

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Santa Cruz Region



2015 IMPACT REPORT

SCHOOL SUCCESS BEGINS AT BIRTH



90% OF A CHILD'S CRITICAL BRAIN DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS BEFORE KINDERGARTEN,

so early experiences lay the foundation for success in school and in life. Arizonans created First Things First (FTF) to give more children the tools they need to arrive at school prepared to meet our state's high expectations. FTF provides resources and professional expertise then combines it with local decision-making to build on the work of community organizations impacting children and families. Local volunteers – parents, educators, business professionals, philanthropists, faith leaders and tribal representatives – decide how the funds will be used to best improve school readiness for children in their area.

EARLY CHILDHOOD IS ONE OF THE BEST INVESTMENTS A STATE CAN MAKE

Research by Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman showed that every \$1 invested in early childhood can yield returns between \$4 and \$16. Early literacy and its impact on school success is one of the best examples of the return on investment in early childhood. High quality early learning experiences, rich in language and literacy, reduce early learning gaps and ensure that children are ready to start reading when they enter kindergarten.



Gaps in children's vocabulary start to appear as early as **18 MONTHS.**



By the time children are **3 & 4 YEARS OLD,** their vocabulary, attention and general knowledge are predictors of **THIRD & FOURTH GRADE** reading comprehension.



THIRD GRADE reading ability is one of the best predictors of **HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION.**



As an early childhood system partner, First Things First invests in proven programs and innovative strategies that: strengthen families in their role as their child's first teacher; improve the quality of early learning environments like preschool and child care, and expand access to those programs; and, promote prevention and early identification of health problems that could impact learning later on. By getting more Arizona kids ready for school, FTF helps put children on a path to academic success that benefits them, our communities and our state.

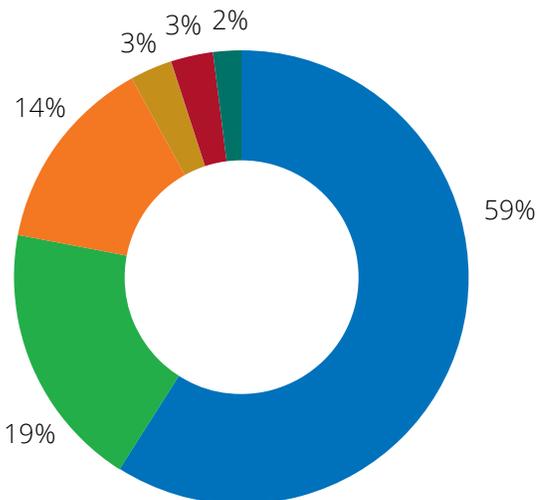
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INVESTED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD YIELDS UP TO A **\$16 RETURN**

FISCAL YEAR 2015 IMPACT

SANTA CRUZ FY2015 PROGRAM EXPENDITURES



- Strengthening Families and Early Literacy \$785,637.65**
 Families are a child's first and best teachers.
- Quality Preschool and Child Care \$259,863.02**
 Children exposed to high quality early learning do better in school and are more likely to graduate.
- Preventive Health \$181,840.5**
 Undetected or untreated health issues can impact learning later on.
- Workforce Development and Training \$39,800.79**
 A child's relationships with early caregivers impact whether her brain will develop in ways that promote learning.
- Parent and Community Awareness \$38,829.63**
 We all have a shared responsibility to help children arrive at school prepared to succeed.
- Research and Accountability \$22,245.85**
 Measuring effectiveness and promoting continuous quality improvement rely on robust, accurate data.

Total = \$1,328,217.44

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158 Children had access to a higher standard of early learning through preschool and child care programs participating in quality first.
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71 Infants, toddlers and preschoolers received scholarships to access high quality early learning through preschool or child care.
- 
2,713 Families accessed early childhood information, education or referrals through family resource centers.
- 
644 Families of newborns left the hospital with tools to help them support their child's health and learning.
- 
93 Families received voluntary in-home visits from trained providers to enhance their parenting skills and deal with specific challenges, including first-time parenting, parenting a child with special needs, or dealing with multiple births.
- 
256 Parents and other caregivers completed a voluntary series of community-based classes on topics like parenting skills, brain development, early literacy and nutrition.
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2,067 Fluoride varnishes applied to protect against dental decay.
- 
121 Screenings completed to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues in young kids and prevent learning challenges later on.

INVESTING IN SCHOOL READINESS



NOGALES KINDERGARTNER FINDS SUCCESS AT FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

It was a random visit to a neighborhood park where Jessica Fierro first learned about the Nogales Family Resource Center. A conversation with another parent told her about the place where she could attend parenting classes and do learning activities with her 2-year-old daughter, Isabella, all for free.

"We registered the next day," Fierro said.

The Center, which is one of three in Santa Cruz County and funded by First Things First, provides classes for families and caregivers to support their role as a child's first teacher. Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools Alfredo Velasquez recommends all families with young children to engage in classes to help their kids be successful once they start school.

At the center, Fierro learned how to allow her daughter to use her imagination to guide her. For example, if her daughter wanted to paint a green cloud, normally Fierro would correct her and tell her that clouds should be white.

"The instructor told us to let the child choose. This is how they learn to be independent," Fierro said. "I was encouraged to motivate and allow my daughter to complete activities on her own, even if it frustrated me to hear her say, 'I can't do it mom, you do it.'"

Eventually, the mother saw independence emerge from Isabella.

Mother and daughter gradually worked their way through the various classes at the center, including a kindergarten readiness class, where the focus was more academic. The preparation paid off on the first day of kindergarten, when Isabella did not cry.

"I remember having nightmares about this since she was 4," Fierro said. Instead, she saw her daughter getting along swimmingly with the other children.

"In kindergarten, she had to learn to write her name, but she already knew her letters, so she entered with the basics," Fierro said. "She was ready."

Today, Isabella's on the principal's honor roll and has begun to read short words.

Now that Fierro and her husband have a second child, the mother continues to attend classes.

"The center gives us positive solutions to problems that I'm able to apply at home," she said.



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