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# Making the Case for The Early Years

Measure X Report on Contra Costa County's County Early  
Childhood System

MAY 26, 2021

## **About This Report**

This report provides Measure X Community Advisory Board members and alternates with an overview of the current early childhood landscape for young children and their families in Contra Costa County and highlights priority needs and gaps in serving our children and families.

## **CONTRIBUTORS**

The foregoing information in this report was a collaborative effort across multiple County departments, First 5 Contra Costa, and other community-based organizations and providers of early childhood services, including:

**First 5 Contra Costa**

**Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD)**

**CocoKids, Inc.**

**Community Services Bureau Head Start (CSB)**

**Contra Costa County Health Services Department (CCHS)**

**Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCCOE)**

**Contra Costa County Local Planning Council for Early Care and Education (LPC)**

**Healthy and Active Before 5 (HAB45)**

**We Care Services for Children**

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### INTRODUCTION

The brain is built through a process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. In these first five years, children are developing the foundations by which they will learn, behave, and grow. Scientific research continues to demonstrate the long-term effects of supporting young children and their families during this most rapid period of a child's brain development.<sup>1</sup> Further, research has also shown that making investments in programs that support these families yields a 13% annual return on investment by improving life outcomes related to health, education, employment and social behaviors.<sup>2</sup>

Contra Costa is one of the fastest growing counties in the Bay Area. The population growth rate has generally exceeded the Bay Area's average growth rate every decade since 1940. Young children under the age of six represent 7% of Contra Costa's population, which equates to roughly 80,000 children.<sup>3</sup> This growth, combined with an established research base on the critical importance of the first five years of life, indicates a growing need for services, systems, and policies that support Contra Costa's youngest residents.

When we support children and their families during a child's first five years of life, we make the most of the incredible human potential in all of us. Yet, not every child and family has access to the same level of resources that help realize this potential. In Contra Costa County, a need persists to build the supply of services and strengthen early childhood systems to support all children and families in the critical first five years.

### A HOLISTIC, SYSTEMS APPROACH TO SUPPORTING YOUNG CHILDREN

To make the most of these critical early years, all children, prenatal to age five and their families need:

- Access to affordable, quality, and culturally relevant early learning opportunities through childcare and preschool
- Support for mental, physical, and behavioral health
- Food, housing, and economic security
- Strong caregiver and community relationships

The success and impact of these services depends on a strong infrastructure that supports the child and their family; if services are disconnected, at best, children miss out on the reinforcing benefits of

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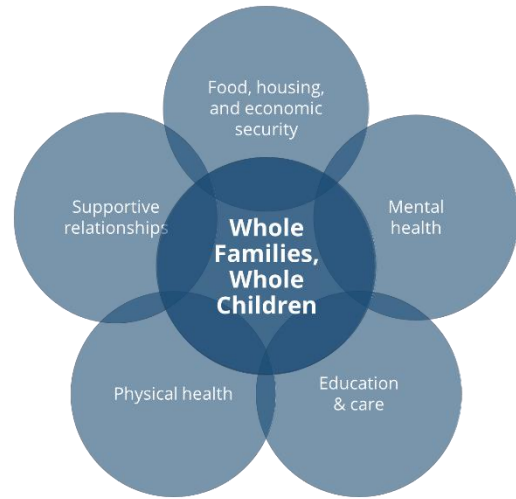
<sup>1</sup> <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program/>

<sup>3</sup> California Dept. of Finance, Population Estimates and Projections (May 2020); U.S. Census Bureau, Population and Housing Unit Estimates (Jul. 2020).

supports, and at worst, families and children do not connect to the supports they need when they need them.

**Simply put, effective early childhood systems must be organized and structured in a cohesive, comprehensive, coordinated, and well-funded “system of care” that aligns a broad array of services, with a lens grounded in equity and addressing the root causes of disparities. To support the well-being and healthy development of all children, responsive “early childhood systems” that look at the whole child and whole family are necessary to ensure children are safe, healthy, loved, educated, and have the social-emotional skills to thrive in school and throughout life.**



## THE 0-5 LANDSCAPE IN CONTRA COSTA

### Demographics of Children Under Six in Contra Costa

A diverse county, with a blend of rural and urban communities, Contra Costa is home to primarily White (34.9%) and Hispanic/ Latino (34.2%) children who make up the majority of the child population, with Asian (13.4%), African American (9%) and multi-racial (6.7%) populations at smaller percentages.<sup>4</sup>

### Children in Poverty

Too many Contra Costa children live in deep poverty, defined as 50% of the Federal Poverty Level (i.e., an annual income of \$12,550 for a family of four). Countywide, 16.2% of families with children under the age of six live in deep poverty, and in 22 of the county’s census tracts, between 25-49% of households with children under six live in this deep level of poverty.

Young children of color represent a disproportionately high percentage of children under the age of six living in poverty (at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level) in Contra Costa. While there is a nearly equal percentage of Latino children and White children under the age of six in Contra Costa, Latino children make up over half (53%) of all children under the age of six who live at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level. The disparity is there for African American children too, who make up 7% of the population but 15% of those children under age six who live at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, defining poverty according to the Federal Poverty Level does not paint a complete picture of families’ and children’s economic statuses in Contra Costa County. According to “The Cost of Being Californian” (2021), Contra Costa ranks the fifth most expensive county in the state.<sup>6</sup> To cover the costs of basic needs for a family of four with an infant and a toddler requires a household annual income of

<sup>4</sup> Kidsdata.org. <https://www.kidsdata.org/region/171/contracosta-county/summary#37/family-economics>

<sup>5</sup> Briefing Book page 6. <http://www.first5coco.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/BriefingBook2019.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [https://insightccd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/INSIGHT\\_CostofBeingCalifornian\\_5\\_web.pdf](https://insightccd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/INSIGHT_CostofBeingCalifornian_5_web.pdf)

\$141,641.<sup>7</sup> When the median household income for a family with children in Contra Costa is \$103,685, a significant proportion of families in the county struggle to make ends meet. The pandemic has deepened economic insecurity for these families, as low-wage workers have been hit especially hard by unemployment.<sup>8</sup>

### School Readiness

A Kindergarten Readiness Assessment<sup>9</sup> (KRA) commissioned by First 5 Contra Costa in 2018 revealed that only 44% of Contra Costa children are fully ready for kindergarten. The data indicates that children who are well-fed, well-rested, visit a library with a caregiver, attend preschool or Transitional Kindergarten (TK), or have parents who are confident and knowledgeable about parenting are more prepared to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

To understand why over half of young children in Contra Costa are not ready for kindergarten, we can look to ongoing adversity that families face in health, safety, and education—painful corollaries of the generational cycle of poverty and racism, which, according to Kidsdata.org, low-income or ethnically diverse families experience at disproportionate rates. For example, one in five Contra Costa children experienced food insecurity (not having reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food). Although it’s encouraging that nearly 56% of 3- and 4-year old children in the county are enrolled in preschool, it’s equally concerning that over one-third of Contra Costa’s children are not. We explore these two components, as well as other factors of child and family well-being, below in describing gaps in our county.

### Child Care

According to the most recent 2017 Child Care Needs Assessment conducted by the Contra Costa Local Child Care Planning Council for Early Care and Education (LPC)<sup>10</sup>, there were about 40,000 licensed child care spaces available to meet an estimated need of 75,000 children birth to 12 years old. Infants and toddlers (birth to 2 years old) care has the greatest shortage.

**Child Care Supply.** The table below is a breakdown of child care spaces in Contra Costa County for children from birth to 12 years old by age category (FCCH = family childcare homes).

Age of Children	FCCH Spaces	Center Spaces	Total Number of Spaces	Percentage of Supply
<b>0 to 2 years</b>	1,933	1,459	3,398	9%
<b>3 to 4 years</b>	3,866	14,861	19,085	48%
<b>School age</b>	2,487	14,806	17,293	43%
<b>Total supply</b>	<b>8,286</b>	<b>31,126</b>	<b>39,776</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>7</sup> <https://insightccd.org/family-needs-calculator/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.epi.org/publication/state-of-working-america-wages-in-2020/>

<sup>9</sup> Ready or Not, Here We Come! First 5 Contra Costa Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, <http://www.first5coco.org/results/kindergarten-readiness-assessment/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://plan4kids.org/resources/reports-and-assessments/>

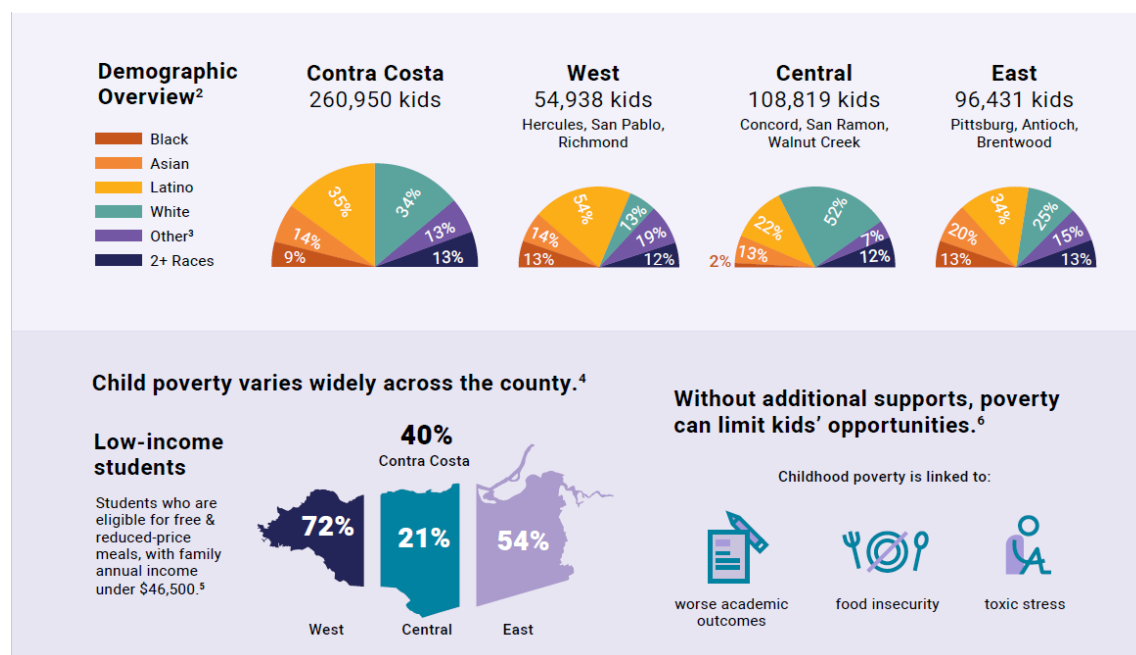
## GAPS

### Racial Inequities: Contra Costa Opportunity Gap<sup>11</sup>

The Contra Costa County Opportunity Gap analysis, developed in 2019, highlights this important context that, when it comes to availability, affordability, and quality of services for families, far too many children in the county have fewer opportunities to succeed than others.

Before delving into the specific gaps for young children in Contra Costa County, it is important to underscore that those who experience these gaps the most—and disproportionately so—are communities of color. Because policies and funding practices have excluded these communities from accessing resources, Black and brown families have had to support their children with far less systemic and structural support than their White counterparts, leading to disparities in health, education, and economic outcomes. These disparities have their roots in the public and private under-resourcing of Black, brown, and Indigenous communities, most clearly and blatantly through redlining policies that prevented these communities from owning homes and building wealth across generations,<sup>12</sup> resulting in disparities that fall along geographic, income, and racial lines.

### Excerpt from “The Opportunity Gap for Children Across Contra Costa County”:



### Gaps: Supply of Services and Supports

The findings of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment highlight the necessary components of an early childhood system of supports—those that support a child’s emotional, intellectual, and physical well-being. However, due to both a lack of supply in these supports and the need to strengthen the

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.childrenow.org/portfolio-posts/opportunity-gap-contra-costa/>

<sup>12</sup> [https://ncrc.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2018/02/NCRC-Research-HOLC-10.pdf](https://ncrc.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2018/02/NCRC-Research-HOLC-10.pdf)



coordination across them, many children are not able to connect to the resources that best support their development.

### Basic needs

Families need affordable, stable, safe homes, adequate household resources, healthy neighborhoods, and access to quality opportunities, education, and services—all of these factors are intricately connected and influence life outcomes at all ages.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, too many of Contra Costa’s families do not have their basic needs met.

With housing being a significant share of most Contra Costa families’ monthly costs, lack of safe, secure, and affordable housing represents a large gap in the system of support for young children and families. According to Bay Area Equity Atlas, 52% of renters in Contra Costa County are housing burdened, i.e., those households that pay more than 30% of their income to housing. Housing burdened individuals are more likely to be Black or Latinx due to a legacy of discriminatory housing policies and practices, both public and private. When households are housing burdened, they become more vulnerable to homelessness, the rates of which increased in Contra Costa by more than 40% from 2017-2019.<sup>14</sup> While difficult to quantify, many of those who are unhoused are families with children. The pandemic has pushed more families to the brink of homelessness; according to the Bay Area Equity Atlas, it is estimated that 12,100 children are at risk of eviction when state pandemic projections expire.<sup>15</sup>

Food insecurity also presents a gap in children’s basic needs. Almost one in five California children live in households with limited or uncertain access to adequate food. California consistently has a higher percentage of children living in food-insecure households than the U.S. overall and in Contra Costa<sup>16</sup>, 17% of the children live in food insecure homes. Food-insecure children are more likely to experience a host of health problems, including developmental, cognitive, behavioral, and mental health issues.<sup>17</sup>

### Child care

**Access.** Before the pandemic, Contra Costa County was already short 12,625 child care slots.<sup>18</sup> Since the start of the pandemic, Contra Costa has lost at least 1,126 more slots.<sup>19</sup> The Measure X Needs Assessment estimated that 17,900 children ages 0-5 years who are eligible for subsidized child care cannot access it due to low supply. Community Services, the largest childcare provider in the county, has a current waitlist of 5,358 children 0-5 and CocoKids, the resource and referral agency for the county, has a waitlist of 5,380 children.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/721/crowded-housing/table#fmt=1022&loc=171,2&tf=108&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.kqed.org/news/11748762/homelessness-in-contra-costa-jumped-more-than-40-since-2017>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.google.com/url?q=https://bayareaequityatlas.org/research/CCCEviction&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1621363358485000&usg=AOvVaw1\\_4TeKsK3gjFKrZQL0xVo3](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://bayareaequityatlas.org/research/CCCEviction&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1621363358485000&usg=AOvVaw1_4TeKsK3gjFKrZQL0xVo3)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/764/food-insecurity/table#fmt=1168&loc=171,2&tf=95&sortType=asc>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/764/food-insecurity/table#fmt=1168&loc=171,2&tf=95&sortType=asc>

<sup>18</sup> [http://plan4kids.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2017LPCNeedsAssessment\\_PDF.pdf](http://plan4kids.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2017LPCNeedsAssessment_PDF.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Data from the California Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division, January, 2021: <https://app.box.com/s/hsgbvgqptmjer2u0cdp5nrc5ic4tqat4>

This lack of capacity has staggering implications for families as more caregivers begin returning to work, as well as for the child care providers, most of whom are women of color and who, without adequate supports and wages, are at risk of going out of business permanently.<sup>20</sup>

The effects of scarce childcare ripple out to the community as well. An economic impact multiplier analysis was conducted for the child care industry in Contra Costa County for 2013. “The impact analysis shows that for every \$1 spent in the County on child care; an additional \$0.68 is generated in additional spending.” The spending results in a multiplier effect that increases economic output, jobs, and tax revenue throughout the entire economy. In 2012, \$300 million were spent annually on child care in Contra Costa County which generated an additional \$203 million in economic activity.<sup>21</sup>

**Affordability.** For many families, child care is an option beyond reach due to lack of affordability. Many families have reached the subsidized “cliff”, in which making even one dollar over the threshold for subsidy prevents them from placing their child in one of the 7,800<sup>22</sup> subsidized child care spaces in the county. In California, a family of four cannot make more than \$84,822 to qualify for a State-subsidized preschool or infant/ toddler program, while the federal Head Start guidelines are lower at \$26,500 for a family of four. Given a family of four needs \$141,641<sup>23</sup> to cover their basic needs, these ceilings often prevent families from accessing adequate care. Parents often have to pass up increased pay opportunities to remain eligible for subsidized child care as they cannot afford it otherwise.

**Wage disparity.** At the same time, early care educators were leaving the field at a rapid pace even before the pandemic. This exodus is a result of low wages and the inability to make ends meet given the high cost of living in California. Although child care worker wages increased more than other education occupations between 2017 and 2019, this 4-percent increase, adjusted for inflation, adds only \$0.44 to the median hourly wage, which rose from \$11.21 in 2017 (in 2019 dollars) to \$11.65 in 2019. The median salary of a childcare worker is approximately \$17.93 per hour less than their kindergarten counterpart and for a Preschool Teacher it is \$14.53 less.<sup>24</sup> Further, California’s rate of child care workers living in poverty pre-pandemic was at 17% as compared to their K-8 counterparts at 2.5%.<sup>25</sup> Child care workers’ chronically low wages are rooted in the systemic undervaluing of labor traditionally held by women, and particularly women of color, who make up 40% of the childcare workforce.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> <https://calmatters.org/children-and-youth/2021/03/child-care-centers-close/>

<sup>21</sup> Economic Impact of Child Care Services in Contra Costa County: <http://plan4kids.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/LPCEconImpactReport.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Contra Costa County Child Care Needs Assessment 2017, [https://issuu.com/cccoe/docs/for\\_issu](https://issuu.com/cccoe/docs/for_issu)

<sup>23</sup> <https://insightcced.org/family-needs-calculator/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/the-early-educator-workforce/early-educator-pay-economic-insecurity-across-the-states/>

<sup>25</sup> [https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/Appendix-2\\_2020-Index.pdf](https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/Appendix-2_2020-Index.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/racial-wage-gaps-in-early-education-employment/>



Title	Median hourly wage in California <sup>27</sup>
Childcare worker	\$13.43
Preschool teacher	\$16.83
Kindergarten teacher	\$31.36

### Unmet need for early childhood mental health services

It is estimated that 9.5–14.2% of all children birth to six experience emotional, relational, or behavioral disturbances that require mental health intervention. Considering recent population numbers for Contra Costa County (e.g., 2018 data from the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health), there are approximately 80,000 children who are 0 to 5 in the county. It is therefore reasonable to estimate that, in Contra Costa County, there are approximately 7,900 to 10,900 children in need of early childhood mental health intervention for mental illnesses meeting medical necessity criteria, including trauma or “toxic stress” effects in babies and young children that can arise as a result of abuse, neglect, violence, and inconsistent parenting related to parental mental illness, substance abuse, and poverty. Present Medi-Cal contracts to the early childhood community-based organizations support approximately 610 children 0-5 annually. The unmet need for varying levels of early childhood mental health interventions in Contra Costa is thus on the order of 7,000 to 10,000 children. Not only are these services immediately needed to address current problems, but investing in mental health intervention and prevention services for young children also, importantly, ameliorate or prevent future mental health needs once these children reach adolescence and adulthood.

### Unmet need for developmental services for children with disabilities

There is an ever present gap in services for children aged 0 to 3 with disabilities. Currently there are 783 infant and toddlers and 2,371 preschool children with a diagnosed disability, yet this number is surely an undercount. For many families, pediatric visits and the developmental screenings conducted by pediatricians are their entry point into referrals and connections to additional support for their children, particularly when they have developmental concerns. Yet well-child visits were down an estimated 24% nationally from pre-pandemic baselines in December 2020.<sup>28</sup> According to Contra Costa Health Services, developmental screenings for children 0-11 fell from approximately 62% in January 2020 to approximately 55% in April 2021. This lack of screening compounded by decreased well-child visits present a highly significant barrier to preventive care and families’ access to an entire system of early childhood resources.

<sup>27</sup> [https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/Appendix-2\\_2020-Index.pdf](https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/Appendix-2_2020-Index.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Ateev Mehrotra et al., The Impact of COVID-19 on Outpatient Visits in 2020: Visits Remained Stable, Despite a Late Surge in Cases (Commonwealth Fund, February, 2021). <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/2021/feb/impact-covid-19-outpatient-visits-2020-visits-stable-despite-late-surge>

For those children that do have diagnoses, any subsidized programs in the county combine state and federal funding to create full-day, full-year services, requiring family income to not exceed the state median income ceilings. Given the high cost of living in Contra Costa, this has resulted in an unmet need with incredibly high stakes, as brain development research shows the critical role of early intervention in these cases.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL IDEAS:

### Children and Families

- 1. Immediate support to families in need:** We need immediate provisions to support the urgent gaps hard-working families face in meeting their basic needs. These supports could take the form of:
  - a. Financial supports, such as direct cash assistance to families, rental assistance, debt relief, and legal aid for tenants
  - b. Safety net supports, including expanding access to resources for food, internet, and utilities
  - c. Resources dedicated to partnering with families, residents, and community-based organizations to shape housing and city planning policies that prevent displacement and strengthen community fabrics.
  
- 2. Funding for childcare slots:** At a minimum, bringing the field up to pre-pandemic numbers will help soften the current childcare crisis. *A public-private collaboration to make up the gap of childcare slots, primarily infant and toddler, for those who do not qualify for a subsidy, will ensure that more children will benefit from early care and that their parents can work and attend school.* To meet this need, local funding could be used to pay local rates for child care using a voucher system similar to the system used by CalWorks Stages 1 and 2, but with a higher income ceiling that better meets the cost of living in the Bay Area. This would boost the child care work industry, help families get quality care they cannot afford otherwise, and would not require additional facilities which are at an all-time low. CocoKids, the resource and referral agency for the county, and Employment and Human Services, Community Services and Workforce Services Bureaus administer the CalWorks programs and have existing mechanisms in place to support a system like this.
  
- 3. Funding for early childhood mental health services:** Contra Costa County needs increased levels of funding for prevention and intervention services based in early childhood mental health, specifically for families with children from birth to age six. Support for provision of these services is needed to improve children’s social-emotional development as a preventive strategy, and to begin to help treat and overcome the effects of traumatic stress that many young children experience as a result of growing up in environments of abuse, neglect, interpersonal

and community violence, systemic oppressions, and parental mental illness and substance abuse.

The California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) and the Office of the Surgeon General have initiated an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) screening project in pediatric primary care which began in January 2020 as a public health strategy to address toxic stress in children. Pediatricians are now incented to screen all patients for ACEs and are referring children and families for “toxic stress treatment” which clearly includes early childhood mental health services. Funding is needed for early childhood mental health agencies as they rise to address new demands necessitated by this initiative, as well as striving to meet, more generally, the current significant unmet need for early childhood mental health services in the county.

The social-emotional well-being of young children is often implicitly mentioned in Behavioral Health and Mental Health Master Plans. It is imperative that early childhood mental health be explicitly called out as a dedicated funding strand in county-level services. *The Early Childhood Prevention and Intervention Coalition (ECPIC) is an existing county-wide coalition of early intervention and prevention service partners, including early childhood mental health agencies, focused on the social-emotional needs of young children.* They take a ‘coordinated and holistic’ approach to leveraging allocated Mental Health Services Act and MediCal funds with other local funding to address the emerging needs of young children and their families or preschool/daycare providers. *The coalition’s ability to leverage funding can help to maximize services to ensure more families can be served.*

- 4. Supporting children with disabilities:** Children with developmental disabilities such as down's syndrome or autism show great gains in mainstream settings with typically developing peers. Funding can be used to support children in an early learning environment through consultation and guidance to providers on strategies to modify their setting to be inclusive of all children. Funding can also be used to fill the gap resulting from income ceilings that are too low for families with disabled children 0-3 years of age, who require the type of comprehensive services offered at programs with combined state and federal funding. *This could be in the form of a voucher to the provider on behalf of the family as described above.*

## TRANSFORMATIONAL IDEAS:

### Service Providers

- 1. Network supports to connect providers with each other and ensure families get properly referred and connected to services:** This county has begun the essential work of creating and connecting the network of care and service providers for children and families, yet more work remains to create a more connected and relational system of care. This work has evolved thanks to Help Me Grow and efforts to connect families with developmental supports and safety net navigation. It continues to evolve and grow as service providers across the county, from pediatricians and behavioral health providers to teachers, childcare workers, and more unpack

their role in supporting young children’s development and particularly the effects of adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress.

Through a one-time grant from ACEs Aware, First 5 is forming a burgeoning Contra Costa Network of Care (<https://www.contracostanetworkofcare.org/>) where these providers connect, exchange resources, and build relationships with one another, ultimately in service of providing stronger, more appropriate, and trauma-informed referrals and supports to families and children. This work has only begun and will need to be sustained and supported beyond the life of the ACEs Aware grants to ensure that every provider has the necessary tools, resources and supports to connect families in their care to the multitude of services they need, and that there is adequate funding to support the provision of these services. *This could take the form of ongoing convenings, networking and relationship-building opportunities, and supporting the online network community and learning hub.*

**2. Funding family partners and resource navigator roles:** As we continue our efforts to elevate and enhance the early childhood system, barriers often emerge in the referral and linkage process due to a lack of resource navigation. Health and Resource Providers can confidently support families within their scope of work but often find it challenging to provide additional information and support connections to external resources due to a limited bandwidth for follow up and knowledge of community resources. With the growing efforts on health, developmental, behavioral, and now ACEs screening, health and education providers find themselves seeking the support of programs like First 5’s Help Me Grow where resource navigators support families in targeting primary needs and connecting them to resources available, but this is not enough. *Family partners and navigators can help both families and providers navigate this complicated system.*

**3. Early care and education supports for providers:** Supporting the childcare workforce is critical to Contra Costa’s economy. Incentives are necessary for retention, to attract new providers, and help the county recover from this crisis.

Stipends. A recent survey conducted by CocoKids indicated that 100% of childcare providers in the county were adversely impacted by the pandemic. New requirements have resulted in less children being served (many providers are forced to serve at half capacity), increased costs for PPE and cleaning supplies, and facilities changes to account for social distancing and new health standards. The Early Learning and Leadership Group (a collaboration of First 5, Employment and Human Services, Community Services, CocoKids, County Office of Education, and Healthy and Active Before 5) in partnership with LIIF (Low Income Investment Fund), and through a public-private collaboration, recently administered \$600,000 in cash stipends to family child care providers in 5 key areas of high need: Concord, Richmond, Antioch, Pittsburg and San Pablo. *Of the 279 eligible applicants, funds were only available for 75. Our hope is to secure matching funds for this effort so that all the eligible applicants can receive the help they need.*

These grants can be used to cover an array of needs including essential facilities costs, defaulting mortgage payments for those operating their business in their home, to payroll costs to keep their workers employed. Expanding this stipend program to distribute more funds to those in desperate need will allow providers to keep their doors open and continue to keep children healthy and safe and parents working.

Incentive grants tied to professional development. *Critical to supporting the field are incentives for child development permit attainment and upgrades, and Bachelor's and Associate's degree attainment. We hear from providers that the greatest barrier to education is the cost.* In December 2020, the State released its [Master Plan for Education](#), a bold 10-year plan with goals and strategies meant to build and professionalize the field of early care. This plan emphasizes a tiered professional development approach; however, the plan has no funding attached to ensure its success. It is apparent that it will be up to local communities to fund pieces of this Plan. First 5 with AB 212 funds have in the past been the “holder” of these incentives, but with the funds on rapid decline each year, the current incentive program has not met the steadily growing need. Without local investment in this area, our community will continue to struggle to attract and retain high quality Early Care Educators.

Technology grants to support infrastructure and distance learning. Approximately 48% of children are home distance learning as childcare remains at minimum capacity and school age children remain at home. Maintaining a direct link with those children and their families is critical for support, on-going learning, and nurturing connections. This pandemic has shown that the digital divide is real, and many providers and families do not have the broadband support needed to maintain the crucial school to home connection. Unfortunately, it is often the low income families that are the most impacted due to the lack of access to tools to support their children. *Technology grants will benefit providers by allowing them to upgrade their and their families' broadband by providing hotspots and laptops for home use.* These tools will also allow more providers to keep up with their professional development through on-line courses in the evenings, while remaining at home with their families.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL IDEAS:

### Integrated Systems

- 1. Dedicated resources for a countywide, cross-sector leadership body for children (Children's Leadership Council):** While adequate and consistent funding for direct services is critical, so is the investment in community-driven networks and the leadership and infrastructure needed to promote an integrated and coordinated system of care. This is an area that necessitates more investment and prioritization when developing funding priorities for early childhood systems.

**A coordinated and integrated system of care would not only yield increased services and strengthen referral pathways for so many more children, it would also open the door to**

**leverage existing funding streams to increase Contra Costa County’s eligibility for expanded levels of federal and state funding drawdown.**

The [Contra Costa Children’s Leadership Council](#) (CLC) is a countywide, cross-sector coalition of public and nonprofit agencies, community leaders, and elected officials whose **purpose** is to develop and strengthen the ecosystem of programs, policies, and partners that support child, youth, family, and community resilience and well-being. Established in 2019 by the Contra Costa Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD), Health Services Department (HSD), County Office of Education (COE), and First 5 Contra Costa (First 5), the CLC **envisions** a future where in every region of Contra Costa:

- **All children and youth** are safe, healthy, loved, educated, and have the social-emotional skills to thrive throughout life.
- **All families** are resilient, connected, empowered, and have the social and economic resources to raise thriving children and youth.
- **All neighborhoods** are safe, just, and vibrant places for families to raise children and youth.
- **All partners** in community-led, public, non-profit, and private groups and organizations advocate for and take collective action to create a healthy ecosystem that recognizes and supports resilience and well-being.

The CLC serves as the ‘big tent’ under which all stakeholders can collaboratively plan, co-design, and coordinate services that support the well-being and success of all children. The CLC intends to do this work shoulder to shoulder with all county departments, local coalitions, and partners dedicated to ensuring children and families emerge from this pandemic healthy, housed, and financially stable. The CLC’s systems integration work depends on the voice of the community in developing programs that best meet the needs of families in the County. Groups such as Healthy and Active Before 5, Parent Voices, the First 5 Regional Groups and the Community Services Head Start Parent Policy Council, inform and guide the important work of the Council. We know that to build back stronger communities, families, and residents, particularly those most impacted by the effects of this pandemic, we have to lead the way in creating programs grounded in equity and in community voice.

Building and strengthening continuous communication, partnerships, and collective action among resident leaders and agency leaders in the CLC requires dedicated resources to coordinate the CLC and compensate resident leaders for their contributions. In addition, the CLC’s work is enriched by the voices and experiences of resident leaders participating in the CLC, and the Steering Committee firmly believes their time and expertise are just as valuable as the time and expertise of paid professionals. Without dedicated resources, the coordination tasks are typically spread among leaders who are already juggling multiple priorities, limiting the coalition’s capacity to take collective action.



*Resources dedicated for integration of systems would include consulting services for planning, coordination and facilitation of CLC activities and projects, technical support and services for data collection, assessment and analysis, and financial incentives for community residents engaged in CLC activities.*

- 2. Invest in a countywide annual Children’s Well-being Index:** The CLC has begun to identify essential data points and indicators related to child, youth, and family well-being to include in a Children’s Report Card, using the Measure X Needs Assessment, the Children Now county report card, and the Leshar Foundation’s “Opportunity Gap” infographic as the starting point. The intent is to develop a Children’s Well-being Index that serves as the basis of “Child & Youth Well-being Agenda” that includes a dedicated Children’s Budget and local, state, and federal policy priorities a countywide vision, action plan, and investments to ensure all children and families in Contra Costa are healthy and thriving.

A Contra Costa Children’s Well-being Index would be a natural extension of existing efforts led by Living Contra Costa but with indicators called out specifically for children. The cross-sector public and nonprofit partnerships that make up the CLC position us to be stewards of the Children’s Well-being Index, providing current and relevant data on an annual basis to the Measure X Community Advisory Board.

## SUMMARY

Supporting a child’s well-being includes supporting the well-being of their family and the environment where that child lives, learns, grows, and plays. While this means the scope of the early childhood system is quite vast, it also speaks to the profound, rippling effects of supporting young children. When we support children in their earliest years, we make sure that they can reach their potential and fully contribute to our communities. The early years of a child’s life represent an unparalleled opportunity to make the most of this potential, but doing so requires a well-resourced and coordinated system of services and supports that reach all children, no matter where they live or what they look like. It truly does take a village, yet both the supply of these services and the degree to which they are connected and coordinated represent critical gaps in our county. When we address these gaps through Measure X revenue, we can change the landscape, not just for young children, but the future of our county.