

## OVERVIEW

First Things First partners with parents and communities to give all Arizona children the opportunity to arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed.

### Created by Arizona Voters

In 2006, Arizonans made an historic decision on behalf of our state's youngest citizens. By majority vote, they made a commitment to all Arizona children 5 and younger: that kids would have the tools they need to arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed. The voters backed that promise with an 80-cent per pack increase on tobacco products, so that funding for early childhood services for our youngest children would not be at the mercy of economic and political winds. The initiative also created the statewide First Things First board and regional partnership councils that share the responsibility of ensuring that these early childhood funds are spent on strategies that will result in improved education and health outcomes for kids 5 and younger.



### Focused on Kids Birth to 5

Why focus on kids 5 and younger? Research shows that 90% of a child's brain develops by age 5. Because of this rapid development, what happens to children in the early years lays the foundation for a lifetime. Research has proven that kids with quality early childhood experiences do better in school. They are more likely to advance into college and successful careers. They also tend to be healthier and demand less from the public welfare system.

### Driven By Local Communities

Not all children have the same needs; and voters designed First Things First to meet the diverse needs of Arizona communities. Decisions about which early education and health strategies will be funded are made by regional partnership councils made up of community volunteers, not government bureaucrats. Each regional council member represents a specific segment of the community that has a stake in ensuring that our children grow up to be healthy productive adults, including: parents, tribal representatives, educators, health professionals, business leaders, philanthropists and leaders of faith communities. The regional councils study the challenges faced by children in their communities and the resources that exist to help kids in their area. Because of all these factors, the regional councils know best what their kids need.

### Proven to Work

National studies show that children exposed to high-quality early childhood education:

- Are 40% less likely to need special education or be held back a grade;
- Are 70% less likely to commit a violent crime by age 18;
- Have better language, math and social skills, and better relationships with classmates;
- Have better cognitive and sensory skills and experience less anxiety; and,
- Score higher on school-readiness tests.

First Things First's signature programs build on this body of research to address critical early childhood needs statewide, including supporting parents in their role as a child's first teacher, improving the quality of early learning in homes and child care centers, enhancing the professional skills of teachers working with our youngest kids, and helping doctors to address a child's developmental and physical needs.

## Effective

The impact of First Things First programs has been significant. In Fiscal Year 2016 alone:

- 34,812 parents and caregivers attended parenting workshops or groups at family resource centers. In addition, more than 232,000 accessed early childhood information, resources or referrals through the centers.
- 72,058 families of newborns left the hospital with tools to help the support their child's health and learning.
- 6,121 families received voluntary, evidence-based home visitation from trained providers to enhance their parenting skills and deal with specific challenges, including first-time parenting, parenting a child with special needs or dealing with multiple births.
- 3,711 parents and other caregivers completed a voluntary series of community-based classes on topics like parenting skills, brain development, early literacy and nutrition.
- 51,069 children had access to a higher standard of early learning through preschool and child care programs participating in Quality First.
- 9,250 Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers accessed high quality early learning with the help of a preschool or child care scholarship.
- 27,376 children received screenings to detect vision, hearing, and developmental issues to prevent later learning challenges.
- 48,480 children received an oral health screening to detect tooth decay. In addition, 41,805 fluoride varnishes were applied to protect against dental decay.

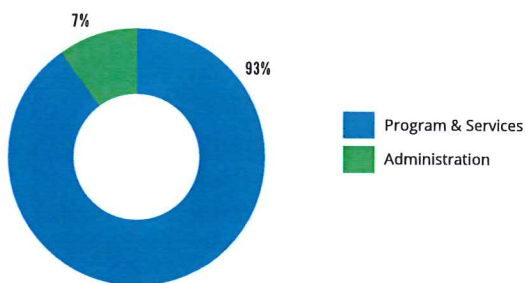


## Accountable

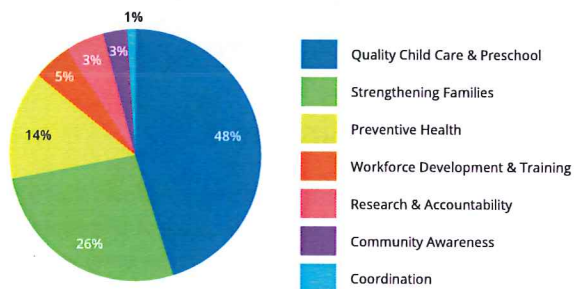
Most importantly, First Things First is accountable – to voters, to the state, and most importantly, to Arizona's children. The strategies funded by First Things First have demonstrated effectiveness in improving educational and health outcomes for kids, or in increasing the knowledge, skills and capacities of parents and other caregivers, such as medical professionals and teachers working with young children. FTF grantees are required to submit detailed financial information, as well reports regarding the numbers of children or families served. This ensures that funds are being spent efficiently and that programs are reaching the intended groups of children. In addition, FTF's Quality Assurance Team works with individual grantees to review program implementation and identify best practices that can be shared with other grantees or that can be used to improve the overall program. At the systemic level, FTF has identified 10 indicators to help us ensure that we are contributing in meaningful ways to improved school readiness for Arizona's kids. FTF also worked with a group of national experts to identify additional steps FTF can take to make sure the programs being funded are making a difference – for individual children and families, and for school readiness throughout Arizona.

## Efficient

In addition to being effective, First Things First is also efficient. Investments in programs and services that help prepare children for success constituted approximately 93% of spending in FY2016. Administrative expenses are kept low – approximately 7% in FY16.



First Things First  
Priority Funding Areas FY09-17\*



\* This figure represents actual expenditures through FY16 and FY17 funding awards through October 14, 2016.

# QUALITY FIRST

FIRST THINGS FIRST



## QUALITY MATTERS IN CHILD CARE AND PRESCHOOL

90% of a child's critical brain development happens before kindergarten, and research shows that the experiences young children have with their caregivers and teachers in their first five years shape their learning now and throughout their lives.

Quality First – a signature program of First Things First – partners with child care and preschool programs across Arizona to improve the quality of early learning they provide in ways proven to help children learn, grow and thrive.

### Benefits for Children and Families

Studies show that quality early learning settings for children from birth to age 5 help develop skills that are crucial to success in school and life, producing strong, positive effects on:

- Kindergarten readiness
- Language, math and social skills
- K-12 test scores
- High school graduation
- College enrollment

### Benefits for Providers

Quality First supports early care and education programs in what they do best – helping children learn and grow. Programs enrolled in Quality First work with a coach to understand their strengths and identify ways to do even better for the children in their care. Program staff has ongoing professional development opportunities and access to a team of experts in children's health, inclusion of children with special needs and more.

### Benefits for Employers

The skills and abilities employers are looking for — focus, self-discipline, motivation and collaboration — all start to take root in the first five years of life. Quality early childhood education is proven to help kids develop these skills and increase school readiness, which leads to workforce readiness.

Learn more at [QualityFirstAZ.com](http://QualityFirstAZ.com).

## THE COMPONENTS OF QUALITY

Quality child care and preschool settings build on basic health and safety to include:

- Teachers and caregivers who know how to work with infants, toddlers and preschoolers;
- Positive, nurturing relationships that give young kids the individual attention they need;
- Learning environments that encourage creativity and imaginative play;
- Hands-on activities that stimulate and encourage positive brain connections in children; and,
- Caregivers who provide regular feedback to parents on the development of their child.

All of these elements combined make a child care environment that prepares children for success in kindergarten and beyond.



# Component Overview

# Timeline

## SECTION ONE COACHING

- Individualized guidance and support
- Monthly on-site visits
- Targeted professional development and technical assistance
- Support of goal development and implementation

## SECTION TWO ASSESSMENT

- Environment Rating Scales
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- Quality First Points Scale Assessment
- Quality First Star Rating calculated from assessments



## SECTION FIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Arizona Early Childhood Career and Professional Development Network
- College Scholarships for Early Childhood Professionals
- Arizona Workforce Registry
- Professional Development Website

## SECTION THREE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

- Financial Incentives
- DHS Licensing Fees

## SECTION FOUR SPECIALIZED ASSISTANCE

- Quality First Academy
- Child Care Health consultation on-site
- Mental Health consultation (regional funding)
- Inclusion Coaching (regional funding)
- Department of Education Early Childhood Program Specialist (regional funding)

WEEK 1

Selection Notification

WEEK 2-3

Contact from your Quality First coach

WEEK 4-6

Assessment contact and scheduled visit

WEEK 14-16

Assessment results available for review

WEEK 15-19

Sign enrollment agreement; participation begins

WEEK 20 AND ONGOING

Goal development; quality improvement begins



## AT YOUR VISIT: THINGS TO LOOK FOR

### POSITIVE, NURTURING TEACHER/CHILD INTERACTIONS

- Does the teacher make eye contact with the children, smile and listen without interrupting?
- Is the teacher at eye level with the kids when they are interacting?
- Is the teacher interacting with children during activity times indoors and outdoors?
- Do you hear the kids talking more than the teacher? Child voices should dominate.
- Does the teacher ask the children questions where they can give more than a yes/no answer?
- Are the children supervised at all times? Children should never be left alone and should always be within sight and sound of teachers.

### CARING FOR INFANTS

- Are babies placed on their backs to sleep?
- Do babies spend part of their play time on their tummies?
- Do caregivers respond promptly to crying babies?
- Are babies held while being fed?

### POSITIVE CHILD/CHILD INTERACTIONS

- Are kids playing either together or side-by-side?
- Are children encouraged to work together to resolve differences or conflicts?
- Do kids move freely from activity to activity?

### CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Is there ample space and materials to encourage play and learning within the children's reach, including:

- Books, books and more books
- Blocks and puzzles
- Pretend play area with puppets, costumes, etc.
- Art /writing materials and musical instruments
- Textured materials, such as sand and water
- Science materials, like plants, funnels, magnifying glasses, etc.

### OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

- Is there an outdoor play area, with shade, that is used daily?
- Are items from the classroom brought outdoors to be played with?
- Are the adults actively engaged with the kids at play?

## AFTER YOUR VISIT: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CHILD

Trust your instincts and also your child's reactions to the teachers and environment.

- Do you think you would like to go play there?
- What did you like best about the classroom?
- What did you like best about the teacher?

## NOTES

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# Quality Early Care and Education—Key Concepts

- Mixed Service Delivery

## Family Choice



Center -Based

For Profit  
Non-Profit

Public School  
Based

Head  
Start



Family Child Care Home

Regulated

Lawfully Unregulated  
(FFN)

**## FIRST THINGS FIRST**

## Quality Early Care and Education — Key Concepts

- Access to Quality Early Care and Education
  - Tuition covered by Parent/Caregiver
  - Federal — Child Care Development Block Grant (Child Care Subsidy), Head Start (including Early Head Start), Preschool Development Grant, and Special Education Preschool (IDEA Part B)
  - State — State General Fund for children involved with Child Welfare and First Things First Quality First Scholarships
  - Private Funding



# Quality Early Care and Education—Key Concepts

- Indicators of Quality Early Care and Education



- **HIGH QUALITY ENVIRONMENTS**

*(measured by the Environment Rating Scale)*

- ✓ Healthy and safe spaces
- ✓ Appropriate supervision
- ✓ Availability & Accessibility of materials

- **POSITIVE ADULT-CHILD INTERACTIONS**

*(measured by the CLASS)*

- ✓ Emotional Climate
- ✓ Classroom Organization
- ✓ Instructional Support

- **ESTABLISHED ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES**

*(measured by the Quality First Points Scale)*

- ✓ Staff Qualifications & Retention
- ✓ Curriculum and Child Assessment
- ✓ Ratio & Group Size

## Quality Early Care and Education—Key Concepts

- Arizona’s Standards and Assessment of Quality
  - Lawfully Unregulated
  - Certification of Homes—Implemented by Department of Economic Security
  - State Licensing Standards—Implemented by Department of Health Services
  - Tribal Regulation
  - Voluntary Quality Improvement and Rating System—Quality First

**## FIRST THINGS FIRST**

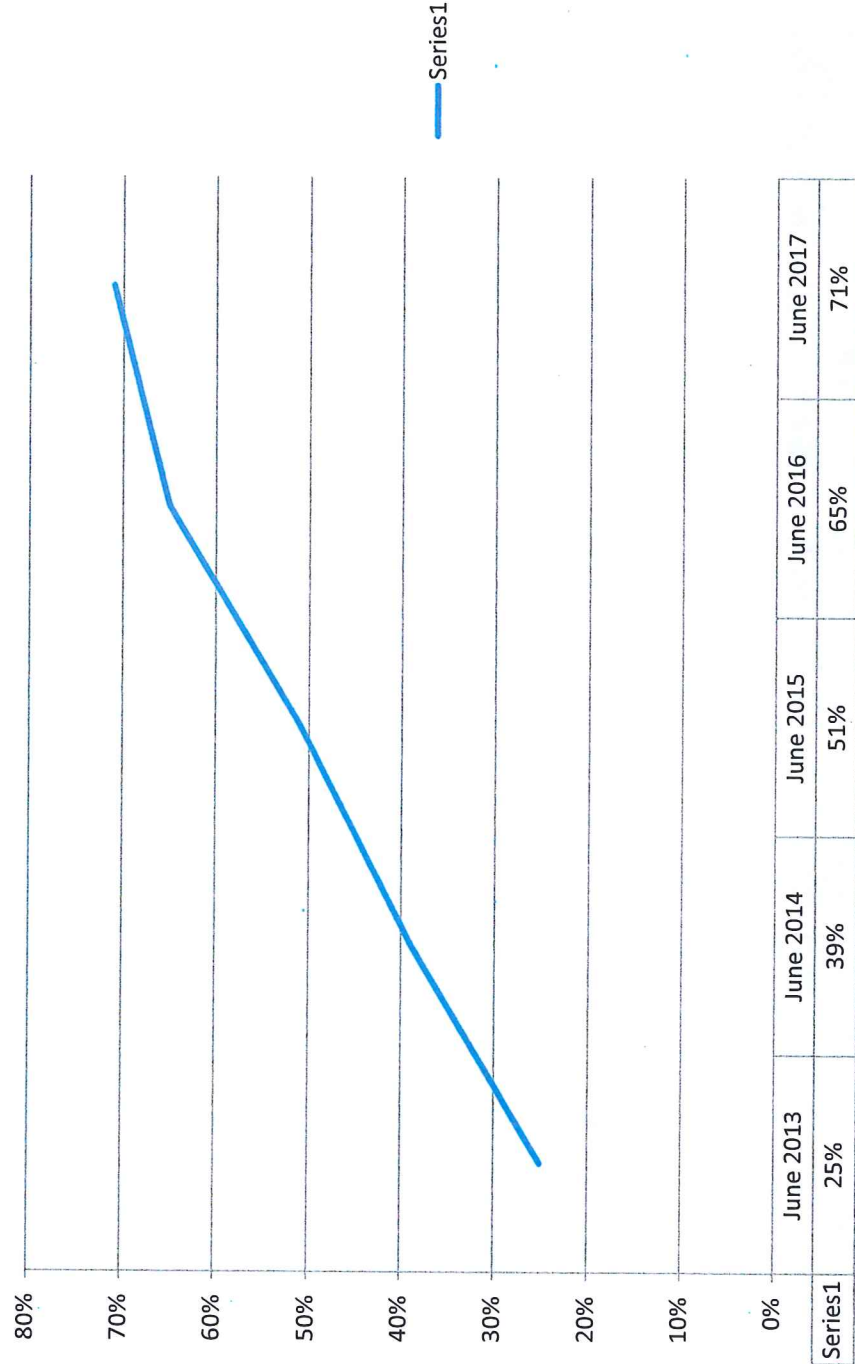
# Quality Improvement and Rating System

- Identify Quality Standards
- Support Implementation of Quality Standards
- Assess Implementation of Quality Standards
- Inform and Empower Families



# Quality First Impact

## Participants with a Quality Level (3-5 stars) Rating



OUR COMMUNITY.  
YOUR LEADERSHIP.  
THEIR FUTURE.



# FIRST THINGS FIRST  
FirstThingsFirst.org/serve

Be a voice for kids in  
your community.

90% of a child's brain develops before age 5.  
A child's early years lay the foundation for their future  
success in school. You can ensure more kids are ready for  
kindergarten by volunteering to serve on a First Things First  
regional council.

In this critical role, you and other council members will  
make high-level decisions about funding local strategies  
to strengthen families and improve the health and early  
learning of young children. Every child should start  
kindergarten ready to succeed.

Make a difference for children today.  
Learn more at [FirstThingsFirst.org/serve](http://FirstThingsFirst.org/serve)

# FIRST THINGS FIRST