



# Bay Area First 5 Commissions Help Children Get Ready For School

Alameda Contra Costa Marin Monterey Napa San Benito San Francisco  
San Mateo Santa Clara Santa Cruz Solano Sonoma

**Mission:** First 5 is improving the lives of children from birth to five years old, by making sure they are healthy, nurtured, and ready to succeed in school and life.

## Why Is It Important for Children to Be Ready for School?

Children who have early learning skills as they enter kindergarten do better in elementary school, are more likely to graduate from high school, have better career success, and are less involved in crime and drugs. Children who don't start with a firm foundation are more likely to fall behind, repeat grades, and drop out of school.

According to Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman, investing in young children "benefits not only the children themselves, but also their children, as well as society."<sup>1</sup> That's because investing in young children pays off later in life. A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis showed that \$1 spent today on quality preschool generates at least \$9 in future savings over the life of the child.<sup>2</sup>

## How Do Bay Area First 5s Make a Difference?

For over eight years, First 5 has invested in the early education of our most vulnerable children from birth to age five. Last year alone, First 5 helped almost 31,000 Bay Area children to get ready for school. Harvard University researchers say, "A balanced approach to emotional, social, cognitive, and language development will best prepare all children for success in school and later in the workplace and community."<sup>3</sup> After participating in First 5-funded school readiness programs, children in the Bay Area showed significant improvements in their social, emotional, cognitive, and language development.<sup>4</sup>

300,000 more  
California  
children attended  
preschool  
in just two years

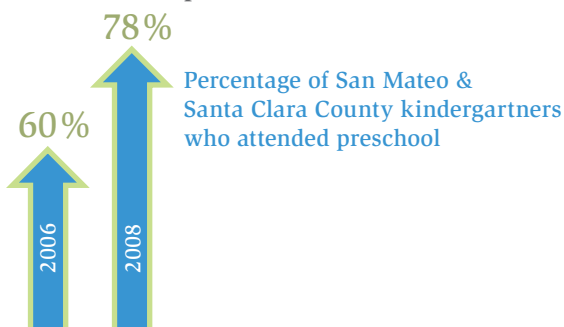
### Bay Area First 5s Invest in Preschool

First 5 works throughout California to get more children into good quality preschools, and it's helping — 300,000 more children received preschool education in California in 2005 than in 2003.<sup>5</sup>

In San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, almost 8 out of 10 new kindergarten students had gone to preschool in 2008 — a significant improvement from 2005.<sup>6</sup>

Paying for high-quality preschool can be tough for families, so First 5 provided free preschool to almost 4,000 children last year. And it worked! At-risk children in San Mateo County's free preschool entered kindergarten ready for school — as ready as their higher income peers.<sup>7</sup>

Bay Area First 5s also invested over \$15 million last year to increase the education of preschool teachers and child care providers and improve early care and education.





92,000 books create a stack 2,000 feet high – over two times as high as the Golden Gate Bridge

## Bay Area First 5s Help Families Read With Their Children

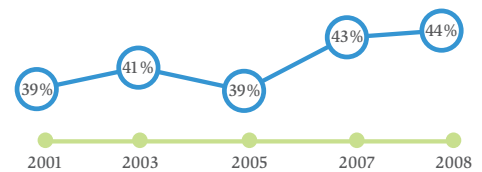
When families read to their infants and preschool children, children learn crucial skills, such as how to recognize letters, words, and sounds. Young children who have these early book skills are more successful later in school in both English and Math.<sup>8</sup> That’s why First 5s gave out 92,000 books to Bay Area children last year – and parents are reading more to their children.<sup>9</sup>

## Bay Area First 5s Level the Playing Field for School Success

Since 2000, First 5 San Mateo County has committed to preparing young children to be ready for school in eight high-needs school districts. In 2001, less than one-third of these children were fully ready for school – but by 2008 after First 5 efforts, over half of the children were fully ready.<sup>10</sup> First 5 Santa Clara County also had exciting results in leveling the playing field for the poorest children. In 2004, 29% of the county’s low-income children were fully ready for school and by 2008, 38% were fully ready. The poorest children had the biggest gains of any income group.<sup>11</sup> In addition, low-income children participating in First 5 preschools in Contra Costa County were rated three times more likely to arrive at school fully prepared than their peers who did not participate in First 5-funded preschool.

## More Children Are Doing Well in English

Young children who have benefited from First 5 and school readiness efforts are just now reaching higher elementary grades, and there are indications that they are doing better academically. In 2001, 39% of children in the Bay Area were proficient or better on state English tests. By 2008, that percentage increased to 44%.<sup>12</sup>



More 3rd grade children in First 5 Bay Area Counties are reading proficiently or better

## Danny Gets Ready for School

Danny is holding his Certificate of Achievement from a four-week summer preschool program supported by First 5 Sonoma County. Danny never went to preschool and had trouble in the classroom and around other students when he first started summer school. But Danny got the boost he needed to start kindergarten more prepared. He learned how to share and take turns, separate from his parents more easily, and follow his teacher’s directions. Danny’s parents learned tips to help Danny at home. Without this program, Danny’s lack of classroom experience could have caused concerns for his kindergarten teacher and parents. But now he is an enthusiastic and confident learner who is much more likely to succeed in school.



Research shows that a child’s brain develops most dramatically in the first five years of life. This is why California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support children from birth to five years old and their parents in the areas of health, family support, and early childhood development. Bay Area First 5s provided support to almost 500,000 children and parents last year. For more information, please visit: <http://www.first5kids.org/bay>.

<sup>1</sup>Heckman, J. et al., “The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children,” 2007.  
<sup>2</sup>Rolnick, A., & Grunewald, R., “Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return,” 2003.  
<sup>3</sup>Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, “In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development.”  
<sup>4</sup>Evaluation Reports for First 5 in Marin, San Mateo, and Sonoma counties, 2007-2008.  
<sup>5</sup>UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, “Trends in the Health of Young Children in California,” 2008.  
<sup>6</sup>Applied Survey Research (ASR), School Readiness Assessment Data, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, 2005, 2008.  
<sup>7</sup>ASR, School Readiness Assessment Data, Redwood City Elementary District, 2008. Analysis of readiness scores controlled for family risk factors and English Learner status.  
<sup>8</sup>University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “Early Learning, Later Success: The Abecedarian Study,” 1999.  
<sup>9</sup>Reading increases from evaluation data for Monterey, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, 2007-2008.  
<sup>10</sup>ASR, School Readiness Assessment Data, San Mateo County, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2008.  
<sup>11</sup>Children are from families earning less than \$32,000 per year; ASR, School Readiness Assessment Data, Santa Clara County, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008.  
<sup>12</sup>California Department of Education, STAR District/School Summary Report, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008. All other data come from Bay Area First 5 Commissions for 2007-2008.

