



STRATEGIC PLAN

2025 - 2030

FIRST5SCC.ORG



A MESSAGE TO OUR COMMUNITY

On behalf of First 5 Santa Cruz County, we are proud to share our 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. This plan—developed in collaboration with staff, Commissioners, agency partners, and community leaders—reflects our continued commitment to focus our efforts and investments on four key priorities: Healthy Children; Early Care and Education; Thriving Families; and Equitable, Sustainable Early Childhood Systems.

Our plan builds on First 5's extensive history of innovation, effective partnerships, and demonstrated impacts. It also recognizes the tremendous challenges and uncertainty that many families and organizations in our community are facing, including First 5.

Over the next five years, this strategic plan will guide us as we navigate challenges—such as the continued decline of our main revenue source, the Proposition 10 tobacco tax—and explore new opportunities and approaches to fulfill our mission.

Our goals are ambitious, and we cannot achieve them alone. We invite you to join us in our work to ensure all children have positive childhood experiences that foster lifelong well-being and flourishing.

In partnership,



A blue ink signature of David G. Brody.

David G. Brody
Executive Director



A blue ink signature of Dr. Faris Sabbah.

Dr. Faris Sabbah
Commission Chair



ABOUT FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Our Vision of Success

Healthy, happy, well-prepared children
Thriving families
Connected communities
Equitable systems

We're on a Mission

To ensure early childhood systems and supports foster equitable health, development, and well-being for all young children and their families in Santa Cruz County.

Our Values & Guiding Principles

- **Whole Child, Whole Family, Whole Community:** We understand that young children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development are interdependent, and that children grow and learn within their family relationships and the larger community.
- **Equity:** We seek out and amplify the voices of families with young children, prenatal to 5. We prioritize efforts that are responsive to the needs of our diverse community. We identify and work toward eliminating barriers to well-being based on race, ethnicity, income, and other characteristics.
- **Strategic Impact:** We invest our time and resources in areas that support our strategic priorities, show evidence of effectiveness, and address root causes of inequities.
- **Stewardship:** We partner with public, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations to make the best use of our resources for the benefit of children and families.
- **Integration:** We work with our partners to break down silos, ensure services are accessible and comprehensive, and increase shared responsibility and accountability.
- **Strengths-based:** We identify and enhance existing community strengths. We build organizational and systemwide capacity to influence meaningful and lasting changes.



Proposition 10

In November 1998, California voters passed Proposition 10, the California Children and Families First Initiative, which added a 50-cent per pack tax on cigarettes and tobacco products. The intent of Proposition 10 is to “facilitate the creation and implementation of an integrated, comprehensive, and collaborative system of information and services to enhance optimal early childhood development and to ensure that children are ready to enter school.” Eighty percent of the tax revenue is disbursed to the 58 counties in California to promote the early health, learning, and family support for children from the prenatal stage through five years of age.

First 5 Santa Cruz County Commission

The Commission consists of nine members authorized to administer and allocate Santa Cruz County’s Prop 10 funds. Commissioners represent county government, health, social services, early care and education, and communities across the County.



OUR AUDACIOUS GOAL

In Santa Cruz County, all children have Positive Childhood Experiences that foster lifelong well-being and flourishing.

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are the experiences, relationships, and environments that drive healthy child development. PCEs provide the foundation for lifelong well-being (happiness and optimal physical, social, emotional, and behavioral health) and flourishing (thriving, growing, and fulfilling unlimited potential).

Newer research on PCEs adds to our understanding of early childhood brain development, Protective Factors, and the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress. Studies show that children with more PCEs are more resilient, do better in school, and have better health outcomes. PCEs also help counteract the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as witnessing family violence, losing a parent, experiencing abuse, and facing other family challenges.

The **Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) framework** identifies four types of PCEs — or Building Blocks of HOPE — that all children need to flourish:¹



RELATIONSHIPS

Safe and supportive relationships within the family and with other children and adults.



ENVIRONMENTS

Safe, equitable, and stable environments where children can live, learn, and play.



ENGAGEMENT

Opportunities for social and civic engagement to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness.



EMOTIONAL GROWTH

Opportunities for emotional growth where children feel supported through difficult events and emotions.

¹ Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) Framework <https://positiveexperience.org/>



THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

The first five years of a child's life, starting prenatally, are crucial for lifelong well-being and flourishing. Ninety percent of brain development happens before age 5, which means a child's relationships, experiences, and environments in the earliest years matter profoundly.

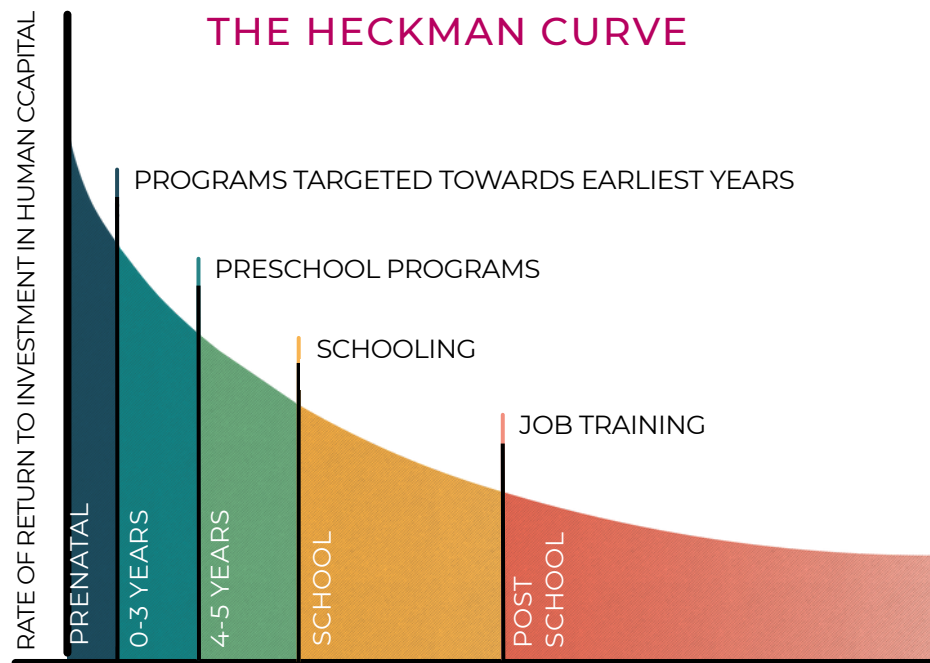


“What happens as a child shapes the adult and the rest of society.”

First 5 Association of California



Scientists and economists, such as Nobel Laureate James Heckman, have proven that investing in early childhood pays off, and the earlier the investment, the greater the return. Investing in high-quality early childhood programs, particularly for children and families facing the greatest barriers to well-being, can deliver a 13% return on investment.²



Yet, we also know the early childhood system was not built for everyone to thrive. Health, education, and social service systems are siloed, inadequately funded, and often designed to exclude children and families who already face the greatest barriers accessing the resources and opportunities that foster well-being.

This is why First 5 remains a committed steward of Proposition 10 revenue.

Our Commission and staff invest these public funds in early childhood systems and supports that benefit all young children and their families in Santa Cruz County, particularly those who are excluded from opportunity based on income, language, immigration status, race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other social identities. We are proud of our track record as an innovative, data-driven, and community-centered partner and leader, as shown on our Community Dashboard.³

² The Heckman Equation <https://heckmanequation.org/>

³ First 5 Santa Cruz County <https://www.first5scc.org/annual-evaluation-report>

OUR STRATEGIC ROADMAP

The 2025-2030 Strategic Roadmap provides a broad framework for prioritizing First 5's efforts and investments over the next five years. It reflects our analysis of the early childhood landscape (strengths to build on, challenges and areas to explore or enhance, and potential risks and roadblocks) conducted during the strategic planning process.

The Roadmap does not name specific programs or initiatives that First 5 will fund or support, in order to provide the greatest degree of flexibility to adapt to changing conditions and circumstances. However, the Roadmap reflects our intent to work alongside community leaders and organizational partners to preserve, strengthen, and expand (when possible) early childhood systems and supports in Santa Cruz County, including First 5's programs and initiatives.

Strategic Priorities



Healthy Children

Strategic Goal

Support and strengthen early childhood systems so that young children and their families have optimal physical, behavioral, social, and emotional health.

Desired Results

- Equity in Strong Start Scores across the county
- Increased access to affordable quality health care
- Increased use of preventive and early intervention services
- Improved perinatal, infant, and child health



Community Indicators

- Strong Start Scores
- Birth outcomes (full-term births, healthy birthweight births)
- Children (0-5) with health insurance and dental insurance
- Children (0-5) receiving early intervention services (measure TBD)
- Emergency Department visits for infants under age 1
- Perinatal mental health
- Prenatal care in the first trimester
- Medi-Cal Newborn Enrollments
- Children (0-5) with Medi-Cal insurance who:
 - received recommended Well-Child Visits
 - received recommended immunizations
 - have been to the dentist in the last year
 - received developmental screenings



Early Care and Education

Strategic Goal

Support and strengthen early care and education systems so that young children are ready for school and fluent readers by 3rd grade.

Desired Results

- Increased access to affordable, high-quality, inclusive early care and education (ECE) for children ages 0-5
- Increased alignment and cohesion within and between the ECE system and TK-12 education system
- Increased stability and sustainability of ECE system, including the workforce
- Increased early learning and school readiness skills (developmental, social-emotional, language, literacy, numeracy)

Community Indicators

- Enrollment in ECE programs
- Unmet need for early care and education
- Inclusive practices implemented in ECE settings (*measure TBD*)
- Enrollment of children with disabilities in inclusive ECE settings (*measure TBD*)
- Kindergarten readiness (*measure TBD*)
- 3rd grade reading fluency



Thriving Families

Strategic Goal

Support and strengthen early childhood systems so that families have what they need to provide Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) for their children.

Desired Results

- Increased resilience of young children and their families
- Improved parenting practices and parent-child relationships
- Increased “social capital” (relationships and connections) of young children and their families
- Decreased child abuse and neglect

Community Indicators

- Families with children ages 0-5 with incomes below the Federal Poverty Level
- Participation in public benefits programs (e.g., Medi-Cal, CalFresh, CalWORKs, WIC, housing assistance)
- Family reading
- Substantiated reports of child maltreatment





Equitable and Sustainable Early Childhood Systems

Strategic Goal

Preserve, enhance, and/or expand services and supports in early childhood systems.

Desired Results

- Increased parent/community voice in early childhood advocacy and systems change initiatives
- Increased coordination and integration among organizations and sectors serving young children and families
- Policies and funding that prioritize prevention, early intervention, and equity for young children and their families

Community Indicators

- Parent/Community leaders (co)leading early childhood advocacy and systems change efforts
- Coordinated care and navigation (e.g., data sharing, closed loop referrals)
- Share of funding for early childhood in local, state, and federal budgets



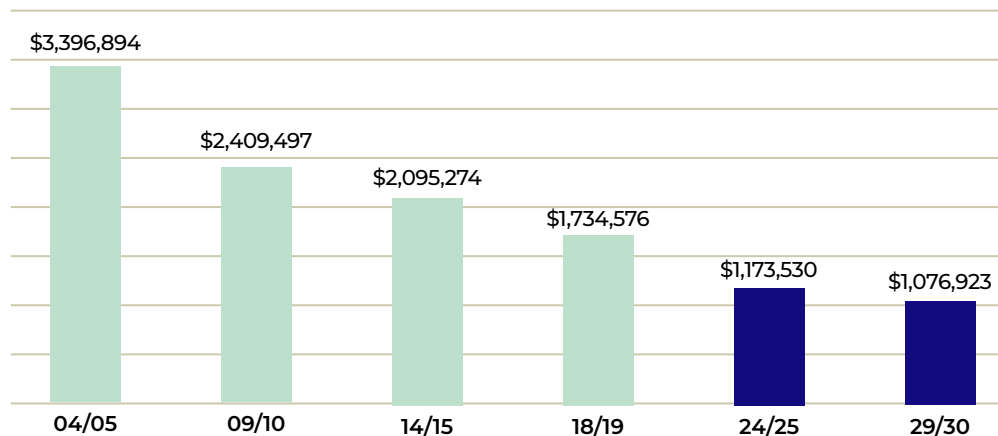
FIRST 5'S LONG-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) is an integral part of the Commission's strategic plan, as it outlines the working assumptions and fiscal scenarios that will impact the implementation of this strategic plan.

First 5's principal source of revenue, the Proposition 10 tobacco tax, continues to decline due to the steady drop in tobacco consumption over the last two and a half decades. Our annual Prop 10 revenue is now 44% lower than it was a decade ago and is down 65% from \$3.4 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 04/05. Santa Cruz County's Proposition 10 revenue is projected to decline another 8% between FYs 24/25 and 29/30.

Proposition 10 Revenue: Actuals & Projected

2004 – 2025



In addition, First 5 has strategically exhausted most of the fund balance that accumulated in its earliest years, in an effort to get resources into the community. The strategic use of the fund balance has allowed First 5 to minimize the degree of funding reductions over the last several years. However, First 5's expenditures will now be limited primarily to its annual Prop 10 allocation and any external funding that has been secured.

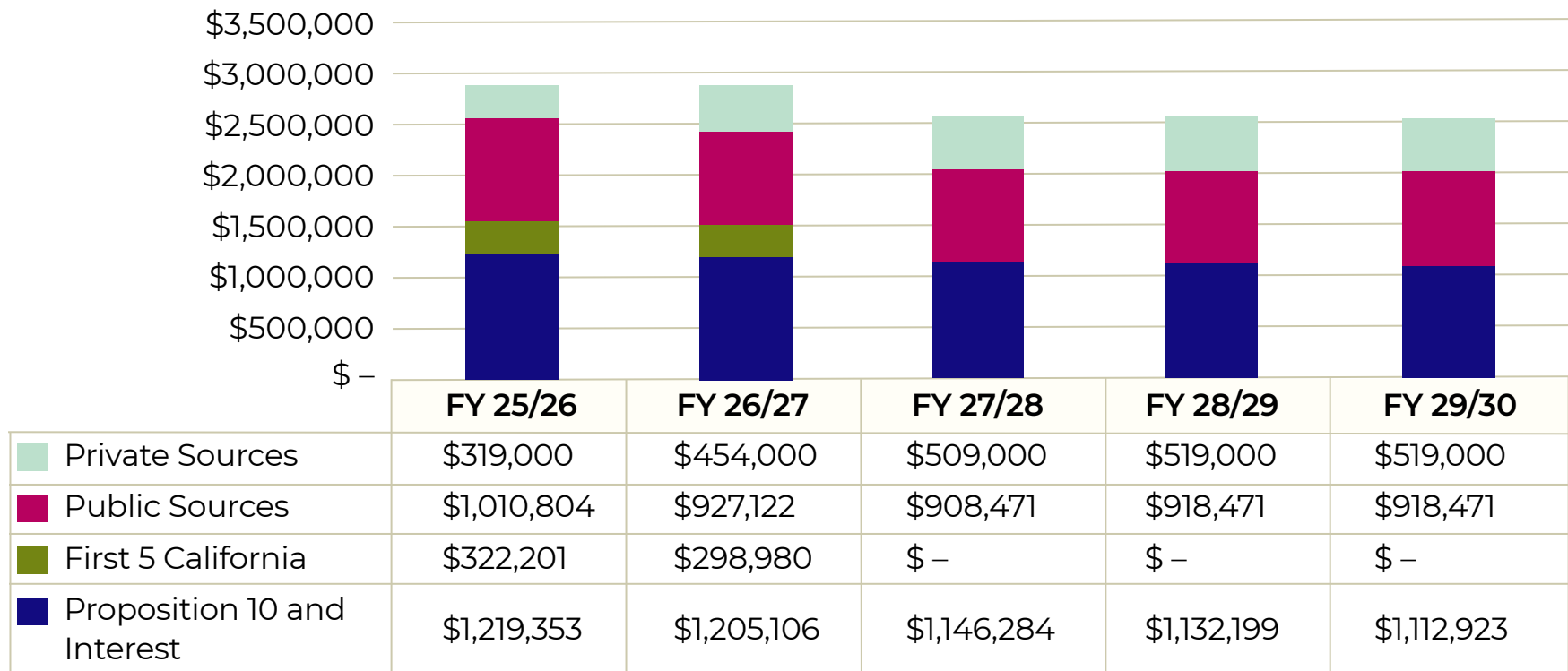
First 5 has benefitted greatly from funding from multiple sources over the past 20 years, including First 5 California, the California Department of Education, the California Department of Health Care Services, Monterey Peninsula Foundation, Sunlight Giving, and many other state and local public agencies, foundations, and health and hospital systems.





The following chart summarizes First 5's projected revenues by funding source during the 2025 – 2030 strategic plan. Projections are based on information known at this time and will be updated annually.

Projected Revenue by Funding Source 2025 – 2030





Anticipated Annual Investments by Priority Area

First 5's anticipated annual investments in each priority area, as well as operating expenses, are summarized below. These figures will be reviewed and modified as needed each fiscal year.

REVENUE SOURCES	FY 25/26	FY 26/27	FY 27/28	FY 28/29	FY 29/30
Proposition 10 & Interest	\$1,219,353	\$1,205,106	\$1,146,284	\$1,132,199	\$1,112,923
First 5 California	\$322,201	\$298,980	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Public Sources	\$1,010,804	\$927,122	\$ 908,471	\$918,471	\$918,471
Private Sources	\$319,000	\$454,000	\$509,000	\$519,000	\$519,000
TOTAL REVENUE	\$2,871,358	\$2,885,208	\$2,563,755	\$2,569,670	\$2,550,394
USES					
Operating Expenses					
Administration	\$296,119	\$302,183	\$308,428	\$292,993	\$299,043
Program	\$251,886	\$257,788	\$ 230,956	\$194,658	\$199,175
Evaluation	\$124,113	\$126,559	\$129,077	\$106,665	\$108,803
Total Operating Expenses	\$672,118	\$686,529	\$668,460	\$594,316	\$607,021
Strategic Priority Expenses					
Healthy Children	\$495,293	\$425,897	\$434,615	\$443,595	\$452,844
Early Care & Education	\$891,422	\$545,557	\$234,301	\$209,423	\$212,345
Thriving Families	\$1,011,888	\$903,655	\$869,215	\$831,681	\$834,122
Early Childhood System	\$352,091	\$376,667	\$404,423	\$432,257	\$437,357
Total Strategic Priority Expenses	\$2,750,693	\$2,251,776	\$1,942,554	\$1,916,956	\$1,936,668
TOTAL USES	\$3,422,811	\$2,938,305	\$2,611,014	\$2,511,272	\$2,543,689
Net Surplus (Deficit)	(\$551,453)	(\$53,097)	(\$47,260)	\$58,398	\$6,704
Fund Balance Begin	\$1,538,312	\$986,859	\$933,762	\$886,502	\$944,900
Fund Balance End	\$968,859	\$933,762	\$866,502	\$944,900	\$951,604

Sustainability Plan



Sustaining First 5's investments in the health, development, and well-being of young children and families remains a priority for the Commission. At the same time, our fiscal reality requires us to continuously assess our approaches, adapt to changing needs, and implement creative solutions with our available resources. This means we will continue to focus on policy and systems change as a sustainability strategy, as we inevitably pare back investments in professional development and direct services as Proposition 10 revenue continues to decline.

We will continue to work with current and future partners to ensure we are making full and best use of all funding options. Our actions may include, but are not limited to:

- Partner with the First 5 Association and Network to advocate for preserving and expanding policies and funding for young children and their families
- Maximize state and local funds for prevention and early intervention services
- Cultivate partnerships with business and philanthropic leaders
- Advocate for new dedicated local revenues (e.g., fees, taxes or other sources, such as cannabis) that could sustain First 5 in the long term.



KEY STRATEGIES

First 5 will implement multiple strategies to advance progress toward the Desired Results and Audacious Goal. Specific activities and investments may shift each year based on community needs and conditions.

Funding and Sustainability

Internal Focus

- Shift to balanced budgets
- Maintain a Fund Balance equal to 3 months of operating expenses
- Enhance organizational infrastructure and capacity to pursue grants, contracts, and other mission-aligned funding opportunities

External Focus

- Leverage Prop 10 resources to create, strengthen, or fill gaps in service delivery systems
- Develop and/or expand public-private funding partnerships
- Work with community partners to assess feasibility of a local ballot measure to support and sustain prenatal-5 services and supports, including First 5's programs and initiatives

Communications and Advocacy

Internal Focus

- Develop and implement a strategic communications plan
- Enhance organizational infrastructure and build for effective strategic communications

External Focus

- Build public awareness of and support for early childhood services and First 5's mission and impact
- Seek and amplify the voices of prenatal-5 families and frontline providers in advocacy and decision-making
- Align First 5's messaging and advocacy with partners in the local early childhood system and the First 5 Network
- Share key findings and recommendations from the Prenatal-5 Comprehensive Fiscal Analysis
- Advocate for programs, policies, and sustained funding across the early childhood system



KEY STRATEGIES, CONTINUED



Capacity Building

Internal Focus

- Assess organizational infrastructure and staffing needs; Adjust as appropriate to align with the strategic plan and long-term financial plan
- Provide professional learning and leadership development opportunities for First 5 staff
- Enhance internal coordination and integration across roles and teams

External Focus

- Support community leaders, initiatives, training, data sharing, community events, and capacity-building projects that strengthen early childhood services and systems

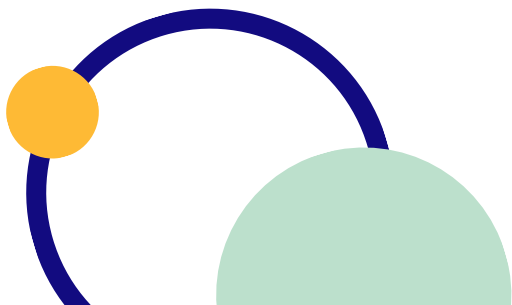
Community Impact

Internal Focus

- Assess organizational infrastructure and staffing needs; Adjust as appropriate to align with the strategic plan and long-term financial plan
- Provide professional learning and leadership development opportunities for First 5 staff
- Enhance internal coordination and integration across roles and teams

External Focus

- Assess the impact and sustainability of First 5's investments; Adjust as appropriate to align with the strategic plan and long-term financial plan
- Prioritize investments in evidence-based and community-informed approaches
- Evaluate the impacts of First 5's investments



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Commissioners

Dr. Faris Sabbah, Chair

County Superintendent of Schools
At-large representative

Jennifer Herrera, Vice Chair

Interim Director, Health Services Agency
Representing the Health Services Agency

Kimberly Petersen, Secretary

Deputy Director, Human Services Department
Representing the Human Services Department

Sandy Brown

Analyst, 3rd District Supervisor Cummings
Representing 3rd District Supervisor Cummings

Monica Martinez

5th District Supervisor
Representing the Board of Supervisors

Diane Munoz

Childhood Advisory Council Community Organizer
Representing 4th District Supervisor Hernandez

Johanna Schonfield

Assistant District Attorney
Representing 2nd District Supervisor De Serpa

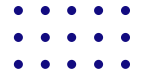
Sheree Storm

Chief Strategy Officer, Dientes Community Dental
Representing 1st District Supervisor Koenig

Dr. Raelene Walker

Director, Pediatric Center of Excellence at Santa Cruz
Community Health
Representing 5th District Supervisor Martinez





First 5 Santa Cruz County Staff

Vicki Boriack, Senior Program Officer

David Brody, Executive Director

Michelle Dodge, CFO/Director of Finance & Administration

Alicia Fernandez, Health Outreach and Enrollment Manager

Irene Freiberg, Master Literacy Coach

Yesenia Gomez-Carrillo, Triple P Program Manager

Holly Maclure, Research and Evaluation Analyst

Jeff Marquardt, Senior Accountant II

Maribel Pedroza, Newborn Enrollment Coordinator

Christine Sieburg, Program and Communications Officer

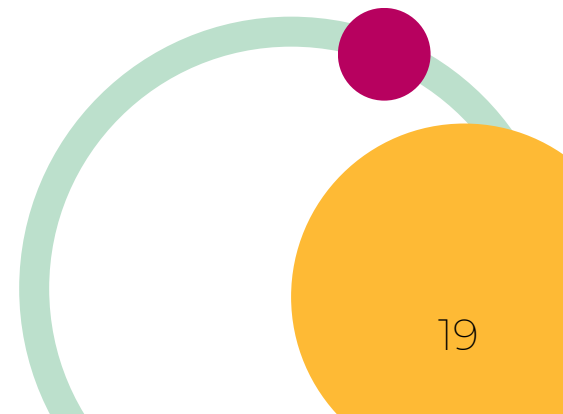
Laura Sotelo, Newborn Enrollment Coordinator

Piper Vogt, Quality Counts Program Manager

Alicia Zenteno, Lead Newborn Enrollment Coordinator

Strategic Planning Consultant

Nicole M. Young, MSW, Optimal Solutions Consulting





4450 Capitola Road, Suite 106
Capitola, CA 95010
(831) 465-2217
<https://www.first5scc.org>

