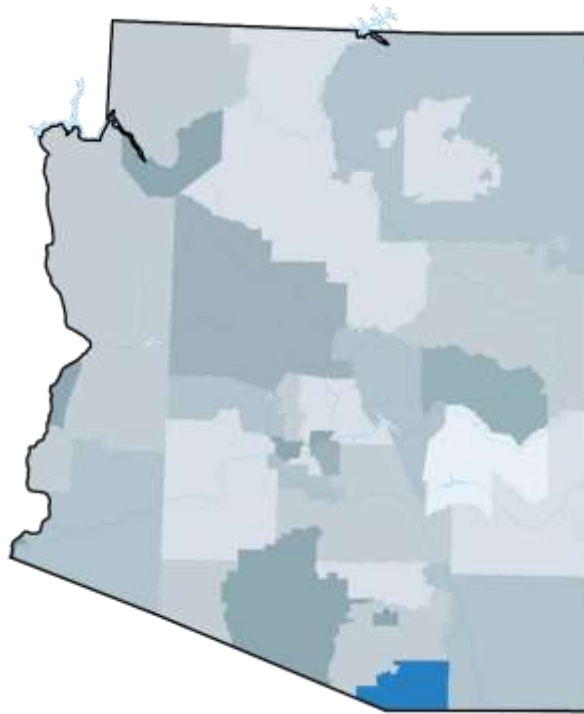


# FIRST THINGS FIRST

## Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council



### State Fiscal Years 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan

Presented to the First Things First Board  
January 10-11, 2023



### **Mission**

First Things First is an essential leader and partner in creating a family-centered, equitable, high-quality early childhood system that supports the development, well-being, health and education of all Arizona’s children, birth to age 5.

### **Vision**

All Arizona’s children are ready to succeed in school and in life.

### **Regional Partnership Councils**

First Things First’s statewide Board and its 28 regional partnership councils share the responsibility of ensuring that early childhood funds are invested in strategies aimed at improving educational and health outcomes for young children. Regional partnership councils identify the unique needs of their communities and decide how to best support young children and families in their areas. Regional councils, comprised of local volunteers, provide vision and leadership, governance and oversight. They identify, implement and fund strategies and build collaborations aimed at helping young children across Arizona succeed in school and life.

---

### **Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council**

**William Kirkpatrick**, chair, representative of a philanthropic organization

**Laura Monarque**, vice chair, early childhood educator

**Chris Ciruli**, member of the business community

**John Fanning**, at large representative

**Erika Garcia Montaño**, at large representative

**Celina Landa**, representative of the faith community

**Adriana Lopez**, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

**Melisa Lunderville**, child care provider

**Karen Rovang**, health services provider

**David Verdugo**, public school administrator

**Diana Yanez**, at large representative

**Francisco Padilla**, Regional Director



# FIRST THINGS FIRST

## Equity Vision Statement

Advancing equity is essential to First Things First’s mission and we aspire to embody our vision for diversity, equity and inclusion through all facets of our work.

To be effective partners and contribute to a world in which Arizona’s children birth to age 5 of all backgrounds have access to high-quality early childhood experiences, we must create and maintain an equitable workplace, work in partnership with the communities we serve and ensure that our funding practices align with our equity-centered values, particularly focusing on those who are most in need.

First Things First recognizes the pervasive inequities historically and currently faced by the Black, Indigenous and Latino communities and all people of color, and we strive for a world in which they will thrive. We also recognize that individuals and groups have been marginalized due to factors such as race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, mental and physical ability, national origin, income, language and religious affiliation and that people of color are particularly affected across these factors. We commit to increasing our understanding about these and all matters that create inequities and to bettering our actions internally and among the communities we serve.

This important work starts from within. As such, we strive to cultivate and maintain a workplace that:

- Reflects the diversity of our state within all levels of the organization (i.e., staff, leadership, regional partnership councils and state Board)
- Cultivates a community in which all members are welcome, seen, heard and valued
- Supports and expects each individual to engage in candid, introspective learning about equity and inclusion
- Engages an intentionally diverse, representative set of voices in key decision-making, centering on the voices of families and the community whenever possible
- Employs equitable workplace practices that yield high satisfaction, morale and career success consistently across all demographic groups
- Responds swiftly to address workplace inequities
- Ensures that our work as a funding organization – from planning to implementation to assessment – reflects our commitment to equity

Through our DEI strategic priorities and individual growth, we will be better able to meet the needs of Arizona’s youngest children, serve as a trusted ally for equity and fulfill our vision that all Arizona’s children are ready to succeed in school and in life.

*Approved December 2021*

## Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council SFY24 – 27 Strategic Plan

Prioritized Strategy Areas	Strategy	Identified Need	Target Service Unit(s)* <i>*If applicable, identify targeted population and/or geographic areas</i>	Desired System Outcome
<b>Quality First And Professional Development for ECE Professionals</b>	Quality First Coaching and Incentives <i>(Statewide)</i>	1) More of Arizona’s early care and education (ECE) programs need to provide high-quality learning environments. 2) ECE programs, at administrative and classroom levels, require access to a system of equitable support to engage in quality improvement to achieve and sustain high-quality practices. 3) Families need reliable information about ECE program quality in order to make informed decisions when seeking child care.	No TSU	Access to high-quality, culturally responsive early care and education.
	Quality First Academy <i>(Statewide)</i>			Well-prepared, highly skilled and appropriately compensated professionals.
<b>Access to Quality Care</b>	Early Learning Systems Change <i>(FTF-Directed)</i>	See Appendix A	No TSU	Coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive systems.
<b>Access to Quality Care</b>	Quality First Scholarships <i>(Statewide)</i>	The high cost of quality early care and education programs limits access for families due to affordability. High-quality child care positively impacts a child’s development and readiness for school.	No TSU	Access to high-quality, culturally responsive early care and education.
<b>Educating Families and Caregivers</b>	Home Visitation	Parents and families, particularly those who are at-risk, need information and support to increase their knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to parenting and enhance their own health and well-being (e.g. managing stress, depression, accessing public support services, etc.). Additionally, access to regular screening for the early detection of children's developmental, vision and hearing impairments is a challenge.	Number of families currently enrolled: 40 – 50	Information, services and support for families.

<b>Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources</b>	Family Resource Centers	1) Some communities need a hub and/or place, and opportunity, to access resources and information, get needs met, engage with other families and receive social support. 2) Some families need additional knowledge about and access to resources, information, and concrete supports and services. 3)Some families need support to increase their confidence in parenting and knowledge about the development of their children. 4) Some families need additional connection to the community, community providers, or community supports.	Number of parenting activities conducted: 650 – 700	Information, services and support for families.
<b>Professional Development for ECE Professionals</b>	Child Care Health Consultation <i>(Statewide)</i>	ECE providers do not have enough access to information and guidance on how to implement consistent high-quality health and safety policies and practices.	Number of center based providers served: 4  Number of home based providers served: 4	Well-prepared, highly skilled and appropriately compensated professionals.
<b>Professional Development for ECE Professionals</b>	Early Learning Systems Change <i>(FTF-Directed)</i>	See Appendix A	No TSU	Well-prepared, highly skilled and appropriately compensated professionals.
<b>Building Awareness of the Importance of the Early Years</b>	Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness <i>(FTF-Directed)</i>	1) Lack of awareness of the importance of early childhood health and development. 2) Lack of awareness of FTF as a trusted source of early childhood information and programs/services.	No TSU	Public understanding and support.

**Please describe how the Regional Partnership Council’s SFY24-27 Strategic Plan promotes equity and support of under-resourced and underserved children and their families.**

The Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council’s SFY24 – 27 Strategic Plan promotes equity and support of under-resourced and underserved children and their families in various ways. This plan utilizes a multi-generational approach, which emphasizes high-quality choices for families and young children.

The Santa Cruz Regional Council is choosing to focus on family support, given the low level of educational attainment among parents in the region and the number of children living in poverty who are considered to be at risk. The regional council is keenly aware that a multi-pronged approach is necessary to serve families across the spectrum of needs. Families receiving home visitation services will be those who are harder to reach and considered to be more at risk or disenfranchised, such as families with limited English proficiency, single parent homes and families with transportation challenges. Family Resource Center services will be targeted to families more universally. Families and caregivers receiving services through the Family Resource Centers may feel a stronger sense of community and may be better equipped in seeking information, education and supports. Family Resource Centers will provide parent support and connection to resources for families that are locally available. Both of these strategies utilize a multi-generational approach so that entire families, including families that represent grandparents raising grandchildren and other family members raising young children, are benefiting from these services.

The Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council also recognizes the importance and need for accessible, affordable, high-quality early childhood education. According to the 2022 Santa Cruz Regional Needs and Assets Report, while the cost of center-based care is lower in Santa Cruz than elsewhere, incomes are also lower. Families in Santa Cruz County pay about 10-13% of their income for child care in center-based programs, depending on the child's age. Child care is a substantial expense for families, especially for families with multiple young children needing care. That is more than the United States Health and Human Services recommended 10 percent of their annual incomes for child care. Single female parent homes, which account for 26 percent of all households in the region, have a lower median income, resulting in a higher proportion of their income being spent on child care (31-44 percent). The regional council currently supports Quality First Scholarships to help minimize inequities, but those only reach a small percentage of eligible children. Additionally, children birth to age 5 living in families with incomes below the poverty guidelines are eligible for Early Head Start and Head Start services; however, there are only two Early Head Start and four Head Start sites serving the entire region. For those families who do not meet the eligibility requirements of Head Start, there are only 46 registered child care providers approved to serve up to 997 children, which isn't nearly enough to serve the 4,416 children birth to age 5. This means that there are 4.5 times as many children birth to age 5 compared to the number of available child care slots in the region, meaning the region meets the criteria of a "child care desert." While accessibility is an on-going issue for the region, the regional council sees improving the quality of early care and education as the first step to reaching accessibility.

The Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council also recognizes the value and need for local professional development opportunities for early childhood practitioners. According to qualitative data provided by early childhood practitioners in the region, there are not enough local professional development offerings available, which forces them to travel to Tucson or Phoenix. Further exacerbating the challenge is that the majority of professional development currently available is only offered in English, which is a challenge to many local practitioners who primarily speak Spanish. The regional council is addressing the inequitable access to professional development by building capacity through the Early Learning Systems Change Strategy. The intent is to provide culturally and linguistically responsive, local professional development opportunities as well as to begin a "grow your own" model to build the professional knowledge and capacity of early childhood professionals in the region. This approach will encourage local early childhood practitioners to become certified to offer high-quality professional development instead of needing to bring in someone from outside the region or accessing professional development outside of the region, which has been the current practice since local instructors do not currently exist.

**Regional Allocation and Proposed Funding Plan Summary SFY24 – 27**  
**Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council**

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$1,088,848	\$1,088,848	\$1,157,168	\$1,157,168
Population Based Allocation	\$721,996	\$721,996	\$721,996	\$721,996
Discretionary Allocation	\$366,852	\$366,852	\$435,172	\$435,172
Carry Forward From Previous Year	\$93,321	\$41,429	(\$11,387)	\$4,117
<b>Total Regional Council Funds Available</b>	<b>\$1,182,169</b>	<b>\$1,130,277</b>	<b>\$1,145,781</b>	<b>\$1,161,285</b>
Strategies	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted
Early Learning Systems Change	\$22,000	\$22,000	\$22,000	\$22,000
Quality First Academy	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$4,000
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$119,290	\$119,290	\$119,290	\$119,290
Quality First Scholarships	\$340,558	\$340,558	\$340,558	\$340,558
Child Care Health Consultation	\$27,200	\$27,200	\$27,200	\$27,200
Family Resource Centers	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
Home Visitation	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000
Statewide Evaluation	\$48,052	\$48,052	\$48,052	\$48,052
Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness	\$9,932	\$9,932	\$9,932	\$9,932
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,221,032</b>	<b>\$1,221,032</b>	<b>\$1,221,032</b>	<b>\$1,221,032</b>
<b>Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended*:</b>	<b>(\$38,863)</b>	<b>(\$90,755)</b>	<b>(\$75,251)</b>	<b>(\$59,747)</b>

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		96.06 %	96.06 %	96.06 %	96.06 %
% to Quality First**	13.58%	12.32 %	12.32 %	12.32 %	12.32 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	96.06%				
% to Quality First **	12.32%				

\* Per FTF State Board direction, allotments reflect the budgeting of projected spending, therefore in some years’ total allotments may exceed total means of financing. However, actual expenditures against the allotments are expected to be fully supported by revenues, and each year the region is anticipated to end with a carry forward balance which is reflected in the subsequent year’s carry forward balance.

\*\*Includes Quality First Academy, Quality First Coaching and Incentives, and Child Care Health Consultation. The SFY24-27 QF Investments do not equal or exceed those of SFY20 as required by the Board because QF Star Ratings for some of the providers in the region have increased since SFY20. That increase in Star Ratings ultimately led to a decrease in the cost of Quality First in the region. The regional council continues to maintain the same level of QF slots as it did in SFY20. Furthermore, the region does not currently have a QF Waitlist from which to add additional providers.

**APPENDIX A**  
**SFY24 Funding Plan – System Change Planning Document**  
**Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council**

<b>Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council -                      Early Learning Systems Change</b>	
<b>Problem to be solved and system to be changed / influenced</b>	<p><i>System Area:</i>                      Early Childhood Practitioner Professional Development</p>
	<p><i>Problem to address:</i>                      There is a lack of professional development opportunities to support the unique professional development needs of early childhood practitioners in the region. Professional development offerings are not regularly offered locally, which forces early childhood practitioners to travel to Pima County or Maricopa County. Additionally, the majority of professional development available outside Santa Cruz County tends to be offered in English, which is a challenge for some local early care and education providers who have limited English proficiency. Furthermore, there aren't any local practitioners who are in a position to serve in an instructor role to provide professional development opportunities.</p> <p>From State Fiscal Years 2021 through 2023 a Capacity Building Strategy was implemented in the region to explore how to address the professional development needs in the region. The pandemic made it extremely difficult to build the capacity in the region as originally envisioned and the Early Learning Systems Change Strategy will build from the previous work.</p>
	<p><i>Geographic area:</i>                      Region-wide</p>
	<p><i>Target Audience:</i>                      Early Childhood Practitioners</p>
<b>Expected Impact</b>	<p><i>Expected Impact:</i>                      This strategy will build upon capacity building work that previously occurred in the region by accomplishing two goals. First, this strategy will continue to offer professional development opportunities for early childhood practitioners within the region. Second, the strategy will create a "grow your own" system that will provide the opportunity for local early childhood practitioners to become the instructors and subject matter experts in curriculums and subjects that align with early childhood best practices. Additionally, the professional development will align with adult learning theories. This will build the capacity by providing locally accessible, culturally and linguistically responsive professional development to practitioners in the regional, while simultaneously building the capacity of instructors in the region to sustainably offer high-quality professional development opportunities.</p>
	<p><i>Timeline:</i>                      This will be a Grant Agreement with the Santa Cruz County School Superintendent's Office. It will be awarded at the beginning of State Fiscal Year 2024 and run through 2027. The county school superintendent's office was chosen because the council has previously collaborated with them on a</p>



Capacity Building strategy that was designed to increase the number of locally offered professional development opportunities for early childhood practitioners. There will also be some leveraging of funds by the superintendent's office for this strategy that will make this a truly collaborative effort. Beginning in State Fiscal Year 2024, the grantee will recruit an early childhood expert to provide culturally and linguistically responsive, local professional development opportunities. There will be a minimum of six professional development workshops per fiscal year. Through these workshops, the region will begin a "grow your own" model to build the professional knowledge and capacity of early childhood professionals in the region. This approach will then encourage local early childhood practitioners to become certified to offer high-quality professional development in the region.