



Strategic Plan Framework

July 2017-June 2023

Strengthening Connections and Advancing Quality in
Early Childhood Development

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Acknowledgements

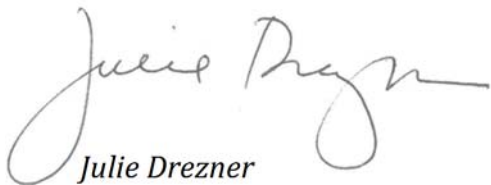
First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) invests in our community so that all young children have access to the opportunities needed to reach their own, unique potential. In order to continue providing the best support possible with the resources available to us, we conducted an in-depth strategic planning process to intentionally reflect on what we have learned over the last decade, and where we need to head in the next.

We appreciate the contributions from many voices in this process including: parents, service providers, policy makers, and community leaders, acknowledge the time and invaluable insights shared, and give our thanks to all.

Special thanks go to: the Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Committee for its engagement and honest feedback every step of the way; the Commission for making the time to diligently vet our ideas; our Funded Partners for participating in the collaborative learning process that allows us to build on experience; the parents and community members that helped bring clarity to our roles; our outside reviewers who provided fresh eyes and perspective; and all F5MC staff, in particular Beth Reeves-Fortney and Oscar Flores, for the countless extra hours and creative thinking it took to work through the details. All played a crucial part in developing this F5MC strategic plan framework. Our intention is that it reflects the most up-to-date knowledge in the field, embodies our values and strengths as an organization, and aligns with what we heard from our community.

Finally, we appreciate being part of a community that values, respects, and invests in early childhood.

Sincerely,



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Strategic Planning Committee Chair



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VISION

All children reach their unique potential in a family and community that values, respects, and invests in early childhood.

MISSION

Enrich the lives of children, prenatal through age five, and their families by strengthening connections and advancing quality within a whole system of care and support.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: WE ARE . . .

Equity Focused - Systems Innovators - Relationship Based - Reflective - Good Stewards

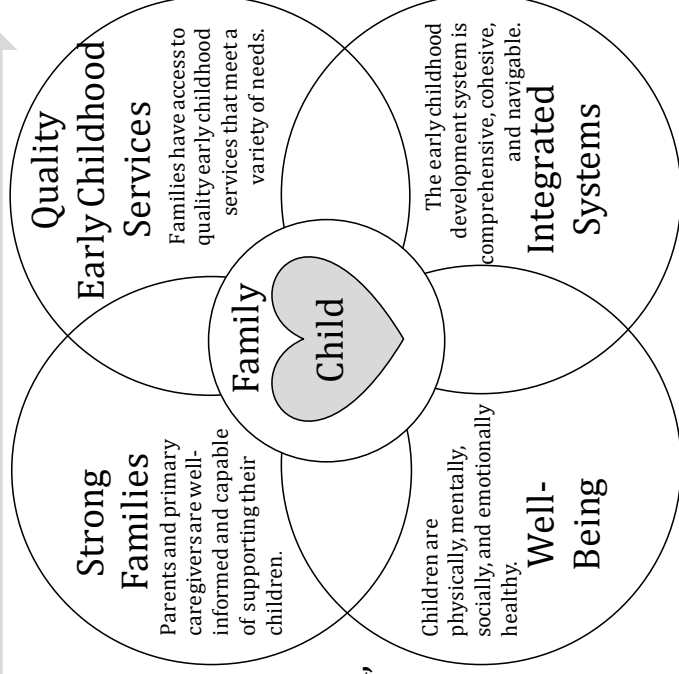
CORE ROLES

- Champion Early Childhood**
Raising awareness and advocating for child-friendly policies and practices.
- Make Connections**
Mobilizing people and resources.
- Build Capacity**
Developing common understanding and effective services.
- Fund the Work**
Investing in quality, coordinated services.
- Evaluate Impact**
Tracking progress and supporting strategic decision-making.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 1 Diversify and increase funding for early childhood development.
- 2 Enhance access to resources, programs, and services through coordination, collaboration, and integration.
- 3 Inform, inspire, and facilitate the adoption of practices and policies that support early childhood development.

IMPACT AREAS & GOALS



1. Introduction

Background

In 1998, the California Children and Families First Act, also known as Proposition 10, was passed. The Act's statutory goal is to promote, support, and improve the early development of children, prenatal through age 5, so that they are ready to enter school. This is to be accomplished by facilitating "the creation and implementation of an integrated, comprehensive, and collaborative system of information and service . . . through the establishment, institution, and coordination of appropriate standards, resources, and integrated and comprehensive programs emphasizing community awareness, education, nurturing, child care, social services, health care, and research."¹

One state and 58 county commissions are funded through a tax on tobacco products. Each county commission receives funding allocations based on annual birth rates, and is governed by commissioners who are appointed by the county board of supervisors.

Highlights

First 5 Monterey County has invested more than \$99 million in the children and families of Monterey County since its inception. Between 2008 and 2015 alone, First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) supported programs that have served a yearly average of 35,300 children, parents, and providers. They have benefited from activities such as: playgroups, home visits, new parent kits, screening and assessment, technical assistance, and community events. Evaluations show that parents gained increased confidence, knowledge, and skills to support their children's social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Our commitment to collaboration and learning influences the way we invest in our community and how we evaluate our collective work. The agencies we fund become partners in advancing quality services, participating in reflective practice and organizational capacity building to create sustainability beyond what funds alone can provide. By providing technical assistance for program evaluation and for collaborative learning, we support partners to improve services for children and families, and they support us to make intentional, strategic decisions in our work.

F5MC brings awareness of the importance of early childhood to a wide audience, from parents to policy makers, to support the integration of program and policy work. In 2011, F5MC hosted *The Wonder of Learning: The Hundred Languages of Children*, an exhibition sharing the internationally renowned Reggio Emilia approach to education. This approach is based on a core belief that children are capable and competent citizens, and that the child cannot be viewed in isolation but rather in a system of interconnected relationships. In 2012, F5MC and the Rotary Club of Monterey invited the esteemed professor and Nobel Memorial Prize Winner Dr. James Heckman to present his research linking quality early child development programs to economic impact and societal good, to a broad audience in Monterey County. This lens helped to articulate the value of

childhood in a way that is relevant to families and services providers, as well as business and community leaders.

These critical perspectives supported community awareness about the responsibility to ensure that every child has access to high quality early childhood services, and that early childhood development supports the vitality of the community as a whole. High quality education is based on: building nurturing relationships around children throughout the community; incorporating the latest understanding of brain development, learning theory, and educational methodology; and encouraging creativity as a means of learning.

Building on the work of many in the early childhood development community, two galvanizing county initiatives have recently emerged, with a focus on both social-emotional and cognitive development: Bright Beginnings (focused on ages prenatal through 8) and Bright Futures (focused on cradle to career). These initiatives, in concert with other existing efforts, set important countywide goals, helping bring the vital role that early childhood experiences play in human development to the forefront. They also align with F5MC's motto: Childhood doesn't last forever, but the experience lasts a lifetime.

Looking Ahead

With a decline in projected Proposition 10 disbursements in recent years and a reliance on finite reserve funds, F5MC sees opportunity within the challenge ahead. In partnership with other agencies, initiatives, community leaders, and families, there is an opportunity in Monterey County to grow investments in early childhood development to close this funding gap while building sustainable, institutionalized support for children and their families.

F5MC presents here its updated strategic plan framework to meet that opportunity. Over the next six years, we will deepen our focus on mobilizing people and resources to anchor practices and policies that enrich the lives of children and families. At the same time, we will continue to support vital programs by building capacity, maximizing funds, advancing quality, emphasizing care and service coordination, and furthering the community vision for early childhood.

This strategic framework is based on a foundation of: local, state, and national data; strengths and lessons learned from almost two decades of experience; research on brain development and best and emerging practices; and the voice of the community. The framework includes updated vision and mission statements, core roles, and guiding principles, and outlines key impact areas, goals, strategic priorities, and evaluation and community investment approaches.

The next phase of our planning-program and evaluation design-brings this strategic framework to life. Specific, measurable intended outcomes for our programs and activities that align with our impact areas will be defined, and a community-engaged process will inform how we fund early childhood development programs that align with our strategic priorities.

2. Our Inspiration: Vision, Mission, & Guiding Principles

At First 5 Monterey County, we are passionate about early childhood. Here are three simple reasons why:

1. 85-90% of the architecture of the brain is developed by age 5. Yet our brains maintain a certain level of plasticity through adulthood, as we learn and adapt to everyday life.²
2. According to the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, “early experiences affect the development of brain architecture, which in turn provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.”³
3. According to Nobel Memorial Prize Winner Dr. James J. Heckman, investing in “quality early childhood development heavily influences health, economic, and social outcomes for individuals and society at large,” especially for under-resourced families.⁴

At F5MC, we **envision** a Monterey County where all children reach their unique potential in a family and community that values, respects, and invests in early childhood. Our **mission** is to enrich the lives of children, prenatal through age 5, and their families by strengthening connections and advancing quality within a whole system of care and support.

Our **guiding principles** represent the values with which we approach our work. We are . . .

Equity Focused.

Quality early childhood experiences are essential for all children. In order to narrow the opportunity gap for under-resourced, under-represented children and families, we are committed to increasing access to quality early care, education, and services.

Systems Innovators.

Everything we do is a part of and affects the early childhood development system. Therefore, we believe collaboration and integration will lead to the best solutions for our community.

Relationship Based.

Relationships are key to human development, at all stages and in all contexts. We strengthen and sustain different kinds of relationships, including: the bond between a parent or caregiver and a child; the relationship between a service provider and parent or caregiver; and the working alliances within and across disciplines and agencies.

Reflective.

Reflective practice helps us evolve and transform our collective work through critical thinking, self-awareness, and processing new information and perspectives.

Good Stewards.

We believe long-term change and sustainability happen through child- and family-focused investments that are research-informed, intentional, strategic, and transparent.

For F5MC, a young child’s “system of care and support” starts with those close to home whose role is to nurture and protect that child: the immediate family (parent(s), primary caregiver(s), and/or household). For some families, it extends beyond the household to an extended network of family and friends that provide child care informally. It may also include formal early learning opportunities, such as a licensed home care or center, and other human support services, such as health care and home visiting. That system of care and support extends to and is influenced by the culture and customs of the region and its people, and the policies and laws that influence children and their families.ⁱ

ⁱ For details on the community vision for such an interrelated, informal and formal system of care and support, and details on the socio-ecological model for early childhood, see Appendix 1.

3. Context & Our Strategic Position

First 5 Monterey County defines “strategic position” as an agency’s unique advantage to meet a particular need or challenge, taking factors such as research, population data, strengths, capacity, and service gaps into consideration. The F5MC strategic planning process was designed to best define our strategic position in the early childhood development community. From this strategic position, our overarching strategic framework emerged, including: updated vision and mission statements, guiding principles, and impact areas; and strategic priorities to guide us into the future.

In the strategic planning process, we collected information from several sources to understand the current context in which we work:

- **Data** (e.g., quantitative and qualitative information)
- **Strengths** (e.g., program evaluations and internal and external perceptions)
- **Research** (e.g., brain science and best and emerging practices)
- **Community Voice** (e.g., community engagement process and community needs assessments from other organizations)

We analyzed findings through the lens of an asset-based model - the Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) analysis.

A summary of findings from the SOAR analysis is below. For context, we provide a statistical snapshot of the socio-economic environment of children and families in Monterey County (e.g., factors of wealth, health, income, occupation, and education), and the Community Vision for Early Childhood Development, based on what we heard during the community engagement process.

General Trends

Research trends in the early childhood community locally, statewide, and nationally align closely. General themes nationwide include:

- Awareness of the importance of early childhood is up, but practices and investment are not keeping pace.⁵
- Upstream, preventative programs and services make the most difference over a lifetime. Quality early childhood education makes a difference, and has the greatest impact on closing the “opportunity gap” for under-resourced children, and is closely linked to the welfare of children. Important to note is that low quality child care is especially detrimental to low-income and vulnerable children.⁶
- A holistic approach to early development is key. Family engagement, parent/caregiver development, relationship-based, reflective interactions, and two-generation programs and services are effective approaches. Early screening and referrals are very important, and an interdisciplinary approach is best.⁷
- Early verbal interaction—both exposure to language rich environments and a relational quality of verbal interaction—is crucial; so are basic math, singing, movement, and the

building of social and emotional skills. Social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development are closely intertwined through age 8 (about third grade).⁸

- Early childhood development care and services are fragmented and disjointed. Care and service coordination is essential, and families need to be supported to access and navigate a system of care and services.⁹
- Early childhood teacher permitting and training generally has not caught up to new knowledge in pedagogy and child development. Workforce development is usually not coherent or standardized and compensation does not reflect the societal value of early childhood development.¹⁰
- Across the US, there is an upward trend of cities adopting parental leave policies that are more expansive than federal and/or state employment policy require.¹¹

Statistical Snapshot of Children and Families in Monterey County

The following data points provide a statistical snapshot of children and families in Monterey County. These statistics help F5MC better understand the circumstances in which many children and families live, and how, through our mission, we can help enrich their lives. They also help us track the combined results of all efforts to narrow opportunity gaps in our community.ⁱⁱ

- There are a total of 47,545 children ages 5 and under in Monterey County.¹²
- In 2013, 6,547 babies were born. Birth rates in Monterey County are on a slightly downward trend, similar to the trend in California overall.¹³
- Of those, 519 were to teen mothers. The teen birth rate has decreased across the county over the last decade.¹⁴
- The rate of prenatal care in the first trimester, at 74.5% in 2013, is about the same as it was in 1995. This flat trend is similar to California overall.¹⁵
- 47% of working families with children ages 0-4 have access to part or full-day licensed care. 41% of children ages 3-4 have access to preschool.¹⁶
- In 2013, 24% of Kindergarteners had the skills needed to be optimally ready for Kindergarten. Children ready for Kindergarten tended to have a few things in common:
 - Their parents read to them daily.
 - They were enrolled in preschool.
 - Their parents had more than a High School degree.
 - Their household was above federal poverty levels.
 - Their transition to kindergarten was reported by their parent(s) as “easy.”¹⁷
- For children served by F5MC funded programs, 77% of children speak Spanish as their primary language.¹⁸
- Of all third graders, 23% read and write at or above grade level in third grade.¹⁹
- In 2014, 53% of Monterey County residents speak a language other than English at home, mostly Spanish.²⁰

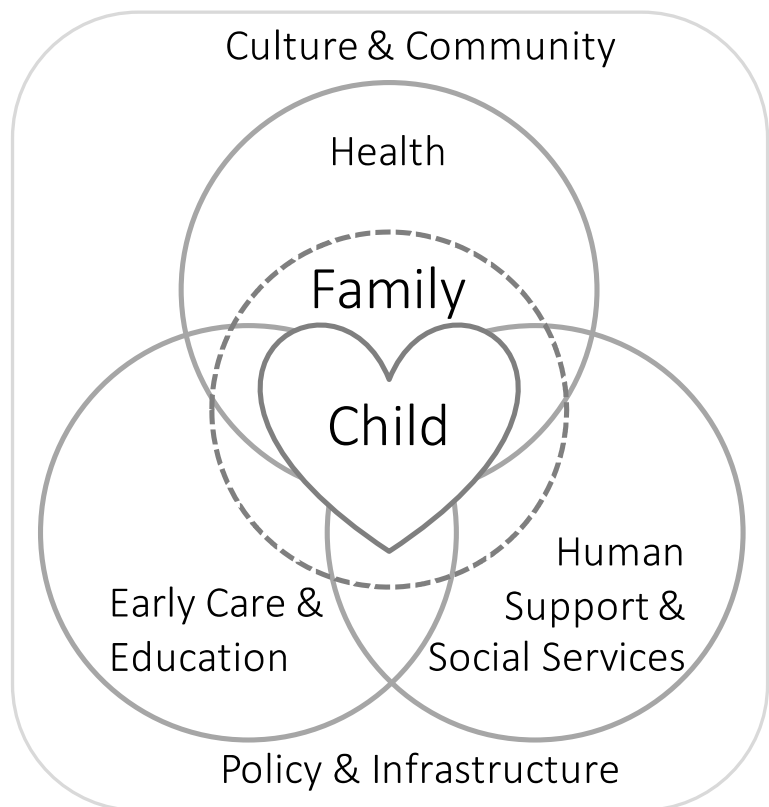
ⁱⁱ Note that these data points only provide a general context. Deeper analysis of local statistics is needed for targeting interventions. Data sources, geographic areas, and collection dates vary; therefore, they cannot be directly compared or correlated.

- An estimated 62,000 undocumented immigrants live in Monterey County (combined with San Benito County).²¹
- Using measures that supplement federal poverty data (e.g., cost of living), Monterey County (combined with San Benito County) has the highest child poverty rate in the state, at 31%.²²
- Monterey County has one of the highest rates of children living in overcrowded housing in the state, at 36.3%.²³
- 25.5% of children are food insecure.²⁴
- Low-income children ages 2-4 tend to be some of the most overweight in the state, with 19.3% obese in 2010.²⁵
- 16.9% of the census tracts in Monterey County are identified as medically underserved.²⁶
- In Monterey County (combined with Santa Cruz County), 20.5% of adults have experienced 4+ adverse childhood experiences, making them 32 times more likely to have learning or behavior problems.²⁷
- For every 1,000 children ages 0-17, there are 26 children with maltreatment allegations reported to Child Protective Services.²⁸
- For every 1,000 youth under 18, there are 4.59 active juvenile probation cases.²⁹
- Monterey County has the highest youth homicide rate in the state, at 23.48 per 100,000 youth ages 10-24.³⁰

Community Vision for Early Childhood Development

In order to tap into the broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives of parents, early childhood service providers, educators, caregivers, advocates, funders, and those that are otherwise affiliated with and interested in early childhood development, the following engagement opportunities were offered over a 10-week period: five parent focus groups, two early childhood development partner dialogs, one communitywide meeting; and two commission working sessions.ⁱⁱⁱ

The graphical depiction shown here captures the community vision that emerged from this engagement process and review of existing assessments (e.g., IMPACT Monterey County). It represents the community's voice. Three overarching, aspirational



ⁱⁱⁱ For details on the process and outcomes of the community engagement process, see Appendix 1.

characteristics of this vision for interrelated care, education, services, practices, and policies are: 1) A society that embraces the value of childhood, 2) Equitable, easy access to care and services, and 3) High quality care and services. This vision provided a foundation on which F5MC articulated its strategic framework, as it finds its unique position within the whole early childhood development community to bring this vision to life.

Our Strategic Position: A SOAR Analysis

To bring together and analyze the information gathered during the strategic planning process, we used an asset-based analysis through the lens of four dimensions: Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR). This provided a model to organize information from multiple sources, and to better understand F5MC's strategic position in the early childhood development community. By understanding general trends in early childhood development, the current context in Monterey County, and the needs, experiences, and aspirations of the community, we had the information required for our strategic framework. The summary below provides the most relevant highlights of our SOAR analysis.

Strengths & Greatest Assets

- F5MC is a public agency with a dedicated funding stream (Proposition 10), and supported by a statewide network of county commissions, First 5 Association, and First 5 California.
- F5MC provides a unique and substantial source of multi-year, flexible funding for early childhood development services and supports in Monterey County.
- F5MC, as a longstanding part of the community and with 16+ years of experience, is seen by its partners as a trusted and primary resource for early childhood development information, tools, policy, etc.
- F5MC invests intentionally, with the goal of making a difference for those who need it most.
- F5MC's staff bases their work on the latest research, best and emerging practices, and local needs.
- F5MC invests in, uses, and shares data and evaluation to measure outcomes and make strategic decisions.
- F5MC promotes cross-discipline learning and practice.
- F5MC encourages, supports, and participates in collaboration and collective learning.
- F5MC has strong relationship with regional foundations, providing a voice for early childhood in the philanthropic arena.

Best Possible Opportunities

- The decline in projected disbursements creates an urgency communitywide to diversify funding streams for early childhood.
- This urgency demands focus, creativity, and innovation in elevating the importance of early childhood development and in creating more effective ways to provide care, education, and services.

- Partners that receive funds from F5MC are able to use that funding to leverage additional monies. They already bring in approximately \$2.88 million of Medi-Cal and other public dollars, and there is opportunity to leverage more.
- Regional foundations have demonstrated their readiness to engage and invest more intentionally and effectively in early childhood.
- There is a growing awareness of the importance of early childhood locally, and a growing interest in creating change for more child- and family-friendly policies and practices.
- Families are asking for more parent/primary caregiver education and resources, especially for working parents and fathers.
- The community has voiced a desire to collectively build a cohesive, comprehensive system of care, education, and services.
- Existing infrastructure, strengths, and relationships lay a foundation for connecting a currently fragmented system.
- Early childhood education is increasingly integrated into the public education system, bringing both resources and a spotlight on the importance of early childhood as a part of an individual's learning and education continuum.

Aspirations & Preferred Future

- Establish a sustainable communitywide funding model for early childhood development by attracting diverse funding streams and institutionalized investments.
- Create a strong, central voice for early childhood development that promotes a common understanding of value and quality.
- Build on collaborative strengths with partners and stakeholders.
- Further the community vision for care, education, and services so they are comprehensive, cohesive, and connected, and efforts span all levels of influence within the greater community.
- Engage parents, caregivers, and community leaders to increase awareness, will, and action.
- Shape communitywide policy and practices to support children so they reach their unique potential in a family and community that values, respects, and invests in early childhood.

Desired Results

- The early childhood development funding gap is closed-whether through F5MC directly or through other agencies.
- There is a communitywide shared commitment to accessible, quality early childhood care, education, and services.
- Early childhood development is widely recognized as a key, cost effective, socially responsible, upstream strategy to prevent the effects of inequity (e.g., poverty, violence, obesity).
- Resources, care, education, and services are integrated to improve child and family outcomes, in particular in areas that have the greatest need.
- The early childhood development workforce is competent and well educated.

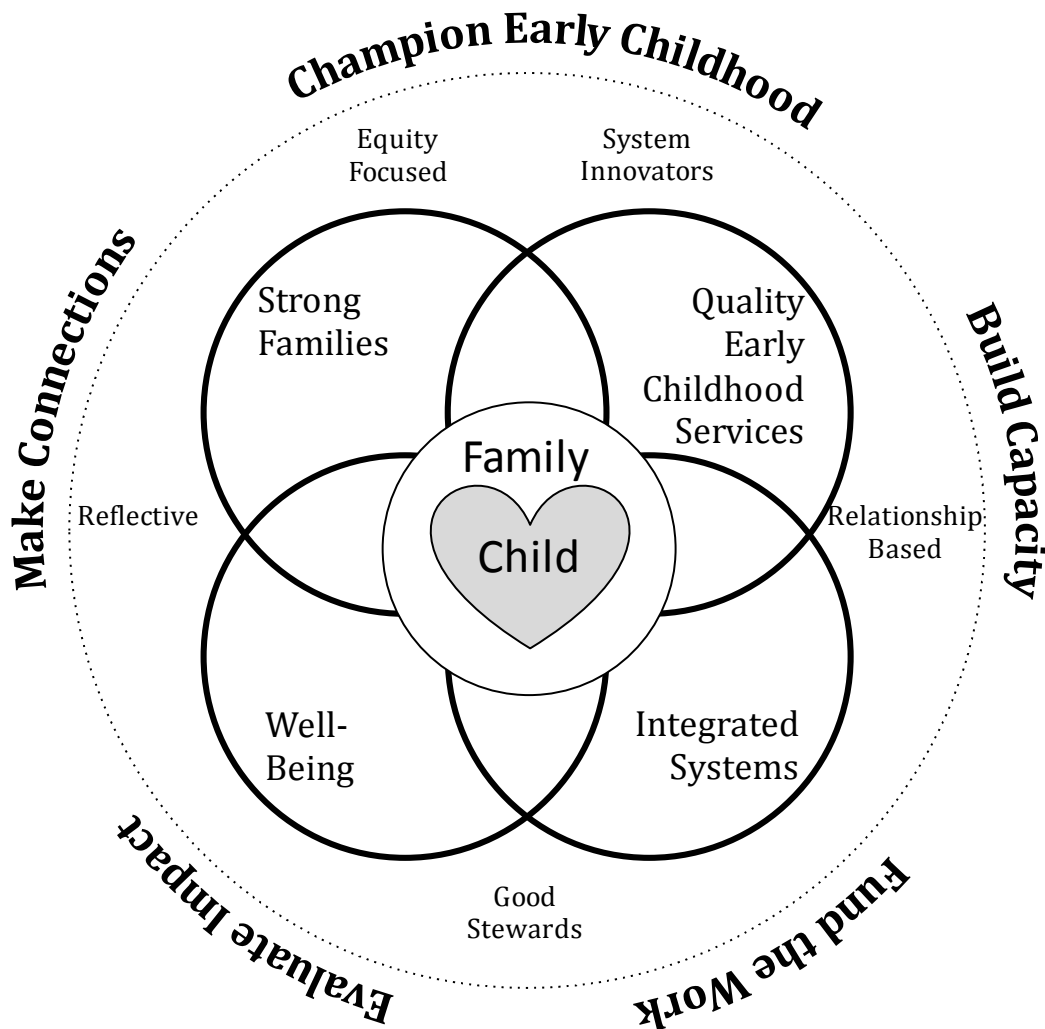
- The community vision for early childhood is furthered through public dialog and engagement, with F5MC providing resources and co-creating its evolution (e.g., data, coordination, facilitation).
- Long-term, systemic change in Monterey County has occurred, so that all children reach their unique potential in a family and community that values, respects, and invests in early childhood.

Alone, F5MC cannot make the comprehensive community vision for early childhood come alive. By looking at our strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results, we have identified F5MC's unique advantage in how we can work together in alignment with other efforts that support young children and their families across the county.

4. Our Strategy

The First 5 Monterey County strategy guides our work over the next six years. It is inspired by the statutory purpose of all First 5s, and F5MC’s vision, mission, and guiding principles. It is informed by context, data, reflection on strengths, and community voice. We took this opportunity to critically reassess and reimagine F5MC’s role in the early childhood development community. This strategic plan framework provides guidance as we make decisions – often difficult – on how to invest our resources. Our mission drives all we do: Enriching the lives of children and their families by strengthening connections and advancing quality within a whole system of care and support.

Our strategy has three main elements visually depicted and described below: core roles, impact areas, and strategic priorities. The child and its family are at the heart of our work, and our guiding principles influence our choices. Reflecting the aspiration for a whole system of care and support, we attempt here to reflect the overlapping, interconnected nature of our work.



Our Core Roles, Impact Areas, & Strategic Priorities

To achieve its mission, First 5 Monterey County has five interrelated, **core roles**: Champion Early Childhood; Make Connections; Build Capacity; Fund the Work; and Evaluate Impact. Our roles are what we do to make a difference for young children and their families.

Champion Early Childhood. A community thrives when children thrive. We raise awareness about the importance of early childhood, especially prenatal through age 5, and advocate for policies and practices that support early childhood development at the local, state, and federal levels. We achieve this by investing in policy and advocacy efforts, emerging and one-time opportunities, and strategic communications.

Make Connections. To sustain a comprehensive, cohesive system for early childhood development, we mobilize people and resources. Across disciplines, sectors, organizations, and initiatives we build relationships, leverage assets, and raise new funds to grow and integrate a network of support and care.

Build Capacity. When it comes to early childhood development, quality makes a difference. To build the capacity of people, organizations, and systems, we rely on research, data, tools, and best and promising practices. To develop a common understanding and effective programs and services, we offer technical assistance and collaborative learning opportunities.

Fund the Work. We invest in quality, coordinated services for children, parents, and primary caregivers. We ensure that funded partners are supported by a range of resources, such as multi-year funding.

Evaluate Impact. Positive outcomes for children and families happen when research and practice are aligned and adapted to the local context. We conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis at the program, population, and systems levels to track progress and support strategic decision-making.

F5MC's four overlapping **impact areas** describe how we envision the future state of our early childhood development community: Strong Families, Quality Early Childhood Services, Well-being, and Integrated Systems.

Impact Area 1: Strong Families

Goal: Parents and primary caregivers are well-informed and capable of supporting their children.

Impact Area 2: Quality Early Childhood Services

Goal: Families have access to quality early childhood services that meet a variety of needs.

Impact Area 3: Well-Being

Goal: Children are physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally healthy, and their parents or primary caregivers have the capacity to support their well-being.

Pf4

Impact Area 4: Integrated Systems

Goal: The early childhood development system is comprehensive, cohesive, and navigable.

These impact areas build on the outcomes of the 2005-2007 Early Learning Opportunities (ELO) community engagement process — an in-depth process that shaped our July 2007-June 2017 Strategic Plan. For the July 2017-June 2023 Strategic Plan Framework, the ELO vision areas have been reframed, refined, and informed by lessons learned, best and emerging practices, research, and community voice.

In order to be successful in implementing our impact areas and goals, F5MC will focus on three cross-cutting **strategic priorities** through related activities.

Strategic Priority 1: Diversify and increase funding for early childhood development countywide.

Activities:

- Support the collaboration between local and regional funders to maximize access to available funds (whether through F5MC or other sources) by direct service providers and other relevant participants in the system.
- Identify and coordinate opportunities to leverage additional state and federal monies with local monies.
- Identify and coordinate co-funding opportunities with early childhood development partners to maximize local monies across agencies and/or programs.
- Identify and solicit new funding streams, including public and private grants and dedicated funding streams, in a collaborative manner. (F5MC may or may not be one of the collaborators in the grant application.)

Strategic Priority 2: Enhance access to resources, programs, and services for young children and their families through community-based coordination, collaboration, and integration.

Activities:

- Provide funding to support programs and direct services for under-resourced families in priority areas.
- Align workforce capacity building with current research, and best and emerging practices in early childhood development, learning/education theory, and integration.
- Build organizational capacity and scale for multidisciplinary care and service coordination.
- Collaborate with early childhood development partners and align with relevant community efforts.

Strategic Priority 3: Inform, inspire, and facilitate the adoption of practices countywide and policies at the local, state, and national levels that support early childhood development.

Activities:

- Implement public communications and dialog opportunities to build the awareness and good will that leads to action, targeting key audiences (e.g., general public, influencers, and decision makers).
- Survey the policy landscape, including awareness of the importance of early childhood.
- Promote community leadership and mobilization for parents and primary caregivers.
- Engage directly in policy change, on those policies that support the four impact areas in coordination with the Policy and Advocacy Network shared with Bright Beginnings.

This framework provides the overall strategic direction for our work. The next phase of planning includes evaluation and program design, when activities and investments will be developed in greater detail. Specific outcomes and indicators will be identified and defined, and the funding process launched.^{iv}

^{iv} For details on service integration, see Appendix 2. For details on advocacy strategies, see Appendix 3. For details on the evaluation and program design process, see Section 6.

5. Alignment within the Early Childhood Development Community

First 5 Monterey County cannot do this work alone. Sustainable, systemic change for children and their families happens best when there are multiple champions working concertedly and synergistically. We intentionally align our efforts with those of other participants in the early childhood development community, including but not limited to, partners we fund, other early childhood development agencies and councils, and communitywide initiatives.

A few examples of major efforts/organizations that also include a focus on early childhood include: Bright Beginnings; Bright Futures; Child Care Planning Council; IMPACT Monterey County; and United Way. This is not a comprehensive list of all current efforts that overlap with the early childhood development community, nor all the partners with whom we work. In addition, over time, we anticipate that more efforts and opportunities to align will emerge. Shown here are the areas of focus of those organizations that align with some or all of F5MC's impact areas:

Bright Beginnings – Early Childhood Development Initiative

Established: 2012

Purpose: Aims to maximize community efforts to improve early childhood development outcomes through effective coordination, capacity building, empowerment, and strategic action for children from prenatal stages through 3rd grade and their families.

Alignment:

- Reading and writing at grade level – 3rd grade
- Early literacy skills
- Social and emotional skills
- Early care and learning
- Maternal education level
- Prenatal care

Bright Futures for Monterey County

Established: 2013

Purpose: The charter for our community is to ensure that every child is prepared for school, succeeds in and out of school, completes a post-high school credential, and enters a promising career. We foster progress in education outcomes for local students, from cradle to career, and improve the pipeline of quality talent within Monterey County.

Alignment:

- Children have access to quality, affordable early care and education
- Children are prepared for Kindergarten
- Children read and write on grade-level in elementary school

Monterey County Child Care Planning Council

Established: 1991

Purpose: Create a comprehensive, integrated child care delivery system that offers: Safe, high quality, culturally sensitive, affordable child care to families who need it; Allows parental choice; Is supported by a partnership of public and private resources.

Alignment:

- High quality, culturally sensitive, affordable child care
- Comprehensive, integrated service delivery system
- Cross-sector initiatives

Impact Monterey County

Established: 2013

Purpose: Impact Monterey County is a collaborative effort of nonprofits, businesses, public agencies, and the community working together to identify the most effective ways to improve life in our county.

Alignment:

- Parents and caregivers have support to develop parenting skills
- Children and youth are physically, emotionally, socially, and academically prepared to learn
- Information and resources empower people to live healthy lives
- Quality child care is affordable, accessible, and available throughout the county
- Parents, caregivers and youth have the support, skills, and knowledge to navigate education systems
- Health and mental health services can be accessed quickly and conveniently

United Way Monterey County

Established: 2000

Purpose: Engage the community and focus resources to improve lives.

Alignment:

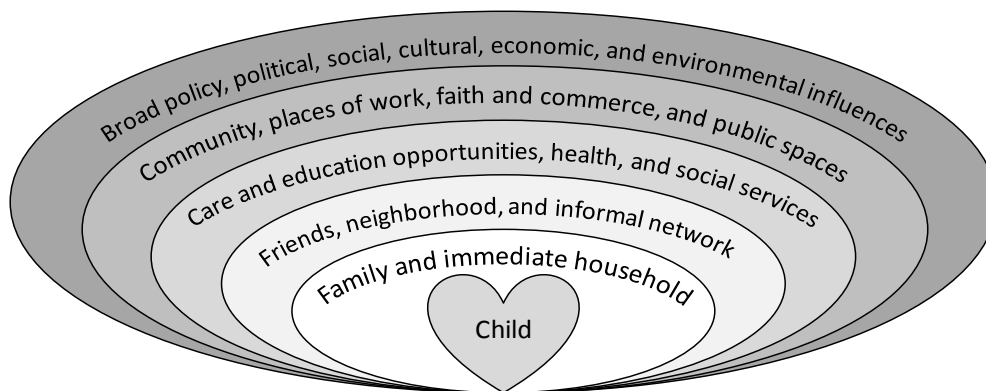
- Improving access to child care for working families with children under six years of age
- Support systems change and improvements

A strong network of relationships enhances our ability to inspire new practices and policies that support early childhood development, and to create the kind of systems that can make a long-term difference for children and families

6. Evaluation & Learning

“Evaluate Impact” is one of First 5 Monterey County’s core roles, grounded in years of experience and investment. In this role, we see ourselves as a resource for strategic decision-making for F5MC, for partners and collaborators, and for the community as a whole. Our impact areas define what we evaluate in order to measure change, learn, and improve our work: Strong Families, Quality Early Childhood Services, Well-Being, and Systems Integration.

As F5MC addresses systems-level change with greater intention, it has the advantage of a strong foundation in evaluation methodologies that support a multi-level approach: collection and analysis of client-level data, annual surveys of funded partners, analysis of common program-level surveys, county Kindergarten Readiness Assessments, bellwether surveys, key influencer interviews, learning circles, etc. To deepen systems evaluation, methodologies may also include: retrospective evaluation, process evaluation, and a broad early childhood development community social network analysis. During the design phase, F5MC will also consider new audiences and their varying needs and perspectives.



A socio-ecological model, such as the one shown here, can inform program and evaluation design that leads to systemic change by including outcomes and activities across all levels of influence. For a young child, the socio-ecological model may

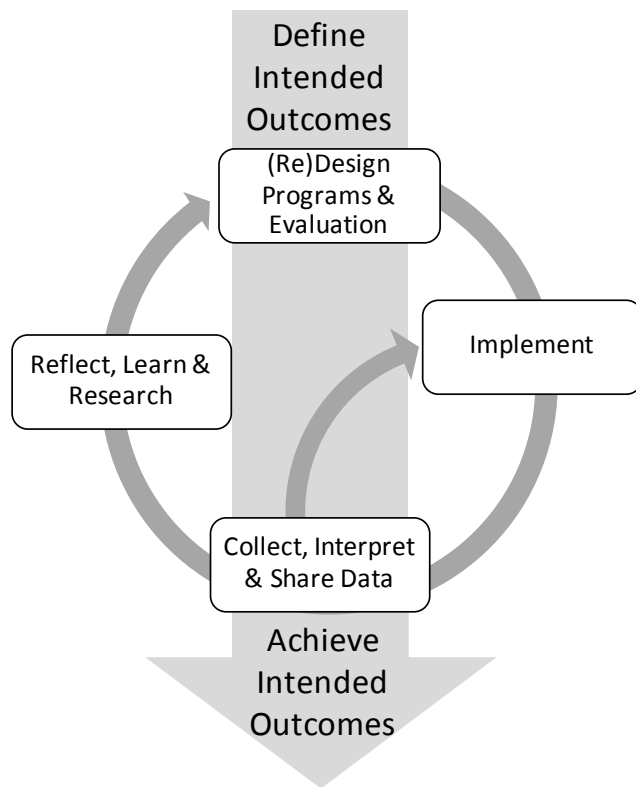
look like this: members of the household closest to the child; places of faith and the neighborhood; services, playgroups, care and education opportunities; a parent’s place of work, public parks, and shops; and finally the broad culture and policies that influence the whole system.^v

For effective evaluation and learning, we know that: 1) We need good information; 2) We are accountable for transparency; and 3) We must collaborate in all stages of our evaluation.

To make strategic decisions, **we need good information.** Information includes: quantitative and qualitative data about programs, their participants, and the population as a whole; and the latest scientific research on early learning practices. In designing an evaluation, indicators selected need to clearly link to what is being measured (validity), and data must be collected accurately and consistently over time (reliability).

^v For details on the socio-ecological model, see Appendix 2.

To be good stewards of public funds, **we are accountable for transparency.**



Transparency drives better outcomes. Our evaluation and learning process, shown here, allows us to transparently and intentionally monitor progress and redesign programs and activities as needed to improve outcomes or to avoid negative, unintended consequences. The process is iterative, allowing us to reflect on and integrate what we learn and to evolve a program or activity as needed over its lifespan.

Evaluation is important for statutorily required reporting and to share the impact of programs with the community. It is also about evolving programs so that we best enhance the lives of children and their families. For transparency to exist, it is important to have a culture that supports sharing of both the good results *and* the disappointing results openly and with the intent to reflect, learn, and evolve.

To create systemic, sustainable change for families and children, F5MC does not work alone. **We collaborate in all stages**

of our evaluation. Collaboration partners include, but are not limited to: the partners we fund; other agencies working in early childhood development; and community initiatives such as Bright Beginnings, Bright Futures, and IMPACT Monterey County.^{vi} Collaborating includes: planning collectively; sharing and linking data between agencies (while maintaining confidentiality); agreeing on common vocabulary and definitions; applying comparable concepts and models; setting common indicators; and reflecting on findings and their meaning together.

The next phase of planning will provide more detail to program and evaluation design. Evaluation design includes: identifying intended, measurable outcomes and indicators at the program, population, and system levels; creating an evaluation for the strategic plan framework as a whole; and selecting appropriate evaluation tools. Programs and systems work will be designed to achieve the intended outcomes.

We will continue to work closely with the partners we fund to develop logic models, identify intended outcomes, and to consistently track and report outcomes. As in the previous funding cycle, funded partners will develop program evaluation plans, and enter information into a common data management system. They also participate in regular group experiences to allow for reflection and shared learning.

^{vi} For details on early childhood development community efforts/organizations, see Section 5.

F5MC collects and monitors a spectrum of population data from public data sets, and generates community specific data. This allows us to not only evaluate, learn, and evolve programs that are linked to our impact areas, but to better understand the broader, deeper perspective of the context in which F5MC and its partners work. It also helps us understand how early childhood programs and services may influence other complex issues our community faces, such as poverty, obesity, or violence, and how we work synergistically with community efforts that complement early childhood development.

7. Investing in Our Community

First 5 Monterey County invests in the community through its core roles: Fund the Work; Champion Early Childhood; Make Connections; Build Capacity; and Evaluate Impact. “Fund the Work” and “Champion Early Childhood” are the most direct means of investment, and are described in this section. Through all activities and investments, F5MC’s aim is to influence the four impact areas: Strong Families, Quality Early Childhood Services, Well-Being, and Integrated Systems. Per our strategic priorities, our investments tend to focus on integrated care and services that utilize diverse funding streams, and activities that sustain impact across the socio-ecological model.^{vii} Co-funding and leveraging are maximized for all types of investments.

Fund the Work: Community Grant Making

The primary activity of the “Fund the Work” Core Role is through Community Grant Making. F5MC provides multi-year funding and comprehensive support to build sustainable practices for community partners that directly serve young children and their families. In addition to direct funding, investments include technical assistance and collaborative learning opportunities, which are supported through the “Build Capacity” and “Evaluate Impact” Core Roles. Engagement of the early childhood development community is a vital component to developing program criteria and the grant making process.

As F5MC positions itself to diversify and expand revenue sources, we will use a phased approach to funding to accommodate less predictable funding streams. Within the time frame of this strategic plan, there will be two phases for multi-year funding:

Phase 1: The funding cycle begins in the fiscal year 2017/2018. Funded partners receive funding for up to four years.

Phase 2: Beginning in fiscal year 2021/2022, the Commission may extend existing funding contracts and/or may begin a new multi-year funding cycle. The duration of the cycle will be determined based on the funding available and conditions at that time.

The following characteristics are essential to the programs we fund:

- Culturally and linguistically appropriate
- Family-centered/centric
- Community-based
- Coordinated among agencies
- Flexible operating hours

These characteristics were defined during the 2005-2007 Early Learning Opportunities (ELO) community engagement process. These characteristics were used in the F5MC Strategic Plan for 2007-2017, continue to be highly valued, and are reflected in our updated strategic plan framework and approach to funding.

^{vii} For details on the socio-ecological model, see Appendix 2.

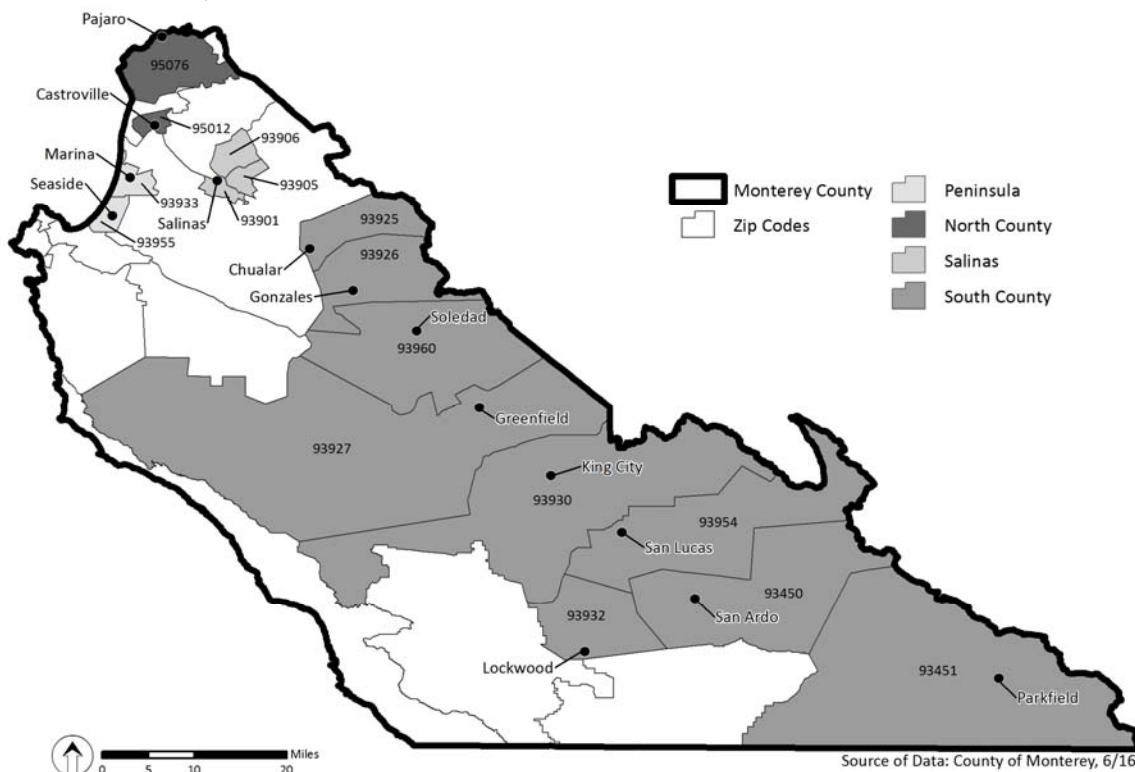
F5MC prioritizes serving children and families with the greatest need. To reach those families, we analyze several socio-economic indicators and determine geographic areas as “high priority” based on their rank. To capture determinants of income, health, education, and vulnerability, we use the following socio-economic indicators:

- Number of children ages 5 years and under
- Percent of third graders below 3rd grade reading level
- Percent of center-based slots per number of children 5 years and under
- Percent of family child care home slots per number of children 5 years and under
- Percent of mothers without prenatal care in their first trimester of pregnancy
- Rate of child maltreatment allegations
- Rate of juvenile probation
- Percent of children in poverty, per federal poverty levels
- Percent of households with more than 1 occupant per 2 rooms
- Percent of medically underserved census tracts

These indicators provide a general guideline for determining priority for our multi-year funding choices. There may be exceptions, based on specific circumstances.

The zip codes within the following geographic areas have been determined to have highest priority:

1. **South County:** 93927, 93960, 93954, 93930, 93925, 93926, 93932, 93450, 93451
2. **Salinas:** 93905, 93901, 93906
3. **North County:** 95076, 95012
4. **Peninsula:** 93955, 93933



Champion Early Childhood: Emerging & One-Time Opportunities

F5MC recognizes that significant yet unexpected or short-term opportunities can arise that help champion early childhood. As funding is available, F5MC will consider both Emerging Opportunities and One-Time Opportunities that are consistent with our strategic framework.

Emerging Opportunities support programs that do not fall within the multi-year funding cycle. Emerging Opportunities generally fall within the Geographic Priority Areas, are urgent, and/or cannot be readily supported through other funding sources. In order to be responsive to short-term community needs and to reach broad or specific segments of the community, F5MC will also consider One-Time Opportunities, such as events, workshops, or trainings.

Make Connections: Fund Development

Proposition 10 disbursements are not enough to meet the need for funding early childhood development in Monterey County. Therefore, F5MC will work to attract more sources of funding including, but are not limited to: leveraging state or federal monies (e.g., Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (MAA) and Targeted Case Management (TCM)); foundation grants; and state or federal grants. These funds may be received and re-granted through F5MC, F5MC may collaborate with other agencies, or F5MC may support the fund development of other agencies.

8. Conclusion

As economic analysis and scientific research show, investing in quality early childhood programs is a cost effective way to build a more equitable, thriving society. While childhood does not last forever, we know the experiences influence a lifetime.

Building on almost two decades of leading innovation and change, First 5 Monterey County is poised to meet the challenge of declining disbursements, with this strategic plan framework guiding our work. In partnership with other agencies, initiatives, community leaders, and families, there is an opportunity in Monterey County to grow investments in early childhood development and build sustainable support for young children and their families.

Over the next six years, we will deepen our focus on mobilizing people and resources to anchor practices and policies that enrich the lives of children and families, with a goal of closing the funding gap. At the same time, we will continue to support vital programs, build capacity, maximize funds, advance quality, emphasize care and service coordination, and further the community vision for early childhood. The focus for change is defined by our impact areas: Strong Families, Quality Early Childhood Services, Well-Being, and Integrated Systems.

In order to bring this strategic framework to life, we will launch the next phase of planning with program and evaluation design. We will identify the specific outcomes and indicators by which we will measure our performance at the program, population, and systems levels. This will shape our community-engaged process that informs how we fund early childhood development programs. Ultimately, the questions that guide our programming, evaluation, and learning are: How will we create an integrated, comprehensive, and collaborative system that enhances optimal early childhood development (per the statutes of the California Children and Families First Act)? What difference is First 5 Monterey County making?

The more that is understood about social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth and what we can do to be nurturing adults, the more we know how to champion early childhood. F5MC is making the strategic decisions needed to best meet the challenges and opportunities ahead, bringing Monterey County closer to a place where all children reach their unique potential in a family and community that values, respects, and invests in early childhood.

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APPENDIX

A1. The Community Voice

In order to tap into the broad spectrum of experiences, perspectives, and aspirations of parents, early childhood service providers, educators, caregivers, advocates, funders, and those that are otherwise affiliated with and interested in early childhood development, F5MC gathered input from two main sources: existing community assessments and a community engagement process.

Existing assessments included: *Impact Monterey County Community Assessment: Adult and Youth Experiences and Aspirations May 2015*; *Monterey County Community Health Improvement Plan 2014-2018*; *Early Childhood Development Initiative Collaborative Action Team Plans 2015*; and *Bright Futures of Monterey County: Glimpse at Our Community 2016*.

The community engagement process is described below, capturing what we heard from participants.

Community Engagement Process

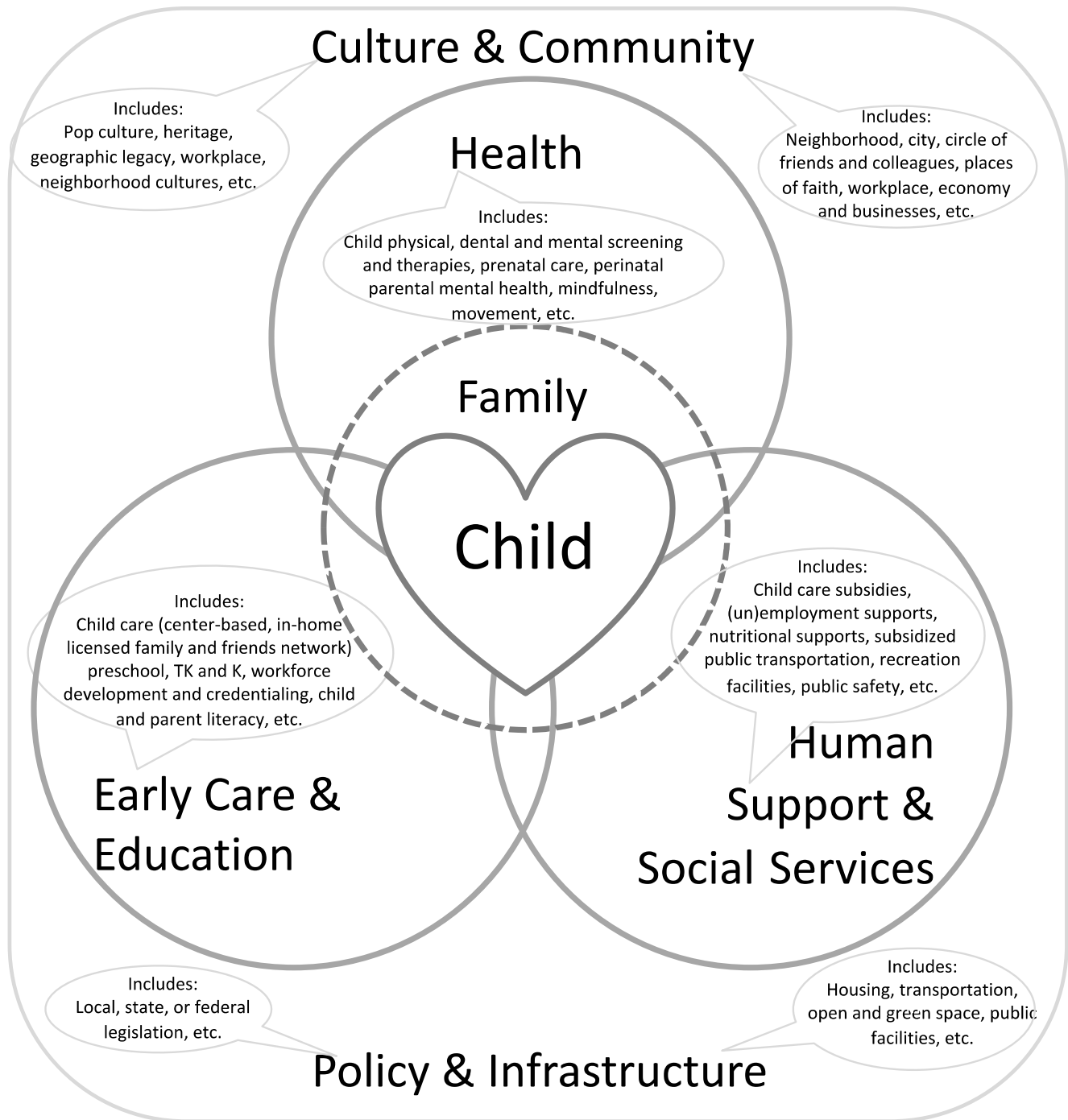
The following engagement opportunities were conducted over a 10-week period, engaging more than 150 people (excluding staff and Commissioners):

- 5** Parent Focus Groups – King City, Seaside, and Salinas with CalWORKs Employment Services (English) and Castroville (Spanish) and Soledad (Bilingual English/Spanish) with Library Storytelling Groups
- 2** Early Childhood Development Partner Dialogs – Funded Partners and Community (Non-Funded) Partners (English)
- 1** Communitywide Meeting – open invitation (Bilingual English/Spanish)
- 2** Commission Working Sessions – open invitation (Bilingual English/Spanish)

For the Parent Focus Group and Funded Partner and Community Partner Dialogs, the approach was a dialog format, with questions that allowed participants to incrementally co-develop an aspirational vision for early learning and family programs and services. This vision became a comprehensive, cohesive “web of love” that engages with and strengthens families so that parents can be the best parents they can be, and their children are healthy and ready for school and life. We sought insights on: What is working well now for children and families? What are the challenges for families, service providers, and communities? What opportunities might we create in Monterey County to fill in the “in-between spaces”? The first iteration was developed after several parent and partner dialogs. It was provided for reflection at the communitywide meeting and updated based on outcomes from the communitywide meeting and both commission working sessions.

Community Vision for Early Childhood Development

The graphical depiction and following characteristics capture the outcomes of the community engagement process. It represents the community's various voices, experiences, and aspirations. This vision was used as a reference point in developing F5MC's strategic position and the strategic plan framework that will guide F5MC's work into the future.



The three overarching characteristics, as articulated by participants in the community engagement process, further describe the countywide vision for interrelated care, education, services, practices, and policies are: 1) A society that embraces the value of childhood; 2) Equitable, easy access to care and services, and 3) High quality care and services.

A Society that Embraces the Value of Childhood

- Importance of early human development and economic impact is widely recognized by policy makers, employers, community leaders, and the general public.
- Communities advocate for and invest in childhood-related issues, using common language and data-systems.
- Early childhood development is viewed as essential in the education continuum, and the link between preschool and kindergarten is seamless.
- Parents and communities are informed and involved in decision-making and how public funds are invested.
- Work places provide opportunity for flexible, paid parent/child time (e.g., breastfeeding, post-birth bonding time, and sick days).
- Both mothers and fathers are positively enabled and engaged in their child's early years.
- Adults are positive role models and self-respect is learned early in life.
- Children's curiosity, competence, and creativity are visible, embraced, and respected.

Equitable, Easy Access to Care & Services

- All families are served (regardless of income, job, zip code, etc.) at convenient times.
- Ample early childhood development services are available across the county.
- Up-to-date parent-resource information is available in multiple formats and languages.
- Services are responsive to diverse needs, characteristics, and culture of communities.
- "One-Stop" services are available for child development services, including basic needs.
- Open entry points exist into a system of connected and coherent support services, where everything is connected.
- Families can easily navigate between different types of services, without long waitlists.
- Transportation options are flexible and family-friendly.
- A common early childhood development public message is shared throughout the county.
- Children have access to a free education, from child care to college.

High Quality Care & Services

- Quality standards are set and reached across the system.
- Comprehensive family assessment/screening and case management is the norm.
- Parents' needs, before and after birth, are recognized and served.
- Therapies are adapted for local needs (e.g., trauma-informed).
- Local education, training, and networking opportunities with diverse professionals exist for the early childhood development workforce, with an emphasis on continuing education and ongoing practical training.
- Information is easily, securely, and confidentially shared between agencies, while data supports strategic decision-making.
- Workforce pay and benefits reflect professional and societal value of the field.

To augment and re-enforce this community vision, additional, highlights from what we heard during the community engagement process include:

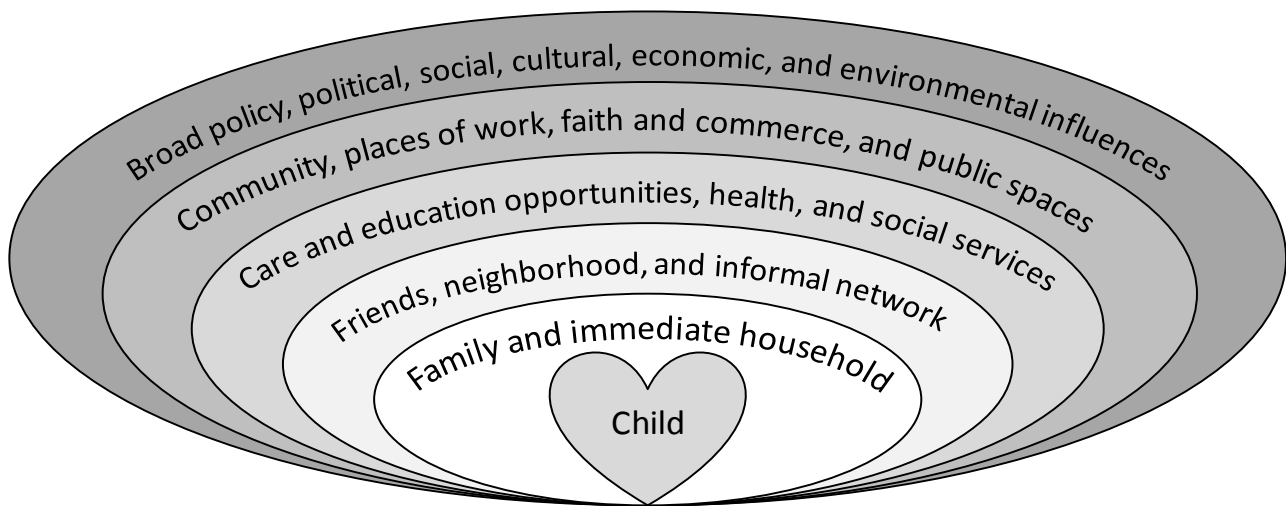
- Our community is asking for a comprehensive, cohesive, connected system for early childhood development with families and children as the focus of services.
- By partners in the early childhood development community, F5MC is seen as poised to help lead the coordination and connection of that system, especially because of strengths as a capacity builder and connector.
- There needs to be more flexibility to support a coordinated system, for example: working relationships appropriately defined through written agreements (i.e. Memorandums of Understanding), or local funding that is more flexible/less categorical.
- Parents want to take an active role in that system, whether empowered to navigate it successfully or to participate in the decision-making process for investments and policies.
- Income is a barrier for families that are just over eligibility thresholds for subsidies. This keeps parents from enrolling their children in preschool programs. It also keeps them from accessing other social or human support services.
- Parenting development, home visits, care and service coordination, and professional development for providers are highly valued and more are wanted. Opportunities for family engagement, especially fathers, are needed.
- Partners funded by F5MC want help to access non-F5MC funding sources locally.
- Families want one-stop resource hubs/centers to access services (e.g., basic needs, early childhood, youth and parent development, and counseling) and to interact with other community members.
- Parents and providers express a desire for more playgroups, parent development, home visits, training/learning opportunities, etc., especially in South County.
- General public awareness about the value of early childhood still needs to be raised, especially to help encourage increased investments, both financially and socially.
- Employers need to increase flexibility so that families with young children can actively support early development.
- Families and partners want a common message about the importance of early childhood, with common vocabulary and a unified, seamless data system to share information.

A2. Systems Integration

Systems integration marries two conceptual frameworks have been and continue to be central to First 5 Monterey County’s work: the socio-ecological model and the integration continuum.

The Socio-Ecological Model

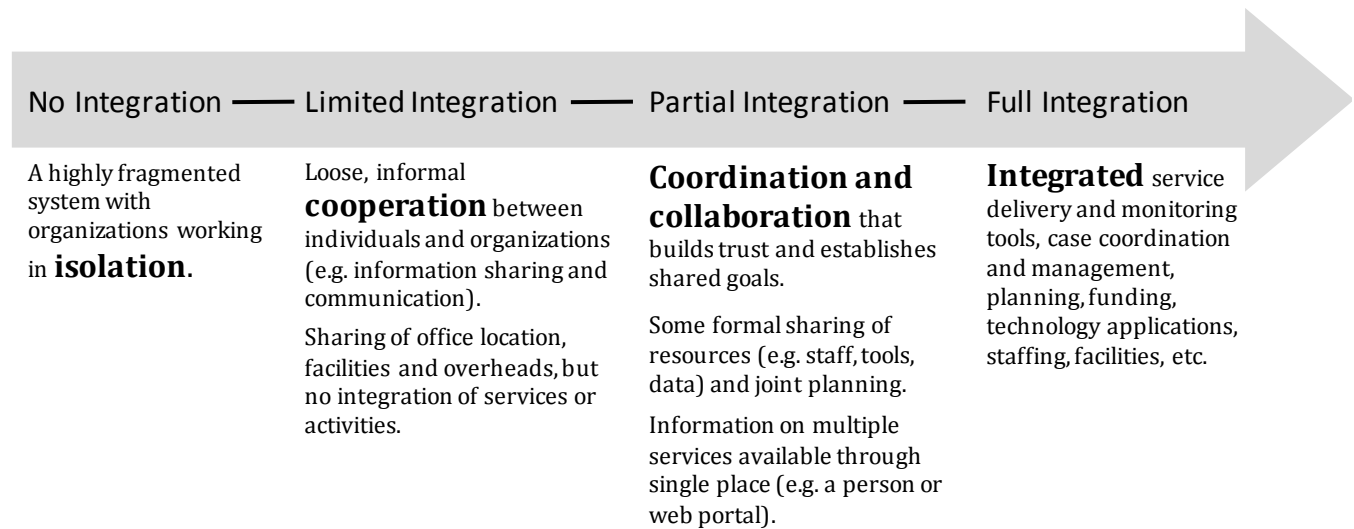
The socio-ecological model captures a systems-thinking approach: the understanding that everything is connected. A child does not grow up in isolation—she or he is influenced by many factors, directly or indirectly. For a young child, the socio-ecological model may look like this: members of the household closest to the child; places of faith and the neighborhood; services, playgroups, care and education opportunities; a parent’s place of work, public parks, and shops; and finally the broad culture and policies that influence the whole system – traditions, media, government, etc.



Integration Continuum

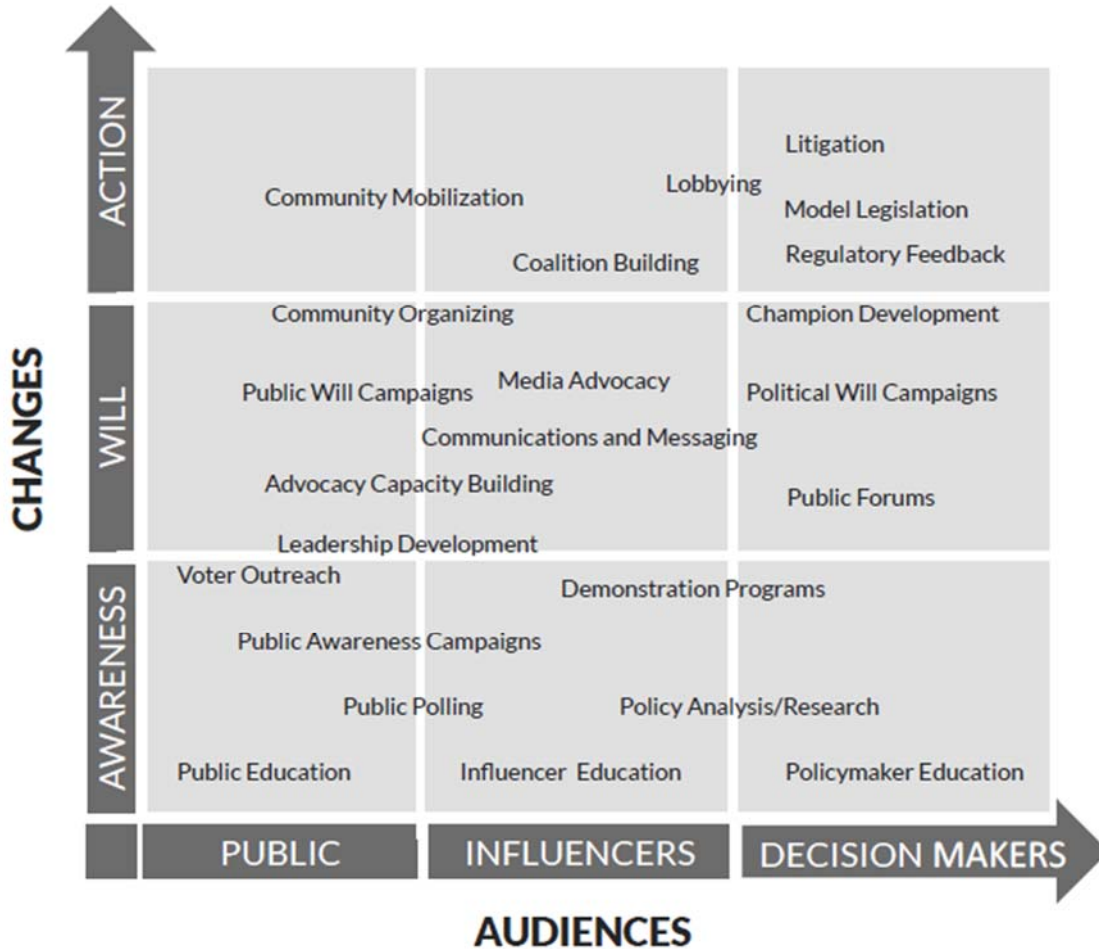
Just as F5MC strives to make connections and strengthen relationships across circles of influence, we also strive to do so within each circle. In particular, we strive to support deeper collaboration across service practitioners and organizations—systems integration. The continuum of integration shown here provides examples of how service integration may progress, from no integration (isolation) to full integration (integrated). It conceptually mirrors similar models that map the degrees of interaction between agencies and the social network.

In response to the community voice, following the current trend in best practices, and building off current success with funded partners, we support the movement towards higher degrees of integration for services and systems designed to meet families’ needs. We also recognize that every partner has its own pace for integration, and its own end point – full integration may not be the appropriate solution for all.



A3. Advocacy Strategy Framework

The Advocacy Strategy Framework below allows F5MC to situate a range of advocacy strategies and activities,⁸ per Strategic Priority 3: Inform, inspire, and facilitate the adoption of practices countywide and policies at all levels. It is organized around two main dimensions: the audiences targeted and the change desired with the identified audiences. Activities, as shown in the matrix below, include: advocacy capacity building; public forums; public awareness; and community mobilization for policy change.



⁸ From *F5MC Year 4 Policy Evaluation: Lines of Inquiry and Tools Crosswalk*. Harder+Company Community Research. April 2016. Original source: Coffman, J and Beer, T. *The Advocacy Strategy Framework: A Tool for Articulating an Advocacy Theory of Change*. 2015.



First 5 Monterey County Commission

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Julie Drezner, Co-Chair – *Retired, Community Foundation for Monterey County*

Josefina Silva, Secretary – *Preschool Coordinator, Greenfield Union School District*

Elsa Jimenez – *Director, Monterey County Health Department*

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Chris Shannon – *Executive Director, Door to Hope*

Jamie Valenzuela-Mumau – *Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services Division,
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