

Ready Kids East County



First 5 Contra Costa partners with organizations in East County on a multi-layered effort to reform the systems and services available to African American and Black families with children under 5 with an emphasis on school readiness.

The effort includes working to enhance the capacity of early childhood systems, enhancing the skills and awareness of service providers, and empowering parents and caregivers to be change agents. The Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation is a funding partner of this effort.

Many factors impact kindergarten readiness.

In order to succeed in school, career, and life, young children must be fully supported and prepared to begin kindergarten. A child's wellbeing is one of the best predictors for whether or not they'll be ready for kindergarten. Studies show that economic, food, and housing security, as well as health and wellness, resiliency in the face of trauma and adversity, and access to resources are inextricably linked to a child's wellbeing, and therefore how ready they are for school.

Not all children have the same resources to support their readiness for school. Our [2017 study of kindergarten readiness in Contra Costa¹](#) surfaced the racial disparities in school readiness between Black and other children, with some of the deepest disparities countywide in Pittsburg.

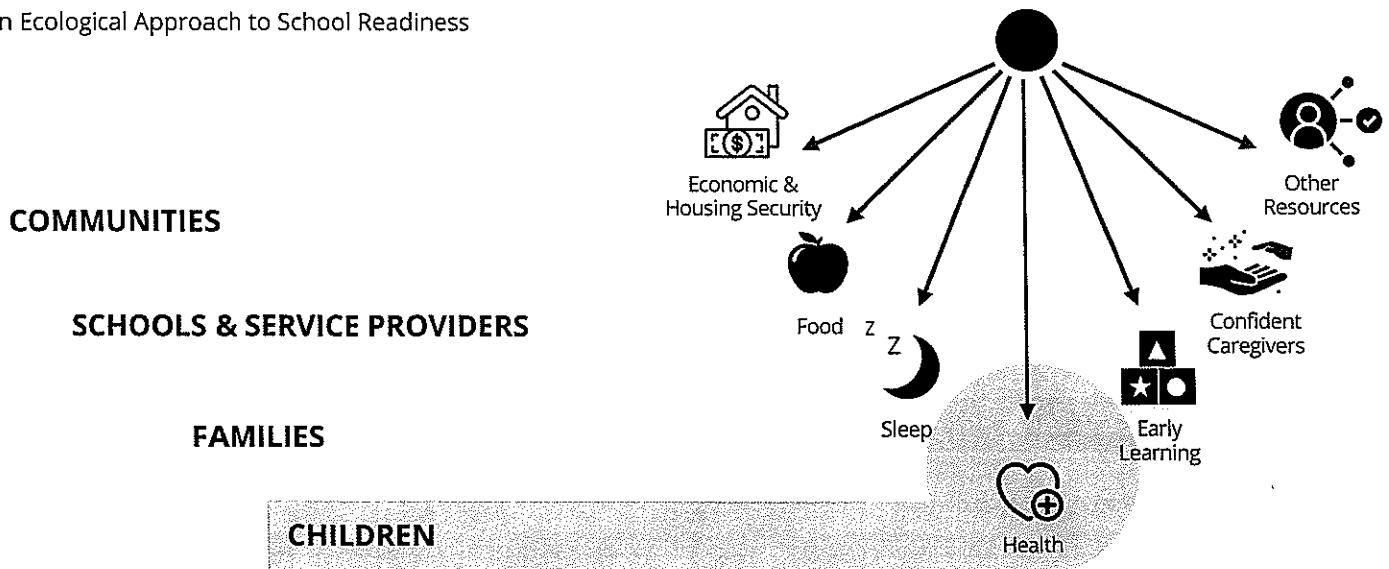
It takes a village.

It takes a village to get our children ready for school, and even more so to transform years of under-investment, racist policies, and systemic oppression. That's why Ready Kids East County takes an ecological approach and works on multiple layers of community change:

- Empowering parents and caregivers
- Offering learning opportunities to service providers and educators
- Expanding African American/Black-focused programming
- Exploring changes to policies, practices and approaches within our communities and organizations

Factors Impacting School Readiness

An Ecological Approach to School Readiness





In Their Words

The quotes below are from the parents, caregivers, service providers and stakeholders that have worked with First 5 Contra Costa over the last five years to help ensure all children in Pittsburg are ready for Kindergarten.

Parents & Caregivers

"Thankful to be a part of discussions that help our community grow! Very empowering and enlightening."

"I love the fact that this is geared towards the black community. We truly need these resources."

"I appreciate the deep and sometimes difficult conversations that this meeting provided."

"The topics are awesome. I listen to what other parents share and it gets me thinking about things I haven't thought about in different aspects."

"I am always looking for more resources for my children. Especially since there are not many programs in this area for black children."

Service Providers

"Thanks for giving us an effective way to introduce the anti-bias into our classrooms."

"This is really important work...Made me realize how important the work is and how it should be integrated across all of the work we do in early childhood."

"This [anti-bias training] was a meaningful topic. We need more conversations like this one."

City Leader

"...who bears the responsibility for school readiness? I think now there's synergy around bringing resources together to solve the challenges that we have in our community. I think the timing is perfect. We've really been looking at how we improve the investment that our city makes into youth services in a way that is coordinated and driven by outcomes and through partnerships."

- Holland Barrett White, former Mayor of Pittsburg



Focusing on Pittsburg

School Readiness

% of Kindergartners Fully Ready for Kindergarten, 2017

Pittsburg: **27%**

County Average: **44%**²

Income Levels

Median Household Income

Pittsburg: **\$87,124**

County Average: **\$119,567**³

Unmet Need for Child Care

Projected unmet demand for infant/toddler care in 2027

Pittsburg: **83%**

County Average: **29%**⁴

¹<https://www.first5coco.org/our-impact/kindergarten-readiness-assessment/>

²*Ready or Not, Here We Come! An Assessment of Kindergarten Readiness in Contra Costa County, 2018, First 5 Contra Costa & Applied Survey Research*

³American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2016-2020) Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2020 inflation-adjusted dollars)

⁴Contra Costa County Comprehensive Countywide Child Care Needs Assessment—2017 to 2027, Brion Economics, Inc. for Contra Costa County Local Planning and Advisory Council for Early Care and Education, 2018.

https://cdn5-ss16.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_1077313/File/2017LPCNeedsAssessment_PDF.pdf

First 5 Contra Costa thanks the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation for their generous support of this effort.



Supporting Families with Family Resource Centers in Contra Costa County



Strong families lead to strong children.

Recent research underscores the critical role positive parent-child relationships and healthy family dynamics have on children both during their early years and throughout their lives. In addition, our health, education and social service systems are fragmented and overburdened. Families struggle to navigate each system's jargon, eligibility requirements, and services. Many public systems are under constraints that make it difficult to take a "whole child" or "whole family approach." Yet research shows that young children need all of these elements present to maximize their development and prevent negative health and education outcomes and even child abuse.

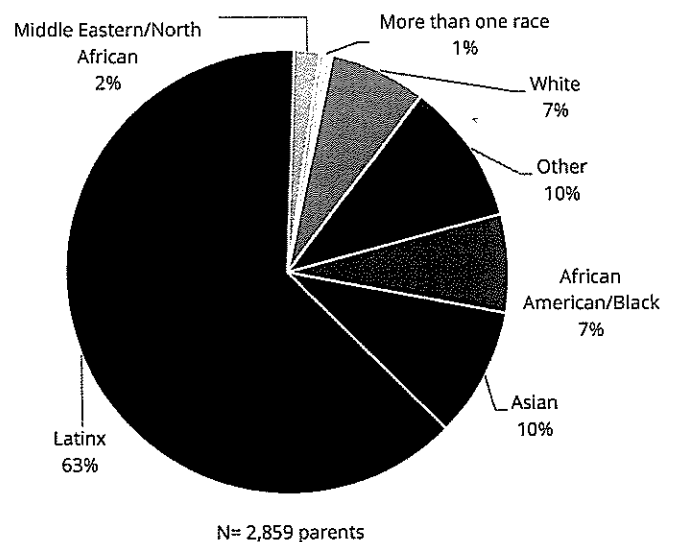
First 5 Contra Costa's family resource centers, called First 5 Centers, help families' access the information and services needed to help their children thrive.

Two Decades of Experience Building Families' Capacity

First 5 Contra Costa has worked hand in hand with communities to continually refine the First 5 Center model for more than two decades. Unlike other community centers, First 5 Centers are designed to holistically support families with children ages 0 to 5. The centers use evidence-based prevention strategies that enhance parents' understanding of child development, positive parenting techniques, school readiness, and self advocacy, while also building a sense of community and ownership in the program among participants.

The centers collectively serve almost 3,000 parents and their children from across the county each year. The centers offer group classes for parents as well as for parents with their children, playgroups, school readiness activities, support groups, one-on-one assistance connecting to other services, and give-aways such as food and diapers - all for free for any family interested.

Demographics of Parents Participating in First 5 Centers FY 2022



First 5 Center Locations



Antioch First 5 Center
(925) 301-4052 | 300 H Street, Antioch



Delta First 5 Center
(925) 516-3880 | 760 1st Street, Brentwood



East County First 5 Center
(925) 301-4040 | 355 E Leland Rd., Pittsburg



Monument First 5 Center
(925) 849-8861 | 1736 Clayton Road, Concord



West County First 5 Center
(510) 232-5650 | 2707 Dover Street, San Pablo

Connecting Families to Other Systems to Meet Their Needs

Based on two decades of experience, First 5 Centers added staff dedicated to providing families one-on-one consultations to refer them to other services in the community based on their needs. Since adding this service in 2009, the First 5 Centers have been providing this service to more parents each year:



347 parents in FY 2020



391 parents in FY 2021

13% increase from the prior year



412 parents in FY 2022

5% increase from the prior year

The vast majority of the parents benefiting from these consultations are Black, indigenous, and people of color, and parents who speak languages other than just English.



More Families Seeking Support While Funding for Centers is Diminishing

First 5 has conducted several needs assessments over the years to gauge the communities with the highest unmet needs and what services they need most. The current center locations and array of services were determined by community need. Our latest assessments indicate there are still many families with unmet needs in the county and a demand for more hours, staff, and expanded reach of the First 5 centers, particularly in areas where few nonprofits or county services exist. In addition, First 5 Contra Costa's main funding source, state tobacco tax, is declining rapidly, threatening the sustainability of the First 5 Centers. First 5 Contra Costa is seeking new funding sources to help sustain current centers and expand services throughout the county.

Every year, more parents share with First 5 that they need help parenting, understanding if their child is on track with their development, connecting with services, and surviving life's challenges. The data below summarizes data from an annual survey First 5 Centers give to parents before they register with the center.

Parents/Caregivers Need Help Parenting and Connecting to Services

Percent of Parents that Mostly Agree/Strongly Agree



45%

There are times when I don't know what to do as a parent.



67%

I know where to go for help if I had trouble making ends meet.

First 5 Contra Costa connects families to programs and places that focus on promoting families' own skills and capacity to foster their children's development and school readiness.



(925) 771-7300 | www.first5coco.org

First 5 Contra Costa works to ensure young children are healthy, ready to learn, and supported in safe, nurturing families and communities. We invest in policies, programs, and capacity building to change systems that support families and children during their first five years—the most important time in children's development.

Enhancing Early Intervention for Contra Costa's Young Children



All children deserve to reach their full potential.

First 5 Contra Costa's Early Intervention efforts ensure that families have access to prevention and early intervention supports that foster the optimal development of all children.

Regular, evidence-based screenings can change the trajectory for children. Early identification of developmental delays, behavioral concerns, and other needs related to trauma help children access services during the critical years of their development. The earlier interventions begin, the more likely they are to be effective and the greater the chance a child has of reaching their full potential. Research has also shown intervening early enhances family functioning and resiliency, and can save significant taxpayer dollars that would otherwise be needed to address untreated issues later in life.

Promoting trauma-informed and resiliency practices.

One of the most potentially damaging factors in a child's development is the effect of trauma and toxic stress, which can lead to children facing lifelong physical, behavioral and emotional challenges. The effects of toxic stress are detectable as early as infancy and can be associated with failure to thrive, growth delays, sleep disruption, and developmental delays.

First 5 Contra Costa works with public and private healthcare providers to build their capacity to screen, treat and heal toxic stress. Using a family-centered approach, First 5 Contra Costa created the Network of Care that helps build connections between health and social service providers to ensure all aspects of families' needs are met with trauma-informed practices that bolster families' resiliency.

First 5 Contra Costa builds the capacity of the professionals and the systems they work within to adopt proven prevention and early intervention approaches. Many providers working with young families are stretched thin with large caseloads of families with multiple needs.

First 5 Contra Costa works across public and private sectors to bring training to providers, resources to pilot new approaches, and best practices to institutionalize proven methods.

First 5 Contra Costa is working to ensure that all health providers in our county have the knowledge and systems to screen all children for Adverse Childhood Experiences at least once before they are age 5, and that healthcare providers can successfully refer families to the health or social services needed to heal.

750+

professionals from the health care, social service, and other fields trained on trauma in FY 2022

65%

of training participants, on average, said they plan to change their practice as a result of the training

"The other piece that really made a difference is the idea that there is hope—that even though trauma can derail development, we can still rewire the brain and there's still things that can be done." - Training Participant

Developmental Screenings

To help children ages birth to 5 in Contra Costa County achieve their best development, the Help Me Grow program ensures children have regular developmental screenings and get connected to services they need. Evidence-based developmental screenings help identify developmental delays and behavioral concerns that if left untreated can result in poor academic and health outcomes for children as they age.

The program works with a variety of agencies and families throughout the county to increase awareness of the importance of early identification and intervention, and enhance the way families are referred to support services. Families, medical staff, and social service providers can access a Help Me Grow hotline to speak to staff dedicated to helping families access screenings and services to support families' needs.

1,375+

referrals made to 778 families who were served by the Help Me Grow Contra Costa program in FY 2022

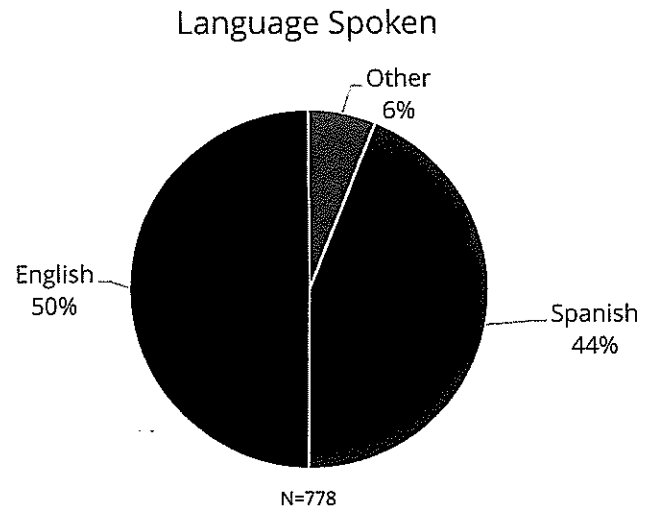
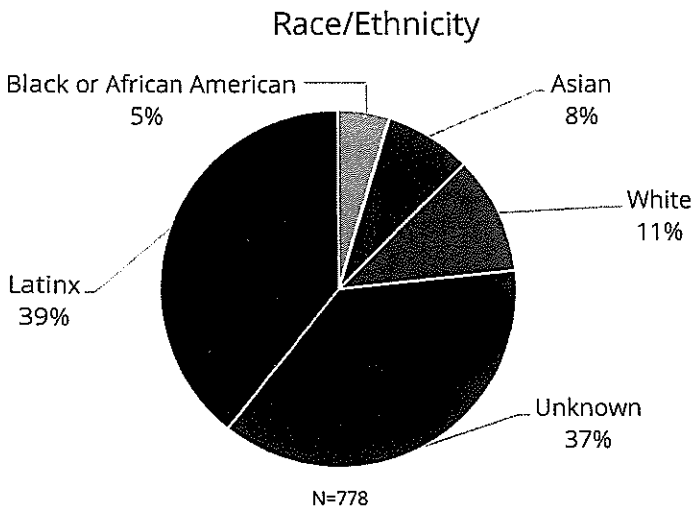
175+

professionals from healthcare, child care and other social service agencies trained in developmental screenings and/or the Help Me Grow Referral Pathways

80%

of professionals participating in a training said they felt confident in conducting development screenings as a result of the training

Demographics of Parents Receiving Referrals to Services Through Help Me Grow Phone Line, FY 2022



Working to Support Families and Address Mental Health Services Crisis

Contra Costa County has a severe shortage of mental health services to meet families' needs, which have only increased since the pandemic. Parents accessing services funded by First 5 Contra Costa continue to identify their child's development and behavior as one of their top concerns, above paying bills and making ends meet. For example as highlighted in this table, 15% of parents reported their child's development and behavior was their biggest concern.

First 5 Contra Costa works with other partners to call attention to these unmet mental health needs and to strategize ways to access new and leverage existing resources to serve those families with the most critical needs.

Biggest Concerns in FY 2022	% of Parents Identifying as 1 of their 3 Biggest Concerns
Development/behavior of my child	15%
Paying rent or housing	13%
Paying bills	10%

Note: Parents could select up to 3 of their biggest concerns. Percentages are based on parent responses, and do not total 100%. This chart only shows specific concerns. N= 1,527 responses.



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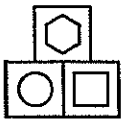
First 5 Contra Costa works to ensure young children are healthy, ready to learn, and supported in safe, nurturing families and communities. We invest in policies, programs, and capacity building to change systems that support families and children during their first five years—the most important time in children's development.



Our Kids, Our Future

For more than two decades, First 5 Contra Costa has worked to support every child in reaching their full potential by focusing on their most critical years of development—prenatal to age 5.

We focus on prevention, center our work around equity, and play many roles to reach our vision: funder, convener, and advocate.



Early
Childhood
Education



Early
Intervention

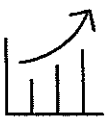


Strengthening
Families

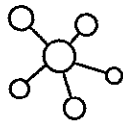
Working in partnership with others, First 5 Contra Costa aims to change systems of services and supports to better meet the needs of young children and their families through our core strategies.



Capacity
Building



Research



Resource
Connection



Advocacy &
Community
Engagement

Why Focus on Ages 0-5?

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically during the first five years of life. During this critical period, a window of opportunity exists to help shape how a child's brain matures and to lay the foundation for the years that follow.



Vision:

Contra Costa's young children will be healthy, ready to learn, and supported in safe, nurturing families and communities.

Mission:

To foster the development of our community's children, prenatal through 5 years of age.



While the early period in children's development is critical to their future success, it is also where public investments are lowest. Research shows that early childhood programs have some of the highest returns on investment of social service programs.

At First 5 Contra Costa, we prioritize our efforts and investments to focus on eliminating disparities and creating equitable opportunities and outcomes.



Quality early learning programs impact children's future.

Our **Early Childhood Education** efforts help ensure children have high-quality early learning experiences that help them succeed in school and in life.

Interactions with children during their first 5 years makes a difference in their future learning, behavior, and health. Nurturing, supportive relationships impact children's academic and emotional well-being in the short and long-term.

First 5 Contra Costa offers professional development opportunities for early learning educators, supports continuous program quality improvement, and promotes policies and supports to foster school readiness and a stable early learning educator workforce.



All children deserve to reach their full potential.

Our **Early Intervention** efforts ensure that families have access to prevention and supports that foster the optimal development of all children.

Regular, evidence-based screenings that lead to connecting families to needed services can change children's developmental trajectory. Research shows prevention and early intervention can not only improve lifelong outcomes for children, but also yield long-term economic benefits.

First 5 Contra Costa builds the capacity of professionals and the systems they work within to adopt proven prevention and early intervention approaches, including developmental screenings and strategies to address toxic stress and Adverse Childhood Experiences.



Thriving families lead to thriving children.

Our **Strengthening Families** efforts help families access the information and services needed to help their children thrive.

Increasing parents' and caregivers' understanding of child development and parenting can lead to better child and family outcomes.

First 5 Contra Costa connects families to resources and programs that focus on strengthening families' abilities to foster children's health and development, including supporting five family resource centers, parenting classes, and distributing kits to new parents.



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Early Childhood and Education Crisis in Contra Costa County



Every child deserves access to quality early childhood education.

Research shows all children, and particularly children from lower income families, benefit from high-quality early learning programs in which children have meaningful interactions with qualified staff who are culturally and linguistically responsive. Children who attend high-quality early childhood education programs are more likely to be ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. First 5 Contra Costa works with other organizations in the county to increase families' access to such high-quality early childhood education programs, and to ensure staff in those programs have the supports they need to foster children's optimal development.

The early childhood education landscape in Contra Costa County faced many challenges before the pandemic occurred. As with many other regions of the country, the Covid-19 pandemic intensified those challenges and created even more pressure on a field already struggling to keep up demand and sustain a qualified workforce.

Even Harder for Families to Find the Child Care They Need

Contra Costa is one of the fastest growing counties in the Bay Area, with approximately 75,000 children under the age of 6. Economic stability for families in our county varies greatly depending on the location, and in 22 of the county's census tracts between 25-49% of households with children under age 6 live in deep poverty.

Far too many of our county's low-income working families cannot access the quality child care they need. An estimated 19,400 children under the age of 5 eligible for subsidized care cannot access spaces due to our county's low supply. This translates to about 90% of children under the age of 3 who were eligible in 2022 without a program to enroll in, and similarly 60% of eligible 3 and 4 years old not able to enroll.

The shortage of subsidized child care to meet the needs in our county is exasperated by the insufficient reimbursement rates paid by the state system. Many subsidized programs have staff vacancies because their state funding is not enough to retain or attract qualified staff. In our county's Head Start program alone, more than 40 classrooms were closed impacting 450 children in May 2022 due to staffing shortages. In addition to the low state reimbursement rates, the pandemic and related economic impacts have had large impacts across the child care field in our county. In FY 2021 alone, there were about 90 child care providers (including both those who serve subsidized children and those who do not) who closed, resulting in approximately 2,000 fewer children being served.



Contra Costa County

75,000

children under the age of 6

19,400

children under the age of 5 eligible for subsidized care cannot access spaces due to our county's low supply.

2,000

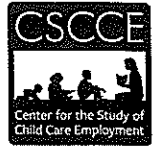
child care spaces lost due to 90 child care providers closing in FY 2021.

Lower Compensation Continues to Threaten the ECE Workforce

Recent data from the UC Berkeley Center for the Study of Child Care Employment shows that early childhood education staff in the Bay Area continue to make less than comparable staff in TK-12 school districts. On average, center-based teachers earn \$6,300 less in annual pay while family child care teachers earn \$16,500 less than their TK-12 counterparts.

Many early childhood education providers are dedicated to their work despite the lack of compensation and recognition. The UC Berkeley Center's work documents how hard early childhood education staff try to make ends meet so they can continue working with young children—they work second jobs, take on debt, seek safety net services like Cal Fresh or other forms of assistance. For many, this is not sustainable, no matter how committed they are to caring for and educating children. As transitional kindergarten expands in California, many early childhood education teachers are drawn to the stability, benefits, and higher pay of the TK-12 system.

ECE teachers earn less than TK-12 counterparts



Center-based teachers:

\$6,300 less

earned annually on average by center-based teachers than their K-12 counterparts

Family child care teachers:

\$16,500 less

earned annually on average by family child care teachers than their K-12 counterparts

First 5 Contra Costa is partnering with public and private agencies to introduce possible solutions to the county's early childhood education workforce crisis, including exploring solutions such as guaranteed income pilots or teacher stipends to reach TK-12 parity.



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