



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Ready for School. Set for Life.

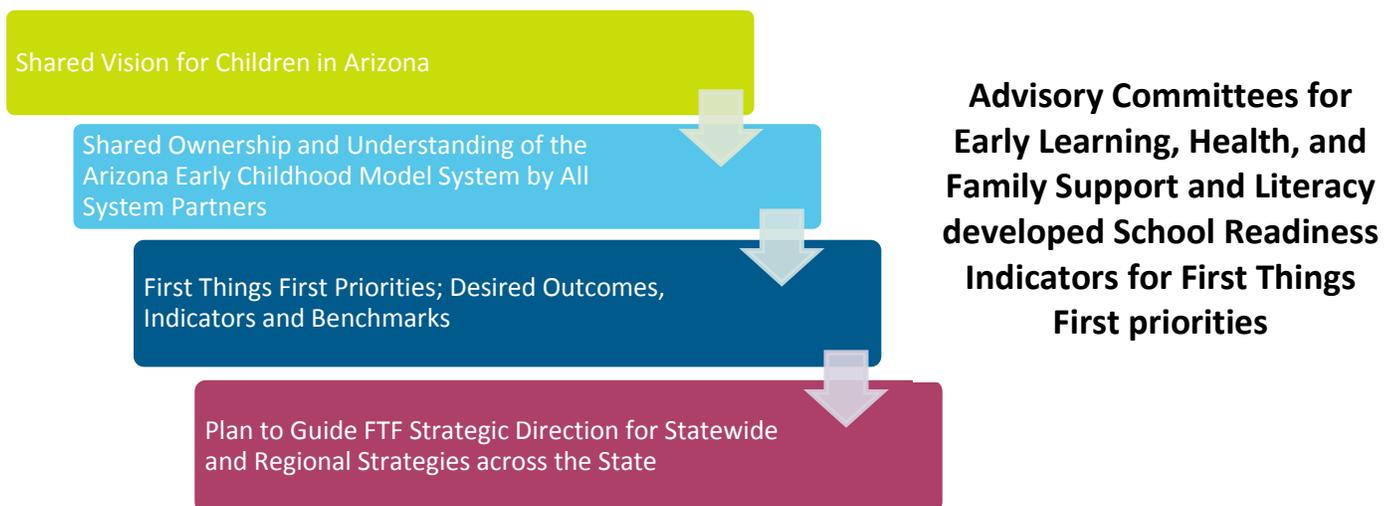
Recommended School Readiness Indicators

Introduction

Achieving the mission of First Things First to ensure all young children arrive in kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed will require more than simply funding programs and services. It will take all partners, across the state, to own a common vision for young children in Arizona and a cross-sector commitment to ensure that vision is realized.

The Arizona Early Childhood Taskforce, with members appointed in January 2010 by First Things First Board Chair, Steve Lynn, were charged with establishing a shared vision for all young children in our state, and conceiving a model system that could be embraced by all of Arizona’s early childhood partners, including families, early educators, health providers, state agencies, tribes, advocacy and service delivery organizations, philanthropic, faith-based and business representatives and other stakeholders. The Task Force developed the vision for and elements of comprehensive model system, and recommended eight priority roles for First Things First, with the explicit understanding that First Things First is only one of many key partners that have an important role in building and sustaining the system.

Using this foundation, First Things First is continuing to develop a strategic framework around the priority roles that will guide our work for the next 3 – 5 years. Over the past eight months, members of First Things First Advisory Committees for Early Learning, Health and Family Support and Literacy developed indicators in order to provide a snapshot of progress. A subset of these indicators provide a comprehensive composite measure for young children as they prepare to enter kindergarten, and are recommended as School Readiness Indicators. These indicators give us the opportunity to focus on achieving measureable and real long-term results for children.



Indicator Development

Under the direction of First Things First Policy and Program Committee Chair, Dr. Pamela Powell, three Advisory Committees were convened in the areas of Early Learning, Health and Family Support and Literacy. The Advisory Committees are chartered to provide on-going early childhood expertise and make recommendations related to their content area to the First Things First Policy and Program Committee. Membership is geographically diverse and includes First Things First Regional Council members, content experts, and community partners.

Two co-chairs provide leadership for each committee: Dr. Michael Kelley and Juan Sanchez for Early Learning; Jeanette Shea and Pat VanMaanen for Health; and, Marilee Dal Pra and Colleen Day-Mach for Family Support and Literacy. Expert facilitation for indicator development for the Early Learning and Health Committees was provided by Leslie Anderson, Leslie Anderson Consulting, Inc. and for Family Support and Literacy by Dr. Linda Cannon, Cannon and Associates. Membership lists for all Advisory Committees are on the First Things First web site at: <http://azftf.gov/WhoWeAre/Board/Pages/BoardCommittees.aspx>.

In January 2011, 15 of the 20 First Things First roles were grouped by content area and assigned to each committee respectively. The remaining five roles addressed early childhood system development and public awareness and were not directly assigned to a committee. Members met monthly to review and revise the goal statements for their assigned roles and to develop indicators of progress for those roles. Over several meetings, and with homework between meetings, members culled through national and local resources to identify targeted indicators of progress and developed an expansive list of potential indicators for each assigned role. Each committee then sorted the list of indicators for each role using an approach adapted from *Results-Based Accountability*, developed by Dr. Mark Friedman, Founder and Director of the national Fiscal Policy Studies Institute. Indicators were sorted into one of four categories depending on which question an indicator would address:

1. How Much Did We Do?
2. How Well Did We Do It?
3. Are Children and Families Better Off?
4. Are System Supports in Place?

Each committee completed a final review of the sorted indicators and then forwarded their recommendations for the 15 roles to the Policy and Program Committee in June 2011. First Things First staff completed work on the five remaining roles by using indicators sorted into the category, "Are System Supports in Place" as indicators for the three early childhood system development roles, and used indicators already approved in the First Things First Communications Plan for the two public awareness roles.

The Health Advisory Committee forwarded an additional recommendation to the Program Committee to add a priority role for *Nutrition and Physical Activity* (Health Role 3), in addition to the existing priority role in the Health area, *Access to Quality Health Care Coverage and Service* (Health Role 2). The Health Advisory Committee recommendation cited that the role, *Access to Quality Health Care Coverage and Services*, is fairly comprehensive in addressing access to health care services, pre-natal care and health insurance, but falls short in addressing any preventive and community health services. Adding the role, *Nutrition and Physical Activity*, as a priority gives First Things First a unique opportunity to address both the need for health care and the concrete support for health and wellness, thereby reducing future need. The Program Committee unanimously agreed with this recommendation from the Health Advisory Committee at their August 11th meeting, and forwards this recommendation to the Board.

The Advisory Committees conducted their work and decision-making related to indicators in public open meetings, and final recommendations on indicators were informed by an on-line survey completed by almost 200 stakeholders. Additional comments were received at six regional forums attended by Regional Partnership Council members and the public and through several meetings and key informant reviews with tribal representatives. First Things First also received valuable comment on the recommended indicators during a Tribal Consultation requested by First Things First with tribal government leaders on July 28, 2011. (See Attachment B for 2011 Tribal Consultation Summary Notes.)

A table of the 20 First Things First roles and recommended indicators developed by the Advisory Committees is found in Attachment A. Priority roles are shown in red font, and include the proposed ninth priority role, *Nutrition and Physical Activity*, as recommended by the Health Advisory Committee and Policy and Program Committee.

Recommended First Things First School Readiness Indicators

The desired outcome from the First Things First strategic framework is that children and families are better off as a result. This outcome aligns well with the *Results-Based Accountability* approach that emphasizes the use of indicators in the “Are Children and Families Better Off” category to measure real long-term results. In preparation for the Policy and Program Committee, First Things First staff reviewed the cumulative list of “Better Off” indicators for the nine priority roles, and eliminated similar or duplicate indicators developed by more than one committee. The resulting set included 12 “Better Off” indicators for the nine roles.

Upon further review, First Things First staff recommended to the Policy and Program Committee at the August 11th meeting that two of the 12 indicators be removed before recommending the final set to the Board. The two indicators were both aligned with an Early Learning priority role, *Early Care and Education System Development and Implementation*:

- # of families satisfied with the level of cultural responsiveness of their early childhood education provider
- # of families indicating the Quality First star rating system was an important factor in their choice of an early childhood education program

The first indicator was recommended for removal because it aligns better with the “How Well Did We Do It” category. A similar indicator (#/% of positive ratings on measures of cultural responsiveness of environment) is already listed as a “How Well” indicator for another priority Early Learning role, *Quality, Access, and Affordability of Regulated Early Care and Education Settings*. Staff also observed that this indicator may be difficult to accurately measure as the meaning of the term “cultural responsiveness” may not consistently be understood by families.

The second indicator was recommended for removal because ultimately, if families understand the importance of quality in their child’s early learning program, the “Better Off” indicator is that their child is participating in a high quality program, and one of the “Better Off” indicators already addressed the number of children enrolled in a high quality program. The Policy and Program Committee agreed with these two recommendations, but requested that the Advisory Committees have further discussion on these two important indicators to ensure the intent of the indicators is not lost, and to come back to the Policy and Program Committee with an update of that discussion and any recommendations.

The following set of 10 “Better Off” indicators provide a comprehensive composite measure to show whether young children are ready for success as they prepare to enter kindergarten and are recommended by the First Things First Board Program and Policy Committee as School Readiness Indicators.

School Readiness Indicators	
<p>1. #/% children demonstrating school readiness at kindergarten entry in the development domains of social-emotional, language and literacy, cognitive, and motor and physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent of indicator is to increase the number of children with equal opportunity to be successful and school and close the achievement gap before kindergarten entry. • Aligned to 4 Priority Roles in Early Learning, Professional Development, and Family Support and Literacy • Data is not currently available, but may be available from the FTF external evaluation and through implementation of a child level assessment system in a longitudinal statewide early childhood data system with data aggregated at the statewide and local levels. 	
<p>2. #/% of children enrolled in an early care and education program with a Quality First rating of 3-5 stars</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent of indicator is to increase the number of children with access to affordable high quality early learning programs. • Aligned to 2 Priority Roles in Early Learning • Data will be available through the FTF Quality First data system at the statewide and regional levels. 	
<p>3. #/% of children with special needs/rights enrolled in an inclusive early care and education program with a Quality First rating of 3-5 stars</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent of indicator is to increase in the number of children with special needs/rights who enroll in high quality inclusive early learning programs. • Aligned to 1 Priority Role in Early Learning • Data is not currently available, but may available through the FTF Quality First data system at the statewide and regional levels. 	
<p>4. #/% of families that spend no more than 10% of the regional median family income on quality care and education with a Quality First rating of 3-5 stars</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent of indicator is to increase the number of families that can afford high-quality early learning programs by reducing the tuition cost per child so that it is no higher than 10% of the regional median family income. • Aligned to 1 Priority Role in Early Learning • Data is not currently available, but may be obtained through a regular early care and education study at the statewide and regional levels. 	

5. % of children with newly identified developmental delays during the kindergarten year

- **Intent** of indicator is to decrease the number of children who are not screened and identified with developmental delays until after they have already entered their kindergarten year. Use of the term “developmental delay” is not intended as a narrowly defined eligibility category; rather it is used in the broadest sense to include preschool moderate or severe delay in cognitive, physical, communication, social/emotional or adaptive development, and preschool speech language delay. It is also likely that this indicator will initially trend upward as awareness increases about the importance of early identification and intervention.
- **Aligned to 4 Priority Roles** in Early Learning, Health and Family Support
- **Data** is not currently available, but may be available through development and implementation of a longitudinal statewide early childhood data system.

6. # of children entering kindergarten exiting preschool special education to regular education

- **Intent** of indicator is to increase the number of children who transition to kindergarten without an identified special need due to timely screening, identification and delivery of effective intervention services prior to their kindergarten year.
- **Aligned to 1 Priority Role** in Early Learning
- **Data** is not currently available, but may be available through development and implementation of a longitudinal statewide early childhood data system.

7. #/% of children ages 2-5 at a healthy weight (Body Mass Index-BMI)

- **Intent** of indicator is to increase the number of children who maintain a healthy body weight.
- **Aligned to 1 Priority Role** in Health
- **Data** is currently obtained in conjunction with an oral health strategy funded through the AZ Department of Health Services, but may be available in the future through other strategies and studies.

8. #/% of children receiving timely well child visits

- **Intent** of indicator is to increase the number of children with consistent well child visits where there is higher opportunity for immunizations, appropriate screenings and early identification of development delays, other medical healthcare, and support for family members to understand their child’s health.
- **Aligned to 1 Priority Role** in Health
- **Data** is obtained through the Arizona Health Survey conducted by St. Luke’s Health Initiative

9. #/% of children age 5 with untreated tooth decay

- **Intent** of indicator is to increase the number of children who begin at an early age and regularly visit an oral health professional to receive preventive oral healthcare and services necessary to treat tooth decay.
- **Aligned to 1 Priority Role** in Health
- **Data** may be available through the AZ Department of Health Services, but may also be available in the future through other strategies and studies.

10. % of families who report they are competent and confident about their ability to support their child's safety, health and well being

- **Intent** of indicator is to increase the number of families who report they are competent and competent to support their child.
- **Aligned to 1 Priority Role** in Family Support and Literacy
- **Data** is currently obtained as a composite of several measures in the FTF Family and Community Survey.

A one-page handout with the recommended set of 10 First Things First School Readiness Indicators is found in Attachment C.

Indicator Policy Decisions and Implications

Indicators are important planning tools because while they don't replace more comprehensive evaluation, they will help us know if we are moving in the right direction, making progress toward, or have ultimately achieved the desired result. The Policy and Program Committee recommends the following four policy decisions to guide use of the indicators in planning at the state and regional levels:

1. Statewide priorities and Regional Funding Plans, beginning FY13 (developed this fall) will align with the School Readiness Indicators.
2. Regional Councils will select a minimum of 3 highest priority School Readiness Indicators based on their community data to develop their funding plans.
3. School Readiness Indicator data is tracked annually and benchmarked every three years (or in alignment with the funding plan cycle).
4. "Better Off" indicators not included in the School Readiness Indicators will not be used in planning. Any exceptions must be supported by Regional Council data and a justification provided to the Board.

Using the recommend indicators in FY13 planning will require an adjustment by Regional Councils and First Things First staff during this transitional period. Regional Council planning will be optimized by using a model that begins with a review of their community data and then alignment to a minimum of three priority School Readiness Indicators that are reflective of their priorities, rather than using current strategies or funded programs as a basis of selecting indicators to move. First Things First staff must be prepared to provide support to Regional Councils in using the indicators, and develop multiple tools to provide information, promote critical thinking and facilitate discussion and decision-making with a systems perspective during the planning process.

One issue that will have both short-term and long-term implications is data collection for tracking and developing baselines and benchmarks. This will be especially challenging for some of the recommended indicators because the data has never been collected in a systemic manner before. While the current availability of data and feasibility of collecting future data were considered by the Advisory Committees as they developed indicators, they were advised that it should not be a limiting factor in recommending an indicator. The fact that a recommended indicator requires a new data collection may prove beneficial in effecting long overdue policy changes and practices related to statewide early childhood data.

Since it may take some time before data is available on all recommended School Readiness Indicators, Regional Councils may wish to track data on Key Measures that are aligned with the new indicators as a very short-term and interim step. First Things First staff completed an initial comparison of First Things First Key Measures in the

FTF Roadmap to the “How Much” and “How Well” indicators recently developed by the Advisory Committees and found the sets of indicators to be very similar. Staff will identify a list of Key Measures aligned to each School Readiness Indicator that can be used by Councils for short-term tracking purposes, and as part of this process, must assure that data for any aligned Key Measure is available now or in the near future. Because it is important to remain focused on progress toward the School Readiness Indicators, Key Measures will only be monitored, not benchmarked.

Another issue related to data is recognizing the value in tracking other population indicators in our Needs and Assets reports that may or may not be indirectly impacted by the work of First Things First, but help tell the story of how well kids and families are doing in our state. Examples of these indicators include:

- % of students reading at grade level by the end of third grade
- % of students at benchmark on NAEP scores
- % of cases of child neglect or abuse
- % of high school graduation rates
- % of children in poverty

Finally, several Councils have inquired about the consequences of not achieving a designated benchmark on selected School Readiness Indicators in the next three or four years. First Things First staff is committed to providing as much support as requested and necessary to assist Regional Councils in achieving the progress results they have identified for their work in their community. There will be further policy discussion and decisions related to the development of benchmarks in time for FY 14 planning.

Using a Systems Approach to Move School Readiness Indicators

Knowing if First Things First is headed in the right direction and making progress toward desired results requires more than just funding programs. Both statewide and locally, First Things First must be prepared to engage other public and private agencies in a robust partnership. This includes, in many instances partnerships with the Governor, the legislature, the private sector, state and local agencies and the public. First Thing First across Arizona and locally will consider, among others, the following approaches and strategies to move the School Readiness Indicators:

- System alignment and infrastructure elements
- Accessibility and effectiveness in system alignment
- Connection to community and outside resources
- Convening partners
- Coordination and collaboration
- Community development
- Public outreach and awareness
- Leveraging knowledge and resources through public and private partnerships

Note that during the development of indicators, system indicators were listed in their own category, “Are System Supports in Place”, and were not included in the “Better Off” category. As a result, system indicators were not identified as School Readiness Indicators. Additionally, the five system roles recommended by the taskforce addressing early childhood system development and public awareness were not assigned to the Advisory Committees. However, the system indicators developed by committee members for the 15 roles were then aligned by staff to the five system roles:

- **Early Childhood System Leadership** - Convene partners, provide leadership, and provide funding for the conceptualization and implementation of a high quality, child and family centered, coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive early childhood system that includes clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- **Coordinated Use of Early Childhood System Data** – Convene and collaborate with partners to identify data needs and resources; define and carry out roles related to collecting, analyzing, and reporting data; and utilize data to design, develop, plan, and evaluate the early childhood system.
- **Early Childhood System Evaluation** - Provide leadership in the evaluation of the early childhood system and collaborate with partners to utilize the results to foster continuous improvement of the system.
- **Building Public Awareness and Support** - Convene partners, provide leadership, and provide funding for efforts to increase public awareness of and support for early childhood development, health, and early education among partners, public officials, policy makers, and the public.
- **Early Childhood System Funding** – Secure, coordinate, and advocate for resources required to develop and sustain the early childhood system.

There is a vital, unequivocal connection between system indicators and the School Readiness Indicators because results for children and their families will not be realized if the leadership, public engagement, public awareness, policy change, funding, and partnerships measured by system indicators do not exist. Due to this relationship, system indicators will be included in the list of Key Measures aligned to the School Readiness Indicators.

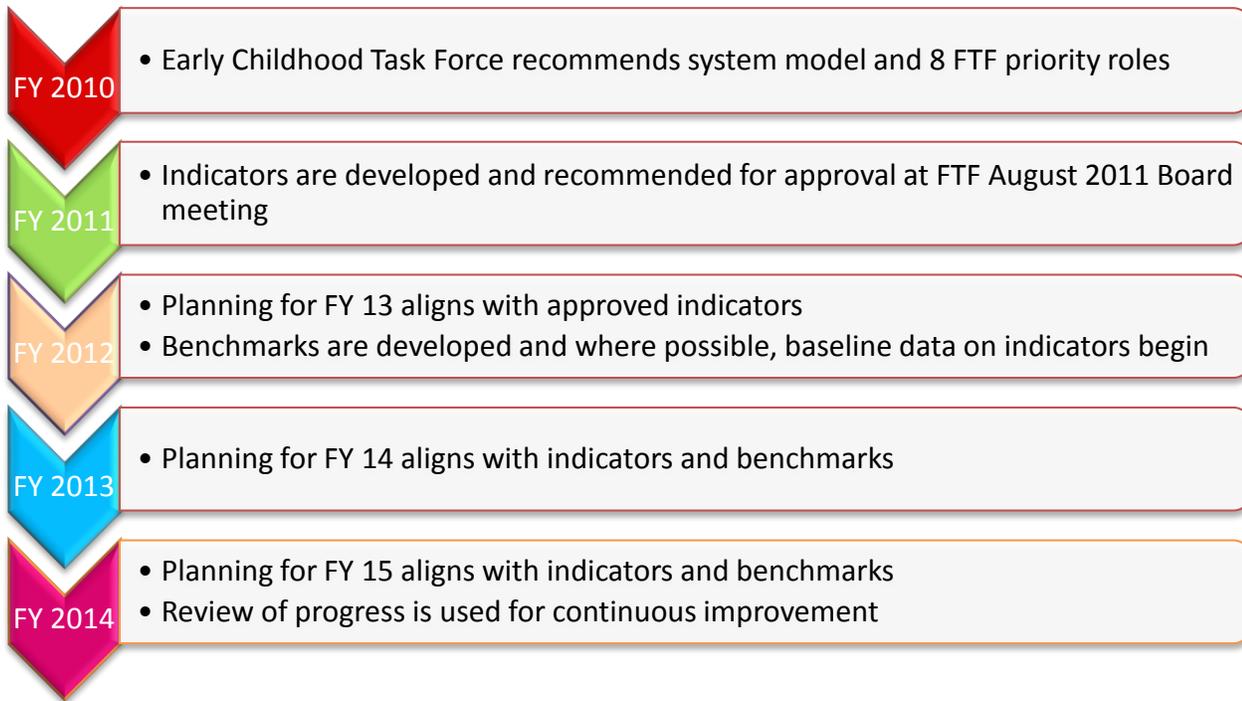
We recommend that the State Board address these system roles through their strategic planning and in conjunction with the Board’s Policy and Program, Government Affairs and Communications and Finance and Administration Committees.

Implementation of School Readiness Indicators

Upon Board approval of recommended School Readiness Indicators and related Policy Decisions, next steps include:

- Under the direction of the Board’s Program and Policy Committee, the Early Learning, Health, and Family and Support and Literacy Advisory Committees will begin work on recommending benchmarks for the indicators.
- Staff will begin collecting current and new data to establish baselines, and plan for future data collection methods and systems.
- First Things First will continue to work with all system stakeholders to develop a common policy agenda. This will include partnerships with the Governor, the legislature, tribal governments, state agencies, philanthropy, business and community stakeholders.
- FY13 statewide funding plan will be presented for board consideration in September.
- Regional Councils will begin developing their FY13 Funding Plans with strategies that align to the recommended School Readiness Indicators.
- Presentation of proposed benchmarks for approval in summer 2012.

First Things First will continue convening and seeking input from partners and stakeholders in carrying out the next steps. The following is a proposed timeline for implementation:



Recommended Board Action

The CEO recommends approval of the following Board Policy and Program Committee recommendations:

1. Adopt Nutrition and Physical Activity as an additional priority role.
2. Adopt 10 School Readiness Indicators as developed by the Advisory Committees, with continuing discussion and study related to indicators on cultural responsiveness and family consideration of Quality First star rating in selecting an early childhood education program for their child.
3. Regional Councils select a minimum of three School Readiness Indicators to guide funding plan and system development, and that School Readiness Indicators are tracked annually and benchmarked at a state and regional level every three years or in alignment with the funding plan cycle.

Additionally, the CEO recommends that the Board take responsibility for the five system roles through its own strategic planning and in conjunction with the Board’s Policy and Program, Government Affairs and Communications and Finance and Administration Committees.