

# **First 5 Monterey County Annual Report to the County Board of Supervisors**

## **Fiscal Year 2024–2025**

### Purpose of the Report

Provide the Monterey County Board of Supervisors with:

- A clear understanding of the current conditions facing families and young children through the State of Systems report;
- Example recommendations to strengthen countywide early childhood systems; and
- The impact of First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) investments in FY 24–25.

### **The State of Systems in Monterey County: An Examination of Supports for Children Ages Prenatal to Five**

***An overview of how systems are supporting families, providers, and young children including recommendations.***

In 2012, F5MC launched the first Kindergarten Readiness Report. The report examined the status of children and how ready they were to learn. Since then, F5MC has grown and adapted in its data collection for children and families. Measuring school readiness is not about determining a child’s eligibility for school but rather about evaluating how well the various support systems for families have worked together to promote healthy child development.

In April 2025, First 5 Monterey County released The State of Systems in Monterey County: An Examination of Supports for Children Ages Prenatal to Five. The report highlights trends in local data to inspire Monterey County stakeholders to address the questions “how do we each understand our part in supporting the healthy development of children, starting prenatally,” and, “how do we collectively do better?”

The most important drivers of kindergarten readiness are those that impact child and family well-being, which depends on the functioning of our broader social, economic, health, and education systems.

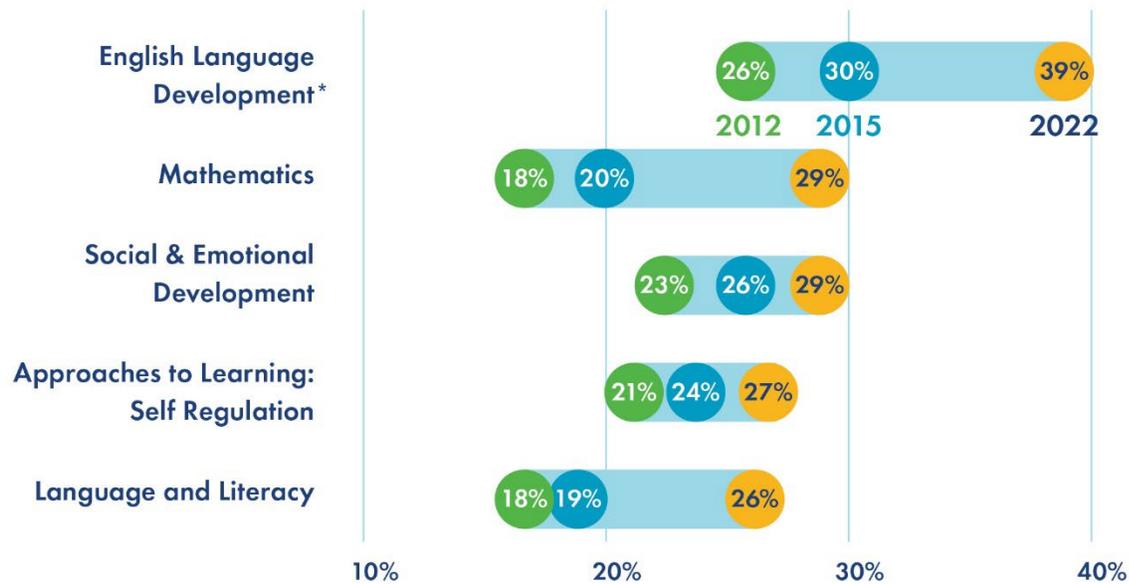
Research points to five community systems that drive healthy development in children ages prenatal to five in ways that support them in being ready for school and life:

1. **Family Financial Stability:** Families have the income they need to thrive, including having the resources to meet their basic needs, save for the future, and access safe and stable housing.

2. **Family Health Care:** Families have excellent prenatal care and primary care within medical settings that are comprehensive, compassionate, and family centered.
3. **Optimal Nutrition and Physical Activity:** Families have access to foods providing optimal nutrition and opportunities for daily physical activity so that children arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies.
4. **Early Care and Education:** Families have access to high-quality child care and preschool that supports both parental employment and healthy child development.
5. **Family Support Services:** Parents have the supports they need to form healthy attachments with their children and serve as their children’s first teachers.

By understanding trends in the systems supporting children over the last decade, we can better identify the strengths in the ways we support young children and families and suggest areas of opportunity for improvement. We are pleased to see the progress over time and the continuing pressing need to do more.

Children in ● **2022** were more likely to meet the readiness thresholds across all domains than children in ● **2015** and ● **2012**.



\*Only emerging bilingual learners were rated in this domain.

The DRDP-SR was used in 2012 and 2015; the DRDP-K was used in 2022. The 2012 and 2015 scores were converted to domain scale scores for comparison with 2022. There were no data collected between 2015 and 2022 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. See technical appendix for the differences between the SR and K versions of the DRDP.

## Examples of Data and Recommendations

The full report includes key data points and recommendations created with local, state, and federal partners. Some examples include:

### 1. Family Financial Stability

- a. **Data:** Nearly two out of three families with children under six did not earn enough to cover basic living needs, according to 2023 data.
- b. **Recommendation:** Advocate for continuous eligibility to family stability programs like CalWORKs, CalFresh, Medi-Cal and WIC, including advocating for the elimination of some time limits or granting waivers for certain programs at the federal, state and local levels.

### 2. Family Health Care

- a. **Data:** Overall, a larger proportions of birthing parents received adequate prenatal care in 2021 than in 2009. However, several populations (those with less than a high school diploma, those with self-pay insurance and Native Americans) are below the Healthy People 2030 goal.
- b. **Recommendation:** Identify barriers to accessing services and support pregnant people to attend regular prenatal check-ups.

### 3. Optimal Nutrition and Physical Activity

- a. **Data:** In 2021, A larger percentage of infants in Monterey County (44%) were enrolled in CalFresh by their first birth than in California at large (34%).
- b. **Recommendation:** Continue to increase enrolment by advocating for streamlined application processes, for example dual enrollment between WIC and CalFresh or other child-serving programs.

### 4. Early Care and Education

- a. **Data:** In 2022, there were only enough licensed care spaces for about one-quarter of children ages 0-4 in Monterey County.
- b. **Recommendation:** As the lack of a trained workforce is a large barrier, incentivize entry into a career pathway in early care and education, for example through earn-to-learn models, scholarships, targeted loan forgiveness, and tax benefits.

### 5. Family Support Services

- a. **Data:** 84% of children under three who could benefit from home visiting were not receiving these services, according to 2022 data.
- b. **Recommendation:** Support the connection, coordination, and integration of family support services by supporting organizations such as First 5 to provide the coordination, capacity building, data collection and reflection needed for continuous quality improvement.

The full report outlines trends in local data for Monterey County stakeholders to celebrate the progress made, support collaboration among different sectors, and inspire action in policies and systems. For the full report and summaries of each section visit: [www.first5monterey.org](http://www.first5monterey.org).

## **2024-2025 First 5 Monterey County: Our Pathway to Stronger Systems**

### ***The Impact of First 5 Monterey County investments on the community***

F5MC’s work in FY 24–25 builds on the insights from the State of Systems Report and is grounded in the agency’s strategic plan and theory of change. The theory of change serves as a roadmap for reaching the future we envision, a future where families and caregivers are well-connected, respected, and supported as they nurture their young children. If services and systems center the needs of young children and families, then, we will make progress on these results. Although F5MC is not solely responsible for these results, it is important to measure and track these results at the county level (our population) to guide our work and hold ourselves and systems partners accountable.

#### How F5MC See Change Happens: Theory of Change

If we implement activities in these strategic areas:

- Strengthen connections and enhance family access to integrated and collaborative services.
- Build capacity with service providers, administrators, and families as they support young children.
- Elevate early childhood as a priority and advocate for what families need to thrive.



We will make progress on the changes needed in policy, systems, and services that will lead to:

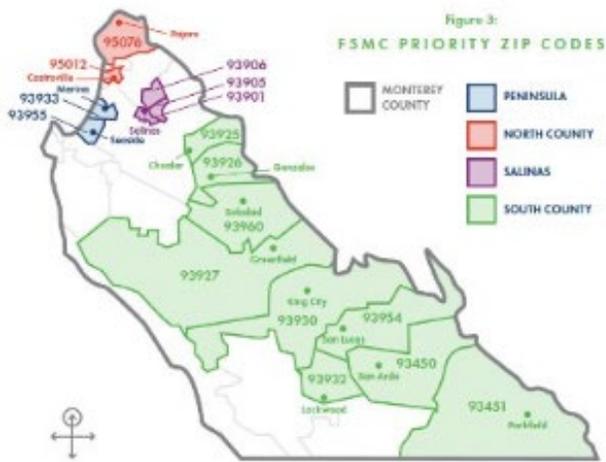
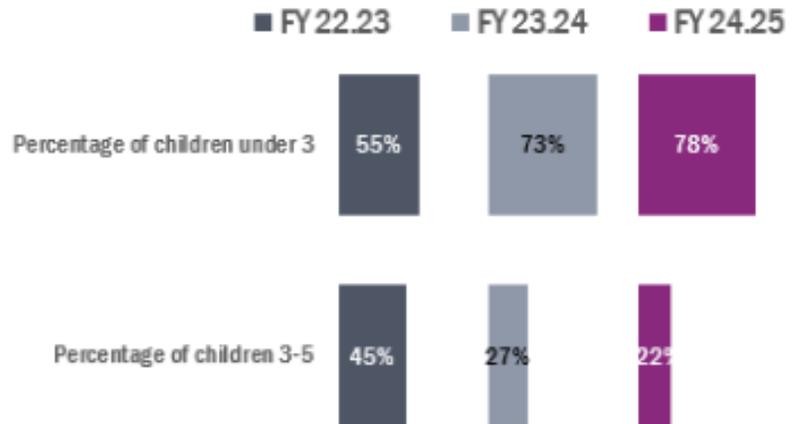
- Services for families that are high-quality, accessible, and responsive to families’ needs.
- The whole system serving young children and families is cohesive, navigable, and equitable.
- A community culture and local policy that honors and supports all families in the important task of raising children.



Results for children and families:

- Families/Caregivers are connected, respected, and supported in caring for their children.
- Children are healthy, well-cared for, and reach their unique potential.

With the 2023-2029 Strategic Plan, F5MC prioritized serving children under three because healthy child development begins prenatally and these years lay the foundation for future learning and development. **The percentage of children under three served in FY 24-25 increased from about one-half to three-quarters of children served.**



F5MC is also committed to centering families most impacted by Systems Inequities and one strategy to reach this focus population is to fund partner agencies located in zip codes furthest from opportunities. In FY 24-25, 93% of families served resided in F5MC’s priority zip codes. More than half of families served in FY 24-25 resided in South County. 97% of children in Care Coordination and Home Visiting were also enrolled in Medi-Cal.

**Strategic Area 1: Strengthen connections and enhance family access to integrated and collaborative services.**

F5MC funds and partners with direct service agencies to provide care coordination and Parents as Teachers home visiting services to families with children ages prenatal through five.

Care coordination is the support that helps families connect to the services, resources, and relationships they need, without having to navigate systems alone. A care coordinator listens to a family’s goals, helps identify next steps, and walks with them as they access services like health care, child development supports, nutrition programs, or parenting resources. Door to Hope, Go Kids, Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oxaqueño, and Monterey County Probation—Child Advocate Program provide care coordination services.

F5MC also funds Parents as Teachers a home visiting model that promotes optimal early development, learning, and health of children by supporting safe, stable, and responsive parent-child relationships. The program improves parent, child, and family health and well-being. Door to Hope, Go Kids, and North Monterey County Unified School District provide home visiting services.

## Finding Strength, Confidence, and Connection – Sara's story



Sara's family journey was full of challenges, lessons learned, support, and opportunities. Sara was connected with the Child Abuse Prevention Unit (CAP) at the Monterey County Probation twice. "The first time I was incarcerated, I didn't think much about what needed to change. I didn't take it too seriously, but the second time around, something shifted and it changed my life," says Sara. "I knew I couldn't go down that road again. I had too much to lose, especially my children. I wanted to do better, but I didn't know how."

After incarceration, coming home was a difficult transition for Sara. "You're not social after prison; everything feels different. I was mandated to take parenting classes and counseling. At first, I was embarrassed about what I had done. I didn't want to talk about it. But I learned that you don't really change unless you admit to what you did. **A parent educator helped me start loving myself again. For the first time, I began to feel that I deserved to be a good parent.**"

First 5 Monterey County funded programs, like Probation's Child Advocate Program and GoKid's Parents as Teachers Program, focus on personal healing and support parents' confidence interacting with their children in ways that promote connection and growth. Sara talks about how she learned that **healing herself was the first step toward being the parent her kids deserve, "Today, I feel proud — not ashamed — to talk about my life and my children.** I've learned to make healthier choices and better decisions. I used to dwell on the past, but now I focus on how far we've come."

"Each person who supported me — CAP, GoKids — gave me the tools and encouragement I needed. They were the *kickoff* that helped me become the parent I am today. If you give it a chance, if you really sit, listen, and want to learn — you *can* change."



**Strategic Area 2: Build capacity with service providers, administrators and families as they support young children.**

Capacity building is the process of strengthening the knowledge, skills, relationships, structures, and resources that individuals, organizations, and communities need to do their work effectively and sustainably. In early childhood, it means creating the conditions that allow providers, families, and systems partners to grow, learn, collaborate, and deliver high-quality support to young children and their caregivers. When we have a well-trained workforce pregnant parents and families with young children demonstrate high levels of quality, support whole family well-being, and center equity.

**Infant Family Early Childhood Mental Health Training**

Capacity building is *not* a one-time training or a single workshop. It’s an ongoing investment in people and systems so they can respond to the evolving needs of children and families. As such, F5MC has been implementing the Infant Family Early Childhood Mental Health (IFECMH) Training program for 14 years. The First 5-funded IFECMH training program builds the capacity of service providers in Monterey County to support the mental health needs of young children and families. The program is open to providers in all sectors of the early childhood ecosystem in Monterey County, creating a unique cross-disciplinary space of learning, exploration, and connection. 783 practitioners have participated in one or more years of IFECMH since inception, with a majority of providers (58%) participating in one year of the training and more than 40% have participated for two or more years. Participants come for a variety of sectors including Behavioral health, Medical/Public health, and legal services.

**“Me siento más capaz de poder seguir ayudando a mi comunidad y las familias con las que trabajo, con los consejos y enseñanzas que nos ha dejado saber los Instructores de como autoregularnos a nosotras mismas eso me ha ayuda a fortalecerme mas en mi trabajo.” // *I feel more capable of continuing to help my community and the families I work with, with the advice and teachings that the Instructors have given us on how to self-regulate ourselves. This has helped me become stronger in my work.***



**As a result of the IFECMH series, most participants felt ready to:**

- Support responsive caregiver-child relationships
- Consider a family’s cultural context when discussing their concerns
- Incorporate new practices into their healing

- Engage families in exploring their own ways of healing
- Create spaces for families to support their safety, connection, and expression of their authentic identities
- Use stories and books to support families' healing

## Monterey County Health Department Innovations 2.0 -- Race, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) Training



In collaboration with the Public Health Nursing program of the Monterey County Health Department, F5MC is implementing a 5-year initiative to provide capacity building for home visitors and other direct service providers in Monterey County. In its second year -- FY 24-25-- F5MC provided three workshops: Diversity-Informed Tenets, Building Cultures of Community Care, and the Training of Facilitators for Building Cultures of Community Care.

- 51 Providers participated in the Diversity-Informed Tenets workshop. The workshop is designed for cross-functional teams of staff from agencies working with infants, children, and families. Participants engaged in a collaborative, reflective journey where they explored how to align their practice with principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This workshop also served as a grounding for participation in the Building Cultures of Community Care workshops.
- 22 Providers participated in the Building Cultures of Community Care two-day workshop. F5MC supported the development of the Building Cultures of Community Care curriculum in partnership with the Health Department staff. The FY 24-25 workshop engaged home visitors and direct service providers over two days to explore their personal and professional identities and experiences; understand the local history of systemic racism and its impact on the lives of infants, children, and families in their communities; and map their individual and collective roles as home visitors and direct service providers to be social change agents.
- 6 Building Cultures of Community Care Curriculum participants were trained to facilitate future workshops. F5MC and the Health Department envision a community-owned and community-led facilitation capacity to advance REDI practice in working with children and families in Monterey County. Community-centered facilitators bring the uniqueness of lived experiences and community-relevance as crucial resources to embed REDI practices in local culture. These facilitators will be conducting trainings throughout FY 25-26.

**Strategic Area 3: Elevate early childhood as a priority and advocate for what families need to thrive.**

Communities thrive when they come together to support the healthy development and well-being of their youngest members. By creating spaces where parents, caregivers, providers, and neighbors are informed, engaged, and connected, we strengthen the environments in which young children grow. At the same time, when public policies and public funding prioritize early childhood, we build systems that advance equity and improve community-level outcomes for all children. Together, these efforts ensure that every child—regardless of zip code, background, or circumstance—has the opportunity to learn, grow, and reach their unique potential.

**Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network (CCECAN)**

CCECAN builds bridges across Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito Counties to catalyze parent leadership, regional partnerships, and a growing movement for the policies and systems all children deserve. This tri-county collaboration represents over 94,000 children. As of FY 24-25, there were over 750 members on the CCECAN roster, 52% of members represent Monterey County. The growing membership for the Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network is vital because it strengthens collective voice and ensures that the needs of children and families are heard at every level of decision-making.



Each new member brings unique experiences, perspectives, and connections that enrich the network and expand its reach. A larger membership base increases credibility with elected officials and community leaders and shows a strong coalition. The growing membership better reflects the voices of the community served and creates lasting impact for generations to come.



CCECAN held several events including capacity building policy workshops in partnership with the California Budget and Policy Center and Parent Voices, legislative visits with elected state officials, and a tri-county gathering called the Parent Power Summit. For each of these events, community parent leaders collaborate with organizers to plan, lift family stories, and facilitate. For the 2025 legislative session, three bills that CCECAN members advocated for around CalWORKs home visiting, immigration school safety planning, and birth center licensing requirements were signed into legislation.

## Speaking Up, Standing Together – Expanding Child Care Access



Child care is a long-standing concern in Monterey County and across the state. To spotlight the local context, Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño and First 5 Monterey County partnered with The California Budget and Policy Center to create a report detailing the local unmet need for child care in Monterey County. The report came out in early 2025 to uplift localized challenges and community-driven recommendations for expanding access to affordable and nurturing child care. Focus groups intentionally centered the perspectives of families representing indigenous, agricultural, and rural communities to amplify the unique child care challenges they face in Monterey County.

***“Yes, there are some programs that are coming out saying that moms can be providers ... but they ask for many requirements, and there is also a lot of space needed for them to care for the kids. But, there are also some in the community who would find it difficult to train and take care of the kids themselves. They know the community well, so there's a lot of trust in leaving the children with someone familiar” - Focus Group Participant***

The perspectives and recommendations from Monterey County parents provide insight into how state-level decision makers can improve the child care system to support Monterey County parents and all families across California.

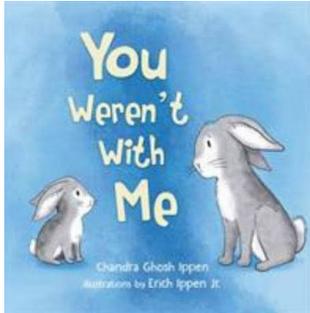
To read the full report visit: <https://shorturl.at/IMZ4H>

### **Strategic Area 4: Ensure young children and families furthest from opportunity and most impacted by systems’ inequities are at the center of F5MC’s work**

Increasing pathways for community members—especially those historically excluded from decision-making—to share their voice and influence solutions strengthens our collective ability to build a Monterey County where everyone can thrive. This strategic priority is also implemented through the activities shared on previous pages of this report. For example, direct services to families prioritize serving those most impacted by systems’ inequities. Immigrant support activities are featured in this section but also could appear in other sections of this report (e.g.,

elevate early childhood, build capacity). F5MC strategic priorities are intentionally interconnected, and activities often support more than one strategic priority.

**Immigrant Support**

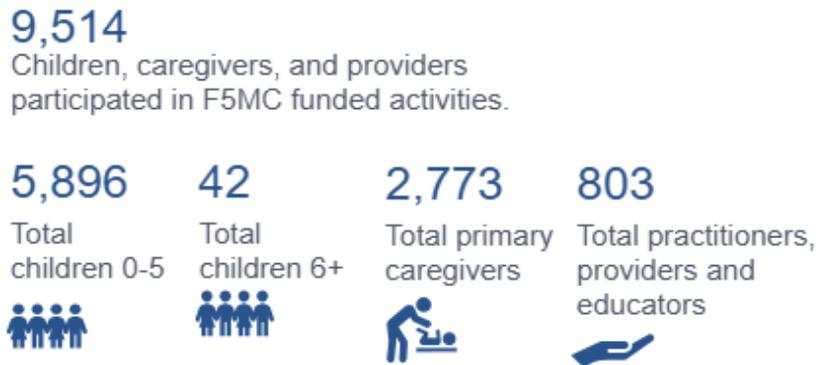


At the start of the 2025 year, F5MC quickly formed a culturally affirming mental health and wellness practice strategy to support the impacts of immigration policy on children, families, and providers. The activities included training, technical assistance, and advocacy. F5MC serves on the strategy team for the Monterey County Immigration Coalition, participated in County immigration forums, and staff serve as a Legal Observer. F5MC also developed a bilingual emergency family preparedness toolkit that includes information on how to talk with children during times of stress and links to local resources. Materials that

were distributed out to the community included the red cards and books that were specifically selected to support families in processing big emotions, engaging in mindfulness, and how to discuss separation and goodbyes.

**Bringing it All Together**

In FY 24-25, F5MC served a total of 9,514 children, caregivers, and providers through direct services and capacity building activities. However, this number only represents the people who directly participated in F5MC funded activities—and does not represent all the families who will be impacted by F5MC’s capacity building and systems change work or who were reached by outreach activities.



The work of First 5 Monterey County not only addresses the immediate needs of children and families but also builds long-term investments for healthier communities. This work needs to be done in partnership. The work of supporting children and families is a collaborative process to impact systems. We welcome the Board of Supervisors to join us in advancing these efforts and co-creating solutions that ensure every child has the foundation to thrive.