



Advocacy Agenda 2017

“How are the Children?” At First 5 in San Luis Obispo County and across the state, this is the question we ask ourselves and our communities every day. “The children are well” is the answer we seek in all of our work. We invest funds in promising programs that help children 0-5 and their families get a solid start in life. We host gatherings to explore solutions to challenges of early childhood. And – most importantly – as advocates, we call on society to recognize and prioritize the earliest years in a child’s life as our collective responsibility and opportunity.

This Advocacy Agenda lays out First 5 San Luis Obispo County’s plan for mobilizing societal commitment to young children. We are inspired in our efforts by the Children’s Bill of Rights of SLO County, which has been endorsed by dozens of local organizations and which calls on all of us in our communities to “cultivate our understanding of child development and use it to nurture, guide, challenge and encourage our children along their many paths.” We are also fueled by overwhelming evidence that *early* support for children during their youngest life stage reaps huge rewards down the road. We are witness to the many individuals and organizations in our county who dedicate themselves daily to the important work of protecting and nurturing the youngest among us. And we have deep faith in our community’s capacity to maintain a commitment to shared financial investment in early childhood -- because it’s the *right* thing and the *smart* thing to do.

Each of the following 2017 Advocacy Agenda goals falls within one or more of First 5 SLO County’s strategic Priority Areas as articulated in the 2016-20 Strategic Plan, and is activated through a combination of public awareness-building and promotion of changes in policies or practices. First 5 SLO County designs and pursues concrete Goal Area Action Plans to drive momentum on the Advocacy Agenda. Commissioners serve as “champions” for specific Goals.

First 5 SLO County events to look for in 2017 that reinforce the Advocacy Agenda:

- Talk.Read.Sing! Continued multimedia messaging, expanded outreach to parents & community groups
- New Public Awareness campaign to reinforce one or more Advocacy Goal
- Children’s Share Forums – Community discussions and action planning with leaders and stakeholders related to early childhood Return-on-Investment
- Blog posts on First 5 website/social media spotlighting local, state and national ways to advocate on behalf of young children and families
- Presentations at public meetings by First 5 staff, Commissioners and early childhood advocates to showcase the Advocacy Agenda



As the adults of San Luis Obispo County... One of our greatest hopes as a community is that our children grow up with healthy minds, bodies and spirits that enable them to maximize their potential.

As endorsers of the Children’s Bill of Rights, we collectively pledge to work together toward this vision. May we, together, demonstrate daily that *our youth are our highest priority*, as evidenced by our collective commitment of time, money, sustained effort and unified support. May we cultivate our understanding of child development and use it to nurture, guide, challenge, and encourage our children along their many paths.

As the children and youth of San Luis Obispo County, may we each...

- 1** Live in a stable, comfortable home surrounded by parents, family and other caring adults who nurture us throughout childhood.
- 2** Eat healthy and plentiful meals every day.
- 3** Have the basics for our daily life – clothing, transportation, and supplies for school, outside interests, and activities.
- 4** Be and feel safe, everywhere we go.
- 5** Enjoy daily physical activity and time outdoors.
- 6** Visit a doctor, dentist or counselor when needed to help us stay physically and mentally healthy.
- 7** Learn and master ideas and skills in and out of school that inspire us, help us understand and be ready for our place in the world.
- 8** Explore a variety of experiences – in arts, nature, culture and music – that illuminate the world’s natural beauty, richness and human creativity.
- 9** Make and keep healthy relationships with friends.
- 10** Know that adults and peers listen and support us as individuals while we grow, and respect our diverse cultures, backgrounds, circumstances, talents, sparks, and passions.
- 11** Have opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways to our community by voicing our ideas, sharing in decisions and offering service to others.
- 12** Be encouraged to dream big, to grow through challenge and mistakes, and to always live with hope and aspiration.

Adopted: First 5 San Luis Obispo County | January 23, 2013



ADVOCACY AGENDA 2017

AND, HOW ARE THE CHILDREN?



PERINATAL READINESS

Reinforcing the earliest stages of parenthood, from pregnancy planning through the first six months of life



ADVOCACY GOALS:

- Expanded Family Leave Opportunities for New Parents
- Expanded Options for Early Parent Education/Support

WHY? Paid Family Leave and early parenting support should be universally available in our county – but aren't. Paid Family Leave is linked with reduced infant mortality, increased breast-feeding rates, lower incidence of post-partum depression. Early parenting education and support groups are known to increase parent confidence while reducing stress.

CHILD HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Promoting young children's wellness and access to quality care



ADVOCACY GOALS:

- Stronger alignment of systems that track and address developmental milestones in young children
- Increased access to pediatric oral health care and disease prevention

WHY? The health of our community's youngest children should be protected regardless of family income or circumstance – but isn't. Fewer than 1 in 3 infants and toddlers are given routine recommended developmental screenings, while 1 in 4 are at risk for delays. Dental disease is largely preventable, yet a majority of low-income children reach grade school with cavities.

EARLY LEARNING

Ensuring that from birth, children have rich and varied opportunities to develop their minds



ADVOCACY GOALS:

- Increased parent engagement as a child's first teacher
- Community investment in quality AND affordable access to early childhood education

WHY? Children learn from birth; 80% of brain development happens in the first 3 years of life. Children who are regularly talked, read and sung to from infancy do better in school. Knowing this, our community should maximize investment and time in early learning – but doesn't. We face a paradox: quality child care and parent education costs are out of reach for most families, while child care worker salaries are among the lowest in the workforce.

FAMILY STRENGTHENING

Supporting parents and families to build stable, nurturing and enriching home environments for young children



ADVOCACY GOALS:

- Increased access to safe, affordable homes for families with young children
- Increased Culture of Family-Friendly Workplaces that Support Young Families

WHY? Our community should be a place where young children and families thrive – but sometimes it isn't. Families working and raising children here should be able to afford a place to live – but often can't. It is more expensive to live here than most areas of the country. Families with young children are frequently at maximum stress and minimum earning power. Government and business have a role to play in supporting them during this important stage of life.