

OVERVIEW

First Things First partners with parents and communities to give all Arizona children the opportunity to arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed.

Created by Arizona Voters

In 2006, Arizonans made an historic decision on behalf of our state's youngest citizens. By majority vote, they made a commitment to all Arizona children 5 and younger: that kids would have the tools they need to arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed. The voters backed that promise with an 80-cent per pack increase on tobacco products, so that funding for early childhood services for our youngest children would not be at the mercy of economic and political winds. The initiative also created the statewide First Things First board and regional partnership councils that share the responsibility of ensuring that these early childhood funds are spent on strategies that will result in improved education and health outcomes for kids 5 and younger.



Focused on Kids Birth to 5

Why focus on kids 5 and younger? Research shows that 90% of a child's brain develops by age 5. Because of this rapid development, what happens to children in the early years lays the foundation for a lifetime. Research has proven that kids with quality early childhood experiences do better in school. They are more likely to advance into college and successful careers. They also tend to be healthier and demand less from the public welfare system.

Driven By Local Communities

Not all children have the same needs; and voters designed First Things First to meet the diverse needs of Arizona communities. Decisions about which early education and health strategies will be funded are made by regional partnership councils made up of community volunteers, not government bureaucrats. Each regional council member represents a specific segment of the community that has a stake in ensuring that our children grow up to be healthy productive adults, including: parents, tribal representatives, educators, health professionals, business leaders, philanthropists and leaders of faith communities. The regional councils study the challenges faced by children in their communities and the resources that exist to help kids in their area. Because of all these factors, the regional councils know best what their kids need.

Proven to Work

National studies show that children exposed to high-quality early childhood education:

- Are 40% less likely to need special education or be held back a grade;
- Are 70% less likely to commit a violent crime by age 18;
- Have better language, math and social skills, and better relationships with classmates;
- Have better cognitive and sensory skills and experience less anxiety; and,
- Score higher on school-readiness tests.

First Things First's signature programs build on this body of research to address critical early childhood needs statewide, including supporting parents in their role as a child's first teacher, improving the quality of early learning in homes and child care centers, enhancing the professional skills of teachers working with our youngest kids, and helping doctors to address a child's developmental and physical needs.

Effective

The impact of First Things First programs has been significant. In Fiscal Year 2016 alone:

- 34,812 parents and caregivers attended parenting workshops or groups at family resource centers. In addition, more than 232,000 accessed early childhood information, resources or referrals through the centers.
- 72,058 families of newborns left the hospital with tools to help the support their child's health and learning.
- 6,121 families received voluntary, evidence-based home visitation from trained providers to enhance their parenting skills and deal with specific challenges, including first-time parenting, parenting a child with special needs or dealing with multiple births.
- 3,711 parents and other caregivers completed a voluntary series of community-based classes on topics like parenting skills, brain development, early literacy and nutrition.
- 51,069 children had access to a higher standard of early learning through preschool and child care programs participating in Quality First.
- 9,250 Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers accessed high quality early learning with the help of a preschool or child care scholarship.
- 27,376 children received screenings to detect vision, hearing, and developmental issues to prevent later learning challenges.
- 48,480 children received an oral health screening to detect tooth decay. In addition, 41,805 fluoride varnishes were applied to protect against dental decay.

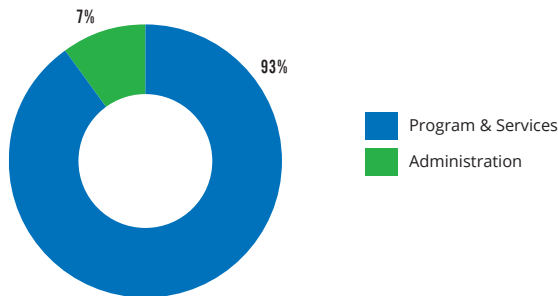


Accountable

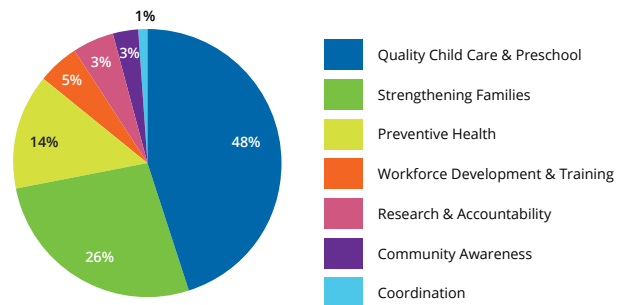
Most importantly, First Things First is accountable – to voters, to the state, and most importantly, to Arizona's children. The strategies funded by First Things First have demonstrated effectiveness in improving educational and health outcomes for kids, or in increasing the knowledge, skills and capacities of parents and other caregivers, such as medical professionals and teachers working with young children. FTF grantees are required to submit detailed financial information, as well reports regarding the numbers of children or families served. This ensures that funds are being spent efficiently and that programs are reaching the intended groups of children. In addition, FTF's Quality Assurance Team works with individual grantees to review program implementation and identify best practices that can be shared with other grantees or that can be used to improve the overall program. At the systemic level, FTF has identified 10 indicators to help us ensure that we are contributing in meaningful ways to improved school readiness for Arizona's kids. FTF also worked with a group of national experts to identify additional steps FTF can take to make sure the programs being funded are making a difference – for individual children and families, and for school readiness throughout Arizona.

Efficient

In addition to being effective, First Things First is also efficient. Investments in programs and services that help prepare children for success constituted approximately 93% of spending in FY2016. Administrative expenses are kept low – approximately 7% in FY16.



First Things First
Priority Funding Areas FY09-17*



* This figure represents actual expenditures through FY16 and FY17 funding awards through October 14, 2016.