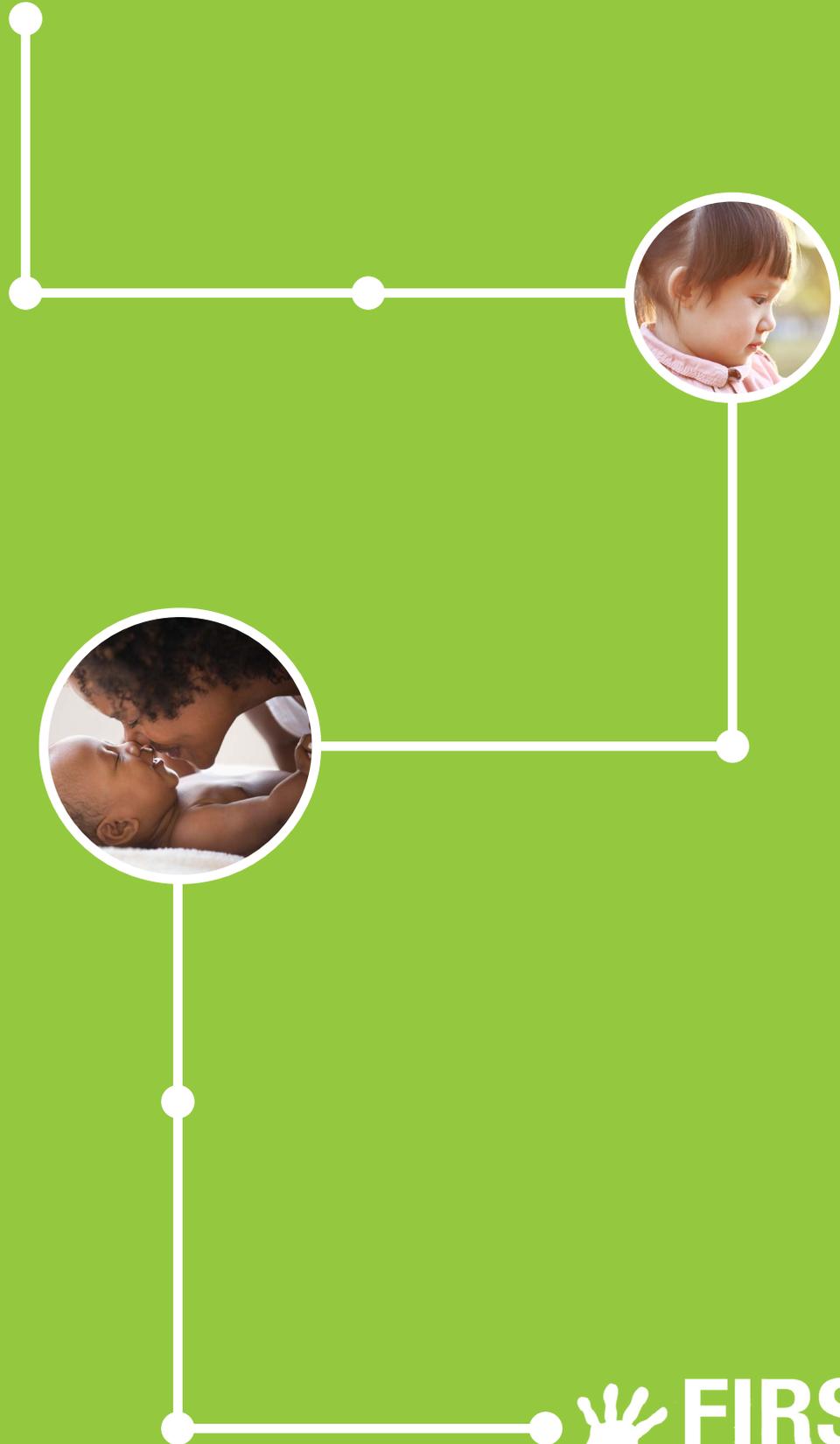


# First 5 San Mateo County Early Childhood Primer



## INTRODUCTION

Proposition 10 was based on research that a child's brain develops more during the first five years than at any other time and that a child's experiences and relationships during these years will impact that child the rest of his or her life. Since that time, a wealth of research has supported and expanded upon these earlier findings. This newer research provides First 5 Commissions with additional information about types of early childhood programs and services that make the greatest difference, as well as demographic targets that will achieve the greatest benefit.

This primer includes different types of resources—from tip sheets and articles to webinars and video clips—designed to deepen knowledge about early childhood. It is aligned with the First 5 San Mateo County Strategic Plan 2015-2020 focus areas of early learning, child health and development, and family engagement.





## FOUNDATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD OVERVIEW

The brain is composed of billions of highly integrated sets of neural circuits (i.e. brain connections) that are wired under the influences of genetics, environment, and experience.<sup>1</sup> A child's genes determine when neural circuits are formed, but environment and experiences shape how that formation unfolds. For example, a healthy and loving attachment to a primary caregiver contributes to healthy brain development.<sup>2</sup> In fact, babies appear to be so strongly motivated and prepared to develop attachments to one or more caregivers that, given the opportunity to interact regularly with a responsive caregiver, he or she will develop an emotional tie to that person.<sup>3</sup>

The raw number of actual brain cells (neurons) peaks before birth, but physical brain size increases rapidly in the first five years of life. A child's brain is 80% the size of an adult's brain at age three and 90% at age five.<sup>4</sup> This growth is due mainly to the structure of neurons, which physically resemble miniature trees with a trunk (axon) and hundreds of growing branches (dendrites). Early experiences determine whether a child's developing brain architecture provides a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.<sup>5</sup> Striking disparities in what children know and can do are established by kindergarten; these differences are strongly associated with social and economic circumstances and are predictive of subsequent academic performance.<sup>6,7</sup>

As a person ages, the brain becomes more specialized to assume increasingly complex functions, which leads it to become less capable of reorganizing and adapting to new or unexpected challenges. The basic principles of neuroscience illustrate that providing favorable conditions for healthy development in early childhood is likely to be more effective than treating problems at a later age.<sup>8</sup> In the past forty years, a compelling body of research has demonstrated that programs aimed at improving young children's health and development have resulted in positive long-term childhood outcomes. In addition, numerous studies show that certain parental decisions and utilization of community programs result in substantial long-term cost savings.

## FOUNDATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCES

### Publications and Briefs

#### [From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development](#)

A foundational text that was central to the movement to pass Proposition 10 and establish the First 5 Commissions. The book provides extensive research on the science of early childhood development, along with the implications it has for early childhood policy, practice, professional development, and research. The entire text is available online; chapter 2 provides an overview of the findings and recommendations.

#### [Through the Prism of the First Three Years](#)

A chapter by John T. Bruer from his book, *The Myth of the First Three Years: A New Understanding of Early Brain Development and Lifelong Learning*, that explores the links between neurobiological research, child development, and early childhood education policy and initiatives.

#### [The Science of Early Childhood Development](#)

This brief from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University provides important context for understanding the neuroscience behind child development and the connection to early childhood education and policy.

#### [The Impact of Early Adversity on Children's Development](#)

This brief from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University summarizes the neurobiology of adverse experiences in early childhood and their short- and long-term impacts.

#### [Executive Function: Skills for Life and Learning](#)

This brief from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University highlights the conditions to support healthy development of executive functioning and the individual and societal outcomes of positive executive functioning.

#### [Building Resilience](#)

This ZERO TO THREE publication outlines practices and considerations for counteracting adverse experiences for parents, families, and communities.





## FOUNDATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCES

### Webinars and Videos

#### [Brain Builders \[3:19\]](#)

This video presented by the First Five Years Fund provides a visual depiction of how early brain development is influenced by a child's environment and interactions.

#### [Change the First 5 Years and You Change Everything \[3:57\]](#)

This video from the Ounce of Prevention Fund provides examples of positive and negative environments for fostering healthy brain development.

#### [Three Concepts in Early Development \[Total time: 5:32\]](#)

This video series from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University focuses on how scientific research is advancing our understanding about how early experiences shape brain development.

1. [Experiences Build Brain Architecture \[1:57\]](#)
2. [Serve and Return Interaction Shapes Brain Circuitry \[1:43\]](#)
3. [Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development \[1:52\]](#)

#### [The Science of Early Childhood Development \[3:58\]](#)

This video from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University features Center Director Dr. Jack Shonkoff, who discusses the neuroscience and behavioral health foundations of early childhood development.

#### [The Impact of Early Adversity on Children's Development \[3:54\]](#)

This video from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University discusses the adverse impact of stress on the developing brain architecture and resulting effects on learning, behavior, and health.

#### [Executive Function: Skills for Life and Learning \[5:36\]](#)

This video from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University discusses the importance of executive functioning for lifelong development and how these skills are fostered or restricted in early child development.

#### [Brain Hero \[2:59\]](#)

This video from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University in partnership with the Interactive Media Division of the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California depicts how actions by a range of people in a child's life impacts development.

# FOCUS AREA: EARLY LEARNING

## Research Overview

Research into how the brain develops during the formative years of a child's life has shown how significant early experiences are in shaping the trajectory of child development and the acquisition of skills that are critical to learning, behavior, and health. Whether these early experiences promote or inhibit healthy development is dependent upon the environments to which a child is exposed. The archetype of early childhood education provides the nurturing, engaging environment that fosters the experiences, interactions, and learning that research has shown is critical to healthy childhood development and lifelong success.

Early childhood education is a broad term used to describe any type of educational program that serves children aged 0-5, before they are of legal age to enter kindergarten. Early childhood education may consist of any number of activities and experiences designed to aid in the cognitive and social development in the early years before entrance into formal elementary school settings. How and where early childhood education is provided can be very different from one state, or even one program, to the next. They may be located in center-based, home-based, or public school settings, and they may be part-day, full-day or even year-round. They can also be privately run, operated by a local school system, or operated by a federally funded program like Head Start.

Quality matters when providing early care and education services. High quality early childhood programs are strongly associated with positive and persisting child outcomes that may extend throughout childhood and adolescence and into adulthood. High quality programs have shown to result in greater outcomes not only for children, but also for society as a whole. The long-term economic benefit of children attending high-quality preschool programs is well documented. These "rate of return" studies differ on level of return depending on the population served, length of the program, and quality enhancements. One of the most studied is "The Perry Preschool Project," a high quality, half-day preschool program targeted to very low-income children. Evaluations of this preschool project document that the program returned seven dollars for every dollar invested.<sup>9</sup>

Research has explored what specific elements of quality are most strongly associated with better outcomes for children, families, and communities. Among those elements studied, the quality of the workforce and level of adult-child interactions appear to play a strong role in producing a high-quality learning environment for children. Programs with highly qualified staff and low staff turnover are associated with positive results for children.<sup>10,11</sup> In addition, children whose child care providers are observed to be responsive, attentive, and sensitive are shown to have optimal development and are more likely to enter school eager and ready.<sup>12</sup> Providing high quality care is largely dependent on having a qualified and stable workforce. Some factors that contribute to a qualified workforce include: completion of coursework in early childhood education, higher wages, low staff-to-child ratios, and low staff turnover.<sup>13</sup>

However, despite the research affirming the need for high quality early childhood programs to support healthy child development, the current state of early childhood education is a mixed bag of high and low quality programs. Administration and oversight of early childhood programs is fragmented. Funding is convoluted and unreflective of the financial demands and resources needed to create and sustain the high quality environments known to best support child development.

## FOCUS AREA: EARLY LEARNING

### Publications and Briefs

#### [The Economics of Inequality: The Value of Early Childhood Education](#)

James J. Heckman is the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, a Nobel Memorial Prize winner in economics, and an expert in the economics of human development. His groundbreaking work has proven that quality of early childhood development heavily influences health, economic, and social outcomes for individuals and society at large.

#### [California's Early Learning & Development System](#)

A 2010 review of funding streams and programs that feed the early learning system in California. While this publication is slightly dated and some of the information contained within has changed since it was initially authored, it is still demonstrative of the complexity of the early learning system.

#### [Blending and Braiding Early Childhood Program Funding Streams Toolkit](#)

A review of how programs “braid” and “blend” funding to effectively deliver high-quality, comprehensive, full-workday, full-year early education programming to vulnerable young children and families. To do so, they must maximize public and private sector investments by using funds from two or more funding streams, such as Early Head Start, Head Start, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF—also called child care assistance or child care subsidy), state pre-kindergarten (pre-k), and state infant-toddler (0-3) programs.

#### [Children Now's 2016 California Children's Report Card](#)

The 2016 California Children's Report Card provides a complete evaluation of the current status of California's children to ensure that the state's leaders make sound policy decisions and keep children a priority in 2016 and beyond.

#### [The Effectiveness of Early Childhood Development Programs](#)

This article examines the effectiveness of early childhood program interventions in preventing developmental delays.

#### [Early Education for Dual Language Learners: Promoting School Readiness and Early School Success](#)

This report presents research findings for program supports for dual language learners (DLLs) and policy recommendations for improving outcomes for DLLs in early childhood settings.

#### [Program Quality and Early Childhood Inclusion: Recommendations for Professional Development](#)

This article explores the evidence and approaches to supporting inclusive environments in early child care through professional development. The article highlights QRISs that include quality standards specific to inclusion and emphasizes the need for more research into quality standards specific to students with disabilities.





## FOCUS AREA: EARLY LEARNING

### Webinars and Videos

#### [The Leading Edge of Early Childhood Education: Session 1](#) [1:23:05]

This program convened leading scholars, practitioners and policymakers for a strategic new discussion about offering high quality pre-k, what we know about early learning and development among today's children, and the challenge of taking ideas to scale. Co-chaired by Harvard Graduate School of Education faculty members Stephanie Jones and Nonie Lesaux, the session highlights the best of what we currently know about healthy child development and high quality systems, schools, and classrooms of early learning, while also bringing in new thinking from other fields to provide insights that bear on the design of pre-k improvement and expansion.

#### [Dr. Jack Shonkoff on Brain Power: Why Early Learning Matters](#) [9:32]

This video is from the 2011 Education Summit and presents Dr. Jack Shonkoff's talk on early brain development.

#### [Early Childhood Program Effectiveness](#) [4:57]

This video from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University discusses the importance of implementing effective early childhood programs and policies to support healthy child development and ensure that children have a solid foundation for their futures.

#### [Preschool: America's Best Investment](#) [7:39]

Can investing in high quality early education reduce the demand for high cost special education, social welfare, and criminal justice systems? NIEER Director Steve Barnett makes this point in this video, which features children in preschool and parents who weigh in on the issue.



# FOCUS AREA: CHILD HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

## Research Overview

**Physical Health:** Access to medical care for pregnant women and children can help prevent threats to healthy development, as well as provide early detection and intervention for problems that emerge.<sup>14</sup> Well-baby and well-child health care focus on prevention and promotes child health by reducing the incidence of illnesses and general health problems. Providing access to affordable health services, including mental health services, is one of the most effective policies available for reducing perinatal and early childhood health impairments.<sup>15</sup>

**Mental Health:** Early identification of special needs during the first five years of life is critical because this is the time when a child's brain, body, and behavior are most malleable.<sup>16</sup> Undetected developmental problems and mental health needs in young children may cause delays in acquiring speech and language, inability to maintain relationships, and serious impediments to school learning.<sup>17</sup> Parent mental health affects children's school readiness. Children who have parents who are either clinically depressed or parents that report symptoms of depression are at risk for a variety of negative outcomes including health, cognitive, and mental health problems.<sup>18</sup>

**Oral Health:** In California, more than 40% of children have already experienced dental decay by the time they enter kindergarten.<sup>19</sup> By third grade, this number has risen to 70%. Dental decay can lead to serious consequences if left untreated; 5.5% of low-income children attending school need immediate care due to severe dental decay and abscesses. Other consequences include pain, chewing difficulty, malnutrition, and low self-esteem. Early dental decay in the primary (baby) teeth can also lead to decay in the permanent teeth. This is almost entirely preventable if families begin to receive counseling during pregnancy and if they themselves have good oral health and a regular source of care, and if they value and practice health-promoting behaviors.





## FOCUS AREA: CHILD HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

### Publications and Briefs

#### [The Foundations of Lifelong Health Are Built in Early Childhood](#)

Driven by converging evidence from neuroscience, biology, genomics, and advances in the behavioral and social sciences, this paper explores how to think and act creatively to enhance the healthy development of young children by reducing the disruptive effects of significant adversity on developing biological systems.

#### [Early Childhood Education: Pathways to Better Health](#)

This National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) brief covers policy recommendations in the context of research in the United States and abroad in the areas of mental and physical health in early childhood programming.

#### [Promoting Health in Early Childhood](#)

This publication reviews programs and policies successful in promoting health in early childhood including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), universal immunization, and high quality, center-based early childhood care and education. The research reveals that these programs' benefits outweigh their costs, suggesting that public spending to support them is more than justified.

#### [The Link Between Early Childhood Education and Health](#)

This brief advocates for focusing on prevention and protective factors early in childhood, and states that quality care and learning can help children to grow up healthy.

#### [Research Synthesis: Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#)

This synthesis describes early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) and reviews the existing evidence base for its effectiveness in fostering healthy social and emotional development in young children, birth through age 6.

#### [Oral Health During Pregnancy & Early Childhood](#)

This report from the CDA Foundation provides considerations and implications of oral health during pregnancy and early childhood, as well as preventive care practices and strategies.

#### [Promoting Oral Health](#)

A guide developed by Bright Futures for best practices in oral health including oral health risk assessments, the importance of dental homes, the use of supplemental fluoride, and treating children with special health care needs.



## FOCUS AREA: CHILD HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

### Webinars and Videos

#### [The Foundations of Lifelong Health \[7:13\]](#)

This edition of the In Brief series explains why a vital and productive society with a prosperous and sustainable future is built on a foundation of healthy child development. The video summarizes findings from *The Foundations of Lifelong Health Are Built in Early Childhood*, a report co-authored by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child and the National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs.

#### [Early Childhood Mental Health \[5:06\]](#)

Science tells us that the foundations of sound mental health are built early in life. Early experiences—including children’s relationships with parents, caregivers, relatives, teachers, and peers—interact with genes to shape the architecture of the developing brain. Disruptions in this developmental process can impair a child’s capacities for learning and relating to others, with lifelong implications.

#### [Addressing Health Disparities in Early Childhood \[59:31\]](#)

This Centers for Disease Control webinar presentation explores the concept that interventions that support healthy development in early childhood reduce disparities, have lifelong positive impacts, and are prudent investments.



# FOCUS AREA: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

## Research Overview

Research on family engagement has repeatedly demonstrated that the majority of parents want the best for their children. Nationally, 42% of parents believe that involvement in their children's education is most critical between birth and preschool.<sup>20</sup> However, they may lack the knowledge and/or resources to promote development during these critical years.

Secure, stable, and supportive relationships with caring adults significantly contribute to a child's healthy brain development.<sup>21</sup> It is associated with many positive outcomes including higher self-esteem, increased communication, and fewer psychological and behavioral problems.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, the lack of secure relationships can lead to long-term negative outcomes. Families in greatest need of support, for example, parents with mental health or substance abuse problems or parents experiencing domestic violence or incarceration, benefit from focused services that are targeted to their particular source of stress.

Positive home learning environments also contribute significantly to a child's school achievement.<sup>23</sup> When parents act as their child's advocate and are involved in their child's education, it is more likely that their child will have increased school attendance and higher academic achievement.<sup>24</sup> Effectively partnering with parents in promoting their child's optimal development also results in better lifelong outcomes and reduces costs to society for special education, welfare, criminal justice, and health.

In recent years there has been a movement away from parent involvement (opportunities for parents to participate within program activities) and towards authentic family engagement (strength-based approaches that authentically honor cultural and structural diversity in families).

Authentic family engagement is the shared responsibility of families, providers, and communities to all collaborate in meaningful ways to support children's optimal development and learning. Family engagement also respects and strengthens parents' and families' roles as strong leaders and advocates for their children. It refers to the systematic inclusion of families in the planning, development, and evaluation of activities and programs that promote children's development, learning and wellness.<sup>25</sup>

Increased family engagement has been linked to programs that are family-centered, supportive, empowering, and culturally relevant.<sup>26,27,28</sup> There are a variety of ways to support parents' abilities to engage with their children at home, as well as in early child education and school settings, including encouraging parent partnerships (establishing relationships with parents as equal partners) and parent connectivity (reducing parents' isolation and lack of parenting support).

The Harvard Family Research Project (HRFP) suggests that essential elements of family engagement are:

- Shared responsibility to promote development of children among families, schools, and communities.
- Occur across multiple settings where children live and learn (i.e. schools, summer camps, digital media, libraries).
- Coordination and communication among various service providers
- Continuous across a child's life.
- Engage parents by allowing them to gain mastery in the skill through practice and application.
- Dual capacity building (families and providers are able to develop skills through/for family engagement).



## FOCUS AREA: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

### Publications and Briefs

#### [Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Lifelong Consequences of Trauma](#)

This report from the American Academy of Pediatrics discusses the role and biology of traumatic stress on child development as well as the effects that may carry through to adulthood.

#### [The Science of Resilience](#)

This brief from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University summarizes the biology around responses to toxic stress and explains how some children may be more resilient than others to the persisting effects of toxic stress.

#### [The Family Engagement Inventory \(FEI\): A Brief Cross-Disciplinary Synthesis](#)

This synthesis of the Family Engagement Inventory (FEI) focuses on how family engagement is both similar and different across different systems, including early childhood education. The synthesis also identifies strategies for family engagement that are common across systems and identifies strategies that are most effective for each discipline.

#### [Growing and Sustaining Parent Engagement: A Toolkit for Parents and Community Partners](#)

This toolkit from the Center for the Study of Social Policy and First 5 LA is a guide to help support and sustain parent engagement, with how to's for implementing three parent engagement strategies.

#### [Family Engagement, Diverse Families and Early Childhood Education Programs](#)

This joint NAEYC and Pre-K Now briefing is an integrated literature review that describes ways to strengthen relationships and provides recommendations for practice.

#### [Increasing Family Engagement in Early Childhood Programs](#)

This NAEYC briefing explores the Strengthening Families approach, in which early childhood teachers and child welfare professionals work intentionally through relationships with families to build protective factors, which are positive attributes that are known to strengthen all families.

#### [Family Engagement in Anywhere, Anytime Learning](#)

This article from the Harvard Family Research Project explores family engagement through the concept of anywhere, anytime learning—a broad view of what learning is—and offers examples of opportunities to engage families.

#### [Families, Powered On](#)

This brief looks at improving family engagement in early childhood education through technology, barriers to effective family engagement, and how technology may support enhanced family partnerships.



## FOCUS AREA: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

### Webinars and Videos

#### [Bay Area PLAN: Engaging Families and Communities in Children's Futures \[2:25\]](#)

The Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network (PLAN) in Oakland, California, is working to strengthen early learning outcomes of vulnerable children by developing leadership and building the capacity of families, schools, and communities to work together to promote success.

#### [The Science of Neglect \[5:57\]](#)

This video provides an overview of "The Science of Neglect: The Persistent Absence of Responsive Care Disrupts the Developing Brain," which explores how successful interventions can have long-term benefits to the adverse developmental impact of neglect during early childhood.

#### [Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development \[1:52\]](#)

This video from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University reviews how toxic stress accumulated through adverse experiences can hinder healthy brain development and lead to lifelong consequences for health and learning.

#### [Technology for Family Engagement in Early Learning Settings \[1:01:52\]](#)

Published on Mar 17, 2016, this Early Learning Lab webinar takes into account that more and more early childhood programs that support the parents of children birth to five are turning to technology to enhance their engagement with families. This webinar covers latest research on tech habits of today's parents, discusses incorporating technology tools, and provides an overview of early learning platforms.

#### [Family Engagement and Education: A Talk with Sherri Killins \[2:10\]](#)

Sherri Killins, Massachusetts Commissioner of Early Education and Care, in an interview with Jake Murray, Senior Director of the Aspire Institute at Wheelock College, discusses the importance of engaging family members and helping them understand and support the state's efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education programs.





## KEY CONFERENCES

### California

#### First 5 California Child Health, Education, and Care Summit

November 8-10, 2016

Sacramento, California

This annual conference for health care providers, early learning providers, county commissions, program directors, family advocates, social workers, and others typically occurs each year in November. The conference focuses on sharing best practices and policies that will prepare California's youngest children to be healthy, well educated, and successful.

#### **Annual Early Learning Water Cooler Conference**

Hosted by the [Advancement Project](#)

2017 information not yet available

This annual conference usually occurs in the early spring. It focuses on early childhood policymaking, bringing together diverse stakeholders to build consensus for policy solutions that support the needs of children birth to five.

#### **New Grantmakers Institute: Grantmaking for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Hosted by [Northern California Grantmakers](#)

2017 information not yet available

This annual professional development event is designed to help new grantmakers, or grantmakers who are seeking a refresher, learn about best practices for effective and ethical grantmaking.

## KEY CONFERENCES

### National

#### Zero to Three Annual Conference

##### **Building Powerful Connections**

Hosted by ZERO December 7-9, 2016

New Orleans, Louisiana

This annual conference, held each year in December, shares the latest research and best practices in the early childhood field. The 2016 event is focused on policies and practices to build strong connections with children and families and help them reach their full potential.

#### **Conference on Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Hosted by the Center for Youth Wellness

2018 information not yet available

This is a biennial conference held in the fall, designed for early childhood policymakers, researchers, and funders, as well as clinicians and practitioners working in health care, early childhood, and child welfare. It aims to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as a public health crisis by sharing insights and best practices for addressing ACEs and toxic stress.

#### **QRIS National Meeting**

Hosted by the QRIS National Learning Network and the BUILD Initiative

June 27-29, 2017

Dallas, Texas

This annual meeting, held each summer, brings together those implementing quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) across the country to share the latest research, effective practices, innovations, and ideas in the development, implementation, and revision of QRIS.

#### **GEO National Conference**

Hosted by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations

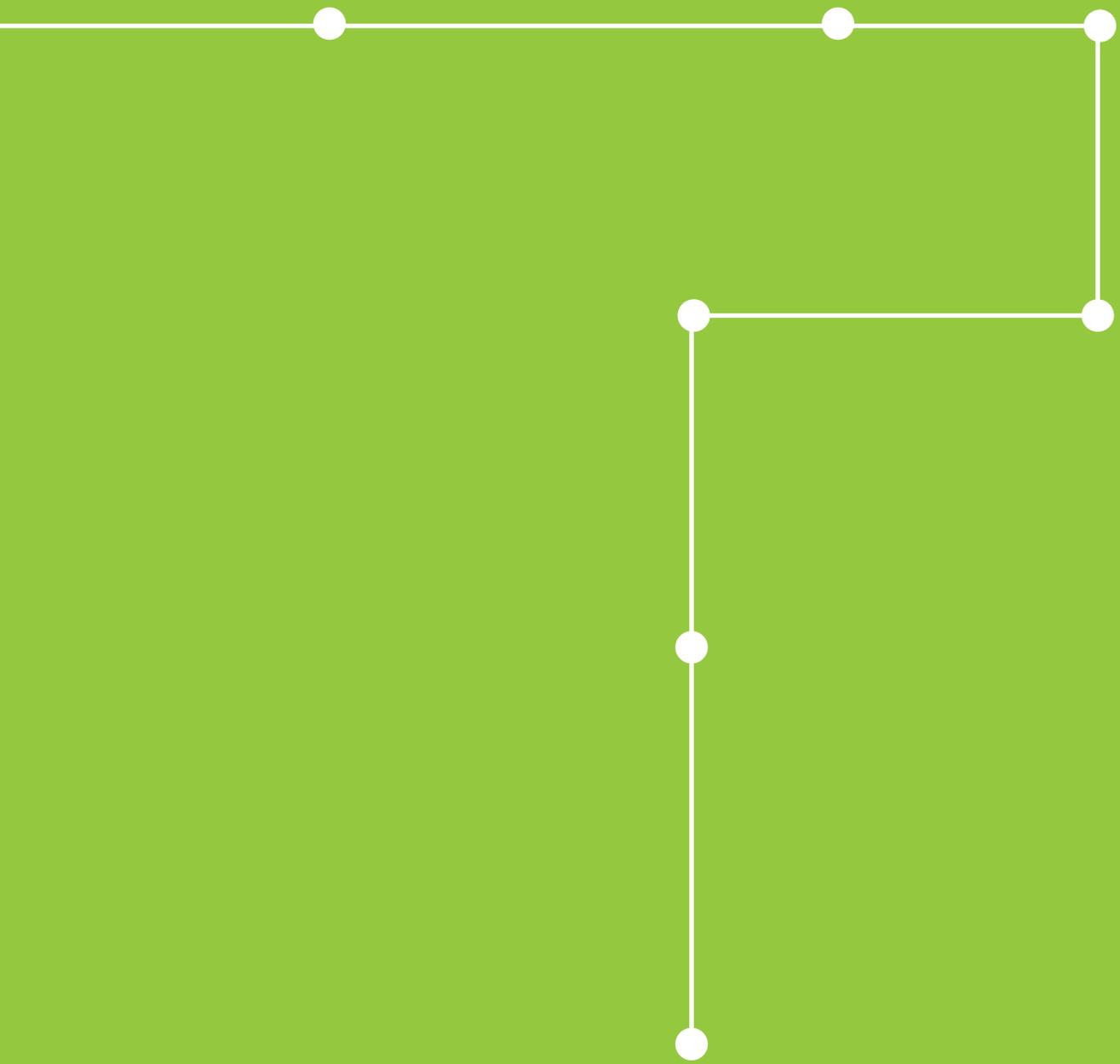
2018 information not yet available

This biennial conference is held in the spring every other year. At the event, grantmakers explore the most relevant topics in the philanthropic field and learn about smarter grantmaking practices that lead to stronger nonprofits and better results.



## END NOTES

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