



Together, preparing

every child for

life and school

**A strategy for Monterey County to better support *all* children
and their families, from the prenatal stage through age 8**

(2018-2025)

**COMIENZOS
BRILLANTES**
INICIATIVA PARA PROMOVER EL DESARROLLO INFANTIL

**BRIGHT
BEGINNINGS**
EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

ABOUT BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

Imagine if all children in Monterey County lived in safe, nurturing homes and communities and were healthy, valued, successful in school, achieving their full potential. That is the vision of the Monterey County Children's Council and the Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative.

Bright Beginnings supports the community as a whole to work together to ensure that young children, from the prenatal stage through age 8, have what they need to succeed. This initiative aims to maximize community efforts to improve early childhood development outcomes through effective coordination, capacity building, empowerment, and strategic action for children and their families.

Research confirms that community investment in early childhood development, especially for children from socio-economically disadvantaged families, yields the highest returns on investment. These investments improve not only their cognitive abilities, but also crucial life skills like sociability, motivation, and self-esteem. Studies that have followed children through their adult lives confirm enormous payoffs for these investments for both children and the broader community, including greater success in college, higher incomes, and lower incarceration rates. Visit www.brightbeginningsmc.org to learn more.



ABOUT BRIGHT FUTURES

The Bright Futures Education Partnership is a community partnership of diverse members fostering progress in education outcomes for local students, from cradle to career, and improving the pipeline of quality talent within Monterey County. Visit www.brightfuturesmc.org to learn more.

Cover Photo: Child and caregiver in Gonzales (2016)

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This document lays out a consensus on what is needed to transform systems and achieve tangible results for the 64,500 young children ages 0-8 in Monterey County and their families. It highlights our shared vision for how change must happen to better support early childhood development, and outlines ***ten strategies we are prioritizing for implementation.***

With this strategic framework, we aim to increase the scale and efficacy of collaborative action by improving coordination and aligning resources. It is the result of a collaborative process and is co-owned by key county agencies, organizations and stakeholder groups ensuring it will receive the necessary attention to achieve results.

Bright Beginnings and Bright Futures support community change efforts. Together we share a focus on children's kindergarten readiness as a key part of the success within the cradle to career education spectrum. Progress is being made and the overall trends are positive, but we are not achieving results quickly enough. Many more children and families would benefit from improved and expedited efforts by the community. And our community is asking for greater results. So, in 2017-18, we took steps to accelerate our efforts. We began by re-analyzing local data and research and taking stock of what was working well and what needs to be changed. An Early Childhood Development Advisory Group was formed to shepherd this process. The Group worked to deepen our shared vision and provide guidance on strategies and approaches needed to achieve our shared community goals (all Bright Beginnings goals and Bright Futures Goals 1 and 2).

This document presents the initial outcomes of that process:

- a **strategic framework** for understanding early childhood development in the context of families and communities,
- agreed **principles** on *how* we can make systems-level changes to better support children and their families,
- and a set of **priority strategies** to be further developed and implemented over the next seven years.

As we come together to celebrate progress so far, we invite you – members of the community, business leaders, teachers, service providers, parents, caregivers, and political leaders – to step up and join us, by committing to work together to achieve our ambitious goals, and by rolling up your sleeves and helping to make changes and implement new strategies to improve the lives of our county's youngest learners!

WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL THE PLAN MAKE?

The “Together, preparing every child for life and school” strategic framework is meant to be used for local prenatal-through-age-eight planning. It will be used by advocates, service providers, the private sector, families and policymakers to:

- Think in different ways about children, families and systems - and the change processes they are part of - so that we can achieve transformational change.
- Hold each other accountable for achieving tangible improvements in systems that impact children and families.
- Focus on the most important drivers that impact child development, so that good intentions translate more quickly into positive results.
- Consider how those drivers—and therefore the strategies to address them—are interconnected, so that services are coordinated and policies are coherent to support families holistically.
- Understand the research and evidence base around what works in key areas that impact child development, to ensure scarce resources are used wisely.
- Support efforts in Monterey County to measurably improve outcomes for children and families.

Strategic Framework for Early Childhood Development

While our end result is clearly defined – **we will transform systems to improve the well-being of children and their families** – how we get there cuts across policy areas, systems, and program types and goes far beyond the early education sector.

In examining the root causes of the challenges facing children and families in Monterey County, our analysis began with recognizing that while children are at the core of our strategies, they are embedded within relationships, families and communities, and their development cannot be understood outside of this context. We also know that children and families cannot make change alone – so we must focus our efforts on changing the conditions (systems) that are keeping them from being successful.

We know from research that improving children’s well-being, requires integrated strategies that cover the prenatal-through-age-eight developmental period and take into account all the domains of children’s lives. No single intervention or program can impact child development at the population level. Rather, a bundle of integrated and aligned interventions are needed to turn the curve.

The concepts and principles described in this strategic framework represent our shared understanding of how children develop in the context of their families and communities, and how we can work together to better support them – and ultimately make Monterey County a better place for everyone.



Building on this understanding, we analyzed key drivers affecting children’s development, using a literature review and analysis of currently available local data on kindergarten readiness. Based on this analysis, the Advisory Group identified four key drivers¹ on which we will focus our collective efforts:

- Empowered and resilient parents²
- Families surrounded by support
- Caregivers³ that help children grow and learn
- An equitable system of support for all

By understanding that these four elements are all necessary for children’s healthy development, and focusing on influencing these areas, we will achieve greater change in services and systems in ways that will make more children and families better off– and ultimately make Monterey County a better place for everyone.

¹ The findings of this analysis will be published in a series of papers (forthcoming).

² Throughout the document the term ‘parent(s)’ is used to mean primary caregivers, both biological parents and others – such as legal guardians or grandparents – that play an important role in children’s lives.

³ The term “caregivers” is used to mean anyone taking care of or responsible for young children, in any setting, and can include people such as: parents, teachers, early care educators, childcare providers, nannies, grandmas, family friends, and coaches.

Strategic Framework + Strategy Priorities for Early Childhood Development in Monterey County



Core Principles

In this strategic framework, the core values that inform how we will pursue change are equally as important as the strategies we pursue. These Principles define how each strategy should be designed, implemented, and evaluated, to ensure they achieve sustainable impact, while shifting power dynamics so that everyone has a place at the table.

TO IMPROVE SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WE COMMIT TO WORK TOGETHER IN WAYS THAT VALUE:

- **A holistic view of children and families:** The physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development of children are all connected and all important. Success for our children is dependent on and interrelated to their family and community context, and the relationships that surround them.
- **The power of interconnected community systems:** We will work together – not in silos. By implementing strong cross-agency/organization collaboration, coordination, and integration we can meet the entire range of needs of families in an effective and responsive manner. We will hold ourselves accountable for achieving community-level outcomes.
- **The rights of *all* children to access equitable opportunities:** Equity is the just and fair inclusion into a society where all can participate, prosper and reach their full potential. It is not enough to understand that there are disparities among children and families, we must actively pursue transformative change (in policies, practices, and resource flows) to eliminate inequities, including those created by structural racism, sexism, able-ism, poverty, and other forms of systemic exclusion and discrimination. We know that a more equitable society will be better for everyone, and is necessary for creating a healthy, safe, thriving County.
- **Culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices:** High levels of trauma affect individual children, families, and neighborhoods. We will use child and family focused approaches to care and services in which the cultural strengths of the child, parent, and family are identified and nurtured to promote the well-being of children, families, and communities. Culturally responsive and reflective practices will be implemented at the personal, institutional, and policy level.
- **Co-creating solutions:** We believe in working with, for and by children and families – creating systems and practices that enable authentic community leadership of individual and community-wide change processes. We believe it is essential that community voice is at the table while programs are being designed, implemented, and evaluated to ensure they are effective in meeting their needs and are sustained. All strategies will reflect our local context and respond to local priorities, cultures, and needs.
- **A tenacious focus on results:** About 20 babies are born each day in Monterey County – this means 20 new people and families whose life outcomes we are committed to supporting and whose rights we will defend! We measure our success not in terms of dollars spent or actions taken, but by real change in families' lives that have a tangible impact on children's well-being.
- **Informed by research:** Good intentions are not enough! We will use the best available research, evidence and local data to identify needs, evaluate change, and accelerate growth.

We know that a more equitable society will be better for everyone, and is necessary for creating a healthy, safe, thriving County.

Our Overall Goal

Our goal is to transform systems to better support every child and family in Monterey County. If we succeed, the result will be seen in improved health and well-being for children and their families. Over time, these community-level efforts will be reflected in reductions in maltreatment and abuse, and in improvements in children's holistic development.

To focus our collective efforts, and keep children's holistic development at the center, we will work towards two community-wide objectives:

- **By 2025, double the number of children who** are holistically supported so that they are healthy, their development is on track, and they **are well prepared for kindergarten***
- By 2023, significantly **reduce gaps in kindergarten readiness between children in low-income households and children in non-low-income households***

We will use these two goals to reflect on the systems changes that are needed – and to evaluate whether our strategies are achieving their desired results. They will also inform our efforts to make sure our health, education and social service systems are ready for – and responsive to – children and families.

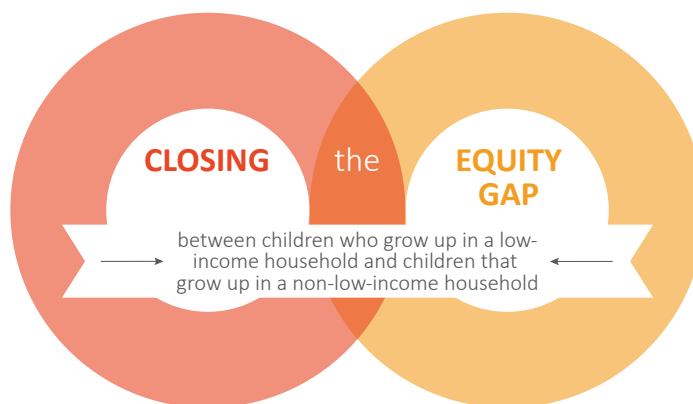
No single group or agency can achieve these goals alone – but by working together, we can! In order to achieve this goal, we will have to work smarter and do more – scaling up current programs that are already working well, and innovating to find new solutions to reach more families. The following pages describe priority strategies for achieving these goals.

Our community-level outcome is a holistic measure of a child's development, measured at age five. However, to ensure sustained impact, our strategic framework covers work supporting families and children from the prenatal stage through age 8. Our support should not end there, and we will work with Bright Futures Education Partnership and other partners to continue to support children and families as they move through school and life.

Our goal is to transform systems to better support every child and family in Monterey County.



Chart data source: Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, First 5 Monterey County (2015). Kindergarten Readiness is measured using the Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP) and countywide figures are estimated based on a sample of participating schools that is broadly representative of children in the county. These are the best data currently available to capture a countywide snapshot of children's development and school readiness.



⁴ *These are preliminary targets and we expect to refine them as new data become available and measurement tools improve. See "How will we measure progress?" for more information.



HOW WILL WE MEASURE PROGRESS?

A critical part of our collective impact approach is the commitment of all partners to monitor and evaluate the results of their work using shared measures. This will allow the community to monitor short term progress in strategy implementation – and make improvements. We will also use the findings to track our collective progress in achieving our overall community-level goals.

We are currently working to improve the measures used to assess kindergarten readiness and other early childhood indicators, and ways of gathering and analyzing those data. Our goal is to have a more comprehensive system for gathering key information on each child's development in place by 2020.

Tracking kindergarten readiness is just one of the ways we will measure collective progress. We will evaluate the effectiveness of this strategic framework and the priority strategies annually, and track the systems changes we create. We will support Action Teams implementing these strategies to develop and use appropriate **strategy-level measures**. Some examples of targets and strategy-level measures (some of which are already being used) are provided below. Data on strategy implementation will be housed in the Impact Monterey County strategy maps scorecard.

Priority Strategies

These ten strategies will be the focus of our collaborative work over the next two years. They were developed by the Early Childhood Development Advisory Group based on a review of local data, research and evaluation literature. Each potential strategy was reviewed using a set of criteria to determine whether or not it was likely to contribute to systems changes that would have a significant, positive impact on children and families in our county. This is not an exhaustive list of work supporting early childhood development in Monterey County - rather it is the areas we are choosing to focus our collaborative efforts to reach the community-level goals none of us can achieve alone. By addressing the entire system, we will achieve more than isolated efforts focusing on only one element.

In addition, three cross-cutting strategies will support the implementation of the strategic framework: generating sustainable funding; capacity development and awareness raising; and involving families in decision-making.

1. A COMPREHENSIVE, EQUITABLE SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS ALL CHILDREN'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

This key driver is about the systems that influence children and their families, including social norms, the built environment, and socio-economic and political systems. Our aim is to work towards a comprehensive, equitable system that better supports all children's holistic development. In these systems, children are not segregated because of funding streams but flourish in diverse, high quality programs. Programs are based on the unique strengths of each family and community as well as the universal aspects of child rearing and development. Children are assessed in authentic ways and fair amounts, and success is defined in ways that meaningfully reflect lived-experience.

We want to change the mind-set that a child's well-being is only the responsibility of individual families. Instead, we will work together to support a high-quality, comprehensive system where each child and their family have equitable access to appropriate services and supports that enable them to make choices and reach their unique potential.

While systems change is woven throughout this strategic framework, we will focus on two specific systems-shaping strategies aimed at supporting early childhood development, described here.

1.1 Transform early care and education systems to increase access and improve quality

This strategy will focus on licensed early care and education centers and family childcare, and will increase the percent of children enrolled in high quality early care and education. This approach involves systems change (changes in policies, regulations, resource flows, power dynamics, and mental models) to move from a complex fragmented system of early care and education, to a coherent system where all children receive equitable access to top quality care and education. Our systems-thinking approach involves addressing individual "gears" in the system, while also seeking to address the systems dynamics that are maintaining the current problems related to low quality, unaffordable care, and limited access. This requires shifting from a system where funding is at the center to a system where children's well-being is at the center – and the true costs of low quality care are recognized and shared. In this system, early educators are valued and compensated at a level that reflects

their vital role in shaping young minds – and thus contributing to the well-being not only of children, but of the entire economy and society at large. We will address systematic inequities through supporting efforts to nurture resilience in children of color; nurturing empathy and inclusivity among all children; supporting caregivers to raise children who think critically about the why and how of patterns of racial inequity and other systemic forms of oppression; and support a justice advocacy movement for all children and adults.

This strategy will include specific projects to expand the early care and education workforce, and to address facilities limitations with collaborative pilot solutions to develop universal preschool in the City of Salinas.

1.2 Design coherent policies that improve the lives of children and families: Children First in all Policies

This strategy involves mainstreaming early childhood into other policy areas not typically considered - such as transport, land use, housing and economic development - and including early childhood language in general plans, master plans, and (re-)development

plan policy documents at the city, county and state levels. It would ensure improved policy coherence and result in tangible improvements in the environment, as well as direct supports to families. The Advisory Group identified a particular need in Monterey County to focus on more coherent affordable housing and transport policies.

We will support the use of tools to transform public investments and policies, such as requiring a “Child Impact Assessment” (similar to Environmental Impact Assessment) which mandates staff/developers to examine potential positive and negative impacts of legislation, regulations, and new developments on young children and their families. It may also involve supporting sector-specific programs or policies with research, data analysis and policy recommendations, based on deepening partnerships between the Early Childhood Development Advisory Group and specific public departments/sectors. This strategy has many parallels to – and will complement – the Health Department’s Health in All Policies (HIAP) approach.

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL STRATEGY-LEVEL TARGETS AND MEASURES FOR STRATEGIES FOCUSED ON SUPPORTING EQUITABLE SYSTEMS FOR ALL

- Have at least 23% of licensed early care and education sites participating in the Quality Matters program by 2020⁵
- Increase from 47% to 65% the percent of working families with children ages 0-8 that have access to part or full-day licensed care
- Increase from 41% to 60% of children ages 3-4 who have access to quality preschool by 2021
- Increase the percent of enrollment of 3-5 year olds in the City of Salinas in early care and education from 51% to 90%
- Reduce the percent of children in Monterey County attending a racially/ethnically or economically segregated early care and education setting
- Reduce the percentage of families with young children experiencing homelessness⁶
- Improve walkability of neighborhoods and access to safe non-motorized transport
- Reduce air pollution and exposure to other environmental contaminants



⁵ For a complete list of references and data sources please visit BrightBeginningsMC.org

⁶ As defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The term “homeless” means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. It includes families sharing the housing of other persons, living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds; and migratory children.



2. EMPOWERED AND RESILIENT PARENTS

Parents are more likely to achieve healthy, favorable outcomes if they are resilient. Our aim is not only to support individual parents in being healthy and strong, it is also to create an enabling environment that allows for parents to lead positive change in the community.

All parents and all families have strengths - and all parents and families need support at some point! No one can eliminate stress from parenting, but a parent's capacity for resilience can affect how a parent handles stress, and what impact daily stress has on their children. Furthermore, we have seen time and again that parents that are supported in their role as "first teachers" become positive – and powerful – agents of change, in their own families and beyond. Local data show that children that have been the least prepared for kindergarten are four times as likely to have a parent that does not have others who will listen when they need to talk about their problems, and three times as likely to have a parent that says they don't know how to help their child learn (both indications of lower resilience). Parents need special supports in their role as first teachers.

2.1 Improve screening, treatment and support for parents' mental health

The well-being of parents – including their mental health – plays a critical role in children's development. Early experiences affect the development of brain architecture, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. To develop a healthy foundation, children need caregivers who are emotionally responsive and available. When a parent is impacted by a mental health disorder, they are less likely to be able to respond to their children's emotional needs. Nationally, depression and anxiety affect up to 1 in 5 women during or after pregnancy, and nearly 50% of women living in poverty. The mental health of fathers, grandparents, and other primary caregivers all influence children's development as children develop in the context of their relationships with their caregivers. Untreated mental health and substance use disorders negatively impact the quality of the relationship between the caregiver and the developing child. This strategy aims to create a system for comprehensive mental health screening and supports for parents, caregivers, and children. It will include scaling up access to treatment in dyads (parent-child), as well as in individual and group therapy, and through support groups with professionals.

2.2 Expand access to playgroups

This strategy involves scaling up “parent-child playgroups” where children come with their parent and learn that ‘play’ is the way that young children learn. Playgroups are currently being implemented across the county, but there is more demand for play groups than can be met, particularly in South County communities. Expansion could include increasing the offerings of current providers, and opening play groups in more settings by working with Child Welcoming Businesses or service providers offering recreational activities for children and families (such as libraries, Recreation Departments and sports clubs).

Key components of play groups that seem to contribute to positive outcomes include: having trained facilitators, and small, consistent groups to build family relationships. Playgroup facilitators support parents with modeling, coaching, observation, and discussion - based on adult learning approaches and research on early childhood development. The groups support parents with knowledge and skills needed to change/support behaviors that are developmentally appropriate for children. Implementation of this strategy will include coordination and collaboration across playgroups throughout the county.

3. FAMILIES ARE SURROUNDED BY CONCRETE AND SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Families and their children are healthier when they are supported by their community in specific ways. All families need basic supports like food, shelter, clothing,

and health care to thrive. Likewise, when families encounter a crisis such as job loss, domestic violence, mental illness or substance abuse, adequate services and supports need to be in place to provide stability, treatment, and help for family members to get through the crisis. Strategies in this area will focus on creating better choices for all families within a better overall system of formal and informal supports - that are more accessible and match everyone’s needs - while also providing specific support to families facing the most difficult circumstances.

Formal family supports are policies, practices, or programs designed and delivered to families, such as means-tested government programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or child-care subsidies. These supports can be universal (meaning open to everyone), or designed to support families living in particular circumstances of high stress. Informal supports are described as the people and community in the lives of children, adults, and families. These may include extended family, neighbors and colleagues who help each other. These supports help individuals to develop a sense of social belonging, dignity and self-esteem.

3.1 Implement an integrated, holistic, family-centered support system of screening, care coordination, referrals, and services

Families often face challenges in accessing the supports they want, because the early childhood system is fragmented and sometimes difficult to navigate.

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL STRATEGY-LEVEL TARGETS AND MEASURES FOR STRATEGIES FOCUSED ON SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING PARENTS

- Develop county wide protocols for screening and referring pregnant women for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMAD)
- Increase capacity across non-profits, public and private providers to treat PMAD in order to have an array of supports to meet varying levels of need
- Increase the percent of parents that report “I have someone to talk to if I need to talk about a problem”; “I know how to help my child learn”; and “I feel very close to my child” during kindergarten in-take
- Increase by 20% the number of playgroups offered, with a priority on those accessible to low-income parents





EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL STRATEGY-LEVEL TARGETS AND MEASURES FOR STRATEGIES FOCUSED ON SURROUNDING FAMILIES WITH SUPPORT

- Reduce to 20% the number of women who receive late or no prenatal care (currently 26%)
- Increase the proportion of infants who are breastfed exclusively through 6 months, while reducing gaps between hospitals in initial breastfeeding rates
- Increase the % of eligible families enrolled in Cal-Fresh, WIC, Medi-Cal, and childcare subsidies
- Reduce parents reporting stress related to caregiving obligations and work conflicts
- Track long-term increases in worker productivity, employee satisfaction and retention among family friendly businesses in Monterey County



Demand for services often far exceeds capacity of providers. This strategy involves the implementation of “Integrated Service Collaboratives” which help connect families to resources by providing child development screenings, care coordination, parenting information, and services to children prenatal through age 5 and their families. Each collaborative provides parent-child playgroups and also helps families with referrals and coordination of services. This approach is currently being piloted by First 5 Monterey County and partners and – if effective – could potentially be scaled up to reach more families. It is implemented in coordination with many other strategies listed here (e.g. home visiting, mental health screening, which are also provided by the Collaboratives).

3.2 Scale up home-visiting programs for families with young children

Parent-child home visiting is an evidence-based practice that provides an opportunity for families to learn age-appropriate strategies for supporting their children and receive support in their own home. It involves having some type of trained support person (often a nurse or other paraprofessional) who visits the home on a regular basis. Home visiting is generally

provided before/after birth and continuing for first two years of life, and is targeted at first time and high risk mothers. Home visiting has shown positive impacts when implemented universally.

The Advisory Group identified a need for a particular focus on supports to increase duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding, in the context of home visiting programs. Evidence-based home visiting and lactation support programs directly influence parenting behaviors, and if done effectively, can help parents strengthen their own resilience and empowerment, while reducing child maltreatment and positively impacting children’s development. Various home visiting programs are currently in place in the County, ranging from visits from a public health nurse, to trained Certified Parent Educators, and visits from a community health worker or *promotora*. Implementation of this strategy will begin by taking stock of current home visiting programs in the County to increase coordination and evaluate focus and potential for scaling. Our ideal strategy would aim for universal programs for home visiting (with lactation support) that would reach everyone with differentiated, culturally-tailored supports.

3.3 Expand paid family leave, protect and support breastfeeding, and increase other family-friendly business practices and policies

This strategy aims to reduce external stress on families to improve parents' and their children's well-being. It supports a host of specific business practices and policies that can improve the well-being of working families.

Paid family leave is one specific policy change to allow more parents/guardians (biological or other) to provide care for young children with paid leave for 24 weeks. The workplace can be either a barrier or a support for working parents to reach their own breastfeeding goals. Exclusive breastfeeding is a crucial first step in protecting the health of mothers and infants, nourishing infants and building a foundation for a healthy immune system. Hospital and workplace practices have an enormous impact on infant-feeding success. Other "Family-Friendly Business" practices and policies include providing flexible work schedules or providing onsite childcare to make work environments more conducive to parent and child development.

Currently, Bright Beginnings is working with local chambers of commerce to recognize businesses demonstrating best practices. This strategy could be modified and scaled up to support additional changes in policy and business practice.

4. ALL CAREGIVERS USE POSITIVE, DEVELOPMENTALLY-SUPPORTIVE BEHAVIORS

This key driver is about how caregivers behave towards and interact with children on a regular basis, in all care settings. An important part of caregiver behavior is knowledge and awareness, including accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children's behavior at every age. Such knowledge can help caregivers see their children in a positive light and promote their healthy development. Caregivers are influenced by information from many sources, including family members as well as parent education classes and surfing the internet. Studies show that information is most effective when it comes at the precise time caregivers need it to understand their own children or children in their care. Caregivers who experienced harsh discipline or other negative childhood experiences may need extra help to change the parenting patterns they learned as children.

Caregiver behavior that supports each unique child's optimal development is defined as the physical, social, and emotional back and forth interactions between parents/caregivers and young children that:

- are mutually engaging and positive in affect,
- responsive and sensitive to children's communicative abilities and social/emotional needs,
- and allow children to establish secure expectations that their needs will be met.

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL STRATEGY-LEVEL TARGETS AND MEASURES FOR STRATEGIES FOCUSED ON SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

- Reduce the % of children that have more than 2 adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
- Reduce incidence of maltreatment and abuse in the County
- Develop a more comprehensive system for developmental screening and referrals for young children
- Increase to 90% the percentage of parents that read, show picture books, or tell stories to their children more than 4 times per week (currently 75%)
- Increase the % of young children that play outdoors or indoors every day
- Increase the % of informal providers that read, show picture books, or tell stories to children in their care
- Increase the self-efficacy of family, friends and neighbors, and other early care providers





4.1 Embed parenting and child development supports in health and other public services

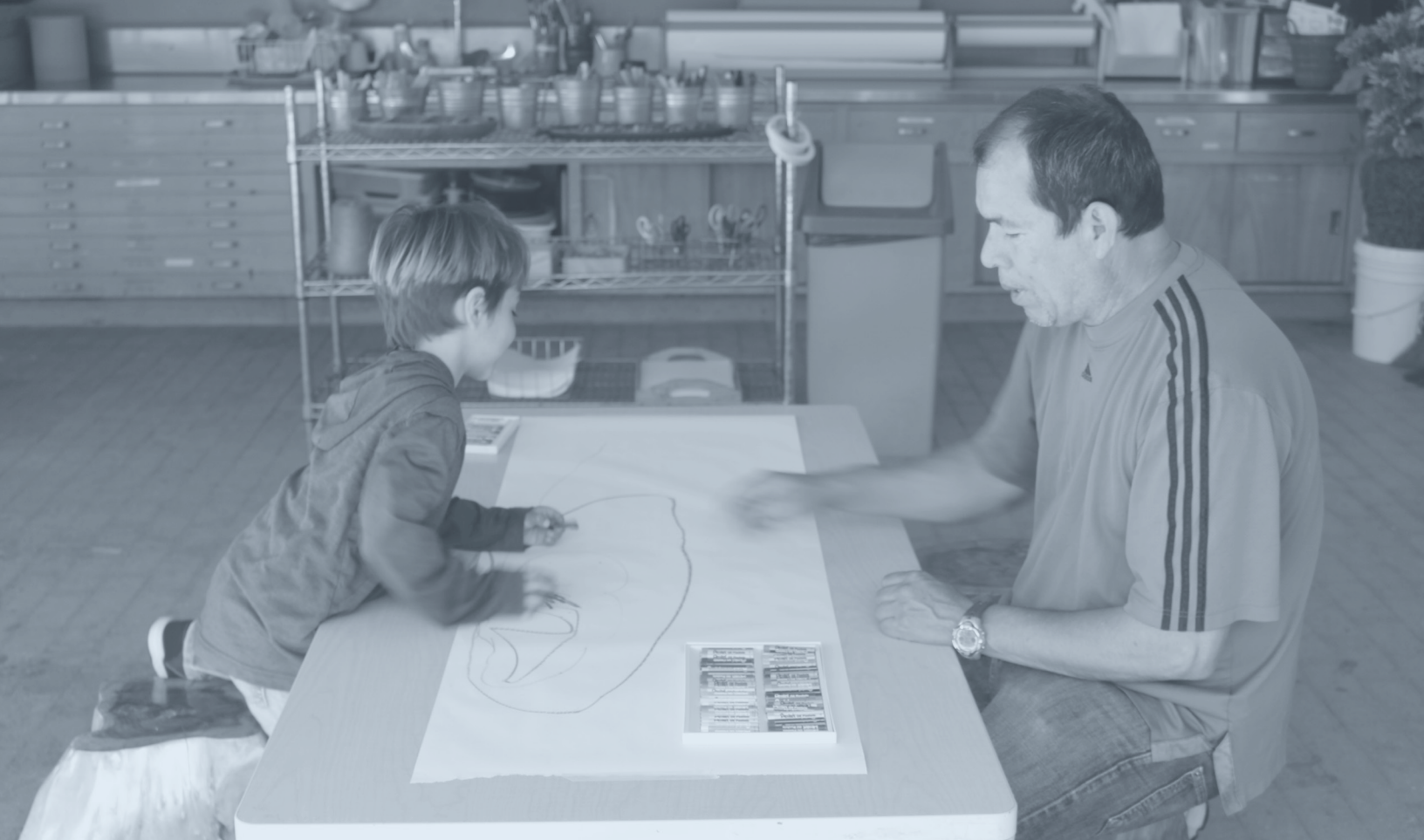
This strategy involves integrating supports for early childhood brain development and supportive parenting behaviors for development and pre-literacy learning (“talk, read, sing, play” etc.) into other settings serving families, specifically through pediatricians and service providers. It also supports parents as their child’s first teacher. This strategy would support healthy child development and effective parenting and has been proven to increase access to the guidance, support, and resources needed to raise healthy families. The specific activities would be further developed with deep involvement of local families and service providers to ensure that it is relevant, culturally-responsive and well adapted to their daily realities.

In the local context, we have identified two priority settings – one universal and one targeted – in which we will look at scaling up supports: pediatrician offices (health clinics) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC), which serves low-income families. Children enrolled in WIC represent a high percentage of the children least-well prepared for kindergarten, and are a population that is already designated as high risk.

The focus of the strategy would be to fund additional staff/volunteer supports to complement WIC staff and enhance the mental health, child development, parenting and early literacy components of the program. We will explore rolling out programs based in pediatricians’ offices (with professionals embedded in the primary care team) that help families identify, understand and manage parenting challenges like feeding, behavior, sleep, and adapting to life with a young child.

4.2 Support family, friend and neighbor caregivers (FFN)

Local data show that the more time children spend in informal care with a non-relative, the less likely they are to be well prepared when they start school. Informal providers often provide affordable care, are familiar, easy to access and trusted by families, and match the home language and ethnicity of the children in their care (which some families view as particularly important). While some informal providers offer excellent quality and special connections with the children in their care, others are not providing optimal experiences and are the only care available for parents who cannot afford other options.



This strategy would build on local pilots to provide capacity development and technical support through play groups for Family, Friend and Neighbors (FFN) Caregivers. During play groups, trained facilitators provide modeling, coaching, and support to help increase participants' knowledge of child development and how to best support each child's learning and development. It would aim to directly improve the quality of informal caregiver behavior and also improve the home environment. Different types of FFNs (paid/unpaid, family or non-family, etc.) would benefit differently, and supports would be tailored to their unique relationships to the children in their care, and individual professional goals.

4.3 Provide more effective parenting programs

This strategy involves providing additional support for parenting education and development programs throughout the County. This strategy would focus on supporting relationship-based approaches, using adult learning theory and child development science. It would also ensure that programs are well-adapted to local cultures and context. Effective parenting

programs support parents with core concepts, values, knowledge and skills needed to understand their role, and to change or support behaviors that are

developmentally appropriate for children. Parenting programs are currently provided in a variety of settings, including through the healthcare system, at schools, and by community-based organizations. For example Opening Doors/*Abriendo Puertas*, is a workshop program that supports parents in their roles as family leader and as their child's first and most influential teacher.

All parents and all families have strengths - and all parents and families need support at some point!

5. CROSS CUTTING STRATEGIES

The following core strategies will support overall implementation of the strategic framework and help transform systems for sustainable impact.

5.1 Generate sustainable funding for early childhood services

As part of the implementation of this plan, we expect to see improved coordination and alignment of public, private, and philanthropic resources to implement individual strategies and achieve our shared goals. In addition to new funding, we expect efficiency gains from better coordination and working “smarter”, to achieve greater positive impacts within existing programs.

We will explore options for creating sustainable, dedicated funding for children services at the city and county levels. Establishing a sustainable Children’s Fund in Monterey County or local cities would bring the consistent funding needed to move the needle on indicators to better serve children. We will begin by reviewing county and city budgets to identify the portion of local spending that currently aligns with the countywide priority to support education, and children and families. Where we find gaps, we will advocate for change.

5.2 Engage families with young children in shaping local and regional policies, budgets and services

When parents and other community members - especially those from groups that have been systematically excluded - are given space, opportunities, and tools to lead change it can be very powerful for them as individuals, as well as for their children and communities. Involving parents directly in decision making and change processes strengthens their resilience and allows for self-empowerment. When parents feel seen, and important, it can transform how they view themselves as a parent and as a leader. It also makes the programs more effective and sustainable.

In addition to supporting family and community leadership in designing, implementing and evaluating all of these strategies, we will actively support community leadership across policy making in Monterey County. This is about putting parents (and children) in the “driver’s seat” in setting the

agenda, understanding problems, designing solutions, and evaluating progress. We will work to create an enabling environment for leadership and advocacy that shifts power to families and children, especially families from communities of color and those working in low-wage jobs. This involves supporting the development of parent and other community leader capacities.

5.3 Capacity development and awareness raising

In line with our commitment to continuous learning, we will strengthen our own and others’ core knowledge and skills needed to implement the principles and strategies outlined above. This involves cross-sector agreement on what constitutes quality practices, programs, and policies. It means intentionally and strategically increasing the knowledge and skills of everyone working in this sector (and related sectors) to support children and their families in ways that will lead to holistic and transformative change.

We measure our success not in terms of dollars spent or actions taken, but by real change in families’ lives that have a tangible impact on children’s well-being.

Next Steps

This plan already benefits from a core set of partners who have committed to working together to achieve the goal of transforming systems to reduce inequities in kindergarten readiness and increase the number of children ready for kindergarten by 2025. Following the “soft launch” in May 2018, we will continue to build support for the plan among a broader group of stakeholders and invite different communities, organizations, schools, and families to step forward in implementing one or more strategies.

Our intention is that the core concepts and principles laid out in this strategic framework will change the way we all think and work – and ultimately catalyze more effective action.

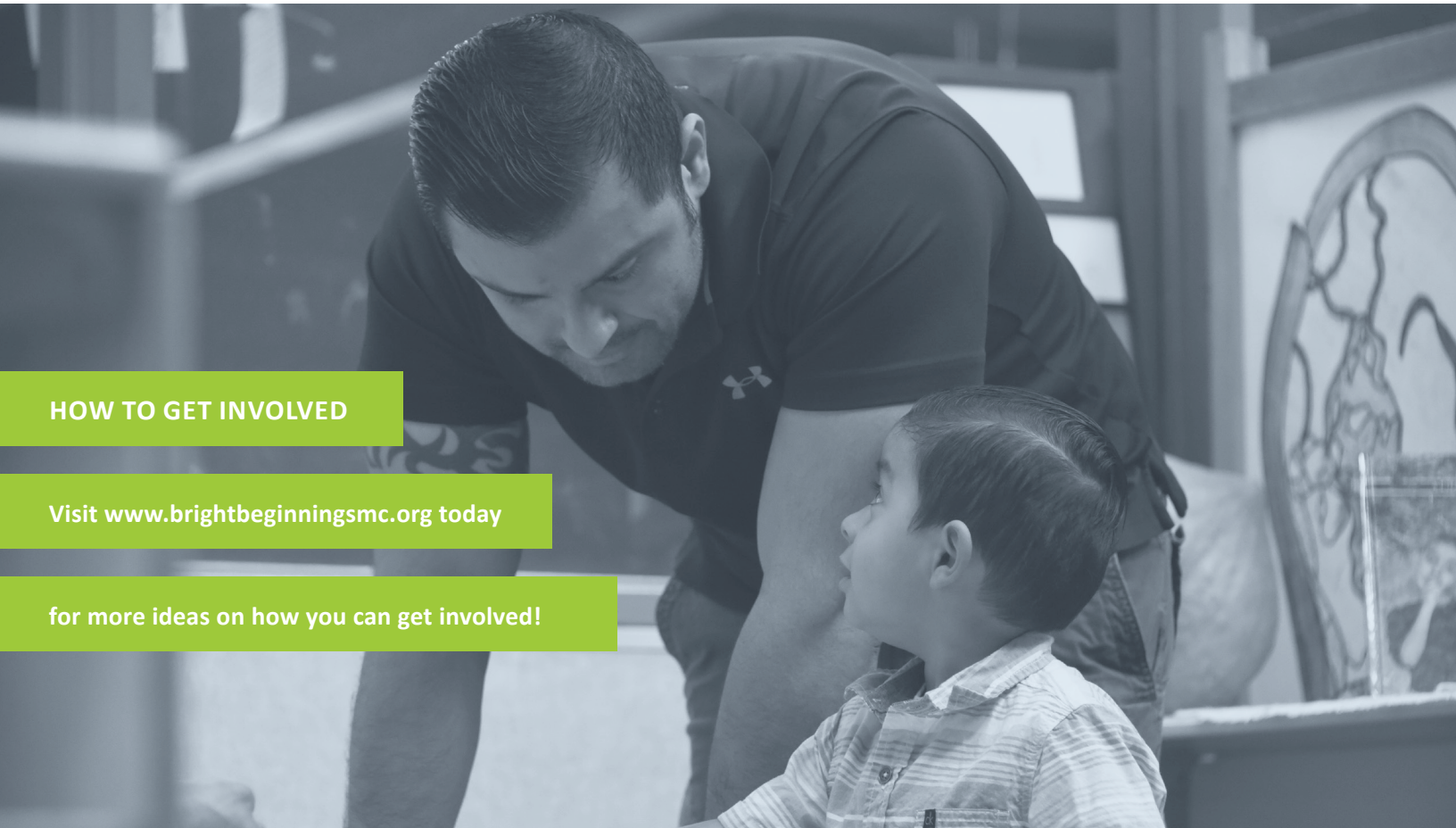
- **Action Teams**, made up of key stakeholders including families, will be formed (or are already working) to design, implement, and evaluate specific projects within the priority strategies outlined above.
- The **Early Childhood Development Advisory Group** will support further development of this strategic framework, and monitor strategy design and implementation.
- **Bright Beginnings and Bright Futures backbone staff** will continue to provide overall strategic management and capacity supports for partners throughout the County in implementing change projects.

Join us! In doing so, you will be demonstrating your commitment not only to improving the lives of children and families – but to making the entire County a better place!

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Visit www.brightbeginningsmc.org today

for more ideas on how you can get involved!



Strategic Partners

The development of this strategy was led by the Early Childhood Development Advisory Group of Monterey County, with staff support from Bright Beginnings/Bright Futures, First 5 Monterey County and the United Way of Monterey County:

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This document lays out a shared vision of what is needed to transform systems and achieve tangible results for the 64,500 young children ages 0-8 in Monterey County and their families. The concepts and principles described in this strategic framework represent our shared understanding of how children develop in the context of their families and communities, and how we can work together to better support them – and ultimately make Monterey County a better place for everyone.

Ten strategies are outlined, across four areas on which we will focus our collective efforts:

- Empowered and resilient parents
- Families surrounded by support
- Caregivers that help children grow and learn
- An equitable system of support for all

These strategies already benefit from a core set of partners who have committed to working together to achieve the goal of transforming systems to reduce inequities and increase the number of children ready for kindergarten by 2025. We will continue to build support and invite different communities, businesses, organizations, schools, individuals, and families to step forward in implementing one or more strategies. *We hope you will join us.*

