



First 5 San Benito

**STRATEGIC PLAN
2026-2031**

Introduction

First 5 San Benito was established in 1999 following the passage of Proposition 10 in 1998. This proposition created a dedicated funding stream to support the healthy development of children from the prenatal stage through age five. First 5 San Benito invests in programs and partnerships that promote the well-being of young children and their families by supporting coordinated, high-quality services and partnerships.

For the 2026-2031 Strategic Plan, First 5 San Benito is refining its role to maximize impact within a changing funding landscape. As tobacco tax revenues continue to decline, the Commission is prioritizing strategies that:

Address Gaps and Drive Impact

Focus on areas where First 5 San Benito can uniquely contribute to improved outcomes for children and families.

Leverage and Align Resources

Strengthen partnerships and coordination with existing services to reduce duplication and extend the reach of limited funding.

This plan reflects a shift toward a systems-oriented, partnership-driven approach, ensuring that families are connected to the right services at the right time.



First 5 San Benito is committed to a vision in which children and families thrive at home, in school, within the community, and across the lifespan. Achieving this vision requires strong partnerships and intentional collaboration with local agencies and community-based organizations throughout San Benito County. Through these coordinated efforts, we aim to strengthen and align a comprehensive system of care that effectively supports young children and their families.

Our leadership approach is grounded in collaboration, shared accountability, and a focus on measurable impact. In partnership with stakeholders, we have identified key priority areas to guide our work: strengthening family support systems, advancing child development and early learning opportunities, and promoting the social-emotional well-being of children. These priorities reflect our commitment to building a responsive, equitable, and sustainable network of services that meets the evolving needs of our community.

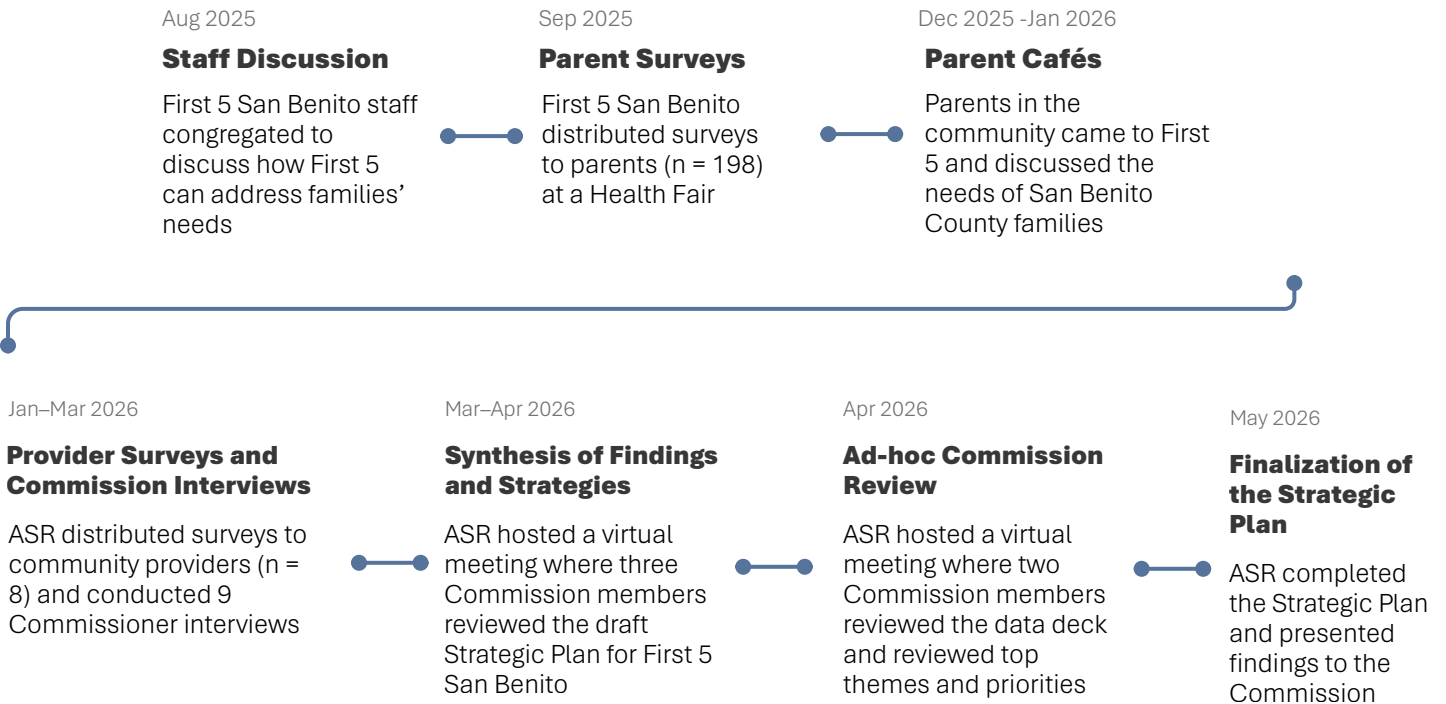
-Luisa Power, First 5 San Benito Executive Director

How We Built This Plan Together

Over eight months, First 5 San Benito staff, Commissioners, parents, community partners, and Applied Survey Research (ASR) worked together to develop this plan. This process ensured that the plan reflects community needs, provider realities, and system-level opportunities. Applied Survey Research synthesized these data and information sources to identify system-level insights that define priorities for this strategic plan.



The Strategic Planning Process



Strategic Plan at a Glance



Vision

San Benito County's children and families thrive at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life.

Purpose

First 5 San Benito invests in early learning, health, and family-centered programs to strengthen the well-being of children prenatal to 5 and their families.

First 5 San Benito Goals

Aligned with First 5 California Result Areas and Reporting Requirements



Improved Family Support

Promote protective factors in families by providing tools and resources that increase parent knowledge, support children's development, strengthen social connections, and provide concrete support in times of need.



Improved Child Development

Increase access to quality early learning experiences by providing linkages to care and professional development to the early learning provider community.



Improved Child Health

Promote health and safety by supporting maternal mental health, increasing early screenings, and ensuring children have access to preventative healthcare and safe environments.



Improved Systems of Care

Strengthen early childhood systems by increasing reach, cross-system collaboration, and resources.

Goal	Improved Family Support	Improved Child Development	Improved Child Health	Improved Systems of Care
Outcomes	<p>Strengthen family protective factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased access to concrete supports ✓ Increased parental resilience and support networks ✓ Increased knowledge of parenting and child development 	<p>Promote early learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased access to high-quality early learning and child care ✓ Improved early literacy ✓ Strengthened early childhood provider capacity 	<p>Promote maternal, infant, and early childhood health and well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased achievement of developmental milestones ✓ Improved access to preventive child health services 	<p>Build accessible, coordinated, and sustainable systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased family and provider awareness and navigation of early childhood services ✓ Increased partnerships and system alignment ✓ Increased resources to develop or sustain essential services
Strategies	<p>Resource referral and navigation</p> <p>Parent groups & peer support (e.g., Family Fun Nights; Talk, Read, Sing)</p> <p>Parent education (e.g., New Parent Kits, Positive discipline, Triple P)</p> <p>Home Visiting support</p>	<p>Referrals and linkages to child care (e.g., to Go Kids)</p> <p>Early literacy programming (Raising a Reader, DPIL)</p> <p>Partnerships with libraries and community programs</p> <p>Professional development and training for early childhood providers</p>	<p>Developmental screenings (ASQ Online), care coordination and referrals</p> <p>Comprehensive vision exams and screenings</p>	<p>Outreach and engagement (e.g., social media, meet-and-greets, existing partnerships)</p> <p>Collaboration/Integration/Cross-referrals</p> <p>Fund development (e.g., Commercial Kitchen and Community Pantry, Medi-Cal, grants)</p>

Goal

1

Family Support

Strengthen family protective factors

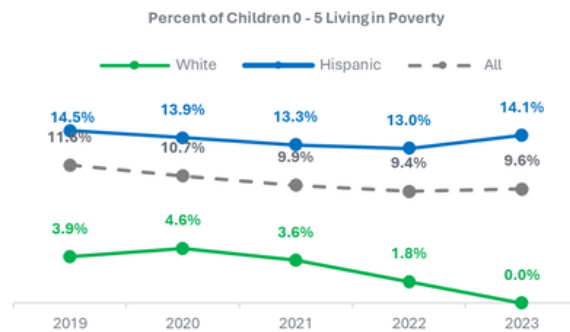


Families in San Benito County experience persistent economic pressure that affects their ability to meet basic needs. Community trend data show elevated child poverty for Hispanic children, and fluctuating levels of food insecurity. Parents emphasize the need for resources such as food and clothing, as well as parenting support and opportunities for social connection. Survey and Community Café findings indicate that while services exist, families face barriers related to awareness, scheduling, and accessibility. Together, these patterns suggest that strengthening family support requires material assistance, pathways that improve access to resources, and activities to reduce isolation.

Data Spotlight

Child Poverty

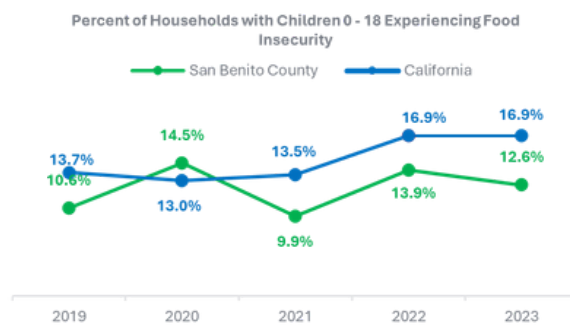
The percent of children living in poverty in San Benito County has slightly declined since 2019, though the percent of Hispanic children living in poverty remains high.



Source: US Census American Community Survey, five-year estimates.

Food Insecurity

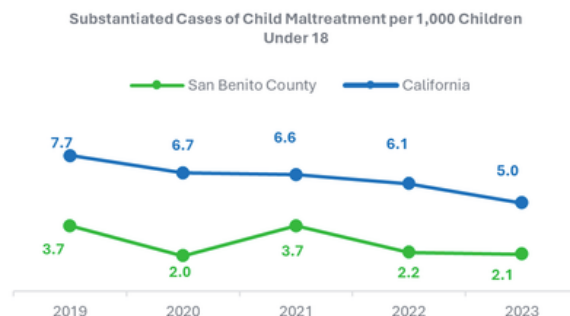
Food insecurity has fluctuated in San Benito County over the last five years. However, since 2021, the percent of households experiencing food insecurity has been lower than the state level.



Source: Feeding America.

Child Maltreatment

The rates of child maltreatment in San Benito County have fluctuated since 2018 but remain substantially lower than the state rate.



Source: Child Welfare Indicators Project.

OUTCOME 1: INCREASED ACCESS TO CONCRETE SUPPORTS

What Is the Need?

Families report challenges meeting basic needs,

including food and clothing.

Families indicate a need for a resource hub

to facilitate access to services and supports.

Strategies

- Assess families' needs and provide resource and referral coordination as needed.
- Provide basic needs support, including food, diapers, and other essential items.

OUTCOME 2: INCREASED PARENTAL RESILIENCE AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

What Is the Need?

Parents report isolation

and limited opportunities for peer connection and express interest in informal, relationship-based support.

Strategies

- Offer parent gathering and family-centered community activities, such as Family Fun Nights, and ensure they are offered at times when families can attend.



**Todas las actividades están bien...
Es muy divertido y mi hijo se quiere
quedar más tiempo.**

All the activities are good... It's very fun and my child wants to stay longer.

OUTCOME 3: INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

What Is the Need?

Parents seek guidance on child development,

behavior, and positive parenting.

Families face language and communication barriers

when accessing parenting information and services.

Families indicate not being aware

of existing parenting resources.

Strategies

- Continue offering evidence-informed parent education offerings focused on early learning and development such as Talk, Read, Sing, Raising a Reader, and Ready for K/ParentPowered.
- Integrate parenting information into other existing First 5 San Benito outreach/programs and partner programs.
- Ensure parenting information and education is offered in multiple languages.



Goal

2

Child Development

Promote early learning

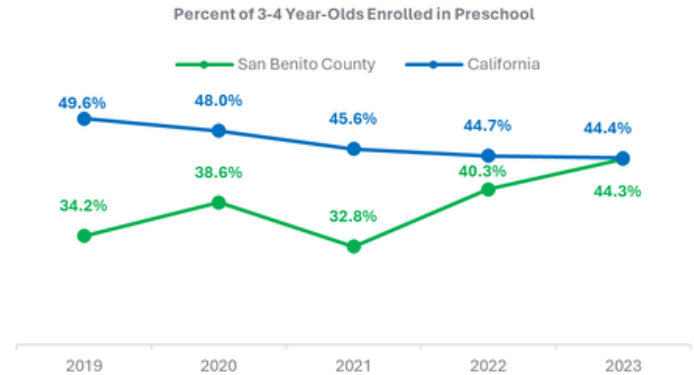


Children face barriers to early learning and developmental success, including limited access to affordable child care and gaps in early literacy. These challenges are compounded by a high proportion of English learners and a lack of awareness of available services. Commissioners emphasized the importance of comprehensive and sustained provider training to ensure high-quality child care environments. This highlights the need for a strong, accessible childcare system that can meet the diverse needs of children and families.

Data Spotlight

Preschool Enrollment

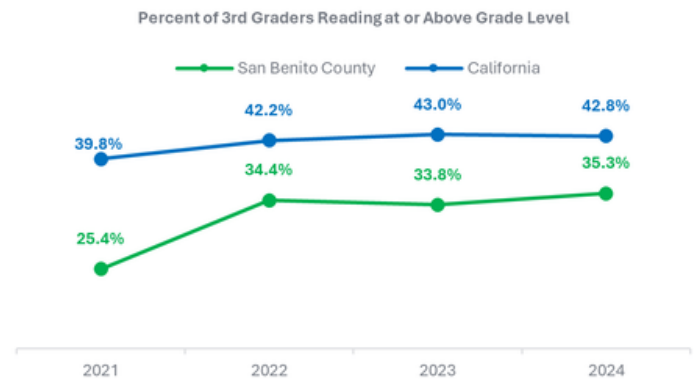
The percent of 3–4-year-olds enrolled in preschool has fluctuated over the last five years but has recently reached the state level.



Source: US Census American Community Survey, five-year estimates.

Reading Proficiency

Though reading proficiency in San Benito County has increased since 2021, the percent of 3rd graders reading at or above grade level has consistently remained below the statewide level.



Source: CA Department of Education, DataQuest.

OUTCOME 1: INCREASED ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

What Is the Need?

Affordable, high-quality child care is a high priority

and difficult to access due to limited availability and waitlists.

Strategies

- Support referrals and navigation to early learning and child care options

OUTCOME 2: IMPROVED EARLY LITERACY

What Is the Need?

Early literacy gaps

are evident by third grade.

Interest in reading and learning activities

is prevalent among families.

Strategies

- Expand early literacy programming such as Raising a Reader.
- Promote developmentally appropriate learning activities for young children.
- Partner with libraries and community programs to reinforce learning.

OUTCOME 3: STRENGTHENED EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDER CAPACITY

What Is the Need?

Updated practices

are not accessible to all providers.

Quality early learning environments

require proper child care provider support.

Strategies

- Support professional development and training for child care providers in alignment with UPK/mixed delivery collaborators.
- Offer incentives that encourage provider participation

Goal

3

Child Health

Promote maternal, infant, and early childhood health and well-being

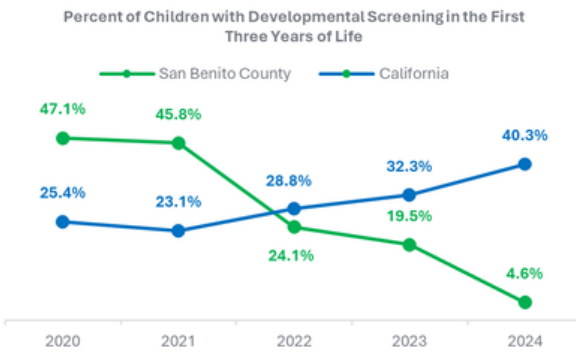


Health indicators reveal significant gaps in preventive and developmental care for young children. The percent of developmental screenings in San Benito County have declined sharply since 2020 and are far below the percent of screenings statewide. Adequate prenatal care has also decreased over time, and postpartum depression has increased. Parents and providers consistently prioritize screenings, dental care, and early identification services, indicating both high need and unmet demand. These patterns suggest systemic challenges in access, follow-up, and coordination across child health services.

Data Spotlight

Developmental Screenings

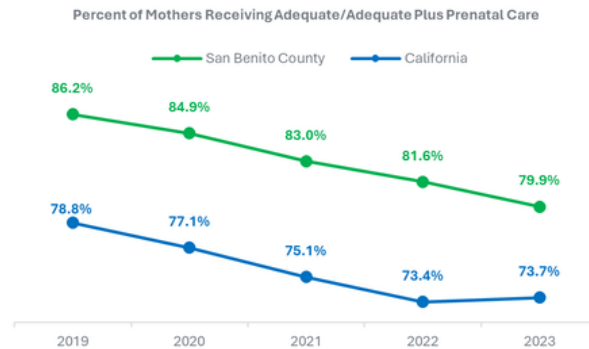
Developmental screenings of children in San Benito County have decreased sharply since 2020. The proportion of developmental screenings in San Benito County is substantially lower than statewide.



Source: Medi-Cal Managed Care Quality Improvement Reports.

Prenatal Care

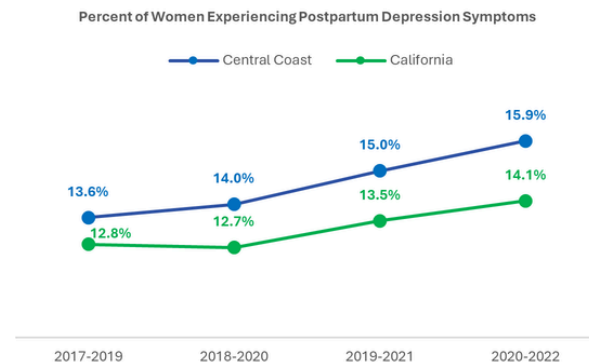
Since 2019, the percent of San Benito County mothers receiving adequate prenatal care has been higher than the percent of mothers in California, but this has been steadily decreasing.



Source: CA Department of Public Health.

Postpartum Depression Symptoms

The percent of mothers in the Central Coast Region experiencing postpartum depression symptoms has increased since 2019 and has consistently remained higher than the California rate.



Source: CA Department of Public Health. Includes San Benito County, Monterey County, Santa Cruz County, San Luis Obispo County, Santa Barbara County, and Ventura County.

OUTCOME 1: INCREASED ACHIEVEMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

What Is the Need?

Developmental screening rates have declined

sharply in the county.

Developmental screenings are a high priority

and difficult for families to access.

Gaps in early identification of developmental delays

hinder access to needed support.

Strategies

- Support developmental screening at a variety of venues (e.g., Community Health Fairs, Community Health Clinics and pediatricians, Resiliency Center) and offer coordination and referrals.
- Strengthen partnerships that facilitate follow-up and connection to developmental services.

OUTCOME 2: IMPROVED ACCESS TO PREVENTIVE CHILD HEALTH SERVICES

What Is the Need?

Dental care and preventive health were a priority

for families.

Gaps in service accessibility

were noted by families and providers.

Strategies

- Ensure that families know where to access primary health and dental care through resource and referrals or community health fairs.



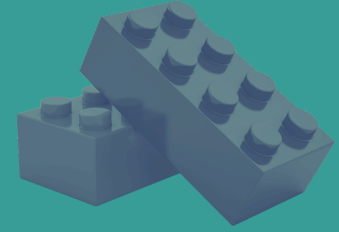
I have loved the help given to us for my kids' development and resources.

Goal

4

Systems of Care

Build accessible, coordinated, and sustainable systems



Across all data sources, lack of awareness is noted as a barrier to service utilization. Parents report difficulty navigating available resources, and providers indicate low referral rates to First 5-affiliated programs. Commissioners consistently emphasize the importance of a centralized resource hub, stronger partnerships, and increased visibility. These findings indicate that improving outcomes requires not only service availability but also system-level coordination, communication, and trust-building.

Data Spotlight

Compelling quotes from survey respondents.

Parent Survey Respondent

“

Middle class families struggle having educational programs because they do not qualify but cannot afford to pay for them.

Parent Survey Respondent

“

No todos conocen los programas y es difícil aveces porque nadie te platica de ello.

Not everyone knows about the programs, and sometimes it's difficult because no one tells you about them.



OUTCOME 1: INCREASED FAMILY AND PROVIDER AWARENESS AND NAVIGATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

What Is the Need?

Families report limited knowledge

of available programs.

Providers under-refer

to First 5 services.

System navigation is complex

for many families.

Strategies

- Develop and maintain a centralized resource hub to support referral alignment and shared understanding of available services.
- Integrate warm handoffs and referrals within First 5-supported services.
- Improve outreach through multiple communication channels such as social media and the website.

OUTCOME 2: INCREASED PARTNERSHIPS AND SYSTEM ALIGNMENT

What Is the Need?

Inconsistent coordination

across providers and systems.

Advocacy and system alignment

are priorities for Commissioners.

Strategies

- Increase visibility and engagement at local and regional levels including local officials and legislators.
- Strengthen partnerships with health, education, and community organizations.
- Participate in and convene cross-sector collaboratives.

OUTCOME 3: INCREASED RESOURCES TO DEVELOP OR SUSTAIN ESSENTIAL SERVICES

What Is the Need?

Flexible funding sources

support sustainable programming.

Fund development and revenue diversification

were key priorities for Commissioners.

Strategies

- Leverage existing assets such as the Commercial Kitchen and Community Pantry.
- Identify new funding streams, such as services reimbursable from Medi-Cal (e.g., CalAIM Community Schools, CYBHI).
- Expand grant-seeking activity.



Measures of Impact

First 5 San Benito is committed to tracking trends across the County and showing how its reach and impact help improve conditions for children and families. This table summarizes the indicators First 5 San Benito will monitor between 2026 and 2031. Indicators at the Goal level are community-level trends, while indicators at the Outcome-level reflect the changes we intend to make with the children, families, and providers we serve.

Goal 1: Family Support

Community-Level Trend

- Percent of Children 0 to 5 Living in Poverty
- Percent of Households with Children 0 to 18 Experiencing Food Insecurity
- Substantiated Cases of Child Maltreatment per 1,000 Children under 18
- Percent of Mothers Experiencing Postpartum Depression Symptoms

Outcomes and Outcome-Level Indicators

Increased access to concrete supports

- Number of families served during Food Distribution and number of food boxes given out
- Number of families served through the Commercial Kitchen

Increased parental resilience and support networks

- Number of parents and children served during (potential) Family Fun Nights
- Number and percent of parents with improved protective factors after engaging in programs
- Number of children and caregivers served through Home Visiting

Increased knowledge of parenting and child development

- Number of Kits for New Parents distributed
- Number and percent of parents with improved scores regarding child behavior and the parent-child relationship
- Number and percent of families participating in PC-Care
- Pre-to-post scores in families participating in PC-Care (e.g., positive child behavior)
- Number of participants attending Hola Bebe

Goal 2: Child Development

Community-Level Trend

- Percent of 3- to 4-year-olds Enrolled in Preschool
- Percent of 3rd Graders Reading at or Above Grade Level

Outcomes and Outcome-Level Indicators

Increased access to high-quality early learning and child care

- Number of children enrolled by Quality Counts site and per individual provider

Improved early literacy

- Number of parents participating in Raising a Reader
- Percent of parents who see improvements in their child's behavior following Raising a Reader
- Number of parents and children attending Talk Read Sing
- Percent of parents attending Talk Read Sing who said they learned things they could do to help their children learn

Strengthened early childhood provider capacity

- Number of ECE providers participating in CPIN workshops
- Number of ECE providers participating in Quality Counts and the number of children enrolled
- Number and percent of Quality Counts ECE providers demonstrating improved knowledge and capacity to provide quality care

Goal 3: Child Health

Community-Level Trend

- Percent of Children with Developmental Screening in the First Three Years of Life
- Percent of Mothers Receiving Adequate/Adequate Plus Prenatal Care
- Percent of Women Experiencing Postpartum Depression Symptoms

Outcomes and Outcome-Level Indicators

Increased achievement of developmental milestones

- Number of ASQs conducted
- Number and percent of children flagged on the ASQ
- Number and percent of children referred to early intervention services
- Number and percent of referred children who are successfully connected to services

Improved access to preventive child health services

- Number of community health events held (e.g., Health Fair)

Goal 4: Systems of Care

Outcomes and Outcome-Level Indicators

Increased family and provider awareness and navigation of early childhood services

- Number of families connected through a centralized resource hub
- Number of calls and walk-ins to the FRC

Increased partnerships and system alignment

- Number of organizations using FRC space, by reason and attendees
- Number of collaboratives attended or staffed
- Number of public presentations to/meetings with local officials and legislators

Increased resources to develop or sustain essential services

- Amount of revenue generated from Commercial Kitchen use and space rental
- Amount of revenue generated from classroom space rental



About the Research Team

Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a social research firm that helps people build better communities. We do this by creating meaningful evaluation and assessment data, facilitating information-based planning, and developing custom strategies. ASR has the advantage of bringing more than 40 years of experience working with public and private agencies, health and human service organizations, city and county offices, school districts, institutions of higher learning, and charitable foundations. Through our community assessments, program evaluations, and related studies, ASR provides the data-based insights that communities need for effective strategic planning and community interventions.

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