



EARLY CHILDHOOD TASK FORCE

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the various roles of agencies that work with children as part of the early childhood system? Who are the lead agencies for early childhood programs in Arizona?

Two webinars were recently recorded to provide a more in-depth review of Arizona's early childhood system. The following links provide you access to these webinars: [1/18 Early Childhood Recording](#) and [1/19 Quality First Recording](#)

In addition, the National and State Policy Scan was developed as a resource to highlight key national early childhood policy and funding areas and implementation of these in Arizona. While not an exhaustive list, the purpose of this document is to provide you with a level of information on key policy areas and funding that are part of the early childhood system, the level of interface and coordination that occurs across state agencies and partners and opportunities for improved alignment and coordination and impact on children. [National and State Policy Scan](#)

The following State Agencies are responsible for leading and implementation of policies, programs and services for children birth through five across the early learning, professional development, health and family support areas that make up Arizona's early childhood system and are highlighted in both the webinars and National and State Policy Scan: Department of Economic Security (DES), Department of Health (DHS), Department of Education (ADE), Department of Child Safety (DCS), Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), and First Things First (FTF).

2. How does FTF help parents who don't use child care learn about early childhood and quality care?

FTF communication strategies include Community Outreach, which seeks to build awareness and support of community members in how they think about, value and engage in supporting early childhood development and health. Parents and caregivers are a primary audience of FTF's community outreach efforts focused on increasing their understanding of the importance of early childhood and awareness of services and supports available. First Things First works with its grant partners that work directly with families on providing information about the importance of early childhood including information about quality early care and education as well as working collaboratively with partners on disseminating information. First Things First has a website (qualityfirstaz.com) dedicated to supporting parents, families, and providers in their understanding of Quality Early Education. Information on the website includes: what quality looks like; why quality is important; what Quality First is; tools for choosing child care; paying for child care, and; supporting your child at home. In addition to the Quality First Website, First Things First has a robust website (<http://www.firstthingsfirst.org/>) for families that includes information about: brain development, ages and stages, child care and preschool, literacy, birth to five helpline, and why early childhood matters.

3. **Why are there a limited number of children in Quality First settings and how can we get that to scale?**

Currently, almost 50% of licensed and regulated programs are participating in Quality First, Arizona's Quality Improvement and Rating System. Quality First was launched in 2009 and is predominantly funded through FTF funds along with federal funding from the Preschool Development Grant, a partnership with the Arizona Department of Education. Quality First is implemented through a slot based funding mechanism and the Regional Partnership Councils determine the level of funding for Quality First in their region, balancing this with the other priority areas they have identified. The funding level set by the regional council then determines how many centers and/or homes can be enrolled in Quality First in that region.

A Quality First Advisory Subcommittee (QFASC) was convened in 2016 to undertake a comprehensive review of the model. The QFASC made several recommendations to refine the model including being able to move to scale. A pilot study in partnership with the state agencies is being planned to test out implementation of the recommendations and work through a financing model that would support movement towards scale.

4. **What is the relationship with community colleges and organizations that provide professional development for the early childhood workforce?**

The Professional Development Workgroup (PDWG) is facilitated by Frist Things First and includes stakeholders from the early childhood training organizations and Institutes of Higher Education (IHE - both Community College and University). FTF meets with each group separately on a monthly basis and with the two groups together on a quarterly basis. The positive relationships with both groups have resulted in collaborative work to:

- Align community based training and college coursework with the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies (<http://azearlychildhood.org/resources--information/workforce-knowledge--competencies>) a set of professional competencies and standards that define the skills and knowledge required by those working in the early childhood field;
- Develop a set of standards for those who are training and teaching the early childhood workforce, and;
- Identify instructor qualifications that are rigorous to ensure the quality of community based training for the early childhood workforce.

5. **What is the impact of strategies that support college degree attainment? How are we making professional development for early educators more affordable?**

Frist Things First has invested in college scholarships to assist professionals in achieving a Child Development Associate Credential and/or college degree (both Associate degrees and Bachelor's Degrees). Between State Fiscal Year 2015 and State Fiscal Year 2016 there was a significant increase in the number of college scholars that were being supported.

- 2015 Annual Report – 415 college scholars
- 2016 Annual Report – 812 college scholars

Multiple factors in 2016 influenced the participation in college scholarships, including:

- A new college scholarships program was implemented that broadened the eligibility requirements to receive a scholarship, included scholarship liaisons at colleges, removed the scholar commitment of partial tuition, and removed the employer obligation of partial tuition and staff release time;
- The launch of the Arizona Career and Professional Development Network that supported a streamlined FTF College Scholarship process for application, approval, and invoicing colleges; and
- Federal funding from the Preschool Development Grant that supported Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

The current college scholarships strategy pays for 100% of tuition and 100% of books to ease the financial burden on the early childhood workforce who are traditionally paid low wages. Scholars have a service commitment throughout their time as a scholarship recipient as well as after they have achieved a degree.

6. What role does FTF have in ensuring quality in the curriculum used to train early childhood professionals?

The PDWG (mentioned above in question 4) is working towards the alignment of training with the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies (see question 4 above). This alignment will ensure that curriculum is inclusive of the core knowledge areas that are identified in the WFKC. In addition, the delivery of the training is as important as the curriculum. The PDWG developed a set of standards for early childhood instructors to indicate best practices in the delivery of training.

7. Where does the early childhood workforce come from currently?

According to the National Workforce Index (<http://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2016/Early-Childhood-Workforce-Index-2016.pdf>) painting a detailed portrait of those who fulfill teaching and caregiving roles is exceedingly difficult. Depending on the data source used, estimates of the size and scope of the early childhood workforce vary widely. In part, these variations can be attributed to whether researchers gather information provided by parents, by members of the early childhood workforce, or by their employers.

Regardless of setting or role, this almost exclusively female workforce is responsible for safeguarding and facilitating development and learning of our nation's youngest children. Nonetheless, professional expectations and compensation for the role of early educator vary greatly based on setting and program type, resulting in identifiable differences related to demographic character

The workforce Registry is a core component of the Arizona Early Childhood Career and Professional Development Network. This Registry includes information about the workforce. Since its launch just over 1 year ago, there are 24,000 participants. The current work is focusing on the completeness of the information we have about participants (i.e. submitting and review of transcripts, complete personal information, and complete and verified employment information).

We anticipate that in the next several months, we will be closer to having more completed information that can be reviewed and shared at an aggregate level to answer this question.

8. What does workforce look like in tribal regions?

In addition to the information provided in question 7 above, there are a number of regional councils that include Tribal lands that have committed to supporting professional development for their early childhood workforce. Some, like the Navajo Nation and San Carlos Apache Tribe, have done so by supporting college scholarships for early childhood professionals. Others such as Tohono O’odham Nation and Pascua Yaqui Tribe also have supported a community of practice model that provides an opportunity for participants to discuss early childhood topics with other professionals with the intent to bridge theory to practice.

9. How does FTF reach out to and communicate with parents?

FTF has several universal strategies focused on reaching parents and caregivers which include the following:

- The Birth to Five Helpline is a free service available to all Arizona families with young children, as well as parents-to-be, with questions or concerns about their infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Parents, caregivers and professionals can call, text or submit questions online to the Helpline and receive information and support from an early childhood specialist, registered nurses, disabilities specialists, early literacy specialists and mental health counselors.
- The Arizona Parent Kit is distributed to parents at the birth of a child in the hospital, through birthing centers, health clinics. Each Arizona Parent Kit contains a guide listing resources for young children and their families, an infant board book, Birth to Five Helpline magnet and Read On book mark that has reading tips for parent and child engagement. In addition, in partnership with Delta Dental Foundation, an oral health kit has been recently added to the Parent Kit. A total of 76,000 Parent Kits are distributed in English and Spanish annually.
- Parenting Outreach and Awareness provides families of young children with information, materials or connections to resources and activities that increase awareness of early childhood development and health. Resource distribution and parenting activities increase families’ awareness of positive parenting practices, child development including health, nutrition, early learning and language acquisition, and knowledge of available services and supports to enhance their child’s overall development.

In addition, all of First Things First’s integrated community awareness strategies aim to increase public information about the importance of early childhood development and health; and a large part of our public audience are parents. For parents and other caregivers, awareness is the first step toward engaging in programs or behaviors that will better support their child’s health and development.

FTF communication strategies include Community Outreach, which seeks to build awareness and support at the grassroots level through tactics such as community presentations, site tours of funded programs and earned media in local communities. In addition, through the FTF community

engagement program, stakeholders are engaged in taking action on behalf of young children, which often includes sharing information and resources with parents in their communities. Regional Councils can also choose to fund the Community Awareness strategy, through which parent information is distributed, such as educational reinforcement items and collateral which help to share important information about early childhood development and resources to help parents support the healthy development of their young children.

First Things First statewide media efforts ensure that messages about the importance of early childhood development are shared as broadly as possible. For instance, our SFY17 awareness campaign titled “Help Them Get There” specifically targets parents and caregivers to remind them that their positive daily interactions with babies, toddlers and preschoolers promote healthy development to help young children be successful in school and in life.

In SFY17, informed by extensive research on how to most effectively reach today’s parents, FTF is launching a digital content strategy. This includes a redesigned website that is user-friendly and serves as a foundation for robust parent information, including a digitized version of the Parent Kit resource guide, which features extensive, high-quality information for parents of young children. In order to better reach this Millennial generation of parents, FTF will publish online information in engaging new ways, such as short videos, blog posts and infographics and, most importantly, use digital marketing tools to ensure the content is placed strategically and prominently in those online spaces that today’s parents frequent. Additionally, research on reaching today’s parents is also informing updates to FTF programmatic parent awareness efforts.

10. Who else does casework to stabilize families?

When supporting families, there is a wide range of casework provided by a variety of organizations across the state. These services range in intensity from low to high intensity. Low Intensity includes meeting with a family for the short term and includes a general assessment of the family needs, and then providing resource information for the family. Due to the short term nature of Low Intensity work, caseloads will change often and will have a higher staff/case load ratio.

Medium Intensity includes meeting more regularly with the family over a longer period of time, includes an assessment, goal setting and reviewing curriculum materials to increase knowledge and change outcomes. Case management of services may be included as a part of this work in order to increase communication between families and service providers, and to decrease duplication of services. With regular support occurring, medium Intensity caseloads will have fewer turn over, therefore a consistent staff/caseload ratio. In addition to low intensity support, the Caseworker may support the family by assisting them in filling out service application forms and attending inter-agency case plans meetings to increase access to services.

High Intensity suggests long term support to families with the highest of needs. These families are usually involved in receiving support from multiple state entities. Supporting these families includes both low and medium intensity support, as well as participating in inter-agency team work including case plan management, communication, documentation, and goal setting. Case management of services is included as a part of this work in order to increase communication between families and service providers, and to decrease duplication of services.

Various organizations including government, for-profit and non profit provide casework and case management services and may focus on early childhood, child abuse prevention, family support, behavioral health, crisis intervention, and support in meeting basic needs. These organizations may provide any or all levels of casework intensity across the continuum at the local level. Services may range from resource and referral provision, coordination of services, case management and in-home support services.

At the local level, City Governments provide resource and referral provision and coordination of services to families who have housing needs and support in payments of rental assistance, utilities bills, and other basic needs. In addition, faith –based organizations such as churches, temples, and mosques, may provide low intensity casework support to families within their congregation, as well as the greater community. They often provide resource and referral provision and coordination of services to families who have housing needs and support in payments of rental assistance, utilities bills, and other basic needs.

Department of Child Safety (DCS) is responsible for providing oversight of the safety, permanence and well-being of children in Arizona. DCS staff provides resource and referral, case management and coordination of services both in the community and families' homes. In addition, DCS contracts with non-profit and for profit organizations to provide an array of additional services. Some of these include parent/child visitation workers, parent aides and in-home therapists that support increased learning and outcomes for parent/child reunification.

Department of Economic Security (DES) provides a range of services to families including assistance with basic needs, early intervention services, children with disabilities, and employment assistance for parents and caregivers. DES provides some of these services and they contract with non-profit and for profit organizations for community provision.

First Thing First – First Things First funds grant partners to provide casework services through the Family Support and Health goals areas. Services range from low to mid-intensity through resource and information provision, coordination of services, and in-home support services families.

The Department of Health Services provides services, as well as contracts to various organizations to support children and family health through resource and referral provision, coordination of services, care coordination and in-home support.

Hospitals, Medical Providers and County Public Health Departments provide resource and referral provision, coordination of services, care coordination and in-home support to children and families with their health care needs.

Behavioral Health – Regional Behavioral Health organizations focus their work on supporting children's behavioral and mental health needs and include case management.

Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) and health plans support families in their medical and oral health care needs by providing medical coverage reimbursement for care coordination, and therapies such as occupational and physical therapies which may take place in the community or home.

11. How is FTF working with Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS)?

FTF and AHCCCS have identified areas for cross agency collaboration. This includes exploring opportunities to leverage Medicaid dollars through services such as the application of fluoride varnish, developmental and sensory screenings, care coordination, and home visitation. FTF is also working with AHCCCS to conduct analyses of utilization data by enrolled children. At a systems level, FTF and AHCCCS participate in several interagency work groups that are sharing information and coordinating care for children. For example, AHCCCS is a key stakeholder in the interagency work group of the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant led by FTF, which is tasked with improving a statewide system of care for children with developmental concerns and delays.

12. How does FTF address the behavioral health needs of children?

The Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines (ITDG) and Early Learning Standards (ELS) are research based, measurable expectations of what children should know (understand) and do (competencies and skills) in different domains of learning. They provide a framework for understanding and communicating a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for young children, presented within a context of shared responsibility and accountability with families for helping young children meet these expectations. Both documents include the domain of social emotional development. The sense of trust and emotional security that young children develop within their families, cultures and communities shapes their interactions and relationships throughout their lives. Professional development on both the ITDG and ELS is available for FTF grant partners and early care and education providers.

FTF funds the evidence based Developmental and Sensory Screening strategy to support routine and age appropriate screening of all young children across all domains. The expected result is early identification of a developmental, hearing or vision concern, referral for further evaluation if necessary and family education about healthy development. This can be a stand-alone strategy or a secondary strategy associated with other First Things First (FTF) strategies. Screening only indicates the *possible* presence of developmental delay or concern, and cannot definitively identify or describe the nature or extent of a disability nor capture the full range of development, skill or capacity among children. Screening leads to parent education and support and if appropriate, or a referral for a diagnostic evaluation by a child's health care provider, the Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) for children birth up to age 3, or the local public school district for children age 3 – 5 years, to determine if the child is eligible to receive intervention services. When children are not eligible for Part C or Part B services but still in need of support, providers working with families can support them in navigating other services which can include behavioral health, health care, and community based interventions.

The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation strategy provides support to early childhood staff to support the social-emotional development of children. Mental health consultants help build the skills and capacity of early childhood educators and family support staff to prevent, identify, and reduce the impact of social-emotional development problems among young children. The expected result is the prevention, early identification, and reduction of challenging classroom behaviors and improved teacher skills. Further expected results are a decrease in negative outcomes for children, such as expulsion from preschool programs.

13. How is FTF connecting pediatrician offices to available services?

Several funded strategies by FTF help link pediatricians to available services. In oral health, grant partners are working to educate pediatricians around the importance of oral health in early

childhood, which includes linking pediatric patients to a dental home and including fluoride varnish as a practice. Care coordination grant partners hire care coordinators that serve to link social services with the medical home to address complex needs of patients. Home visitors are in close contact with the primary care physicians of children they are serving. They work to support the medical goals of the child by linking them with other supportive services. More broadly, FTF works with groups such as the Academy of Pediatrics to convey important information about the availability of FTF services to physicians. FTF's Community Outreach Strategy also reaches out to the health community including pediatricians and family practices.

14. How does FTF work with Indian Health Service (IHS) and tribes on a coordinated system for kids?

FTF works with IHS and other tribally funded health care to obtain data on the health status of children and health services available in tribal communities in order to assist funding decisions on health strategies most needed by children in tribal communities. In addition to funded strategies, FTF may work with tribal healthcare providers on the implementation of unfunded approaches that improve the health and wellbeing of children including nutrition and obesity prevention and oral healthcare. In oral health, FTF is working with IHS regional dental directors and the Arizona American Indian Oral Health Initiative to look at ways to improve the delivery of oral health care for Native children.

15. Does FTF have a legislative agenda?

There are several ways in which First Things First works to ensure that public policy reflects early childhood best practice and will lead to improved outcomes for young children. The first of these is to work with policymakers at the federal, tribal and state levels to build their awareness of the importance of early childhood. We also serve as a resource to them in providing feedback on early childhood policies they may be considering. Every year, we also track legislation introduced at the Legislature and in Congress; where appropriate, we contact policymakers regarding those bills to provide information on the potential impacts to young children. The First Things First Board may also take positions on certain pieces of legislation, and in those cases, we actively work with policymakers who author those pieces of legislation and/or will be hearing those policies debated in committee to ensure they understand the impact to kids birth to 5 years old and their families. Many early childhood policies are not the result of legislation; they are the result of decisions made at the agency or program level. That's why First Things First has extensive relationships with our agency partners to coordinate, collaborate and ensure that agency/program decisions will leverage existing infrastructure, maximize resources, reduce duplication and lead to improved outcomes for kids. This work is facilitated by having representatives of the Arizona Departments of Education, Health Services and Economic Security as ex-officio members of our statewide Board; participating in systemic collaboration groups (such as statewide collaboratives to improve home visitation or oral health services); and direct outreach to state agencies on issues we are working on.

16. How is First Things First engaged in efforts to improve the pipeline of the workforce needed by businesses for the future?

A high-quality education is crucial in order for Arizona students to be prepared for the jobs of tomorrow. First Things First is a key partner in ensuring that Arizona's kids get the right start to their education by funding strategies and/or working with communities on unfunded initiatives that support families in their role as their child's first teachers; improve the quality of and access to early education; and, help with the early identification of health conditions or developmental issues that could turn in to learning problems later on. Each regional partnership council includes a business representative to ensure that the business perspective is included in decisions made about what

children in their communities need to be successful in school and beyond. And, through our local and statewide community outreach efforts, we continuously work on building awareness of the importance of early childhood to school success and the role that early childhood investments play in long-term economic development initiatives.

17. How is FTF engaging federal partners that are also key players in Arizona’s system for children?

First Things First works continuously to build relationships with the leadership and staff of federal agencies working on behalf of young children, including the Centers for Medicaid Services and the Administration for Children and Families’ Offices of Head Start and Child Care. FTF also works closely with those working on national policy – such as the BUILD Initiative, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and Ounce of Prevention, as well major foundations who work to impact public policy regarding children’s health and education, including the Annie E. Casey, Robert Wood Johnson and Packard foundations – to ensure that we are aware of the impacts of federal policy on young children and can do our part to promote public policies that improve outcomes for young children. In addition, FTF actively engages with Arizona's Congressional Delegation and their staff.