhibit 2. More parents are reading daily to their children at Time 2 than at Baseline



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