



FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

October 2023

Early Literacy Foundations (ELF) Initiative

California 3rd graders are struggling to become proficient readers. The latest 2022 statewide data indicate that 58% are below grade level in reading. Among low-income 3rd graders of color, that number jumps to over 75%.³⁰ Because language development in the early years is crucial to later reading proficiency, parents and early childhood educators have a unique role in influencing language and literacy development and later educational success. As stated by First Things First³¹:

“When babies and toddlers hear words and language from caring adults, their brains develop the important connections needed to learn how to read. Studies show that children whose parents and caregivers regularly talk and read with them develop larger vocabularies, become better readers and do better in school. That’s because the first few years of a child’s life are when the brain grows and develops the most, and a child’s experiences in these early years affect how their brain develops.”

The Early Learning Foundations initiative was founded in 2006-07 and has trained over 700 early childhood educators, transitional kindergarten teachers, and family child care providers throughout Santa Cruz County in the SEEDS of Learning[®] framework. These early childhood educators are working to ensure that their children are on target for kindergarten readiness by using evidence-based early literacy strategies, receiving coaching, and integrating pre-literacy materials into their learning environments. The Raising A Reader program provides a way for children and their parents to participate in a weekly rotating book bag program through early care and education settings, fostering healthy brain development, supporting parent-child bonding, and motivating families to read aloud with their children, all of which helps develop the early literacy skills that are critical for school success.

The ELF Initiative features:

1. Professional development for early childhood educators working in **center-based Pre-K and TK sites** through **SEEDS of Learning[®]** training and coaching. Educators earn an educational award and attend literacy labs. In FY 2022-23—for the first time since 2020—the SEEDS of Learning[®] trainings were held in person. This program is described in more detail on the following pages.
2. Professional development for **family child care providers** working with Spanish-speaking children through **SEEDS of Learning[®]** training and coaching. Training includes opportunities to create literacy-based materials to use in the family child care home environment through “Make and Take” workshops. For FY 2022-23, professional development for FCC providers took place via an online format. This program is described in more detail on the following pages.

³⁰ California Reading Coalition, *California Reading Report Card 2022*, retrieved 9/20/23 from <https://www.careads.org/2022-reportcard>.

³¹ First Things First, *Why Early Childhood Matters: Early Literacy*, retrieved 10/5/22 from <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/early-childhood-matters/early-literacy>.

3. Family Engagement through continuation of the “Raising A Reader” weekly rotating book bag program. All Raising A Reader classrooms and family child care homes have SEEDS trained staff, resulting in mutually complimentary interventions to boost shared reading practices with children and their families, and to impact children’s early literacy skills. Information on this program can be found in the Raising A Reader partner profile.

SEEDS of Learning[®]

Program Description

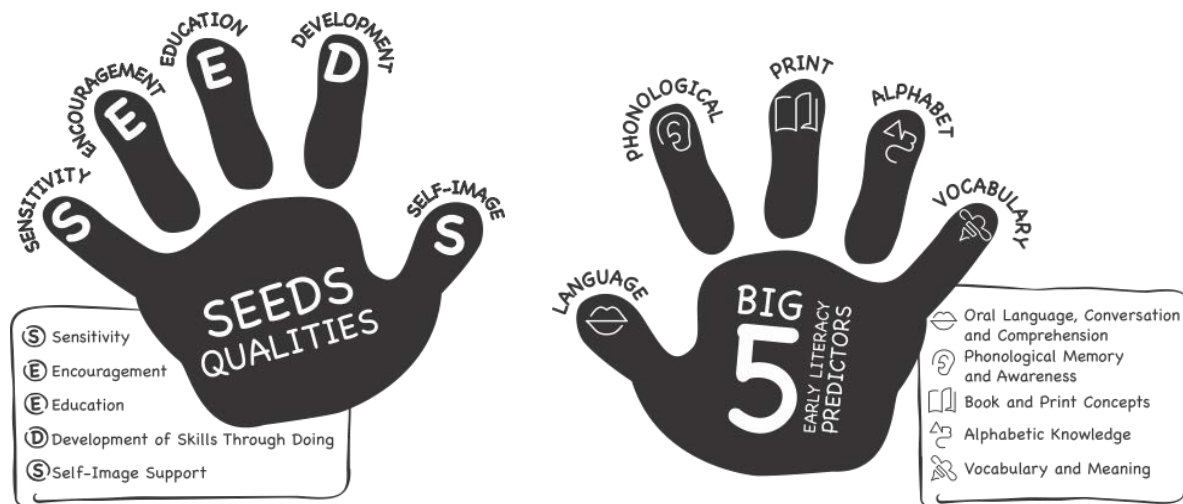
This professional development initiative follows the SEEDS of Learning[®] framework that has been researched by the University of Minnesota. Research on the SEEDS model shows that teachers trained and coached on the SEEDS of Learning[®] framework score significantly higher on the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO)* tool and show greater change over time in teaching strategies than teachers without such training or coaching. Results also indicate that preschool children who were taught by teachers trained in SEEDS entered kindergarten ready to read at higher rates than children in non-SEEDS groups (Lizakowski, 2005).

The SEEDS Professional Development model trains early childhood educators on how to effectively integrate research-based language, literacy, and early math strategies and materials into their classrooms. Early childhood educators are taught to use the strategies of both embedded instruction (planned strategies that occur within the typical routines of the class day) and explicit instruction (teacher-directed activities that emphasize the teaching of a specific skill), and to create a classroom environment that is designed to target early literacy and math predictors.

These predictors of later reading success include:

- **Oral Language, Conversation and Comprehension:** The ability to produce or comprehend spoken language.
- **Phonological Memory and Awareness:** The ability to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language, including the ability to distinguish or segment words, syllables, rhymes, and beginning sounds.
- **Book and Print Concepts:** Refers to what children understand about how books and print work, such as left-right, front-back, letters, words and that print has meaning.
- **Alphabetic Knowledge:** The ability to visually discriminate the differences between letters and say the names and sounds associated with printed letters.
- **Vocabulary and Meaning:** A collection of words that relate to experiences and knowledge that children have of the world around them.

These diagrams³² display the five essential SEEDS Quality Interactions and the five predictors of early literacy and early math ideas.



The predictors of later math literacy success include:

- **Comparison and Classification**
- **Geometry and Spatial Sense**
- **Measurement**
- **Numbers and Operations**
- **Patterns**



The Santa Cruz County’s SEEDS of Learning® program has proven to be very effective at strengthening classroom environments and practices, as well as influencing changes in children’s skills on research-based predictors of early reading and math.

³² “Hand” diagrams: Kate Colwell Horst, SEEDS of Learning®, FY 17-18 SEEDS of Learning Manual.

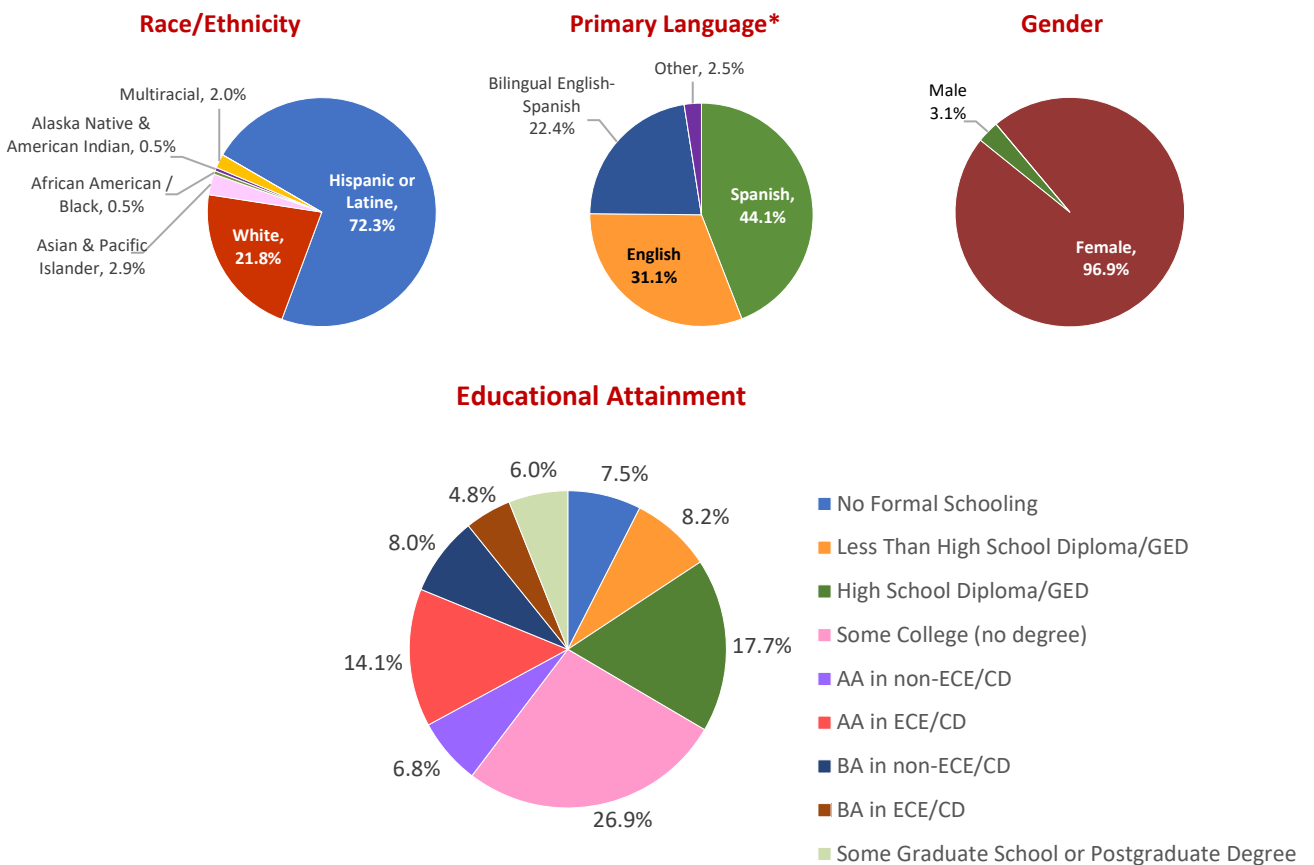
Population Served

	THIS FUNDING CYCLE 2022-2023	CUMULATIVE TOTALS 2007-2023
Educators in licensed family child care homes and private/non-profit centers	24	332
Educators in State- and Federally-subsidized classrooms	9	265
Educators in public school Transitional Kindergarten classrooms	2	23
Literacy Tutors in Reading Corps Classrooms*	-	83
TOTAL (unduplicated)	37	703

Source: (Educator current Funding Cycle) First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023, (Educator Cumulative Totals) First 5 Santa Cruz County, *Early Literacy Foundations program records, 2007-2023*. (Literacy Tutor Cumulative Total) First 5 Santa Cruz County, *Early Literacy Foundations program Reading Corps records, 2012-2020*

* The Santa Cruz Reading Corps program was discontinued in 2020-2021 as California State Preschool programs were not open to in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The cumulative total for Literacy Tutors reflects the years that this program was provided: 2012-2020.

Figure 50: Demographics of SEEDS-trained Early Childhood Educators (2007-2023)



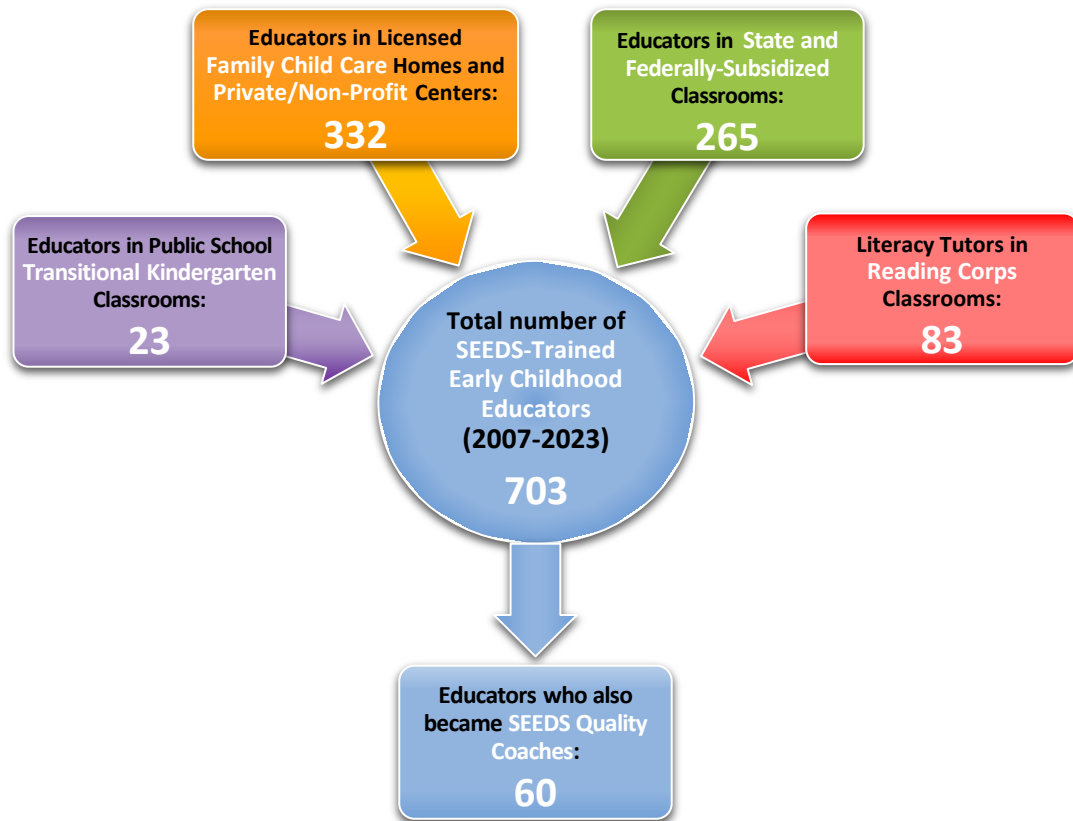
Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County, *Early Literacy Foundations program records, 2007-2023*.

Note: SEEDS-Trained Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) include SEEDS coaches and participants in all SEEDS classes offered since 2007. Santa Cruz Reading Corps Literacy Tutors began to be included in these analyses in 2017-18. Early childhood educators and coaches may have participated in more than one SEEDS class, but are only counted once in these analyses. For ECEs who have participated more than once, their language and education data are as of their earliest class, in order to assess the status of these educators at the beginning of their participation in the SEEDS program. Educators might also speak other languages that they do not consider their primary language.

* "Other" language includes Multilingual and other languages.

N: (Ethnicity)=611, (Language)=644, (Gender)=646; (Education) N=547.

Figure 51: **Number of SEEDS-trained Early Childhood Educators, by Type of classroom (2007-2023)**



Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County, *Early Literacy Foundations program records, 2007-2023.*

Notes:

- This figure includes the Santa Cruz Reading Corps Literacy Tutors, who were also trained in the SEEDS of Learning® framework. The Reading Corps program was discontinued in 2020-2021 as California State Preschool programs were not open to in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so this cumulative total of Literacy Tutors reflects the years that this program was provided: 2012-2020.
- “Light touch” and “refresher” trainings in the SEEDS of Learning® framework were also provided in the past: 1) Between 2007-2020, up to 150 Family, Friend, or Neighbor (FFN) informal child care providers attended “light touch” SEEDS of Learning® workshops that modeled basic early literacy concepts. 2) Between 2011-2013, some educators participated in the SEEDS Plus program, which was designed for “graduates” of the basic SEEDS of Learning® classes. This course was designed to promote and embed the on-going use of SEEDS strategies, identify children who would receive tailored literacy-based interventions (using Response to Interventions (RtI) strategies), and increase the number of children on target with early reading predictors. Currently, SEEDS skills are incorporated into all SEEDS of Learning® trainings for SEEDS coaches and early childhood educators, without the use of RtI.

Outcome Objective: Increase the number of early education settings that provide high quality support for language and literacy

SEEDS of Learning[®] Trainings

In FY 2022-23, First 5 Santa Cruz County offered SEEDS of Learning[®] programs to early childhood educators:

SEEDS of Learning[®] program with an Early Math Focus for family child care providers working with Spanish-speaking children

The Basic SEEDS of Learning[®] program was held in the summer of 2022 (June – August), designed for Spanish-speaking family child care providers who work with Spanish-speaking children ages 0-3 in migrant families. Utilizing the SEEDS for Parents curriculum framework, this series of five workshops included an Early Math focus and was designed to teach basic evidence-based literacy skills that, with the support of a coach, the provider would then embed into practice.

This training continued utilizing a virtual format, with light-touch coaching provided via virtual breakout rooms. The First 5 Master Literacy Coach built packets containing all the materials and instructions needed to create props to support the literacy environments in their homes, and providers picked up these packets curbside at a central location before each workshop.

Each participant received:

- 5 “Make and Take” workshops comprised of:
 - 2 hours of instruction
 - 2 hours to create literacy-based materials to use in their programs
- 5 children’s books and curriculum materials to use in their program
- Stipend of \$100 at the end of the series

Basic SEEDS of Learning[®] workshops for center-based Pre-K and TK teachers

The Basic SEEDS[®] program was held from October, 2022 through May, 2023 and provided professional development for early childhood educators working in Toddler, Pre-K, and transitional kindergarten (TK) centers. This series of 14 workshops was conducted in person and included lab time to complete “Make and Take” props.

Participants in the Basic SEEDS[®] workshop series received:

- 14 three-hour instructional in-person sessions including lab time
- One-on-one coaching via the online Coaching Companion platform
- Light-touch group coaching during each session
- 5 books and curriculum materials to use in their centers with their families
- Stipend of \$800 at the end of the series

Preschool and Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Classrooms

Research on teacher effectiveness shows that by focusing professional development on language and literacy and social/emotional development, children are much better prepared for school and have higher academic achievement. The first indicators of change are the literacy environment, teacher-child interactions, and language opportunities that teachers provide to children.

First 5 SEEDS Quality Coaches are trained to assess SEEDS classrooms that are teaching children ages 2 ½ - 5, using the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Pre-K Tool* (ELLCO Pre-K). The ELLCO Pre-K is used to assess the following five classroom components: “*Classroom Structure*,” “*Curriculum*,” “*Language Environment*,” “*Books and Book Reading*,” and “*Print and Early Writing*.” Each of these five classroom components are comprised of 3-5 individual questions, with a total of 18 questions in the ELLCO Pre-K.

Items are scored along a 5-point scale, where 1 is deficient and 5 is exemplary. From this scale, early childhood educators’ classroom scores can be categorized into three levels, indicating that their classroom environment provides **low-quality support**, **basic support**, or **high-quality support for language and literacy**.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to complete any ELLCO Pre-K assessments during the previous three fiscal years (2019-22). While classrooms are still not yet comfortable with on-site coaching visits, in FY 2022-23 Coaches were able to “observe” and evaluate classrooms via the online Coaching Companion platform. Coaching Companion is a video-sharing and coaching feedback application that allows a teacher to share their classroom practice with their coach and to view the videos to make comments and reflect on their practice. Due to this more limited access and changes in coaching techniques, Coaches are no longer using the entire ELLCO Pre-K in their classroom evaluation. Instead, seven individual questions from the ELLCO Pre-K have been selected to assess the classrooms at the beginning and end of the semester:

- Question 2: “*Contents of the Classroom*”
- Question 5: “*Approaches to Curriculum*”
- Question 9: “*Opportunities for Extended Conversations*”
- Question 10: “*Efforts to Build Vocabulary*”
- Question 11: “*Phonological Awareness*”
- Question 15: “*Approaches to Book Reading*”
- Question 18: “*Support for Children’s Writing*”

The results of these evaluations are used as a coaching tool, supporting teachers in setting early literacy goals.

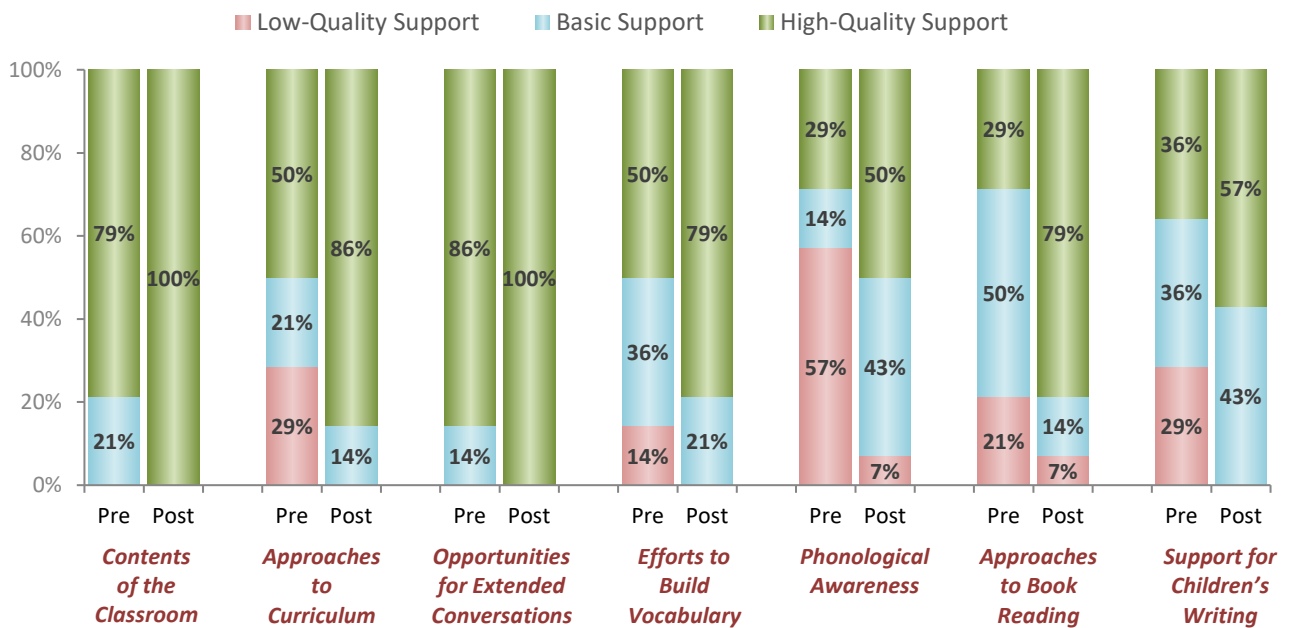
Due to the changes in coaching techniques and classroom evaluation, only this first year of new measurements of language and literacy components in the classroom are presented in the following analyses.

Preschool and TK Outcomes

Seven questions from the ELLCO Pre-K assessment were used to evaluate the quality of support for language and literacy in SEEDS classrooms, which were completed at the beginning (Pre) and end (Post) of the fiscal year.

- On average, classrooms showed improvements from the beginning of the semester to the end across all seven elements of language and literacy.
- The classroom element where the most change occurred was in “Approaches to Book Reading,” where the percentage of classrooms rated as having High-Quality Support increased from 29% at the beginning of the semester to 79% by the end of the semester.

Figure 52: **Preschool and transitional kindergarten classrooms: Support for language and literacy (2022-23)**



Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County Early Literacy Foundations program records, *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) Pre-K, 2023*
 Note: Low-quality support = means less than or equal to 2.5; Basic support = means between 2.51 and 3.5; High-quality support = means between 3.51 and 5.
 N=14

Family Child Care Settings

Early childhood educators from licensed family child care settings also participated in SEEDS training and received SEEDS coaching. Their sites were observed at the beginning of their SEEDS training in May and again at the end of the fiscal year, in July.

The *Child/Home Early Language and Literacy Observation (CHELLO)* is a tool designed to rate the early literacy environment in home-based child care settings of children ages birth to 5 years. Two sections of the CHELLO tool were used to assess home-based classrooms: the Group/Family

Observation section and the Literacy Environment Checklist. For the Group/Family Observation section, items were scored along a 5-point scale, where 1 is deficient and 5 is exemplary. Early childhood family child care providers' scores were categorized into three levels, indicating their classroom environment provided **low-quality support**, **basic support**, or **high-quality support for language and literacy**. Scores on the Literacy Environment Checklist ranged from 1 to 26, and were similarly categorized into three levels of support (**Poor, Fair, Excellent**).

Early childhood educators in home-based child care settings were also assessed on a measurement of phonological awareness in the classroom environment, using the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) Pre-K* tool. Early childhood family child care providers' scores were similarly categorized into three levels, indicating their classroom environment provided **low-quality support**, **basic support**, or **high-quality support for Phonological Awareness**.

For these analyses, several years of data have been aggregated when possible,³³ in order to present a more robust portrait of the extent to which SEEDS-trained early childhood educators in family child care settings were providing high quality support for language and literacy in their preschool classrooms.

Note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic there were no evaluations for fiscal years 2020-22, and in fiscal year 2022-23 there were no coaching or assessment visits to Family Child Care sites. However, the cumulative results for 2007-2020 are shown below to illustrate the improvements that were made during the years that this assessment was utilized.

Family Child Care Outcomes

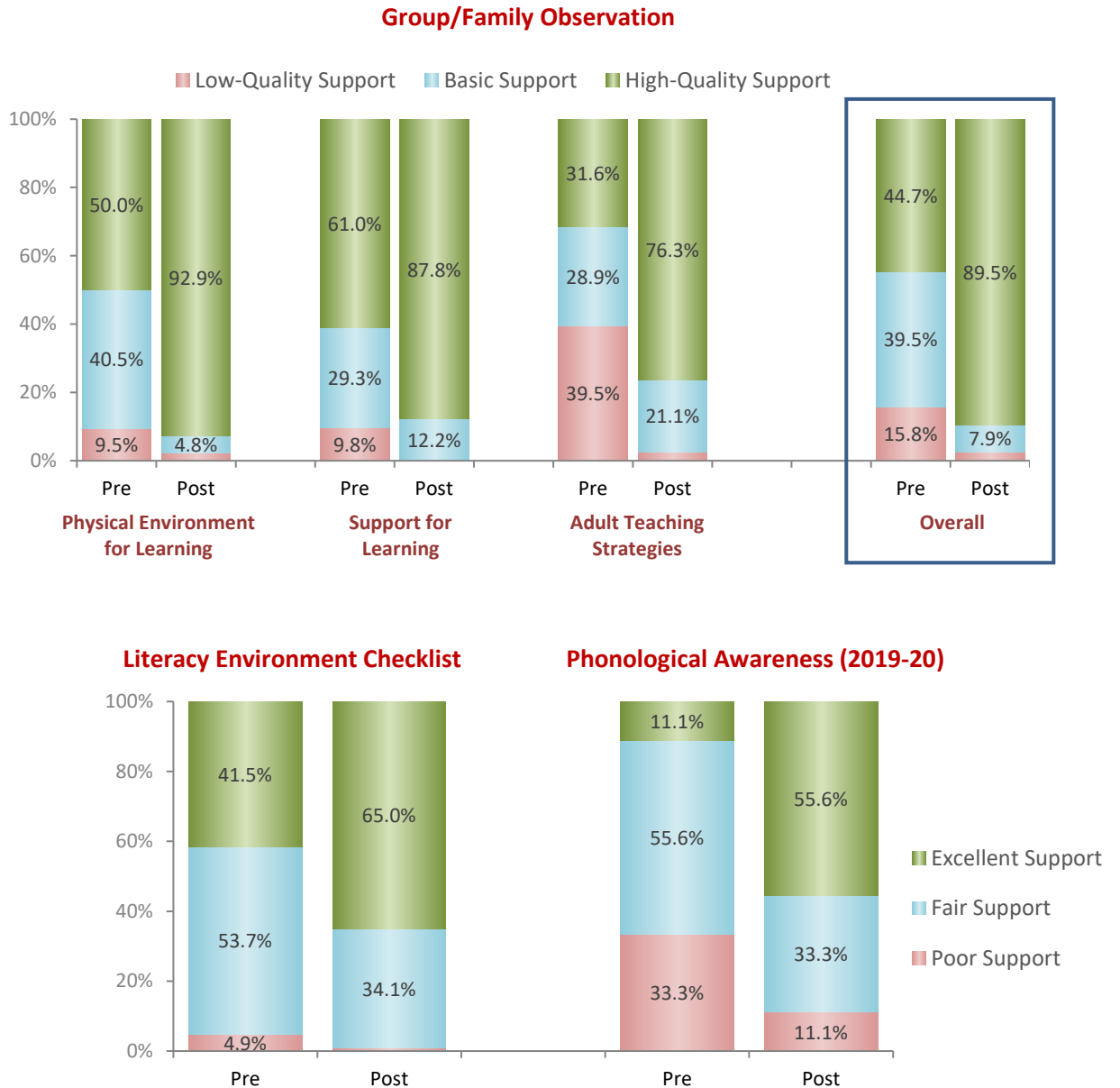
The following figures present the PRE and POST scores gathered from early childhood educators in family child care settings for infants/toddlers. Across all these components, classrooms showed substantial improvements from the first training to the final training.

- Results from the Group/Family Observation section showed that overall, the percentage of family child care settings that were rated as having High-Quality Support increased from 45% to 90%.
- Among the individual Group/Family Observation components, by the end of the trainings the majority of family child care settings were rated as having High-Quality Support in all areas: "Physical Environment for Learning" (93%), "Support for Learning" (88%), and "Adult Teaching Strategies" (76%).
- Scores on the Literacy Environment Checklist showed that the percentage of family child care settings that were rated as having Excellent Support increased from 42% to 65%.

³³ Between 2008-2011, early childhood educators in family child care settings did not use the CHELLO, and consequently no CHELLO data were collected during those years. Therefore, this analysis represents the results for the years that the CHELLO has been utilized (2007-2008, and 2011-most current year available).

- In 2019-20, scores on the amount of Phonological Awareness showed that the percentage of family child care settings that were rated as having Excellent Support increased from 11% to 56%.

Figure 53: Family Child Care settings: Support for language and literacy (2007-2020)



Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County Early Literacy Foundations program records, *Child/Home Early Language and Literacy Observation (CHELLO)*, 2007-2019. In 2015-19, no clients answered enough questions in the CHELLO Group/Family Observation section to enable a complete score.

Notes:

- Low-quality support = means less than or equal to 2.5; Basic support = means between 2.51 and 3.5; High-quality support = means between 3.51 and 5. Percentages less than 3% are not labeled.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic there were no evaluations for fiscal years 2020-22, and there were no coaching or assessment visits to Family Child Care sites in fiscal year 2022-23. However, the cumulative results for 2007-2020 are shown below to illustrate the improvements that were made during the years that this assessment was utilized.

N: (Physical Environment for Learning)=42; (Support for Learning)=41; (Adult Teaching Strategies)=38; (Group/Family Observation Overall)=38; (Literacy Environment Checklist)=123; (Phonological Awareness)=9.