

EVALUATION, MANAGEMENT, AND TRAINING ASSOCIATES, INC.

First 5 Kings County Annual Evaluation

Fiscal Year 2021–22

Prepared for:

**First 5 Kings County Children and
Families Commission**
330 Campus Drive
Hanford, CA 93230



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First 5 Kings County Commission Investments in Child Health, Early Learning and Family Strengthening

Introduction

In 1998, California voters approved Proposition 10, known as the California Children and Families First Act, to fund investments in early learning, health, and family development for children 0-5 years of age. Prop 10 imposes a 50-cent retail sales tax on the purchase of cigarettes and other tobacco products sold in the state. The act established a state commission—First 5 California—and 58 local county commissions to oversee expenditures of tobacco tax revenues. The local First 5 commissions allocate tax dollars to early childhood programs and services in the community and monitor program accountability.

First 5 Kings County established a vision that “all Kings County families receive access to the tools, knowledge and quality care necessary to encourage each child to develop to their fullest potential.” First 5 Kings County is achieving its vision by directing resources to funded partners in the community who provide direct child and family services, support workforce development, and enhance early childhood systems of care.

First 5 Kings County engages in strategic planning every five years to assess local community needs and to direct Commission investments to priority areas. The latest 2020–2025 Strategic Plan outlines the Commission’s strategic focus and its implementation approach, financial plans, and evaluation methods for ensuring program accountability and best practices. The five-year plan is guided by a state framework that targets outcomes in the following four strategic result areas:

- **Improved Child Health: Healthy Children**
- **Improved Child Development: Children Learning and Ready for School**
- **Improved Family Functioning: Strong Families**
- **Improved Systems: Integrated, Consumer Oriented, Accessible services**

The strategic plan guides the achievement of results through its four funded initiatives—the School Readiness, Family Resource Center (FRC), Early Care and Education (E3), and New Projects Initiatives.

School Readiness Initiative. The School Readiness Initiative develops and sustains a system of collaborative school-linked services to prepare children for entry into kindergarten. The Commission allocated \$431,004 in FY 2021-22 to support three community programs—United Cerebral Palsy of Central California’s (UCP) Parent & Me and Special Needs programs serving children who are at risk for developmental concerns, and the Linkages 2 Learning (L2L) kindergarten transition program.

Family Resource Center (FRC) Initiative. The FRC Initiative funds place-based community centers that serve as a single access point to early childhood education, health, and family services, resources, and supports. The Commission allocated \$618,392 in funding in FY 2021-22 to support FRCs in four locations serving the Corcoran, Hanford, Kettleman City, and Lemoore communities. The Avenal location was allocated funding but there was no contractor available to provide the service.

Early Care and Education (E3) Initiative. The E3 Initiative promotes workforce development to increase the quality of center-based preschools, family day care centers, and home visiting programs. The E3 Initiative was allocated \$88,545 in FY 2021-22 to support components of the Kings County Office of Education’s Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Academic Standards (CARES) program. Funds are used to provide coaching, technical assistance, and training services for early childhood education (ECE) providers.

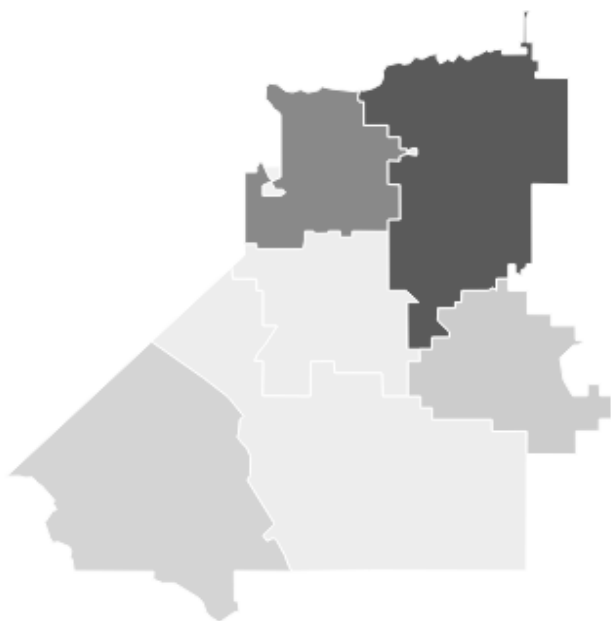
New Projects Initiative. The New Projects Initiative invests in emerging and innovative strategies that benefit children, families, and systems of care. The commission invested \$36,307 in funding for FY 2021-22 to support development of the Kings County Referral Exchange System to promote service coordination across partners.

Evaluation Method

Local First 5 commissions collect and analyze evaluation data and report findings to the state annually for performance monitoring and accountability purposes. To support measurement of outcomes, the First 5 Kings County Strategic Plan identifies goals, objectives, and result indicators within each of its four funded initiatives. First 5 Kings County partners with an evaluation firm, EMT Associates, Inc., to evaluate its program investments and to support data system enhancements. The evaluation ensures compliance with state requirements, informs future planning and decision-making, and supports quality improvement efforts.

Kings County Children and Families

Kings County covers a 1,391 square mile area of California's Central Valley bordered by Fresno, Kern, Tulare, and Monterey counties. There are currently 152,023 Kings County residents (2022). Seventy-nine percent of the population is concentrated in one of the four incorporated cities of Avenal, Corcoran, Hanford, or Lemoore, with the balance of the population (21%) living in the unincorporated areas. This includes the small communities of Armona, Home Garden, Kettleman City, and Stratford. Approximately 12.7% of the county is designated as rural (U.S. Census, 2010).



According to recent population estimates from the American Community Survey (2021), there are approximately 15,015 Kings County children 0 to 5 years old, including 6,105 infants and toddlers (58%), 3,024 preschool-age children (29%) and 1,386 children of kindergarten age. Census estimates indicate that 3,781 family households have a child under the age of 6. Fifty-eight percent of children live in married family households and 42% live in male- or female-headed, single-parent households. There are 1,803 children under age 6 living in households headed by a grandparent.



Kings County communities are rich in terms of their cultural, ethnic, and language diversity. About 60% of county children are of Hispanic or Latino origin, more than a quarter are White (28%), and 12% are multi-racial or come from other racial or ethnic backgrounds. About 10.5% of Kings County households have limited proficiency in English, with Spanish being the primary language spoken at home (95%).

Often Kings County family households face serious economic hardship. About 29 percent of all county children under 5 years of age (28.6%) live below poverty. About 19% of the adult population never graduated from high school. Twenty percent of children (20.1%) live in food insecure households and 3% of public school-age children experience homelessness. Hispanic or Latino residents of any race (21.6%) are twice as likely as White, non-Hispanic residents (11.7%) to live at or below poverty exposing considerable income disparities.

Data recently released from the CA Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA) profiles the characteristics of Kings County mothers with newborn infants. From 2016-2018, about 7% of mothers with newborns were teens 15-19 years of age. Eighteen percent never completed high school. Forty-six percent were living at or below poverty, 3.2% lacked stable housing, and 16.5% were food insecure. Twenty percent of new mothers (19.9%) spoke a primary language other than English at home. Similar to patterns in the general population, Hispanic mothers (18.6%) were far more likely than non-Hispanics (6.5%) to be uninsured or to experience gaps in coverage, creating additional barriers to accessing needed health care.

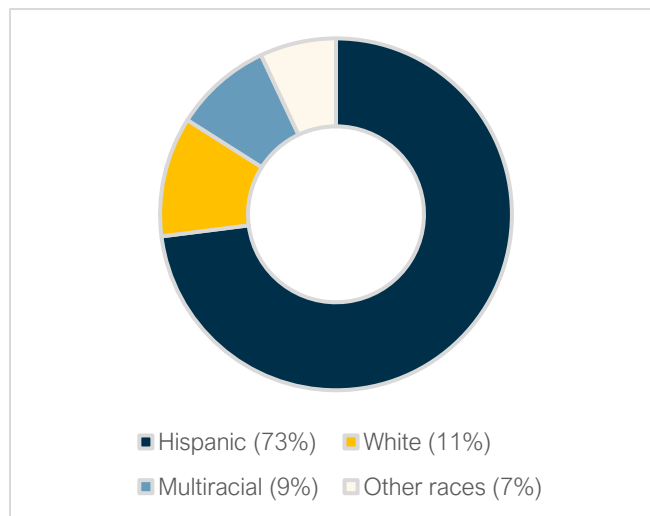
Kings County data also show that many mothers of newborns experience trauma or other personal challenges during pregnancy, such as divorce or separation (8.9%), job loss (14%), intimate partner violence (7.5%), or depressive symptoms post-partum (14.4%). Other data sources show that all Kings County adults in family households with children are more likely (20%) than their state counterparts (17%) to have a history of exposure to trauma, referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which are associated with negative physical and behavioral health outcomes. In 2021–22 7.1 in every 1,000 children countywide had a substantiated report of child abuse and 84 children 0-5 entered the foster care system.

According to census estimates, 2,172 Kings County children over the age of 3 were enrolled in preschool and 2,502 attend kindergarten. The demand for childcare spaces has historically exceeded the available supply creating a substantial gap in access to quality childcare. The county has 201 licensed childcare facilities including 39 center-based providers and 162 family childcare homes (2021). Licensed facilities support 3,326 childcare spaces countywide. Current data on childcare availability show that 79% of working families lack access to affordable, licensed childcare spaces. This profile of Kings County children and families underscores some of the challenges facing young children and families and highlights the need for early childhood services and supports to help all children and families thrive.

First 5 Kings County Service Reach

In 2021–22 First 5 Kings County invested in an array of direct services for children, caregivers, providers to promote access to early care and education, workforce development, school readiness, and family support services benefitting young children and their families. Direct service programs funded under the School Readiness and Family Resource Center initiatives delivered health, early education, and family support services to an estimated 2,228 children, about 21% of whom were infants and toddlers and 71% of whom were preschool or kindergarten age. This number accounts for about 15% of the 15,015 children 5 years of age and under countywide. Sixteen percent of children were identified with special developmental needs and were served through the UCP Special Needs and Parent & Me programs. First 5 additionally partnered with 15 high-need public schools to offer stipends supporting kindergarten transition activities reaching 1,379 school-age children.

Exhibit 1 **Racial or Ethnic Composition of Children Served**



The racial and ethnic composition within the child service population included a mix of Hispanic or Latino (73%), White (11%), and multiracial children (9%), and children of other or unknown races or ethnic groups (7%). Hispanic or Latino children were slightly overrepresented relative to the larger child population countywide. Almost half of all children served (46%) spoke a primary language other than English at home.

First 5 Kings County funded partners also reached 1,898 parents, caregivers, or other family members in FY 2021–22. Parents and caregivers accessed a range of community programs and services, including parent education, parent-child interactive programs, home visitation, and other coordinated services available through family resource centers. This included 1,266 families who received New Parent Kits that were distributed to parents with newborns countywide. First 5 Kings County additionally reached 244 members of the ECE workforce who benefitted from coaching and professional development opportunities aimed at enhancing the quality of ECE settings and promoting provider effectiveness in working with children with special needs.

First 5 Kings County funded partners reached 2,228 children and 1,898 parents and caregivers in FY 2021-2022.

Data Limitations

The First 5 Kings County evaluation approach is guided by the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, which allocates public resources to fund community-based early childhood programs and services. The strategic plan contains a results matrix that identifies performance indicators for each initiative to measure the achievement of strategic results. Performance indicators are framed as targeted increases in service outputs from year to year as the basis for determining program success. The strategic plan acknowledges the declining trend in revenue and Commission funding that has occurred over time. This is due both to a newly enacted federal tobacco tax and to reductions in tobacco use statewide that affect the revenue base. The decline in funding, combined with escalating program costs, may require funded partners to reduce scale, limiting their capacity to achieve targeted increases.

The other important limitation of the evaluation approach is that counts of children, parents, and providers reached through First 5 Kings County funded programs are duplicative, meaning that funded partners track individual participants within programs, but cannot account for duplicate enrollment across multiple funded partners and activities. This factor potentially inflates the actual number of children and families served and fails to embrace systems integration that is a goal of the five-year strategic plan. The California Children and Families Commission has also requested that First 5 Kings County establish a mechanism for tracking unduplicated participants across multiple funded partners to create a more accurate accounting of program reach. First 5 program staff continue to explore alternative options for low-cost data applications that would allow for more robust and longitudinal tracking of service utilization and child and family outcomes over time. This represents a critical next step for performance measurement and reporting, which could enhance the overall value of evaluation activities.

Structure of the Report

The next sections of the report detail child and family participation in First 5 funded programs and services delivered during the 2021–22 fiscal year. The report presents a data snapshot for each of the core funded programs and initiatives and presents data supporting measurement of selected performance indicators. The report concludes with a summary of findings related to the overall status of program implementation and recommendations for future efforts in monitoring and performance assessment.

UCP Parent & Me and Special Needs Project

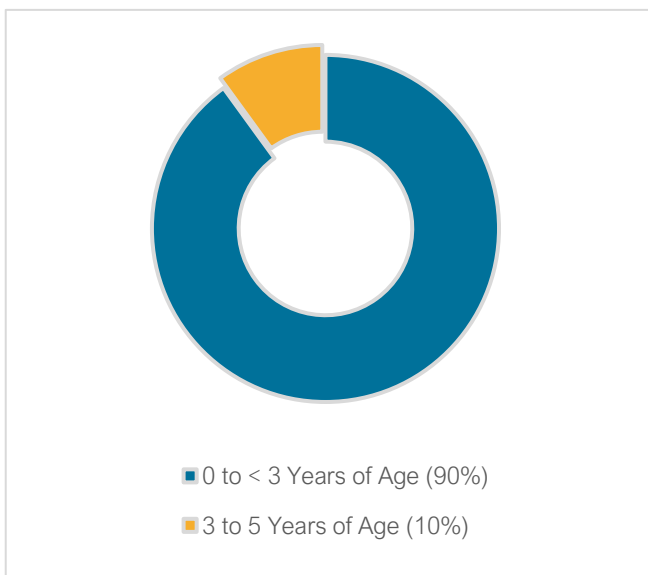
Funded Programs

First 5 Kings County partners with United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of Central California to implement two early education programs for children who may have special developmental needs. This includes children with a known disability, health, or mental condition requiring specialized services or supports, or children with mild to moderate delays who may still require special supports or monitoring. The UCP programs promote equitable access to quality early learning programs for all children by addressing gaps in systems of care for children who may be ineligible for other special developmental services.

Services for Children with Special Needs

In FY 2021–22 UCP was awarded \$88,200 in funding for the Special Needs Project. The project offers classroom-based support to ECE providers and provides screening, intervention, and follow-up for children with developmental delays. The project provided interventions to 118 children in 2021–22 compared to 78 children served in the previous year. This constitutes a 51% increase in service reach. Ninety percent of children were 0–3 and 10% were 3–5 years of age. UCP staff also provided coaching to 59 ECE providers in classroom settings and provided support to 18 special needs children in Parent & Me classrooms as part of its inclusion program with Early Start.

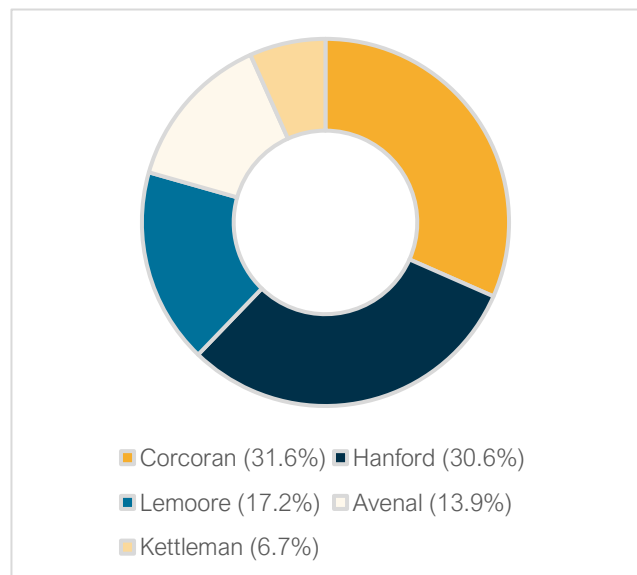
Exhibit 2. Special Needs Participants by Age (n=118)



Parent & Me Early Education Programming

UCP also received \$342,804 in funding to implement the Parent & Me curriculum-based, interactive early education program for parents and their children. Parent & Me programs served 209 children across 5 sites serving the Avenal, Corcoran, Hanford, Kettleman City, and Lemoore communities. Parent & Me sites offered 1,478 interactive, parent education and support sessions reaching 161 parents or caregivers in 2021–22.

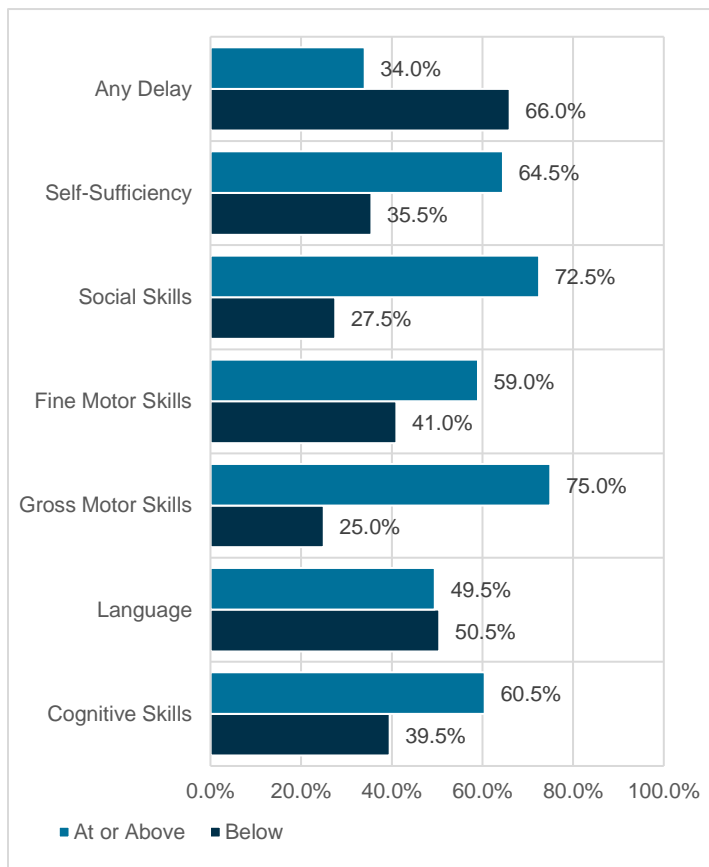
Exhibit 3. Children Served by Program Location (n=209)



Developmental Screenings

UCP also aims to expand the number of children who have access to early developmental screenings to detect developmental delays. UCP Parent & Me programs conducted 200 health and developmental screenings with 148 children using the Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP). More than half of children (51%) were under 3 years of age at the time of screening, which is an optimal age for interventions to be most effective. Of the children screened in FY 2021–22, two thirds (66%) functioned below their chronological age in months on at least one measure of development. The domain with the highest percentage of children with an identified delay was language development (51%), followed by fine motor skills (41%), cognitive skills (40%), and self-sufficiency (36%). Fewer children experienced delays in social (28%) or gross motor skills (25%). Children who participate in UCP programs are reassessed at periodic intervals to monitor progress and inform the development of program interventions.

Exhibit 4. Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP) Developmental Screening Results (n=200)



Parent & Me Parent Survey Results

Parents who participated in Parent & Me sessions with their children were administered a survey in April to May 2022 to share their perspectives on the program. Parents completed the survey electronically (n=47) from a portable device using a scannable QR code. Forty-three percent of parents/caregivers completed the survey form in English and 57% completed the survey in Spanish.

Quality of Staffing

When asked about the quality of program staffing:

- 100% of parents/caregivers surveyed 'strongly agreed' that staff made them feel welcome, interacted with them in a positive and supportive way, and presented information to them in a manner that was easy to understand; and,
- 98% of parents/caregivers 'strongly agreed' that staff were helpful when working with them.

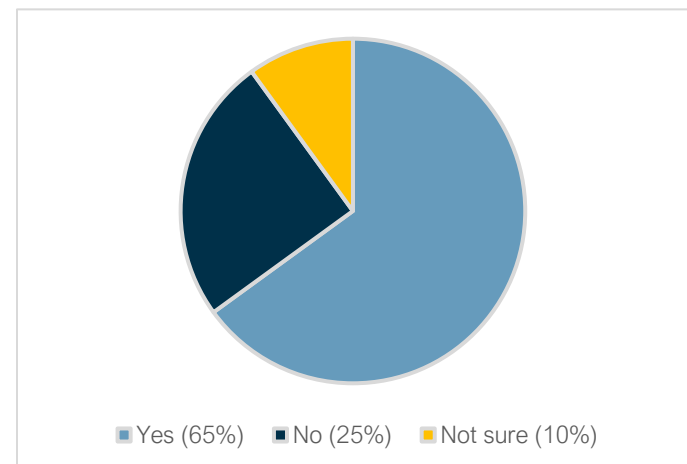
Service Access

Parents were also asked about their ability to access Parent & Me services for their children.

- 98% of parents/caregivers 'strongly agreed' that services were offered in their preferred language;
- 91% 'strongly agreed' that sessions were offered at convenient times;
- 88% 'strongly agreed' that the location was convenient; and
- 81% 'strongly agreed' that if Parent & Me was not in their community, they would have trouble finding similar activities for their children.

About two-thirds (65%) of parents surveyed also accessed services through a First 5 Family Resource Center indicating a high degree of overlap in utilization across programs.

Exhibit 5. Ever Attended an FRC (n=40)



Child Academic and Social Development

Parents also had an opportunity to share perceptions of how participation in Parent & Me services had impacted their children's development:

- 98% 'strongly agreed' that programs helped children develop new skills and learn how to socialize with same-age peers;
- 95% of parents 'strongly agreed' that programs helped prepare their children for kindergarten; and,
- 88% of parents 'strongly agreed' that as the result of their participation they were more aware of activities they could do at home with their children to support their learning and development.

Parenting Knowledge and Support

Parents also perceived that the Parent & Me sessions had positively impacted them in their role as a parent. More specifically:

- 93% of parents/caregivers surveyed 'strongly agreed' that they understood more about their children's growth and development as a result of their Parent & Me participation;
- 88% 'strongly agreed' that they felt more confident in their parenting; and,
- 79% 'strongly agreed' that they felt more connected to their community as an outcome of their involvement.

“ Spending time with my child and doing something that benefits them is the best part of all. They get to interact with teachers, other children, and parents, they read books, songs, we do activities, and my children all loved the Parent & Me program. I am very thankful I had the opportunity to attend with all my kids. ”

25%

of parents surveyed were referred to a UCP therapist for further assessment and evaluation.

30%

would not have sought therapeutic services for their child if they had not been involved with UCP.

Parents had the opportunity through open-ended questions to share thoughts about the benefits offered through the program. In their responses, parents noted opportunities for their children to interact socially with other children, opportunities for enrichment, learning and development, positive interactions with teachers, opportunities to spend quality time to build the parent-child bond, and the ability to access activities and resources. Parents also benefitted from linkages to follow-up assessment and therapeutic services through UCP when children were identified with suspected delays. Of the parents surveyed, 25% had been referred to a UCP therapist for further assessment; 30% of referred families said they would not have sought services on their own in the absence of UCP programming.

Parents also offered recommendations for how Parent & Me sessions could be improved. Parents' suggestions ($n=9$) included increasing the length of sessions (33%), offering more activities (33%), holding classes in a larger physical space (22%), holding classes more frequently (e.g., moving from once to twice per week) (11%), and increasing the number of participants in each session (11%).

“ Esta aprendiendo a convivir con nuevos niños y aprender cosas nuevas cada que venimos. ”

[My child] is learning how to get along with new children and is learning new things each time we come. ”

Linkages to Learning (L2L)

Funded Programs

First 5 Kings County continues to partner with public elementary schools to help children enter school ready to learn. First 5 Kings County restructured the former Linkages 2 Learning (L2L) kindergarten transition program in 2020-21 to shift ownership to locals schools due to declining funding. School sites and teachers continue to receive small stipends to support kindergarten orientation events and promote kindergarten registration and access to school readiness resources. Research has demonstrated that these types of kindergarten transition activities are associated with modest gains in academic achievement by the time children reach the end of kindergarten.

Backpack Distributions

First 5 Kings County continued to incentivize timely kindergarten registration by distributing backpacks filled with school readiness materials to incoming kindergarten students. Backpacks contained basic supplies such as crayons, pencils, pencil sharpeners, rulers, and magnetic letters and numbers. Backpacks also included learning resources for parents and caregivers to use at home to help foster the development of core competencies in children, which are needed to achieve kindergarten readiness. First 5 distributed 1,379 new backpacks across 23 elementary schools in 10 districts in 2021–22.



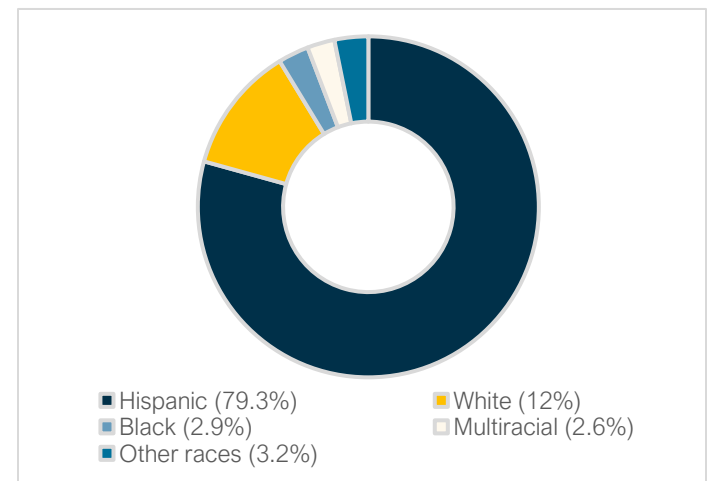
Kindergarten Orientation Events

Stipends were used to host Spring and Fall orientation events for incoming kindergarten children and their families. Sixteen schools across seven districts hosted transition events, including the following schools:

- Armona Elementary School
- Hamilton Elementary School
- Jefferson Elementary School
- Monroe Elementary School
- Roosevelt Elementary School
- Washington Elementary School
- Island Elementary School
- Kit Carson Elementary School
- Lakeside Elementary School
- Cinnamon Elementary School
- Engvall Elementary School
- Lemoore Elementary School
- Meadow Lane Elementary School
- Avenal Elementary School
- Kettleman Elementary School
- Tamarack Elementary School

L2L schools collectively enrolled 1,117 kindergarten age children or about 46% of kindergarten age children in public schools countywide. This included 172 children (15%) in transitional kindergarten (TK) classrooms. Resources were appropriately allocated to higher need schools that served a proportionately higher number of socio-economically disadvantaged children (78%) and English Language Learners (29%) compared to countywide averages.

Exhibit 4. Race/Ethnic Composition of Children in L2L Schools



Kings United Way Referral Exchange Program

Funded Programs

First 5 Kings County awarded \$39,200 in funding to Kings United Way to support the continuing development of the Kings County Referral Exchange. The Referral Exchange connects county and regional government agencies, healthcare providers, and community organizations through the *Unite Us* technology platform as part of a countywide network of care. The platform provides a secure, closed-loop electronic referral system that allows providers to refer clients to local services and track outcomes of referrals and services that are delivered across partnering agencies. The Referral Exchange involves a five-step process that includes entry into the system, screening, referral, resolution, and feedback.



Outreach, Engagement, and Support

Kings United Way provides direct outreach to the community to introduce potential partners to the *Unite Us* platform, recruit, and onboard new member organizations, and deliver training and technical support to facilitate participation.

The Referral Exchange currently supports 34 active user organizations including representatives from the healthcare, education, and social service sectors. Specific accomplishments reported for FY 2021–22 include:

- Participating in community outreach events and engaging in social media marketing campaigns to advertise *Unite Us* platform demonstrations;
- Providing training, educational materials, and demonstrations to 31 medical providers and other community stakeholders;
- Onboarding 11 providers who focus on services for special needs children 0-5 years of age.
- Supporting seven providers who offer access to school readiness resources and services to increase family literacy.
- Supporting seven organizations that offer early care, education, and buffering resources to children 0-5 years and their families.

Successes & Implementation Barriers

Kings United Way noted several important accomplishments in FY 2021–22 related to onboarding the organizations, including the following:

- Kings Community Action Organization (KCAO) which serves as the umbrella agency for 23 community-based education and health and human service programs.
- Kings County Job Training Office, which supported *Unite Us* organizational recruitment efforts by sharing their experiences on the platform.

Kings United Way encountered several barriers to recruiting and onboarding new members, falling short of its annual goal to engage providers of early care, education, and buffering resources for children 0-5 years and their families. These barriers include difficulty engaging organizational leaders who had the requisite decision-making authority, generating buy-in across large organizations, concerns over data sharing and privacy protections, limits on demonstrating full utility of the platform while still in its infancy, and discontinuation of state funding for the Kings County ACES Network of Care.



Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Academic Standards

Funded Programs

The Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Academic Standards (CARES) program is a component of the larger Kings County Cares About Quality (KCCAQ) initiative, implemented by the Kings County Office of Education (KCOE). KCCAQ is a countywide early education initiative that aims to promote children’s access to quality ECE experiences. Research identifies the primary dimensions of ECE access that include reasonableness of effort to secure ECE spaces, equity, affordability, and the ability of programs to support the child’s development and meet the needs of parents.

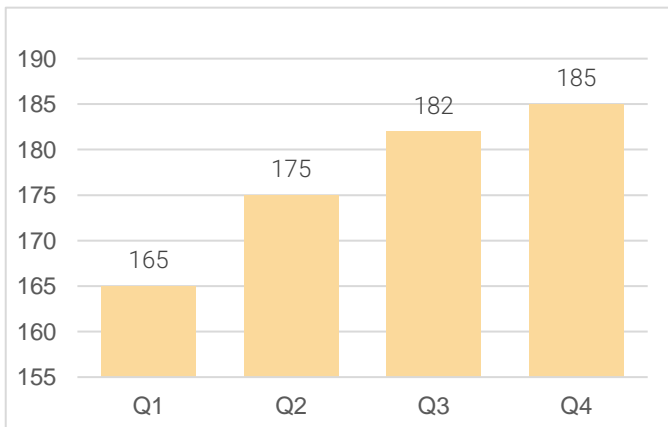
The CARES program focuses on delivering professional development, support, and incentives to ECE programs and providers as a mechanism to improve program quality.

Participant Level Services

For the 2021–22, the CARES project used First 5 funding to deliver direct services to 185 CARES participants, which included the following:

- Enrollment and Meet & Greet orientations for newly enrolled CARES participants;
- Provision of technical assistance including reviewing personal growth plans, assisting with permit applications and access to higher education, and providing coaching and mentoring.
- Provision of resources including implementation materials, check-out materials, and computer access.

Exhibit 6. CARES Provider Enrollment by Quarter



Coordinated Services

The CARES program established and distributed a countywide training calendar for ECE professionals that was posted on the CARES and First 5 websites and distributed to community partners and CARES participants by email. The ECE training calendar was distributed to 3,853 recipients throughout the program year, far surpassing the number of providers targeted for dissemination. Staff also collaborated with the local Resource & Referral program to offer specialized training to two ECE providers supporting workforce development goals. CARES consultants also hosted Inclusion Community of Practice groups throughout the year and launched a new Home Visitation Professional Learning Community (PLC) to support home visiting staff.

Quality Improvement Activities

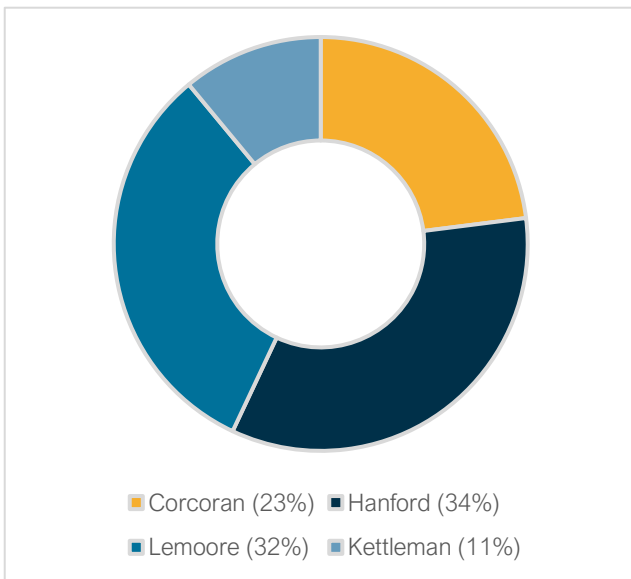
For the 2021–22 program year, KCOE offered professional growth training and materials support to 222 providers in response to needs identified through the assessment process. Staff also provided coaching to 183 Family Child Care (FCC) providers and provided stipends and materials to 1,036 participants.

Family Resource Centers (FRCs)

Funded Programs

The First 5 Commission also continues to support five FRCs serving the communities of Corcoran, Hanford, Kettleman City, and Lemoore. FRCs are place-based collaboratives that provide a single point of access to an array of health, early childhood, and parent support services for children 0 to 5 and their families. The FRCs' goal is to increase children's readiness for school and to provide quality early learning experiences for all children, including those who may lack access to formal preschool opportunities. In 2021–22, FRCs reached 522 children and 471 parents and caregivers and recorded 15,137 total service contacts across centers. This represented a 44% decrease in service volume from the previous fiscal year.

Exhibit 7. Service Contacts by FRC Location (n=15,137)



The FRCs varied regarding the size and scope of their budgets, as well as the array of programs and services offered to families. The two largest FRCs in terms of total service volume were Hanford (33%) and Lemoore (32%) followed by Corcoran (23%), and Kettleman City (11%). FRCs recorded an average of 14.9 service contacts per participant over the course of the program year, indicating a high level of engagement among families. Hanford (15.7 contacts) and Lemoore (16.1 contacts) recorded the highest level of engagement per participant, which may reflect the larger number of service offerings available through these two locations.



Exhibit 8. FRC Service Contacts per Participant (Average)

	Corcoran	Hanford	Kettleman	Lemoore
Average Service Contacts	13.5	15.7	13.0	16.1

Early Childhood Programs

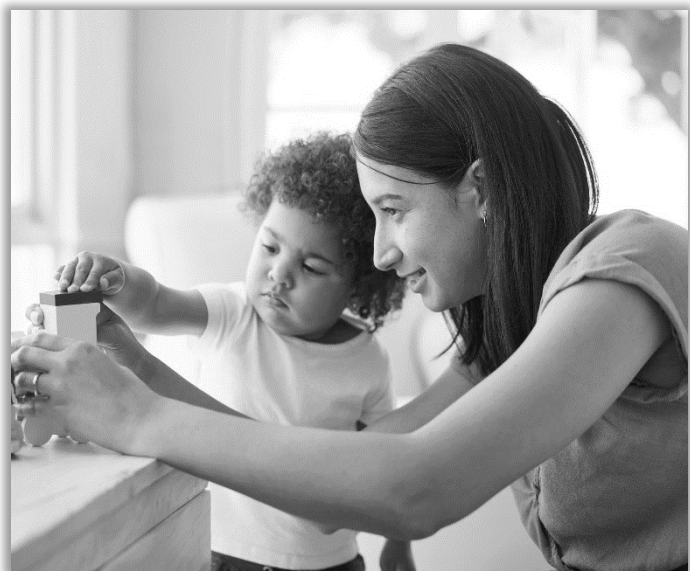
FRCs offered a mixture of in-person and virtual ECE services focusing on infants and caregivers, toddlers, and preschool-age children. Classes offered enrichment opportunities on an array of topics that included, but were not limited to art, music, cooking and nutrition, movement, storytelling, and sensory exploration. Of the 522 children reached through FRCs countywide, about 47% were infants and toddlers under 3 years old, and 53% were preschool or kindergarten age.

Parent Education and Supports

FRCs also offered a wide range of educational and support services that benefitted parents and other caregivers, including family-centered activities, such as family literacy and socialization events, and parenting education workshops. For the 2021–22 fiscal year, 197 parents and caregivers (unduplicated) and 204 children attended family literacy events, and 123 parents and caregivers and 123 children participated in family socialization events.

Home Visiting Services

The Kettleman City FRC also continued to offer prenatal and postnatal home visits to families in the Kettleman City service area regardless of family income. The program serves expectant parents and families with young children 0-2 years of age. Home educators conducted both virtual and in-person home visits in 2021–22 using the Parents as Teachers (PAT) evidence-based curriculum. Home educators also delivered Raising a Reader bags and educational activity packets to families as an evidence-based strategy to promote early literacy development. In 2021–22, home visitors delivered 153 in-person and virtual visits with 12 parents and 13 children and distributed 169 Raising a Reader activity bags.



Developmental Screenings

First 5 Kings County aims to increase the number of children who receive developmental screenings. There is specific focus on maximizing the number of children screened prior to their 3rd birthday, which is the optimal age for delivering early intervention services to remediate developmental delays. Funded partners screen children using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) screening tool. For the current fiscal year, funded partners completed 257 screenings. This included 114 screenings conducted through the Hanford Family Connections, 1-3 screenings conducted through the Lemoore Family Connection, and 40 screenings conducted by PAT home visitors deployed through the Kettleman City FRC. Eighty-two percent of children (82%) were screened using the English language version of the ASQ and 18% were screened in Spanish. The 2021–22 contract year was the first year that PAT screening results were recorded in electronic data systems.

Fifty-two percent (52%) of children screened were under the age of 3. More than half (52%) of children were identified with at least one area of concern, indicating a potential delay. The percentage of children identified with suspected delays was highest on measures of communication (15%), fine motor skills (14%), and personal-social skills (14%). Once a suspected delay is identified, children can be referred to appropriate services in their communities for further assessment.

Exhibit 9. **Developmental Screening Results** (n=257)

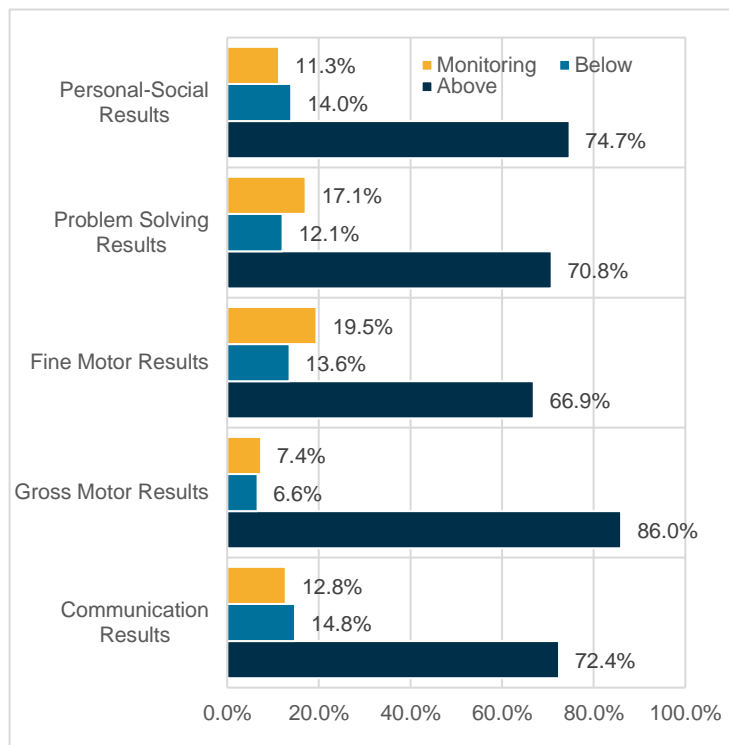
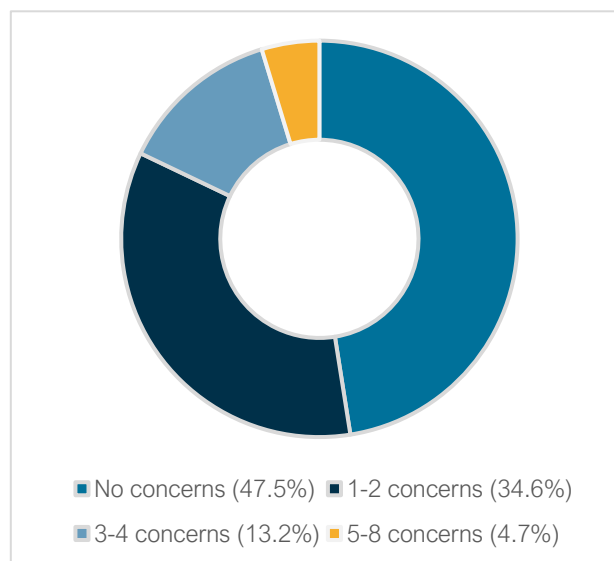


Exhibit 10. **Overall Concerns among Children Screened**



Resource & Referral and Coordinated Services

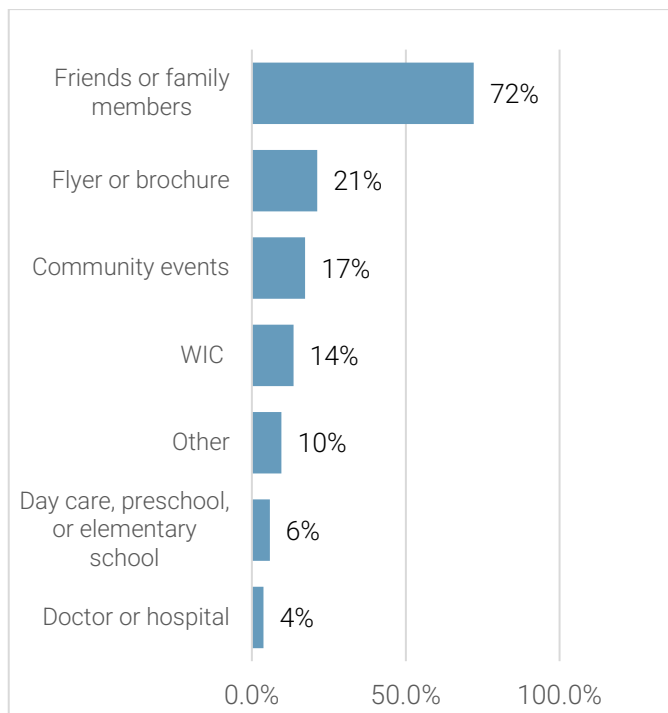
FRCs offer access to a range of services for children and families provide on-site and through referral. Many of these services are co-located at FRC locations and are coordinated through partnerships with other community-based providers and agencies. FRCs delivered 821 units of coordinated services to 106 unduplicated parents or caregivers in 2021–22. Services included parent education workshops, behavioral health services, food distributions, healthcare enrollment assistance, breastfeeding support, and car seat installation and safety training. FRC staff also provided resource assistance (e.g., translation, application assistance, incentive closet) to 100 parents, and referred 64 parents and caregivers to providers in the community. Community partners in 2021–22 included Kings View Behavioral Health, CalViva, La Leche League, and CalFresh Healthy Living UC Cooperative Extension.

FRC Parent Survey Results

To learn more about the experiences of families who accessed services through the FRCs, parents were invited to participate in a voluntary survey administered from April to May 2022. All four FRC centers participated. Parents completed the survey electronically from a portable device using a scannable QR code. Seventy percent of parents/caregivers completed the survey form in English and 29% completed the survey in Spanish. More than 100 parents and caregivers participated.

FRC Visibility and Outreach

Exhibit 11. How Parents Learned About FRC Resources



Parents were first asked to share information on how they learned about the services and resources that were available through their community FRC. Nearly three-quarters (72%) reported hearing about the FRC through word of mouth from friends or family members. Other leading sources of information included flyers, brochures, or other print outreach materials (21%), information shared at community events (17%), and through WIC programs (14%). Few parents learned about FRC services through their children's daycare, preschool, or elementary school (6%) or through their healthcare providers (4%). This suggests that additional marketing activities could be beneficial for outreach and engagement efforts.

Service and Staffing Quality

Parents were then asked to evaluate the quality of the services they received through the FRC:

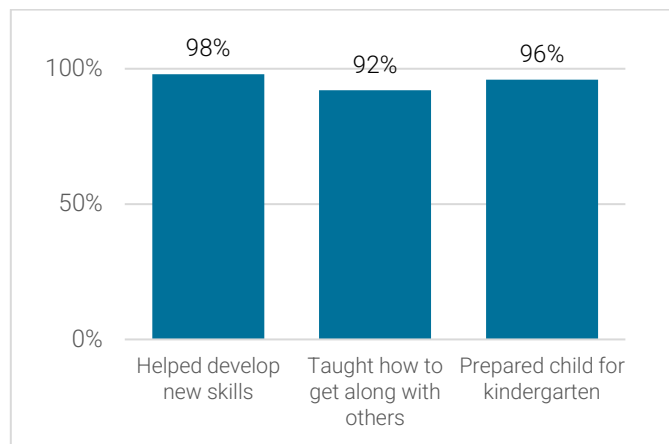
- 97% of parents 'strongly agreed' that the location was convenient;
- 95% 'strongly agreed' that FRCs offered a good choice of services and activities;
- 89% 'strongly agreed' that activities were offered at convenient times; and,
- 84% 'strongly agreed' that if the FRC was not in their community, they would have had trouble finding similar activities for their children.

Parents universally agreed that FRC staff were helpful (97%), interacted with parents and children in a positive way (98%), and made families feel welcomed (98%).

Child and Family Outcomes

Parents also attributed positive changes in their children's learning and development to their participation in FRC programs.

Exhibit 12. Parents Who 'Strongly Agreed' on Positive Developmental Outcomes



Child and Family Outcomes (continued)

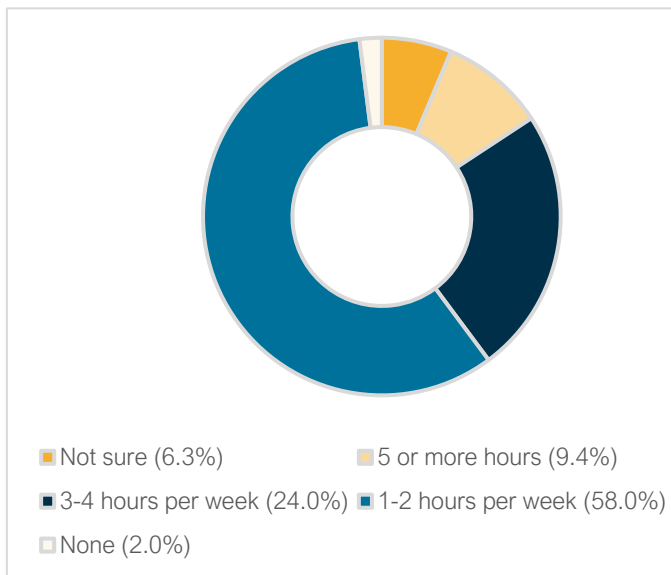
- 98% of parents felt that FRC programs helped their children develop new skills;
- 96% felt that programs helped prepare their children for kindergarten;
- 92% felt that FRC activities taught their children how to get all with their same-age peers.

Parents also had an opportunity to share perceptions of how participation in FRC services had impacted parenting knowledge and practices.

- 90% 'strongly agreed' that they understood more about their children's growth and development;
- 89% of parents 'strongly agreed' that they knew more about activities they could do at home with their children;
- 85% 'strongly agreed' that they felt more confident as a parent;
- 73% 'strongly agreed' that they felt more connected to their community;
- 66% 'strongly agreed' that they had access to information or resources to promote healthy pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Parents who attended FRCs in their community also shared information about how frequently they read with their children. About 60% of parents indicated that they read two hours per week or less, which underscores the need for structured programs, such as the FRC ECE programs, which focus on early literacy development.

Exhibit 13. **Frequency of Parents Reading with their Children**



When asked to identify the most important benefits of attending FRC programs and activities in their community, parents offered various responses:

- 48% of responses focused on opportunities for their children to socialize with other children;
- 27% of responses noted opportunities for learning, development, and enrichment;
- 8% of responses identified benefits of preschool or kindergarten readiness;
- 6% focused on parent education, for example, opportunities to learn about pregnancy and children's early development;
- 5% identified other benefits for parents, such as having opportunities to meet other families in the community and to engage with their own children through structured learning opportunities;
- 3% of responses focused on the value of having access to community services and resources, including mental health support services;
- 3% of responses referenced the value of positive interactions with FRC staff.

Evaluation Summary

The First 5 Kings County 2021—22 Annual Evaluation Report details the scope and reach of Commission investments in early education, health, and family support services for Kings County families with young children. The report profiles child and family needs within the community and highlights the efforts of funded partners, working in collaboration with First 5 staff and the Commission, to positively impact the lives of children 0-5 countywide.

The 2021—22 program year was the second year of a five-year strategic plan. Under the five-year plan, the Commission continued to invest in four key strategic initiatives—the School Readiness Initiative, the Family Resource Center Initiative, the Early Care and Education Initiative, and the New Projects Initiative—expending nearly \$1.2 million in contracts with funded partners for the 2021—22 fiscal year. Collectively, funded partners reached 2,228 children and 1,898 parents and caregivers. These investments supported a mixture of direct service programs, professional development opportunities, and new infrastructure aimed at improving child health, improving early learning and development, strengthening families, and promoting systems integration.

The 2021—22 program year marked a return to in-person services following the COVID-19 pandemic. Although COVID had temporarily disrupted service delivery and impacted staffing and service demand, it also enabled programs to introduce new virtual options for reaching children and families. Funded partners continued to offer virtual programming in response to community needs and preferences, although most parents, when surveyed, indicated a preference for in-person services (80%).

First 5 Kings County partners documented several key accomplishments from the 2021—22 fiscal year that include the following:

- The UCP Parent & Me and Special Needs programs served a combined total of 136 children who were at risk for developmental delays, filling a critical gap in early childhood systems of care.
- Parent & Me programs screened 200 unduplicated children for developmental delays in 2021—22 and served 18 special needs children in inclusion classrooms where they benefitted from interactions with typically developing children.
- Parents who attended Parent & Me programs expressed strong positive sentiments about their involvement, most notably, 93% of parents 'strongly agreed' that they understood more about their children's growth and development and 88% felt more confident in their parenting due to their program involvement.
- Kindergarten transition activities were supported across 16 high need public elementary schools to promote school readiness. L2L schools reached an estimated 46% of incoming kindergarteners in public schools countywide. More than three quarters of children (78%) attending L2L schools were socio-economically disadvantaged and 29% were English Language Learners. The L2L project also distributed 1,379 new backpacks filled with basic school supplies and learning resources.
- FRCs served 522 children and 471 parents and caregivers and recorded 15,137 service contacts countywide, averaging 14.9 contacts per family. These figures represent a 44% decrease in service volume from the previous fiscal year, underscoring the effect of declining revenues on service reach. FRCs continued to offer an array of health, education, childcare, and family support services in both virtual and in-person formats and to coordinate with community partners to expand service offerings. FRCs also screened 257 children for developmental delays. Half of those screened (52%) were under 3 years of age, when early intervention is most effective. Parents perceived strong benefits from their FRC involvement. Ninety-eight percent of parents felt the FRCs helped their children develop new skills and 96% believed programs helped prepare their children for kindergarten.
- The Kings United Way used First 5 funds to support the development of the *Unite Us* referral exchange to establish a countywide network of care. The Referral Exchange currently supports 34 active user organizations including representatives from the healthcare, education, and social service sectors.
- CARES continued to promote children's access to quality ECE opportunities by providing coaching, technical assistance, and stipends to build the capacity of the ECE workforce. The program reached 185 providers over the course of the 2021-22 program year.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Specific recommendations to guide ongoing implementation of the First 5 Kings County 2020-2023 Strategic Plan include the following:

Build partner capacity to pursue new funding opportunities to supplement declining revenues.

Kings County funded partners continue to navigate reductions in Commission funding tied to declining tobacco tax revenues. This has been largely achieved by downsizing operations (e.g., closing locations, reducing staff); however, without an infusion of new resources and with escalating program costs, capacity will become increasingly limited. Notably, this year FRCs experienced a more than 40% decrease in program volume compared to the previous fiscal year. To continue to serve families and communities, First 5 Kings County and its funded partners need to aggressively pursue new avenues for fund development, leverage existing resources, and work to expand partnership opportunities to supplement Commission investments. This may require a stronger leadership role from the county and the Commission to help build the professional capacity of partner agency staff to seek and obtain new funding sources (e.g., supporting proposal development, fiscal management). This would help partners, such as FRCs, build internal capacity, while expanding the breadth and depth of available services (e.g., early childhood behavioral health services). This includes services referenced in the First 5 Kings County Strategic Plan that are not yet widely implemented (e.g., prenatal education, breastfeeding support, smoking cessation, parent education, health screenings).

Adopt and implement evidence-based programs (EBPs) and practices with fidelity for parents and caregivers and young children. Funded partners should continue to seek ways to integrate EPBs, best practices, and model curricula that are culturally responsive and that address the needs of children, families and communities served. Using EPBs in the field of early childhood ensures that knowledge and research findings of professional experts guide programming, and that program strategies are proven effective for achieving positive outcomes for children and families.

Increase visibility and coordination of First 5 and other early childhood and family services. UCP and FRCs continued to offer an array of early education and enrichment programming, family events, and material resources to benefit young children and their families. Parents held strong positive perceptions of both service quality and effects on their parenting and their children's development. To maximize these services' benefits, particularly given resource constraints, partners should focus on outreach and promoting programs throughout the community to increase visibility and ensure that classes and other resources are fully utilized when offered (e.g., maximize classroom capacity). Funded partners should also seek new opportunities for coordination with other early childhood and family providers, including preschools. The Kings United Way Referral Exchange focuses on adopting a countywide referral system using the *Unite Us* digital platform, which will allow programs to coordinate service delivery and track referrals and service utilization across systems and funded partners. Building the *Unite Us* platform should be a high priority, given that uptake has been slower than anticipated.

Strengthening data collection and reporting systems to demonstrate programmatic outcomes more effectively. First 5 California expects counties to track unduplicated participants across funded partners to create more accurate accounting of program reach. First 5 Kings County's data infrastructure has lagged, limiting the capacity for more robust evaluation of programs and services. First 5 staff should continue to identify low-cost data solutions for this purpose and should push to utilize the *Unite Us* platform as a data-monitoring tool as more organizations begin to join. These data system enhancements and accountability measures can help partners monitor program performance longitudinally and be better positioned to use data to assess outcomes in support of future planning and decision-making.