

La Paz/Mohave Regional Partnership Council
Early Childhood

ADVOCACY KIT



FIRST THINGS FIRST

The right system for bright futures

www.azftf.gov

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Governmental Affairs

Please follow the link below for more information on Governmental Affairs within First Things First:

<http://www.azftf.gov/WhoWeAre/HowWeWork/Pages/GovernmentalAffairs.aspx>

Each year there are a variety of bills and issues discussed on both the federal and the state level. The budget affects all of us and it is our intent to keep you informed of these discussions and to help you stay abreast of what is happening regarding children birth through five years of age.

FIRST THINGS FIRST – ISSUE BRIEF

“When we invest wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productive and responsible citizenship.”

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child

In November 2006, in a statistical landslide, Arizona voters passed Proposition 203 - a citizen's initiative that supports a system for high quality early childhood education, development, and health services. With its passage, the Proposition created a new state level board known as the Arizona Early Childhood Development & Health Board. The Board subsequently adopted the name First Things First as an uplifting reference to the voter-enacted initiative, and to exemplify the importance of early childhood. First Things First created a new, dedicated revenue stream for children birth through five through a tobacco tax. These dollars are used to ensure that all children have the tools they need to be ready to succeed. This initiative also empowered Arizona Federally Recognized Tribes to decide how they want to take advantage of the funds that are available to help children birth through five within their tribal communities. Each Arizona Tribe had the opportunity to establish their own Regional Partnership Council located on their tribal lands or stay within a designated region.

As the legislature and Governor contemplate a budget shortfall this year, using FTF fund balances may be considered an easy way to address the state's multi-billion dollar deficit. Though FTF statutory language prohibits supplanting with its funds, the legislature can access FTF accumulated funds in 2009 in one of two ways:

- At least 45 members of the House, 23 members of the Senate, and the governor vote to take the funds; or
- A referendum is referred by the legislature for public vote in a special election and receives a majority of the votes cast.

FACTS ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Early childhood development is the first and essential step toward achieving primary school completion. Early childhood is the most rapid period of development in a human life. Although individual children develop at their own pace, all children progress through an identifiable sequence of physical, cognitive, and emotional growth and change. Young children respond best when caregivers use techniques designed to encourage and stimulate progress to the next level of development.

The ultimate goal of early childhood development (ECD) programs is to improve young children's capacity to develop and learn. A child who is ready for school has a combination of positive characteristics: he or she is socially and emotionally healthy, confident, and friendly; has good peer relationships; tackles challenging tasks and persists with them; has good language skills and communicates well; and listens to instructions and is attentive. The positive effects ECD programs have can change the developmental trajectory of children by the time they enter school. A child who is ready for school has fewer chances of repeating a grade, receiving special education services, or dropping out of school.

Did you know?

- Nearly 90% of the core structure of the brain develops in the first three years of life. This “wiring” impacts the capacity to learn and develop social, emotional and cognitive skills.
—www.futureofchildren.org
- Identifying and helping children who have special needs at least 2 years before they enter kindergarten can produce savings of \$30,000 to \$100,000 per child.
—*Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention, Second Edition, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press*
- Studies have found a 95% correlation between children's language interaction with adults in the first two to three years of life and their reading level in 4th grade. —[Pre-K NOW](#)
- Children acquire the foundation for desirable business skills such as communication, teamwork and critical thinking before age 5. —www.futureofchildren.org
- Children who participate in developmentally appropriate early childhood learning programs are more likely to graduate from high school and get a job. —www.fpg.unc.edu
- Every dollar invested in high quality early childhood programs may yield at least \$7-\$9 in future savings. —www.nieer.org

FIRST THINGS FIRST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

FTF Infrastructure

- **The establishment of the Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health/First Things First State Board.** This is a nine-member board whose members are appointed by the Governor and represent diverse geographical, political, and professional perspectives. The current Chair is Steve Lynn.
- **The completion of a statewide Needs and Assets Assessment, and the Strategic Plan Roadmap** that identifies the organization’s mission, vision, guiding principles, goal statements, key measures, and optional strategies.
- **The development of 31 Regional Partnership Councils across the state** that promote a common vision, serve as the voice for children in each region, and commit to the development of an integrated system that connects services to children. They are family-centered, community-based partnerships linking state and local government, communities and families.
- **The creation of Regional Needs and Assets Reports.** These reports provided data on the need to improve early childhood education practice and capacity, highlighted existing resources or assets currently available to support early childhood efforts, and identified opportunities for creating a comprehensive early childhood improvement plan for each region. The Regional Needs and Assets Reports were also used to guide strategic planning and funding decisions for the regions. This report was the first of its kind for many communities.
- **The development of Regional Funding Plans.** After a series of strategic planning activities, each Regional Partnership Council developed strategies, or funding priorities, to meet the unique needs of its region.

How have FTF dollars been spent on statewide programs?

- Parent Kits are given to every family with a newborn baby at hospitals statewide.
- 637 child care providers are providing the best possible care to children through their voluntary participation in the Quality First program.
- Child Care Health Consultants assists child care providers statewide to better address the health and safety needs of children in their care.
- Hundreds of T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) scholarships are available for child care professionals to enroll in college degree programs.
- Regional Allocations – over \$90 million beginning July 1, 2009.

How have FTF dollars been spent in La Paz & Mohave Counties?

Early Care and Education

- 60 children in Quartzsite, Topock and Littlefield will have access to preschool for the first time.
- 280 children were able to remain in child care while their parents were working or looking for work.
- 975 children are receiving improved child care, including better trained teachers and more nurturing learning environments.
- 56 child care providers in La Paz and Mohave Counties will receive scholarships to enroll in college degree programs.

Health & Mental Health

- 162 children in remote and isolated communities, like Colorado City and Bouse, where health resources are severely limited, will receive developmental screening, information and resources to link families with affordable health insurance and appropriate preventive health care.
- Health and welfare professionals from across the region will receive training on early childhood brain development and learn how to best serve our most vulnerable infants and toddlers.
- Community Health Workers will reach 300 families in Bullhead City to provide information and resources to keep children safe and healthy.

Supporting Families

- 250 families in Bullhead, Lake Havasu, Kingman and Parker receive weekly home visits to teach parents positive parenting techniques and link isolated families with parent support groups and other community resources.

HOW TO BECOME AN EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVOCATE

Call to Action: Please get involved!

Below are several things you and your community can do to support First Things First funded early childhood development strategies in your region and across the state.

- Visit your state legislators' field staff – right in your local area
- Call your state legislators
- Email, fax or mail a letter to your state representatives and senators

What Should You Say?

If you are calling or visiting:

- First, thank them for speaking/meeting with you
- Briefly share the importance of the First Things First initiative for children in your community
- State the following request:

Please support the success of our children by supporting the sustainability of Arizona's First Things First. This endeavor provides our community with the knowledge and resources to implement early care, education, and health programs that were designed by the community to address the most pressing issues facing children ages zero to five.

- Emphasize that this investment will provide a greater return on investment through long term decreased spending in other areas such as remedial education, clinical treatment, and prisons.
- Ask your representative, senator, or their staff if you can count on their support.
- Remember to send a follow-up thank you letter, briefly restating your request.

TIPS FOR MEETING WITH YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS

The most effective way citizens can directly influence public policy is to meet with their legislative representatives (or his or her staff).

During the Meeting

- Be concise. Keep your remarks short and focused. Make clear exactly what you want the member to do.
- Listen – even if his or her view differs from your own. Don't be confrontational.
- Personalize the issue. Stress why early childhood development and health is important to you.
- Press for a commitment of support. Don't let your legislator evade the issue or change the subject. Ask specifically for his or her position on the issue.
- Don't feel like you have to be an expert. Your concern is what is important. If you are asked a question to which you do not know the answer, simply say so, and then ask FTF staff to follow up with more information.

After the Meeting

- Within a week of your meeting, fax or email a note to thank your legislator and/or the staff members for their time (do not use regular mail – it may take too long to get through the security procedures). In the note, remind them of what you discussed in your meeting.
- Provide follow-up information. If your legislator asked questions, or was particularly interested in one aspect, seize the opportunity to follow up with a letter, fact sheet, phone call, or second meeting.
- Share the knowledge you learned. Be sure to tell First Things First staff what you learned about your legislator's position.
- Stay in touch. A first visit should never be the end of contact. Make sure you stay in touch with the member and his or her staff on the issue

SAMPLE LETTER TO YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS

Please use the text below to create your own letter on your own letterhead.

Date: _____
The Honorable _____
Phoenix, AZ
Fax: (602) _____
Email: _____

Dear Representative/Senator: _____

I am a constituent in your district and I am writing to express my deep concern about the potential that First Things First (FTF) dollars may be under consideration as an easy way to address the state's budget deficit. First Things First funds are not taken from the General Fund or any other source of existing state revenues, but are added tax revenues that were solely enacted to help support the development of young children. These funds would not be available today if First Things First had not been adopted. Using First Things First funds is asking young children to bail out the state.

First Things First dollars are designed to be distributed based on funding plans created by communities across Arizona, including right here in La Paz and Mohave Counties. Should this proposal become a reality, La Paz and Mohave Counties and the entire state of Arizona will potentially lose the ability to adequately deliver much needed services to our children. First Things First dollars are funding critical services that have been specifically designed *for our community, by our community*. These programs are designed to reach thousands of children to provide services such as quality childcare and preschool, preventive health screening and outreach, and culturally-based parent education.

On behalf of the children of La Paz and Mohave Counties and all of Arizona's children, I am respectfully requesting your assistance in protecting First Things First funding. I sincerely ask that any proposal to alter the Voter Protection Act or redirect First Things First dollars be abandoned.

I thank you for all of your efforts to assist local families and all of Arizona's communities. I ask that you help lead the charge to preserve the services and programs offered by First Things First. I would be honored to have you join this effort to protect early childhood funding sources and also offer my help in any way that I might be of assistance.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at () _____ so that we can work together to create a solid foundation for young children.

Sincerely,

Name: _____
Address: _____
Email: _____

STRATEGIES TO EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY REGADING EARLY CHILDHOOD

Outlined below are a variety of strategies that you can engage in to inform individuals and to increase their awareness about early childhood investment and how it impacts the lives of young children from birth through 5 years of age.

YOU COULD (IN ORDER OF EFFECTIVENESS):

- Have a Face to Face meeting to inform and educate your legislator.
Meet with your legislator(s) in their Phoenix legislative offices.
Invite your legislator(s) to a special meeting of your Regional Partnership Council.
Invite your legislator(s) to attend a regular Regional Partnership Council Meeting.
- Write a letter to your legislator.
- E-mail, with your address in the subject line to show that you are a constituent, to educate and inform your legislator(s) of the benefits of the investment for children birth – 5 years of age.
- Call and talk to your legislator(s) and inform them of the importance of the investment for children birth – 5 years of age.
- Call and leave a message for your legislator(s).

YOU COULD ALSO ASK OTHERS TO:

- Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper.
- Write a letter to your local newspaper to encourage increased coverage of children's programs birth – 5 years of age.
- Ask for a visit with your local newspaper editorial board and bring other Regional Partnership Council Members to discuss the investment for children birth – 5 years of age.
- Participate in a local town meeting to educate others about the investment for children birth – 5 years of age.
- Invite other community members to participate in a briefing about the State of Children in your area – include community, faith and business leaders; legislators; and the general public in your invitation.
- Share stories from your region that will provide example(s) of the benefits of the early childhood investment being made, the needs of young children and/or the effects of losing revenue.

LA PAZ/MOHAVE LEGISLATORS



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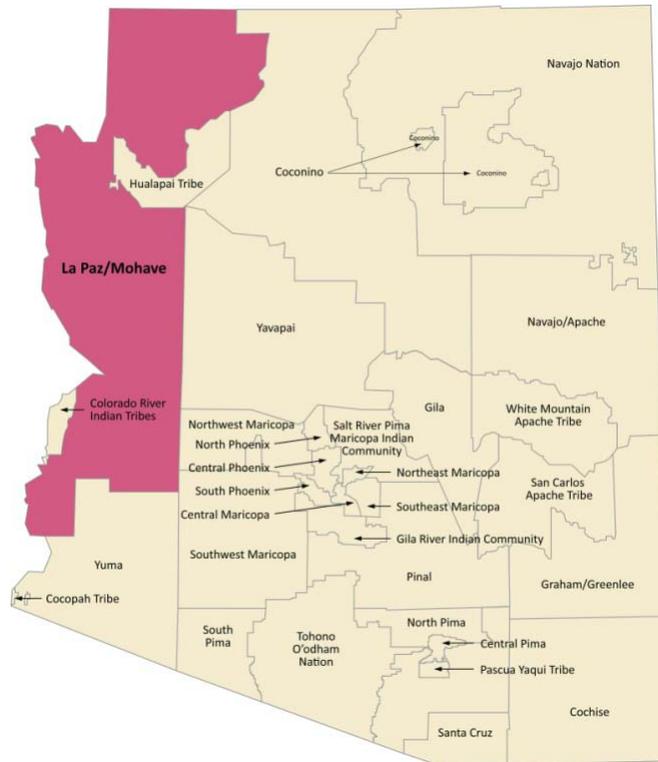


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