

# IMPACT OF THE BRIGHTER FUTURES' FAMILY CENTERS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

OCTOBER, 2011

BRIEF #1

For over twenty years, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has supported the Brighter Futures Initiative. The Brighter Futures Initiative is designed to prepare young children to enter school ready to learn and succeed during the early grades. It is built on the premise that young children who are healthy, have high quality early childhood experiences and have families who are supported in their childrearing will experience that success. A large part of the effort is through six Family Centers that are strategically placed throughout Hartford. Each center provides programs to develop parent-child interaction, parent education, quality care and education, adult education, and parent leadership development among other activities. Two of the Family Centers have child care centers on site.

The developmental levels of pre-school children three years old and older who are participating in each Family Center are assessed using the Early Screening Profile.<sup>1</sup> This tool assesses children on five major developmental areas associated with school readiness. Cognitive skills, language skills, and motor skills are measured through interaction directly with the children. Self-help and social skills are obtained from reports by teachers about what they have seen each child do. Assessments are conducted by community members who have been trained for this purpose. These assessments are done when the child first begins to attend the Center on a regular basis and again approximately six months later.

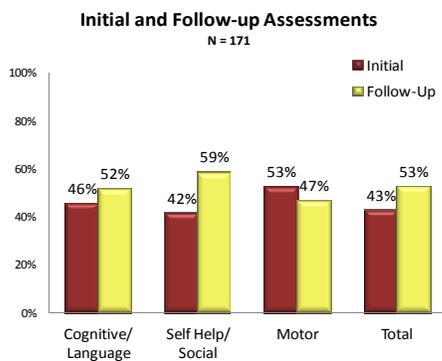
<sup>1</sup>Early Screening Profiles are nationally normed assessments. The instruments have been tested and found to produce results that are both reliable and valid. Profiles include national percentile ranks that take into account the performance of other children of the same age. Thus, children with a percentile rank of 60 have scored above 60% of the national sample of children the same age they are. Children whose percentile rank increased from 60 at the initial testing to 80 at a later testing would have developed faster than many children their same age so that these children now rank above 80% of the children nationally. The average child in the nation ranks at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile.

*“The Brighter Futures Initiative of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving works so that young children will enter school ready to learn.”*



## Development Between Initial Assessment and Follow-up

Initial and follow-up assessments are available for 171 children who participated in the Family Centers between July 2008 and June 2011. These assessments demonstrate that at the time the children began coming to the Family Centers they were below the average of other children in terms of their cognitive/language development and their self-help/social skills. Only their motor skills were at or above the average of other children. Overall, the average child ranked at the 43<sup>rd</sup> percentile.



Between the time of the initial assessment and the assessment at follow-up, the average child participating in the Family Centers moved up ten percentile points. The average cognitive/language ranking moved up six percentile points while percentile rankings on the self-help/social skills dimension went up seventeen percentile points. On both of these dimensions, and on their total profile, they ranked above the national average at follow-up.

The largest increase the average child participating in the Family Centers experiences is in self-help/social skills. The average child moved from the 42<sup>nd</sup> percentile at the time they entered the center to the 59<sup>th</sup> percentile at follow-up. This represents more than a forty percent increase in their development compared to other children. Self-self/social skills are widely recognized as a core factor of early success in school.<sup>2</sup>

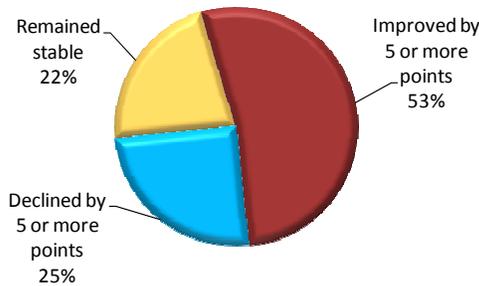
Increases in cognitive/language and self-help/motor skills, as well as the total profile, are widespread. Over half of the children increased their percentile rankings by at least five points while only a quarter decreased by this much.

<sup>2</sup>Kauffman Foundation. *Set for Success: Building a Strong Foundation for School Readiness Based on the Social-Emotional Development of Young Children*. Kansas City: Kauffman Foundation, 2002; Raver, C. Cybele. “Emotions Matter: Making the Case for the Role of Young Children’s Emotional Development for Early School Readiness” *Social Policy Report*, 16 (3), 2002; Bowman, Barbara. *School Readiness and Social-Emotional Development*. Washington, DC: National Black Child Development Institute, 2006.

### Inside this issue:

<i>Development Between Initial Assessment and Follow-up</i>	1
<i>Gender and Development</i>	2
<i>Race/Ethnicity and Development</i>	2
<i>Participation in Child Care Programs and Development</i>	3
<i>Participation in Family Center Programs and Development</i>	3
<i>Family Functioning and Child’s Level of Development</i>	4
<i>Time Between Assessments and Developmental Gains</i>	4
<i>Implications</i>	4

**Comparison of Initial and Follow-up Total Assessments**  
N = 171



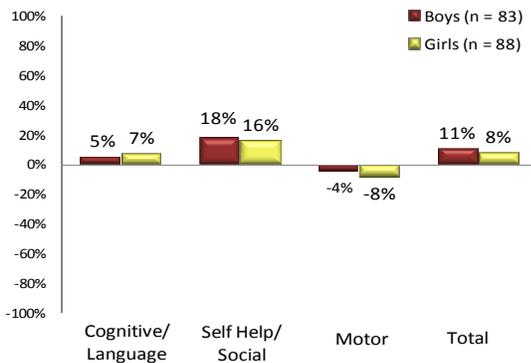
The only dimension on which children participating in the Family Centers do not increase their average percentile rank is their motor skills. Average motor skills decreased from the 53<sup>rd</sup> percentile at the time the children began participating in the Family Centers to the 47<sup>th</sup> percentile at follow-up. Motor skills are related to the physical development of children and they develop at different rates.<sup>3</sup> They may be less affected by the activities of Family Centers than cognitive/language and self-help/social skills are.

<sup>3</sup>Snyder, Thomas D and Sally A Dillow. "Table 118: Percentage of Children Demonstrating Specific Cognitive and Motor Skills at about 9 Months of Age, by Child's Age and Selected Characteristics: 2001-2002" Digest of Education Statistics, 2010. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2011.

### Gender and Development

Although girls demonstrate higher developmental levels than boys, both groups benefit equally from participation in the Family Centers. Girls entered the Family Centers with a higher average percentile rank than boys (47<sup>th</sup> percentile compared to 39<sup>th</sup> percentile) and continued to demonstrate a higher average percentile rank at follow-up (55<sup>th</sup> percentile compared to 50<sup>th</sup> percentile). However, their growth in cognitive/language skills and self-help/social skills are almost identical.

**Gender and Development**



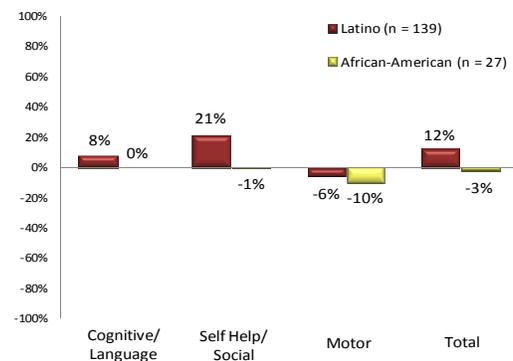
The average motor skills of girls did decline more than boys (a decline of 8 percentile points compared to 4 percentile points for boys). Again, since girls demonstrate motor skills earlier than boys do, the motor skills of boys may be catching up with those of girls. At the time of the follow-up assessments, the motor skills of both groups are identical.

The fact that the percentile rank of average motor skills for boys does not decline as much as it does for girls accounts for the fact that the overall average percentile rank for boys increases slightly more than it does for girls. Changes in the other two dimensions are almost the same with girls showing slightly higher development of cognitive/language skills and boys slightly higher development of self-help/social skills.

### Race/Ethnicity and Development

Over eighty percent of the children participating in the Family Centers are Latino and sixteen percent are African-American. Four children are from other countries. A comparison of the development of Latino and African-American children indicates that the growth among Latino children is significantly greater than the growth among African-Americans. On average, the total scores of Latino children increased twelve percentile points with increases of eight percentile points in cognitive/language scores and twenty-one points in self-help/social skills. The scores of African-American children did not change.

**Race/Ethnicity and Development**



There is a confounding factor that should be considered. Latino children are enrolled in child care programs through the Family Centers where they participate while African-American children are participating in Family Centers that do not offer child care programs. The observed differences between racial/ethnic groups may be due to differences in child care program participation.



## Participation in Child Care Programs and Development

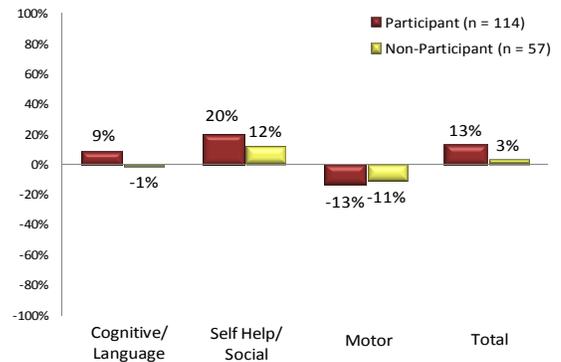
Two thirds of the children participating in the Family Centers are enrolled in child care programs operated by two of the Centers. Comparing the children enrolled in these programs with children who are not demonstrates that participation in these programs results in significantly greater developmental gains.<sup>4</sup>

Children enrolled in child care programs moved up an average of thirteen percentile points between their initial and follow-up assessments while children who were not participating in these programs moved up only an average of three points. Put another way, the gains for participants in child care programs was four times the gains for non-participants.

Gains were greater in both cognitive/language skills and self-help/social skills among children enrolled in child care programs. The average child enrolled in a child care program gained nine percentile points in cognitive/language skills compared to an average decline of one percentage point among children who were not participating in those programs. Participants gained twenty percentile points in self-help/social skills compared to an average gain of twelve points among non-participants. There was no difference in the change in motor skills.

A major factor in the greater gains among children participating in

Participation in Child Care Programs and Development



child care programs may be the more time their families spend in Family Center programs. On average, families whose children are in child care programs have spent an average of 2,484 hours in Family Center programs compared to an average of 553 hours for other families.

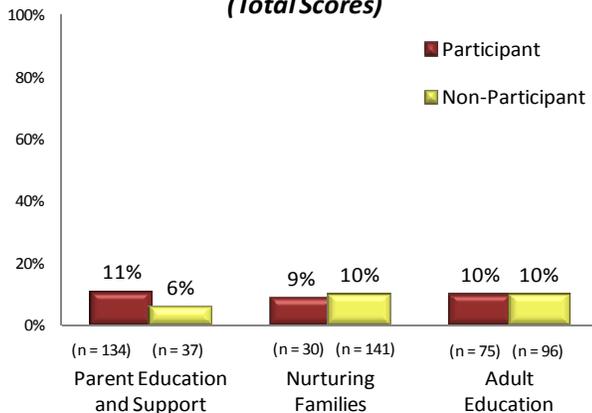
<sup>4</sup>The two Centers that operate child care programs only assess children enrolled in those programs. It is not possible to separate the impact of the Center from the impact of the program.

## Participation in Family Center Programs and Development

The families of almost all of the children with assessments participate in parent-child interaction programs (98%) and quality care and education programs (89%). Since everyone participates it is not possible to observe the impact of participation in those programs.

Three-quarters of the families participate in parent education and support programs. The children of those who participate show greater developmental gains than the children of non-participants.

Participation in Family Center Programs and Development (Total Scores)

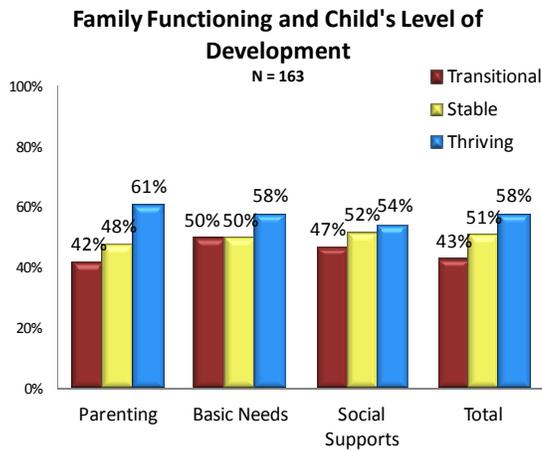


The total score of participants gained an average of eleven percentile points with a seven percentile point increase in cognitive/language skills and a twenty percentile point increase in self-help/social skills. Children of non-participants only increased half that much.

Thirty families participate in Nurturing Families. There are no differences in the developmental gains of children from these families and children from the families of non-participants. Their gains in cognitive/language skills, self-help/social skills and total scores are almost identical. Nurturing families may be useful to Family Centers as a way to connect with families of young children, but participation in the program appears unrelated to their developmental gains.

Parents from seventy-five families participate in adult education programs through the Family Centers. There are also no differences in the developmental gains of children from these families and the families of non-participants. Adult education may increase the ability of the family to support and care for their children, but it does not immediately increase children's developmental gains.

### Family Functioning and Child's Level of Development



Families who participate in the Family Centers are assessed by staff on their parenting skills, ability to meet basic needs, and social supports. Family assessments are available for 163 of the families of children with Early Screening Profiles. At the time they began participating in the centers, 6% of the families were assessed as in-crisis, 37% were transitional, 51% were stable, and 6% were seen as thriving. At their last follow-up, none of the families were seen as in-crisis, 7% were transitional, 67% were stable, and 23% were assessed as thriving.

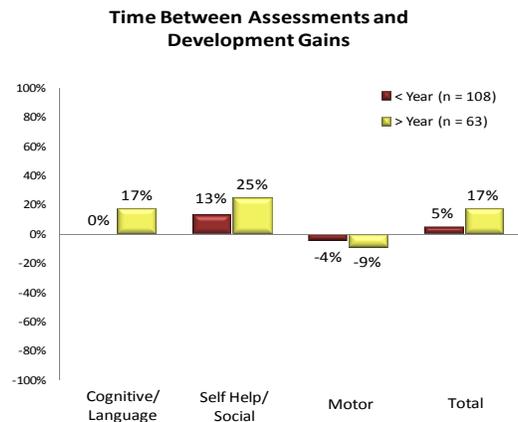
The higher the family's functioning assessment, the higher the level of development demonstrated by their child. Children whose families were assessed as thriving at follow-up scored 35% higher on the Early Screening Profiles than children whose families were assessed as transitional and 14% higher than children whose families were assessed as stable.

Parenting skills are particularly related to child development. Children whose families' parenting skills were rated as thriving scored 19 percentile points (or 45% higher) than children from transitional families. Thriving basic needs produced an 8 percentile point difference and social supports was associated with a 4 percentile difference.

### Time Between Assessments and Developmental Gains

Protocols call for the completion of Early Learning Profiles when a child begins regular participation in Family Center programs with follow-up assessments completed six-months after that. However, the interval between first and last assessments varies sometimes because there is a delay in completing the follow-up assessment and sometimes because multiple follow-up are completed.

Developmental gains are more evident when follow-up assessments are completed at least a year after the initial assessment. Follow-up assessments that are completed a year or more after the initial assessment average increases of seventeen percentile points in total and cognitive/ language scores and twenty-five points in self-help/social skills. Children whose follow-up assessments are completed in less than a year demonstrate no gains in cognitive/language skills and increase their total scores only an average of five points.



### Implications

The analysis of Early Learning Profiles from children between the ages of three and six who participated in Family Centers between July 2008 and June 2011 demonstrates that, on average, these children increased their average percentile rank by ten percentile points with the greatest gains in self-help/social skills. However, more detailed analysis of these scores reveals that the gains are not evenly spread.

- Over half of the children increased their average score by more than five percentile points while a quarter declined.
- Children who participated in child care programs increased more than children who did not.
- Children whose parents were in parent education and support programs increased more than children whose parents were not.
- Families with greater abilities to meet basic needs, social supports, and especially parenting skills have children who demonstrate higher levels of development.
- Gains are much greater when there is more than a year between the initial and follow-up assessments. Gains in cognitive/language scores do not appear during the first year, but are very strong after that.