



Systems Alignment and Coherence

Opportunities for Alameda County's Early Care
and Education System

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Early Care and Education in Alameda County

This report highlights opportunities for building systems alignment and coherence for Alameda County's early childhood mixed delivery system. It focuses on the leadership role that First 5 Alameda plays in implementing two major initiatives in Alameda County: **Measure C** and the **Oakland Children's Initiative**. As a trusted public agency in the county, the administering agency for Measure C, and the implementation partner for the Oakland Children's Initiative, First 5 Alameda is well positioned to support systems building, alignment, and coherence efforts in Alameda County's early childhood system.

“As you know, high-quality childcare is essential to the well-being and development of our children, as well as to the economic stability of our community.”

—EMAILED TESTIMONY, JANUARY 10, 2025

The Important Role of System Conditions

Children are better able to thrive in the context of thriving families, and families are better able to thrive in the context of thriving communities. Research and practice show that well-being, learning, and human development are deeply influenced by the context and conditions in which they occur (Cantor et al., 2018; Osher et al., 2020). Therefore, one essential function of our social systems (such as urban development; the workforce and the economy; and our education, housing, safety, transportation, health, and mental health systems) is creating the *conditions* in which children, their families, and their communities can achieve well-being, belonging, and self-determination.

Policy and practices that ensure community members have fair access to resources and opportunities also serve to strengthen the community's ability to invest in itself. When communities and their residents are healthy and thriving, they provide a strong tax base for building infrastructure (such as roads and public transportation) and providing access to public facilities (such as public parks and libraries). This encourages strong and sustainable local employment opportunities, sustains the quality of local education, and protects community safety. Finally, well-designed and implemented policies can help unwind the impacts of historical policies and practices that marginalized some communities and perpetuated or intensified their disparities in access, experiences, and economic and other outcomes.

Benefits and Challenges of a Mixed Delivery System for Early Care and Learning

In many jurisdictions, early care and learning is described as a “mixed delivery system,” reflecting the broad range of public and private settings that serve the needs of infants, toddlers, young children, and their families. Mixed delivery systems include public preschool; private care settings (both in centers and in homes); family, friend, and neighbor care; and other private, unlicensed settings such as family resource centers, parks and recreation centers, libraries, and community centers. Although this variety of settings responds to the diverse goals and needs of families, the lack of adequate funding and the variety of service modality results in fragmentation, creating barriers to addressing enduring challenges, such as

- **siloed or opaque funding streams**, which are not leveraged with other initiatives and are underutilized;
- **inefficient subsidy systems** that intend to provide families that are underresourced with access to high-quality care that meets their preferences and needs but that often have long waiting lists;
- **fragmented data systems** among early care and learning agencies and between those agencies and K–12 and other child- and family-serving agencies;
- **poor access to the higher education, training, and professional development** that educators need to continuously improve their service quality;
- **poverty-level wages** that result in high workforce turnover;
- **loss of workforce to other sectors** (e.g., early care and learning educators who achieve undergraduate or higher degrees often leave their early childhood jobs for the K–12 system, where they can earn higher wages and benefits);
- **lack of investment in facilities and playgrounds**, complicated by zoning and lack of capacity in permitting offices to support facility upgrades and new construction;
- **lack of investment in community facilities** such as family resource centers, libraries, and parks, impacting quality programming for family, friend, and neighbor caregivers;
- **inadequate funding of licensing**, slowing the ability to expand in order to meet needs and, at worst, limiting the ability of the state to mitigate risk for children in underresourced sectors; and
- **fragmentation that contributes to lack of economies of scale** so that back-office infrastructure needs and purchasing are not cost efficient.

In 2022, only one in nine of California's children who were eligible for subsidized childcare received services. By comparison, in the same year, only one in seven of Alameda's children who were eligible for subsidized childcare received services. Further, the lack of access to high-quality care falls disproportionately on families of color and families with low incomes. (Pryor & Saucedo, 2024)

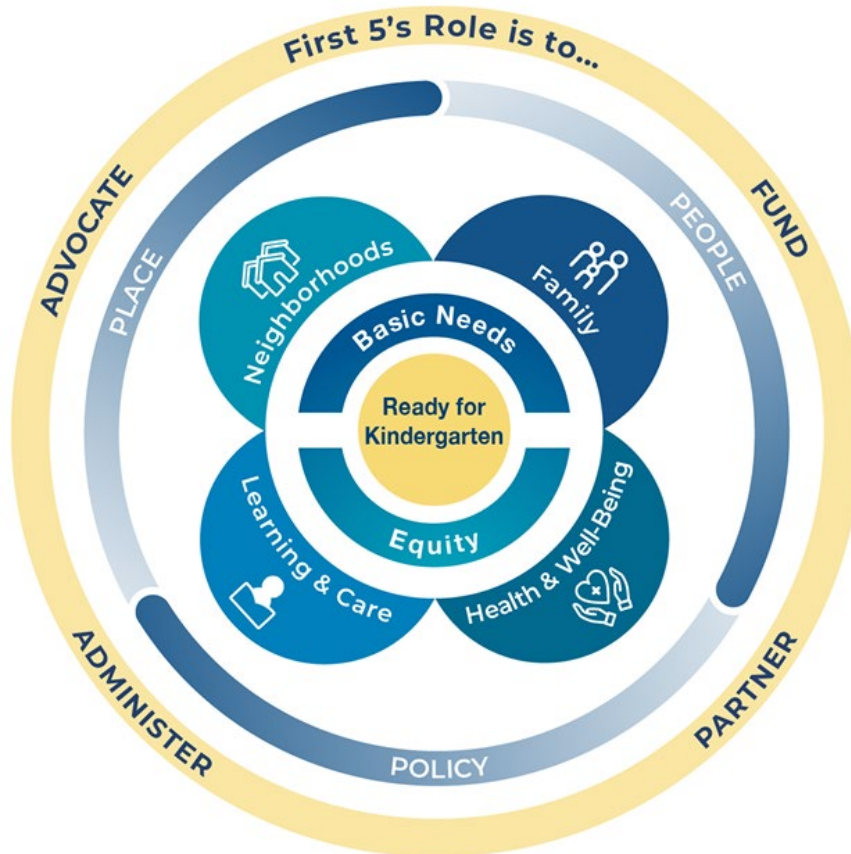
Each of these enduring challenges is also influenced by the policies and practices of other child- and family-serving systems. In Alameda County, the well-being and development of young children and their families is the shared responsibility of all child- and family-serving agencies, not only the early care and learning sector. Complex systems issues call for multidisciplinary, interdependent strategies. To truly address these challenges with sustainable solutions that serve the needs of all interest holders, system leaders must take intentional, collaborative steps to work across silos and to build aligned, coherent, efficient, and effective early childhood systems for serving young children, their families, and their educators.

Introduction to First 5 Alameda

First 5 Alameda County embraces a cross-system, whole community, whole family, whole child approach. Established in 1998 through the California Children and Families Act (Proposition 10), the First 5 California network of agencies oversees the expenditure of tobacco tax revenues to “create and implement an integrated, comprehensive, and collaborative system of information and services to enhance optimal early childhood development and ensure that children are ready to enter school” (California Children and Families Act, 1998).

First 5 Alameda strives to work with other systems to “move from a patchwork system of services to an integrated system of care that gives all young children an opportunity to thrive” (First 5 Alameda County, n.d.). First 5 Alameda's approach to systems building includes four roles: grantmaking, program administration, capacity building, and advocacy. In these roles, First 5 Alameda partners with families and communities to shape and implement policy on learning, care, health, and well-being in order to prepare the county's children for kindergarten, using strategies that ensure equity and that basic needs are met. This approach to systems building is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. First 5 Alameda County's Approach to Systems Building



Note. *First 5 Alameda Strategic Plan, 2022–2027*. For a description of this figure, see the appendix, [Figure 1](#).

Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative

Measure C

In March 2020, voters in Alameda County passed Measure C, a countywide transaction and use tax-funded health care and childcare initiative that will generate an estimated \$150 million annually for the initiative's Child Care, Preschool, and Early Education Fund. The measure was upheld by the California State Supreme Court in April 2024 and is currently being launched. Measure C's Child Care, Preschool, and Early Education Fund has three key aims:

- Provide additional support for and expanded access to high-quality childcare, preschool, and early education services for children and families with low and middle income in Alameda County.

- Improve wages and compensation for participating childcare providers and early educators who provide services under this ordinance.
- Promote wellness, kindergarten readiness, and school success.

Measure C's initial investments will include a 2-year Emergency Stabilization Fund as part of the initial investment of the 5-year plan to provide short-term relief aligned with the measure's objectives.

The full text of the Measure C ordinance can be found in this [letter from the Alameda County Registrar of Voters regarding certification of the initiative](#).

Oakland Children's Initiative

Established through Measure AA in 2018, the Oakland Children's Initiative seeks to expand access to high-quality early care and learning, ensure that all children in Oakland have the resources necessary for school readiness, and support students to and through college. First 5 Alameda is the city's contracted implementation partner for the Early Education Fund.

The Oakland Children's Initiative comprises two components: early childhood and college persistence and success. The early childhood education component focuses on funding early learning programs, improving the quality and affordability of early education, and expanding child development services for children from birth to age 5. The college persistence and success component is implemented by Oakland Promise, and it provides college access, persistence, mentorship, and scholarship support services for students to obtain 4-year or 2-year college or technical degrees. The Oakland Children's Initiative is expected to generate approximately \$30 million in annual revenue. Approximately 7 percent of this revenue will cover the administrative fee, including the mandated 2-year evaluation, with 62 percent of the remaining amount allocated to early childhood and 31 percent of the remaining amount allocated to college persistence and success.

Recognizing the profound impact of early care and learning, both components of the Oakland Children's Initiative emphasize increased investment in early learning to strengthen the broader community. By aligning resources and expanding collaborative efforts, the initiative ensures that families and educators have the support necessary to create a strong foundation for Oakland's youngest learners. For example, both First 5 Alameda and Oakland Promise work closely with Oakland Unified School District to implement programming funded by the initiative. And Oakland Promise includes the Brilliant Baby program, which sets up college savings accounts for babies, offers financial coaching for their parents and caregivers, and helps build a supportive community for the whole family.

The full text of the Oakland Children's Initiative ordinance can be found in [Article XVI, The Children's Initiative of 2018](#) at the City of Oakland's website.

Shared Findings From the Community Listening Sessions

To ensure that the implementation of Measure C and Oakland Children's Initiative reflects the priorities and needs of their interest holders, First 5 Alameda engaged WestEd to facilitate a series of community listening sessions as part of a broader participatory, community-informed process. The purpose of the community listening sessions, held from December 2024 to March 2025, was to gather diverse input from interest holders to inform the implementation and alignment of local early childhood initiatives in Oakland and Alameda County. Participants in each set of sessions raised many similar goals and concerns, as articulated in Table 1.

Table 1. Shared Findings

Theme	Description
Access and affordability	Providers shared that they commonly struggle with getting children in the subsidy program placed in their care, and families shared that they commonly struggle with long waiting lists for placement. This high demand from families eligible for the subsidy program and the high supply of providers available to serve them indicate inefficiency in the placement process. Additionally, in the Measure C community listening sessions, both families and providers reported struggling with navigating subsidy applications, meeting eligibility requirements, and waiting on slow reimbursement systems. Finally, participants emphasized the need for assistance for families who do not qualify for the subsidy program but still struggle with costs.
Market shifts	Providers struggle with the rising costs of providing quality care and the demands of securing contracts to keep their businesses afloat, especially as more families opt for free options (i.e., public preschool and transitional kindergarten).
Workforce development	Providers expressed a need for accessible, affordable, and relevant professional development, mentorship, and career pathway options.
Wages	Providers struggle with low wages that do not keep up with the cost of living in Alameda County and a lack of access to other types of compensation, such as retirement plans and other benefits.
Outreach	Families are eager for more information about accessing high-quality early care and learning through channels that meet them where they are, such as faith-based organizations, health centers, shelters, and community centers and in a variety of languages.
Inclusion	Educators and families are eager for support that is more comprehensive for the various developmental needs of all children, including neurodiverse children.
Family supports	Educators and families expressed a need for wraparound supports for families, such as access to housing, food, employment, transportation, and other basic needs.
Facilities	Educators expressed a desire for high-quality, safe, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive facilities and environments.

Alameda County's Early Childhood Ecosystem

Alameda County is fortunate to have a great many initiatives and programs that aim to serve its diverse community of young children and their families by creating conditions that support learning, development, and collective well-being. Its mixed delivery system includes both licensed and license-exempt providers who work across a variety of settings, including family, friend, and neighbor care; family childcare homes; private centers; and public programs such as Early Head Start, Head Start, and public preschool. There are approximately 1,800 licensed centers and family childcare providers in Alameda County, a decline of 34 percent since 2007. There are about 250,000 children aged birth to 12 in Alameda County; about 118,000 of them are aged birth to 5 (Alameda County Early Care & Education Planning Council, 2021).

The providers and the families they serve are further supported by a rich network of local community-based organizations that provide resources and wraparound supports for basic needs, specialized learning and care, and other essential services. This network includes community centers, public libraries, parks and recreation areas, faith communities, resource and referral agencies, family resource centers, and school districts. Finally, county agencies such as Alameda County Office of Education, Alameda County Social Services Agency, Alameda County Health, Alameda Alliance for Health, Alameda County Library, and First 5 Alameda provide key infrastructure—such as funding, services, and programming—to support the early childhood ecosystem.

However, like other counties in California and municipalities across the country, Alameda also struggles with fragmentation, which has been a critical barrier to system building. These challenges are compounded by Alameda County's relatively high cost of living (and, therefore, relatively high cost of providing care) and shifting political, social, and economic contexts.

Alameda County covers about 737 square miles and is one of California's principal urban areas. The county has grown in population from 1,513,040 in 2010 to 1,684,000 in 2025, an 11.3 percent increase, and it has become the seventh most populated county in the state (Alameda County Early Care & Education Planning Council, 2021). The county's key demographics are described in Table 2.

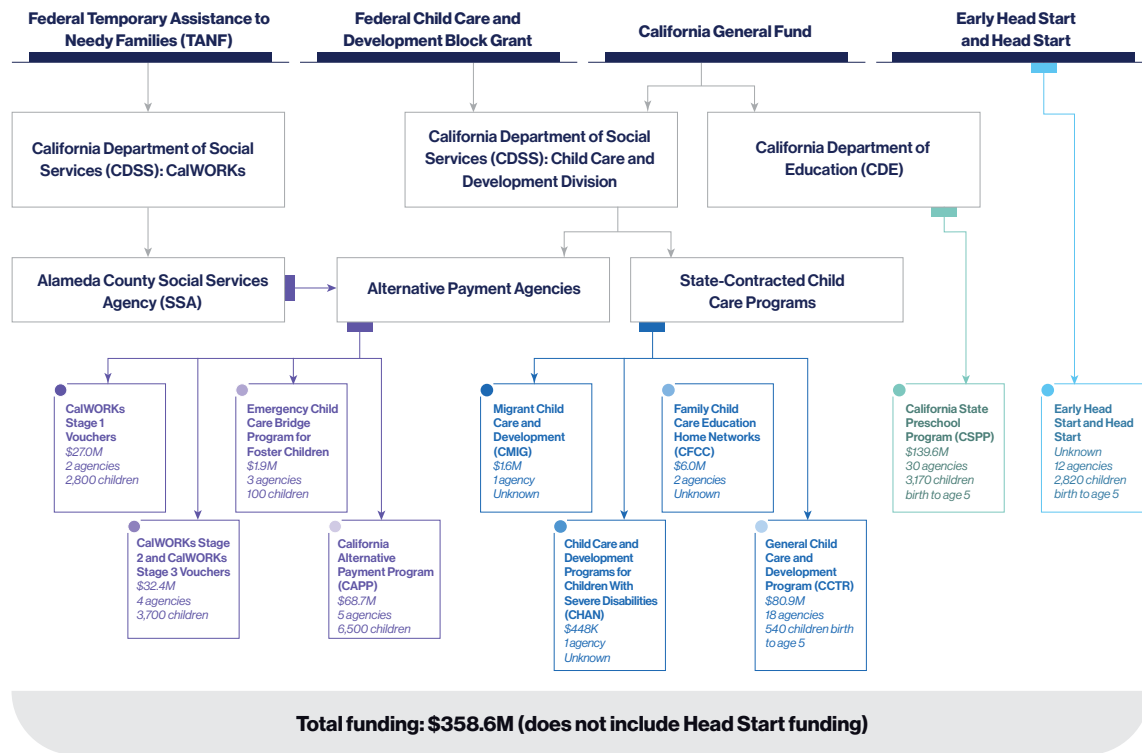
Table 2. Key Demographics of Alameda County, California

Demographic	Alameda	California	United States
Square miles	737.3	155,854	3,796,742
Population	1,649,060	39,431,263	340,110,988
Population growth, 2010–20	11.4%	6.1%	7.4%
Languages spoken	Over 80 languages, including Spanish, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Farsi, Cambodian, and Tagalog	Over 200 languages	Over 350 languages
Percentage of families living below the federal poverty line	7.3%	10.7%	9.8%

Note. U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *QuickFacts: United States*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *QuickFacts: California*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *QuickFacts: Alameda County, California*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *2020 Census apportionment results*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Population change and distribution: 2010 to 2020*; U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *USA QuickFacts: Area in square miles*.

Figure 2 illustrates the flow of funds in Alameda County's early care and learning ecosystem. The illustration underscores how funding in Alameda has inadvertently created silos among program areas.

Figure 2. Alameda County Early Care and Learning Funding Ecosystem, FY 2023/24



Note. Award amounts and the number of agencies were obtained from the CATS report for FY 2023/24. CAPP award amounts are from CDSS. Bridge awards are from Alameda County Social Services Agency. CalWORKS Stage 1 information is from the County of Alameda Final Budget 2023/24. Children served in CAPP, CalWORKS, and Bridge is from FY 2023/24 Alternative Payment agencies annual data. All other children-served data are from the 2020 Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool, which is **very underestimated** because the data are from years other than those for funding awards and because of other data limitations. For a table of the information in this figure, see the appendix, [Figure 2](#)

Families who are served by multiple initiatives are faced with the complex task of navigating different or conflicting regulations, processes, and practices. For example, the California Department of Social Services, a department within the California Health and Human Services Agency, oversees both alternative payment agencies and state-contracted childcare programs that serve children in migrant families, children with severe disabilities, children in family childcare homes, and the general childcare and development program. However, each of these two programs within the California Department of Social Services operates separately from the other, so the programs they operate are siloed. Further, the California Department of Education, a completely separate state agency, oversees the California State Preschool Program, which includes universal prekindergarten and transitional kindergarten.

Systems Alignment and Coherence

Alignment and Coherence Is Foundational to Outcomes

System leaders often leverage multiple funding, policy, and programmatic initiatives to serve children, families, and communities. However, their efforts often miss their desired goals because the systems work in disconnected silos. When systems are aligned and coherent, their efforts work in concert to achieve the intended goals. WestEd defines alignment and coherence as follows (Walrond & Romer, 2021):

- *Alignment* refers to all policies, practices, processes, and roles in a system working together in similar or consistent ways. Think of a jigsaw puzzle. Alignment describes how all of the pieces fit together.
- *Coherence* refers to integration and interconnection between the parts of the system in a way that mutually reinforces shared understanding and overall progress toward a clear vision and set of goals. In the analogy above, coherence describes the full, recognizable picture that the puzzle pieces create.

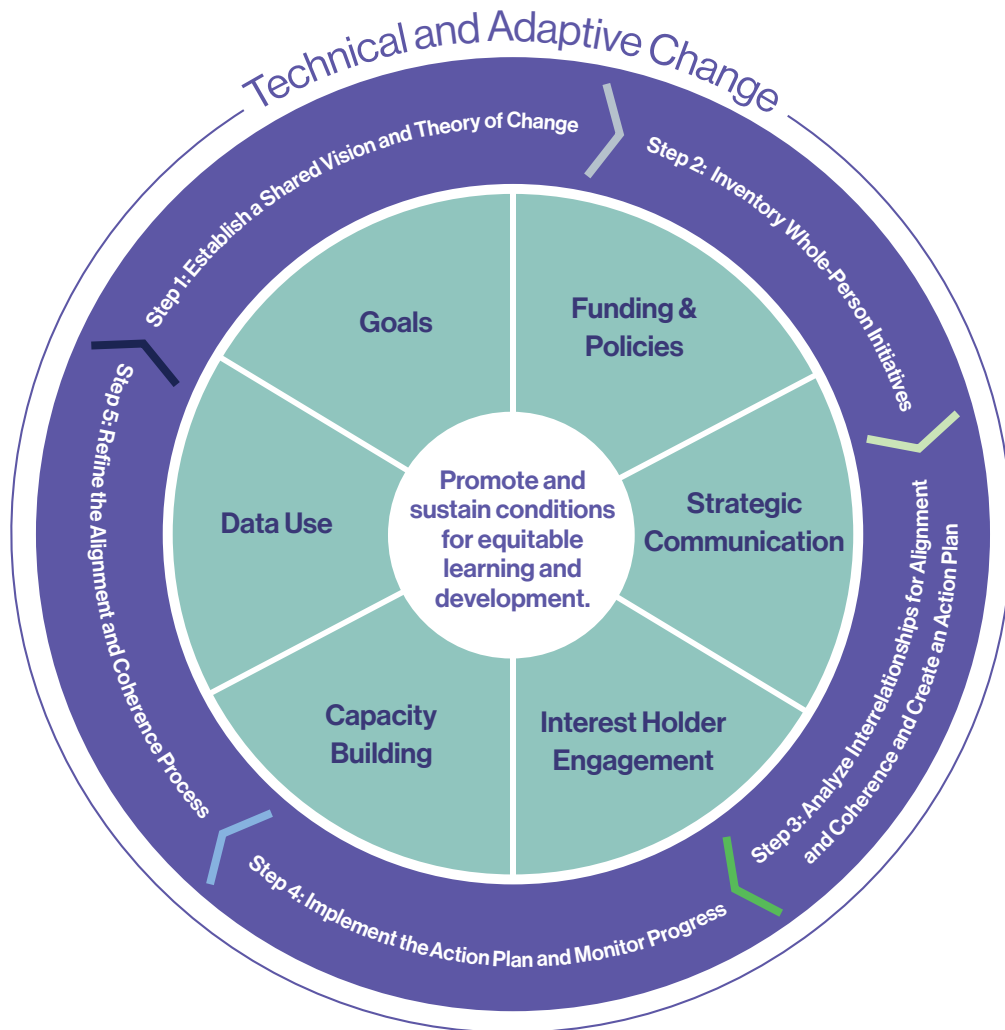
Alignment and coherence can be considered *internally* (the extent to which departments within an organization or agency work together in coordinated, consistent ways toward a shared goal, often addressed through strategic planning); *horizontally* (the extent to which organizations and agencies existing at the same level of the system and serving the same interest holders work together toward a shared goal, often addressed through cross-sector collaboration); or *vertically* (the extent to which organizations and agencies from federal, state, and local levels work together toward a shared goal, often addressed through comprehensive system improvement efforts) (Valdez et al., 2024).

The features of alignment and coherence can be organized along six interrelated domains: **goals, funding and policies, strategic communication, interest holder engagement, capacity building, and data use**. Figure 3 shows how these domains are related within a data-driven continuous improvement process frame that could include five steps:

1. Establish a shared vision and theory of change.
2. Inventory whole-person initiatives.
3. Analyze interrelationships for alignment and coherence and create an action plan.
4. Implement the action plan and monitor progress.
5. Refine the alignment and coherence process.

Alignment and coherence efforts are situated within technical and adaptive approaches to change and hold the central purpose of promoting and sustaining conditions for equitable learning and development.

Figure 3. The Features of Alignment and Coherence



Note. Walrond, N., & Romer, N. (2021). *Serving the whole person: An alignment and coherence guide for state education agencies*. WestEd. <https://www.wested.org/resource/serving-the-whole-person-an-alignment-and-coherence-guide-for-state-education-agencies/>

By building on existing partnerships and seeking new partnerships across the entire early childhood ecosystem, First 5 Alameda can find strategic ways for Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative to work in alignment and coherence with other mission-aligned initiatives in order to coordinate funding, leverage programs, and amplify their impact. This may include public or private funding at federal or local levels. The sections that follow describe First 5 Alameda's existing approach and opportunities for additional alignment and coherence for each of the six domains.

Goals

When system leaders share an overarching vision for the impact possible for young children, their families, and their educators, leaders are better able to coordinate their efforts to address the needs and promote the successes of the communities they share.

First 5 Alameda's Approach

First 5 Alameda has strategically selected its governance and advisory partners to support a coherent approach to its impact. For example, First 5 Alameda's commissioners represent key parts of the early care and learning ecosystem, including health, social services, higher education, and parent and community power-building organizations. The agency also has a broad cadre of partners working across multiple social systems at the national, state, and local levels.

Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative share a focus on early childhood learning and development and kindergarten readiness. The initiatives identify many of the same issues but have somewhat different primary focuses. Together, they aim to create the conditions for healthy learning and development for children from birth through college graduation. As Table 3 illustrates, there are many key areas of overlap in their goals and priorities.

Table 3. Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative Goals

Areas	Measure C	Oakland Children's Initiative
Sectors	Early care and learning and health	Early care and learning and postsecondary education
Funding	County sales tax	City parcel tax
Early care and learning goals	<p>Provide additional support for and expanded access to high-quality child-care, preschool, and early education services for children and families with low and middle income in Alameda County.</p> <p>Increase wages and compensation for participating childcare providers and early educators who provide services under this ordinance.</p> <p>Promote wellness, kindergarten readiness, and school success.</p>	<p>Prioritize funding for public early learning programs in partnership with Oakland Unified School District and Oakland Head Start.</p> <p>Improve the quality and affordability of early education.</p> <p>Expand child development services for children from birth to age 4.</p>
Primary focus	Promotes equity within the full mixed delivery system, serving young children from birth to age 12	Serves 3- to 4-year-olds whose families are underresourced and are part of the public education system (infants and toddlers in nonpublic settings are a secondary priority)
Identified priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family access and supports • Wages and compensation • Workforce development • Quality improvement, family supports, coordination, navigation, and inclusion • Facilities and infrastructure 	<p>Availability, access, affordability, and quality, influenced by the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • priority populations • outreach • classroom experiences • hours of operation and location • inclusion supports • family supports and basic needs • workforce development • facilities

Opportunities for Additional Systems Alignment and Coherence

These similarities and distinctions between the two initiatives provide insight into how the strategies and resources can be coordinated.

- Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative can work together toward improving issues such as workforce development, wages and compensation, inclusion supports, facilities, system navigation, and family supports and basic needs. Because the Oakland Children's Initiative is mandated to prioritize families in the public system, currently through Oakland Head Start and the Oakland Unified School District, Measure C can focus its efforts on serving families in family child-care homes; private centers; family, friend, and neighbor care; and other settings, particularly for infant and toddler care.
- Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative can continue to collaborate with other county agencies to identify a shared vision for young children and their families in the county, provide a comprehensive and holistic system of support, and minimize duplication of effort. There is also an opportunity to build more transparency for families, communities, and systems administrators through data and technology systems.

Funding and Policies

When system leaders think strategically about how funding sources can be allocated or leveraged within the given policy parameters that guide their use, funding sources can reinforce one another, making impact deeper and more sustainable.

First 5 Alameda's Approach

By First 5 Alameda's estimate, the cost of addressing the full scope of needs in Alameda County's early care and learning ecosystem may be as much as \$1.3 billion, not counting significant needs for capital investments in facilities. Although the funding for Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative's is significant—even transformational—it is insufficient to meet *all* of the early childhood needs in Oakland and Alameda County.

First 5 Alameda is working with state and county agencies, including the California Departments of Education and Social Services and the Alameda County Social Services Agency, to map the scopes of their early childhood investments—and the scopes of state and federal funding—to ensure that Alameda County leverages and maximizes those funding opportunities first and that Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative investments

are not duplicative of other initiatives. These agencies engage in ongoing conversations about how best to coordinate and align their respective efforts related to technology systems, data collection, and data use. First 5 Alameda is also collaborating with managed care plans on fiscal mapping to understand the impacts of declining Proposition 10 funding and the availability of other Medicaid entitlement funding in order to sustain and scale early identification and screening supports, care coordination, and navigation.

Opportunities for Additional Systems Alignment and Coherence

- Blend and braid the funding sources of Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative (county sales tax and city parcel tax, respectively) in order to maximize impact and sustainability efforts.
- Continue to work with local elected officials and city and county administrators to leverage local tax investments and coordinate other funding streams. This effort could include
 - » analyzing existing allocations and use of funds,
 - » exploring opportunities to potentially administer state funding locally, and
 - » maximizing all funding to ensure local funds that have the most administrative flexibility are the funding source of last resort.
- Engage with commercial and housing developers to understand how the low-income housing tax credit program and other affordable housing funding streams can benefit both developers and communities and subsidize the cost of care for family childcare providers. Developers could also be incentivized to co-locate childcare on the properties.
- Include consideration of early care and learning in policies that impact families and their care providers (e.g., economic development, city planning, public transportation).
- Elevate policy priorities to state and federal government and to leaders in philanthropic and small business communities.
- Collaborate with environment, energy, and climate initiatives—such as those offered by PG&E—to help family childcare providers invest in making their facilities more energy efficient.
- Take advantage of the green initiatives of several local parks and recreation departments in order to help improve the quality and access of public spaces appropriate for the needs of young children.

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication with interest holders is both an engine and a by-product of alignment and coherence. Done well, strategic communication builds awareness, engagement, and commitment for an initiative. Further, when designed to be bidirectional, strategic communication also creates avenues for system leaders to receive timely, honest feedback from interest holders.

First 5 Alameda's Approach

First 5 Alameda's strategic communication happens through its role in grant making, program administration, capacity building, and advocacy. Strategic communication happens organically through First 5 Alameda's many family and community initiatives and through strategic partnerships for program implementation and policy and advocacy. First 5 Alameda invests intentionally in building trusted relationships through the administration of programs for providers (such as Quality Counts), for families (such as Help Me Grow), for the public (such as AlamedaKids.org), and for policymakers (such as creating data profiles for each board of supervisors district).

Opportunities for Additional Systems Alignment and Coherence

Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative present an important opportunity for First 5 Alameda to frame the early childhood needs and opportunities in Alameda County in a way that helps to engage policymakers and inform future policy and investments at the local, state, and national levels. Additionally, in the community listening sessions many participants expressed a desire for better access to more information on available early childhood opportunities. Participants asked for materials to be shared in places that are part of their routines (such as faith communities or community resource centers) or places where their children's learning and development is a primary focus (such as childcare programs, clinics, and maternity wards). They also called for materials to be translated into multiple languages and for community leaders, who are often trusted advisors, to be included in outreach.

- Identify and implement new outreach strategies and partners in order to connect with communities that are often marginalized and harder to reach.
- Ensure that communication channels are diverse and fully accessible in order to meet language, technology, and diverse ability needs.
- Coordinate to ensure that accurate, consistent, and concise information is being distributed widely and updated as needed in a timely manner. The centralized

eligibility and enrollment system, which aims to improve access to the subsidy system for families, will support this recommendation.

- Codevelop and widely codisseminate messaging that speaks to community members who may not have children but who are ultimately impacted by the trajectory of young people. Underscore for community members that today's preschooler is tomorrow's neighbor, doctor, teacher, or business owner.
- Work with local advocacy groups to strengthen key messages and strategies in order to engage local and statewide representatives and policymakers.
- Collaborate with city and county systems to prioritize early childhood care and learning in their policy platforms, agendas, and policy advocacy activities.

“ The Mam community is very close-knit, and information gets shared by word of mouth.

—PARTICIPANT TESTIMONY, OAKLAND CHILDREN'S INITIATIVE
COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSION, MARCH 20, 2025

Interest Holder Engagement

Interest holder engagement ensures that families and providers are a part of both implementing and overseeing the initiatives that intend to serve them, increasing transparency and enabling continuous quality improvement. Further, participatory approaches help ensure relevance and longevity of initiative outcomes.

First 5 Alameda's Approach

First 5 Alameda has a strong partner engagement strategy through its collaboration with the First 5 Commission and other key private organizations, public agencies, institutions of higher education, and community-based organizations at the national, state, and local levels. For example, First 5 Alameda formally adopted the Early Development Instrument (EDI) as the standardized kindergarten readiness assessment, which allows for important data collection. First 5 Alameda convened a research advisory group of parents and caregivers, community-based organizations, policymakers, and others to support the design and implementation of this survey, which informs policy, investment, and practice across the county. As another example, the Alameda County Library is currently hosting community

focus groups to inform improvements to their family spaces, which could also inform First 5 Alameda's own strategies.

Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative both employ participatory approaches as part of their design and implementation, which inform the design of the work. Both initiatives leveraged community listening sessions and surveys, and they created community and citizen bodies: the Oakland Children's Initiative Oversight Commission and the Measure C Child Care, Preschool, and Early Education Community Advisory Council.

Opportunities for Additional Systems Alignment and Coherence

There are many opportunities for First 5 Alameda to leverage Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative in order to strengthen partner and community engagement:

- Continue to seek approaches that reach families and early childhood interest holders and partners where they are in order to talk about their priorities and the strengths and needs of the system. Always ask, "Whose voice is missing?" Meet with families prioritized by Measure C in settings they typically frequent—such as playgroups, community centers, and libraries—to ensure that their voices are included in community engagement and are the focus of decision-making. Continue to offer translation and interpretation, meals, and childcare to increase family participation.
- Continue to ensure that community members have authentic opportunities to contribute to and lead the implementation of the initiatives. One mechanism for this is the Measure C Community Advisory Council, which represents the community and supports community engagement. Consider other opportunities for meaningful decision-making in partnership with families and communities. Similarly, be transparent with families and communities about their sphere of influence in implementation and decision-making.

Capacity Building

Aligned and coherent capacity building supports families and providers in their ability to leverage all available initiatives and resources to achieve their goals. They receive the professional learning, tools, and other supports they need to successfully navigate the initiatives.

First 5 Alameda's Approach

First 5 Alameda has long administered Quality Counts, a quality rating and improvement system that focuses on technical assistance and capacity building for early care and learning educators rather than simply providing a quality rating. Another example of capacity building is that the California Department of Education has provided small grants to support professional development on how to administer the EDI survey and use the data to inform decision-making. This funding also provides professional development and training on unconscious bias to ensure that the administration of the survey is strengths based and fair.

First 5 Alameda also invests in workforce development efforts, including initiating a public-private partnership with Alameda County Social Services Agency (using CalWORKS dollars) and Tipping Point Community (private philanthropic funding) in a cohort-model apprenticeship program. The program offers 12 units, supporting educators in earning an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree.

Opportunities for Additional Systems Alignment and Coherence

In the community listening sessions, participants called for a range of capacity-building supports, including professional development, real-world learning opportunities such as apprenticeships, and access to higher education that is affordable and offered at convenient times. Measure C's workforce development investments will inevitably support the advancement of Oakland's providers:

- Provide families with accurate, relevant, and timely information about accessing high-quality and affordable childcare and building capacity for leadership, advocacy, and decision-making.
- Collaborate with institutions of higher education and K-12 education to provide educators with accurate, relevant, and timely information about career development opportunities such as access to degree programs, career technical education opportunities for high school students, apprenticeships, training, and professional development.
- Coordinate with institutions of higher education, including local 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities, and high schools and continuing education programs to invest in accessible degrees and training strategies such as apprenticeship models that provide real-life experiences and reflective practice and career technical education programs.
- Collaborate with institutions of higher education and community-based organizations to provide technical assistance regarding business and financial management for family childcare owners.

- Explore ways that facilities investments and loan-forgiveness programs can support providers in strengthening their assets and building long-term financial security.

Shared Data Use

Shared data use ensures that initiatives identify and adopt the same or similar key measures of progress and effectiveness in order to better understand how they are contributing to a shared vision and to create opportunities for efficient and respectful data collection and shared decision-making.

First 5 Alameda's Approach

Because Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative share similar goals and strategies, the initiatives are well positioned to leverage data collection and evaluation. Further, First 5 Alameda has engaged American Institutes of Research to serve as the evaluator for both initiatives, piggybacking on the City of Oakland's procurement and creating important opportunities for shared learning and continuous improvement.

Opportunities for Additional Systems Alignment and Coherence

There are many opportunities for First 5 Alameda to leverage Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative to strengthen shared data use:

- Develop data-sharing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with other child- and family-serving public agencies and organizations to help ensure that their respective initiatives can align continuous improvement efforts, coordinate investment strategies, and align reporting.
- Invest in technology systems that support data sharing across organizations and agencies that serve the same families and communities in order to streamline services and provide better care.
- Share school readiness data to inform public investments in social and health and human services by cities, school districts, and the county.
- Ensure that the interest holders are not being asked for the same data from multiple partners.
- Ensure that data are shared with the community in consistent and ongoing ways.
- Invest in opportunities to support the community in engaging with and making meaning of data.

The Responsibility and the Opportunity of Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative

Investing in our early childhood systems has far-reaching benefits beyond serving the needs of young children, their families, and their educators. As participants in First 5 Alameda's recent community listening sessions shared, a strong early childhood system is foundational to a strong community. Consistent access to quality care allows working parents to engage fully in the local economy and pursue higher education, ensures that young children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn and thrive, and supports the livelihood of its early care and learning educators, who are essential workers in Alameda County.

In 2025, Alameda County's early care and learning system is navigating a turbulent context that compounds its existing challenges. New federal policy is disrupting the funding and infrastructure that many providers and families have long relied on. Regional Head Start offices have closed, and the U.S. Department of Education has laid off large numbers of employees. Locally, Oakland Unified School District is facing state receivership, a structural budget deficit, a strike, and a superintendent transition. Oakland is in the midst of a mayoral transition and a structural budget deficit, and the city has not had a permanent director of human services since the COVID-19 pandemic. Both Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative faced multiyear litigation that has delayed their implementation.

It is therefore essential that the implementation of Measure C and the Oakland Children's Initiative capitalize on the opportunity to bring together all of Alameda County's child- and family-serving systems to ensure that their intersecting missions improve outcomes for young children, their families, their educators, and their communities. Further, because these initiatives are funded by sales and parcel taxes, which increases the cost of living in Alameda County, it is of paramount importance that they demonstrate impact and be implemented with great discipline, transparency, and public accountability. The mechanisms for implementing these initiatives—such as comprehensive community engagement and needs sensing and participatory approaches to implementation—are uniquely positioned to contribute data and insight to support other systems. Beyond simply strengthening the early childhood system, this ecosystem approach can connect economic and workforce development, education, housing, urban planning and building, parks and recreation, and other sectors to truly invest in the conditions essential for young children, their families, their educators, and their communities to thrive.

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Appendix: Descriptions of Figures 1 and 2

Figure 1. First 5 Alameda County's Approach to Systems Building

Overview and Presentation

A graphic of two concentric rings surrounding an inner circle with four tabs stemming from it represents First 5 Alameda's mission of investing in a better future through long-term, holistic solutions for children, families, and communities in Alameda County. Their goal is to evolve Alameda County's early childhood system so all children are ready for kindergarten.

- The outer ring indicates First 5 Alameda's role in systems building: to fund organizations and initiatives, partner with communities to build the best possible early childhood system, administer programs that offer tangible services to families, and advocate for effective public policies and programs grounded in racial equity and justice.
- The next ring represents the place, people, and policy framework that guides First 5 Alameda in their work. The organization works with communities to ensure neighborhoods are safe, livable, and kid-friendly; ensure that the basic needs of communities and families are met so that children can thrive; and advocate for policies, programs, and services that help young children and everyone they rely on.
- The inner circle and tabs indicate that First 5 Alameda builds effective early childhood systems by engaging parents and caregivers as leaders and connecting them to resources that support their children's well-being; working with communities to ensure thriving neighborhoods; helping facilitate culturally competent care and teamwork among professionals to ensure children's health and development; and supporting early care and education professionals, care providers, and teachers with professional development and technical assistance.

Figure 2. Alameda County Early Care and Learning Funding Ecosystem, FY 2023/24

Overview and Presentation

A flow chart illustrates how Alameda County's early care agencies are funded. The total funding for FY 2023/24 was \$358.6 million, not including Head Start funding.

Table A1. Information Presented in the Chart

Funding source	Agencies funded	What is funded
California General Fund	<p>California Department of Social Services (CDSS): Child Care and Development Division</p> <p>California Department of Education (CDE)</p> <p>State-contracted childcare programs</p> <p>Alternative payment agencies</p>	<p>California State Preschool Program (CSPP), \$139.6 million, 30 agencies, 3,170 children birth to age 5</p>
Federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	<p>California Department of Social Services (CDSS): CalWORKs</p> <p>Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA)</p> <p>Alternative payment agencies</p>	<p>CalWORKs Stage 1 Vouchers, \$27.0 million, 2 agencies, 2,800 children</p> <p>CalWORKs Stage 2 and Stage 3 Vouchers, \$32.4 million, 4 agencies, 3,700 children</p> <p>Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Foster Children, \$1.9 million, 3 agencies, 100 children</p> <p>California Alternative Payment Program (CAPP), \$68.7 million, 5 agencies, 6,500 children</p>
Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant	<p>California Department of Social Services (CDSS): Child Care and Development Division</p> <p>State-contracted childcare programs</p> <p>Alternative payment agencies</p>	<p>Migrant Child Care and Development (CMIG), \$1.6 million, 1 agency, unknown number of children</p> <p>Child Care and Development Programs for Children With Severe Disabilities (CHAN), \$448 thousand, 1 agency, unknown number of children</p> <p>Family Child Care Education Home Networks (CFCC), \$6.0 million, 2 agencies, unknown number of children</p> <p>General Child Care and Development Program (CCTR), \$80.9 million, 18 agencies, 540 children birth to age 5</p>
Early Head Start and Head Start	<p>Early Head State and Head Start</p>	<p>Early Head Start and Head Start, unknown amount of funding, 12 agencies, 2,820 children birth to age 5</p>