

The Big Lift Implementation Study: Final Report

Susannah Faxon-Mills, Anamarie Whitaker, Jill S. Cannon, Celia J. Gomez, Lynn A. Karoly

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Preface

The Big Lift is a preschool to third grade collective impact initiative in San Mateo County, California. The collective impact effort consists of people and organizations from various sectors uniting to tackle a single, complicated societal problem (Kania and Kramer, 2011)—in this case, third grade reading achievement. The initiative is a partnership of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF), the San Mateo County Office of Education, and the County of San Mateo with the support of dozens of community organizations and school districts. Launched in 2012, the initiative aims to boost children’s reading proficiency in San Mateo County by third grade through four different types of activities, called “pillars”: (1) high-quality preschool, (2) summer learning, (3) school attendance, and (4) family engagement. The first year of program implementation was school year 2015–2016, in which four school districts received funding and support from the Big Lift to implement the four pillars. In the subsequent year (2016–2017), three additional districts received funding and support.

The RAND Corporation is conducting a multiphase evaluation of the initiative, including an implementation study of the effort and descriptive analyses focused on the outcomes of children who participated in Big Lift programs. This report serves as the final report for the implementation study that focused on the collective impact design of the initiative and the Big Lift activity pillars. Two waves of data were collected: wave 1 began in fall 2015 and ended in summer 2016; wave 2 data collection began in winter 2017 and ended in summer 2017. Results from key informant interviews, a survey about collaboration, and focus groups are presented in this report.

This research was commissioned by the Big Lift and SVCF with generous funding from the County of San Mateo and the federal Social Innovation Fund. The report should be of interest to Big Lift stakeholders including San Mateo County policymakers, educators, parents, and community members. Practitioners, policymakers, advocates, and researchers in other parts of the United States might find the reports on this initiative useful for work related to the planning, implementation, or evaluation of other early-learning initiatives or collective impact efforts.

This research was conducted jointly in RAND’s Education and Labor and Population units. Additional information about RAND is available at www.rand.org.

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Summary

The Big Lift is a preschool to third grade collective impact initiative in San Mateo County, California. The collective impact effort consists of people and organizations from various sectors uniting to tackle a single, complicated societal problem—in this case, third grade reading achievement. The initiative is a partnership of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, the San Mateo County Office of Education, and the County of San Mateo with the support of dozens of community organizations and school districts. Launched in 2012, the initiative aims to boost children’s reading proficiency in San Mateo County by third grade through four different types of activities, called “pillars”: (1) high-quality preschool, (2) summer learning, (3) school attendance, and (4) family engagement. The first year of program implementation was school year 2015–2016, in which four school districts received funding and support from the Big Lift to implement the four pillars. In the subsequent year (2016–2017), three additional districts received funding and support.

The RAND Corporation conducted an implementation, or process, study of the collective impact approach and four-pillar strategy as part of the comprehensive evaluation of the Big Lift. The implementation study answered two overarching research questions and used multiple research methods including interviews, focus groups, and an online survey. The research questions were:

1. To what extent are community members engaging in collective impact?
2. How are the strategies for the four pillars being implemented?

Answering these two research questions provides an understanding of the extent to which the initiative uses the selected collective impact framework and of the current status of the Big Lift activities. Two waves of data were collected: wave 1 began in fall 2015 and ended in summer 2016; wave 2 data collection began in winter 2017 and ended in summer 2017. The findings were as follows:

- Members of the Big Lift indicated that the initiative shares a common vision and purpose, and the environment in San Mateo County, California, is supportive and well suited for the level of collaboration needed to successfully implement a collective impact effort.
- Community leaders and partners were proud that the initiative was launched and pillar activities were occurring. Necessary organizations and key partners within and across school districts were mentioned as being in place to help achieve the common goal of raising third grade reading scores.

- As with any complex initiative, challenges exist. Community leaders and partners mentioned issues with communication, attracting and retaining a quality teaching workforce, and turnover among key members of the collaborative.
- Another challenge surfaced by research participants was the large workload necessary to keep up with increased data collection. However, local partners did note they appreciated the data support they received from community leaders.
- Financial sustainability of the initiative was the most frequently cited concern for the Big Lift community leaders and partners. Possible avenues to gain further financial support were noted to be engaging local businesses and involving legislators.

Acknowledgments

We appreciate the support and guidance provided by Andrea Jones at Silicon Valley Community Foundation and Diana Harlick at San Mateo County Office of Education. We are especially appreciative to them for fulfilling numerous requests regarding additional information on the Big Lift and providing rooms and locations for interviews and focus groups. We also would like to acknowledge Angel Barrios from the Institute for Human and Social Development, Inc., for providing locations for preschool teacher focus groups.

The report benefited greatly from technical reviews provided by Andrea Prado Tuma at the RAND Corporation and Carolyn Riehl at Teachers College, Columbia University, and from research and administrative support from David Richardson at RAND.

We are especially grateful to the Big Lift stakeholders who participated in our research study, including the online survey, key informant interviews, and focus groups.

Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|--|
| BELL | Building Educated Leaders for Life |
| BLIS | Big Lift Inspiring Summers |
| PPL | Program Partner Leads |
| PPLC | Peninsula Partnership Leadership Council |
| QRIS | Quality Rating and Improvement System |
| RAR | Raising a Reader |
| RAR+ | Raising a Reader+ |
| RCT | randomized control trial |
| SIF | Social Innovation Fund |
| SMCOE | San Mateo County Office of Education |
| SVCF | Silicon Valley Community Foundation |

1. Introduction

San Mateo County, California, is best known for booming technology businesses, affluent neighborhoods, and a well-educated, diverse population. Median household income in the county is above the national average, but high costs of living in the area present a challenge to families. The issue is such that, in 2017, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development designated the low-income cut point for a family of four to be \$105,350 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2017). Another challenge the county is facing is early literacy proficiency rates. Close to 50 percent of third grade children in the county are not reading at a proficient level (California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, undated). As a response to these challenges, local leaders from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF), San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE), and the County of San Mateo launched an initiative, the Big Lift, to increase children’s reading proficiency.

Leaders of the initiative identified 11 school districts, out of 23 in the county, where the majority of children in third grade were not reading at grade level. In the first round of funding, four school districts were selected through a competitive process and provided with funding to implement the Big Lift in school year 2015–2016 (referred to as “Cohort 1,” comprising Cabrillo Unified, La Honda-Pescadero Unified, Jefferson Elementary, and South San Francisco Unified). Three additional districts were funded starting in the 2016–2017 school year (referred to as “Cohort 2,” comprising San Bruno Park, Redwood City, and Ravenswood).

A key component of the Big Lift is that it is led by a collective impact collaborative, which, at the county level, consists of SVCF, the SMCOE, and the County of San Mateo, with support from dozens of community organizations. At the local district-community grantee level, the Big Lift consists of two to three co-lead agencies and several partner organizations (e.g., preschool program partners serving lower-income families) per school district. Collective impact in this context consists of people or organizations from various sectors uniting to tackle a complicated societal problem of raising low-income children’s reading skills (Kania and Kramer 2011; Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster, 2014).

The Big Lift Pillars

1. **High-quality preschool:** A comprehensive school readiness strategy focused on high-quality preschool for three- and four-year-olds.
2. **Summer learning:** Inspiring summer learning opportunities that help children maintain their academic and developmental gains from high-quality preschool through third grade.
3. **Attendance:** A focus on reducing chronic absenteeism from preschool through third grade, based on research showing the importance of attendance in the early years for improving academic outcomes.
4. **Family engagement:** Strengthening family and community engagement through strategies that help parents/caregivers provide rich learning environments in the home in preschool through third grade (Gomez et al., 2017, p. 1).

Each of the seven selected districts and their local partners received funding and support from the Big Lift county collaborative to implement the four key pillars—or sets of activities—that comprise the program: (1) high-quality preschool, (2) summer learning, (3) school attendance, and (4) family engagement. These pillars were selected by the Big Lift leadership using Annie E. Casey Foundation reports on the importance of third grade reading and recommended early actions to promote reading proficiency (Fiester, 2010 and 2013).

Funding for the initiative comes from the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), the County of San Mateo Measure K,¹ and a variety of grants from the philanthropic and business communities. As part of the SIF grant, the Big Lift leadership selected the RAND Corporation in 2015 to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the initiative. As part of the evaluation, we have conducted descriptive analyses that examine students’ participation in the Big Lift pillars and associations between participation and school readiness skills (Gomez et al., 2017). We also conducted an implementation study of the initiative, specifically examining the Big Lift pillars and the collective impact process, which is the focus of this report.

¹ Measure K, which passed in November 2016, “supports essential services in the community” (County of San Mateo, County Manager’s Office, 2018).

Background on Collective Impact

Collective impact refers to a coordinated effort among cross-sector organizations to address a common problem (Collective Impact Forum, 2014; Kania and Kramer, 2011). The term is fairly new, but the practice of community members or organizations collaborating to achieve a mutual goal is not (Henig, Riehl, Rebell, and Wolff, 2016). However, with the inception of the term collective impact came an outline of five key elements characteristic of such collaborations (Kania and Kramer, 2011; Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, 2012; Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster, 2014):

1. Common agenda: shared vision for initiative including agreement on what the goal is and how the initiative will achieve it
2. Continuous communication: partners are kept informed of decisions and activities as a way to maintain trust and ensure progress towards meeting the common goal
3. Shared measurement system: consistent system and tools used across partners to assess progress
4. Mutually reinforcing activities: organizations or collaborative members provide activities aligned with each other and the common agenda
5. Backbone organization: coordinating entity that provides support and structure for collective impact.

These elements are common in collective impact initiatives, but little evidence exists on what components are truly needed for effective collaboration, and the five key elements are not empirically tested (Henig et al., 2016; Wolff, 2016). Instead, these elements can be used as guidelines for communities attempting to implement collective impact initiatives, with the understanding that the process is complicated and challenging (Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, 2012).

Implementation Study of the Big Lift

We conducted an implementation, or process, study of the collective impact approach and four-pillar strategy as part of the comprehensive evaluation of the Big Lift. The implementation study answered two overarching research questions and used multiple research methods including interviews, focus groups, and an online survey (each described further later in this report):

1. To what extent are community members engaging in collective impact?
2. How are the strategies for the four pillars being implemented?

Answering these two primary research questions provides an understanding of the extent to which the initiative uses collective impact to make decisions and of the current status of the Big Lift activities. Table 1.1 provides the full set of research questions that are addressed in this implementation study.

Table 1.1. Implementation Study Research Questions

| Research Questions |
|---|
| 1. To what extent is the community engaging in the collective impact collaborative? |
| 1.1. To what extent and how are the five domains of collective impact being established at the county and local school district level? |
| 1.2. What is the level of collaboration among members of the collective impact collaborative? |
| 1.3. To what extent are changes underway in the county and local school districts that are a result of the collective impact collaboratives? |
| 1.4. What are the successes and challenges of implementing a community-wide initiative? |
| 1.5. To what extent are systems and resources aligned with the collective impact collaboratives' short- and long-term goals? |
| 1.6. What successes and challenges have the county and local collective impact collaboratives had in meeting the Big Lift goals? |
| 2. How are the Big Lift pillar strategies being implemented? |
| 2.1. To what extent are the needed resources available and being used for programs associated with the pillars? |
| 2.2. To what extent are personnel in preschools and school districts aware of the Big Lift and its goals? |
| 2.3. What is the planning and implementation process for program activities that are a part of the Big Lift? |
| 2.4. What is the perceived quality of the activities? |
| 2.5. How do the participating school districts differ in implementation? How are they similar? |
| 2.6. What are the perceived successes and challenges of acquiring the resources and designing the activities that are a part of the Big Lift? |

The first overarching question centers on the extent to which the community is engaging in the collective impact collaboratives, both at the county leadership level and at the local school district-community level. Specific research questions include the extent to which the five domains of collective impact are present or are being established, the level of collaboration among members of the collaboratives, the changes underway in the communities that are a result of the collaboratives, and the successes and challenges of the collaboratives. Answers to these research questions can be used to assess the effectiveness and cohesiveness of the collective impact collaboratives in the early stages of the Big Lift implementation and to identify strengths and weaknesses within the five domains of collective impact approaches the Big Lift is using to structure the initiative (Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster, 2014).

The second overarching question focuses on the individual pillars that comprise the Big Lift initiative and the inputs and activities that are being implemented. Specific research questions consider resource availability and usage, school personnel and community member awareness of the Big Lift, planning and implementation of program activities, the perceived quality of activities, and the successes and challenges associated with acquiring resources and implementing activities. By answering these questions, the implementation study will help the

Big Lift leadership team gain a better understanding of both the facilitators of and barriers to successful implementation of the initiative, as well as what additional resources and supports may be needed as the initiative moves forward.

Study Methodology

We used three data-collection methods to answer our research questions: key informant interviews, an online collaboration survey, and focus groups. We describe each of the methods in detail in the next subsections. The implementation study consisted of two waves of data collection. The first wave occurred in fall 2015 through summer 2016. The second wave began in fall 2016 and again lasted the full school year, ending in summer 2017. In this report, we provide results based on these two waves of data collected for the implementation study. For the interviews and focus groups, it should be noted that there was variation in both participants and protocol questions between wave 1 and wave 2. Thus, while this report generally combines findings when consistent across the two data-collection waves, we are limited in our ability to integrate findings between the two waves or to draw conclusions around how the initiative evolved from wave 1 to wave 2. For the sake of clarity and transparency, this report articulates whether a finding is relevant to wave 1, wave 2, or both waves.

Key Informant Interviews

In collaboration with the Big Lift leadership, we identified individuals to contact for the interviews. Members of the Big Lift Collaborative (previously referred to as the Peninsula Partnership Leadership Council [PPLC]), the large community group focused on supporting the Big Lift's goals, are represented in the key informant interviews through the community partner organizations and the county and local leaders. These individuals included members of the three key county leadership organizations (SVCF, SMCOE, and the County of San Mateo); local collaborative leaders, such as the Big Lift coordinators in the local district-communities and school district superintendents; and key community partner organizations for the initiative. In wave 1, 33 individuals participated in interviews. In wave 2, 30 people were interviewed. In both waves, there were cases in which more than one interviewee participated in a single interview.

Table 1.2 shows the total number of interviews and interviewees by position (county leadership, local collaborative leaders, and community partners) for the data-collection waves 1 and 2. Interview topics included the collective impact aspect of the Big Lift, implementation strategies for the four pillars of the initiative, and overall challenges and successes thus far. Additional information on interview methods and the full interview protocols used in waves 1 and 2 is provided in Appendix A.

Table 1.2. Key Informant Interview Responses

| Type of Interviewees | Wave 1 | | Wave 2 | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| | Number of Interviews | Number of Interviewees | Number of Interviews | Number of Interviewees |
| County leadership | 9 | 12 | 11 | 12 |
| Local collaborative leaders | 10 | 12 | 11 | 14 |
| Community partners | 8 | 9 | 3 | 4 |
| Total | 27 | 33 | 25 | 30 |

Each interview was audio recorded, and researchers took detailed notes during the interview. Once the interviews were completed, the notes were supplemented as needed with additional information from the audio recordings, and then were entered into a qualitative data coding software program, NVivo. An experienced RAND researcher analyzed the notes to identify the themes that arose in the interviews, and then themes were reviewed with a second researcher to reach consensus on key findings.

Wilder Collaboration Factors Survey

To learn more about the level of collaboration occurring in the community, we administered the Wilder Collaboration Factors Survey (Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey, 2004). This survey can be used across or within organizations working to achieve a common goal to understand elements of collaboration such as whether the right members and funds are in place, and whether the community environment is right for collaboration. Past research on community initiatives have used the survey to gauge collaboration (Perrault et al., 2011; Ziff et al., 2010).

The survey consists of 40 questions, phrased as statements that can be divided into six factors:

- environment (e.g., time is right, history of collaboration)
- member characteristics (e.g., sense of trust, necessary organizations involved)
- collaborative process (e.g., adapt to changing conditions, commitment level is high)
- collaborative communication (e.g., open communication in group, members should be kept informed)
- collaborative purpose (e.g., clear understanding of purpose, established reasonable goals)
- resources (e.g., adequate funding available, necessary people power).

Respondents react to each statement on a five-point scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree. Higher scores on this survey indicate more positive perceptions of collaborative factors. Appendix B contains the full list of Wilder survey questions divided by the six factors. The survey factors are not meant to precisely reflect the five domains of collective impact, but instead demonstrate the levels of collaboration the Big Lift initiative was experiencing at the time of survey administration.

Members of the Big Lift Collaborative, county-level leadership, and local district-community collaborative leaders were invited to complete the survey online during waves 1 and 2 of data collection. Unique survey links were created for each of these three groups and were sent to individuals by email in December 2015 or January 2016 (wave 1) and March 2017 (wave 2). Response rates in both data-collection waves to the survey were high for the leadership groups, while the Big Lift Collaborative membership had much lower response rates. The lower response rates for the Big Lift Collaborative are likely due to the fact that the survey was sent to all of its members, including those who may not engage with the group frequently or are no longer actively participating. Response rates across the groups indicate that results are not generalizable to the group populations. Table 1.3 details the number of invited participants, responses, and response rates by group.

Table 1.3. Wilder Collaboration Survey Response Rates

| Wilder Survey Groups | Wave 1 | | | Wave 2 | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | Number of People Invited | Number of Responses | Response Rate | Number of People Invited | Number of Responses | Response Rate |
| County leadership | 19 | 15 | 79% | 18 | 12 | 67% |
| Local collaborative leaders | 27 | 19 | 70% | 37 | 28 | 76% |
| The Big Lift Collaborative | 312 | 69 | 22% | 695 | 85 | 12% |
| Total | 358 | 103 | 29% | 750 | 125 | 17% |

NOTE: The Big Lift Collaborative refers to a broad group of stakeholders.

Focus Groups

The final data-collection method was focus groups with the Big Lift Inspiring Summers (BLIS) teachers, BLIS Program Partner Leads (PPLs, who act as program managers for each participating district), preschool teachers, and preschool directors. Each of these focus groups was intended to glean specific information about either the BLIS program or preschool pillar. Although our focus group discussions centered primarily on the implementation of specific pillar strategies, some of the information obtained during those conversations is also relevant for assessing the five collective impact conditions used in the Big Lift. Therefore, this report also notes areas in which focus groups surfaced a finding separate from those gleaned from our key informant interviews.

BLIS teachers included three categories of summer instructors: certified elementary school teachers, teaching assistants, and enrichment facilitators. Throughout this report, we will refer to them collectively as BLIS teachers unless otherwise specified. We specifically conducted these focus groups to gain contextual information about the program. For example, the focus groups provided information on how the summer program was implemented such as the curricula used by the two summer providers jointly coordinating the program (Building Educated Leaders for

Life [BELL], a national evidence-based out-of-school time provider, and San Mateo County Library) and what type of professional development or training was offered to teachers. In wave 1, we conducted two focus groups with BLIS teachers, and in wave 2, we conducted six focus groups with BLIS teachers and one focus group with BLIS PPLs.

The preschool teacher and director focus groups aimed to understand how the Big Lift funds were used in preschool programs for classroom materials, professional development, and family engagement. Additional questions were asked about how the Big Lift budgeting is perceived and general successes and challenges with receiving the Big Lift funds. In wave 2, we conducted three focus groups with preschool teachers and one focus group with preschool directors.

Table 1.4. Focus Group Participation

| Type of Focus Group | Wave 1 | | Wave 2 | |
|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number of Focus Groups | Number of Participants | Number of Focus Groups | Number of Participants |
| BLIS teachers | 2 | 16 | 6 | 51 |
| BLIS PPLs | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Preschool teachers | 0 | 0 | 3 | 18 |
| Preschool directors | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 2 | 16 | 11 | 76 |

One to two RAND researchers led the focus groups, and each lasted 30–60 minutes. During the meetings, extensive notes were taken, and the session was audio recorded (with the participants’ permission) to supplement the notes. Each focus group had between three and 14 participants. Focus group notes were coded using NVivo software and analyzed to identify major themes. Appendix C provides the questions used in the BLIS and preschool focus groups.

Summary of Data Sources

Table 1.5 presents a list of the data sources and how they were used to answer research questions related to the collective impact approach or implementation of the four pillars of the Big Lift. In the following sections, we report a finding as a theme when two or more (in almost all instances, more than two) respondents discussed an issue or concept about the Big Lift.

Table 1.5. Summary of Data Sources Used in Both Waves of Implementation Study

| Data Collection Method | Collective Impact Approach | Four Pillar Implementation |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Key informant interviews | X | X |
| Wilder collaboration factors survey | X | |
| Focus groups | | X ^a |

^a Specifically for preschool and summer pillars.

Study Limitations

Our study has several limitations that should be noted. First, data collected as part of the implementation study should not be viewed as representative of all the Big Lift stakeholders. Instead, results presented are from a sample of key members and leaders of the initiative. In some instances, for example, the Wilder survey for the Big Lift Collaborative, our recruitment did not yield a large sample, and so caution should be used when drawing conclusions from these data. In other instances, for example, the key informant interviews, specific participants were identified by the research team and the Big Lift leadership—this selection may introduce some bias into our results. Additionally, interview, focus group, and survey data are all self-reported and represent respondents’ views rather than independently validated facts. We also focused our research questions on current implementation of collective impact or pillar strategies. Our evaluation does not consider the process that led to the formation of the Big Lift collaborative nor the selection of the four pillars the collaborative would implement.

Overall, it is important to note this report contains results from two waves of data collection that occurred during the early years of the Big Lift. It is likely the program has grown in the third year of implementation and will continue to evolve. Findings from this study should be treated as one piece of our evaluation, with the findings from our descriptive analysis (Gomez et al., 2017) shedding additional light on the Big Lift. As additional data are collected through various sources such as kindergarten readiness assessments and early elementary reading scores, more information on the Big Lift will be gleaned and described in future descriptive analyses. Themes identified in this report may either be corroborated with more evidence or found not to be robust as the program develops and additional evaluation strategies are used to study the Big Lift.

Report Outline

We begin by presenting results for the collective impact approach used by the Big Lift leaders and community partners, followed by a discussion of findings for the various pillar strategies. We then present overall successes and challenges noted by study participants in the initiative’s first few years of implementation. Within each section, we describe key findings from both wave 1 and wave 2, highlighting differences and similarities between the two rounds of data collection. Lastly, we conclude with recommendations for the initiative.

2. Collective Impact Approach

The Big Lift seeks to accomplish its goal of increasing third grade proficiency in San Mateo County by using a collective impact approach. Collective impact is a process through which individuals and organizations from a diverse range of sectors commit to a common agenda for solving a complex problem (Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster, 2014). The collective impact framework selected as the model by the Big Lift is intended to include five key conditions: (1) common agenda, (2) backbone infrastructure, (3) shared measurement, (4) continuous communication, and (5) mutually reinforcing activities (Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster, 2014). In this chapter, we use data from interviews, focus groups, and the Wilder Collaboration Survey to better understand how each of the five collective impact conditions have been enacted within the Big Lift to date.

Interview and Focus Group Results

Our interviews and focus groups surfaced several findings about the Big Lift's implementation of the five collective impact conditions to date as well as about the local context within which the collective impact was occurring. Key findings for the Big Lift collective impact model include:

- Interviewees expressed that members of the Big Lift collaborative have a shared vision for the initiative but that some differences exist in how collaborative members anticipate reaching that vision or how they feel about the vision itself.
- The Big Lift is viewed as having a leadership structure that is shared across three key organizations, and interviewees expressed that while the existing structure has been effective it has also been a largely top-down mechanism and there may be opportunities for improvement in the future.
- The Big Lift has started administering a common kindergarten-readiness assessment to its cohort 1 districts, which is considered an important accomplishment by interviewees. However, the data-collection requirements that the initiative demands have placed a heavy burden on collaborative members at both the county and local level.
- Interviewees expressed appreciation for the communication they had been receiving about the Big Lift, but also felt that such communication could be improved by further streamlining and deepening the information that is shared with and among the collaborative partners.
- Interviews revealed that people are excited about the four-pillar strategy of the Big Lift, and that ensuring the quality of those pillars as well as aligning preschool and elementary school efforts should be of top priority going forward.

In the remainder of this chapter, we further define the five collective impact conditions focused on by the Big Lift and elaborate on our interview and focus group findings for each.

Common Agenda

In the collective impact model selected by the Big Lift, a common agenda or a shared vision is viewed as critical (Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster, 2014). A common agenda describes the goal and the agreed-on process or steps to be taken to achieve the goal.

Overall, participants expressed that the collaborative partners of the Big Lift have a shared vision for the initiative: reading proficiency by third grade. This mirrors the Big Lift's stated goal "to achieve a big lift in San Mateo County's educational outcomes by going from 50% of our children reading proficiently in 3rd grade to 80%" (The Big Lift, undated). As one interviewee from wave 1 described:

I think it is a tremendous success that there is this common agreement in San Mateo County that this is a really important thing to be doing . . . ten years ago there was not that same understanding . . . I think that has grown during the time that the Big Lift has been active as well . . . I think that's a tremendous win.

Interviewees were generally also in agreement that the goals of the Big Lift are a top priority for San Mateo County as a whole, and many expressed that buy-in at the county leadership level provided evidence of that. In wave 2, county leaders pointed toward a visit from the SIF as an example of how the common agenda of the Big Lift had shown through in the participating communities; as SIF representatives visited each of the participating communities, they remarked on how consistent people were in how they spoke about the Big Lift. As one interviewee described: "from what I saw myself and from what [SIF] said afterwards, every place they went, everyone they spoke to was on point and yet nobody had rehearsed it."

Although there is a shared vision, interviewees revealed that perceptions vary about how to achieve that vision. We heard from stakeholders in both waves—particularly wave 1—that the approach for reaching the Big Lift's shared goals may vary between partners and districts: "I think the ultimate goal has always been very clear and very straightforward. How to get there . . . is a different story."

While there was consensus on the initiative's current vision among most stakeholder groups, we did hear concerns about the vision itself and found that one stakeholder group (preschool teachers) did not have a clear understanding of the initiative's goals. For example, we heard wave 1 interviewees question whether the Big Lift's vision was too narrow and should perhaps focus on a broader age range of children (e.g., including zero- to three-year-olds) instead of focusing solely on children in preschool to third grade or on goals beyond literacy. In wave 2, the preschool teacher focus groups also provided some evidence that more work is needed to ensure that the vision of the Big Lift is shared and understood by those doing the work of the Big Lift on the ground. In each of our preschool teacher focus groups, participants had limited knowledge regarding the overarching goals and activities of the Big Lift (outside of those they participate in themselves).

Backbone Infrastructure

The Big Lift's selected model for collective impact includes a backbone infrastructure as a key component. A backbone is intended to provide an initiative with support and direction to achieve the shared goals and follow the common agenda. It also manages and coordinates the various organizations and partners of the initiative (Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster, 2014).

The Big Lift has a county-level backbone infrastructure that consists of a trio of leaders from the SMCOE, SVCF, and the County Board of Supervisors. This trio is known as ACE among collaborative members. As one interviewee described, "The buck stops with ACE." The group is responsible for the ultimate decisionmaking for the Big Lift and also works with a CORE team made up of selected staff from the key organizations. The CORE team is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Big Lift effort, including managing data collection and working directly with grantees. There are also two outside consultants that were brought on by the Big Lift to assist with strategic planning, marketing, and communications.

With many players from multiple organizations participating in decisionmaking and operations, the backbone infrastructure itself could be considered a collective impact effort. As one wave 1 interviewee noted, "I would describe [the collective impact approach] as starting with three organizations that are independent entities but that are leading the initiative together. So right from the core of the leadership, it's a collective strategy." Stakeholders saw the collective nature of the backbone infrastructure as bringing both barriers and benefits. For example, while bridging different organizational cultures between the three lead agencies was cited as a challenge, the different and complementary skill sets and backgrounds they each bring to the table was perceived as a strength. As one interviewee pointed out, the partnership of government, education, and philanthropy makes for a strong backbone infrastructure.

Overall, the backbone infrastructure was viewed as effective and supportive. As one wave 1 interviewee described, "For technical assistance, everything's been terrific." In wave 2, an interviewee stated:

[I] feel like [the CORE team are] the ones that basically support us with all that . . . A lot of times when there are questions that come up and they can't give us an answer right away they'll have a meeting, they'll follow up on it . . . sometimes things come up and I don't think they had planned for it but they're willing to work with us on it.

This willingness to work with local communities was echoed by another local leader in wave 2: "Anytime we've asked for things, [they] are very supportive in coming and meeting with us or changing meeting times to . . . work with our schedule. I think they've been very, very flexible and very supportive in that regard."

In the interviews, suggestions were made for potential improvements to the backbone structure in the future. In particular, we heard that additional clarity (e.g., an organizational chart) around the specific roles and responsibilities of the backbone leaders would be helpful. As one interviewee in wave 1 explained, "It's not always clear who to talk to about what, or what

information is coming from what agency.” There was also an acknowledgment by interviewees in both data-collection waves that the backbone infrastructure may need to evolve to include someone in a director role or a board for the initiative.

We also heard concerns in wave 2 about such a shift—for example, the expense of adding a director, concern that the position would just add another cook to the kitchen, or simply that the role was not necessary. However, others in wave 2 felt strongly that a director would be an important benefit to the Big Lift initiative. For example, one interviewee from that data-collection wave noted, “I would push for one person being . . . an executive director and then you’ve got ACE as the board . . . it can be hard to get to consensus and there’s no one person that’s like, ‘Okay great, here’s the next step.’”

Another challenge we heard throughout both waves of interviews was the perceived top-down nature of decisionmaking. Although some interviewees in both data-collection waves viewed decisions as being made collaboratively, others expressed that decisions—such as which summer program to use—were being made authoritatively at the county level. For example, in wave 1, one interviewee stated

[the three leaders] like being able to make those decisions and I don’t always know what some of those are. I mean I feel like I can ask people . . . but I’m not necessarily included in, like . . . “what do you think, we’re thinking of doing this.” It’s really with those three.

In wave 2, one interviewee described, “[I] feel like it’s, ‘You joined us, you do what we said . . . you opted in, this is what you opted in to. So we’re not forcing this on you, but you opted in to participate and this is what participation looks like.’” That said, in the areas that did allow for some local autonomy, we heard interviewees in wave 1 express the need for additional guidance or support. For example, one participant noted, “It seems like the outcomes have been clearly defined, the activities are being defined, and then districts are being [left] to figure out how we’re going to do this given the resources that we have.”

In wave 2, one significant change was the turnover of some key CORE team members. Local leaders expressed that the departure of those team members was a setback: “The other challenge is that the . . . backbone support that we anticipated to be in place for the Big Lift ended up not being there . . . people leave their jobs and it takes a while to replace them.”

Finally, on a local level, local leaders in the second data-collection wave mentioned the importance of having a Big Lift coordinator for their community: “You need a dedicated person . . . if you have someone as a side job as part of their responsibilities it’s not going to end up being a priority.”

Shared Measurement

Another key component of the collective impact model chosen by the Big Lift is the use of common measurement tools through which collaborative members can hold one another accountable and measure progress toward meeting established goals (Preskill, Parkhurst, Juster,

2014). The common measure the Big Lift will use to assess progress on achieving their goal is third grade reading scores on the statewide assessment. Other common assessments not initially planned, including a kindergarten readiness measure, are being implemented as a way to track benchmark progress along the way to third grade reading scores.

Establishing shared measurement tools across organizations and initiative partners can be a challenging and complicated endeavor. Our key informant interviews assessed shared measurement in the Big Lift two different ways from wave 1 to wave 2 data collection. First, in data-collection wave 1 (and new interviewees in wave 2), we asked participants whether partners feel a sense of collective accountability for results. Overall, interviewees felt individually accountable for the Big Lift but also acknowledged that the feeling of *collective* accountability could improve. The majority of interviewees felt responsibility for the Big Lift's success. As one person described, "I think [the sense of collective accountability] would be pretty strong . . . that's a gut reaction. There's a lot of people that have a lot invested here." However, when it came to what exactly each partner is accountable *for*, wave 1 interviewees noted a lack of clarity. Furthermore, stakeholders in both waves expressed that there may be variation in the accountability felt across the different partners of the Big Lift and that this accountability may be siloed within individual pillars or districts: "I'm not sure we feel collective accountability. I know we feel individual accountability for the results. . . . but I don't know how much accountability . . . I have for how something is being implemented or worked out in another school district."

Second, in wave 2 data collection, we asked interviewees about the scope and process of data collection. The Big Lift requires several types of data collection from preschool grantees and school districts, including detailed, individual-level family and teacher data, assignment of California Student Identifiers to preschool children, administration of a common kindergarten readiness assessment, and submission of reading assessment and other student data for kindergarten through third grade students.

The administration of a common kindergarten readiness assessment, the Brigance Early Childhood Screen, began in the 2016–2017 school year for the Big Lift cohort 1 districts. In school year 2017–2018, all districts in both cohorts will administer the Brigance. This was a large-scale effort, and its execution was cited in our wave 2 interviews as an important accomplishment. As one interviewee explained, "The Brigance piece was huge this year; the fact that we got a universal kindergarten readiness assessment baseline was enormous."

Interviewees talked about a wide range of data their communities collected for the initiative, including not only administering the Brigance to entering kindergarteners, but also collecting preschool attendance data, summer enrollment data, parent participation data, teacher professional development data, and kindergarten entry forms. Interviewees also spoke positively about the level of support they had received for their data collection and analysis efforts. Interviewees at the local and county level mentioned that they had been able to hire additional staff, and there were also a few mentions of helpful management information systems such as

Cocoa or Learning Genie (mentioned in a preschool focus group in particular). One local leader described Cocoa, the primary database used by the Big Lift, as “easy to use, easy to implement and learn.”

The challenges of collecting this breadth of data were mentioned by interviewees at both the county and local level, as well as within our focus groups with preschool and BLIS teachers and BLIS coordinators. Concerns were wide-ranging, but included overlap or redundancy among multiple databases, teacher buy-in and burden, as well as the overall time and resource demands that data collection and analysis required: “It’s a pretty big . . . burden. For programs who weren’t expecting it, they think, ‘Oh, my secretary can enter a few things a day.’ It’s quite a bit more than that.”

With all the work going into data collection and analysis, we heard interviewees express a desire to see more data presented back to them, or data presented in a different way, or to get some sense as to whether and how the Big Lift is working.

Continuous Communication

Communication in a collective impact initiative such as the Big Lift is important for keeping partners apprised of decisions, upcoming meetings and events, and progress to date. As Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster (2014) note, having open and consistent lines of communication builds trust between members and organizations.

According to our interviewees, information about the Big Lift is generally shared with stakeholders via the Big Lift Collaborative and Knowledge Network meetings, email, and meetings with key colleagues (e.g., superintendents meet with one another and SMCOE on a regular basis). Interviewees also acknowledged that some information was distributed via social media or the Big Lift website, although we also heard in wave 2 that the website was intended more for marketing and was not useful for the Big Lift implementers. Interviewees in wave 2 also mentioned that they had received communication about data and early results from the initiative.

In wave 1, county leaders expressed that the communication strategy for the initiative is still developing and evolving: “I think we are . . . in an experimentation phase with what kind of communication people want and . . . what works for people.” This development appeared to be heading in the right direction—communication efforts, particularly more recent ones such as the newsletter, were viewed satisfactorily for many and interviewees in both data-collection waves expressed appreciation for the communication they received about the Big Lift. As one wave 1 interviewee described, “I feel like I know what I need to know . . . I feel like I have . . . the information I need.”

The countywide meetings, in particular, were an area that seemed to develop over time. Although meetings were named as a primary vehicle for communication about the Big Lift, wave 1 interviewees felt the countywide meetings (e.g., the Big Lift Collaborative and Knowledge

Network) were often surface-level, and not an opportunity to dig deeper into the progress and challenges of the Big Lift. A wave 1 interviewee noted:

[The Big Lift Collaborative meetings] are . . . really just highlighting various . . . programs and then having speakers and that kind of thing, so that's not really the venue where there's brainstorming or sharing of challenges and trying to figure out together where we might go from there.

However, stakeholders in wave 1 also acknowledged that the meetings were evolving and that the meeting prior to our interviews had been more engaging than previous meetings had been: “this last [quarterly meeting] was really an engaging one. Not just, you know, a reporting out of information but really engaging folks in larger policy and systems discussion about kids and families.” By wave 2 of data collection, meetings were noted as useful ways to share information and gain ideas from the colleagues: “There's been opportunities [during quarterly meetings] for grantees to present on what they're doing and tackle questions as well, and also just be able to connect with other services in the community that aren't necessarily funded by the Big Lift.” That said, wave 2 interviewees also expressed a desire to make even more progress in ensuring meetings at both the county and local level are an opportunity for deeper and more productive collaboration.

Although some improvements to communication strategies had been made, wave 2 interviewees expressed that further work could be done in developing a more streamlined and clear approach to communication. In particular, interviewees expressed the need for streamlining emails both in terms of volume and source. One interviewee explained that sometimes there is confusion about who is who in terms of where emails are coming from. Similarly, wave 2 interviewees expressed that the number of meetings could be overwhelming, especially when it was not clear in advance what the agenda for a meeting was going to be or who was expected to attend.

A few other recommendations for improving communication emerged. These included providing more documentation (e.g., a manual for participants), setting up a central repository or portal from which partners could access information, developing strategies for communication about the Big Lift with specific audiences (e.g., parents, teachers), and, relatedly, finding a way to better articulate the story of the Big Lift for people who are not directly involved (e.g., potential funders).

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

The last domain in the Big Lift's chosen model of collective impact involves organizations and initiative partners engaging in coordinated activities that, while different, align with the common agenda (Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster, 2014). Because our interview protocols included questions about each individual pillar (i.e., preschool, summer learning, attendance, family engagement), we did not include separate questions on mutually reinforcing activities.

Here, we focus on how the pillar activities, implemented by multiple school districts and community organizations, work together to achieve a common goal.

Wave 1 interviewees spoke highly of the four-pillar strategy, expressing that employing the combination of high-quality preschool, summer learning, attendance, and family engagement differentiated the Big Lift from other preschool through third grade initiatives. As stated by one interviewee, “It’s not a single thing. One of the reasons that SIF gave us the money is that we’re trying four different pillars with collective impact. They didn’t know anyone who was doing that.” Another interviewee explained, “One of the things that is very interesting about the Big Lift is that you’ve got . . . this cocktail of these four interventions operating in synergy with one another rather than ‘well we’re just going to focus on early education or we’re gonna focus on summertime.’”

In wave 2, interviewees at the county level in particular expressed that a top priority for the initiative going forward was ensuring that each of the four pillars is operating at the highest possible quality. As one interviewee stated: “Getting all four pillars running at maximum . . . impact . . . is the number-one priority.”

Although it was emphasized more in wave 2, in both data-collection waves, interviewees expressed that, to reach the initiative’s goal of third grade reading proficiency, more attention would need be paid to what occurs outside of those four pillars. Alignment between preschool and elementary school was cited as a particular concern:

I think the P-3 piece is important. . . . We feel like we’re pouring a whole lot in at the front end, and then we gotta make the promise of those early elementary years really pan out. . . . I think the summer piece will be good in between, but it’s what’s happening in the school year to support the gains.

Another interviewee echoed a similar sentiment: “Not everybody really understands what pre-third grade . . . alignment means . . . whether or not we’ll be able to sustain the impact is, I think, really up in the air.”

Wilder Collaboration Survey

The Wilder survey was used as another way to assess the level of collaboration among the Big Lift partners. We analyzed the results from the survey for all respondents by the three groups (county leadership, local leadership, and the Big Lift Collaborative) and by the six factors (environment, membership, process, communication, purpose, and resources) and total score. Table 2.1 shows the total and factor scores for the three survey groups and for all respondents, in waves 1 and 2 of data collection. A higher score represents a more positive view on collaboration. Results from wave 1 indicate that generally all groups reported that collaboration was adequate (average of 3.8 on a 5-point scale; median was 4). In wave 2, we found almost identical results to wave 1.

Table 2.1. Wilder Collaboration Survey Results: Wave 1 and 2

| Wave 1 | | | | | | | Total Score |
|----------------------------|-------------|------------------------|---------|---------------|---------|-----------|-------------|
| Survey Groups | Environment | Member Characteristics | Process | Communication | Purpose | Resources | |
| County leadership | 4.1 | 3.6 | 3.3 | 3.7 | 4.3 | 3.0 | 3.7 |
| Local collaboratives | 4.1 | 4.1 | 3.9 | 4.1 | 4.3 | 3.6 | 4.0 |
| The Big Lift Collaborative | 3.9 | 3.7 | 3.5 | 3.8 | 4.2 | 3.4 | 3.7 |
| All | 3.9 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 3.8 | 4.2 | 3.4 | 3.8 |
| Wave 2 | | | | | | | Total Score |
| Survey Groups | Environment | Member Characteristics | Process | Communication | Purpose | Resources | |
| County leadership | 4.1 | 3.8 | 3.5 | 3.8 | 4.4 | 3.0 | 3.8 |
| Local collaboratives | 4.1 | 4.1 | 3.8 | 4.1 | 4.3 | 3.6 | 4.0 |
| The Big Lift Collaborative | 3.9 | 3.8 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 4.1 | 3.5 | 3.8 |
| All | 3.9 | 3.8 | 3.7 | 3.8 | 4.2 | 3.5 | 3.8 |

NOTE: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral, no opinion; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. Wave 1 sample sizes: county leadership = 15; local collaborative = 19; the Big Lift Collaborative = 69; all = 103. Wave 2 sample sizes: county leadership = 12; local collaborative = 28; the Big Lift Collaborative = 85; all = 125.

Some slight variation exists across the six factors when examining results descriptively by survey group; however, very little variation exists from wave 1 to wave 2. On average, survey respondents in all groups and across both waves most strongly agreed with questions in the purpose factor (e.g., “I have a clear understanding of what our collaboration is trying to accomplish,” “People in our collaborative group know and understand our goals”). This result matches our interview findings indicating that the Big Lift stakeholders and collaborative members had a shared vision and that the goals of the Big Lift were a county priority. Participants in both waves tended to score questions related to resources (e.g., “Our collaborative had adequate funds to do what it wants to accomplish”) with lower agreement than other survey questions. Given the changing funding and political environment during our survey data-collection waves, this finding is not surprising and matches challenges mentioned by county and local leaders during interviews.

3. Pillar Strategy Implementation

The Big Lift aims to employ four pillars in its efforts to raise third grade reading proficiency (as described in Chapter 1, Box 1): high-quality preschool, summer learning opportunities, family and community engagement, and attendance. The intention is for each of these four distinct strategies to work in concert to improve outcomes for the children of San Mateo County.

Our interviews and focus groups surfaced several interview and focus group findings about the Big Lift's implementation of each of its four pillars:

- **Preschool:** Participants were pleased with the progress of this pillar and acknowledged that it was one of the more robust strategies employed by the Big Lift. However, this pillar also faced some barriers in implementation, particularly around workforce constraints (e.g., challenges attracting and retaining quality teachers, burden on preschool staff).
- **Summer:** This pillar saw the most growth across the span of our data-collection activities, with new programs providing summer learning opportunities to students in all seven districts by wave 2. Participants noted that with this rapid growth came some challenges, including a sense that there had been limited community input about the summer program, concerns around staffing of the summer program, and the need for improved or different training for summer teachers.
- **Family engagement:** The primary activity in this pillar is the facilitation of a program called Raising a Reader+ (RAR+), although other activities were also cited by interviewees and focus group participants as feeding into their family engagement strategy. Interviewees shared with us that they viewed the family engagement pillar as particularly crucial to the goals of the Big Lift, but that they had concerns about whether the current strategies were deep or comprehensive enough to make an impact.
- **Attendance:** This pillar is still in development following a pilot initiative run by Harvard University that provided parents with attendance reminders. Interviewees generally acknowledged that there had not been much activity within the attendance pillar beyond general awareness raising, but that there was an intention to use the data from the Harvard study to inform further strategy development.

In the remainder of this chapter, we further describe each of the four pillar strategies and elaborate on our interview and focus group findings for each. As noted in the study methodology section, we present results by study wave and method (e.g., interview or focus group).

High-Quality Preschool

The Big Lift's preschool pillar provides preschools with funding and supports to improve their quality on the San Mateo County Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Direct funding to programs has been used to both open new preschool classrooms and make improvements to existing classrooms. For example, some grantees have used funds to purchase

learning materials, furniture, and technology and/or to hire additional teaching staff and specialists such as mental health consultants and family engagement coordinators. Big Lift preschool classrooms are required to participate in intensive, on-site coaching designed to increase the use of optimal instructional practices. They also have access to professional development workshops aligned with the QRIS.

Wave 1 Interviews

It was clear in our wave 1 interviews that the activities implemented through the Big Lift preschool pillar built on, and worked within and among, existing preschool efforts already underway in San Mateo County. As one interviewee described: “The Big Lift is . . . a specific funding stream that interacts and intersects with a lot of our other funding streams . . . I’m not actually sure . . . what is specific to Big Lift that isn’t specific to . . . the similar work that we’re doing.”

Preschool efforts under the Big Lift were viewed positively, but not without challenges. A majority of interviewees indicated that the launch of the preschool pillar was viewed as a real success: “I think we’ve taken the first huge step by like working on quality preschool piece and that’s exciting.” Many interviewees also viewed the preschool pillar as the most-advanced and robust pillar out of the four. However, interviewees also acknowledged some barriers to implementing the preschool pillar activities. In particular, interviewees noted that space and facility limitations hindered attempts to expand the number of preschool spaces or extend the school day or year; there simply are not enough classrooms to accommodate a steep rise in spaces. Challenges with the preschool workforce were also cited as barriers to implementation. Interviews spoke about both teacher shortage and teacher burden, often in relation to what was perceived as a low salary received by local teachers. As one interviewee described: “Another challenge for the Big Lift on the preschool side is attracting and retaining qualified staff who can afford to live in San Mateo County on their teacher salary, which is very, very low.”

Wave 2 Interviews

Since wave 1 of data collection, the preschool effort of the Big Lift had expanded to all seven participating districts, and the number of students enrolled in a Big Lift preschool had more than doubled (986 preschoolers in school year 2015–2016 to 2,051 preschoolers in school year 2016–2017). Some interviewees expressed the perception that these were students who would not otherwise be served, particularly because the Big Lift had a slightly higher-income cap than other preschool options in the area. Mentions of a focus on quality also came up throughout our interviews, with county and local leads talking about QRIS components, as well as a raised awareness of what quality preschool means (e.g., that it is more than just daycare provision).

Challenges with the preschool workforce continued to be cited as a significant concern for many when it came to the preschool pillar. Interviewees acknowledged that it was still a challenge to find qualified preschool staff, particularly when they are not paid what is considered

a livable wage, and that staff turnover and burden can also be a challenge in the preschool setting. While these issues are not unique to the Big Lift, they could affect the initiative's ability to implement the preschool pillar as intended.

Our second wave of data collection also surfaced discussion around the Big Lift's accommodation of special education students. While we heard some concerns (in interviews and focus groups) around a lack of infrastructure to support students with special needs, some local leads also expressed excitement that they were able to open an inclusion classroom (e.g., a classroom that is inclusive and supportive of both special education and general education students) through the Big Lift.

Wave 2 Focus Groups

We asked preschool directors and teachers what changes someone would see if they walked into their center pre–Big Lift funding and then again post–Big Lift funding. In all four focus groups, two elements came up in response to that question: changes in environment (e.g., new furniture, new technology or materials) and changes in teacher practice (e.g., new or improved use of curriculum, improved teacher/child interactions).

Both coaching and professional development were mentioned in our teacher focus groups, with participants speaking positively about both. Teachers expressed appreciation for their coach's feedback and found value in the trainings and workshops they attended (particularly those with content around supporting special education students). However, interviews also revealed that the amount of coaching received by teachers varied widely. For example, while one teacher reported that she saw her coach once a month for stretches of two to four hours at a time, another teacher mentioned seeing her coach only once for a 30-minute period.

Big Lift Inspiring Summer Programs

BLIS was implemented in six schools across the Cohort 1 districts for the first time in summer 2016. The program was intended for students entering kindergarten and first grade. In summer 2017, BLIS was implemented in 11 schools across Cohort 1 and 2 districts. Cohort 1 districts served rising kindergarten, first, and second grade students, while most Cohort 2 districts served rising kindergarten and rising first grade students (one served rising kindergarteners only). Each district's summer program lasted five weeks, although their start and end dates varied slightly among the districts. BLIS ran five days a week, for approximately eight hours a day.

On Mondays through Thursdays, the first half of the day was run by the participating school districts with the support of BELL and was intended to be academically focused, with certified elementary teachers leading the lessons together with a teacher assistant. Morning activities were literacy focused, with a combination of reading with students and rotating center-based activities. The second half of Mondays through Thursdays was run by the San Mateo County Library and

was intended to be enrichment focused, including activities such as yoga and breathing exercises and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) activities. The library provided programming all day Fridays, also with an enrichment focus, and sometimes included a field trip for the students. For the library-run afternoon sessions, an enrichment facilitator replaced the certified elementary teacher, but the same teacher assistant remained with the students all day.

Of all the pillars, BLIS evolved the most between our two waves of data collection. As described in more detail, the summer pillar went from being in a nascent stage of planning during wave 1 of our interviews to a program that had completed its first year and was well underway toward starting its second year of implementation as of wave 2.

Wave 1 Interviews

Key informants understood that planning for summer learning efforts was underway at the time of our interviews (fall 2015), but they felt that communication about this pillar could improve. They expressed a sense of excitement regarding the BLIS pillar: “the summer thing is really exciting . . . summer programs are so important for families, especially working families.” They also noted that, similar to the preschool pillar, the summer pillar fits within the context of other summer activities already established in each of the local communities.

Interviewees also surfaced frustrations around the BLIS pillar, such as feeling that there had been limited community input. Similarly, local leaders we spoke with explained that there had been some confusion about the level of local control over the summer program: “We can’t change our minds locally . . . my understanding is that they adopt one [summer program] for all of Big Lift so I can’t say, ‘No, I don’t like that one.’”

Wave 2 Interviews

Interviewees remarked on how BLIS was an important opportunity for families, with several local leads mentioning that the program filled a gap in their community where summer programming had been previously lacking. Interviewees also described the launch of the first year of BLIS as a success, or sign of the Big Lift’s evolution.

The Big Lift’s evolution did not occur without growing pains, however. Interviewees at both the county and local level described challenges regarding the first year of BLIS, including a rushed timeline, long program day, and summer staff shortage. Many of the challenges cited by interviewees seemed to stem from a tight timeline that rushed planning, enrollment, and staffing: “This past year, the [BLIS] . . . was like the front end of the roller coaster. It was not enough time, and it was incredibly ambitious, and I don’t think any of us really understood what we were getting ourselves into.” Other concerns included the length of the program day being too long for the age group served, as well as issues around finding quality summer staff.

Looking ahead, interviewees expressed hope that the second year of the summer program would go smoother than the previous year. One driver of such improvements is a summer task

force made up of partners at both the local and county level that started meeting shortly after the first summer program concluded in 2016. As one interviewee described:

I'm very hopeful that the Inspiring Summers work this coming year will be so much easier. That group, the day after it stopped, they were meeting to debrief and dissect what was working and what was not. And they started from literally the week after it ended and have been at it . . . so that I think we'll see some much smoother implementation.

In spite of its challenges in year 1, interviewees nonetheless reported hearing positive feedback from parents and school staff about the program: "Last year was the first year we had summer school in kinder, we hadn't had it in years because of fiscal reasons, and every single teacher and principal said . . . [it] made such a huge difference the kids who did attend the summer school versus not." In addition to this anecdotal evidence of success, several interviewees also mentioned that preliminary results from BELL's internal evaluation of the program were exciting and promising.

Waves 1 and 2 Focus Groups

Focus group participants shared feedback on a range of BLIS program elements. Because BLIS was a completely new program for the county, we present detailed findings on all elements of the program. Additionally, this was the only pillar where focus groups were held in both data-collection waves.

Enrollment and registration. Teachers across both waves of data collection voiced concerns around the enrollment of special education and English-language learner students into the BLIS program. Providing adequate support for students with special needs was a challenge. Additionally, student registration was done online in year 2. While this was perceived as a positive move by some PPLs and interviewees alike, there was also concern about whether this could be a barrier to enrollment for families without technology access.

Staffing. Teachers across both waves of data collection had positive things to say about their BLIS colleagues. One teacher from wave 2 explained: "[A]s a teaching staff we came together as a group really quickly on a common goal and ran with it. That was a very powerful thing." However, in both waves of data collection, focus group participants expressed concerns that the teacher assistants and afternoon enrichment facilitators did not have enough experience working with young children.

Given that the teaching teams shift from morning to afternoon, focus group participants emphasized the importance of having time before and during the program to meet and communicate with their teaching team. This came up in both wave 1 focus groups as something that had been lacking during year 1 of the program. In year 2, some program sites had responded to this need by building time for collaboration into the daily schedule. One teacher described having 30 minutes between lunch and recess where all three teachers could meet to discuss students and areas for improvement. This teacher explained that they did not have that

opportunity last year. However, this seemed to occur on a site-by-site (or even classroom-by-classroom) basis, and teachers who did not have that opportunity expressed that it would be very helpful.

Teacher training and support. Academic teachers and enrichment facilitators received two separate trainings: academic teachers were trained by their site leads on BELL, while enrichment facilitators were trained by the San Mateo County Library. Teaching assistants attended both trainings. Teachers across focus groups (and data-collection waves) felt that both trainings could be improved. Academic teachers expressed that the training was not particularly useful, especially for experienced teachers, and that it was particularly hard to glean value from the training without having the program materials in hand. Teaching assistants and enrichment facilitators expressed that their training spent too much time focused on yoga and not enough on specific classroom and behavior-management skills. The suggestion was also raised (in both a teacher and the PPL focus group) that assistants and facilitators could benefit from some hands-on experience during their training—observing a classroom, for example. The BELL model is “train the trainer” in which the BLIS PPLs from each district were trained by BELL, and then went back to their local communities to train their site leads (who in turn trained their teachers). The PPLs we spoke with expressed either that their training was not particularly helpful or that it was a logistical challenge to attend the training given their school-year job duties.

Teachers (during both waves of data collection, but especially wave 2) expressed appreciation for the on-site support they had received during the program from both their coaches and their principal. Teachers described situations in which their coaches had helped them with their curriculum, acted as resources, or provided feedback.

Programming and curricula. Focus group participants across both waves of data collection had mixed opinions about the BLIS programming and curricula for the morning as well as the afternoon. Teachers and PPLs praised several elements of the programming—some mentioned liking the books or the field-trip element of the program. Others expressed that the lesson plans were easy to follow, or that they felt the program was indeed preparing students for the next grade.

Several concerns about the curricula were also raised. In particular, the levels seemed to be off for many classrooms: Some teachers and PPLs felt that the curriculum was too advanced for students, while others felt the curriculum was too simple or that it was too easy to complete the afternoon-enrichment activities in less than the allotted time. In almost every focus group from waves 1 and 2, teachers—especially academic teachers—talked about supplementing the curriculum with their own materials and resources. Teachers also expressed that it would be helpful to have more social-orientation time with students before having to jump into academics. As one teacher in wave 1 explained: “There was no time basically, they wanted us to jump right in with centers the second day. I mean in a regular academic curriculum, we spend the first month of school getting them ready . . . for all the routines but they wanted us to just to jump right in and just do it from the get go and that’s just not realistic.” While some additional

orientation time was mentioned as being built into the schedule in one wave 2 focus group, it was not clear if that was universally implemented—other focus groups still mentioned this as a desired program feature. Finally, we heard in a small number of focus groups (as well as interviews) that there did not seem to be enough cohesion or connection between the morning and afternoon programming.

As with the interviews, the length of the day came up as a concern in our focus groups across both waves of data collection. Teachers felt that the structure of the day needed to build in more nap, play, and transition time for students.

Teachers’ overall perceptions. One of the final questions asked in the focus groups was, “What two words would you use to describe the BLIS program?” Teachers acknowledged the positive elements of BLIS with such words as creative, energetic, fun, community, and ambitious. In our wave 2 focus groups in particular, the words teachers chose were overwhelmingly positive. While in wave 1, we heard such words as exhausting, chaotic, or disorganized from many of the teachers with whom we spoke, such words came up sparingly in our wave 2 focus groups.

Family Engagement

The primary family engagement strategy for the Big Lift is RAR+, an evidence-based early literacy and parent engagement program (Raising a Reader, undated). Through RAR+, caregivers are provided with books to share with their children, connected with local libraries, and invited to participate in five workshops aimed at increasing and enhancing the ways they engage in literacy activities with their children (in school year 2017–2018, the number of parent workshops will decrease to three). RAR+ is considered an evidence-based intervention, which was a requirement of the SIF grant. Many schools in San Mateo County had already been employing standard Raising a Reader (RAR), a pared-down version of RAR+ that does not include the parent workshops, prior to the start of the Big Lift.

Another strategy frequently referenced in relation to the family engagement pillar was the Parent Cafés, forums for parents to network with one another and school staff. These were coordinated by teachers and family engagement staff at school sites with support and training provided by SMCOE. Although Parent Cafés are not a required Big Lift strategy, sites are allowed to use grant funding to support their implementation. One additional area in which the Big Lift funds can be used for family engagement is in the hiring of family engagement specialists.

Wave 1 Interviews

Interviewees most often pointed to RAR and RAR+ as the primary activity being implemented for the family engagement pillar: “I do know that there are some [other] family engagement activities . . . but the more concrete one that I know is in place and is an expectation

in all four communities is the RAR+.” However, interviewees also mentioned that implementation of RAR/RAR+ was not universal across programs or classrooms. Interviewees also spoke about Parent Cafés, parent trainings, and a variety of other activities underway at a local level that may be in addition to efforts supported by the Big Lift.

Interviewees seemed to view family engagement as central to the progress of the other three pillars. However, several concerns were raised in our interviews. Several interviewees felt that the vision for this pillar was unclear and that more guidance was needed. We also heard that the current strategies were not going deep enough to produce results: “I don’t feel like [RAR is] the only solution or the right strategy actually. . . . We have had RAR for a long time and . . . has the needle been moved?” A few interviewees cited receipt of the SIF grant as a barrier to progress in the family engagement pillar because the SIF requirements for an evidence-based program stopped the conversation at RAR+. An interpretation of this is that interviewees thought because RAR+ met the SIF program requirements, no further discussion was given to other family engagement programs that could be implemented and potentially have a large impact on children’s learning.

Wave 2 Interviews

During our wave 2 interviews, RAR and RAR+ continued to be cited as the formal or primary family engagement strategy of the Big Lift. In fact, the number of classrooms implementing RAR+ had increased dramatically since the first year from 22 to 75. Parent Cafés were also mentioned frequently. Some Big Lift programs have hired family engagement specialists with Big Lift funds, while others already had family engagement staff in place or had other priorities for the use of grant funds. Having designated staff to work on family engagement (at both the county and local levels) was mentioned as an important factor to successful implementation of the family engagement pillar. As one local lead explained: “[I] think there was a hope that everyone would be able to afford through the grant money a parent engagement coordinator . . . that hasn’t happened in a lot of the communities. That’s still a piece that is critically important and necessary and I don’t think that there’s that person to pull it all together.”

Interviewees also mentioned funding streams separate from the Big Lift that were playing a significant role in their family engagement strategies. For example, at the time of our interviews, a new program called Friday Parent Cafés (funded by First 5 San Mateo) was just getting off the ground. Friday Parent Cafés are workshops intended to give family engagement providers an opportunity to support and network with one another, and while not funded by the Big Lift, they came up in some of our interviews as complementing the work of the family engagement pillar.

Interviewees shared success stories regarding the family engagement pillar. For example, one person told the following story:

We learned from a couple of mothers who, as their children were learning how to read, so were they. They realized how important it was that they read so they could help their children. So they’re in the library . . . and moms are learning how

to read in English, just like their kids.... It was the most heartwarming story I heard because I thought, “That’s how we’re going to get it done, through libraries and literacy and schools, we’re gonna get families reading together and they’ll be stronger.”

Still, real concerns around the family engagement pillar continued to come up in wave 2, with an emphasis on family engagement strategies being too superficial and disconnected. Interviewees expressed that the family engagement pillar in particular needed to become more defined, robust, comprehensive, and coordinated: “The family engagement pillar has not been fully defined yet. . . . I think it’s the only one [of the four pillars] that’s not fully defined, with Raising a Reader+ being the only strategy that’s been formalized as a Big Lift strategy. Everything else is sort of in the periphery . . . programs have option to participate or not.”

Wave 2 Focus Groups

When asked about the family engagement activities their preschools were implementing, focus group participants mentioned the same ones described in the previous section. RAR+ was cited in all four preschool focus groups, and Parent Cafés were mentioned in almost all. Interestingly, however, two of the focus groups talked about “Father Cafés” in particular, which are Parent Cafés aimed at engaging fathers.

Participants in all four focus groups provided positive feedback about the family engagement activities occurring at their sites, as well as about their involvement in those activities. One teacher explained that some parents were shy at the beginning, but the activities she shared with the parents were very active. “At the end,” she said, “I was really happy because [parents] say, ‘Now I know how to read with my child.’” Two key enablers of parent participation mentioned in every focus group, were that parent workshops provided food and they provided child care.

Two teachers also had suggestions for improving family engagement efforts—ensuring inclusivity in terms of which parents were invited to participate in workshops, for example, and providing books in a variety of languages.

Attendance

The attendance pillar of the Big Lift thus far has followed a pilot initiative run by a Harvard University professor that provided parents of elementary school age children six attendance reminders throughout the 2015–2016 school year. The reminder provided information to parents about the importance of school attendance. Based on the positive results of the study (Rogers et al., 2017), the Big Lift has implemented the reminders in all Cohort 1 districts starting in fall 2017, with Cohort 2 districts added in January 2018.

Wave 1 Interviews

It appeared from our wave 1 interviews that the attendance pillar was primarily associated with the Harvard randomized control trial (RCT). The RCT was most often cited by interviewees

when asked about the attendance pillar. As one interviewee stated, “You kind of hear about the attendance pillar like, ‘Oh yeah, Harvard’s taking care of that’ and you don’t actually hear anything other than that, and I feel like, ‘What does that actually mean?’” This quote suggests that the interventions occurring within the attendance pillar remains unclear to some.

Wave 2 Interviews

At the time of our wave 2 interviews, the Harvard RCT had concluded. This activity continued to be the one most-often cited by interviewees when asked about the attendance pillar.

Interviewees mentioned that a more articulated plan for the attendance pillar was in the works, with the intention of using the data from the Harvard RCT to inform future strategies. In the meantime, including attendance as a pillar within the Big Lift has been viewed as raising awareness around the importance of attendance—especially for the early years. As one interviewee described:

The absenteeism [pillar] was supposed to be the ability to teach families how important it was that their kids not miss school . . . they discovered that parents thought it was more important that kids not miss high school than beginning school . . . how important it is that they come to school every day.

Another interviewee said the following regarding the attendance pillar: “I can’t tell you if it’s made an impact on attendance, but it has brought awareness.”

4. Successes and Challenges of the Big Lift

Our process evaluation revealed several positive aspects of the initiative that the Big Lift collaborative can build on. However, it also surfaced issues that the Big Lift has encountered and will need to address to move forward successfully. Throughout our key informant interviews, both successes and challenges were frequently mentioned in relation to our questions about collective impact conditions and pillar implementation. However, we also endeavored to end each interview by asking interviewees to share any additional challenges, successes, and needs. This section highlights the overarching successes and challenges that were described by key informants and (where applicable) focus group participants.

Successes

The Big Lift stakeholders were proud of the initiative's many successes to date.

- **Organizing partners.** Interviewees in both waves viewed the Big Lift as an organizing force that had coalesced a diverse group of partners around a common goal at the county level. We also heard from interviewees and focus group participants alike that the Big Lift had accessed, enhanced, and aligned partnerships at the local level. Although most of these interviewees cited collaborations within their local communities, a few also mentioned increased connection across districts. One preschool director described a situation in which her agency collaborated with others to put together a list of potential preschools for parents:

Where before that would have never happened. I think our mentality is . . . get a child into a program, doesn't matter whose program it is. We're not territorial . . . it's, "They need a program, let's find one that's gonna meet their needs."

- **Building awareness.** Interviewees across waves 1 and 2 felt that the Big Lift had raised awareness about the important issues it is intended to tackle. As one interviewee described:

In a relatively short period over the last couple of years, we've, you know, signaled to the community that we've got to invest in our kids and we've got to do a lot more for our kids. And I think we're at the beginning of building a movement around that, and where that movement takes us I don't know but I think there has been a groundswell of interest and support.

- **Gaining support.** That the Big Lift has been able to garner that broad-based support in the county was perceived as another success of the initiative by wave 1 interviewees and points to its ability to tap into San Mateo County's existing culture of collaboration and historical focus on children—both of which were mentioned by interviewees. In wave 2, interviewees mentioned that support and interest had continued to grow over the past year.

- **Increasing funds.** Even with some of the funding challenges described later in this section, key informants in wave 1 viewed the funding, both county and federal, that had been garnered by the Big Lift to date as a real sign of success: “The fact that this is a county-wide initiative and that there’s county dollars . . . going toward this . . . is incredible. The fact that they have embraced this as a priority is exciting and that SVCF has been . . . awarded federal dollars for this is impressive. I think they should be really excited and proud about that . . . that reflects great success.”
- **Launching initiative.** Wave 1 interviewees expressed excitement that the initiative was “up and running” and that activities—particularly under the preschool pillar—were being implemented in four communities in the county. In wave 2, the initiative had expanded to seven communities and almost all pillars were well underway: This was viewed as a further accomplishment by interviewees.
- **Improving data culture and processes.** Interviewees in wave 2 expressed that the Big Lift had made a positive difference in how data were being used and how progress was being measured. In particular, the adoption of the Brigrance assessment was noted as a significant accomplishment. Prior to that adoption, San Mateo County had no consistent measurement of kindergarten readiness across districts.
- **Improving lives.** Interviewees expressed in both wave 1 and wave 2 that the Big Lift was making a real difference for San Mateo County children and their families. Furthermore, many felt that the Big Lift was serving a population of students who may not otherwise have access to the kinds of activities provided through the pillars. In wave 2, we heard several stories (many of which were shared throughout this report) of ways in which the Big Lift was making an impact and of the positive feedback people had been hearing from parents and school staff.

Challenges

In addition to its successes, Big Lift stakeholders acknowledged that the initiative has also faced and is facing challenges in its implementation.

- **Constraints of funding mechanisms.** In wave 1, a majority of interviewees mentioned that the funding received by the Big Lift had introduced a set of constraints (e.g., evaluation requirements, quicker pace of expected progress) that can be challenging to work within: “Once you go after and you receive sort of federal funds, the complexity increased probably by a hundredfold because of . . . all the strings attached with federal funding dollars.” The constraints or complexity that SIF added to the initiative were mentioned by a few interviewees in wave 2 as well, although not as often.
- **Initiative growth and complexity.** Similarly, we heard that the rapid and continuing growth of an initiative as complex as the Big Lift is overwhelming. As one wave 1 interviewee described: “What I would say the biggest challenge about it has been is when we started this a couple of years ago it was very small. . . . And all of a sudden, we’ve got: WOAHH . . . but each time we ratchet up in terms of involvement, it ratchets up the intensity.” One result of the Big Lift’s growth is that the workload demanded by the initiative has become a concern for both county and local leaders; this was emphasized in both waves of data collection. In wave 2, we also started to hear discussion of the need to

move from an initial mode of start-up and survival to an evolved mode of stabilizing, managing, and codifying the initiative.

- **Broader community context and constraints.** One concern we heard during both waves of data collection is that the broader economic, educational, and political context that the Big Lift is operating within may limit the initiative’s success. As one wave 1 interviewee described:

We have challenges because Silicon Valley, which we’re a part of, is rapidly changing . . . you know, housing and wages are a real challenge. So we’re working with this . . . what we’re doing is ambitious enough, but given those two added factors, those keep us up at night.

Another wave 1 interviewee explained:

The main driving force behind the achievement gap . . . is the larger problem of inequality and low income and parents, families, and communities being horrifyingly under-resourced. . . . I think the Big Lift will make a difference, but the Big Lift on its own can’t address that problem.

- **Full engagement of partners.** The Big Lift’s collective impact efforts were perceived as not yet taking full advantage of the resources, expertise, and engagement that *current* collaborative partners have to offer. As one wave 1 interviewee described, “People are almost hungry to know what they can do with the Big Lift—people who aren’t involved programmatically now, want to know what is the next step and how can they contribute. So a problem is keeping those folks engaged even if they’re not involved in the immediate implementation.” This was also mentioned, although not as often, in our wave 2 interviews.
- **Financial sustainability.** By far, the most-frequent challenge cited in our wave 2 interviews was the Big Lift’s long-term sustainability. While sustainability was a concern in wave 1 as well, the number of people who mentioned in wave 2 nearly doubled and represented county leaders, community partners, local leads, and preschool staff. When asked about what the Big Lift’s top priority should be in the coming year, sustainability was mentioned most often. The majority of sustainability concerns were funding based. As one interviewee explained:

My hope is that some of those approaches and internal policies for school districts that may have been put on the books, my hope is that they sustain past any funding. My realist view on this is that a lot of sustainability starts with the funding, if not all of it. And so I would say that a lot of it starts and ends with funding and that’s going to be our primary focus on sustainability.

Tensions were particularly high given the change in the federal administration, with worries that the SIF may be cut from the federal budget. Shortly after our wave 2 data collection concluded, it was announced that this was in fact the case. Interviewees during wave 1 felt that engaging business leaders and the private sector may be important for financial sustainability down the line, and our wave 2 interviews suggest that these sectors continue to be a challenge to engage. Wave 2 interviewees also mentioned the importance of getting local legislators on board.

- **Personnel sustainability.** In addition to concerns about long-term funding sustainability for the initiative, staff turnover also surfaced during wave 2 as a sustainability challenge

for the Big Lift. Interviewees questioned how to maintain the momentum of the initiative even as key players at the county and local level left the table.

- **Balancing local autonomy with initiative-wide consistency.** Interviewees in wave 2 talked about the challenges of walking the fine line between providing guidance at the local level and ensuring fidelity to the initiative’s vision, while not micromanaging communities and districts or overlooking their local context. This is further complicated by the fact that each local community is unique, and communities vary in terms of the level of oversight and support they may need. One local lead expressed that the local level had little authority to make Big Lift decisions, but also acknowledged that, “Having a lot of local flexibility would dilute this collaborative effort county wide. . . . Part of the power of it is that we’re all doing the same thing, we’re all following the same rigorous expectations.”

5. Summary and Recommendations

In this section, we summarize the findings and then present recommendations the Big Lift partners should consider as they continue to implement the initiative's pillars using a collective impact approach. These recommendations stem from the findings described throughout this report.

Summary

Our data collection sought to answer two overarching research questions:

1. To what extent is the community engaging in the collective impact collaborative?
2. How are the Big Lift pillar strategies being implemented?

As we began to explore the first question, we turned to interviews with key informants along with some information from focus groups, as well as an online collaboration survey. Our findings suggest that members across the collaborative share a strong vision and purpose for the initiative, and that the environment in San Mateo County is one that is supportive and well poised for the collaboration required by a collective impact effort. However, they also suggest that there is room for improvement when it comes to supporting, engaging, and communicating with stakeholders across the Big Lift and moving the initiative forward in a collaborative and transparent way.

For the second research question, we again relied on interviews with key informants as well as focus groups with preschool and summer staff. We found that three of the four pillars (preschool, summer, and family engagement) had launched and were serving students in seven Big Lift districts in the past year. However, our conversations around each of the pillars surfaced perceived challenges. For summer in particular, teachers highlighted specific programmatic areas that could be improved for future years, such as adjusting staffing requirements and distributing materials before the program began. We also found that while the RAR+ intervention was being implemented for the family engagement pillar, key informants felt that this pillar was one that was critical for the Big Lift's purpose and may require more comprehensive programming. The attendance pillar was still under development, although some important groundwork had been laid. Finally, for both collective impact and pillar implementation, we heard concerns about resource limitations including staff workload and preschool facilities.

Recommendations

We have several recommendations for the Big Lift leadership on ways to improve on a strong initiative. **First, several key informants noted that *the initiative could benefit from a***

director, and other findings support this recommendation. For example, our findings indicate that there is a need for clear communication and assistance carrying out program decisions, both between the ACE and CORE team as well as between the county and local communities. Someone in a director position could manage communication plans and support the backbone of the initiative with decisionmaking and carrying out program policies. This person should be dedicated full time to the initiative and have oversight over each of its many moving parts while reporting to leaders of the three collaborating agencies. The county leadership would need to decide where this position would be housed (e.g., SMCOE, SVCF, or the County of San Mateo), funding for the position, and the exact responsibilities given the already operating leadership groups.

Second, our findings indicate that *placing emphasis on filling key designated staff roles across the initiative would benefit the work of the initiative and build capacity—especially at a local level.* We heard across several interviews the value of local Big Lift coordinators, data support staff, and family engagement specialists or parent liaisons (and we also heard about the challenges communities faced when those positions were not filled). The Big Lift should think through what support and guidance could be provided around funding, finding, and hiring designated staff for each of the seven communities. We also recommend that the Big Lift engage in succession planning. Turnover in key leadership positions is inevitable, and the ACE and CORE teams should be consciously developing the next generation of Big Lift leaders.

Third, a long-term funding strategy will be essential to the longevity and efficacy of the Big Lift initiative. A key point raised by interviewees was the need to engage different stakeholders, such as the business community, in raising funds and ensuring the sustainability of the Big Lift. Given that a large federal funding stream for the Big Lift was recently cut, working with state and local governments, as well as diverse sets of private businesses and foundations—strategies the Big Lift is currently pursuing—may help with securing long-term funding.

Fourth, the Big Lift should *set up and share a central repository of key information that collaborative partners can access.* This central repository would house any documentation that would clarify the work of the initiative overall and would aid in the work of the local collaboratives. Such documentation could include: write-ups of key policies and procedures, descriptions of each pillar and its activities, job descriptions, an organizational chart, the logic model, and/or marketing or recruitment materials. It could also include a calendar of meetings, with agendas and expected participants clearly outlined. Such a repository could improve consistency in practice across communities (and act as a resource for newcomers as staff turns over), provide key resources to local collaboratives, and would also help to streamline communications.

Fifth, the backbone infrastructure should *be clear and transparent about which elements of each pillar are nonnegotiable components of Big Lift participation and which elements are open to local flexibility and tailoring.* This will help clarify the importance of county-wide initiative fidelity and consistency while also acknowledging and valuing the unique context of

each participating community. Communication about nonnegotiable components should also clearly explain why these elements are inflexible.

Sixth, our findings indicate that the Big Lift could benefit from better *articulating a policy on admitting and (as applicable) supporting special needs and English-language learning students into its programs* and ensuring that there is adequate staff, training, and supports in place to accommodate that policy. While this is especially true for the BLIS program, there may be room for improvement on this front in the preschool pillar as well. Any such policy should be clearly communicated to sites, parents, and teachers.

Finally, we have several **recommendations specific to the BLIS program:**

- *Hire teaching assistants that have experience working with children.* Our interviews and focus groups highlighted the importance of the teaching assistant role, as assistants are the one constant staff person that children interact with throughout the day. Ensuring this person comes in with some background knowledge and experience has the potential to increase student learning and safety, as well as to better support the afternoon enrichment facilitator.
- *Include greater emphasis on classroom and behavior management in the library facilitator training.* Adding concrete techniques and strategies for managing student behavior and promoting student safety to the training agenda could fill gaps in staff skills, particularly for facilitators with little to no experience with children.
- *Build in adequate time before and during the program for all three classroom teachers to meet and communicate.* Although some progress toward this has already been made, further efforts would help ensure that, across all sites, academic teachers, enrichment facilitators, and teaching assistants can share information about the program and their students with one another.
- *Provide guidance and materials for differentiation for both morning and afternoon curriculum.* Interviews and focus groups revealed that curricula (particularly the morning academic curriculum) were not a perfect fit for student levels: We heard reports of it being too hard or too easy and that teachers were regularly supplementing it with their own materials. We recommend giving teachers additional suggestions (and books) to support differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of all students and additional training on lesson design/curriculum modification.
- *Ensure curriculum and materials are available to teachers during training.* Having curricula and materials in hand will help ground and contextualize the content of the training for both morning and afternoon teachers.

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Appendix A. Interview Protocols

In our interviews, we asked key informants about the Big Lift's implementation of the five collective impact conditions to date and about the local context within which the collective impact was occurring. Where relevant, we also asked interviewees to elaborate on whether they felt implementation of these conditions varied between the larger county collaborative and their local district-community collaborative. We also asked interviewees about the progress and implementation of the four pillars. Depending on a given interviewee's role in the Big Lift, we focused our questions primarily on the pillar(s) in which that person was most involved. As interviewees responded, we then followed up as needed with more-specific questions.

The interview protocols presented here were used in waves 1 and 2 of data collection. The wave 1 protocol was used with all interviewees. During wave 2 of data collection, we asked many of the same interview questions as in wave 1, with some variation depending on whether someone had been interviewed previously. Additionally, during wave 2, we asked questions specifically about how the Big Lift had evolved over the past year.

Additional Information on Interview Methods

Prior to the interview, individuals were told the interview was voluntary and answers to questions would not be attributed to individuals. The majority of the interviews consisted of one interviewee and one or two RAND researchers; however, in several of the interviews, more than one interviewee participated. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour and were conducted in November and December 2015 in wave 1 and in February and March 2017 in wave 2.

DATA-COLLECTION WAVE 1 OVERALL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND DATA-COLLECTION WAVE 2 NEW INTERVIEWEE PROTOCOL

PART I: Involvement with and understanding of The Big Lift

[Ask all interviewees]

I'd like to start by asking you some questions about The Big Lift initiative, and your involvement within it.

1. How would you describe The Big Lift?
 - a. What are the goals of The Big Lift?
2. What is your role in The Big Lift?
 - a. How long have you been part of the initiative? [For example, when did you first attend a Big Lift meeting, participate in a workgroup, or become funded?]
 - b. Has your involvement in The Big Lift changed over time? [If so] How has it changed?
 - c. Are you part of a local collaborative?
 - d. [If not clear from above prompts] How would you characterize how much you're participating in The Big Lift (a little, a lot, it varies)?

PART II: Collective Impact–Context and implementation

[Ask all interviewees]

3. How would you describe the collective impact approach of The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. [If part of a local collaborative] Do you think this approach is different at the county versus the local collaborative level? [If so] How?
4. How, if at all, does The Big Lift tap into the strengths and assets of the community? [Probe for specific examples.]
 - a. [If part of a local collaborative] Are there differences in the ways in which strengths and assets are used at the county versus local level? [If so] What are they?
5. Do you feel there is broad-based support for The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. [If yes] How has that broad-based support been gained? [Probe for how the backbone infrastructure is ensuring that support]
 - b. [If no] Why do you think that is? How do you think that support could be gained?
 - c. What key partners or supporters are missing?
 - d. [If part of a local collaborative] Is there a difference between the level of county support versus local support for The Big Lift?
6. How, if at all, is The Big Lift collaborative evolving in response to progress or challenges in achieving outcomes? [Probe for specific examples.]

PART III: Collective Impact–Common Agenda

[Ask all interviewees]

7. Would you say that the collaborative partners of The Big Lift have a shared vision for the initiative?
 - a. [If yes] What is that vision?
 - b. [If no] Can you tell me a little more about where the differences lie?
 - c. Do you think that the partners have a common understanding of the problem that The Big Lift is trying to solve?
 - d. [If part of a local collaborative] Do you think this is true at both the county level as well as in your local community collaborative?
8. To what extent are the goals of The Big Lift of top priority for the county?
 - e. [If part of a local collaborative]: To what extent is the goal of The Big Lift of top priority for your local community?

Part IV: Collective Impact–Backbone Infrastructure

[Ask all except for school district leadership. See notes for Q11 for additional restrictions.]

9. A backbone infrastructure that includes a clear governance structure, skilled leaders, and influential champions is one of the key characteristics of a collective impact collaborative. Based on your understanding, can you please describe the backbone structure of The Big Lift?
 - a. In your opinion has The Big Lift collaborative established an effective backbone structure at the county and/or local level (e.g., clear governance structure, influential champions, clear guidelines for each workgroup)?
 - i. [If yes] What makes it effective?
 - ii. [If no] What makes you say that? How could the backbone infrastructure be improved at the county and/or local level?
 - iii. Who is making decisions? Are decisions made collectively?
10. *[For county and local leadership]* How do you and the rest of the county/local leadership team provide support and guidance to The Big Lift collaborative partners?
 - a. Do you feel that the partners have the support they need to enable their work as planned? [If no] What additional support or guidance is needed?

Part V: Collective Impact–Continuous Communication

[Ask all interviewees.]

11. To what extent are The Big Lift collaborative members kept informed about decisions, progress, and challenges encountered by the initiative? [local leaders: must ask for both local and county-level]
 - a. How is that sort of information shared with collaborative members?

12. How, if at all, could the communication within the [local leaders: must ask for both local and county-level] collaborative be improved?

Part VI: Collective Impact–Shared Measurement

[Ask Leadership Team, PPLC, and local collaborative leads.]

13. To what extent do partners feel a sense of collective accountability for results?
 - a. [If part of a local collaborative] Do you think this is true at both the county level as well as in your local community collaborative?

Part VII: Pillar Implementation

[Ask all but EAC.]

[Local leaders should answer only for their local initiative unless otherwise noted. See additional questions for local leaders.]

Now I would like to switch gears and talk a little bit about the four pillars of The Big Lift.

14. To begin, can you walk me through the current activities being implemented for:
 - a. Supporting high-quality preschool aligned with K-3
 - b. Strengthening family and community engagement
 - c. Reducing chronic absenteeism
 - d. Providing summer learning opportunities
15. How would you rate the quality of the current activities being implemented for each pillar?
16. How are decisions being made about programming for the various pillars?
 - a. [For local leaders] How are decisions about programming being made at the county level that influence how your local community is making decisions about The Big Lift?
17. To what extent is planning underway for further development of each of the four The Big Lift pillars? For example, if you are primarily focused on preschool implementation currently, what are your plans for further developing family engagement, summer learning and attendance?
 - a. [For local leaders] What planning is underway at the county level that influences how your local community is planning for The Big Lift?
18. To what extent do the programs involved in The Big Lift (e.g., preschools, Raising A Reader, summer learning) have the necessary resources to be successful?
 - a. [For local leaders] How is the county supporting the local collaborative in providing necessary resources?
19. Where is the initiative experiencing significant challenges?*

- a. How, if at all, is the collaborative [For local leaders: must ask for both local and county-level] addressing those challenges?
- 20. [For local leaders: must ask for both local and county-level] What else is needed to continue supporting The Big Lift's progress?*
- 21. [For local leaders: must ask for both local and county-level] Has The Big Lift collaborative experienced any particular successes that you would like to share?*
- 22. Are there any questions about The Big Lift or about your collaborative process that I should have asked, but didn't?

Thank you very much for your time!

*Priority questions

DATA-COLLECTION WAVE 2 COUNTY LEADERS PROTOCOL

PART I: Involvement with The Big Lift

Last year we asked about your involvement in The Big Lift, this year we want to start with similar questions to see how your role may have evolved over the past year.

1. What is your current role in The Big Lift and how, if at all, has it changed over time?
 - a. [If not clear from above prompts] How would you characterize how much you're participating in The Big Lift (a little, a lot, it varies)?

PART II: Changes in The Big Lift During Year One

2. How has The Big Lift evolved over the past year?
 - a. What programs or activities have been implemented? Prompt for activities under each pillar:
 - i. High quality preschool
 - ii. Family engagement
 - iii. Reducing chronic absenteeism
 - iv. Inspiring summers.
3. What were some of the successes The Big Lift experienced during the first year of program implementation (school year 15-16)?
4. What have been some of the challenges the initiative has faced in the first year?
5. How has leadership responded to challenges? What changes have been made in response to the challenges? [Probe for specific examples.]

PART III: Collective Impact

6. How would you describe the collective impact approach of The Big Lift initiative?
 - b. How, if at all, has the collective nature evolved during the first year of program implementation?
7. Do you feel there is broad-based support for The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. [If yes] How has that broad-based support been gained? [Probe for how the backbone infrastructure is ensuring that support]
 - b. [If no] Why do you think that is? How do you think that support could be gained?
 - c. Do you feel there are any key partners or supporters missing?

Part IV: Collective Impact–Backbone Infrastructure

8. In your opinion has The Big Lift collaborative established an effective backbone structure at the county and/or local level (e.g., clear governance structure, influential champions, clear guidelines for each workgroup)?
 - a. [If yes] What makes it effective?
 - b. [If no] What makes you say that? How could the backbone infrastructure be improved at the county and/or local level?
 - c. Who is making decisions? Are decisions made collectively?
 - d. Has your understanding of the backbone infrastructure changed over the last year?

Part V: Collective Impact–Continuous Communication

9. In what ways has information on first year progress and program implementation been shared out to school districts and community members?
 - a. How has the information been received?
10. How, if at all, could the communication within the collaborative be improved?

Part VI: Collective Impact–Shared Measurement

11. Are you involved in any data collection or data entry tasks for The Big Lift? {IF YES}
 - a. In your opinion, has the support provided for the process been adequate?
 - b. What are some of the challenges with data collection or data entry?
 - c. What has worked well in terms of data collection or data entry to date?

Part VII: Concluding Questions

Earlier we asked about challenges and successes during the first year of program implementation. Now we have a few last questions on the overall initiative.

12. Looking ahead, what do you think should be of top priority for The Big Lift over the next year?
 13. Other than what we've discussed already [cite examples if possible], are there areas in which the initiative is experiencing significant challenges currently? Or areas that you anticipate there being challenges in the future?*
- a. How, if at all, is the collaborative addressing those challenges?
14. What else is needed to continue supporting The Big Lift's progress?*
 15. Other than what we've discussed already [cite examples if possible], are there areas in which The Big Lift collaborative is experiencing any particular successes that you would like to share? Are there successes you anticipate in the future?*
 16. Are there any questions about The Big Lift or about your collaborative process that I should have asked, but didn't?

Thank you very much for your time!

*Priority questions

DATA-COLLECTION WAVE 2 DISTRICT LEADERS PROTOCOL

PART I: Involvement with The Big Lift

Last year we asked about your involvement in The Big Lift, this year we want to start with similar questions to see how your role may have evolved over the past year.

1. What is your current role in The Big Lift and how, if at all, has it changed over time?
 - a. [If not clear from above prompts] How would you characterize how much you're participating in The Big Lift (a little, a lot, it varies)?
2. What activities are your school district/community participating in that are part of The Big Lift? Prompt for activities under each pillar:
 - a. High quality preschool
 - b. Family engagement
 - c. Reducing chronic absenteeism
 - d. Inspiring summers

PART II: Changes in The Big Lift During Year One

3. How has The Big Lift evolved over the past year?
 - a. What programs have been implemented?
 - b. How has the participation of your district/community changed over the course of the year?
4. What are some of the successes your district/community experienced in the first year of implementation of The Big Lift?
5. What have been some of the challenges your district/community faced in the first year of implementation?
6. How has leadership, county and local, responded to those challenges? What changes have been made in response to the challenges? [Probe for specific examples.]

PART III: Collective Impact

7. How would you describe the collective impact approach of The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. How, if at all, has the collective nature evolved during the first year of program implementation?
 - b. Do you think this approach is different at the county versus the local collaborative level? [If so] How?
8. Do you feel there is broad-based support for The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. [If yes] How has that broad-based support been gained? [Probe for how the backbone infrastructure is ensuring that support]
 - b. [If no] Why do you think that is? How do you think that support could be gained?

- c. Do you feel there are any key partners or supporters missing?
- d. Is there a difference between the level of county support versus local support for The Big Lift?

Part IV: Collective Impact–Backbone Infrastructure

- 9. In your opinion has The Big Lift collaborative established an effective backbone structure at the county and/or local level (e.g., clear governance structure, influential champions, clear guidelines for each workgroup)?
 - i. [If yes] What makes it effective?
 - ii. [If no] What makes you say that? How could the backbone infrastructure be improved at the county and/or local level?
 - iii. Who is making decisions? Are decisions made collectively?
 - iv. Has your understanding of the backbone infrastructure changed over the last year?

Part V: Collective Impact–Continuous Communication

- 10. To what extent are The Big Lift collaborative members kept informed about decisions, progress, and challenges encountered by the initiative?
 - a. How is that sort of information shared with collaborative members?
 - b. Are there differences in how communication occurs at the local level, then how it occurs at the county level? [If yes] What are they?
- 11. How, if at all, could the communication within the collaborative be improved, both locally and county-wide?

Part VI: Collective Impact–Shared Measurement

- 12. Can you describe your school district or community involvement in data collection and data entry, if any, for The Big Lift?
 - a. Has the support provided for the process been adequate?
 - b. What are some of the challenges with data collection or data entry?
 - c. What has worked well in terms of data collection or data entry to date?
- 13. Are you aware of results that are being presented back to leadership or the community? If so, what and how are results presented (e.g., email format; newsletter)?

Part VII: Pillar Implementation

Earlier we asked about the different activities currently being implemented in your district/community for each of the four pillars of The Big Lift. Now we would like to ask some follow up questions about those pillar activities.

- 14. On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high), would you rate the quality of the current activities being implemented for each pillar?
- 15. How are decisions being made about programming for the various pillars?
 - a. Are decisions about programming being made at the county level that influence how your local community is making decisions about The Big Lift? [If yes] In what ways?

16. To what extent do the programs involved in The Big Lift (e.g., preschools, Raising a Reader, summer learning) have the necessary resources to be successful?
 - a. How is the county supporting the local collaborative in providing necessary resources?

Part VIII: Concluding Questions

Earlier we asked about challenges and successes during the first year of program implementation. Now we have a few last questions on the overall initiative.

17. Looking ahead, what do you think should be of top priority for The Big Lift over the next year?
18. Other than what we've discussed already [cite examples if possible], are there areas in which the initiative is experiencing significant challenges currently? Or areas that you anticipate there being challenges in the future?
 - a. How, if at all, is the collaborative addressing those challenges?
19. What else is needed to continue supporting The Big Lift's progress?*
20. Other than what we've discussed already [cite examples if possible], are there areas in which The Big Lift collaborative is experiencing any particular successes that you would like to share? Are there successes you anticipate in the future?*
21. Are there any questions about The Big Lift or about your collaborative process that I should have asked, but didn't?

Thank you very much for your time!

*Priority questions

**DATA-COLLECTION WAVE 2 PPLC COMMUNITY MEMBERS
PROTOCOL**

PART I: Involvement with The Big Lift

Last year we asked about your involvement in The Big Lift, this year we want to start with similar questions to see how your role may have evolved over the past year.

1. What is your current role in The Big Lift and how, if at all, has it changed over time?
 - a. [If not clear from above prompts] How would you characterize how much you're participating in The Big Lift (a little, a lot, it varies)?
2. What activities are you participating in that are part of The Big Lift? Prompt for activities under each pillar:
 - b. High quality preschool
 - c. Family engagement
 - a. Reducing chronic absenteeism
 - b. Inspiring summers

PART II: Changes in The Big Lift During Year One

3. How has The Big Lift evolved over the past year?
 - a. What programs have been implemented?
 - b. How has the participation of your district/community changed over the course of the year?
4. What are some of the successes The Big Lift experienced in the first year of implementation?
5. What have been some of the challenges the initiative faced in the first year of implementation?
6. How has leadership, county and local, responded to those challenges? What changes have been made in response to the challenges? [Probe for specific examples.]

PART III: Collective Impact

7. How would you describe the collective impact approach of The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. How, if at all, has the collective nature evolved during the first year of program implementation?
 - b. [If applicable] Do you think this approach is different at the county versus the local collaborative level? [If so] How?
8. Do you feel there is broad-based support for The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. [If yes] How has that broad-based support been gained? [Probe for how the backbone infrastructure is ensuring that support]
 - b. [If no] Why do you think that is? How do you think that support could be gained?
 - c. Do you feel there are any key partners or supporters are missing?
 - d. Is there a difference between the level of county support versus local support for The Big Lift?

Part IV: Collective Impact–Backbone Infrastructure

9. In your opinion has The Big Lift collaborative established an effective backbone structure at the county and/or local level (e.g., clear governance structure, influential champions, clear guidelines for each workgroup)?
 - i. [If yes] What makes it effective?
 - ii. [If no] What makes you say that? How could the backbone infrastructure be improved at the county and/or local level?
 - iii. Who is making decisions? Are decisions made collectively?
 - iv. Has your understanding of the backbone infrastructure changed over the last year?

Part V: Collective Impact–Continuous Communication

10. To what extent are The Big Lift collaborative members kept informed about decisions, progress, and challenges encountered by the initiative?
 - a. How is that sort of information shared with collaborative members?

- b. Are there differences in how communication occurs at the local level, then how it occurs at the county level? [If yes] What are they?
11. How, if at all, could the communication within the collaborative be improved, both locally and county-wide?

Part VI: Collective Impact–Shared Measurement

12. Can you describe your involvement in data collection and data entry, if any, for The Big Lift?
- a. Has the support provided for the process been adequate?
 - b. What are some of the challenges with data collection or data entry?
 - c. What has worked well in terms of data collection or data entry to date?
13. Are you aware of results that are being presented back to leadership or the community? If so, what and how are results presented (e.g., email format; newsletter)?

Part VII: Concluding Questions

Earlier we asked about challenges and successes during the first year of program implementation. Now we have a few last questions on the overall initiative.

14. Looking ahead, what do you think should be of top priority for The Big Lift over the next year?
15. Other than what we've discussed already [cite examples if possible], are there areas in which the initiative is experiencing significant challenges currently? Or areas that you anticipate there being challenges in the future?*
- a. How, if at all, is the collaborative addressing those challenges?
16. What else is needed to continue supporting The Big Lift's progress?*
17. Other than what we've discussed already [cite examples if possible], are there areas in which The Big Lift collaborative is experiencing any particular successes that you would like to share? Are there successes you anticipate in the future?*
18. Are there any questions about The Big Lift or about your collaborative process that I should have asked, but didn't?

Thank you very much for your time!

*Priority questions

DATA-COLLECTION WAVE 2 SUMMER DIRECTORS PROTOCOL

PART I: Involvement with The Big Lift

Last year we asked about your involvement in The Big Lift, this year we want to start with similar questions to see how your role may have evolved over the past year.

1. What is your current role in The Big Lift and how, if at all, has it changed over time?

- a. [If not clear from above prompts] How would you characterize how much you're participating in The Big Lift (a little, a lot, it varies)?
2. Can you walk us through the implementation process of the Big Lift Inspiring Summer (BLIS) program this past summer—from the beginning of your involvement to the last day of the program?
3. What were some of the successes BLIS experienced during the first year of program implementation (school year 15–16)?
4. What have been some of the challenges BLIS has faced in the first year?
5. How have you and/or The Big Lift leadership responded to challenges? What changes have been made in response to the challenges? [Probe for specific examples.]
6. Can you describe the data collection, entry, and analysis process for BLIS?
 - a. In your opinion, has the support provided from The Big Lift leadership for the process been adequate?
 - b. What are some of the challenges with data collection or data entry?
 - c. What has worked well in terms of data collection or data entry to date?
7. In what ways has information on first year progress and program implementation been shared out to school districts and community members?
 - a. How has the information been received, or in other words, how has the community reacted to the information?
8. How, if at all, could the communication within the collaborative regarding BLIS be improved?

Part II: Summer Pillar Implementation 2017

Now, we would like to ask a few questions about the 2017 summer program.

9. Can you describe the planning process for summer 2017? What steps were or are being taken to prepare for the program?
 - a. For example, can you walk us through any current or planned activities for:
 - i. Staff recruitment and hiring
 - ii. Staff professional development/training?
 - iii. Student recruitment
 - iv. Programming (e.g., curriculum, daily schedule)
10. How are decisions being made about programming for the various pillars?
 - a. Are decisions about programming being made at the county level that influence how your local community is making decisions about The Big Lift? [If yes] In what ways?
11. We understand that BLIS combines programs from both BELL and the county library—how, if at all, do the two programs work together?
12. To what extent do the BLIS programs have the necessary resources to be successful?
 - a. How is the county supporting the local collaborative in providing necessary resources?

PART III: Collective Impact

The next set of questions focuses more broadly on The Big Lift initiative and the collective impact approach.

13. How would you describe the collective impact approach of The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. How, if at all, has the collective nature evolved during the first year of program implementation?
 - b. Do you think this approach is different at the county versus the local collaborative level? [If so] How?
14. Do you feel there is broad-based support for The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. [If yes] How has that broad-based support been gained? [Probe for how the backbone infrastructure is ensuring that support]
 - b. [If no] Why do you think that is? How do you think that support could be gained?
 - c. Do you feel there are any key partners or supporters are missing?
 - d. [If part of a local collaborative] Is there a difference between the level of county support versus local support for The Big Lift?

Part IV: Collective Impact–Backbone Infrastructure

15. In your opinion has The Big Lift collaborative established an effective backbone structure at the county and/or local level (e.g., clear governance structure, influential champions, clear guidelines for each workgroup)?
 - a. [If yes] What makes it effective?
 - b. [If no] What makes you say that? How could the backbone infrastructure be improved at the county and/or local level?
 - c. Who is making decisions? Are decisions made collectively?
 - d. Has your understanding of the backbone infrastructure changed over the last year?

Part V: Concluding Questions

Earlier we asked about challenges and successes during the first year of BLIS program implementation. Now we have a few last questions on the overall initiative.

16. Looking ahead, what do you think should be of top priority for The Big Lift over the next year?
 17. Other than what we've discussed already [cite examples if possible], are there areas in which the initiative is experiencing significant challenges currently? Or areas that you anticipate there being challenges in the future?*
- a. How, if at all, is the collaborative addressing those challenges?
18. What else is needed to continue supporting The Big Lift's progress?*
 19. Other than what we've discussed already [cite examples if possible], are there areas in which The Big Lift collaborative is experiencing any particular successes that you would like to share? Are there successes you anticipate in the future?*
 20. Are there any questions about The Big Lift or about your collaborative process that I should have asked, but didn't?

Thank you very much for your time!

*Priority questions

Appendix B. Wilder Collaboration Items

Survey Questions (rated on a 5-point scale; 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)

| |
|--|
| Collaborative Environment |
| Agencies in our community have a history of working together. |
| Trying to solve problems through collaboration has been common in this community. It's been done a lot before. |
| Leaders in this community who are not part of our collaborative group seem hopeful about what we can accomplish. |
| Others (in the community) who are not part of this collaboration would generally agree that the organizations involved in this collaborative project are the "right" organizations to make this work. |
| The political and social climate seems to be "right" for starting a collaborative project like this one. |
| The time is right for this collaborative project. |
| Member Characteristics |
| People involved in our collaboration always trust one another. |
| I have a lot of respect for the other people involved in this collaboration. |
| The people involved in our collaboration represent a cross section of those who have a stake in what we are trying to accomplish. |
| All the organizations that we need to be members of this collaborative group have become members of the group. |
| My organization will benefit from being involved in this collaboration. |
| People involved in our collaboration are willing to compromise on important aspects of our project. |
| Collaborative Process |
| The organizations that belong to our collaborative group invest the right amount of time in our collaborative efforts. |
| Everyone who is a member of our collaborative group wants this project to succeed. |
| The level of commitment among the collaboration participants is high. |
| When the collaborative group makes major decisions, there is always enough time for members to take information back to their organizations to confer with colleagues about what the decision should be. |
| Each of the people who participate in decisions in this collaborative group can speak for the entire organization they represent, not just a part. |
| There is a lot of flexibility when decisions are made; people are open to discussing different options. |
| People in this collaborative group are open to different approaches to how we can do our work. They are willing to consider different ways of working. |
| People in this collaborative group have a clear sense of their roles and responsibilities. |
| There is a clear process for making decisions among the partners in this collaboration. |
| This collaboration is able to adapt to changing conditions, such as fewer funds than expected, changing political climate, or change in leadership. |
| This group has the ability to survive even if it had to make major changes in its plans or add some new members in order to reach its goals. |
| This collaborative group has tried to take on the right amount of work at the right pace. |
| We are currently able to keep up with the work necessary to coordinate all the people, organizations, and activities related to this collaborative project. |
| Collaborative Communication |
| People in this collaboration communicate openly with one another. |
| I am informed as often as I should be about what goes on in the collaboration. |
| The people who lead this collaborative group communicate well with the members. |

| |
|---|
| Communication among the people in this collaborative group happens both at formal meetings and in informal ways. |
| I personally have informal conversations about the project with others who are involved in this collaborative group. |
| Collaborative Purpose |
| I have a clear understanding of what our collaboration is trying to accomplish. |
| People in our collaborative group know and understand our goals. |
| People in our collaborative group have established reasonable goals. |
| The people in this collaborative group are dedicated to the idea that we can make this project work. |
| My ideas about what we want to accomplish with this collaboration seem to be the same as the ideas of others. |
| What we are trying to accomplish with our collaborative project would be difficult for any single organization to accomplish by itself. |
| No other organization in the community is trying to do exactly what we are trying to do. |
| Resources |
| Our collaborative group has adequate funds to do what it wants to accomplish. |
| Our collaborative group has adequate "people power" to do what it wants to accomplish. |
| The people in leadership positions for this collaboration have good skills for working with other people and organizations. |

Appendix C. Focus Group Protocols

Focus group questions were directly aligned with specific pillars. In summers 2016 and 2017, we conducted focus groups with teachers in the summer program, including certified elementary school teachers, teaching assistants, and enrichment facilitators. These focus groups occurred mid-program, while BLIS was underway. During these focus groups, we asked a series of questions regarding the implementation of the summer program to date. Questions covered topics such as the perceived goals of BLIS, description of a typical day during the summer, curriculum and materials, training and support, and overall challenges and successes of the program. We asked similar questions to an additional focus group of PPLs, who each act as program managers for the BLIS program in their respective district.

In spring and summer 2017, we also conducted focus groups with preschool staff (one with preschool directors and three with preschool teachers). During these focus groups, we asked a series of questions regarding how Big Lift funds had been used, what sort of professional development and support teachers had received through the Big Lift funds, and about the different family engagement activities in which preschools had been engaged.

Additional Information on Focus Group Methods

We or the summer or preschool program director initially contacted BLIS and preschool teachers by email to let them know about the RAND focus groups. BLIS coordinators and preschool program directors were recruited by RAND researchers. RAND researchers then followed up with an email to all potential focus group participants regarding details for the meeting, including location, and that participants would receive a meal and a \$20 Target gift card for attending the focus group. A reminder email was sent to participants in cases when focus groups had not reached capacity (10-12 participants). Participants were also told that we would not disclose their participation and that it was completely voluntary. One to two members from our team led the focus groups, and each lasted approximately 30 minutes to one hour. During the meetings, extensive notes were taken, and the session was audio recorded (with the participants' permission) to supplement the notes. Participants were told that quotations used in reports would not be identified.

PRESCHOOL DIRECTOR PROTOCOL

PART I: Introductions

1. To begin, please go around the room and let us know:
 - a. Your first name

- a. The district in which you work
- b. How long you have been in your position as a preschool director

[BEGIN NOTE-TAKING AND AUDIO RECORDING AFTER INTRODUCTIONS]

2. Can you also state whether your preschool program is year-round or school year and whether it operates full or half day programs?

PART II: Understanding of The Big Lift and role of preschool in the initiative

3. How would you describe The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. How would you describe the goals of the preschool pillar in particular?
4. In what ways has your center been involved with The Big Lift?

PART III: The Big Lift Funding

5. When did your center first receive The Big Lift funds?
6. Can you describe how your center has used The Big Lift funds?
 - a. Programming activities?
 - b. Opening additional classrooms?
 - c. Extending school year or day?
 - d. Teacher professional development? [Probe on coaching as well as training.]
 - e. Classroom or programming materials?
 - f. Additional staff?
7. Can you describe your experiences working with budgeting for The Big Lift?
 - a. Have you found the process easy, difficult?
 - b. What improvements can be made?
8. Do you have flexibility in how you use The Big Lift funds?
9. If your program is in the second year of funding, what differences do you see from the first to second year, if any?

PART IV: Family Engagement in The Big Lift preschool

10. Does your preschool provide family engagement activities?
 - a. If so, can you describe them?
 - b. Are they teacher led or is there a family engagement specialist that leads all activities?
11. Does your preschool program implement Raising A Reader or Raising a Reader+?
 - a. If so, what are your experiences with the programs?

PART V: Overall Questions

12. [For pre-existing centers] If someone had walked into your center pre-Big Lift funds and then again post-Big Lift funds—what changes, if any, would they see?

13. Do you believe that your districts and schools have the resources and support they need to implement The Big Lift preschool program as intended?
 - a. If not, what is missing?
14. What are some of the most challenging elements of your work with The Big Lift?
15. What are some of the most beneficial or successful elements of your work with The Big Lift?
16. Is there anything else about your experience with The Big Lift program to date that I should have asked but didn't?

PRESCHOOL TEACHER PROTOCOL

PART I: Introductions

1. To begin, please go around the room and let us know:
 - a. Your first name
 - b. The district in which you work
 - c. How long you have been in your position as a preschool director

[BEGIN NOTE-TAKING AND AUDIO RECORDING AFTER INTRODUCTIONS]

2. Can you also state whether your preschool program is year-round or school year and whether it operates full or half day programs?

PART II: Understanding of The Big Lift and role of preschool in the initiative

3. How would you describe The Big Lift initiative?
 - a. How would you describe the goals of the preschool pillar in particular?
4. In what ways has your center been involved with The Big Lift?
5. If your program is in the second year of funding, what differences do you see from the first to second year, if any?

PART III: Family Engagement in The Big Lift Preschool

6. Does your preschool provide family engagement activities?
 - a. If so, can you describe them?
 - b. Are they teacher led or is there a family engagement specialist that leads all activities?
7. Does your preschool program implement Raising A Reader or Raising a Reader+?
 - a. If so, what are your experiences with the programs?

PART IV: Teacher Development and Coaching

8. Can you describe any training or professional development you participate in prior to the start of a preschool year, if any?

- b. Are the activities provided by the preschool center or through another organization?
 - c. Is the training or professional development mandatory?
9. What professional development opportunities are provided during the preschool year?
- a. Are the activities provided by the preschool center or through another organization?
 - b. Is the training or professional development mandatory?
10. Do you know if any of the PD opportunities you've described are facilitated or funded by The Big Lift?
- a. [If yes] Can you describe these activities in more detail? [Probe on frequency and duration of activities, who led activities, where activities took place, content of activities.]
 - b. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with five being highest possible quality), how would you rate the quality of these activities?
11. Does The Big Lift provide opportunities or funding for professional conferences?
- a. If so, do you take up any of the offers or use funding for conference?

PART V: Overall Questions

12. [For pre-existing centers] If someone had walked into your center pre-Big Lift funds and then again post-Big Lift funds—what changes, if any, would they see?
13. Do you believe that your districts and schools have the resources and support they need to implement The Big Lift preschool program as intended?
- a. If not, what is missing?
14. What are some of the most challenging elements of your work with The Big Lift?
15. What are some of the most beneficial or successful elements of your work with The Big Lift?
16. Is there anything else about your experience with The Big Lift program to date that I should have asked but didn't?

SUMMER TEACHER PROTOCOL

PART I: Involvement in Inspiring Summers

1. To begin, please go around the room and let us know:
- a. Your first name
 - b. Where you are teaching this summer
 - c. What grade and/or subject (if relevant) you teach during the school year

[BEGIN NOTE-TAKING AND AUDIO RECORDING AFTER INTRODUCTIONS]

PART II: Understanding of The Big Lift and Inspiring Summers

2. Have you heard of The Big Lift? [If so] What do you understand to be the overarching goals of The Big Lift?

3. What do you understand to be the goals of the Inspiring Summers program, in particular?

PART III: Daily Schedule

4. Can someone walk me through a typical day in the Inspiring Summers program?
5. To what extent are you using the curriculum provided to you for this program—every day, some days, not at all?
 - a. Are you using any other curricular materials besides the curriculum you were given for this program?
6. Do you feel that the curriculum is helping to prepare your students for the grade they'll be entering into next year? Why or why not?
 - a. Are the summer program curriculum lesson plans clear and easy to follow?

PART IV: Support

7. What sort of training did you receive to help you prepare for the summer?
 - a. How long was the training?
 - b. What topics were covered?
 - c. How could it be improved?
8. What sort of support have you received now that the program has begun?
 - a. How could it be improved? What additional supports, if any, would be helpful?

Part V: Overall Questions

9. What two words would you use to describe the Inspiring Summers program? [Go around the table.]
10. Have you experienced any challenges in teaching with the Inspiring Summers program this summer?
11. What could be improved about the Inspiring Summers program in future years?
 - a. From your point of view as a teacher?
 - b. From the point of view of your students and their families?
12. What elements of Inspiring Summers have worked well this year and should be continued in future years?
13. Is there anything else about your experience with the Inspiring Summers program that I should have asked but didn't?

SUMMER COORDINATOR PROTOCOL

PART I: Involvement in Inspiring Summers

1. To begin, please go around the room and let us know:
 - a. Your first name
 - b. The district in which you work
 - c. How long you have been in your position as BLIS coordinator

[BEGIN NOTE-TAKING AND AUDIO RECORDING AFTER INTRODUCTIONS]

PART II: Understanding of BLIS and role

2. What are the main goals of BLIS?
 - a. How, if at all, do you see BLIS fitting into the broader scope of The Big Lift initiative in your districts?
3. Can you describe your role?
 - a. What are your key tasks?
 - b. What does a typical day look like for you?
 - c. Who do you report to? Who else is on your team?
4. [For anyone who was in this role last year] Has your role changed since you worked with BLIS last year?

PART III: Planning for BLIS

5. Can you describe how the planning process has worked leading up to the start of this summer's BLIS program?
 - a. When did you start planning?
 - b. Do you meet regularly about BLIS? If so, who do you meet with?
 - c. [For anyone who was in this role last year] Has the planning process been different from last year? If so, in what ways?
6. What has worked well about the planning process?
7. What could be improved about the planning process?
8. Do you feel prepared for the program to start this summer? If not, what elements for you feel unprepared for?

PART IV: BLIS Enrollment

9. Have you all been involved in the BLIS enrollment process in your district?
 - a. If so, can you describe the process?
 - b. Do you have too few, too many, or just the right amount of students enrolled for this summer?
 - c. Did you encounter any barriers to enrolling students in BLIS?
 - d. Has anything worked particularly well about the enrollment process?

Part V: BLIS Staffing

10. In your district, what staff will be involved in implementing the BLIS program during the summer? [Probe for staff structure at the school—role of principal, role of coaches, etc.]
11. Were you all involved in the hiring process for BLIS teachers?
 - a. If so, can you describe what that process has looked like?
 - b. What has worked well about the hiring process?
 - c. What has been challenging about the hiring process?

12. What sort of training will BLIS teachers (both academic and enrichment) receive prior to starting the summer program?
 - a. Do feel that BLIS teachers will be prepared on Day One of the program?

Part VI: BLIS Programming

13. Can someone walk me through what you imagine will be a typical day for students in BLIS this summer?
 - a. Will everyone's typical day be similar to this, or are there variations? [Probe for time spent on instruction versus enrichment time.]
 - b. [For anyone who was in this role last year] Do you anticipate that the BLIS day will look different than it did last year? If so, in what ways?
14. What sort of support will BLIS teachers receive once the summer program has started?

Part VII: Overall Questions

15. Do you believe that your districts and schools have the resources they need to implement BLIS as intended this summer?
 - a. If not, what is missing?
16. Do you believe you have the support you need to do your job as BLIS coordinator?
17. If not, what is missing?
18. What are your biggest concerns about BLIS going into this summer?
19. What are you most excited about for BLIS going into this summer?
20. Is there anything else about your experience with the BLIS program to date that I should have asked but didn't?