

From Gaps to Gains:

A Report on Measure X Investments Advancing Inclusion for Children with Disabilities and Delays



Behind the numbers: Investing where it counts

In Contra Costa, more than 72,000 children under age six call our county home—about thirty new births each day. Roughly two-thirds of those families have all available parents in the workforce, and these young children need access to affordable, high-quality early care and education to support their parents' employment and their own development.

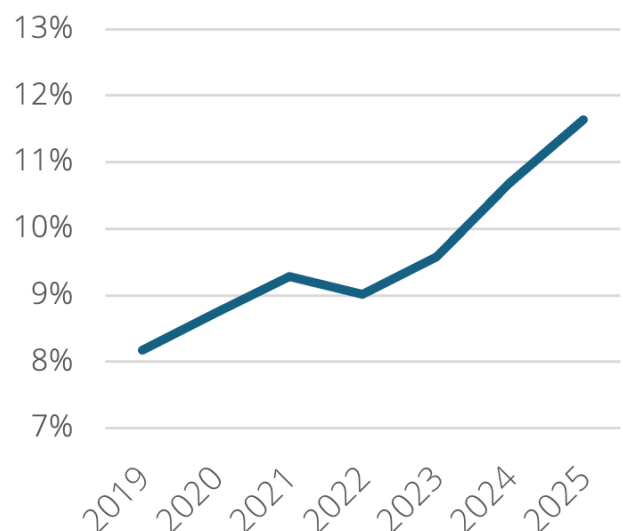
Currently, there are over 300 child care centers and nearly 800 family child care homes that can provide licensed care and education, enough to enroll approximately 35,000 children from birth through age 5 in our county, which may be inadequate to support the estimated 48,000 that have all available parents in the workforce.

In addition to this overall shortfall, **there is an even more significant gap in access to inclusive child care programs that can meet the needs of children with disabilities, delays, and developmental concerns**—a segment of our early childhood population which is growing at an alarming pace, and which continues to grapple with the lingering effects of the pandemic.

Last year alone, First 5–supported services delivered developmental screenings to approximately 2,500 young children, and more than 800 of those screenings pointed to concerns with developmental progress. In Fiscal Year 2025, our county's publicly funded early intervention and early childhood special education sectors served more than 3,300 infants and toddlers, and more than 2,700 preschoolers. Yet an estimated 4,500 children under six remain without access to vital federally-funded services, and non-English-speaking families remain disproportionately under-served.

Importantly, young children with disabilities and delays require more than just these federally-funded specialized services; their families often need child care programs that can meet the needs of children with a wide range of abilities so they can work or attend school.

Percent of K-1 Students with Identified Disabilities



Source: DataQuest, California Department of Education, <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

Access to early care and education spaces that are truly inclusive is a crucial part of the early childhood system that has been overlooked for too long.

First 5 Contra Costa is leading a project focused on creating more inclusive early care and education programs for children with disabilities, developmental concerns, and social-emotional delays. This effort aims to ensure that child care providers have the tools, knowledge, and resources they need to effectively support the diverse needs of all children. Thanks to the leadership of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, this project is supported by local county Measure X sales tax funding, which First 5 Contra Costa matched with the state tobacco tax funding it stewards for our county.

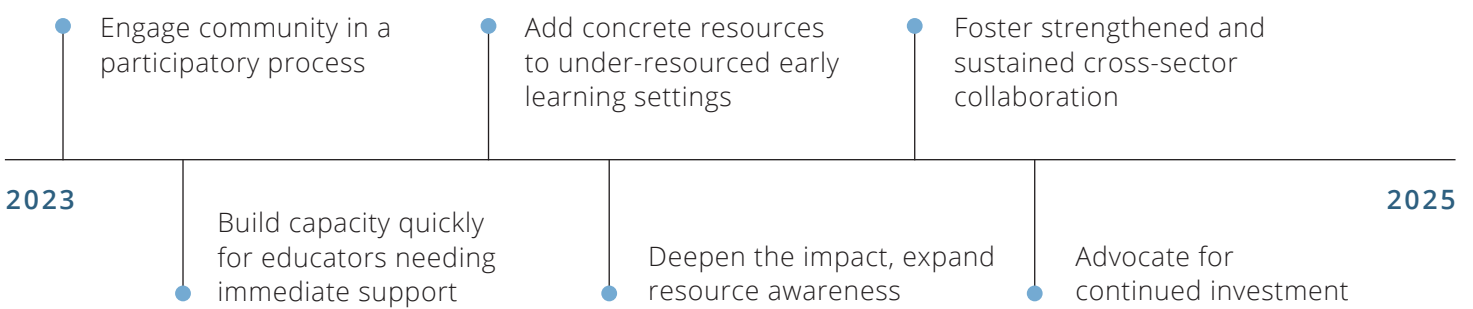
This two-year report spotlights some of the high-impact investments that moved the needle on inclusion for children with disabilities and delays in child care programs. We aim to showcase where **bold investment and collaborative leadership** translated into measurable progress for children and families across the county.

As stewards of public resources and champions of equity, county leaders play a pivotal role in closing remaining gaps.

The successes documented here offer proof points and lessons learned to inform policy, guide future investments, and sustain momentum. By reflecting on what worked, and where barriers persist, we can together chart the course toward more inclusive child care in which every child, regardless of ability, region, or language spoken at home, has the support they need to flourish.

Progress at a Glance

Throughout the length of the *Inclusion in Early Learning project*, First 5 Contra Costa, our community partners, and the dedicated early learning and early intervention professionals serving our county’s children have taken action toward improving the services that families and caregivers interact with every day.



Our goals have been driven by the lived experiences of parents, providers, and disability advocates county-wide.

Raise awareness of resources that already exist to identify and support children with disabilities, delays, and developmental concerns

Build capacity and peer support among child care providers to boost access to high quality, inclusive early learning programs

The remainder of this report showcases examples of the work that has been done, *the tangible impact on our community*, and a roadmap for the work ahead.



Setting the Stage: Gathering Input from Families & Child Care Providers

First 5 Contra Costa began this effort by leading a [comprehensive community engagement process](#)¹ to ground the work in the lived experience and collective wisdom of our community.

Through interviews, focus groups, meaning-making sessions, and community convenings conducted between March and August 2024, we identified strengths, challenges, and opportunities in our county's child care and early intervention landscape.

By the Numbers:

- **200+** individuals participated in the community engagement process
- Findings translated into **3** languages
- Learnings shared with **more than 7,000** community members

Key Insights



Strong community connections and collaborative environments support inclusion in child care.



Mini-grants for classroom materials, more consultation services to support child care providers, and parent peer support are top short-term priorities.



Long wait times and resource navigation challenges hinder family access to inclusive child care and early intervention services.



Increased child care provider wages and funding for more classroom aides rank highest among long-term needs.



Parental resistance paired with low pay and understaffing are key challenges child care providers face.



Ongoing community engagement and equity-centered approaches will continue to drive successful implementation.



Cultural and linguistic barriers necessitate more inclusive outreach and multi-lingual support in services for children with disabilities or delays.

¹<https://bit.ly/creating-inclusive-ecce-programs>

Goal 1: Raise Awareness of Existing Resources



Activities focused on expanding knowledge of existing screening tools and supports for children with disabilities, developmental delays, or social-emotional concerns.

Community-Based Outreach

- Five organizations contracted to develop culturally responsive materials and conduct outreach in English, Spanish, and Mam — reaching **more than 2,000** linguistically marginalized and other underserved families with information on screening and developmental milestones.
- Strengths-based materials shared via videos, text messaging campaigns, printed materials, and an overhaul of the [Help Me Grow Contra Costa](#)² website
- Digitally isolated families engaged in-person with trusted partners at [First 5 Centers](#)³ and other family support organizations, at resource fairs, and through word-of-mouth
- Wide dissemination of visuals and communication aids help bridge providers' and families' understanding about child development, the role of screening, and how to seek additional services when needed.

Training & Technical Assistance on Screening Resources

- Pilot launched with child care programs to receive one-on-one guidance on how to use developmental screening tools
- **12+** hours of group training on using developmental screening tools delivered to **66** participants, who also received toolkits to implement the tools in their child care programs

Impact:

- Families received culturally relevant materials and accessible guidance—normalizing early identification and destigmatizing developmental concerns.
- More children received timely developmental screening from child care providers, pediatricians, school districts, and community-based organizations
- Providers, parents, and interventionists are beginning to “speak the same language” about developmental concerns.
- Families reporting greater clarity on how to seek help and what quality inclusion in child care looks like.
- Providers reporting increased awareness and confidence in talking to resistant parents about evaluations and intervention pathways.

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“What really makes a difference is that our outreach staff really reflects the communities that we serve. They speak Spanish and have lived experience in immigrant and working-class communities... [T]hat kind of trust... resonates with families.”

- Outreach Specialist

Goal 2: Build Capacity and Peer Support

Activities strengthened the skills, community, and tangible supports available to child care professional and early educators.

Training & Technical Assistance on Inclusive Classrooms and Practices

- Delivered **19** group trainings with **400** attendees.
- Trained providers across **273** unique child care programs, which collectively serve thousands of children.
- Topics included sensory needs, classroom assessments, inclusive spaces, managing challenging behaviors, and authentic family connection with providers.
- **99%** of participants rated information quality highly across trainings.

Inclusion Learning Communities

- Supported peer learning cohorts of **36** child care providers, focused on bringing together previously isolated programs
- Confidence in applying inclusive practices increased to **100%** of child care providers by the final learning community session
- **89%** of child care providers committed to changing teaching practices as a result

Mental Health Consultation Program

- Launched a partnership with three local agencies to provide consultation support to **11** child care programs (serving **793** children) with evidence-based, trauma-informed inclusion strategies.

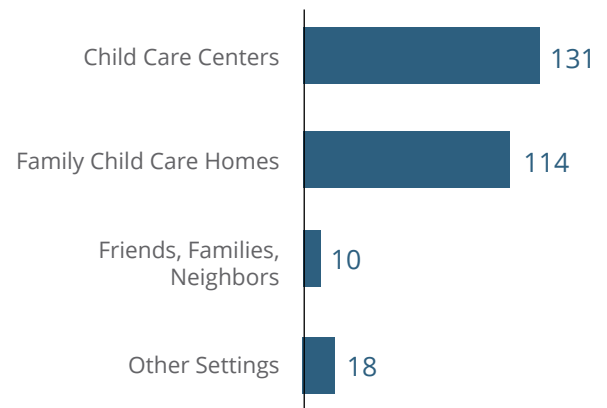
Tools & Materials to Enhance Inclusive Practices

- Awarded **210** shopping passes worth **\$600** each to child care providers who attended an inclusion-related training for classroom materials like weighted blankets, flexible seating, and visual aids — **92%** of recipients reported that materials improved inclusive practices.
- Distributed **325+** reference books and children's books to child care providers
- Provided **350** multilingual inclusion toolkits (sensory mats, communication cards, visual timers, etc.) with accompanying video tutorials to early learning educators.

Impact:

- Providers adopted inclusive classroom strategies and felt equipped with knowledge and materials to support children with disabilities and development needs.
- Peer communities created space for reflection and ongoing learning, fostering deeper professional trust and exchange.

Wide Reach across Diverse Early Learning Settings



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“This training was amazing... I am taking many ideas to apply in my classroom. The strategies shared were impressive.”

- Early educator



Putting it All Together

Throughout this two-year effort, child care providers often accessed multiple opportunities to learn and reinforce new skills, build community with peers facing similar struggles, and receive concrete resources and grounded guidance from national and local experts to support inclusive child care spaces.

Take, for example, one provider who leads a private child care center in West County. The child care site benefited from multiple, no-cost supports over the 2024-2025 school year, including a monolingual Spanish training in trauma-informed practices to support social-emotional development; a shopping pass to purchase inclusion-related classroom supplies; and 10 weeks of participation in a learning community with other child care providers who sought guidance on inclusion.

The cumulative effect of these supports was profound for the providers, children, and families at this site, many of whom were struggling with the lingering pandemic impacts:

“We’ve been having a lot of those meltdowns, all those social-emotional difficulties for some kids...[w]e have a couple of kids who easily get into a tantrum and you cannot stop them... the child looks at you and makes eye contact with you... [and you can] see tears coming down.”

During the 10-week learning community, the provider learned techniques to help those children regain their emotional equilibrium, and shared tools with the teachers at her site:

“So, one idea that came out was like, ‘how about we do the calm bottle’...[t]hat was the highlight of the week... [Each child] has their own specific bottle, and then they use glitter, small objects in there, food coloring... they kept it in the cubby... [and] we practice on how to use it. How you shake it, how you let the glitter settle down... [A]nd it was so nice to see that a lot of the [children], especially the ones we needed the most, were using it right, and throughout the week.”

“[The learning community] gave me the opportunity to bring that out to my staff.”

This provider reported her surprise and delight when families began sharing stories of how the children in their care have fully absorbed what they’ve been taught, demonstrating their stronger emotional regulation skills at home as well:

“Then a week and a half later, they took it home; but it was nice to get feedback from the family, ‘Oh, that was so wonderful! You know, my child was having a tantrum and all of a sudden he or she said, ‘I need to calm down myself – I need my bottle’...I can see the change in the kids. I can see the change in the family.’”



Sustaining our Efforts

As the work continues with community partners and families, First 5 Contra Costa aims to build further capacity, continue to strengthen connections, and pursue systemic improvements to ensure all children have access to inclusive, high-quality early learning experiences that foster lifelong development.

Above all, First 5 Contra Costa will continue to advocate for inclusive spaces for young children with disabilities, delays, and developmental concerns to learn, grow, and thrive.

Providing More Opportunities to Build Knowledge, Skills, and Confidence

Ongoing professional development is essential in early care and education to provide educators with the skills to recognize and accommodate diverse needs, foster positive social-emotional development for all children, and create welcoming environments where every child feels a sense of belonging and can reach their full potential.

Across our trainings and workshops, **97%** of teachers and providers reported wanting to attend more training on inclusion of children with special needs.

Due in large part to continued county Measure X funding to support inclusion, First 5 Contra Costa plans to continue and expand these impactful strategies, including:

- Group training for early educators on inclusive care
- Early childhood mental health consultation
- Additional supportive peer learning communities
- Site-specific technical assistance on inclusion strategies
- Shopping passes to help child care providers access materials that enable inclusive practices

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“Excellent! Just want more! Want all my teachers to have access to inclusion workshops... please!”

– Early educator



Advocating for Sustained System Investments

To address the long-term priorities identified in our community engagement process, First 5 staff and community partners will continue to advocate for inclusive child care spaces and a supported workforce for young children. Some wins we have already seen include:

- Advocating for the launch of the [BOOST pilot program](#)⁴ to enhance early educator wages in neighborhoods with child care deserts in our county
- Developing an *Early Childhood System Map* to increase cross-sector collaboration and data-driven decision making even further
- Advocating for stronger county investment via Measure X funding in parent peer support and family navigation for children with disabilities and developmental delays

First 5 Contra Costa is committed to supporting early childhood educators to build inclusive early learning environments.

[Learn more about our past work and latest efforts on our website](#)⁵, and join us as we work to improve inclusion in early learning in our county.

The progress detailed in this report was made possible through the support of Measure X funding. We extend our sincere appreciation to the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors for their leadership and commitment to building a more inclusive child care system where all children can thrive.



first5coco.org

¹ Creating More Inclusive Early Childhood Education Programs: <https://bit.ly/creating-inclusive-ecce-programs>

² Help Me Grow Contra Costa: <https://helpmegrowcoco.org>

³ First 5 Centers: <https://bit.ly/first-5-center>

⁴ BOOST Pilot Program: <https://bit.ly/early-learning-workforce>

⁵ Supporting Inclusive Early Care & Education Environments: <https://bit.ly/inclusive-ecce>