



May 9, 2022

INFORMATION ACTION

SUBJECT: FIRST 5 CALIFORNIA EARLY LITERACY PROGRAM

Strategic Plan Priority Area: Child Development

Goal: All children birth through age 5 have high-quality, nurturing environments that ensure their learning readiness.

Strategic Plan Priority Area: Family Functioning

Goal: All families have the knowledge, skills, and resources to support their children's optimal development.

RECOMMENDATION

First 5 California (F5CA) staff recommends the Commission approve \$15 million over three years to launch an Early Literacy Program.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

Early literacy programs promote parent/child bonding, support resiliency, and provide positive mitigation against adverse childhood experiences. While ensuring children have access to books is critical at any time, amid a pandemic when isolation and stress among parents and children is heightened, it is more crucial than ever that children have access to books in their home so that families and children have increased opportunities to create safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments.

To prepare children for California's future and reduce disparities, a solid foundation of early literacy skills is required. Roots of the achievement gap and other disparities start long before children enter kindergarten. A major indicator for school success is language and early literacy development. Disparities in early vocabulary growth between children from low socioeconomic status (SES) and high SES families can

manifest themselves in children as early as 16 months of age (Cannon & Karoly, 2007). Early literacy programming that incorporates family engagement also creates opportunities to enhance safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments, which are foundational for a child to be successful in life.

Recognizing the importance of getting books into households with young children as a key literacy strategy, California must provide ongoing support for book distribution and literacy programs for its youngest residents and their families. F5CA has a history of investing in early literacy on a smaller scale, and this investment of \$15 million expands on previous funding to reach many more children and families through partnerships with other statewide programs and First 5 county commissions.

Program Description and Administration

Funding for the Early Literacy Program will be used to implement a two-prong strategy. F5CA will partner with existing programs serving target populations to expand access to books. Key partner state agencies will be the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), California Department of Social Services, and California Department of Education. Proposed program partners may include home visiting programs (e.g., Black Infant Health, California Home Visiting Program, CalWORKs Home Visiting Program), child welfare programs, programs serving children experiencing homelessness, the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, Migrant Education programs, and other programs serving multilingual learners. This investment would complement the \$10 million proposed by the Administration for Fiscal Year 2022-23. A portion of the funds would be used to develop training and materials for use with families, as well as program staff who are working directly with families and children. In partnership with the CDPH, F5CA will administer targeted book distribution and culturally and developmentally appropriate early literacy strategies in a cost-effective and efficient way to get more books in the hands of more children, resulting in a high-impact, low-investment program.

In addition to book distribution, F5CA funding will be used to issue competitive grants to First 5 county commissions to strengthen existing literacy efforts and expand innovative strategies. Local grant implementation would incorporate evidence-based strategies or promising practices, including findings from F5CA's Dual Language Learner Pilot Study, to provide comprehensive support of early literacy, child development, and family functioning. The intent is to strengthen community-based efforts to address early literacy through family engagement. Implementation of local programs would be flexible enough to address specific community needs and target high-impact children and families such as low-income children, multilingual learners, immigrant children, and other priority populations. Local programs could include those programs that impact parent-child shared reading, access to books, the quality of adult-child interactions during literacy activities, and parental knowledge and use of early literacy strategies.

Program Goals

The goals of the Early Literacy Program are:

- Children and families have access to high quality, multilingual, culturally and developmentally appropriate books
- Shared literacy experiences between adults and children enhance safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments
- Direct service providers and families understand and can utilize strategies to increase early literacy in young children
- Counties expand implementation of evidence-based and promising practices in early literacy
- Successful local strategies and programs are identified for possible expansion

Program objectives might include:

- Reaching 65% of identified priority populations of children with book distribution programs
- Building capacity and establishing and/or expanding needed infrastructure that emphasizes family and community involvement
- Developing guidance documents and resources to support direct service providers and families of children birth to age five
- Increasing family and workforce understanding and use of early literacy strategies

Objectives will focus on the following elements:

1. Diversity of program participants, including families and workforce
2. Multilingual options
3. Well-prepared workforce and engaged families
4. Family and community engagement

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND ACTION

In January 2020, the Commission was presented with examples of programs and organizations providing books and early literacy supports to young families.

Presentations were given on four models used in several counties in California: Little by Little, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Raising a Reader, and Reach Out and Read.

In April 2020, staff requested the Commission approve \$44,595,000 over three years to launch the California Reads Together Initiative. The Commission did not approve the request.

In May 2020, staff revised the program design and requested \$5.5 million over one year for the California Family Book Distribution Partnership. The Commission approved \$1.48 million of redirected funds from another contract for this project.

FISCAL DETAIL

The program budget is based on the estimated funding needed for three years for book distribution, development of training and materials, local grants, and evaluation.

Book Distribution (208,065 x \$25)	\$10,403,250
Training/Materials Development	\$1,000,000
Local Grants	\$2,500,000
Evaluation	\$1,096,750
Total program cost	\$15,000,000

Fifteen million dollars in program cost would be funded over three years. The program cost of \$13,903,250 would be funded from the Education account (20% or \$2,780,650 in year 1, 40% or \$5,561,300 in year 2 and 40% or \$5,561,300 in year 3). The remaining \$1,096,750 for evaluation would be funded from the Research and Development account, split equally across three fiscal years. Utilizing these accounts is appropriate given the work outlined in this item. Funding at the recommended amount would allow for flexible funding for other projects in outlying years and not jeopardize the accounts in the short- or long-term.

ATTACHMENTS

A. First 5 California Early Literacy Program PowerPoint