

Ready Kids East County

2nd Annual Big Table Event

In October 2025, First 5 Contra Costa hosted its second annual Ready Kids East County Big Table Event. The event was the latest community engagement activity in an ongoing effort to support the womb to classroom journey for Black and African American families in East Contra Costa County. 47 partners and community leaders, representing 29 organizations and County departments, as well as 19 Black and African American parents and caregivers, gathered to listen to strategies and participate in discussions on how to enhance services for Black and African American families in East County.

Many organizational leaders and community partners have shared a desire to increase Black and African American participation in their programming, but are often unsure how to achieve that. To address this topic, First 5 invited Dr. Nisaa Kirtman, Ph.D., of Rockman et al Cooperative, to share research about how Black families connect to resources, and to facilitate a discussion between families and community partners to reflect on practices and co-create actionable strategies for engaging Black communities.



The following themes emerged from the event:

Centering Black Parent and Caregiver Voices is Key

A repeated theme across last year's and this year's Big Table event is the need to center the voices of Black parents and caregivers as the experts of their experiences. Suggestions to support engagement included:

- tailoring outreach language and methods to be culturally resonant with the target audience, and
- creating opportunities to integrate their feedback into program design.

Effective Engagement is Driven by Relationships

Opportunities for informal networking, unhurried conversations, and personal interactions with providers are foundational ingredients for building trust and authentic connections. These opportunities enhance families' feelings of inclusion and belonging and enlist families as assets, partners, and trusted messengers.

Collaboration Between Partners

Many partners in attendance expressed interest in strengthening relationships with other community-based organizations and faith-based partners to better reach and support Black families. These relationships are also crucial to providing multiple entry points for families to access additional resources they may need through referral pathways, but require sustained collaboration between partners to be effective.



As we continue to seek ways to strengthen the womb to classroom network for Black and African American families in East Contra Costa County, Big Table events like this one will be integral to amplifying parent voices and to bringing families, community members, and organizational leaders together.

Together, we aim to create an integrated and aligned East Contra Costa County network of system partners that improves the way that Black and African American families with young children are served.



Watch the Highlight Reel:
bit.ly/big-table-highlights-2025

To learn more about Ready Kids East County, contact Jessica Keener, Program Coordinator, at jkeener@first5coco.org

First 5 Contra Costa thanks the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation for their generous support of this effort.

