



Pacesetter Criterion 1

San Mateo County, California, is one of the most affluent counties in the nation, yet about half of third-graders can't read proficiently. This statistic rises to a shocking three-fourths of low-income children of color. Children who cannot read at grade level by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school and be unemployed or incarcerated. If kids aren't reading proficiently by third grade, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to be academically successful, thus closing off important career opportunities in the Bay Area's thriving knowledge economy. The Big Lift is a bold social venture that gives low-income children the evidence-based boosts they need to read and succeed. Funded by local tax revenues, the White House's former Social Innovation Fund and a variety of grants and philanthropic donations, this initiative includes high-quality preschool, inspiring summers, family engagement and attendance programs to combat chronic absence, buttressed by rigorous data collection and evaluation.

In 2012, San Mateo County leaders came together and agreed that tackling third-grade reading proficiency was the most powerful thing they could do to change a child's trajectory. Led by the county of San Mateo, San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) and Silicon Valley Community Foundation, The Big Lift is a collective impact initiative of 300+ organizations that provides low-income children the evidence-based boosts they need to overcome the opportunity gap: two years of quality preschool, three years of inspiring summer experiences, continuous family engagement and attendance interventions that reduce chronic absence. The Big Lift's long-term vision is to have 80 percent of county children reading proficiently by third grade.

The Big Lift focuses on the county's seven school districts with the lowest third-grade reading proficiency scores. The seven districts are South San Francisco USD, Jefferson Elementary SD, Cabrillo USD, La Honda-Pescadero USD, Redwood SD, San Bruno Park SD and Ravenswood City SD. Overall, The Big Lift is reaching a population where 63 percent of children are Hispanic/Latino, 14 percent are Asian and 7 percent are Pacific Islander. 40 percent of our kids come from single-parent/divorced/separated families, and 74 percent of children have mothers with a high school education or less. The average household income is \$31,974 a year, well below the self-sufficiency income needed for a family of four in San Mateo County (\$99,000).

The Big Lift's four program pillars each have high-level goals:

- High-Quality Preschool — Goal: 80 percent of children are kindergarten-ready
- Inspiring Summers — Goal: 75 percent of children maintain or experience growth in their reading skills over the summer
- Family Engagement — Goal: 100 percent of families have tools to support their children's reading
- Attendance — Goal: 15 percent reduction in chronic absences

High-Quality Preschool

The Big Lift is providing two years of quality preschool to support the necessary academic, social and emotional skills for kids to be kindergarten-ready, with 1,900 kids participating each year in 99 classrooms throughout the county. SMCOE supports staff professional development in order to ensure high-quality programs. Thanks in part to The Big Lift, nearly half of the county's school districts now have a common way of measuring kindergarten readiness, and it is hoped that more will follow.

Inspiring Summers

The Big Lift Inspiring Summers program is designed to end summer learning loss and to inspire kids to engage with STEAM subjects, with 1,300 children participating each summer. Inspiring Summers is led by San Mateo County Libraries in partnership with the seven school districts and supported by the national nonprofit Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL). This multi-organization collaboration provides literacy instruction in the morning, taught by credentialed teachers following the BELL model. The afternoons are filled with exciting, hands-on STEAM activities led by San Mateo County Libraries' college interns. Interns work from a curriculum developed by San Mateo County Libraries and the Bay Area Discovery Museum's Center for Childhood Creativity. The curriculum focuses on child-directed, risk-friendly, exploratory activities on STEAM topics including Fairy Tale Engineering and Math All Around. In prior years, children went on field trips to parks and science museums and received books to build home libraries, as well as library cards.

Family Engagement

Ongoing family engagement helps parents support their children more effectively, with 1,900 families participating each year in The Big Lift family engagement programs. Raising A Reader Plus offers preschool families three workshops introducing evidence-based interactive book-sharing strategies. SMCOE's Parent Café programs engage parents and develop leadership skills, build stronger parent-provider partnerships and educate parents on how to build the protective factors that research says keep families strong. The last family engagement strategy, Ready4K, was developed by educational

researchers and is an evidence-based text messaging program for parents of children from birth through preschool. Families receive regular text messages with tips and tricks for parents to engage in fun-filled literacy activities at home.

Attendance

Research-based attendance messages are mailed home to more than 7,000 children in preschool through second grade seven times per school year. Developed by the Harvard Graduate School of Education and tested with 16,000 children in San Mateo County, the messages showed a reduction in chronic absences between 8–15 percent, with the greatest benefit being to English-language learners. The messages are positive and stress the importance of regular attendance even in preschool and the early grades. The Big Lift is deeply committed to data-driven decision making and has implemented collaborative data collection strategies that address all the stated areas (scope, scale, access, quality and outcomes). SMCOE oversees evaluation and data collection for The Big Lift with the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and an external evaluator, the RAND Corporation. Data sharing between all involved partners has been a cornerstone of our ability to attain and measure success, impacting everything from program planning and implementation to assessment. All children involved in The Big Lift are tracked in a database managed by SMCOE, capturing not only detailed child/family demographic data, but also attendance and service data.

Pacesetter Criterion 2

Now in the third year of implementation, The Big Lift’s ambitious goals are already bearing results. Overall, about one in three children in the 2016–17 kindergarten class in the first four funded Big Lift school districts was served by either The Big Lift preschool or summer program.

High-Quality Preschool

For our preschool strategy, the short-term goal is for Big Lift children to be more prepared for kindergarten compared to non-Big Lift children. Our recently released RAND Corporation report, based on only the very first year of Big Lift implementation, shows that Big Lift children scored 27 percent higher on kindergarten readiness scores than demographically similar children who did not attend preschool. The Big Lift reached more than half of all entering kindergartners in participating districts who had annual family incomes of less than \$50,000. The kindergarten readiness findings represent the early results of the RAND Corporation’s multiyear independent evaluation of The Big Lift. This

first study, *The Big Lift Participation and School Entry Indicators: Early Findings*, focuses on RAND's analysis of participation rates and school readiness outcomes for children who participated in The Big Lift preschool and/or summer programs during the initiative's first year. Results are based on assessments of 1,496 entering kindergartners in the 2016–17 school year in Cabrillo, Jefferson, La Honda-Pescadero, and South San Francisco school districts. The study provides baseline data that will allow tracking of trends in kindergarten readiness over time.

Inspiring Summers

Big Lift Inspiring Summers program is also showing impressive results. Children who participated in The Big Lift summer program in 2017 experienced a one-and-a-half-month reading advantage instead of the typical two-month summer loss, for a net gain of three-and-a-half months, as shown by STAR test results.

Parent Engagement and Attendance

The RAND Corporation report found that children in The Big Lift are 15 percentage points more likely to have 20 or more books in the home than children in the same demographics not involved in The Big Lift, as well as 10 percentage points more likely to experience daily reading. Other results included a 50 percent increase in the amount of time parents and children spent looking at books and a 15 percent reduction in chronic absenteeism.

Collaboration

More than 300 organizations are involved in The Big Lift collaborative. These partners include a wide range of organizations representing philanthropy, nonprofit, business, government and more. The Big Lift collaborative convenes quarterly to report out on progress, share research and promising practices from around the country, and network. The Big Lift collaborative has become a group of invested organizations who enthusiastically activate around issues and provide support and input to the programs.