



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 15, 2010

Contact: Tracy Irwin
(925) 771-7313

\$6.2 MILLION GRANT AWARDED TO FIRST 5 CONTRA COSTA TO BOLSTER PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

(Concord, CA) – The First 5 Contra Costa commission announced on March 1 the grant award of more than \$6.2 million over five years from the Thomas J. Long Foundation to help ensure low-income children in Contra Costa County are well-prepared for success in school when they start kindergarten. Funding will be used to expand First 5 Contra Costa’s Preschool Makes a Difference program, which provides scholarships to eligible children to attend quality preschool.

“We’re thrilled to partner with First 5 Contra Costa to bring preschool resources to children who need it most,” said Sidne Long, president of the Thomas J. Long Foundation. “We know about the countless benefits of a quality preschool education – and they are too great to ignore.”

First 5 Contra Costa currently funds pilot preschool scholarship programs in Antioch and Pittsburg and is launching a program in Richmond this month. The Long Foundation grant will more than triple the number of low-income children receiving scholarships next year and enable First 5 to establish a program in Bay Point and Concord – communities with four of the lowest achieving elementary schools in the state, according to a list released by the state Board of Education last week.

“We’re grateful for the Long Foundation grant because it allows us to increase access to quality preschool for the county’s youngest and most vulnerable children,” said Sean Casey, executive director of First 5 Contra Costa. “This funding will allow us the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of at-risk children and help get them on the right track.”

The Preschool Makes a Difference program is designed to serve children whose parents earn too much to receive state-funded child care subsidies, but who earn too little to afford quality preschool. In Contra Costa County, the average cost of full-time licensed care for a preschooler in a child care center is \$9,900 a year.

Scholarships from the Preschool Makes a Difference program will be used only at approved licensed child care programs chosen by First 5 Contra Costa through a rigorous screening and assessment process to ensure high-quality practices and well-trained staff.

“These are challenging times for families and this program, which combines parent choice child care subsidies with an assurance of quality programming, is innovative and creative,” said Kate Ertz Berger, executive director of the Contra Costa Child Care Council, which implements the scholarship program. “The program helps low-income families pay for child care so they may work and helps young children prepare for success in school. It’s a win – win.”

For more information on the preschool scholarship program, please visit www.firstfivecc.org.

About First 5 Contra Costa

Research shows that a child’s brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child’s growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on tobacco products to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. Since its inception, First 5 Contra Costa has distributed over \$75 million in Prop.10 revenues to health and education programs that meet local needs.