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First 5 San Benito believes that learning begins at birth, and that all children deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential in school and life. However, exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—such as poverty, cultural and linguistic isolation, discrimination, unstable housing, barriers to accessing health care, lack of access to high-quality early learning experiences, substance use, mental illness, and family or community violence—can disrupt the developing brain and threaten children’s lifelong health and well-being. As the number of adverse experiences in a child’s life increases, so does the risk for developmental delays, behavioral problems, and poor health outcomes later in life, such as heart disease, diabetes, substance abuse and depression.

Young children who experience adversity in their homes and neighborhoods are at greater risk of entering school without the foundational social-emotional and academic skills they need to succeed in school. This “readiness gap” can manifest later on as the “achievement gap” – or disparities in educational outcomes such as reading and math proficiency and high school graduation. Lower educational attainment, in turn, increases the difficulty of finding good-paying jobs, which contributes to the intergenerational cycles of stress and adversity that set the stage for the achievement gap in the next generation of children.

For these reasons, First 5 SB will continue to invest in effective, culturally-sensitive programs that enhance the language and literacy skills of child and adult learners. This two-generation approach recognizes parents and caregivers as children’s first and most important teachers and offers tools and support to teach children language and literacy skills that are essential building blocks of school readiness. Offering literacy programs for both children and adult English Learners helps boost family literacy skills and foster a lifelong love of reading and learning together.

First 5’s direct investments in literacy programs will help ensure that all young children in San Benito county have access to books, language- and literacy-rich environments, and high-quality early learning experiences at home and in their communities, prior to entering kindergarten. These intentional investments are an important aspect of ensuring that all children – regardless of race, ethnicity, language, income, or other socio-cultural characteristics – are socially, emotionally, and academically ready for school and have equitable opportunities to succeed in school and life.

<b>STRATEGIC INITIATIVE: SAN BENITO COUNTY CHILDREN, YOUTH &amp; FAMILIES IMPACT CENTER</b>	
<b>ANNUAL INVESTMENT BY 2022: \$1,000,000</b>	
<b>GOAL:</b> Co-create a trauma-informed Children, Youth & Families Impact Center that demonstrates the effectiveness of therapeutic approaches within an early education and intervention program for children and families who have experienced trauma and adversity.	
<b>OUTCOMES:</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. First 5 SB and community partners develop local evidence of effective approaches and interventions in each of F5 SB’s strategic initiatives.</li> <li>2. Multi-system, cross-sector partners establish a continuum of care across the spectrum of promotion, prevention and intervention</li> <li>3. First 5 SB and community partners utilize local evidence and community-level outcomes to influence systems and policy changes and create opportunities to access funds from diverse funding streams.</li> <li>4. The San Benito County Children, Youth &amp; Families Impact Council is established and advocates for a designated Children, Youth &amp; Families Impact Fund.</li> <li>5. F5 SB staff and community partners deepen their practice and increase their capacity to meet the needs of the most vulnerable families in the community, including teen parents, welfare and foster children, food insecure families, and those who have suffered abuse and neglect.</li> </ol>	
STRATEGIES	F5 SB ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-system, cross-sector partnerships</li> <li>• Demonstration site offering high-quality early learning opportunities with integrated health, wellness and family support services</li> <li>• Developmental screenings and assessments</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> <li>• Training on social-emotional development, self-regulation, neurodevelopment</li> <li>• Resource exchange and stewardship</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> <li>• Communications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene partners across systems and sectors</li> <li>• Establish an interagency San Benito County Children, Youth &amp; Families Impact Council</li> <li>• Establish the San Benito County Children, Youth &amp; Families Impact Center as a demonstration site, in partnership with the Impact Council</li> <li>• Provide opportunities and incentives for early childhood educators to participate in collaborative, reflective learning processes at the demonstration site.</li> <li>• Fund programs and/or align partnerships and resources that foster high-quality early care and education and are grounded in: Infant mental health, Cultural</li> </ul>

<b>STRATEGIC INITIATIVE: SAN BENITO COUNTY CHILDREN, YOUTH &amp; FAMILIES IMPACT CENTER</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative engagement and leadership</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>	<p>responsiveness, Reflective practice, Attuned interactions, and Trauma-informed care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate integration of neurodevelopment into Impact Center programs and practices.</li> <li>• Evaluate Impact Center Initiative and share outcomes with strategic stakeholders.</li> <li>• Build public and political will to establish a dedicated children and youth fund in San Benito county</li> <li>• Advocate for and influence local, regional, state and federal policies that increase investments in a trauma-informed family and child services system in San Benito county.</li> </ul>
<b>INDICATORS OF SUCCESS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• San Benito County Children, Youth &amp; Families Impact Center established.</li> <li>• Other indicators TBD with partners</li> </ul>	

**Rationale for Investing in the San Benito County Children, Youth, and Families Impact Center**

The first five years of life – starting prenatally – are vitally important for building a strong foundation for lifelong health and well-being. During this critical period of development, a healthy brain forms 700 new neural connections every second, reaching 80% of the size of an adult’s brain by age three. Responsive, nurturing caregiving in safe, engaging environments fosters healthy brain development, creating a strong foundation for children to develop the social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills needed to thrive in school and throughout life.

However, not all children begin life with the same strong foundation. Many children live in families and communities experiencing tremendous social, economic, and environmental challenges – such as poverty, cultural and linguistic isolation, discrimination, unstable housing, barriers to accessing health care, lack of access to high-quality early learning experiences, substance use, mental illness, and family or community violence. Chronic stress and adversity disrupts healthy brain development

and increases the risk for developmental delays, social-emotional or behavioral problems, low educational attainment, and poor health outcomes later in life, such as heart disease, diabetes, substance abuse and depression.

This does not have to be the reality for San Benito's children, though. A growing body of research by scientists and economists, such as Nobel prize-winner James Heckman, demonstrates that investing in high-quality early childhood development programs – such as early care and education, developmental and behavioral health services, and parenting and family support – yields the greatest benefits to children, families and society. In fact, investments in high-quality early childhood development programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% annual return on investment by improving life outcomes related to health, education, employment, and social behaviors, which in turn decreases the need for costly treatment and remediation services.<sup>xii</sup> Heckman states, "The highest rate of return... comes from investing as early as possible. Starting at age three or four is too little too late, as it fails to recognize that skills beget skills in a complementary and dynamic way. Efforts should focus on the first years [of childhood] for the greatest efficiency and effectiveness."<sup>xiii</sup>

While the level of knowledge about the importance of early childhood and the impact of trauma and adversity in childhood is growing among local, state, and national leaders, the service environments that address children's early developmental needs are often fragmented, under-resourced, and reflect a "one-size-fits-all" approach designed to meet the needs of the service provider or system, rather than the needs of the child or family. As a result, the systems that intend to support children and families often end up reinforcing or perpetuating the effects of trauma, rather than facilitating healing and resiliency.

In recognition of this dynamic, First 5 SB has organized local leaders around building a sustainable, outcome-based collaborative planning effort as part of its strategy to strengthen systems and networks. Members of the Hollister Literacy Collaborative (the Collaborative) have worked together on past efforts to resolve social equity barriers in a local park and understand the need for deeper systemic work to address the underlying issues that exist within the community.

Partners in the Hollister Literacy Collaborative share a value of investing in early education and prevention and determining the potency and developmental window for intervention strategies that keep children and youth in school and away from the juvenile

justice system. When the Collaborative was initially established (during First 5's 2014-17 strategic plan), the partners adopted third grade literacy scores as a common indicator to measure, as it is a key predictor of later outcomes, such as high school graduation rates or involvement in the justice system.

Soon after selecting this common indicator, a fact-finding process that included one-on-one stakeholder interviews and a review of data and studies led the Collaborative to re-examine common assumptions about the presence and extent of gaps in academic outcomes based on language, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Countywide data revealed that although there were differences between student groups in academic outcomes such as graduation rates and completion of required courses for admission to a UC and/or CSU, the differences were not as stark as originally believed. However, a deeper look at other countywide school data revealed some concerning patterns, such as among students who were suspended, 155 were Hispanic or Latino, 46 were White, and three were Asian. Of those students, only Hispanic/Latino students were suspended for "defiance" both in school and out.

These findings led the Collaborative to further explore the impact of historical and cultural trauma, and acknowledge the tendency of educators, service providers, and policymakers alike to treat differences in outcomes as shortfalls and lay the responsibility for school success in the lived experiences of children, rather than on the education system itself (Shields, 2004).<sup>xiv</sup> This, in turn, led the Collaborative to shift away from focusing on third grade reading proficiency as the main predictor of future educational outcomes, and instead adopt a shared goal of building a responsive, coordinated, trauma-informed child and family service system, "in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system, including children, caregivers and service providers."<sup>xv</sup>

To this end, First 5 San Benito will invest in this strategic initiative and work with partners to establish the San Benito County Children, Youth & Families Impact Center as a framework for creating the desired:

- **Impact** on outcomes related to the health and well-being of children, families, and the community;
- **Influence**, or changes in policies, systems, and public opinion that are necessary to create and sustain investments in a trauma-informed family and child services system;

- **Leverage**, or changes in the way that service providers, funders, policymakers, and community members work together to utilize existing resources and attract additional investments in children and families.

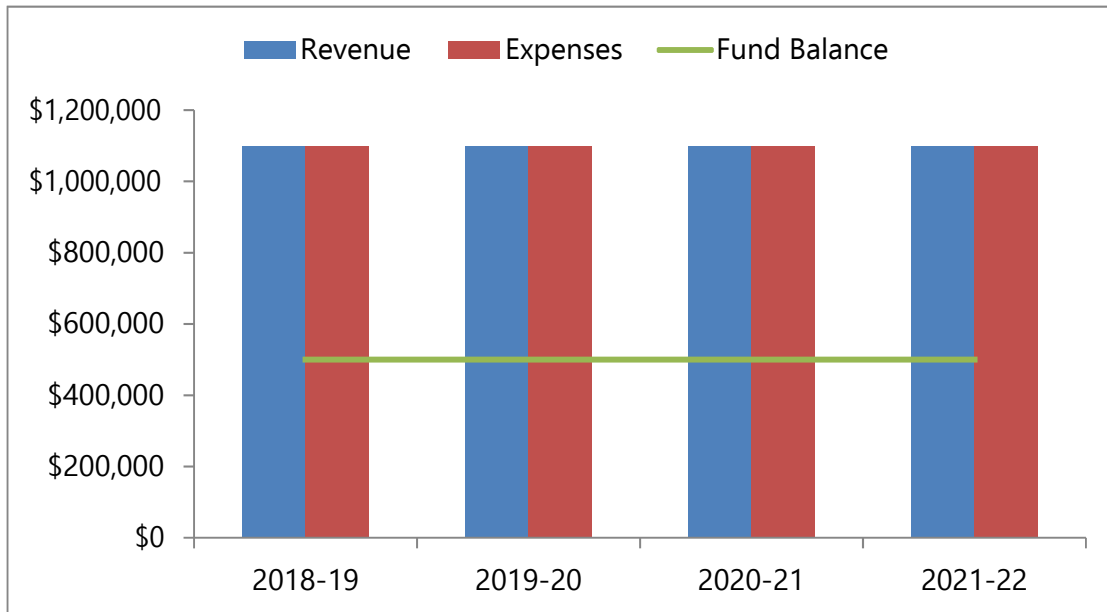
The partnerships, programs, and practices of the San Benito County Children, Youth & Families Impact Center will be grounded in the best available science and local wisdom regarding:

- Infant mental health
- Cultural responsiveness
- Reflective practice
- Attuned interactions
- Trauma-informed family and child services systems

The ultimate goal of the Children, Youth & Families Impact Center is to create a healthier and more equitable community. Implementing a continuum of promotion, prevention, and intervention strategies in First 5 SB's other strategic initiatives can lead to positive changes in parental knowledge, skills, behaviors, health, or conditions for children, youth, adults, and the community. First 5 SB is dedicated to evaluating and measuring which of these strategies creates the most change and positive impacts for individuals and families. Through scientific research, First 5 SB and community partners will demonstrate the effectiveness of various strategies and build a local "evidence base" of effective programs and practices. These results will then be disseminated and used as leverage to influence macro-level systems changes and advocate for policy changes that ensure the changes at the individual and family level are sustained.

## Long-Term Financial Plan

First 5 San Benito’s Prop 10 revenue is projected to remain stable for the duration of this strategic plan, thanks to the small-county allocation funding formula adopted by First 5 California. First 5 SB will receive a baseline allocation of \$650,000 per fiscal year, enabling the Commission to continue making strategic investments while maintaining a healthy fund balance. Additional revenue from Prop 56 and other sources will bring First 5 SB’s annual revenue to approximately \$1.1 million. The chart below reflects the Commission’s updated financial plan.



## Evaluation Plan

First 5 San Benito will contract with an evaluation firm to update its evaluation plan that is aligned with the strategic plan. The Executive Director will support regional and state efforts aimed at shared fiscal and evaluation services among other First 5 counties resulting in lowering costs.

## Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> 2012-2016 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.
- <sup>ii</sup> Ibid
- <sup>iii</sup> California Dept. of Public Health, Center for Health Statistics, Birth Statistical Master Files; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Natality data on CDC WONDER; Martin, J. A., et al. (2015). Births: Final data for 2013. National Vital Statistics Reports, 64(1) (Mar. 2015).
- <sup>iv</sup> Children Now, 2016-17 California County Scorecard of Children's Well-Being, San Benito County. Retrieved from <http://pub.childrennow.org/2016/county/san-benito/>
- <sup>v</sup> Children Now, 2016-17 California County Scorecard of Children's Well-Being, San Benito County.
- <sup>vi</sup> California Department of Education, Data Reporting Office. English Learners Students by Language and Grade, 2017-18. Retrieved from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/content.asp>
- <sup>vii</sup> Children Now, 2016-17 California County Scorecard of Children's Well-Being, San Benito County.
- <sup>viii</sup> Children Now, 2012-13 California County Scorecard of Children's Well-Being, San Benito County. Retrieved from [https://www.childrennow.org/files/CN/2012-CN-CaCountyScorecard\\_complete.pdf](https://www.childrennow.org/files/CN/2012-CN-CaCountyScorecard_complete.pdf)
- <sup>ix</sup> 2017 Child Care Portfolio, California Child Care Resource and Referral Network. Retrieved from [https://www.rrnetwork.org/2017\\_portfolio](https://www.rrnetwork.org/2017_portfolio)
- <sup>x</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xi</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, San Benito County, 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/california/2018/rankings/san-benito/county/outcomes/overall/snapshot>
- <sup>xii</sup> Heckman, J. 2014. Invest in Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy. [www.heckmanequation.org](http://www.heckmanequation.org)
- <sup>xiii</sup> García, Jorge Luis, James J. Heckman, Duncan Ermini Leaf, and María José Prados. "The Life-cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program." (2016). [www.heckmanequation.org](http://www.heckmanequation.org)
- <sup>xiv</sup> Shields, Carolyn M. 2004. "Dialogic Leadership for Social Justice: Overcoming Pathologies of Silence." Educational Administration Quarterly, Vol 40, Issue 1, pp. 109 – 132.
- <sup>xv</sup> <http://www.nctsn.org/resources/topics/creating-trauma-informed-systems>