First 5 California CARES Plus

CARES Plus History
To address the urgent need to enhance the quality and retention of the early learning workforce, First 5 California launched the Comprehensive Approaches for Raising Educational Standards (CARES) in 2000 as a matching-funds program with 44 county commissions. In 2010, First 5 California launched the next iteration of the program – CARES Plus – to support early childhood educators in partnership with 34 counties. CARES Plus builds on the organizational infrastructure and momentum already created throughout the state, leverages additional federal and local funds, and integrates current research on teacher effectiveness to strengthen its impact on improving child outcomes. Since 2000, First 5 California has invested $80 million and generated local investments of more than $250 million while providing stipends to an average of 7,700 early childhood educators each year. A CARES survey revealed participants were more than twice as likely as non-participants to remain in the same center over a two-year period. Evaluation of CARES Plus shows improved teacher effectiveness following training provided by the program.

The Need
Nationally, 76 percent of children under the age of 5 with mothers in the workforce spend a significant amount of time in non-parental care arrangements1. Findings in the field suggest that the quality of care children receive is correlated with the education, compensation, and retention of staff. Research has shown that teachers with Bachelor's degrees and specialized training in child development provide young children with the best preparation to succeed in kindergarten2 and that teacher effectiveness is among the most important factors impacting the quality of early learning programs3.

CARES Plus Builds a Successful Workforce System
CARES Plus improves the quality of early learning programs for children 0 to 5 and their families by supporting the education and professional development of an effective, well-compensated, and diverse early learning workforce. CARES Plus improves the retention of a highly qualified workforce by providing:
- **Incentives:** Stipends incentivize early childhood educators to improve their education, participate in professional development, and obtain degrees.
- **Participant Support Systems:** Academic support and advising helps participants negotiate the maze of educational requirements.
- **Higher Education Articulation:** Pathway partnerships facilitate the recruitment, training, and professional development of qualified early learning educators.
- **Training and Technical Assistance:** Regional meetings, special topic webinars, and other methods to support continuous quality improvement.

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CARES Plus Program Design

Inclusive of state requirements, Lead Agencies design their local CARES Plus program by including up to four professional development options (components) in addition to the required CORE, which participants must complete in their first year of participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component A</th>
<th>Component B</th>
<th>Component C</th>
<th>Component D</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum of 21 hours of CDE- or First 5-approved professional growth trainings</td>
<td>Minimum of 6 units of higher education towards a degree in ECE, CD or related field</td>
<td>Serve as Professional Growth Advisor</td>
<td>MyTeachingPartner® one-on-one professional growth coaching model</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Participate in CLASS observation if selected</td>
<td>• Participate in CLASS observation if selected</td>
<td>• Requires BA degree</td>
<td>• Required to participate in CLASS observation</td>
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For more information contact: caresplus@ccfc.ca.gov

CARES Plus Annual Requirements

Meet with a Professional Growth Advisor two times a year to create and monitor a professional growth plan, and complete three online courses. Complete the annual Participant Satisfaction Survey. Participate in CLASS observation if selected in the random sample.

CARES Plus Benefits Participants

Participants in local CARES Plus programs have access to:

- A unique opportunity for individualized one-on-one coaching
- High quality training through multiple delivery methods
- Educational supports (i.e., book lending library, group trainings)
- Stipends/incentives to further educational goals and help defray costs of higher education
- Training materials and online courses
- Opportunities to complete professional development requirements and units to earn and maintain Child Permits through higher education
- Support of a professional growth advisor for professional development planning

CARES Plus participants found key features of the program helpful, including online training, financial stipends, and access to an advisor. They also reported increased job satisfaction and improved skills and qualifications for career advancement as a result of their participation in the program.


“I have improved in my positive interactions with the children I teach because of the videos and workshops I have attended over the years that have been organized by First 5. I received my Bachelor’s degree recently and am now working toward completing a Master’s Degree in education. None of this would have materialized for me without the workshops, trainings, and help of First 5. I am eternally grateful. Thank you!”
- Santa Barbara County Participant

“CARES Plus has been instrumental in helping me achieve my goals of pursuing a secure and rewarding career in the child development field and implementing a well-rounded and enriched preschool program…By improving ourselves, we are simultaneously improving the educational experiences of the children in our care.”
- Ventura County Participant