



FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021

October 2021

Acknowledgements

First 5 Santa Cruz County would like to thank Nicole Young, of Optimal Solutions Consulting, for the thoughtful and comprehensive development and coordination of the Triple P program throughout our county, as well as her invaluable collaboration in the evaluation of this program.

In addition, First 5 Santa Cruz County would like to thank the staff and participants of the funded partner agencies, whose commitment to data collection has facilitated the gathering of the robust data included in this report.



First 5 Santa Cruz County

David G. Brody
Vicki Boriack
Barbara Dana
Michelle Dodge
Alicia Fernandez
Irene Freiberg
Holly Maclure
Maribel Pedroza
Meghan Reilly
Christine Sieburg
Laura Sotelo
Alicia Zenteno



Optimal Solutions Consulting

Nicole M. Young

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First 5 Santa Cruz County's Strategic Framework

When Proposition 10 passed in 1998, California made a definitive and enduring commitment to promote the health and well-being of young children (prenatal through age five) and their families. For over 20 years, First 5 Santa Cruz County has had the great privilege and responsibility to serve as the steward of Prop 10 revenue, ensuring these public funds benefit young children and their families throughout Santa Cruz County.

First 5 is dedicated to giving children ages 0-5 the opportunities they need to be healthy, able to learn, and emotionally well developed and ultimately reach their full potential. Since its inception, First 5 Santa Cruz County has invested in many innovative, effective programs and initiatives that help:

- Ensure all children ages birth through age 5 have access to health insurance and preventative care
- Increase protective factors and decrease child abuse and neglect
- Improve access to affordable, quality early care and education
- Build early language and literacy skills that are the foundation for future learning

To help realize this vision, First 5 Santa Cruz County has established four strategic priorities for 2020 - 2025:



Healthy
Children

- Increased access to affordable quality health care for children 0-5
- Increased use of preventive health care
- Improved maternal, infant, and child health



Thriving
Families

- Increased resilience of young children and their families
- Improved parenting practices and parent-child relationships
- Increased "social capital" (relationships and connections) of young children and their families
- Decreased child abuse and neglect



First 5 Santa Cruz County's Vision of Success

*Healthy, happy, and well-
prepared children.*

Thriving Families.



Connected communities.

Equitable systems.



First 5 Santa Cruz County's Mission

*To ensure early childhood
systems and supports
foster equitable health,
development, and well-
being for all young
children and their families
in Santa Cruz County.*

 <p>Early Care and Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increased access to affordable, high quality early care and education ➤ Increased early learning and school readiness skills (developmental, social-emotional, cognitive) ➤ Increased stability and sustainability of the early care and education (ECE) system
 <p>Equitable, Sustainable Early Childhood System</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increased coordination and integration among organizations and sectors serving young children and families ➤ Increase in local, state, and federal policies and legislation that prioritize prevention, early intervention, and equity for young children and their families ➤ Increase in local, state, and federal funding to sustain and institutionalize investments in the early childhood system of care

This annual report summarizes findings of the First 5 Santa Cruz County evaluation from **July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021**. 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 continued to work 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** continued to help enroll eligible newborns into Medi-Cal and provided information about new County programs at all three hospitals in the county.
- The **VisionFirst program** was not able to provide any vision screenings this fiscal year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but staff used this time to gather and prepare important resources for families and teachers.
- The **Neurodevelopmental Foster Care Clinic (NDFCC)** provided consults and assessments via telephone, telehealth, and in person, and was able to respond to all new referrals from Child Protective Services and maintain all recommended follow-up visits.
- **Triple P** practitioners continued to offer Triple P classes and 1:1 sessions by phone, videoconferencing platforms, independent study (Inmate Programs only), or Triple P Online

(CalWORKs only). Practitioners' skills and confidence in delivering virtual services continued to grow, and they remained flexible and open to adapting as needs and circumstances changed.

- **Families Together** continued to be flexible and cognizant of the physical and emotional needs of both clients and staff, and adapted their programs to match each client's "comfort level," such as in-person vs. online formats, and home vs. clinic visits.
- **Quality Counts Santa Cruz County** offered professional development and other supports in online formats, and played an integral role in converting a portion of IMPACT and related funding into an Emergency Response Fund that provided cash assistance for providers serving children of essential workers and at-risk populations during the pandemic.
- First 5 also partnered with the County Office of Education and the Child Development Resource Center on three **supply giveaway events** where supplies provided by First 5 California and California Department of Social Services were distributed to hundreds of child care providers in the County. Supplies included diapers, baby wipes, cleaning supplies, masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, touchless thermometers, children's books, and other valuable resources.
- Due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic throughout FY 2020-21, all **SEEDS of Learning®** workshops were held virtually. SEEDS coaches provided 1:1 support to ensure that each workshop participant was able to connect virtually, and trainers spent many hours learning the Zoom format to ensure that participants would receive the same high-quality information and engagement for which these workshops are known.
- The **Santa Cruz Reading Corps** program was discontinued for FY 2020-21 as California State Preschool programs were not open to in-person instruction.
- **Raising A Reader** modified the book distribution process and began rotating library books through the local public libraries, and helped maintain and support all participating child care sites by distributing books and other resources that could be used with families both onsite or online.

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 2020-2025 First 5 Santa Cruz County Strategic Plan.

Overall Well-Being of Children in the County

First 5 Santa Cruz County invests in efforts that support its vision of Healthy, Happy, and Well-Prepared Children, Thriving Families, Access to Affordable, Quality Early Care and Education, and Connected and Equitable Community Systems. To help guide its investments and partnerships, First 5 monitors county-wide trends that affect child well-being. The year 2020-2021 marks the first year of the 2020-2025 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 2021, there were 16,114 children ages 0-5 in Santa Cruz County, continuing a decreasing trend since a high of 19,591 in 2012. The majority of these children were either Hispanic (47%), or Caucasian (45%). This diversity continues into kindergarten, where in 2020 over 38% of children had a primary language other than English.
- **Unemployment varies greatly across the County.** In 2020-21, the average unemployment rate in the County was 8.1%, slightly higher than the year before. Within the County, the percent of unemployed residents differs greatly by area; the average unemployment rate ranges from 2.0% in Capitola to 13.6% in Watsonville.
- **Gender inequalities are affecting family income.** In 2019, for families with a female householder and no spouse present, the median family income was about \$40,000, compared to almost \$92,000 for families with a male householder and no spouse present.
- **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 (using 5-year averages), in 2019 over 13% of all people in the County were earning less than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and almost 15% of all children ages 0-5 were living in poverty. However, there are different measures that are considered more comprehensive measures of income adequacy: the California Poverty Level 2019 data estimated that 17% of all people in the County were in

“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> >

poverty, and the Self-Sufficiency Standard 2021 data estimated that 78% 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 decreasing enrollment in CalWORKs, the number of students receiving Free and Reduced Price Meals, and enrollment in the Women, Infants, & Children program. Interestingly, there has been a growing increase in the number of County residents participating in the CalFresh program.
- **Children have health insurance.** In 2019, the vast majority of County children ages 0-5 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 2020, 84% of toddlers on Medi-Cal (ages 15-30 months) received a well-child check-up.
- **The percentage of young children getting dental care is increasing.** Data indicate that the percentage of children enrolled in Medi-Cal who have been to a dentist has been increasing. In 2019, 52% of children ages 1-2 saw a dentist in the last year, which is an increase of 36 percentage points over the past five years. Similarly, 70% of children ages 3-5 had visited the dentist in the last year, an increase of 33 percentage points over the past five years.
- **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 percentage has been rising 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 percentage 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 6.9 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 2018, only 16% of income-eligible infants and toddlers ages 0-2, and 45% of income-eligible preschool children ages 3-4 were enrolled in subsidized child care, showing a decreasing trend over the previous three years.
- **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.
- **Foster care entry rates are staying relatively constant.** In 2020, the foster care entry rate for children under age 1 was 5.8 per 1,000, with little change over the past five years.
- **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 16% of children ages 0-17 in the County have experienced two or more adverse experiences (as reported by their parents), which is a slight increase from the year before.

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 English language learners, and families who live in higher risk zones of the County.

- **First 5-supported programs are wide-reaching:** In 2020-21, First 5 partners served **4,763** unique children ages 0-5, representing 30% of all children these ages in Santa Cruz County. Approximately **1,489 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, 73% were Latino, and approximately 54% of children lived in households that spoke Spanish or bilingual Spanish/English, a Mesoamerican language, or another non-English language. Of all Latino children ages 0-5 in Santa Cruz County, it's estimated that at least 42% 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 2020-21 who had known ZIP codes, the vast majority (86%) 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 2020-21 include:

- **Skill development and coaching for early childhood educators.** In 2020-21, **54** early childhood educators from preschools, child care centers, Transitional Kindergarten classrooms, and licensed family child care homes received training and coaching from the SEEDS of Learning® program, **5** SEEDS Quality Coaches provided literacy coaching to early educators receiving SEEDS of Learning® instruction during the year, **57** family child care providers participated in the local Quality Rating and Improvement System (Quality Counts Santa Cruz County) with 35 receiving a full rating, and 22 receiving technical assistance and training, for a total of **99 unique early childhood educators**.
- **Development of a population-based system of parent education.** In 2020-21, **16** 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 2020-21, the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program provided 96% of all mothers with a newborn visit while in the hospital (or via phone), and 95% received a *Kit for New Parents*. Of all mothers with births paid by Medi-Cal, 97% 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 are getting connected with new County programs.** First 5 has begun assisting with two new programs that have been implemented in Santa Cruz County, which the Newborn Enrollment Coordinators have incorporated into their newborn visits:
 - The **State-wide Student Identification number (SSID)** is created for newborns by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education and is used to support the social, emotional, and academic development of children from birth through 12th grade.
 - The Santa Cruz Community Ventures (SCCV) **Semillitas college savings account program** for newborns creates a savings account for college or vocational education after high school for every child born in Santa Cruz County. With county partners like Dientes and Salud Para La Gente, the program also incentivizes healthy behaviors by making additional payments into these savings accounts for accomplishing important health milestones (such as a baby going to the dentist by the emergence of their first tooth or their first birthday, whichever comes first).
- **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 provide families at hospitals with resources to apply for the CalFresh program and Women, Infants, and Children (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

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>>

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 74% by 2020. The dramatic decrease in ED visits between 2019 and 2020 may be due to parents choosing not to use the hospital ED during the COVID-19 pandemic for low risk, non-specific symptoms.
- **New vision screening materials are being developed.** Due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, VisionFirst outreach staff were not able to provide any vision screenings this fiscal year. Staff used this time to gather and prepare important resources for families and teachers, which will be used to support the children and parents once this program is able to restart.
- **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*.

Thriving 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 **8.3** in 2020.
- 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 **1.7** in 2020.

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. The sharp decline in 2020, however, may largely be a reflection of the shelter-in-place order related to the COVID-19 pandemic, when child care, schools, health and social services were disrupted, and there were fewer interactions between children and adults who were mandated reporters.

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 2010-2021, over 15,000 parents with over 29,000 children have participated in the program.
- **Parents are engaged and seeking 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:
 - Improvements in child behavior and emotional regulation
 - Increased use of positive parenting styles
 - Improvements in parental emotional well-being and family relationships
 - Increased parental confidence
- **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 in-depth services (8 or more sessions).
- **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 at local correctional facilities, with very high participation and satisfaction rates. Results indicate that participants are demonstrating knowledge of effective parenting and have more confidence in being a parent
- **Parents are satisfied with services.** Parents have rated the quality of services very high, noting that the program helped them deal more effectively with their child's behavior, and with problems in their family.
- **Parents are continuing to use the skills they learned.** On average, parents who participated in the Seminars and Workshops felt that they would continue to use the

strategies they learned, and parents who received more in-depth training felt that the program helped them develop skills that could be applied to other family members.

- 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.

Cumulative assessment results show that 74% of families were assessed as being “high risk” or “very high risk” upon program intake, but this dropped to 16% of families who stayed in the program a full 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 2020 show that no families who received services from the Families Together program had a substantiated allegation 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.

Early Care and Education

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.”

In 2012, First 5 Santa Cruz County launched a 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 Consortium was created, bringing together public and private center-based program leaders, family child care providers, higher education faculty, home visiting program partners, and other early learning stakeholders. Together, this 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.

Since 2015, a statewide QRIS has been established in all 58 counties. Renamed Quality Counts California (QCC) in FY 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.

In FY 2020-21, The California Department of Education (CDE), California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and First 5 California (F5CA) created the Quality Counts California (QCC) Local Consortia and Partnership Grants program unifying funds from several sources. This three-year grant (FY 2020-2023) is designed to achieve a common purpose — funding a system of continuous quality improvement support and an infrastructure for assessing, coordinating delivery of professional development, and promoting quality across the spectrum of early learning and care providers and programs in California, including family, friend, or neighbor care, family child care, center-based, and alternative settings.

Quality Counts Santa Cruz County (QCSCC) - Local Quality Rating and Improvement System. The QCSCC Consortium adopted the Quality Counts California Framework which includes the QCC Rating Matrix and the QCC Continuous Quality Improvement Pathways as the foundation of their local QRIS. This framework encompasses 15 elements of quality, including seven rated elements and eight elements in the CQI Pathways. The elements that are rated include teacher-child ratios, teacher qualifications, and teacher-child interactions.

- **Site ratings.** Full ratings of all participating Quality Counts sites in Santa Cruz County were conducted in December 2019 and are valid for 3-5 years (5 years for sites rated at Tiers 4 or 5, and 3 years for sites rates at Tier 3 or below). 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.

- **Growing number of Family Child Care providers.** In FY 2020-21, 22 additional Family Child Care providers participated in Quality Counts Santa Cruz County, receiving quality improvement supports and coaching, bringing the total to 57 FCC participants. Of these 57 providers, 35 received a full rating in December 2019.
- **Quality Improvement Activities.** During this past year, Quality Counts Santa Cruz County (QCSCC) has: provided online technical assistance to program directors, teachers and providers; maintained the QCSCC database; facilitated an online Professional Learning Community; and collaborated with partners to provide system-wide trainings. 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 2020-21, the Go Kids Quality Improvement Coordinator supported all 57 FCC providers in applying for emergency COVID funding and ensuring they received emergency supplies such as masks, gloves, disinfectant, and hand sanitizer.
- **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 Quality Counts California Region 4 Hub. Regional Hubs are funded by First 5 California and were developed so that neighboring counties could strategize together, share resources, leverage funds, and align practices.

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,¹ 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, 655 unique educators have been trained in the SEEDS of Learning® framework. This includes 257 educators in state- and federally-subsidized classrooms, 20 educators in public school transitional kindergarten classrooms, 295 educators in licensed family child care homes and private/non-profit centers, and 83 Santa Cruz Reading Corps Literacy Tutors.

655 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.

¹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Early Warning! Why Reading By The End Of Third Grade Matters. A KIDS COUNT Special Report On The Importance Of Reading By 3rd Grade*, retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/>, 2021.

- **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, and integrating materials into their learning environments.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was not possible to conduct classroom-based assessments in FY 2020-21. Prior-year assessment results are provided below to illustrate the known effects of the SEEDS of Learning[®] program.

- 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 2011-2019,² the percentage of classrooms that provided high quality support for early literacy increased from 34% at pre-assessment to 88% at post-assessment.
- 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%.
- **Parents are getting involved in their children's reading.** SEEDS classrooms and family child care homes also implemented Raising A Reader (RAR), a weekly rotating book bag program for families, to boost shared reading practices and impact children's early literacy skills. In FY 2020-21, RAR modified this process due to the COVID-19 pandemic and began rotating library books through the local public libraries. In the 2020-21 fiscal year, 2,335 children and their families participated in the program throughout the county, and over 28,000 children have participated since the beginning of this program in 2006.

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

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

- Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998

Equitable and sustainable early childhood 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



CORE Investments
Santa Cruz County

² 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.

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 to 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 (e.g., Health & Wellness of young children and families, Lifelong Learning & Education, and Thriving Families), as well as strengthening the linkages between programs and systems partners that address multiple CORE Conditions.



In fiscal year 2020-21, First 5 continued to serve on the CORE Steering Committee and help guide the project through the multi-phase development process. In addition, the strategic priorities and desired results in First 5’s new strategic plan, adopted in June 2020, are aligned with the CORE framework by design. This helps ensure that First 5’s activities are complementary to other organizations’ efforts to support equitable health and well-being of all county residents across the Core Conditions.

- **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**
 - Improved parental confidence, parenting practices, and 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 of First 5 and Thrive by Three system partners in the 2020-21 fiscal year include:

- Adapted home visiting services in light of COVID-19 and the CZU wildfires
- Leveraged local and state funds
- Provided \$105,000 in Early Learning Scholarships (ELS)
- Contributed to the Child Care Provider Emergency Response Fund
- Supported adoption of HealthySteps
- Launched a new 2-year, \$200,000 “Home Visiting Coordination” grant

In the 2020-21 fiscal year, First 5 continued to provide backbone support 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 FY 2020-21 First 5 continued to sit on the DataShare Santa Cruz County Steering Committee and support on-going development of the platform.

- 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 FY 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 the first half of FY 2020-21 CCECAN hosted a virtual Town Hall with Congressman Panetta that drew 112 participants. Later in the fiscal year the network launched a Policymaking Learning pilot cohort for parents and child care providers that featured curriculum and activities co-created with parents. Two bilingual “prep” sessions were held that focused on the basics of the policy/legislative process, how to connect their stories to the specific policy priorities under discussion, and how to have the most impact as a speaker. Cohort members then participated in five virtual visits with state and federal legislators to directly advocate on policy issues.

CCECAN also held its annual Parent Power Summit virtually in FY 2020-21 which drew 159 participants. Topics for discussion included: Advocating for Children at School; Leadership & Community Organizing; Demystifying Systems of Power; Public Communication to Build Community Support; Advocating for Children with Special Needs; and Working with Schools to Create Change.

- Live Oak Cradle to Career.** The Live Oak Cradle to Career Initiative (C2C) has grown from a nascent idea in 2013 championed by former 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.



Even with the unprecedented challenge of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, Live Oak C2C continued to expand, establishing a 3rd Parent Leadership Committee at Green Acres Elementary School, complementing the Parent Leadership Committees already established at Live Oak and Del Mar Elementary schools.

Focusing on basic needs of Live Oak residents, since April of 2020 Live Oak C2C has distributed \$515,000 in financial aid directly to Live Oak families. The initiative also partnered with the Live Oak School District to follow up with students who were not regularly attending and/or participating in school during distance learning.

In 2020-21 First 5 continued to serve on the C2C Steering Committee, integrated core programming into the initiative (such as Triple P), 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 able to fully participate in the initiative.

- **ACEs Network of Care.** The Santa Cruz County Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Network of Care is made possible through a series of grants to the County of Santa Cruz, Health Services Agency, Public Health Division's Family Health Unit, funded by the Office of the California Surgeon General (CA-OSG) and the California Department of Health (DHS), as part of the ACEs Aware Initiative, which seeks to interrupt the harmful cumulative effects of ACEs and toxic stress.



Beginning in early 2021 First 5 Santa Cruz County led a virtual learning series focused on promoting the ACEs Aware initiative, educating the community about the harmful effects of ACEs and toxic stress, exploring the root causes of ACEs through the “Pair of ACEs,” a framework developed by the Center for Community Resilience at George Washington University, and strengthening the coordination and collaboration among the Medi-Cal provider community and other key social and human services partners serving children and families in Santa Cruz County.

As the fiscal year came to a close First 5 focused on establishing a local ACEs Network of Care website, completing a comprehensive inventory of toxic-stress “buffering” services in the county, and the establishment of an ACEs Community Advisory committee to help guide development of the network moving forward.