



FIRST THINGS FIRST



Public Policy Priorities

Extensive research has proven that children with access to high quality early experiences are more prepared for kindergarten and do better in school. They are less likely to need special education services or be held back a grade, and are more likely to graduate and go on to college. There are numerous public benefits as well, including lower costs for remediation, criminal justice and social welfare.

Increasing access to quality early childhood development and health programs, supporting a highly-skilled workforce, and ensuring that appropriate and timely prevention and early intervention supports are available will result in more children arriving at school healthy and ready to succeed.

To that end, First Things First has established six public policy priority areas that, collectively, bolster the ability of families and communities to effectively support the health and learning of all Arizona children birth to 5 years old. These priorities were informed by research regarding early childhood best practice, the FTF Strategic Plan and on-going work with the FTF Board, regional councils, staff and early childhood system partners.

Within each of these priority areas, the FTF Board supports local, state and federal policies that will:

- *increase the resources available in existing early childhood programs or create new programs.*
- *address system gaps.*
- *enhance access to early childhood services to more children and families, including expanded eligibility and removal of barriers to access.*
- *ensure that early childhood services are developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive.*
- *promote equity in early childhood services.*

Likewise, the Board opposes local, state and federal policies that will:

- *reduce the resources available to or narrow eligibility in existing early childhood programs.*
- *create system gaps or barriers to access.*
- *promote services that are developmentally inappropriate for young children.*
- *exacerbate inequities in early childhood programs, including those that are culturally unresponsive.*

Priority 1: INVESTMENT in the Early Childhood Health and Education System

FTF supports increased local, state and federal investments to develop, enhance and sustain evidence-based early childhood programs and developmentally appropriate innovations promoting the best possible outcomes for children birth to 5 years old.

Priority 2: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION of Early Childhood Workforce

FTF supports proposals promoting recruitment and retention of a highly-qualified early childhood workforce by expanding access to professional development and postsecondary education for health and education professionals, providing a living wage for the early childhood workforce and incentivizing those professionals to work with the young children and families most in need.

Priority 3: ACCESS to Quality Early Learning

FTF supports proposals enhancing the quality of early care and education settings and promote access to quality early learning programs, especially in rural, tribal and low-income communities.

Priority 4: HEALTH CARE SERVICES for Young Children and Expectant Mothers

FTF supports proposals maintaining and increasing access to health care services - including developmental/sensory screenings and oral health care – for children birth to age 5 and prenatal care to promote a healthy childbirth.

Priority 5: INFORMATION AND SUPPORT for Families of Young Children

FTF supports proposals increasing access for families to information, referrals and services for early childhood education, health and human services.

Priority 6: PRESERVATION AND EXPANSION of Arizona’s Early Childhood System

FTF supports the preservation and expansion of funding and programs that collectively and positively contribute to the early childhood system. FTF supports proposals facilitating coordination and collaboration among partners to more efficiently and effectively serve young children and their families.