FIRST 5 LA’S STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS [2004-2009]

First 5 LA Board of Commissioners

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Oh, the places we’ll go!
About First 5 LA

First 5 LA was created by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in December 1998 following the passage of Proposition 10, through which California voters made an unprecedented investment in early childhood development. Our activities have been built on research regarding early brain development and the understanding that the emotional, physical and environmental surroundings that a child experiences in the first five years of life set the foundation for future development. During the past five years, First 5 LA has made a lasting positive impact in Los Angeles County through its allocation of more than $700 million toward grants and programs that improve the well-being of young children and families in Los Angeles County.

Our Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2004-2009 details our continuing commitment to partnering with the Los Angeles County community to improve the lives of expectant parents, children from the prenatal stage through age 5 and their families. This will be the guide by which we will plan, develop, implement, and evaluate our activities through 2009.

First 5 LA developed this plan with input from Los Angeles County’s diverse communities through a series of community meetings, public forums and commission retreats. We also relied heavily on local, state and national data. We are committed to the successful implementation of this plan over the next five years and we welcome the participation of others who share our vision of improving the well-being of children and families in Los Angeles County.

Roles

The intent of this Strategic Plan isn’t merely to outline an ambitious set of goals for the organization. By laying out specific strategies and objectives, it also defines what kind of organization First 5 LA will be over the next five years and what kind of role it will play in the communities it serves.

First 5 LA must act as a dynamic force for change in Los Angeles County. We will not only use our resources to identify needs and fund innovative initiatives, but also rally the community in support of our mutual vision of a better future for our children.

First 5 LA will be an agent of change and a catalyst mobilizing support among families, childcare providers, educators, community-based organizations, businesses, foundations and government entities. We will also be a trend setter, identifying innovative approaches. At the same time, we will act as a convener and facilitator, working with other organizations to identify new ways to serve our communities.

In creating its new Strategic Plan, our Board of Commissioners adopted new vision, values and mission statements and identified clear goals and strategies. Our three adopted goal areas are Early Learning, Health, and Safe Children and Families. Through these three goal areas, we continue to strive toward the Five Desired Outcomes for Children, adopted by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors as well as First 5 LA.
**Vision**

First 5 LA is committed to creating a future throughout Los Angeles’ diverse communities where all young children are born healthy and raised in a loving and nurturing environment so that they grow up healthy, are eager to learn and reach their full potential.

**Values**

We intend to make that vision come true by shaping our efforts around five core values:

1. **Families**: We will acknowledge and amplify the voice of families so that they have the information, resources and opportunities to raise their children successfully.

2. **Communities**: We will strengthen communities by enhancing their abilities to support families.

3. **Results Focus**: We will be accountable for defining results for young children and for success in achieving them.

4. **Learning**: We will be open to new ideas and will modify our approaches based on what we learn.

5. **Advocacy**: We will use our unique role to build public support for policies and programs that benefit children prenatal through age 5 and their families.

**Mission Statement**

Our mission is to make significant and measurable progress towards our vision by increasing the number of children from the prenatal stage through age 5 who are physically and emotionally healthy, safe and ready to learn.

**Our Goals**

We will accomplish our mission by partnering with communities and families in Los Angeles County to make measurable and significant progress in three priority goal areas of Early Learning, Health, and Safe Children and Families. A total of $725 million has been allocated among these three goal areas. Additionally, First 5 LA has allocated $105 million for activities focused on children from prenatal through three years of age within these goal areas, with the aim of achieving $300 million based upon available resources for this new focus.
Objectives

- Increase the number of 4-year-old children in early education programs, especially in underserved areas
- Increase the quality of early learning programs
- Improve the ability of parents to support their children’s learning and development

Research clearly indicates that early experiences and environments have a profound effect on a child’s overall development, and can actually alter the structure of the brain. Rather than expecting all children to achieve a certain level of normative development, our goal is to enable all children to reach their full potential.

The early learning goal for our universal preschool program goes beyond cognitive skills, such as literacy, to address all aspects of children’s development, recognizing that the many important factors involved are interconnected and complex. Among these factors, families and communities are perhaps the most important. Families provide the first learning experiences for their children, and therefore we are committed to supporting programs that work with parents and children together to promote learning. We also believe that efforts focusing on communities can improve child and family well-being and lead to sustainable improvements.

Goal 1: Early Learning ($500 million)

Improve all children’s attainment of their developmental potential

Early learning and preschool are always the rule. If the kids ever want to do well in school...
Goal 2: Health ($150 million)

Improve access to and the quality of health resources and other health enhancing approaches for pregnant women, young children, and their families

And they’ll need doctors and nurses and all
If they want to grow up to be big and tall

Objectives

- Increase the percentage of eligible children enrolled in and retained in low or no-cost health insurance programs
- Increase the utilization of health care services among these children from birth through age 5
- Improve the access to and the quality of developmental and behavioral health resources
- Increase the percentage of babies born at term at a healthy birth weight, improved health and well-being of new mothers and infants
- Improve the health and nutritional status of pregnant women, infants, children and their families

Early childhood health and development greatly impact a child’s success in school and life. Families and the community as a whole play an important role in giving their children a healthy start. Access to health insurance and quality health care will be a primary focus for First 5 LA. To achieve this, we will help enroll eligible Los Angeles County children into existing programs and extend coverage to children 0-5 living at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level who aren’t eligible for existing programs. To address quality, we will go beyond assessment and assurance by enhancing clinical care to address children’s developmental and behavioral health needs.

First 5 LA will also focus on programs that support healthy births and promote good nutrition and physical activity. Birth weight is an important predictor of the quality of an infant’s development and health. Additionally, good nutrition markedly increases children’s capacity for learning, reduces their risk for chronic illness and can prevent diabetes and obesity and the precursors leading to heart disease.
Objectives

• Increase the number of newborns and young children that are raised in physically and emotionally safe environments

• Increase the availability and accessibility of comprehensive community-level resources and supports for families that may be at risk for child maltreatment

• Increase the utilization of community-level prevention resources and support services among families with young children

In order for children to develop optimally, they need to grow up safe and protected from violence, abuse, injuries and neglect. First 5 LA will support this ideal by ensuring that parents and caregivers in Los Angeles County are able to consistently care for their children in the safest possible environment. We will accomplish this through a community partnership approach that is based on the premise that families, neighborhoods, community organizations and service providers should all contribute to children’s safety. Protective factors within families will be enhanced through improved access to supportive services and resources.

In addition, we will strengthen the capacity of communities to support families by promoting shared responsibility for safe children and families throughout the county. The partnerships will be essential to mobilizing communities to support families and work together to prevent child abuse, unintentional injuries and neglect.

Goal 3:
Safe Children & Families
($75 million)

Strengthen support to families so they can safely raise their children

And they’ll always have a better chance to succeed
If they’re safe in their homes with the love that they need
Initiatives
We will pursue our three goals of Early Learning, Health, and Safe Children and Families through a variety of initiatives designed to accomplish specific measurable objectives. These initiatives will be specific projects that address one or more of the goal areas. Our initiatives will be created and strengthened as appropriate with the involvement of communities across the county and will offer opportunities for parents and communities to realize their dreams for a better future for their children.

Strategies
For our initiatives to be successful, First 5 LA will apply a consistent set of strategies that will ensure that all of our actions work effectively and in concert to achieve the Commission’s overall vision.

First 5 LA has chosen Capacity Building, Systems Improvement, Sustainability and Advocacy as our strategies to implement and strengthen efforts across our three goals. While these are complicated terms, they essentially refer to our efforts to increase the community’s ability to provide resources to children and families. Every time we implement a new initiative, develop a partnership or extend help to a certain group of families, we will use one or more of these strategies.

Funding for each of these strategies is embedded within the allocation for each goal area. The Commission will determine actual expenditures for these strategies as it determines funding for specific initiatives.

Capacity Building
(estimated $67 million)
Capacity Building translates to strengthening existing resource networks—or establishing new ones—within communities that succeed in supporting the healthy growth and development of all young children. There are a number of different ways to achieve this and First 5 LA will implement one or more of them every time we implement a strategic partnership or community initiative.

Part of the plan is figuring out how We’ll have this done five years from now
Results ($35 million)

First 5 LA will hold itself accountable for using its resources to produce real, measurable results in improving the well-being of all children from the prenatal stage through 5 and their families in Los Angeles County. We are committed to a comprehensive approach to accountability, and we will work with our partners to track our progress in achieving our goals and objectives as well as the county’s Five Desired Outcomes for Children. In order to accomplish this assessment, it will be critical that we track our progress not only at the county level, but also at the levels of our goals, grantees and Board of Commissioners.

At the county level, we will use population-based indicators of early childhood and family well-being to monitor trends in outcomes that we hope to impact through our investments. Because these investments are not the only influences on these county level trends, it is not possible to attribute changes, or lack thereof, in the trends to First 5 LA efforts alone. However, the problem of attribution does not lessen the importance of tracking what is happening throughout the county in critical outcome areas. Tracking county-level indicators will allow the Commission to respond to new developments in county-level trends.

Using benchmarks, we will also monitor progress toward our objectives in each goal area. Data from these goal-level monitoring efforts will be used for quality improvements to our initiatives, planning and policy development, leveraging of additional resources, and research intended to improve practices in the field.

Our grantees will constantly assess and improve their efforts by tracking program-specific performance measures that are linked to county- and goal-level indicators and benchmarks. First 5 LA will monitor the use of performance measures across our grantees and ensure that data is used in a feedback loop for program and system improvement.

We will also periodically assess First 5 LA’s own efforts to uphold its core values. In this way, we will gauge the progress of our efforts to improve county outcomes and grantee-level performance, build community capacity, improve systems, leverage financial and social capital, advocate on behalf of young children and their families, and measure and disseminate results.

Systems Improvement
(estimated $75 million)

First 5 LA will nurture the growth of family-centered systems in Los Angeles County by creating a learning environment where community resources can come together to share their experiences of how to best address the needs of children and families. By supporting this interactive support structure for community resources, we will promote continuous improvements in performance and generate increased commitment on the part of these resources to better serve their target populations.

Sustainability
(estimated $60 million)

First 5 LA will sustain results that benefit children and families by mobilizing both social and financial capital to produce measurable, positive change for these organizations, communities and families.

Advocacy

We will use our unique role to build public support for policies and programs that benefit young children and their families in Los Angeles County. Local and national research demonstrates that advocacy and communications efforts can be the vehicles that promote credibility, increase public awareness and most importantly, build public will for our activities over the next five years.

Our efforts to build public will are linked to the strategies listed above and will be bolstered by a variety of methods aimed at engaging our community. First 5 LA will expand current outreach, marketing and messaging efforts, and relationship building with all First 5 LA stakeholders, including parents and families, governments, businesses, community-based organizations, policy advocates and foundations, as well as colleagues within First 5 California and the First 5 Association.

Now that we have such a good plan
We’re much better off than when we began
So come along, we’ll have a ball
These places we’re going aren’t so far after all.