



The County Connection

IN THIS ISSUE:

APRIL 2009

[Learning Begins at Birth](#)

[Federal Legislative Update
American Reinvestment and
Recovery Act \(ARRA\)](#)

[First 5 California Facilitates
Federal Issues and
Opportunities Meeting](#)

[Early Learning Quality
Improvement System Advisory
Committee](#)

[Developing Quality in Early
Childhood Educator
Competencies](#)

[Conference Promotes Health
and Nutritional Values](#)

[Asian American Media
Enthusiastic about Kit For New
Parents](#)

[And The Award Goes To...
Hands-on Health Mobile Van!](#)

[Training the Trainer for Better
Science Learning Outcomes](#)

[First 5 California Expands Its
Online Presence](#)

Learning Begins at Birth

Early child development experts and stakeholders from across the nation converged on Sacramento last month to mobilize a movement of advocacy on behalf of California's youngest children.

The Water Cooler Conference, *Learning Begins at Birth: The Larger Education Conversation*, hosted by the Advancement Project, took place March 24 and 25 at the Sheraton Grand in Sacramento. More than 400 stakeholders attended the engaging policy forum.

"We have some of the best minds in the country to learn from today," said Susan Buffet of the Buffet Early Childhood Fund. "You are here because you are an activist for justice, an activist for equal opportunity and an activist who isn't afraid to get his hands dirty."



First 5's Kris Perry, Susan A. Buffet, Chair of the Buffet Early Childhood Fund and First 5 California State Commissioner and President of the Advanement Project Molly Munger at the 2009 Water Cooler Conference.

Attendees included parents, teachers, early learning providers, higher education administrators, business and labor leaders, policy experts, philanthropists and a wide array of health and education stakeholders and advocates for the state's youngest children.

The conference featured interactive panel discussions about the development of high quality learning environments for children birth to age 5. First 5 California Executive Director Kris Perry reminded attendees, “Nelson Mandela said it perfectly: ‘There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way it treats its children.’ How we treat our children today influences who they will be tomorrow and this influences how our communities will be shaped in the future.”

The Advancement Project and First 5 California co-hosted the conference with support from various child advocate organizations, including The Buffet Early Childhood Fund, the First 5 Association of California, Children Now, The Atlas Foundation, California Community Foundation, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, and Preschool California, among others.

Panelists included a variety of distinguished speakers from child development organizations, foundations and public policy outlets.



Kris Perry chatted with Dr. Jack Shonkoff, author of "Neurons to Neighborhoods."

Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University and author of the seminal text *Neurons to Neighborhoods* delivered an intriguing presentation about the science of brain development in children. He conveyed the importance of positive interaction with children from birth and early intervention. “If we don’t do anything early on, we’re going to pay a huge price later on,” Shonkoff said.

Various moderators, including, The Advancement Project President Molly Munger, Ounce of Prevention Fund President Harriet Meyer, Children Now President Ted Lempert and California Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Education, led panel discussions emphasizing best practices in preschool delivery of services and improving the quality of caregiver services, among other critical topics.

Other participants included Jack O'Connell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction; Camille Maben, Director of the Child Development Division at the California Department of Education; Blair H. Taylor, President and CEO of the Los Angeles Urban League; and Patty Siegel, Executive Director of the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, among other distinguished stakeholders.

Many of the panelists elaborated on developing program standards and creating a high-quality workforce within the early childhood learning and development field.

True to the original form of the Water Cooler concept, attendees engaged in multiple workgroups addressing specific issues. During the *Critical Issues Within the Existing System* workgroup, co-chairs, Debby Armstrong and Nina Buthee delivered recommendations that focused on caregiver facility licensing, additional training for providers, fingerprinting and increasing reimbursement rates.

In the *Workforce Development and Certification* workgroup, panelists discussed the need to increase the quality of service delivery and create a competent workforce within the early learning field. They also emphasized the need to link into national efforts to develop a professional development blueprint through six essential policy areas.

First 5 California Deputy Director of Program Management Sarah Neville-Morgan told the audience, "While a variety of activities are in place, California lacks a comprehensive and coherent early learning workforce development system."

Jenny Paul-Rappaport from the Advancement Project summarized all the workgroup reports and shared that the workgroups are still in the process of building consensus on recommendations and then prioritizing the recommendations.

The Water Cooler Conference concluded with a panel discussion from State Senator Tom Torlakson of Contra Costa County, State Senator Gloria Romero of Los Angeles and California Secretary of Education Glen Thomas.

“Today we heard a lot about science, developing a quality workforce, thinking big, being realistic and doing what works,” Kris Perry summarized at the conclusion of the conference as the stakeholders adjourned committed to developing higher quality education outcomes for the nation's youngest children.

[back to top](#)

Federal Legislative Update

American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA)

The recent passage of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) could result in millions of new federal dollars for California in education, health, early childhood and many other programs. First 5 California, along with its partners, has a unique opportunity to influence how state and local institutions choose to invest in building the early learning infrastructure in this state. First 5 California Executive Director Kris Perry sees a great opportunity to strategically access these dollars for critical infrastructure projects necessary to improve quality and expand access to early learning programs for children 0 to 5.

[back to top](#)

First 5 California Facilitates Federal Issues and Opportunities Meeting

On March 16, First 5 California hosted the second meeting of the Federal Issues and Opportunities Workgroup. This Workgroup first convened in January to bring 0 to 5 stakeholders together to optimally prepare

California for the anticipated federal stimulus funds.

This most recent meeting featured speakers Catriona MacDonald, policy advisor of the First Five Years Fund and president of Linchpin Strategies, and Elliot Regenstein, a partner at Education Counsel LLC. They shared significant information about the federal landscape and the importance of shared 0 to 5 priorities.

In addition, the workgroup subcommittees discussed the major funding streams related to early childhood education, including the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start/Early Head Start, Individuals with Education Act (IDEA), Title I, Title IIA and Stabilization funds.

“The stimulus funds for Head Start and Early Head Start provide a momentous opportunity for California to provide greater opportunities for children to receive quality early education,” said Kimberly McDaniel, a First 5 California education consultant.

First 5 California continues to develop partnerships with WestEd, Preschool California and the California Head Start Association to improve California’s readiness and expansion of Early Head Start access.

[back to top](#)

Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee

With the passage of SB 1629, a bill written by Senator Darrell Steinberg and signed into law last year, California is now required to develop an Early Learning Quality Improvement System. On March 23, an advisory committee formed to implement this work and convened its first meeting at the California Department of Education to begin creating the system.

Once the Quality Improvement System is developed, it will serve as the framework to improve the overall quality of early learning programs in the state.

The advisory committee consists of 13 members from state government and the education field as stipulated in

SB 1629. First 5 California Executive Director Kris Perry serves as a committee member.

“This is an amazing opportunity to figure out a quality system for California. It is an enormous undertaking that requires us to dream big about creating the quality programs our young children deserve,” Perry said.

The first meeting established the presence of all committee members and provided an overview of early learning programs and quality rating and improvement systems from around the country. Guest speakers from California and other states addressed the national perspective of delivering quality improvement systems and provided examples of best practices.

The committee completed the day by establishing strategic goals and defining the scope of work for the next two years.

The committee acknowledged the importance of high quality early learning experiences in preparing young children for success in school and life. In addition to developing the policy and implementing the system, SB 1629 requires the committee to submit a final report to the Legislature and the Governor by December 31, 2010.

Visit the [SB 1629 Web site](#) for more information about the Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee and related updates.

[back to top](#)

Developing Quality in Early Childhood Educator Competencies

The California Department of Education, Child Development Division, First 5 California, and WestEd are collaborating to develop Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Competencies. The finished guidelines will outline the knowledge and skills teachers need to support the development and learning of California’s youngest children.

Early childhood organizations, advocates and

stakeholders convened on March 24 at the Holiday Inn Capitol Plaza in Sacramento to gather ideas and provide input for developing these Competencies.

First 5 California Deputy Director of Program Management Sarah Neville-Morgan provided opening remarks, establishing the goals and timeline for development.

The Competencies are now being drafted and a second stakeholders meeting will be held in May to receive additional input for this critical document.

[back to top](#)

Conference Promotes Health and Nutritional Values

First 5 California participated in the 2009 Network for a Healthy California conference March 4 and 5 at the Sacramento Convention Center. The theme of the Conference, “Inspiring Healthy Change Together,” attracted more than 800 participants from throughout the state.

Conference presenters addressed issues related to nutritional food policy, factors that drive food purchases and eating patterns of both children and adults. Workshops focused on improving the health of children and families in a myriad of settings through innovative approaches and strategies.



Kit for New Parents on display at the 2009 Network for a Healthy California conference.

First 5 California's exhibit offered *Yummy for Your Tummy* recipe books, the *Kit for New Parents* and useful fact sheets about First 5 programs.

Lupe Almer from the First 5 California Program Management Team and Jamiann Collins-Lopez and Nasim Assadi from the Communications division shared valuable nutritional facts and answered attendees' questions, in addition to directing them to the First 5 California Web site.

The Network for a Healthy California is a statewide movement of local, state and national partners collectively working to improve the health status of low-income Californians through increased fruit and vegetable consumption and daily physical activity.

[back to top](#)

Asian American Media Enthusiastic about *Kit For New Parents*

First 5 county commissions from Alameda, San Francisco and San Mateo held a successful media roundtable on Wednesday, March 11 at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center. Executive directors, specialists and county commissioners highlighted free and low-cost services and resources available to Bay Area Asian American and Pacific Islander families, including the recently released Asian language *Kit for New Parents*.

Dr. Ricky Choi, head of the pediatric department at Asian Health Services, provided remarks on the usefulness of the *Kit* and the important role parents play in ensuring their children's health and well-being. Asian Health Services is a community clinic funded by First 5 Alameda County.



Ann S. Chun, Cultural Access Specialist at First 5 Alameda County speaks to the media about launching the Asian-language Kit for New Parents.

Eight media outlets from Chinese, Korean and Japanese publications attended the roundtable, including KTSF, the largest Asian American television broadcast station in the Bay Area. *Sing Tao*, *World Journal*, the *Korean Daily* and several other top Asian American media outlets also attended.

The event generated positive media coverage in the APIA Bay Area community, as well as calls from reporters and parents for more information about ordering the *Kit*. If your commission receives any Kit requests from Asian-language speaking parents or caregivers, please direct them to the following Asian-language numbers: (800) 597-9366 for Mandarin or Cantonese; (800) 597-9511 for Korean; or (800) 597-9855 for Vietnamese.

[back to top](#)

And The Award Goes To. . .Hands-on Health Mobile Van!

First 5 California's family friendly Hands-on Health mobile van won acclaim for its innovative educational tools and color display when it received the "Best Exhibit" award at the Capitol City Black Expo held February 27 – March 1.



The Hands-on Health van was the most popular attraction among children at the Black Expo.

More than 5,700 families visited the award-winning exhibit where parents, caregivers and their children learned about living a healthy lifestyle. While children participated in fun educational activities, like the Fruit and Vegetable Toss and the Wheel of Health game, parents and caregivers learned about First 5 programs and services. Families also received information about free health resources available from First 5 Sacramento partners, including Sacramento County Black Infant Health and Cover the Kids, a local health initiative offering access to affordable comprehensive health coverage for children.

[back to top](#)

Better Science Learning Outcomes

Sid the Science Kid, the children's science and education series co-sponsored by First 5 California, the Henson Company and PBS, provides numerous opportunities for children, parents and caregivers to learn science concepts and participate in scientific exploration in creative and innovative ways.

The National Research Council of the National Academies released a report in January that found educational television was an effective way to teach science to children. The report states, "When children watch science-themed educational television programs regularly, they make important gains in conceptual understanding and in their understanding of science processes."

The study also notes that television viewing is particularly beneficial due to its accessibility to nearly everyone (with 98% of homes having television sets) and is effective at reaching low literacy populations.

On Tuesday March 3, KCET and local PBS station KVIE held a *Sid the Science Kid Train the Trainer Workshop* at the KVIE studios in Sacramento. Northern California PBS station representatives, educators and child care providers attended the workshop.

The *Train the Trainer Workshop* provides participants with additional tools and strategies to instruct parent and childcare providers with intricate educational strategies incorporated into *Sid the Science Kid*.

The instruction instills parents and caregivers of preschool children with the confidence, knowledge and resources they need to nurture and guide their children's science learning.

Sid the Science Kid supports adult-child interactions that spark children's natural curiosity, and creates fun and memorable experiences. By using the series and the off-air extension resources, parents and caregivers can help children learn how to explore and understand the world around them.

Dr. Faith Rogow, child development specialist and developer of curriculum and program advisor for *Sid the Science Kid* and the PBS series *A Place of Our Own*, presented the valuable training session.

For more information on the report visit "Learning Science in Informal Environments: People, Places, and Pursuits." The National Academies Press, January 2009 at www.nap.edu.

[back to top](#)

First 5 California Expands Its Online Presence

First 5 California launched its Smoke-free Cars campaign on March 18. The campaign employs an innovative strategy and expands its online presence by unveiling profile pages on the social networking sites

MySpace Latino and Mitodobebe.

These sites effectively connect young and Internet-savvy Latino moms with First 5 California messages about the dangers of secondhand smoke to children and adults.

Through these popular platforms, parents and caregivers are engaged and educated about the valuable resources First 5 California provides, including the *Kit for New Parents*, *Yummy for Your Tummy* and the Hands-on Health mobile van.

The online profiles also call attention to SB 7, the state law that bans smoking in cars while minors are present and features the California Smokers' Helpline (1-800-NO-BUTTS). The public education campaign is a collaborative effort between First 5 California, Farmers Insurance, Pep Boys, and the Black Infant Health Program.

We invite you to view the profiles and become a friend of First 5 California by visiting MySpace Latino at <http://www.myspace.com/primeros5california> and Mitodobebe at <http://mi.todobebe.com/primeros-5-california>

[back to top](#)

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