First 5 Santa Cruz County



Annual Evaluation Report

July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

October 2026

Raising A Reader

Program Description

Raising A Reader (RAR) fosters healthy brain development, supports parent-child bonding, and motivates families to read aloud with their children which helps develop the early literacy skills that are critical for school success. Raising A Reader (RAR) began operation in Watsonville during the last quarter of the 2005-06 fiscal year and has served nearly **35,600** children since then. The program provides a way for children and their parents or caregivers to participate in a weekly rotating book bag program through early care and education settings.

On a weekly basis, participating RAR classrooms and family child care homes provide children with bags that are filled with various award-winning books, which they borrow and bring home to their parents. RAR provides training and information to parents and caregivers on how to effectively share these books with their children at home, to help develop their children's early literacy skills, and instill a love of reading.

RAR also connects families with their local public library, and at the end of the program children are given a book bag of their own as a way to encourage families to continue the practice of borrowing and reading books together.

Funding Transition

In FY 2025-26, First 5 notified RAR that due to budget constraints, First 5 would need to suspend financial support beginning July 1, 2026. In fall of 2025, Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) and First 5 met to discuss a sustainability and transition plan for FY 2026-27 that would help districts, agencies, and sites become independent affiliates of Raising A Reader National. Up until to now, Santa Cruz County RAR has been organized as one independent affiliate of Raising A Reader National, coordinated by PVUSD. The goal for FY 2026-27 is to transition these sites and school districts to be completely independent affiliates with Raising A Reader National. The fee for becoming an affiliate is usually $2,000 per center or school, or $500 per family child care, but Raising A Reader National is supportive of this new sustainability plan in Santa Cruz County and has waived these one-time affiliate fees to help with this transition.

In FY 2026-27, PVUSD intends to maintain the RAR program for its district-operated, state-funded preschool programs, TK classrooms, and contracted family child care providers. First 5

Looking Ahead: Reflections from the RAR Coordinator

"Over the past 20 years, this affiliate has proudly supplied early literacy strategies and books to thousands of children across Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley, ensuring that the most reached-for books are available in their homes. This book bag program has been the foundation of language, family connection, and a love of books in this community.

We extend our deepest gratitude to First 5 Santa Cruz for making this possible and for their steadfast support of young children aged 0–5. Additionally, we appreciate the opportunity to provide materials and training as local sites transition into becoming their own independent affiliates, ensuring that Raising A Reader continues sustainably."

- Raising A Reader, Annual Progress Report

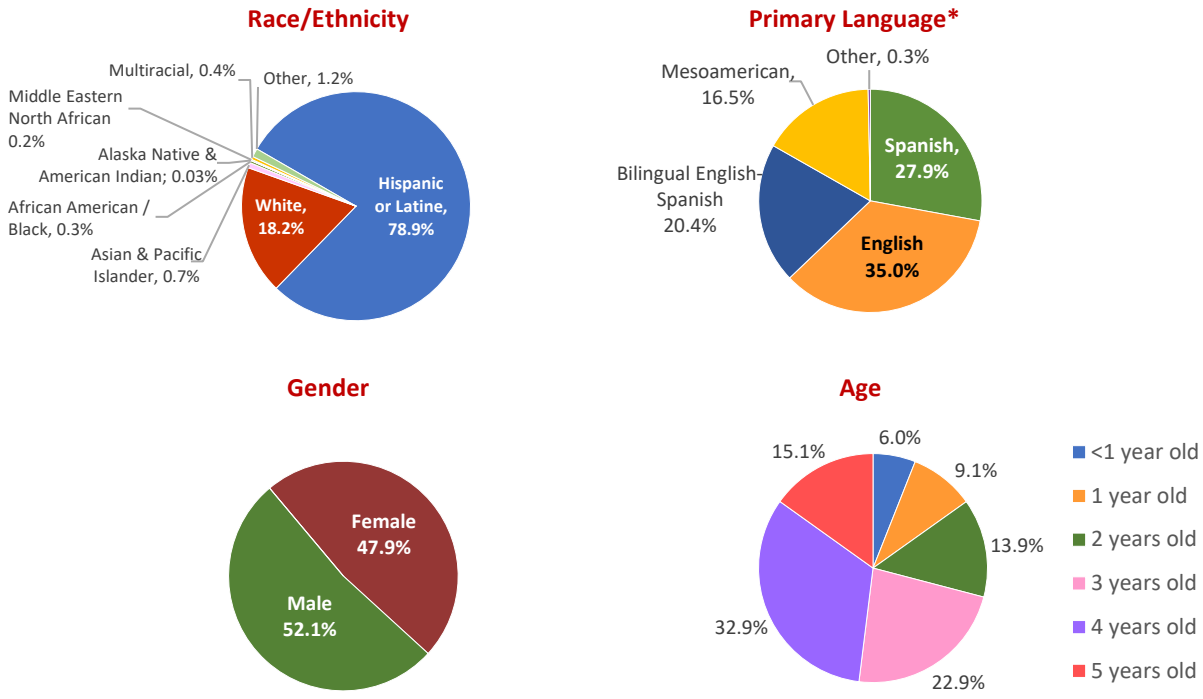
plans to provide one year of transition funding to PVUSD to support training and initial book purchases for agencies that want to continue as independent RAR affiliates. At the end of that 1st year, First 5 will provide results regarding the number of sites that became an affiliate of RAR, and were able to independently continue providing Raising A Reader to the community.

Population Served

	This Funding Cycle 2025-2026			Cumulative Total 2006-2026
	New	Existing	Total 2025-2026	
Children	1,756	1,425	**3,181**	**35,589**

Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026.
Note: "New" children are those who began participating in Raising A Reader for the first time during this fiscal year. "Existing" children are those who began participating in Raising A Reader before this fiscal year and continued their participation into this fiscal year. The population numbers include children reported by Raising A Reader, and also children who were enrolled in this program through Families Together.

Figure 58: **Demographics of Children (ages 0-5) participating in Raising A Reader (2025-26)**



Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026.
Notes:
- These demographics are for the children enrolled in classrooms providing Raising A Reader.
- Clients with missing or unknown data for a demographic are excluded from that demographic's analysis.

* "Mesoamerican" languages include Mixtec, Zapotec, and Triqui. "Other" languages include Bilingual-Other and other languages.
N: (Race/Ethnicity)=3,097; (Primary Language)=3,178; (Gender)= 3,180; (Age)=3,181.

Program Objective: Support existing sites offering Raising A Reader

RAR staff visit participating child care sites to monitor how well the RAR program is operating, and to provide refresher books or trainings as needed. Indeed, as more and more sites in the county have implemented RAR over the years, the objectives of RAR have shifted from adding new sites to maintaining and supporting the existing ones.

The following results show the number of sites that have been supported during the past year. Some sites may be listed more than once if they required additional assistance throughout the year.

Existing Sites	Number of Visits at Existing Sites[1]		2025-26 Total
	Family Child Care Home	Preschool/Child Care Center	
Between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026, sustain, monitor, and support approximately 200 sites with RAR since 2006. Distribute refresher materials, train/re-train teachers/providers on early literacy and family engagement strategies.	160	116	**276**

Source: Raising A Reader *Annual Progress Report*, 2025-26.
[1] Some sites may be visited more than once. Additionally, the actual number of classrooms participating in Raising A Reader is likely to be higher than the total number of sites, as one site may include more than one classroom.

In addition to supporting existing sites, RAR also enrolled 34 new sites in 2025-26.

Number of New Sites Implemented since July 1, 2025		2025-26 Total
Family Child Care Home	Preschool/Child Care Center	
23	11	**34**

Source: Raising A Reader *Annual Progress Report*, 2025-26.

Outcome Objective: Parents will spend more time reading or sharing books with their child

Two surveys were conducted to help to measure the impact of Raising A Reader in Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley area of Monterey County, both utilizing the Raising A Reader *Parent Retrospective Survey* provided by Raising A Reader National through SurveyMonkey (an online tool for creating and analyzing surveys).

Raising A Reader Parent Retrospective Survey

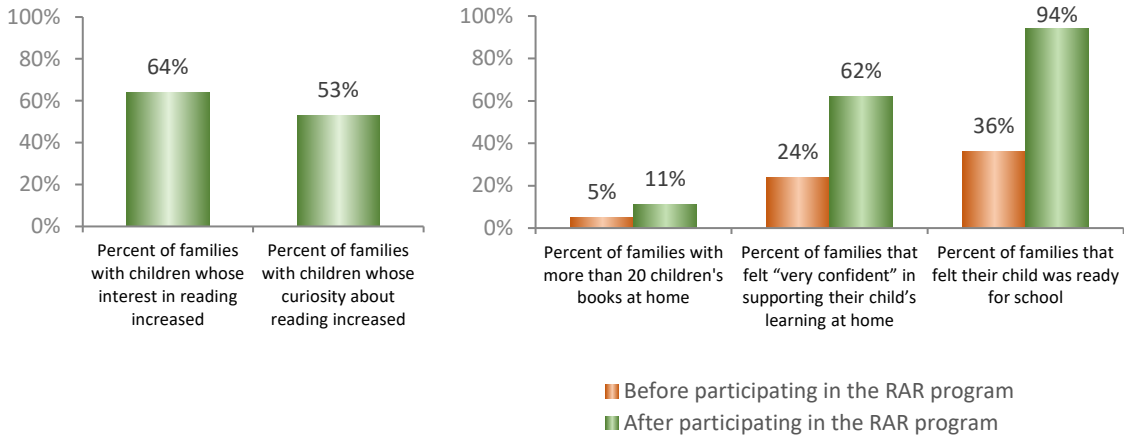
The *Raising A Reader Parent Retrospective Survey* was first administered in the fall of 2025 to 39 migrant parents at the PVUSD Migrant Seasonal Head Start centers in Watsonville, and then again in the spring of 2026 to 213 families throughout the county. RAR staff interviewed migrant parents one at a time and recorded their answers directly into the survey link. For the families throughout the county, the link for this survey was emailed to all the centers and schools so they could forward it to families participating in RAR.

Findings from the *RAR Parent Retrospective Survey* highlight the positive impact of RAR on family reading behaviors and child growth in early literacy.

Impact of RAR on families' pre-literacy activities (2025-26)

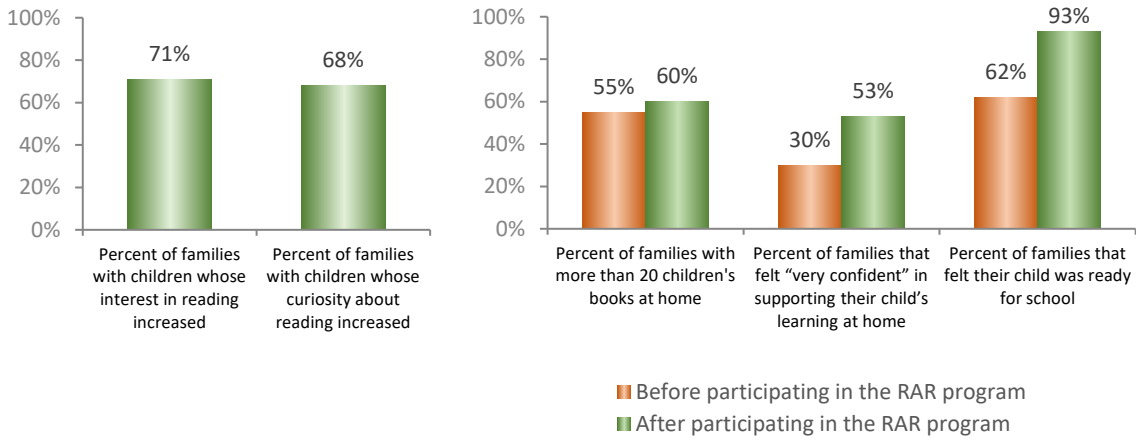
Migrant Families (Fall 2025)

N = 39.



County Families (Spring 2026)

N = 213.



Source: Raising A Reader, Annual Progress Report, *RAR Parent Retrospective Survey* results, 2025-26.