

Ready for School. Set for Life.

 FIRST THINGS FIRST



Creating the
Model Early
Childhood
System



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Our Shared Challenge

... and Opportunity

When Arizona voters passed Proposition 203 in November 2006 and then defeated Proposition 302 in November 2010, they dedicated more than \$130 million in new tobacco revenue annually to ensure that every child in Arizona arrives in kindergarten ready to succeed. The state established the Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board (First Things First) to lead this work.

Decades of research has established that young children's brains are 90 percent developed by the time they are age 5, and the experiences young children have from birth to 5 set the stage for whether they will be prepared to achieve in school and beyond.

The challenges are many:

- More than half of Arizona's young children live in low-income homes (annual income of less than \$44,700 for a family of four).
- 60 percent of Arizona children under age 6 live in homes where all of the adults work.
- Only about 13 percent of children in licensed centers attend nationally accredited early care and education programs.
- The annual average costs for infants and 4 year olds in center-based care are \$8,500 and \$6,600, respectively, compared to tuition of \$8,237 at the University of Arizona.
- Only 27 percent of early childhood center-based teachers are required to have some college education or a college degree.
- More than one-third of parents report that their young child has never been to a dentist.
- Arizona ranks 44th in the nation in the percentage of parents who read daily to their children, ages birth to 5.
- About 14 percent of 2 to 4 year olds and about 31 percent of 10 to 17 year olds are overweight or obese.

In the past few years, Arizona has faced significant budget challenges that affect our children, but the early childhood system has also made some important progress.

Fulfilling our commitment to young children means more than simply funding programs and services. It means having a shared vision about what being prepared for kindergarten actually means and then a collective commitment to work across sectors to realize this vision.

The Arizona Early Childhood Task Force, composed of 35 leaders from an array of disciplines, convened in 2010 to weigh in on these issues. They were supported with national technical assistance from Karen Ponder, former CEO of the North Carolina Partnership for Children. This report summarizes the task force's progress. And it invites you to work with us in the coming years as we continue to build an early childhood development and health system that offers Arizona children the strong start they deserve.

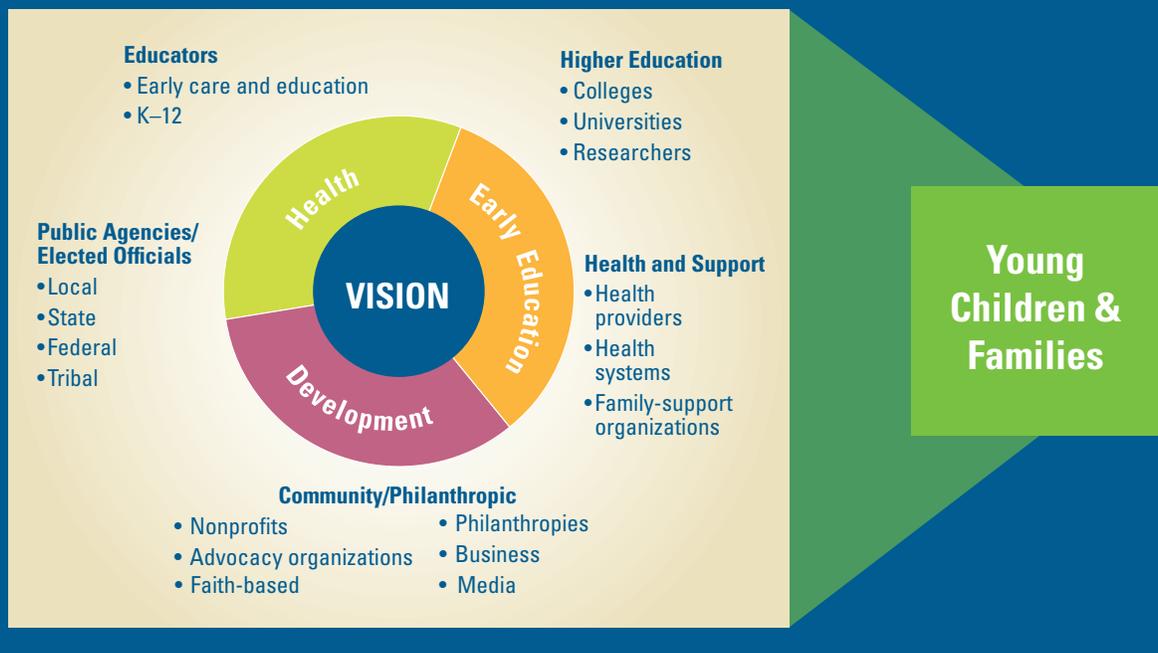


Develop a Model Early Childhood System

Development includes a child’s physical, cognitive, speech and language, and social and emotional development. **Health** includes a child’s physical, mental, oral and nutritional well-being. **Early education** includes environments guided by skilled adults and rich in interaction, language, books and materials so that children are cognitively, socially

and emotionally prepared for kindergarten. Realizing this vision means more than simply relying on programs and services funded by First Things First (FTF), which is one element of the system. Success depends on multiple individuals and sectors working collaboratively to serve young children and their families.

SYSTEM VISION: All Arizona children by the time they are 5 years old have a solid foundation for success in school and in life because we have worked together to create a family-centered, comprehensive, collaborative and high-quality early childhood system that addresses the child’s development, health and early education.



Our Model System Will Be ...

Inclusive and respectful Publicly supported **EQUITABLE**
EFFECTIVE Accountable Affordable Results focused
Clear **CHILD- and FAMILY-CENTERED** Seamless
Strength-based Well-funded **Flexible** Sustainable Comprehensive
AVAILABLE and ACCESSIBLE Community-based Scalable
 High-quality Widely known Developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive **COLLABORATIVE**
 Innovative and Arizona-specific



Key System Elements

We need to move beyond an incremental approach — one pilot project after another, a slew of disconnected programs — to create a comprehensive approach that addresses all elements of the system.

Not all elements will require equal attention all the time. Different communities will focus on different elements, depending on their local priorities. But having a holistic perspective will help everyone stay on track, working on the priorities that matter most.

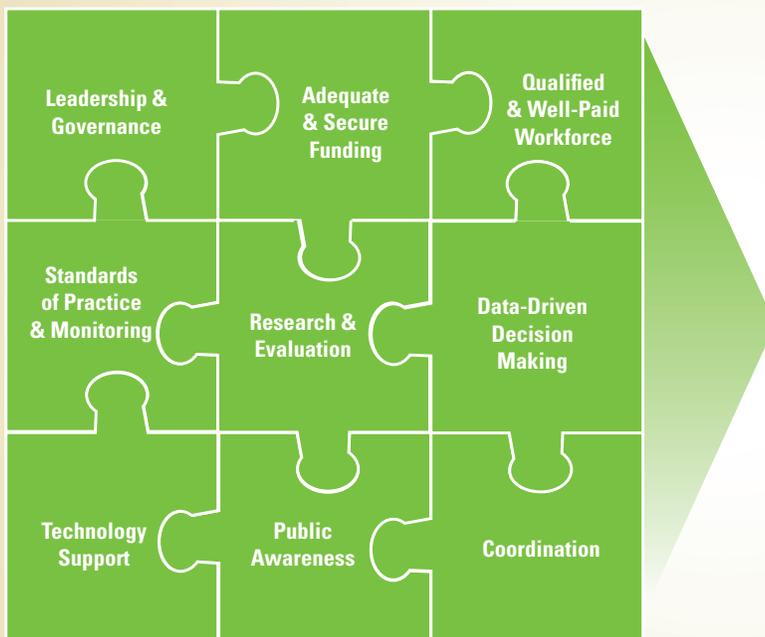
Six System Outcomes

When we succeed, all of us will benefit from living in communities where:

- 1 All children have access to high-quality, culturally responsive early care and education that promotes their development.
- 2 All children have access to high-quality preventive and continuous health care, including physical, mental, oral and nutritional health.
- 3 All families have the information, services and support they need to help their children achieve to their fullest potential.

- 4 All early childhood education and health professionals are well-prepared, highly skilled and compensated based on their education and experience.
- 5 The early childhood system is high-quality, centered on children and families, coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive.
- 6 All Arizonans understand the importance of the early years and the impact of early childhood development, health and education on Arizona's quality of life. As a result, they substantially support — both politically and financially — a model system that delivers these benefits.

Having all elements in place will help accelerate positive outcomes.



- Access to high-quality, culturally responsive early care and education
- Access to high-quality preventive and continuous health care
- Information, services and support for families
- Well-prepared, highly skilled and appropriately compensated professionals
- Coordinated, integrated and comprehensive system
- Public understanding and support

First Things First Priority Roles



The FTF Board charged the task force with identifying all of the possible roles in the system and recommending the strategic priorities for FTF for the next five years. The task force recommended and the board approved the following eight priority roles. FTF will focus financial resources in each of these priority areas. In addition, FTF will convene partners, offer leadership and work collaboratively with the existing system to maximize resources and improve outcomes. Collaboration will be especially important to ensure young children access the existing health care system.

Quality, Access and Affordability of Regulated Early Care and Education Settings

Families need options so they can choose early care and education that makes sense for them. Some families may choose a child care setting; others may choose preschool. Some may want half-day; others full-day. Some may want programs near where they live; others close to their work. Regardless of setting, all programs should offer a high-quality, safe and healthy environment appropriate for each child's developmental and learning needs. They should be culturally responsive. And programs should be affordable so that families aren't paying the same for child care each month as they do for their mortgage.

We recognize that a percentage of Arizona children are being cared for by families, friends and neighbors. While regional FTF strategies focus on this population, our initial statewide focus will be on regulated, licensed settings.

Family Support and Services

Families should have the information, services and supports they need to help their children achieve their fullest potential. To make the best choices for their families, they need access to information that educates them about what to look for in a quality program and tells them what is available in their community. They must have the support they need to teach their children to read, use language and achieve developmental milestones. And they must have opportunities to connect with other families in their community.

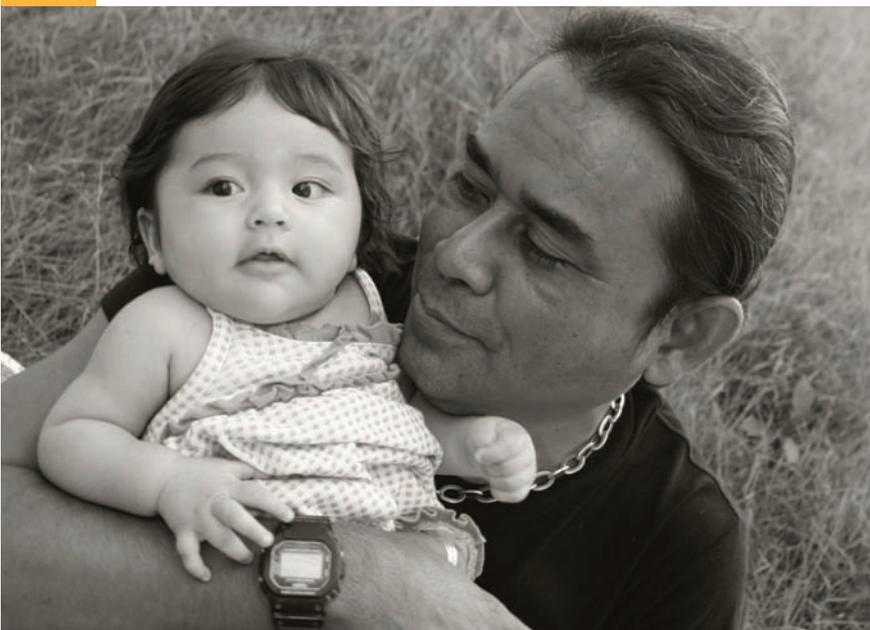
Professional Development System

Arizona's best chance of offering quality early care and education is through well-trained professionals who can teach young children to explore and discover their worlds and who can effectively manage their programs. And health professionals who are trained to work with very young children and understand child development and know resources for families. This means that all early care and education and health professionals must be well-prepared, highly skilled and compensated accordingly.

They need to be culturally diverse to meet the needs of children and families in every community. They need to be able to work in a variety of settings. They must meet specific educational and professional development standards and then have access to the quality education and training programs that allow them to continue learning throughout their careers. Creating a system like this cannot be done piecemeal, community by community. Arizona needs a comprehensive and coordinated approach.

Quality Health Care and Coverage

Young children cannot be expected to thrive unless they have access to high-quality and affordable preventive and continuous health care services. These must address children's physical, mental, oral and nutritional needs.



Unless these basic needs are met, children will face long odds of being prepared for school and life by age 5. Currently, gaps are especially acute in remote and underserved areas of the state.

Adequate and Sustainable Funding

Given the gaps between what children and families need and the current availability of services, the state must continue to invest wisely. Our top priority must be to secure long-term funding that ensures these priorities are sustained in the face of declining revenues.

FTF will not be the sole funder of the early childhood system, but we will take an active role in helping to increase and coordinate available resources from multiple sources.

A Comprehensive, Aligned and Accountable System

To ensure all young children and their families have access to the high-quality and affordable services they need, the system must address all aspects of child development, health and education: physical, cognitive, social and emotional. Agencies, organizations and individuals at all levels must work collaboratively to develop, fund, carry out and evaluate programs and services.

A system that is organized around the unique needs of each child and family has no room for bureaucracy or turf wars. Services should be seamless; children and

families don't care who is offering what, as long as the care, education and health services are high-quality, accessible and affordable. Improved outcomes for children are what matter most.

Quality Standards, Curriculum and Assessments

Learning begins at birth, and a strong foundation in the early years sets the stage for academic success in grade school and beyond. An aligned and coordinated system from birth through college is essential. That includes adopting quality standards across the early learning continuum; having developmentally appropriate curricula and assessments that are connected to K-12 curricula and assessments; and integrating the collection, analysis and use of data.

Public Awareness and Support

In 2006, Arizona's citizens wisely, generously and overwhelmingly supported passage of Proposition 203, which included a steady source of funding to support a quality early childhood development and health system. Voters intended the new funds to supplement existing programs and services supported through the state's general fund, approved by the governor and the legislature. FTF is charged, by law, to expand public information about the importance of early childhood development and health so that all Arizonans are aware of the long-term impact of early childhood on the state's economy and quality of life.

NEXT STEPS

The FTF Board and regional councils, with support from the Arizona Early Childhood Task Force and our partners across Arizona, have begun to chart a course for the next five years. With a clear vision of our collective goal and a solid definition of the system and its priorities, our work will be specific and targeted. The next critical element is to determine how we are going to measure success.

To that end, three policy committees on child health, family support and literacy, and early learning have been convened to refine our specific goals and recommend the indicators that will be used to track progress. With input this summer from regional councils and community stakeholders, these indicators will be presented to the board for final approval at its August 2011 meeting.

While the goal is ambitious, Arizona's future depends on our young children. Hundreds of people across Arizona have spent more than 60,000 hours volunteering their time to help develop an integrated and seamless system for young children. Thousands more are dedicating their professional careers to support families and nurture young children on a trajectory for success.

We now have an agreed-upon statewide strategy and priorities. But the work is not over. It will take all partners in the system to help refine our program implementation. Most important, we must collectively hold ourselves accountable so our work will result in positive, measureable outcomes for our youngest children.



 **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

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