



FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020

October 2020

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First 5 Santa Cruz County

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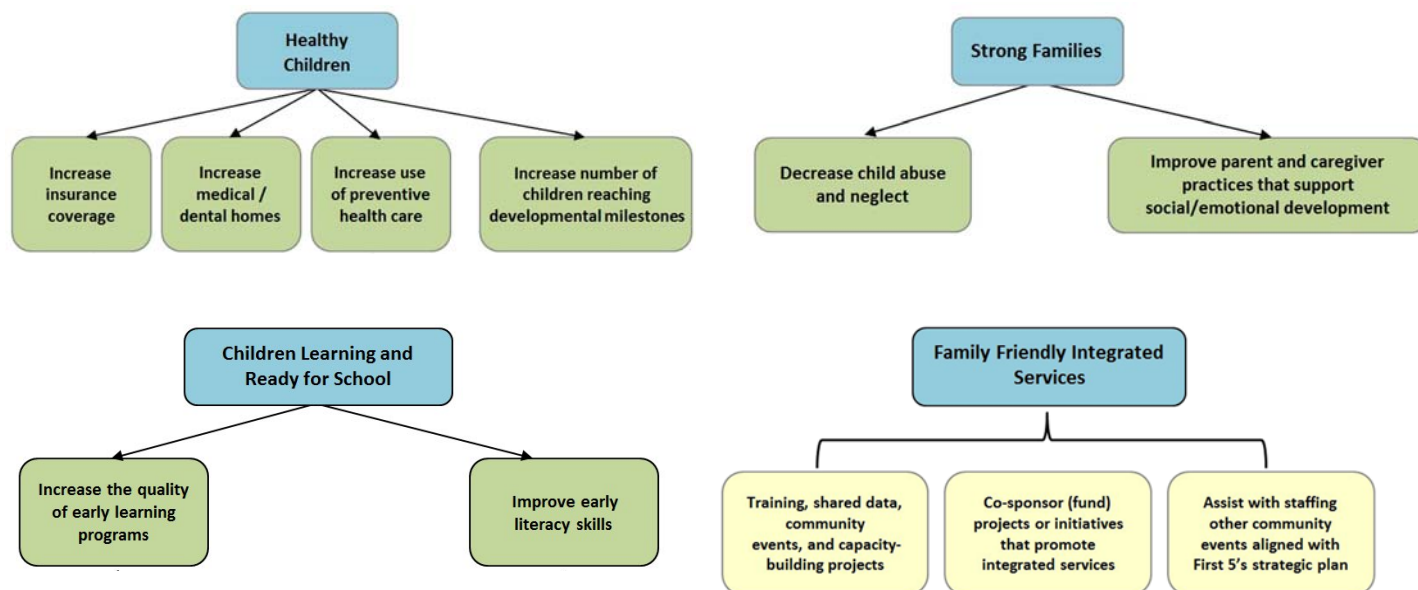
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First 5 Santa Cruz County's Strategic Framework

First 5 Santa Cruz County has the great privilege and responsibility to act as the steward of Proposition 10 ("tobacco tax") resources for young children from prenatal to age 5 in Santa Cruz County. Since its inception in 1998, the Commission has worked to establish a coordinated and integrated system of care and support for children 0-5 and their families.

The 2016-2020 First 5 Santa Cruz County Strategic Plan articulates community goals and results in goal areas of Healthy Children, Strong Families, Children Learning and Ready for School, and Family Friendly Integrated Services. The Strategic Plan was developed with the intentions of: 1) maintaining and further developing current initiatives that were showing high impact and sustainability in the community, 2) continuing to provide a leadership role in several community programs and initiatives, and 3) recognizing a significant decline in funds due to the strategic exhaustion of First 5's fund balance and the ongoing decline in Proposition 10 revenue. The First 5 Santa Cruz County Commission utilizes the strategic framework shown below to guide its funding and programmatic decisions. This enables First 5 to allocate its resources effectively and measure the impact of its investments. See Appendix A for a detailed version of this framework.



This annual report summarizes findings of the First 5 Santa Cruz County evaluation from **July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020**. Many programs are multi-year investments, and therefore some information presented reflects multiple years of data.

Meeting the Challenge of the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic

As the world continues to face the unprecedented difficulties and restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, state and local communities are rallying together to meet the challenge. First 5 and its partners have been working on a number of fronts to support the health, safety, and development of young children and their families during this crisis.

- The **Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program** continues to help enroll eligible newborns into Medi-Cal, at all three hospitals in the county.
- The **VisionFirst program** is working on developing safe and efficient methods for providing vision screening services to young children during the coronavirus pandemic.
- The **Neurodevelopmental Foster Care Clinic (NDFCC)** converted all in-person visits to telephone or online telehealth visits, and was able to respond to all new referrals from Child Protective Services and maintain all recommended follow-up visits.
- During this pandemic, the NDFCC also participated in three county-wide online **Parent Support Groups** co-hosted by First 5, Live Oak Cradle to Career, and the County Office of Education to continue offer parenting support and information through Triple P services.
- First 5 helped the **Triple P practitioners** to continue to offer parenting support services by phone, videoconferencing platforms, or Triple P Online (a structured online program). In April, the Inmate Programs staff switched to an Independent Study program at the local correctional facilities, which allowed participants to continue their Triple P services during the Shelter-in-Place order.
- **Families Together** transitioned to a telehealth service model, and contacted all clients to inform them that services would still be available and staff were going to work via phone or internet to ensure that they received services.
- **Quality Counts Santa Cruz County (QCSCC)** offered professional development and other supports in online formats. A portion of IMPACT and related funding was reallocated to an emergency fund for providers serving children of essential workers.
- First 5 also partnered with the County Office of Education and the Child Development Resource Center on two **supply giveaway events** to hundreds of child care providers in the County, where they distributed supplies provided by First 5 California and other state and local partners. Supplies included diapers, wipes, cleaning supplies, masks, touchless thermometers, children's books, and other valuable resources.
- The **Santa Cruz Reading Corps** Literacy Tutors shifted their service work to creating literacy materials for their classrooms, attending virtual preschool and TK classes, participating in professional development trainings, and volunteering in the community.
- **Raising A Reader** continued to find ways to provide reading materials to families and reach out to the community during the pandemic, and in the coming year will be continuing the rotating book bag program through the local public libraries.

- Drawing on supplies from First 5 California and a generous grant from the Central California Alliance for Health, First 5 completed distribution of baby food, diapers, and baby wipes to over 1,000 **community residents impacted by the pandemic**. First 5 couldn't have succeeded in that effort without their community partners: Santa Cruz Community Health Centers, PVUSD Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, the San Andreas Regional Center and the STARS program, Community Bridges, Encompass Community Services, and Public Health.
- First 5 continued to promote the vital importance of the community's participation in the **2020 Census**.

The COVID-19 pandemic is challenging and on-going, but First 5 is committed to working with County leaders and partners in navigating these tumultuous events and ensuring the collective well-being of our County's children and families. It is First 5's firm conviction that together we will emerge stronger and more interconnected than ever before.

Summary

The following is an Executive Summary of this *Annual Evaluation Report*, providing a review of key County indicators of child and family well-being, a description of the population served by First 5-funded programs, and highlights of the activities and achievements in each of the four goal areas of the 2016-2020 First 5 Santa Cruz County Strategic Plan.

The Importance of Investing in Young Children

A growing body of scientific evidence points to the economic and societal impacts of wise investments in the early years. The Harvard Center for the Developing Child states:

A vital and productive society with a prosperous and sustainable future is built on a foundation of healthy child development. Health in the earliest years lays the groundwork for a lifetime of vitality.

Experiences during the first few years of life – good and bad – literally shape the architecture of the developing brain. Stable, positive relationships with adults and growth-promoting experiences are keys to the development of the architecture that forms the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. When we invest wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.¹

First 5 Santa Cruz County is dedicated to giving children the opportunities they need to reach their full potential.



First 5 Santa Cruz County's Vision

All Santa Cruz County children enter school ready to achieve to their greatest potential.



First 5 Santa Cruz County's Mission

To help children succeed in school and in life, First 5 Santa Cruz County invests in health, early learning, and family support to promote optimal development of Santa Cruz County children.

¹ <http://developingchild.harvard.edu>

Overall Well-Being of Children in the County

First 5 Santa Cruz County invests in health, early learning, and family support to promote the well-being of children. To help guide its investments and partnerships, First 5 monitors county-wide trends that affect child well-being. The year 2019-2020 marks the final year of the 2016-2020 strategic plan, and the following data reflect the status of young children and their families in the County (the most recent data available are reported).

- **Santa Cruz County has a diverse population of young children which is slightly decreasing in number.** In 2020, there were 16,304 children ages 0-5 in Santa Cruz County, continuing a decreasing trend since a high of 18,745 in 2012. The majority of these children were either Hispanic (49%), or Caucasian (44%). This diversity continues into kindergarten, where in 2020 over 38% of children had a primary language other than English.
- **Unemployment is rising, but varies greatly across the County.** In 2019-20, the average unemployment rate in the County was 7.4%, higher than it was the year before (4.9%). Within the County, the percent of unemployed residents differs greatly by area; the average unemployment rate ranges from 2.2% in Capitola to 12.7% in Watsonville.
- **Salaries are rising, but many are still living in poverty.** Although the 2019 median family income was higher than it was five years previously, it was still not enough for many in this County to make ends meet. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2019 over 10% of all people in the County were earning less than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and almost 3% of all children ages 0-5 were living in poverty. However, when incomes were analyzed using different measures that are considered more comprehensive measures of income adequacy (such as the California Poverty Level and Self-Sufficiency Standard), 2019 data estimated that 19% to 45% of families in Santa Cruz County were not able to meet their basic needs.
- **There is varying enrollment in public assistance programs.** In the past five years, there was a relatively unchanged number of students receiving Free and Reduced Price Meals, and decreasing enrollment in the Women, Infants, & Children program. Interestingly, however, in the last year there was an increase in the number of County residents participating in the CalWORKS and the CalFresh programs.
- **Children have health insurance.** In 2019, the vast majority of County children had health insurance (99%). First 5 Santa Cruz County continues to provide assistance to families to enroll in public health insurance programs, to help every child aged 0-5 get insured.
- **Children have access to a provider for routine preventive care.** In 2019, 93% of County children (ages 2-6) who were enrolled in Medi-Cal had access to a primary care practitioner, and 80% of County children (ages 3-6) who were enrolled in Medi-Cal had received a well-child check-up.

"Poverty can impede children's ability to learn and contribute to social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Poverty also can contribute to poor health and mental health."

Risks are greatest for children who experience poverty when they are young and/or experience deep and persistent poverty.

Research is clear that poverty is the single greatest threat to children's well-being."

- National Center for Children in Poverty
< <http://www.nccp.org> >

- **Not all of our youngest children are getting important early screenings.** In 2018, CHIS data showed that 72% of County children ages 0-5 had been to the dentist in the last year. When looking just at children enrolled in Medi-Cal, data from the California Department of Health Care Services showed that 52% of children ages 1-2, and 69% of children ages 3-5 had been to the dentist in the last year, and these numbers had been increasing over the past five years. Early vision screening is also important, and across the state, 2018 data show that only 40% of California children ages 0-5 were getting screened for possible vision problems.
- **Not enough young mothers are receiving prenatal care in the first trimester.** In 2018, the percentage of mothers who received prenatal care in their first trimester was high – 86% — which exceeded the Healthy People 2020 target rate of 78%. However, younger mothers (ages 24 and younger) tended to fall below this target rate, with only 73% receiving first trimester care, although this number has been increasing since a low of 68% in 2013. Additionally, there were differences in receipt of early prenatal care based upon the mother’s source of payment for the care. In 2018, 78% of mothers with Medi-Cal insurance began receiving prenatal care during the first trimester, compared to 94% of mothers with private insurance, although this number has been rising.
- **The number of preterm births and children with low birthweights is staying relatively level.** In 2018, approximately 7.6% of all mothers had preterm births and 6.1% had children with low birthweights, a percentage that has stayed relatively level over the past five years. Interestingly, since the previous year there was very small rise in the percentage of younger mothers (ages 24 and under) having children with low birthweights.
- **The percentage of births to teen mothers in the County is staying low.** In 2018, the percentage of births to teen mothers represented 3.6% of all births in Santa Cruz County, and there was a teen birth rate of 7 per 1,000 (ages 15-19). Both of these measures are staying relatively level after a decreasing trend over the previous five years.
- **Almost half of the births by women in the County were paid for by Medi-Cal.** In 2018, 47% of births, across all age groups, were paid for by Medi-Cal. However, Medi-Cal was utilized by 78% of the births to women under the age of 25.
- **Only some income-eligible children are enrolling in subsidized child care.** In 2020, only 25% of income-eligible infants and toddlers ages 0-2 were enrolled in subsidized child care. Data for income-eligible preschool children ages 3-4 showed that 64% were enrolled in subsidized preschool, an increase over the previous five years. Results from the County DataShare database showed that in 2017, 32% of children ages 0-12 in working families were enrolled in licensed child care.
- **Young children with developmental challenges are getting support.** In 2018-19, 7% of kindergarten students in Santa Cruz County received special education services, demonstrating the importance of having services available to address the developmental issues of these very young children.

- **Third graders are struggling with their reading skills.** In 2019, only 41% of 3rd grade students met or exceeded standards in English language arts/literacy, which is lower than the state average of 49%. Although the county-wide 3rd grade English language arts/literacy scores increased slightly over the previous four years, there are still significant disparities by students' English-language fluency, ethnicity, and economic status.
- **There are decreasing rates of child maltreatment.** The rate of substantiated allegations of child maltreatment in Santa Cruz County has been decreasing, and in 2010 Santa Cruz County moved from being substantially above or at the statewide rates, to below them. However, data are revealing that infants still have substantially higher rates of abuse than toddlers and preschoolers.
- **Many children are experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).** The extreme stress and adversities that children experience can have lifelong impacts on health, well-being, and economic opportunities. Approximately 14% of children ages 0-17 in our county have experienced two or more adverse experiences, as reported by their parents.

A Profile of First 5 Participants

First 5 Santa Cruz County reaches children who can make great gains with early and smart investments

First 5's goal is to serve the most vulnerable children ages 0-5 and their families in Santa Cruz County, including very low-income families, English language learners, and families who live in higher risk zones of the County.

- **First 5-supported programs are wide-reaching:** In 2019-20, First 5 partners served **5,288** unique children ages 0-5, representing 32% of all children these ages in Santa Cruz County. Approximately **2,545 additional services** were provided to children who participated in programs where no client ID was available to track their participation, or who were indirectly supported by a First 5 funded program.
- **First 5 serves a high number of dual language learners:** Of the children served by First 5, 78% were Latino, and 42% of children spoke Spanish in their household. Of all Latino children ages 0-5 in Santa Cruz County, 52% participated in services funded by First 5.
- **First 5 is serving children in the highest risk zones of the County.** The new "California Strong Start Index" uses information collected at birth to understand the conditions under which California's babies are born at a very local level, and measures resources that are tied to good outcomes and resilience throughout a person's lifespan, such as healthy birth weight, timely prenatal care, parental education level, and parents' ability to afford and access health care. Of the children served by First 5 in 2019-20 who had known ZIP codes, the vast majority (90%) lived in the areas of the County with the fewest Strong Start assets (the Live Oak area of Santa Cruz, the city of Santa Cruz, Freedom, and Watsonville), showing that First 5 partners are reaching children and families who typically experience the greatest barriers to good health and well-being.

First 5 strengthens systems by enhancing the capacity of service providers

In addition to supporting direct services to children and families, First 5 aims to boost the capacity of local systems in order to extend the reach of critical early education, family support, and health services to a larger number of children and families. Systems enhancements help ensure better services for years to come. Examples of First 5's capacity-building work in 2019-20 include:

- **Skill development and coaching for early childhood educators.** In 2019-20, **50** early childhood educators from preschools, Transitional Kindergarten classrooms, licensed family child care homes, and Santa Cruz Reading Corps tutors received training and coaching from the SEEDS of Learning® program, **12** SEEDS Quality Coaches provided literacy environmental assessments and literacy coaching to early educators receiving SEEDS of Learning® instruction during the year, **35** family child care providers participated at Step 3 in the local Quality Rating and Improvement System (Quality Counts Santa Cruz County) and were rated, **22** family child care providers participated at Step 2 in the local Quality Rating and Improvement System, received technical assistance, and are not yet rated, and **12** family, friend, and neighbor child care providers attended Quality Improvement workshops and received materials and information, for a total of **120 unique early childhood educators**.

Many additional early childhood educators working in state- and federally-funded center-based programs received professional development training, but were not tracked using a Unique ID. These include **over 125** teachers from centers participating in Quality Counts Santa Cruz County who received coaching and technical assistance, and **hundreds** of early childhood educators who provided the Raising A Reader program to children.

- **Development of a population-based system of parent education.** In 2019-20, **22** parent education practitioners received training to deliver the Triple P –Positive Parenting Program, an evidence-based curriculum shown to improve parental efficacy, parent-child interaction, and child behaviors.

Healthy Children

For the past several years, First 5 Santa Cruz County has invested in strategies to help ensure that all children have health insurance and access to care.

First 5 Santa Cruz County insures children

- **Santa Cruz County's newborns are getting connected to medical care.** During 2019-20, the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program provided 92% of all mothers with a newborn visit while in the hospital (or via phone during the Shelter-in-Place order). Of all mothers with Medi-Cal births, effectively all (99.8%) were assisted to complete a Medi-Cal Newborn Referral application for their new baby, and 99% of these mothers identified a preferred primary care provider (PCP) or clinic for their child before discharge from the hospital.

- **Newborns and their families have access to food.** The current COVID-19 situation has many families in our community struggling with access to food. The Newborn Enrollment Coordinators (NECs) also assist families at hospitals to enroll in CalFresh and WIC.

- **Fewer children are using the emergency department (ED).** Ideally, children and their families who have insurance and who have a medical home will be more likely to access their provider for routine preventive care, and less likely to use the emergency department (ED) for non-urgent medical care.

- The services provided by the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program may have had an effect on the use of the ED for very young infants, and particularly those who were covered by Medi-Cal. Since the launch of this program at Watsonville Community Hospital in 2009, the number of infants (under age 1) on Medi-Cal who visited the Emergency Department dropped 47%.

- **Children are getting vision screening.** The VisionFirst program provides children as young as 6 months old with a simple instrument-based vision screening right in their child care and transitional kindergarten settings. In 2019-20—the fifth year of this program—830 children were screened, and 131 (16%) had possible vision problems identified. At the time of this report, 92 of those children have followed up with a full vision exam at an optometrist, and 85 of these children (92%) have been prescribed eye glasses or are being monitored.
- **Children are getting support to reach developmental milestones.** Foster children with neurodevelopmental needs are getting referred to supportive services through a coordinated and multidisciplinary system called the *Neurodevelopmental Foster Care Clinic*.

Uninsured children are:

- Over 13 times more likely to lack a usual source of care;
- Nearly 5 times more likely to have delayed or unmet medical needs;
- Over 3 times more likely to have unmet mental health service needs;
- 5 times more likely to have unmet dental and vision care needs;
- Nearly 4 times more likely to have an unmet need for prescription drugs.

- Children Now
<<http://www.childrennow.org>>

Strong Families

One indicator of child safety are the County measurements of child abuse and neglect. Fortunately, the rates of child maltreatment are decreasing, and in 2010 Santa Cruz County moved from being substantially above or at the statewide rates, to below them.

- In Santa Cruz County, the rates (*per 1,000*) for **children under age 1** have decreased from a high of **37.1** in 2005, to **11.0** in 2019.
- For **children ages 1-2**, rates (*per 1,000*) dropped from a high of **19.8** in 2004, to **3.7** in 2019.
- For **children ages 3-5**, rates (*per 1,000*) dropped from a high of **17.5** in 2005, to **3.4** in 2019.

This improvement may have been assisted by the efforts of the county-wide Triple P – Positive Parenting Program and the Families Together program, which launched in late 2009 and 2006, respectively.

First 5 Santa Cruz County helps strengthen parent-child relationships and reduce risk for child abuse and neglect

Through innovative programs, First 5 and its partners are helping to decrease the risk and incidence of child abuse and neglect.

- First 5 continued the implementation of the Positive Parenting Program, or **Triple P**. The program consists of five levels of intervention, from broad-based, universal efforts in the community to more intensive, focused efforts with individual parents. The Triple P model is an evidence-based program shown in numerous randomized studies to increase parental confidence and efficacy, promote positive parent-child interactions and child behaviors, and reduce rates of child maltreatment.

Highlights of Triple P include:

- **Evidence-based parenting support is available.** First 5 has implemented all five levels of Triple P in Santa Cruz County, ranging from a media campaign to intensive and focused individual services. Between 2010-2020, over 14,400 parents with over 27,600 children have participated in the program.
- **Parents are engaged and seek more opportunities.** Over the past several years, analyses have consistently shown that brief services are an effective way of getting parents initially engaged in the program, and gives them an opportunity to participate in further services. Parents who attend Seminars and Workshops frequently request follow-up services, and parents who participate in one or two brief consultations for specific parenting concerns often return later for in-depth consultations and multi-session programs.
- **Parenting skills and knowledge are improving along several domains.** Parents who completed assessments that measured their levels of parenting skills and knowledge along several domains showed substantial improvements in all domains, including:
 - Increased use of positive parenting styles • More consistent parenting • Less coercive parenting • More positive encouragement • Improved parent-child relationships • Improved family relationships • Improved levels of confidence in parenting • Reduced levels of conflict over parenting • Increased support in their role as a parent • Increased levels of satisfaction with their relationship with co-parents • Improved parental teamwork • Reduced levels of conflict between parents • Decreased levels of emotional difficulties • Improved parent emotional well-being • Improvements in child behavior • Fewer child emotional difficulties • Fewer child challenging behaviors • Improvements in family nutrition and physically active lifestyles
- **Parents with more serious parenting issues are making the greatest improvements.** There was also evidence that parents who began the program with more serious parenting issues demonstrated the greatest improvements as a result of receiving

Parents are more confident in their parenting skills, are helping to improve their children's behavior, and are building positive relationships within their families.

in-depth services (8 or more sessions). This is particularly true for parents of adolescents, and parents of children with special needs.

- **Participants at local correctional facilities are getting involved in Triple P.** Triple P practitioners from Community Bridges continued to provide three concurrent 12-week workshop series in English and Spanish at local correctional facilities, with very high participation and satisfaction rates. Early results indicate that participants have more confidence in being a parent, and are showing increased knowledge of effective parenting.
- **Parents are satisfied with services.** Parents have rated the quality of services very high, noting that they had received the help they wanted, were dealing more effectively with problems in their family, and would come back to the program if they needed to seek help again.
- **Parents are continuing to use the skills they learned.** On average, parents felt that the Seminars and Workshops answered their questions, and that they would continue to use the strategies they learned. Parents who received more in-depth training felt that the programs had helped them develop skills that could be applied to other family members, and helped them deal more effectively with their child's behavior.
- In partnership with the County's Human Services Department-Family and Children's Services and Encompass Community Services, First 5 supports a program called **Families Together**. Families Together is Santa Cruz County's differential response program, a strategy used to intervene early with families in which there has been an allegation of abuse. This home visiting program includes comprehensive intake and risk assessments, development of a tailored case plan, parent support and education, child development activities, and periodic assessments.

At-risk parents have improved parenting styles and reduced risk of maltreatment.

The percentage of Families Together participants assessed as being at *high risk* or *very high risk* of child maltreatment dropped from 75% to 17% after one year.

Results of the program have been very encouraging:

- **Reduction of risk.** Parents/primary caregivers receiving services from Families Together had their levels of risk assessed while they were in the program. Pre and post risk assessments for several years combined indicated that families reduced their level of risk for future maltreatment.
- **Reduced rates of child maltreatment.** Results from 2019 show that 99% of families who received services from the Families Together program had no substantiated allegations of maltreatment in the six months after their cases closed. This suggests that even though some families are still experiencing high risk factors that lead to a child welfare report, they may have gained skills and resources during their participation in Families Together that prevent court-mandated involvement with child welfare.

Children Learning and Ready for School

First 5 is helping to improve the quality of early learning programs in Santa Cruz County



Santa Cruz County is one of 58 counties participating in Quality Counts California, a “statewide, locally implemented quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) that funds and provides guidance to local and regional agencies, and other quality partners, in their support of early learning and care providers.” Formerly known as the Quality Early Learning Initiative (QELI), in 2018-19 this was officially renamed Quality Counts Santa Cruz County.

In 2012, First 5 Santa Cruz County launched the local QRIS, partnering with family child care and child care center providers to improve the quality of early learning for children ages birth through 5 in Santa Cruz County. First 5 established this initiative as a result of receiving funding through California’s Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge federal grant, and First 5 California’s Child Signature Program.

Drawing on resources from both grants, the Quality Early Learning Initiative (QELI) Consortium was created, bringing together public and private center-based program leaders, family child care providers, higher education faculty, and other early learning stakeholders. Together, members of the QELI Consortium—now called Quality Counts Santa Cruz County—worked to develop and pilot a local Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), aligning with the California Quality Continuum Framework, as a way to foster on-going quality improvement that is proven to help children thrive.

In fiscal year 2015-16, First 5 California launched IMPACT (Improve and Maximize Programs so All Children Thrive), and partnered with the California Department of Education to create the California QRIS (CA-QRIS). Renamed Quality Counts California (QCC) in fiscal year 2017-18, QCC helps to ensure that children ages 0 to 5—particularly those who are low-income, English learners, or children with disabilities or developmental delays—have access to high quality early learning programs so that they thrive in their early learning settings and succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

“A growing body of research confirms the importance of quality early learning experiences to effectively prepare young children not only for school, but for life.”

- First 5 California

During this past year, Quality Counts Santa Cruz County (QCSCC) has: provided technical assistance and coaching to program directors, teachers and providers; maintained the QCSCC database; coordinated independent assessments; facilitated Professional Learning Communities; collaborated with partners to provide system-wide trainings; and created a plan for marketing, communications, and branding which includes QCSCC materials for sites, and information on quality programs for teachers and families. In addition, First 5 contracted with Go Kids, Inc. to continue to lead the QCSCC Consortium’s quality improvement activities for Family Child Care (FCC) programs. In 2019-2020, the Go Kids, Inc. Quality Improvement Coordinator recruited 3 new FCC providers to Quality Counts (for a total of 57 Family Child Care providers) and coordinated trainings and independent assessments.

- Full ratings of all participating Quality Counts sites in Santa Cruz County were conducted in December 2019. Sites were rated on a 5-tier scale (1=lowest tier; 5=highest tier), and as of the most recent rating in 2019:

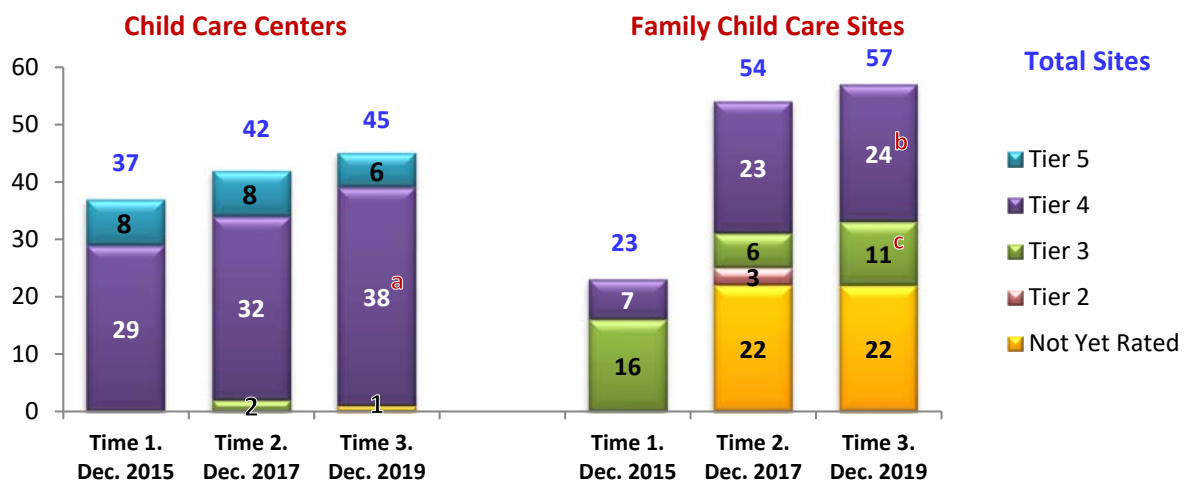
- 0 sites received a Tier 2 rating
- 11 sites received a Tier 3 rating
- 62 sites received a Tier 4 rating
- 6 sites received a Tier 5 rating

It is important to note that several sites are just 1 point away from moving to the next higher Tier rating:

- Nine Tier 3 family child care sites are 1 point from moving to Tier 4.
- Six Tier 4 centers and five Tier 4 family child care sites are 1 point from moving to Tier 5.

- In fiscal year 2019-20:
 - 22 additional Family Child Care providers participated in Quality Counts Santa Cruz County, bringing the total to 57 FCC participants. Of these 57 providers, 35 are participating at Step 3 and received a full rating in December 2019.
 - 12 Family, Friend or Neighbor (informal, unlicensed providers) joined Quality Counts Santa Cruz County at Step 1 (Quality Improvement) and participated in the first of a series of six trainings. Due to the pandemic Shelter-in-Place order, the workshop series was cancelled.
- In fiscal year 2019-20, Quality Counts Santa Cruz County conducted assessments and full ratings of all participating Step 3 sites. The following table presents the results of these ratings.

Number of QCSCC Sites at each Tier Rating, by Rating Time and Type of Site



Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County, 2020.

^a Six Tier 4 centers are 1 point from moving to Tier 5.

^b Five Tier 4 Family Child Care sites are 1 point from moving to Tier 5.

^c Nine Tier 3 Family Child Care sites are 1 point from moving to Tier 4.

- **Local Quality Counts Santa Cruz County resources are leveraged through participation in regional partnerships.** Santa Cruz County has joined with Santa Clara, San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo, San Benito and Monterey counties to form the Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership (BAQELP). This regional consortium (labeled Region 4 HUB by Quality Counts California, and now called Quality Counts Bay Area) was developed so that these eight neighboring counties could strategize together, share resources, leverage funds, and align practices. This regional approach has resulted in strengthening the current resources available for professional development.

First 5 Santa Cruz County builds early literacy foundations by training early childhood educators to enhance language-rich practices in the classroom

One of the most powerful indicators of later success is a child's reading proficiency at the end of 3rd grade,² and data show that Santa Cruz County children are struggling with their reading skills. First 5 Santa Cruz County is working to improve these long-term trends by encouraging families to read together, providing language and literacy skill development for early childhood educators, and encouraging child assessments in order to individualize instruction.

- **The SEEDS of Learning[®] framework is being used throughout Santa Cruz County child care programs.** Since the founding of the Early Literacy Foundations Initiative in 2006-07, 637 unique educators have been trained in the SEEDS of Learning[®] framework. This includes 246 educators in state- and federally-subsidized classrooms, 20 educators in public school transitional kindergarten classrooms, 288 educators in licensed family child care homes and private/non-profit centers, and 83 Santa Cruz Reading Corps Literacy Tutors.
- **Classrooms and home-based settings of SEEDS-trained early educators are being transformed into literacy-rich environments.** SEEDS-trained early childhood educators are working to ensure their children are on target for kindergarten readiness by using evidence-based early literacy strategies, receiving on-site coaching, and integrating materials into their learning environments. Cumulative assessment results are showing that SEEDS-trained and coached teachers are improving the quality of support they provide in their classrooms for children's development of early literacy:
 - In **preschool and transitional kindergarten (TK) classrooms** taught by SEEDS-trained early childhood educators, results from the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation* tool showed that between 2011-2019,³ the percentage of classrooms that provided high quality support for early literacy increased from 34% at pre-assessment to 88% at post-assessment.

637 early childhood educators, Reading Corps Literacy Tutors, and informal family child care providers throughout the county have been trained to promote strong language and literacy foundations for children.

² Kidsdata.Org, Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, *Reading Proficiency*, retrieved from <http://www.kidsdata.org/>, 2013.

³ The *ELLCO Pre-K* assessment is used to evaluate the quality of support for language and literacy in SEEDS classrooms, and is completed at the beginning and end of the fiscal year. However, in 2020 the "post" (2nd) evaluation had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore there are no new results for fiscal year 2019-20, but the cumulative results for 2011-2019 are discussed.

- In **family child care settings**, there were substantial improvements from the first training to the final training. Cumulative results for the *Child/Home Early Language and Literacy Observation* tool from 2007-2020 showed that overall, the percentage of family child care settings that were rated as having high quality support for early literacy increased from 45% to 90%.

First 5 Santa Cruz County helps children build the foundation for later reading success

- **Children are developing skills in key areas of reading success.** The focus of the Santa Cruz Reading Corps is to promote strong literacy and language foundations for young children, especially dual language learners. AmeriCorps volunteers—called Literacy Tutors—are trained to assess children in five areas of early reading predictors: Vocabulary/Oral Language, Comprehension, Phonological Awareness, Alphabet Knowledge, and Letter Sounds. These assessments help them select children who are at risk for not being ready for kindergarten, who then receive tailored literacy-based interventions on a daily basis. Beginning in 2012-13, all Reading Corps classrooms began to emphasize the development of children’s vocabulary skills in English during these interventions. The goal is to increase the number of children “on target” with early reading predictors, particularly in their English vocabulary.

“The seeds of literacy are planted before children enter school.

Important literacy skills do not develop spontaneously, instruction shapes them.”

- Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998

In 2019-20, Santa Cruz Reading Corps trained and placed 12 Literacy Tutors in 14 different classrooms, serving 413 children. However, this program year was greatly impacted by the Shelter-in-Place order issued on March 16, 2020. As classrooms closed, Literacy Tutors were not able to continue their AmeriCorps service for the remainder of the program year. Therefore, no interventions nor Spring assessments were conducted with children after that date.

Nevertheless, results from the first two assessments (Spring and Fall) for 2019-20 continue to support previous years’ findings, which show that children who need the biggest boost in key early literacy areas—and particularly their English vocabulary skills—benefit when they receive individualized literacy-based interventions.

- In **State Pre-K and TK classrooms**:
 - Children in these SEEDS-trained classrooms improved in four of the five pre-literacy skill areas—in English—no matter what their primary language was. “Vocabulary/Oral Language” (*PELI*) was the only skill area where the percentage of children “At/Above” target level did not increase over time. It is important to remember, however, that the *PELI* raises the Benchmark Target levels for each skill area at each assessment time period, so by the end of the year the Benchmark Target for each skill area is higher than at all earlier assessments.

- When assessed in English, Spanish-speaking children on average started with lower scores than English-speaking children, but by their last *PELI* assessment they had increased their scores by similar amounts.
- Improvement in English language vocabulary development was particularly evident among primarily Spanish-speaking children who had received the **tailored interventions** that focused on this important pre-literacy skill. An analysis of average scores on the *PELI* Fall and Winter benchmarks showed that when assessed in English, Spanish-speaking children who were selected to receive tailored interventions started with lower scores than Spanish-speaking children who did not require tailored interventions. But by their last assessment they had increased their scores by a *higher amount* in Picture Naming (vocabulary development).

This last result is especially encouraging, as it suggests that these children are getting the tailored help they need to increase their vocabulary and enter kindergarten on par with their peers.

- **Parents are getting involved in their children's reading.** SEEDS classrooms and family child care homes also implemented Raising A Reader, a weekly rotating book bag program for families, to boost shared reading practices and impact children's early literacy skills. In the 2019-20 fiscal year, 3,659 children and their families participated in the program throughout the county, and over 27,000 children have participated since the beginning of this program in 2006.

Integrated Services and Systems

First 5 continues to focus on building system integration efforts and supporting community initiatives, training, shared data, community events, and capacity-building projects. The following key initiatives are highlighted in this report:

- **Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments.** Beginning in 2015 and initially focused on the transition of the City and County of Santa Cruz's Community Programs funding model, CORE Investments is both a funding model and a broader movement to create the conditions for equitable health and well-being across the life span; prenatal through end of life. While not limited to the well-being of young children and families, CORE has emerged as a substantial and critical initiative designed to help create the type of equitable, integrated services and systems originally envisioned by the authors of Prop 10.

First 5 serves on the CORE Steering Committee, helping guide the project through a multi-phase, collaborative planning process, which has resulted in defining eight interdependent “CORE Conditions for Health and Well-being.”



The CORE Conditions represent vital aspects of health and well-being where equitable opportunities must exist in order for individuals, families, and communities to achieve equitable outcomes. When applied to a systems of care approach, the interconnected conditions represent essential sectors and services in an integrated early childhood system of care. First 5’s investments and partnerships focus on enhancing outcomes in specific CORE Conditions, as well as strengthening the linkages between programs and systems partners that address multiple CORE Conditions.

In fiscal year 2019-20, First 5 continued to serve on the CORE Steering Committee, helping guide the project through a multi-phase development process. In addition, the strategic priorities and desired results in First 5’s new strategic plan, adopted in June 2020, is aligned with the CORE framework by design. This reflects the myriad ways that First 5’s investments have contributed—and will continue to contribute—to multiple dimensions of equitable health and well-being across the community.

- **Thrive by Three.** In January of 2017 the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors approved Supervisor Ryan Coonerty’s request to establish the Thrive by Three Early Childhood Fund.



Thrive by Three was established to invest in the earliest years of childhood, support evidence-based two generation approaches to achieve breakthrough outcomes for young children and their families, and to help develop an integrated and comprehensive prenatal to 3 system of care dedicated to improving the following desired outcomes:

- **Babies are born healthy**
 - Prenatal care in the first trimester
 - Full term births and healthy birthweight
- **Families have the resources they need to support children’s optimal development**
 - Access to high-quality care and early learning opportunities
 - Access to economic and self-sufficiency supports
- **Young children live in safe, nurturing families**
 - Parenting confidence and practices, parent-child relationships
 - Parent and caregiver emotional well-being
- **Children are happy, healthy and thriving by age 3**
 - Prevention of child maltreatment and entries into foster care

Using a systems of care approach, Thrive by Three partners representing home visiting, health care, early care and education, County Health and Human Services, and City government have leveraged resources, increased capacity and coordination, implemented innovative approaches, and supported local and state policies that address and link the CORE Conditions for Health & Well-being for young children and their families. Notable accomplishments in the 2019-20 fiscal year include:

- Strengthened key partnerships with Thrive by Three system partners
- Leveraged other local and state funds
- Provided \$70,000 in Early Learning Scholarships
- Contributed to the Child Care Provider Emergency Response Fund
- Supported adoption of HealthySteps
- Increased enrollment in home visitation programs
- Supported creation of a local progress page for Thrive by Three

In the 2019-20 fiscal year, First 5 continued to serve in a backbone function for the initiative, coordinating the Thrive by Three Advisory Committee, administering the Early Learning Scholarship program, and overseeing the initiative's evaluation.

- **DataShare Santa Cruz County.** In September of 2017 the Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County (HIP) initiated a collaborative effort to develop a county-wide data sharing system designed to share data on a variety of factors that affect the well-being of residents in the county.



DataShare's mission is to provide an accessible, comprehensive, and reliable resource for local, regional, and national data available to everyone. DataShare Santa Cruz County envisions an equitable, thriving, and resilient community where everyone shares responsibility for creating the social, economic, and environmental conditions necessary for health and well-being at every stage of life. The website, www.datasharescc.org, is an interactive data platform with local, state, and national data that allows users to explore and understand information about our local community. The site holds robust data and indicators in the areas of health, economy, education, environment, government and politics, public safety, transportation, and social environment.

In fiscal year 2019-20 First 5 continued to sit on the DataShare Santa Cruz County Steering Committee and support on-going development of the platform, including the establishment of new "Local Progress" pages for Thrive by Three and the Live Oak Cradle to Career (C2C) initiative (both featured in this report). In addition, as a member of the Steering Committee, First 5 supported a process in the latter half of 2019-20 to transition leadership of the project from the Health Improvement Partnership to a consortium of local organizations including the County of Santa Cruz, the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, United Way of Santa Cruz, and the Pajaro Valley Health Trust.

- **Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network.** Building on a series of successful legislative visits and policy wins for early childhood in 2017, First 5 Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties joined forces in fiscal year 2017-18 to help form the tri-county Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network (CCECAN). Representing over 94,000 children ages 0-8, CCECAN is a collaboration of organizations and individuals in the tri-county area committed to strengthening and advocating for policies and systems change at the state and local level that will support thriving children and families. Representatives from each of the First 5s serve on the Planning Group (i.e., Steering Committee), along with representatives from each county's Local Child Care Planning Council.

In FY 2019-20, the Network membership roster included 192 individuals (including 70 from Santa Cruz County, 60 from Monterey, 37 from San Benito, and 25 whose county of origin was unknown), many of whom represented 33 organizational members.

In fiscal year 2019-20 the Network continued and even expanded its efforts to build collective power, highlight the everyday experiences of families with children, and advocate for policies and structural changes to meet families' needs. Key accomplishments included:

- Hosted a bilingual Storytelling for Advocacy workshop
- Hosted the first annual Parent Power Summit
- Coordinated a virtual COVID Advocacy Briefing
- Convened four virtual, bilingual legislative visits

- **Live Oak Cradle to Career.** The Live Oak Cradle to Career Initiative (C2C) has grown from a nascent idea in 2013 championed by Supervisor John Leopold, to a vibrant results-based collaboration between Live Oak parents, and local education, health, and social service leaders. Initially focused on three parent-identified goal areas, 1) Good Education, 2) Good Health, and 3) Good Character, the initiative recognized a 4th goal of Community Engagement in 2017-18.



In 2019-20 the Live Oak C2C continued to flourish within a governance structure that includes a Parent Leadership Committee, Steering Committee, Data Committee, and other working groups, each populated by parent and community leaders working in partnership for the betterment of the Live Oak community and its residents. Like so many others in Santa Cruz County, C2C had to rapidly adjust to the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and related Shelter-in-Place orders beginning in March of 2020. Staff and volunteers quickly converted Parent Leadership and Steering Committee meetings, as well as Zumba classes, to virtual formats, and mastered the use of the online simultaneous translation tools provided by Zoom in particular. In addition, C2C created a resource guide and webpage to help families navigate the crisis. Parent volunteers helped expand the distributions of food and essential supplies. The scope and scale of the C2C Family Engagement Coordinators' work increased significantly as they found new and innovative ways to support Live Oak families during the pandemic that included expansion of the Passion for Produce program, helping deliver

Chromebooks and school packets to families isolated at home, and providing technical support to families struggling with remote learning.

In 2019-20 First 5 continued to serve on the C2C Steering Committee, integrated core programming into the initiative (such as Triple P and Reading Corps), and provided financial support for the overall operations of the initiative (and specifically for simultaneous translation services), helping ensure that the voices of all Live Oak community members were heard and that all were able to fully participate in the initiative.

- **2020 Census outreach.** In the summer of 2019, First 5 Santa Cruz County joined the Santa Cruz County Complete Count campaign in preparation for the 2020 Census. Santa Cruz County developed a strategic plan to roll out county-wide Census outreach in three phases: Educate, Motivate, and Activate. As a part of this plan, Hard to Count (HTC) population sub-committees were formed and began meeting in the fall of 2019. First 5 became the lead of the Santa Cruz County Complete Count “Age 0-5” sub-committee, and met monthly to develop specific Census outreach activities and engagement for families with children ages 0-5.



As trusted messengers in the community, partner agencies on this sub-committee reached out directly to the families they serve in the community to encourage them to fill out their Census forms, and answered any questions they may have had. They connected with clients at numerous touchpoints, including preschools, family child care sites, enrollment appointments, local libraries, food distribution sites, clinics, parent workshops, social media, and more. Partners also distributed an abundance of Census related collateral materials provided by First 5 and the First 5 Association to families with young children.

First 5’s Health Outreach team also began incorporating Census information into their Baby Gateway visits at hospitals. They also began calling families who had been a part of the VisionFirst program to encourage them to fill out their Census. By the end of August 2020, the Health Outreach team had contacted 2,016 families via the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program, and 535 families via the VisionFirst program, with information and encouragement to complete their 2020 Census forms.

- **Community Support.** Drawing on supplies from First 5 California and a generous grant from the Central California Alliance for Health, First 5 completed distribution of baby food, diapers, and baby wipes to over 1,000 community residents impacted by the pandemic. First 5 couldn’t have succeeded in that effort without their community partners: Santa Cruz Community Health Centers, PVUSD Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, the San Andreas Regional Center and the STARS program, Community Bridges, Encompass Community Services, and Public Health.

