Mapping Out Our Future:
ON THE ROAD TO STRONGER FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY
Dear Friends of First 5 LA,

We see many changes here at First 5 LA as we undergo a transformation from a traditional grantmaking organization to one that also focuses a significant portion of funding on geographic communities that are high-need. Last year, we rolled up our sleeves and were hard at work planning, developing and strategizing to ensure that our new “place-based” approach, called Best Start, has a great launch—one that guarantees happy, healthy, successful and safe lives for children 0–5 and their families. At the same time, we continue to keep our sights on Los Angeles County as a whole. With new community investment projects, strategies for systems-level changes and data collection to inform our program development, we laid the groundwork for First 5 LA and service providers across the county, nonprofit and public alike, to have information that will better serve our young children.

It was exciting to be a part of an enterprising and thoughtful First 5 LA team, and I am so thrilled to see that our diligent work during the 2009-10 fiscal year is already paying off. This fall, we began outreach in our new Best Start communities and are working to build partnerships among the wide range of stakeholders who live, work or provide services to children and their families in these communities.

A year ago, many of you were just getting acquainted with our new 2009-2015 Strategic Plan, Strengthening Families and Communities in L.A. County. Since then, the First 5 LA staff and Commissioners spent another year becoming intimately familiar with our new place-based approach and the four goals the plan envisions for L.A. County: that all children are born healthy, maintain a healthy weight, are safe from abuse and neglect and are ready for kindergarten.

The plan reflects upon the success and lessons learned from our first 10 years as a grantmaking organization, and builds on our well-established knowledge, partnerships and missions. Our decision to invest a significant portion of our revenue in a place-based approach is not only an outgrowth of our history, but is also reflective of what other funders, like the California Endowment and the Harlem Children’s Zone, are doing—with promising results. This approach will significantly increase the magnitude and scope of our impact. We have the potential to reach 20 percent of the children in L.A. County via Best Start.
First 5 LA’s $134 million School Readiness Initiative (SRI) brought families, community members, educators and advocates together to help children 0–5 be better prepared for kindergarten. SRI, which began eight years ago, built upon existing early childhood development programs by integrating them with parenting/family supports, as well as health and social services. These services are culturally and linguistically appropriate and sensitive to the needs of diverse populations, including children with disabilities and other special needs. In the last fiscal year, more than 34,700 parents and 30,500 children 0-5 benefitted from SRI programs around the county.

Because parents are every child’s first and best teacher, the First 5 LA Family Literacy program takes a family-focused approach. This $20.8 million project aims to improve parents’ literacy skills so they are better equipped to help their children succeed in school. Resources also go toward improving the quality of services for organizations that focus on family literacy.

First 5 LA’s five-year, $5.5 million Early Developmental Screening and Intervention Initiative (EDSI) improves early identification and intervention for young children with developmental or behavioral problems. Since its launch in 2005, more than 500,000 L.A. County children 0-5 received developmental screening and improved care. In partnership with UCLA’s Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities and working with early care and education, as well as health care providers, school districts and community resource agencies—EDSI resulted in an 85 percent increase in developmental screening rates in these settings. As a result of its far-reaching work, EDSI has attracted national attention. It is the only program of its kind approved by the American Boards of Pediatrics and Family Medicine to offer continuing board certification credits for doctors.

We made a commitment to our community and ourselves with this plan and expect to fulfill our promise by continuing to build upon the groundwork we laid. This is a rare opportunity to grow capacity—both within First 5 LA and among those who provide services to children, ensuring the tools and means to sustain these efforts into the future.

While we were making the transition, we never lost sight of our mission for all young children in L.A. County. Great ongoing programs—like Healthy Kids, the parent helpline and our annual literacy campaign, Read Early, Read Aloud!—continued to thrive.

In addition, a huge component of our Strategic Plan is our Public Policy Agenda, which outlines the ways First 5 LA will proactively seek public policy changes that will make lasting improvements in the lives of children, families and communities throughout the county.

To that end, recognizing that 1.5 million California children were uninsured in 2009, First 5 LA joined with local and national groups in advocating for key provisions for children, and helped push for final passage of, the national Health Care Reform law. This new law will have a dramatic impact on the lives of young children in California. In addition to health insurance, it will also provide funding for important new prevention services, home visitation programs and services for maternal depression.

As we look to the future, we must pause to recognize the successes in some of our multi-year programs, including the School Readiness Initiative, Family Literacy, the Early Developmental Screening and Intervention Initiative and the Early Care and Education Workforce Development Initiative.

First 5 LA supports new and expecting parents and caregivers with information and support via our parent helpline (1-888-FIRST5-LA).
Because the early years are a critical time for brain growth and preparation for future learning, children 0-5 should be in the care of people who understand the important role they play in a child's development. The $15 million Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce Development Initiative, implemented in 2005, aims to strengthen and support the ECE workforce. One component is the High School Recruitment Program, which encourages high school students to look to the ECE field as a career choice. Last year the students had the opportunity to participate in a public service announcement contest to educate their classmates about the importance of early care and education. The winning students received significant media attention in publications around L.A. County and were given formal recognition from California Assemblyman Felipe Fuentes (D-Arleta), the Los Angeles City Council and Los Angeles City Councilman Richard Alarcon.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION
As a grantmaker distributing public dollars, First 5 LA maintains oversight of and data on all of our investments. But with the launch of our new place-based effort, First 5 LA will now become a hub of learning about families and children 0-5 in L.A. County. This is a new approach for our research team, which is changing First 5 LA into an “actiontank,” where we act on what we’ve learned. The team will monitor and evaluate data around the four goal areas that will help the 14 communities design and implement Best Start in a way that is most suited to their needs and strengths. The team will then track our successes. This research approach will not only allow First 5 LA to manage programs in the most informed ways possible, but will ensure that we better serve the needs of families and children and better help other organizations around the county do so, as well.

RESEARCH: Sesame Street Healthy Habits for Life
Today, one in five children are overweight or obese by age 6. To promote good nutritional habits and physical activity in children 0-5, First 5 LA joined with the First 5 Association of California, the National Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Association and the California Department of Public Health to distribute the “Sesame Street Healthy Habits for Life” resource kit. The bilingual activity kit contains a DVD and storybook that encourages parents and caregivers to teach young children about the importance of healthy food and exercise. Child care providers who received the kit reported a significant increase in knowledge levels around nutrition, and discussed the benefits of a healthy lifestyle with the children in their care compared to those who did not receive the kit. One child care provider said the kit inspired her to plant a vegetable patch, while another signed up to receive children’s recipes online.

We look forward to your support as we continue to grow and change to best serve children 0-5 throughout L.A. County. In the following pages, you’ll learn more about both our Best Start effort and our ongoing and new countywide strategies. For more information, please don’t hesitate to contact us. You can also look for news, updates and announcements at First5LA.org, BestStartLA.org and at our parenting website, ReadySetGrowLA.org.

Evelyn V. Martinez
Chief Executive Officer

First 5 LA is working hard on our promise to improve the lives of children in our Best Start communities and countywide.
First 5 LA is a unique organization that was created and is funded entirely by state tobacco tax revenues. First 5 LA was created with the passage of Proposition 10 by California voters. The measure calls for the investment of tobacco tax revenues in programs aimed to improve the lives of children 0-5 in Los Angeles County and throughout the state.

Since its creation in 1998, First 5 LA has invested more than $957 million in services for children 0-5 and their families in L.A. County. An additional $587 million has been allocated for continued financial support of existing First 5 LA programs and investments. During fiscal year 2009-10, we provided approximately $157 million to programs and evaluations that addressed health, safety and school readiness. Total revenues came to $146 million, and total expenditures were nearly $168 million. As of June 30, 2010, First 5 LA had total net assets of $881.3 million.

First 5 LA is pursuing multiple countywide strategies to facilitate policy and systems change, including public education, advocacy, workforce development, data systems integration and the mobilization and leveraging of resources.

FINANCES

TWO FUNDING APPROACHES

COUNTYWIDE AND PLACE-BASED EFFORTS

Recognizing that children and families live in communities that are affected by both extremely localized and larger regional elements, the First 5 LA Commission has committed itself to dual funding approaches: place-based and countywide. A child’s health may be threatened by a single source of pollution in her neighborhood, but statewide smog regulations also influence asthma and other child health issues. Similarly, a family’s access to fresh produce may be limited based on local challenges, such as the lack of a convenient grocery store in their neighborhood, as well as regional factors, such as drought or escalating fuel prices faced by trucking companies that move produce.

On a regional level, First 5 LA understands the critical role of strong, coordinated and responsive systems that deliver health and human services to children and families. Other systemic elements that impact children’s lives are less formal and include factors such as the economy, policy and overall public will for early childhood issues. We also know that broad-based, positive changes to improve the lives of children countywide are most successful when they are informed by, and grow out of, community-based, resident-driven models for strengthening families, such as those that we will be supporting in our 14 Best Start communities.

First 5 LA is pursuing multiple countywide strategies to facilitate policy and systems change, including public education, advocacy, workforce development, data systems integration and the mobilization and leveraging of resources. We will use these strategies to leverage opportunities, advocate for change, instill knowledge and raise awareness about how best to strengthen families with young children.
COUNTYWIDE EFFORTS
First 5 LA is here to serve young children in L.A. County. We want the entire county to benefit from the systemic changes and sustainability measures that work best to improve the lives of children 0-5. The work we do countywide will support our place-based efforts, as we continue to ensure that children 0-5 are healthy, safe and ready to learn.

HEALTHY KIDS
Keeping children healthy is one of First 5 LA’s four goals, and studies show that access to regular medical care plays a major role in keeping children disease and illness free. Partially funded by First 5 LA, Healthy Kids provided low-cost health insurance to about 25,000 L.A. County children, including nearly 3,300 children 0-5, during the last fiscal year. In early 2010, the state budget crisis put funds for this and other First 5 LA-funded programs in jeopardy. First 5 LA joined parents and other child advocates in Sacramento and helped successfully fight proposed cuts that could have left about a million California children without health care.

BABY-FRIENDLY HOSPITAL PROJECT
Recognizing the many benefits breastfeeding brings, including optimal health, cognitive development and infant-mother bonding, the First 5 LA Commission allocated $10.5 million for the Baby-Friendly Hospital project. “Baby-Friendly Hospital” is a designation made by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund and administered by Baby-Friendly USA. Baby-Friendly Hospitals provide mothers the information, confidence and skills they need to successfully initiate and continue nursing their babies. Only about 100 hospitals in the U.S., including three in L.A. County, have earned the “Baby-Friendly” designation.

In March, seven L.A. County hospitals were selected for the five-year Best Start Baby-Friendly Hospital grant. California Hospital Medical Center began piloting the grant in 2009.

FAMILY PLACE LIBRARIES
Family Place Libraries serve as hubs for family development and parent and community involvement. Based on a national model, Family Place Libraries include specially-trained librarians, children’s books, toys, music, videos and events that appeal to infants and toddlers, and offer workshops and parenting support materials. As part of Best Start’s drive to enhance resources for parents with young children within our target communities, Family Place Libraries will be an option for our community partners.

The Los Angeles County Public Library, which already had 25 Family Place Libraries, partnered with First 5 LA in 2008 after the Commission approved investing more than $1 million. The money is to expand the program into more libraries and to build a training center at the Carson library.

The training facility for librarians—the second in the country and the only one on the West Coast, opened on September 25, 2009, at the Carson library. In addition, the Huntington Park, El Monte, Norwalk and La Crescenta libraries were selected for expansion, with other libraries still to be chosen.
CORE COMPETENCIES

First 5 LA recognizes the importance of professionals who work with families with young children in L.A. County having a shared set of skills and knowledge. To that end, we brought together 15 experts from L.A. County to collaborate on a shared set of professional standards across various disciplines key to the health and development of young children as part of our Best Start Workforce Development Project initiative.

In January 2010, the team (which included mental health, early education, early intervention, child welfare and physical health experts) identified a set of eight “Core Competencies” for prenatal through 3 service providers. The goal of the outline is to determine the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for professionals who work with the youngest segment of our population. The outline is currently undergoing peer review, and a training plan is being created.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

Recognizing the need to mobilize and leverage fiscal and non-fiscal resources to sustain desired outcomes for young children and their families, First 5 LA developed a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy and created a Community Investments Department. Dedicated to maximizing the amount of resources available to support and enhance First 5 LA’s four strategic goals, the department will ensure that our endeavors don’t just serve children under 5 today, but that they are sustained over time.

First 5 LA’s Community Investment Department will focus its efforts on three areas:

» Grantmaking, including supporting partnerships that bring allies together to advocate for and secure additional resources

» Building relationships, including those with private foundations, businesses and government

» Sharing information

This department will also work closely with others across the organization by supporting capacity building, policy and systems change work.
PUBLIC POLICY
To fulfill our mission that all children in L.A. County are born healthy, maintain a healthy weight, are safe from abuse and neglect and are ready for kindergarten, real public policy change is needed. Thus, the Commissioners made public policy one of the Strategic Plan’s countywide strategies. First 5 LA’s Public Policy Agenda has 10 goals that will be pursued over the next five years. Using public policy development, education, advocacy, public policy grantmaking and collaborative strategies, First 5 LA hopes to inform and partner with others dedicated to improving the lives of children by achieving the same goals.

ARRA
In addition to giving the nation’s economy a boost, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 increased funding for many federal safety net and early education programs.

Seeking to enhance access to ARRA funding among agencies serving children and families in L.A. County, First 5 LA agreed to provide matching grants to organizations applying for the federal stimulus dollars. Seven agencies received matching funds from First 5 LA, totaling $2.2 million and leveraged about $22 million in federal funds for programs in L.A. County over two years. This reflects a return on investment of 900 percent, with 3,002 new Early Head Start and Head Start slots created as a result—which represents 39 percent of all the new positions the funding created in the county.

First 5 LA’s 10 PUBLIC POLICY GOALS:

1. Promote comprehensive, affordable health insurance for all
2. Increase access to healthy food options and physical activity
3. Promote reductions in drug, alcohol and tobacco use by parents/caregivers
4. Expand access to, and improve quality of, early care and education programs
5. Expand voluntary home visiting
6. Support integration and sharing of data
7. Strengthen the prenatal to 5 workforce
8. Increase supports for breastfeeding
9. Expand early identification and intervention
10. Promote family strengthening principles and prevention practices in the child welfare system
In our effort to strengthen and sustain organizations serving children and families, First 5 LA’s Grantee Technical Assistance Institute helped 36 current or former grantees develop earned-income strategies, pursue and leverage resources and build their leadership skills last year.

The Institute offered several programs aimed at helping organizations increase their effectiveness, including:

» The Social Enterprise Academy, which worked with organizations to identify and develop business concepts to generate earned income.

» The Sustainability Project, which helped organizations strengthen internal and external resources.

» The Organizational Leadership Development Program, which worked with executive directors and senior managers to develop a strong peer network and advance their work.

As a result of the Institute, The Help Group Child and Family Center, which recently completed the Social Enterprise Academy and provides mental health services for people with disabilities, will be launching two resale boutiques and providing employment training opportunities for its clients.

Another organization, LA Best Babies Network, which works to ensure that high-quality perinatal care and social support are available to all families, is developing two ventures: one to expand sales of its training program on well-baby care and a second to provide health education/quality improvement programming for hospitals and insurance carriers.

Through the Community Opportunities Fund (COF), First 5 LA continued to fund long-term sustainable changes for L.A. County’s young children and their families. The fund invests in organizations to build their capacity or conduct activities designed to improve public policies affecting the lives of young children and families.

Policy grants support a variety of efforts that complement the First 5 LA Public Policy Agenda. Through these projects, organizations aim to improve access to healthy eating opportunities for children and families, increase breastfeeding rates by changing Medi-Cal regulations and reimbursement policies and reduce the number of African American children being abused and/or placed in foster care through early identification and treatment of maternal substance abuse.

Additionally, capacity-building grants have helped organizations become more effective at such things as assessing children’s dental needs and providing oral health education to families; expanding parent/child development programs and increasing healthy food offerings.
First 5 LA’s Oral Health and Nutrition Expansion and Enhancement Project (OHNE) continued to coordinate and leverage oral health and nutrition efforts for underserved children 0-5 in L.A. County. First 5 LA-funded clinics provided preventative dental services to about 10,500 children and more than 8,000 parents/caregivers received oral health education/instruction in 2009-10. To date, First 5 LA has launched a number of partnerships with other funders, including the California Endowment, Kaiser Permanente Community Benefits Program, The California Wellness Foundation, as well as federal funding through the Health Research and Services Administration. Through these partnerships, First 5 LA has directly invested approximately $4.5 million and leveraged an additional $9 million in funding.

ORAL HEALTH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The $20 million Oral Health Community Development (OHCD) project, approved by the Commissioners in 2007, aims to prevent tooth decay in children through community water fluoridation and related public education and advocacy activities. OHCD-funded infrastructure projects in the cities of Santa Monica and Torrance, as well as Compton, Lynwood and the other communities served by Park Water Company, continue to make progress toward water fluoridation. Once online, fluoridated water from these water agencies will reach approximately 330,100 residents, including more than 20,000 children 5 and younger.

Track all First 5 LA’s successes and stay in-the-know at Facebook.com/First5LA and Twitter.com/First5LA.
First 5 LA believes that the place where a child grows up impacts his or her well-being. The goal of Best Start is to empower community members and stakeholders to work together to build upon existing services, programs and resources to ensure that children in those communities are born healthy, maintain a healthy weight, are safe from abuse and neglect and are ready for kindergarten. First 5 LA is dedicated to working with each of its Best Start communities to fulfill this promise for children 0-5. We hope to bring out the best in our children by bringing out the best in our communities.

To maximize the potential for success in the Best Start communities, it is essential that our place-based efforts be driven and informed by the communities themselves. Ultimately, community members will determine and prioritize the changes they need to reach the four goals, and First 5 LA staff will work with them to achieve success.

BEST START COMMUNITY SELECTION PROCESS

Once the First 5 LA Commission approved a place-based approach as part of our investment strategy, the next step was to determine which communities had the greatest need in combination with existing resources and strengths that could be built upon. Based on principles and directives decided upon by community stakeholders, Commissioners and staff, First 5 LA developed a selection procedure. With the help of Healthy City and Special Services for Groups, we initiated a three-step process in early 2010 for selecting our Best Start communities:

1. ASSESSMENT: First 5 LA researchers and their partners divided the county into 126 regions and analyzed them for risk factors, focusing on birth and parent-child outcomes. This yielded a list of 20 communities that clustered together naturally, based on geographic and ethnic boundaries, which were determined to be most at-risk.

2. ANALYSIS: Because the place-based approach looks to build upon what already works in the community, the next step was to determine the strengths and capabilities of each community. To do this, researchers conducted focus groups and interviews with existing grantees and other community members to gather a cross-section of opinions and information.

3. SELECTION: Using the data, researchers looked at geographic and ethnic boundaries, mindful to ensure that the selected communities were diverse and evenly dispersed across the county and the 0-5 population. Communities were favored that were historically overlooked but had the potential to thrive with adequate organization and financial and technical assistance.

We appreciate that many communities with young children could benefit from Best Start. With that in mind, these 14 communities are a first step in what we hope will be an ongoing process of community engagement and empowerment. Our vision is that one day, every community in L.A. County will be able to give its children a Best Start in life.

For more information about our Best Start communities, and to learn how you can get involved in shaping the lives of children, please visit BestStartLA.org.
Once the 14 Best Start communities were selected, First 5 LA staff began conducting outreach within each community as an initial step to constructing a broadly representative and diverse Best Start Community Partnership dedicated to realizing First 5 LA’s vision for children and families. The goal of the community outreach is to inform community members and stakeholders about place-based programming and strategies, define what it means to be a Best Start community and begin to decide how best to implement Best Start strategies in each community in order to reach our shared goals for children and families.

In conducting community outreach and public education, First 5 LA staff is intentionally involving a wide range of community members—including parents, business owners, faith-based leaders, community-based organizations, service providers and government officials. Each of these groups brings a unique and vital perspective toward achieving Best Start’s four goals for young children in the community. To date, more than 1,000 community members from Best Start communities have participated in information sessions and community discussions. Hundreds more have heard about Best Start at one of the many community or group meetings at which Best Start staff members were invited to speak. Many participants used the free transportation offered, as well as interpretation and child care services provided in order to increase access and participation in these discussions.

In the next phase of the project’s rollout, community members will learn more about creating a broad-based, representative and diverse partnership that can work together to fulfill Best Start’s vision in their community. In addition, community assessments will be conducted to provide a better understanding of the needs and resources that currently exist. Communities will select a facilitator to guide them through the formation of the Community Partnership, and associated needs will be identified and filled (i.e., selecting a community assessment liaison and providing community-specific training). Ultimately, each Best Start Community Partnership will develop a multi-year plan for identifying, developing and implementing various program components to achieve the four goals of the Best Start project, including home visitation for pregnant women and mothers of infants, family literacy activities and community-based action research projects. The goal is for each Community Partnership to develop their plan by December 2011.
In 2008, First 5 LA rolled out its first Best Start demonstration community. The Best Start Metro LA community is a seven-square mile neighborhood located just north of the USC campus. First 5 LA partnered with Para Los Niños, a nonprofit child service provider, to lead the effort to educate residents and other community members about Best Start and to bring a diverse group of community representatives to the table. The Community Advisory Council, which serves as advisors to the growing Metro LA Community Guidance Body, includes prominent representatives from a wide range of businesses, nonprofits and community-based organizations, including The California Wellness Foundation, Bank of America, Children’s Bureau, LA’s Best, Los Angeles Universal Preschool, Los Angeles Unified School District, the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce and others.

Recognizing that outreach and education to pregnant women and new families can promote both physical and emotional well-being, one of the most significant components of Best Start Metro LA is the Welcome Baby home visitation program. In partnership with California Hospital and Maternal and Child Health Access, Welcome Baby aims to provide primary disease prevention and parent education information and, through a series of pre- and postpartum visits, guides families to appropriate support services in their communities. Welcome Baby has already served more than 500 families. Parent Coaches, including nurses and other staff members, are child development professionals who have received Certified Lactation Educator training. Welcome Baby will serve as a model for other Best Start communities as they endeavor to engage pregnant women and new mothers and seek to strengthen family bonds.

Parents, caregivers and families can find ways to keep kids healthy, safe and bright with tips and activities at ReadySetGrowLA.org.
To get weekly updates about First 5 LA’s countywide and Best Start programs, plus budget, child development information and profiles of people who champion children’s causes, sign up to receive First 5 LA’s Monday Morning Report at First5LA.org/Subscribe.