

Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” in Alameda County WIC Clinics

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FINDINGS MEMO



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Executive Summary

Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” at Alameda County WIC Clinics

Too Small to Fail, in collaboration with First 5 Alameda County and the Alameda County WIC Program, partnered to expand the Oakland the *Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing* campaign at four WIC clinic locations throughout Alameda county. In fall 2018, staff members from First 5 Alameda’s Help Me Grow initiative led an in-person training for WIC Clinic staff using training materials provided by *Too Small to Fail*. First 5 Alameda provided ongoing support to the Clinics as they implemented the initiative with approximately 885 parents.

In late 2018 and early 2019, WIC Clinic staff members shared a brief educational session and materials with parents of children approximately 6 months old during their regular visit with the Nutrition Assistant or Nutritionist. WIC Clinic staff talked with parents about the importance of talking, reading, and singing with their child, and about making healthy eating choices. The materials included a *Talking is Teaching* tote bag, children’s book, placemat, and bib, and were available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.¹ The initiative evaluator, Public Profit, developed brief surveys for parents to complete just after participating in the educational session with a WIC Clinic staff member, and again two to three months later. WIC Clinic staff who offered the educational sessions also completed surveys about their experience.

Shifts in parents’ knowledge and behaviors

A majority of survey participants reported that they knew about the importance of talking, reading, and singing with their children before interacting with their trusted messenger and receiving the tote bag, yet many still reported a shift to knowing “a lot” about the subject after their WIC Clinic visit. Sixty-six percent (66%) of parents reported they knew “a lot” before their WIC Clinic visit, and 88% said the same after. Similarly, six in ten parents (60%) reported they knew “a lot” about the importance of talking with their children about healthy eating; 85% of respondents said they knew “a lot” after meeting with their WIC Clinic staff member. Spanish-speaking parents were particularly likely to report a shift in knowledge about both the importance of talking, reading, and singing and about talking with children about healthy eating.

A few months after participating in the *Talking is Teaching* campaign, participating parents were asked in a follow up survey if they were doing anything differently because of what they learned at their last visit. Ninety four percent of parents (94%) reported that they were doing something different with their child since meeting with a WIC Clinic staff person,² including talking more often with their child (78%), singing more (68%), trying healthy foods (68%), and reading more (65%).

¹ Tote bags and bibs were not available in Chinese and therefore not provided to Chinese-speaking families, though all other materials were provided.

² This is similar to findings from studies conducted at the Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland (100%), and higher than a study at the Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital (79%).

About the WIC Clinic Initiative

One of the goals of WIC is to help parents of young children to support their healthy physical and cognitive development. Parent education and support initiatives play a key role in reaching this programmatic goal.

Too Small to Fail, in collaboration with First 5 Alameda County and the Alameda County WIC Program, partnered to expand the Oakland *Talking is Teaching* campaign at four WIC Clinic locations throughout Alameda county. In fall 2018, staff members from First 5 Alameda's Help Me Grow initiative led an in-person training for WIC Clinic staff using training materials provided by *Too Small to Fail*. First 5 Alameda provided ongoing support to the Clinics as they implemented the initiative among approximately 885 clients.

In late 2018 and early 2019, WIC Clinic staff members shared a brief educational session and materials parents of children approximately 6 months old at their regular visit with the Nutritionist or Nutrition Assistant. WIC Clinic staff talked with parents about the importance of talking, reading, and singing with their child, and about making healthy eating choices. The materials included a *Talking is Teaching* tote bag, children's book, placemat, and bib, and were available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.⁴

The Initiative Evaluation

Too Small to Fail asked Public Profit, an independent evaluation consultancy, to evaluate the WIC Clinic initiative. The study focuses on the ways in which the educational session and materials influenced parents' knowledge and behaviors about talking, reading and singing with young children and about eating healthy foods.

Public Profit developed brief surveys for parents to complete just after participating in the educational session with a WIC Clinic staff member, and again two to three months later. WIC Clinic staff who offered the educational sessions also completed surveys about their experience.

The findings presented in this highlights brief are drawn from 885 client surveys just after the educational sessions, 231 surveys completed a few months later, and 24 WIC Clinic staff surveys.⁵

Since parent surveys were not matched by individual respondent, the shifts in parents' behaviors reported here indicate broad trends among the participating parents, rather than a precise estimate of individual level behavior changes.

⁴ Tote bags and bibs were not available in Chinese and therefore not provided to Chinese-speaking WIC clinic clients, though all other materials were provided.

⁵ Of the 29 complete surveys received, 4 were duplicate submissions with contradictory answers, so were removed from the sample. The remaining duplicate submission was consolidated into 1 entry.

Nearly all parents – 96% - reported using at least one of the materials they received.³ Parents who completed the survey were most likely to report using the book (84%), bib (76%), and tote bag (75%). Fewer parents reported using the placemat (59%) and tipsheet (45%).

WIC staff members' experience of Talking is Teaching

WIC Clinic staff reported on the extent to which they felt prepared to deliver the educational session with clients. Of the 24 staff members who completed a survey, nearly two-thirds (63%) said they felt “very prepared” to talk with their clients about the importance of talking, reading, and singing, and 38% reported they were “somewhat prepared.” Similarly, 96% of responding staff members reported that they felt “very prepared” to talk with parents about the importance of healthy eating.

When asked whether the *Talking is Teaching* campaign helped them in other ways, 81% of WIC Clinic staff reported that the campaign helped them to enhance the current services offered at the WIC Clinic. When asked whether the *Talking is Teaching* initiative should continue, 50% of staff members reported that it is “very important” that it continue, and 50% said it was “somewhat important.”

³ This is similar to study findings from Talk, Read, Sing initiatives at the Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland (98%), and Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital (96%).

About the Project Partners

Too Small to Fail, the early childhood initiative of the Clinton Foundation, is leading a public awareness and action campaign to promote the importance of early brain and language development and to empower parents with tools to talk, read, and sing with their young children from birth. Today, almost 60 percent of children in the United States start kindergarten unprepared, lagging behind their peers in critical language and reading skills. Through partnerships with pediatricians, hospitals, faith leaders, community-based organizations, businesses, entertainment industry leaders, and others, *Too Small to Fail* is meeting parents where they are to help them prepare their children for success in school and beyond. Whether at the pediatrician’s office or the playground, *Too Small to Fail* aims to make small moments big by creating opportunities for meaningful interactions anytime, anywhere.

First 5 Alameda County⁶ helps young children grow up healthy and ready to learn during the most important time in their development. Since its creation by passage of Proposition 10 in 1998, First 5 Alameda has funded innovative programs and advocating for policies that produce better futures for children ages 0-5 and their families. Help Me Grow Alameda County, an initiative of First 5, collaborates with agencies, families and providers to help ensure children ages birth through 5 years reach their optimal development. Help Me Grow has partnered with Alameda County WIC since 2015 to connect parents with questions or concerns about their child’s development to a child development care coordinator for support, and served as the primary point of contact with the WIC Clinics that participated in this initiative.

WIC (Women, Infants & Children) is a national nutrition education program that promotes healthy eating through parent education and financial assistance to purchase healthy foods. In Alameda County, WIC is administered by the Alameda County Public Health Department. Through WIC, parents of young children get nutrition advice, help with breastfeeding, and referrals to other community services, offered at WIC Clinics throughout the county.



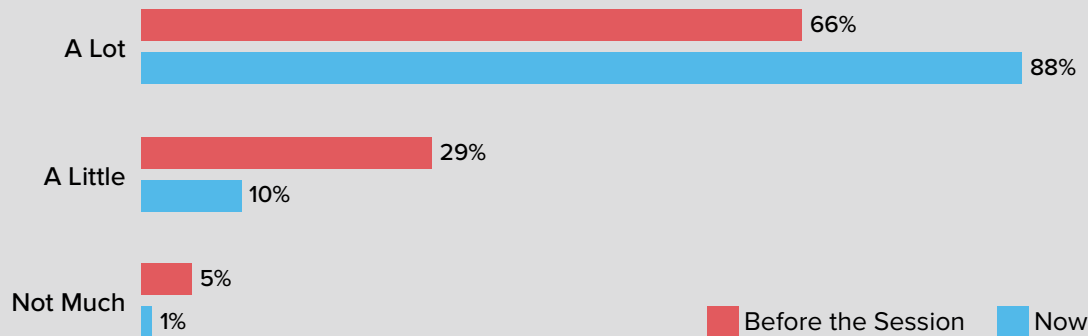
Parents’ Knowledge and Attitudes

Immediately after the educational session with a WIC Clinic staff person, parents were asked to rate their knowledge about the importance of specific types of interactions with their children.

A majority of survey participants reported that they knew about the importance of talking, reading, and singing with their children before speaking with a WIC staff person, yet many reported a shift to knowing “a lot” about the subject after their WIC Clinic visit. Sixty-six percent (66%) of parents reported they knew “a lot” before their visit, whereas 88% said they knew “a lot” after.

Spanish-speaking parents were particularly likely to report a change in their knowledge: 53% reported they knew “a lot” about the importance of talking, reading, and singing with children before their visit, 89% said they knew “a lot” afterward.

Figure 1. Parents reported a notable shift in their knowledge of the importance of talking, reading, and singing with their child



Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 1, N=885. Due to rounding, numbers may not add up to 100%

At all WIC Clinics more parents reported they knew “a lot” about the importance of talking, reading, and singing with children after their visit than before. The percentage of parents varied across site. The largest change in knowledge was observed at Fremont, where nearly all parents reported knowing a lot after the session (94%) compared to before (67%), an increase of 27 percentage points. The smallest change in knowledge was observed at Telegraph, an increase of 16 percentage points (68% to 84%).

⁶ First 5 Alameda County is based in Alameda County, California, in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Table 1. Percent of parents reported they knew “a lot” about the importance of talking, reading and singing with their child

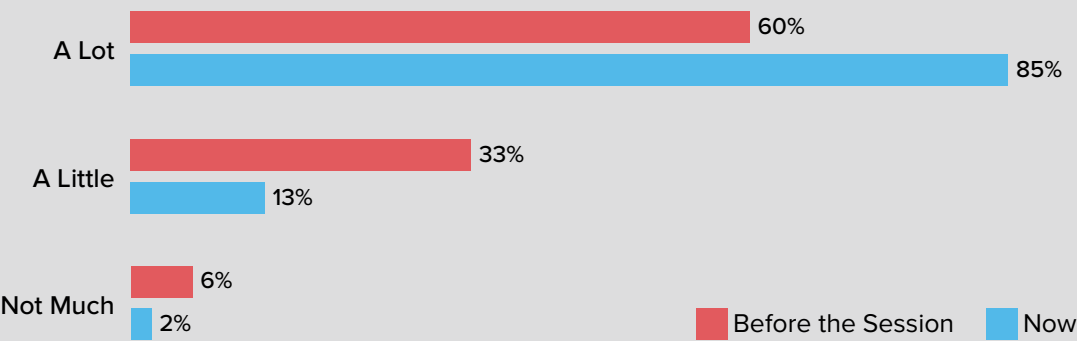
	Overall	Eastmont	Fremont	Hayward	Telegraph
Before the Session	66%	67%	67%	65%	68%
Now	88%	91%	94%	87%	84%*

Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 1, N=885.
* Statistically significant difference among program sites at $p < .05$.

Similarly, six in ten parents (60%) reported they knew “a lot” about the importance of talking with their children about healthy eating; 85% of respondents said they knew “a lot” after meeting with their WIC Clinic staff member.

Spanish-speaking parents were particularly likely to report a shift in their knowledge: the proportion of parents who reported they know “a lot” about the importance of speaking with children about the importance of healthy eating rose from 49% to 86%. Chinese-speaking parents also reported a shift in their knowledge (42% before to 63% after). Similarly, all Chinese-speaking parents who reported that before the session they had “not much” knowledge about the importance of speaking with children about healthy eating (16%) reported knowing “a little” or “a lot” after the session.

Figure 2. Eighty five percent of parents report knowing “a lot” about the importance of talking about healthy foods after their Talking is Teaching session



Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 1, N=885. Due to rounding, numbers may not add up to 100%

Table 2. The proportion of parents who report knowing “a lot” about the importance of talking about healthy eating with their child varies by language

	Overall	English	Spanish	Chinese
Before the Session	60%	65%*	49%	42%
Now	85%	86%	86%	63%*

Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 1, N=885.
* Statistically significant difference among survey languages at $p < .05$.

Twenty-four (24) WIC Clinic staff completed a survey that explored their observations of their clients’ experience of the initiative. When asked if their clients learned something new, 21% reported “my clients learned a lot” and 75% reported “my clients learned a few things.” Just one responding staff person (4%) reported their clients didn’t learn anything new.

Shifts in Parents' Behaviors

When asked about their plans immediately after the Talking is Teaching session, parents reported that they planned to talk more often with their child (80%), read more often (80%) and sing more often (76%).

Among Chinese-speaking respondents, 100% reported that they planned to talk more with their child, compared to 88% of Spanish-speaking, and 77% of English-speaking respondents. These differences held for planning to read more often (88% for Chinese speakers, 86% for Spanish speakers, and 78% for English speakers), and for planning on singing more (94% for Chinese speakers, 83% for Spanish speakers, and 73% for English speakers). These differences are all statistically significant.

Table 3. Parents plan to talk and read more with their child after the Talking is Teaching session

	Overall	English	Spanish	Chinese
Read more	80%	78%	86%	88%*
Talk more	80%	77%	88%	100%*
Sing more	76%	73%	83%	94%*
Try healthy foods	71%	68%	76%	81%*

Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 1, N=885.
* Statistically significant difference among program sites at $p < .05$.

Minor differences were observed between WIC Clinic sites. Parents at Telegraph were least likely to report plans to read more with their child, while parents at Fremont were most likely to report plans to talk more (these differences are not statistically significant). A higher percentage of parents reported no plans to do anything differently at Telegraph (15%) than any other site (ranging from 5-8%); a statistically significant difference.

A few months after participating in the *Talking is Teaching* educational session, parents were asked if they were doing anything differently because of what they learned at their last visit. Ninety four percent of parents (94%) reported that they were doing something different with their child since meeting with a WIC Clinic staff person.⁷

When asked what they are doing differently, parents reported talking more often with their child (77%), singing more (68%), trying healthy foods (68%), and reading more (65%). There were no statistically significant differences among parents' reported interactions based on the language of their survey or WIC Clinic site.

Figure 3. The majority of parents reported interacting with their child more often a few months after their initial Talking is Teaching conversation



Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 2, N=231.

Table 4. Parents' changes in behavior by language

	Overall	English	Spanish	Chinese
Talking more	78%	78%	81%	79%
Singing more	68%	68%	67%	64%
Trying healthy foods	68%	66%	77%	64%
Reading more	65%	65%	67%	50%

Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 2, N=231.

Table 5. Parents' changes in behavior by site

	Overall	Eastmont	Fremont	Hayward	Telegraph
Talking more	78%	84%	68%	78%	77%
Singing more	68%	66%	68%	66%	81%
Trying healthy foods	67%	69%	66%	70%	62%
Reading more	65%	68%	58%	67%	58%

Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 2, N=231.

⁷ This is similar to findings from studies conducted at the Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland (100%), and higher than a study at the Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital (79%).

Parents’ Use of Educational Materials

Immediately after their meeting with a WIC Clinic staff member, parents were asked to report which of the Talking is Teaching materials they planned to use. The largest number of parents reported they planned to use the book and bib followed by the tote bag, placemat, and tipsheet.⁸ Just seven responding parents (1%) said they don’t plan to use any materials.

Figure 4. WIC Clinic parents planned to use the Talking is Teaching materials



Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 1, N=885.

Chinese-speaking parents were less likely than their peers to report planning to use any of the items. Parents at the Hayward Clinic were more likely than their peers to report planning to use the book, bib, placemat, and tipsheet. Available evidence does not indicate why this may be the case.

Table 6. Chinese-speaking parents were less likely to plan to use the items

	Overall	English	Spanish	Chinese
Book	87%	88%	86%	66%*
Bib	84%	82%	87%	NA
Tote	74%	74%	73%	NA
Placemat	71%	75%	62%	56%*
Tipsheet	57%	57%	61%	38%*

Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 1, N=885.

* Statistically significant difference among survey languages at $p < .05$.

⁸ Chinese-speaking parents were not provided a bib or tote bag.

Table 7. Parents at Hayward were more likely than their peers to plan to use the tipsheet

	Eastmont	Fremont	Hayward	Telegraph
Book	84%	85%	90%	87%
Bib	82%	81%	86%	80%
Tote	70%	71%	77%	78%
Placemat	62%*	76%	76%	75%
Tipsheet	47%	53%	65%*	58%

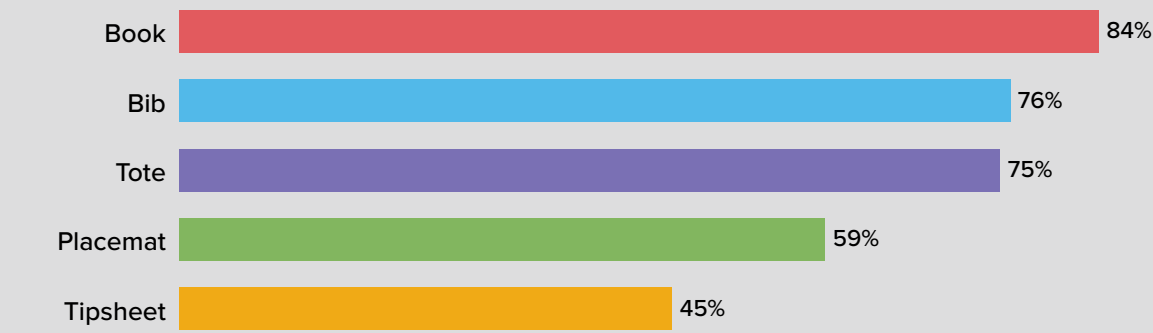
Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 1, N=885.

* Statistically significant difference among survey languages at $p < .05$.

WIC Clinic staff surveys align with parents’ reported plans. Of the 24 staff members who completed a survey, 88% reported that their clients planned to use the tote bag materials. Three staff members (12%) reported that they didn’t talk about the materials with their clients. These staff also reported that they felt “somewhat prepared” to share the importance of talking, reading and singing, suggesting a possible connection between staff members’ perceived preparation and their client-facing interactions. The First Five Alameda liaison with the WIC Clinics noted that it is possible that these responses are from staff members who do not work directly with WIC clients.

Parents’ reports a few months later reflect the intention they set just after the *Talking is Teaching* session. Nearly all parents – 96% - reported using at least one of the materials they received.⁹ Parents who completed the survey were most likely to report using the book (84%), bib (76%), and tote bag (75%). Fewer parents reported using the placemat (59%) and tipsheet (45%).

Figure 5. Parents continued to use Talking is Teaching materials few months after their meeting with the WIC Clinic staff person



Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 2, N=231.

⁹ This is similar to study findings from Talk, Read, Sing initiatives at the Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland (98%), and Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital (96%).

Spanish-speaking parents were notably more likely to report using the bib and tipsheet than their peers, a statistically significant difference. Parents in the Telegraph site were less likely to report using the tipsheet than their peers at other sites. Available evidence doesn't indicate why these patterns exist among survey responses.

Table 8. Spanish-speaking parents were more likely to use the bib and tipsheet

	Overall	English	Spanish	Chinese
Book	84%	83%	91%	79%
Bib	76%	73%	88%*	NA
Tote	75%	74%	79%	NA
Placemat	59%	60%	58%	50%
Tipsheet	44%	41%	63%*	36%

Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 2, N=231.
* Statistically significant difference among survey languages at $p < .05$.

Table 9. Parents in the Telegraph site were less likely to use the tipsheet

	Overall	Eastmont	Fremont	Hayward	Telegraph
Book	84%	83%	84%	88%	77%
Bib	76%	82%	74%	74%	67%
Tote	75%	72%	74%	80%	67%
Placemat	59%	57%	61%	62%	50%
Tipsheet	45%	51%	37%	52%	27%

Source: WIC Clinic parent survey 2, N=231.
* Statistically significant difference among survey languages at $p < .05$.

Further, parents from the Telegraph site were more likely to report they didn't use any of the materials (15%) than the other sites (3%). It is possible that this reflects the relatively large Chinese-speaking population at the Telegraph site. Due to production limitations there were neither bibs nor totes available in Chinese, which may have lessened Chinese-speaking parents' interest in using the materials overall.

Implementation of Talking is Teaching at WIC Clinics

In follow up surveys conducted with parents a few months after their initial *Talking is Teaching* session, 98% of respondents reported that they remembered talking with a WIC Clinic staff person about the importance of talking, reading and singing with their child.¹⁰ This indicates that the educational session and materials were was memorable for clients who returned to their WIC Clinic within a few months of their initial conversation.¹¹

WIC Clinic staff reported on the extent to which they felt prepared to deliver the educational session with clients, and what would have helped them to feel even more prepared. Of the 24 staff members who completed a survey, nearly two-thirds (63%) said they felt “very prepared” to talk with their clients about the importance of talking, reading, and singing, and 38% reported they were “somewhat prepared.” When asked what would help them to feel more confident, staff members asked for more activity ideas, a brief script, more training, and greater access to handouts and books.

Similarly, 96% of responding staff members reported that they felt “very prepared” to talk with their clients about the importance of healthy eating. Just one respondent (4%) felt “somewhat prepared.” When asked if what would help them to feel even more prepared, nearly all staff responded that they had what they needed to talk about nutrition.

Additional Benefits for WIC Clinics

WIC Clinic staff were asked whether *Talking is Teaching* helped them in other ways, such as building relationships with clients and encouraging them to return to the Clinic in the future.

- 81% of respondents reported that the initiative helped them to enhance the current services offered at the WIC Clinic.
- 10% reported that the initiative helped them to build relationships with their clients.
- 10% reported that it helped them to have a conversation about healthy eating with their clients.¹²

When asked whether the *Talking is Teaching* initiative should continue, 50% of staff members reported that it is “very important” that the initiative continue, and 50% said it was “somewhat important.” There were no substantial differences in staff members' responses by program site.

¹⁰ This rate is similar to studies of similar initiatives at the Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland (96%) and Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital (99%).
¹¹ There were no substantial differences in the proportion of parents who remembered talking with a WIC Clinic worker by language or location.
¹² 21 of 24 respondents answered this question.

Conclusion

Too Small to Fail has supported the launch of the *Talking is Teaching* campaign in hospitals, Healthy Start Clinics, and faith communities; the *Talking is Teaching* initiative in Alameda WIC Clinics is an expansion of this model into another family-serving space.

Parents' surveys indicate that their experience of the *Talking is Teaching* initiative was both memorable and meaningful. They report greater knowledge, increased developmental interactions with their child, and continue to use the *Talking is Teaching* materials in the months after their initial conversation. Spanish-speaking parents are notably more likely to report knowing “a lot” about the importance of talking, reading and singing with their child and about the importance of talking about healthy eating after meeting with a WIC Clinic staff person. Spanish speakers were also more likely to report using the bib and tipsheet from the *Talking is Teaching* materials.

The experiences of parents in the Alameda WIC Clinics are quite similar to participants in similar studies supported by *Too Small to Fail*, an encouraging finding about the usefulness and portability of the *Talking is Teaching* model.

For the first time, this study also asked WIC Clinic staff for their opinions of the initiative. Their reports suggest that WIC Clinic staff value *Talking is Teaching*, reporting that it helps to enhance the other parent education and support services offered at the clinic and to strengthen relationships with their clients, key to sustaining contact with parents of young children. Moreover, all surveyed staff indicated that it is either “very important” or “somewhat important” that the initiative continue at their site, another indication of the usefulness of *Talking is Teaching*.

Acknowledgments

Our sincere thanks to all those who were involved in conducting the “Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” intervention and evaluation at Alameda WIC Clinics. This work would not be possible without the dedicated staff members at First 5 Alameda County and the Alameda County WIC Program, researchers at Public Profit, and the participating families whose children received care at Alameda County WIC Clinics. We are especially grateful to the following people for their commitment and support: Angelina Montgomery and Lorren Farrar at First 5 Alameda, as well as Kathleen Willkom, Elizabeth Vado, Candice Poon, Duyen (Kathy Luong) Xing, and Joyce Lin at Alameda WIC Clinics; and Corey Newhouse and Ava Elliott at Public Profit. We are extraordinarily grateful for the generous gift from Lynne and Marc Benioff. Without their support, none of this would be possible.

Appendices

The research excerpted in this brief was completed by Corey Newhouse and Ava Elliott at Public Profit. For a copy of the full reports by Public Profit, please contact *Too Small to Fail* at info@toosmall.org

Appendix: Study Design and Sample Sizes

Study participants were selected from WIC Clinic clients with children approximately 6 months old who visited a WIC Clinic in Alameda County, California between November 1, 2018 and February 28, 2019. Client surveys were fielded in hard copy by WIC Clinic staff immediately after the educational session and at clients' follow-up visit two to three months later. Clients received a free book, *Cooking with You*, in appreciation for their time when they completed the second survey. Surveys were mailed to Public Profit for processing in early March 2019 and again in May and June.

Client surveys were written at a sixth-grade reading level in English and translated into Spanish and Chinese. Survey questions explored parents' knowledge of the importance of healthy nutrition, confidence in their ability to provide healthy meals for their children and use of the educational materials (survey two only).

WIC Clinic staff members who lead educational sessions with clients were asked to complete an online survey between March and April 2019. The survey asked for staff members' observations regarding clients' interest in the session and the materials, as well as any observed shifts in clients' knowledge and behavior. Staff members who completed a survey were entered in a random drawing for a \$25 gift certificate, which was distributed in August 2019.

Survey	Total N	English	Spanish	Chinese
Hayward				
Client survey one	376	296	71	9
Client survey two	90	76	9	5
Staff survey	9	NA	NA	NA
Fremont				
Client survey one	89	77	12	0
Client survey two	38	38	0	0
Staff survey	3	NA	NA	NA
Eastmont				
Client survey one	290	181	109	0
Client survey two	77	42	34	1
Staff survey	6	NA	NA	NA
Telegraph				
Client survey one	130	101	6	23
Client survey two	26	18	0	8
Staff survey	6	NA	NA	NA
Overall				
Client survey one	885	655	198	32
Client survey two	227	174	43	14
Staff survey	24	NA	NA	NA