

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
QUALITY RATING AND
IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM (QRIS)

STRATEGIC PLAN
2016-2018



A LETTER FROM FIRST 5 SAN BERNARDINO'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

First 5 San Bernardino is proud to release our county's first strategic plan to guide the development of a local Quality Rating & Improvement System (QRIS). The QRIS presents an opportunity to integrate and align our current quality improvement services and investments into one coherent system. Developing this system is also an opportunity to support and strengthen the 0-5 focus of our countywide vision by promoting the success of our county's children from cradle to career.

This plan is the first step in building a system to ensure San Bernardino County's youngest children have access to high quality early learning experiences that will give them a strong developmental foundation and prepare them for school and, ultimately, college and career success.

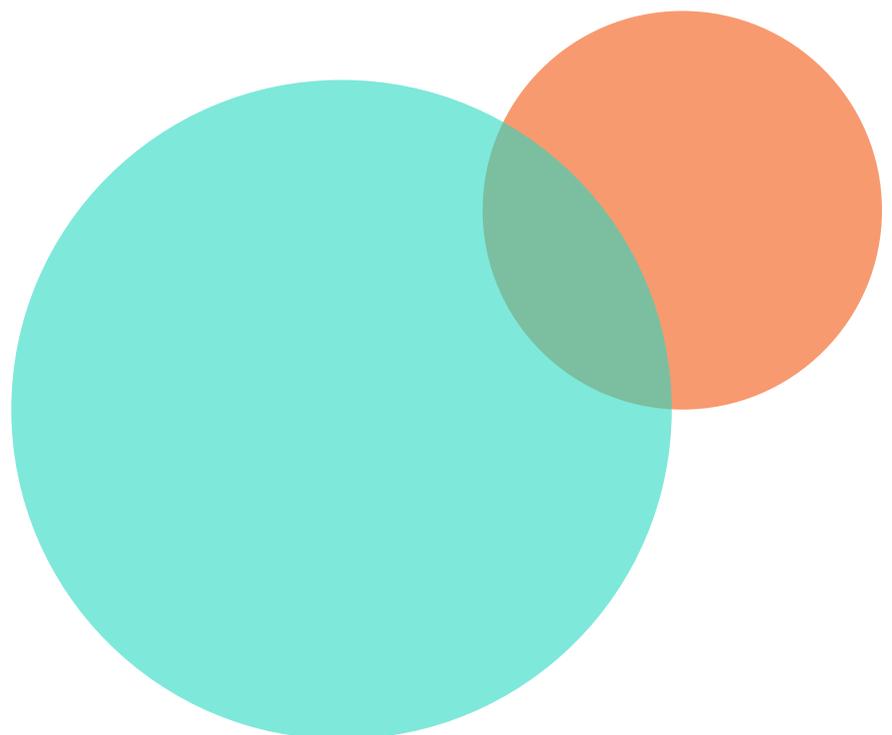
In April 2015, First 5 San Bernardino convened a group of both new and traditional early learning partners to launch the QRIS strategic planning process. Through a diverse partnership including community partners, service providers, and members of our ECE workforce, we developed a shared vision of what a successful QRIS could look like in our county.

This plan is exemplary of the power and potential that exists when partners are engaged and united around a common goal. This plan is truly a product of their hard work, collaboration, and commitment to children 0-5 in our county. We appreciate the significant time investment participants in the QRIS strategic planning process have made over the past 8 months.

San Bernardino County's QRIS Strategic Plan establishes our direction and priorities for the QRIS in the coming years. This plan marks the beginning of our county's QRIS development, and we recognize that it will take continued partnership and commitment from all sectors to make high quality early care & education a reality for all of our children. We invite you to be a part of this exciting new endeavor.



Karen E. Scott
Executive Director, First 5 San Bernardino





HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE & EDUCATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE

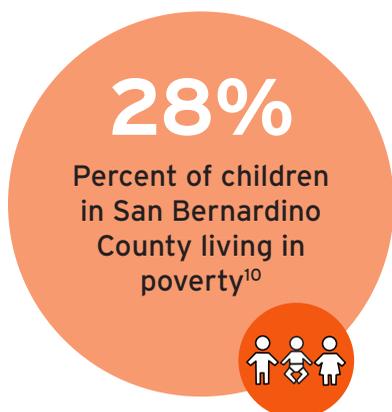
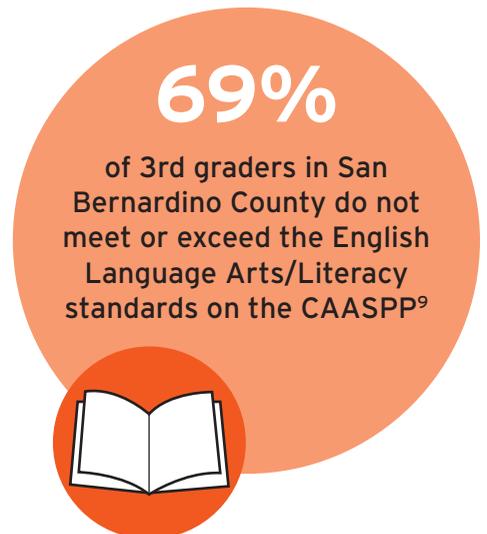
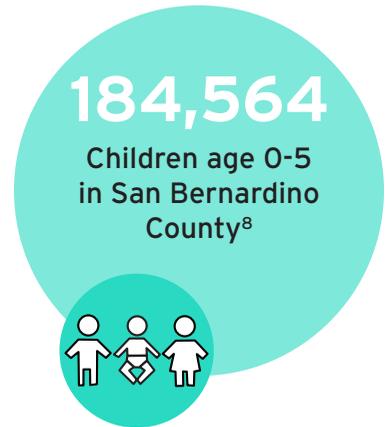
BACKGROUND

Research shows that a child’s brain develops most rapidly during the first 5 years of life. What happens during this time period is critically important to a child’s social-emotional and cognitive development, and impacts their readiness for school. Early care and education experiences help to build a foundation for learning and prepare children for kindergarten, lifelong learning, and college and career readiness. Other benefits to quality early learning experiences include:

- Reduced special education costs;¹
- Increased high school graduation rates;²
- Reduced crime rates over time;³
- Increased employment, income and tax contribution levels;⁴
- Decreased public health care, welfare and child care expenses;⁵ and
- Reduced grade repetition⁶

However, early care and education is not enough. Research demonstrates that high-quality early learning opportunities have a lasting effect on a child’s language development, critical thinking skills, and ability to engage and cooperate with others. The quality of early learning opportunities is critically important to a child’s long-term success in school and in life.

We also know that there must be alignment between high quality early childhood systems and high quality elementary school experiences. When there is coordination between parents and caregivers, early care and education providers and elementary schools, children experience a smoother transition and are better prepared to enter school.



THE QUALITY GAP

Despite what we know about the importance of the first years, the majority of early education programs in California, and across the nation, are considered to be low quality. Nearly 60 percent of U.S. early childhood education centers are found to be of “inadequate or minimal” quality.⁷ A RAND Institute study showed that only 13 percent of California’s low-income children are in high quality early education programs. Low quality early education negatively impacts all children, but for children who are economically disadvantaged, low quality early education puts them at a long-term disadvantage.

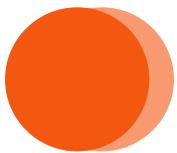


QUALITY RATING & IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS (QRIS) AS A SOLUTION

Over the past decade, states across the country have started to develop frameworks for organizing and communicating standards of quality in early care and education. A Quality Rating & Improvement System (QRIS) is a system that:

1. Defines quality standards for early care and education programs
2. Measures programs against these standards
3. Offers and connects educators to training and professional development opportunities
4. Helps parents & caregivers find quality programs for their children

With a QRIS, communities have a new tool to increase access to quality early learning experiences for children 0-5. The QRIS supports existing and aspiring early care and education providers by helping them recognize what they can do to best support the development of young children in their care. The framework also serves as a tool to help early learning programs determine their level of quality and identify a plan for improvement to meet higher standards of quality. In addition to helping programs and providers, the QRIS offers parents and caregivers a tool for recognizing quality settings and selecting programs that best fit the needs of their children.



QRIS STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In April 2015, First 5 San Bernardino brought together early learning partners, educators, and champions to enter into a strategic planning process for a local Quality Rating & Improvement System. The intent of this process was to create a roadmap to set the stage for a collective impact effort aimed at uniting early learning partners around high standards of quality and coordinated resources to elevate the quality of early care and education in San Bernardino County.

Over a series of 8 months, input was gathered from key local stakeholders through strategic planning sessions, interviews with local leaders, and focus groups and surveys of early childhood educators. Relevant community data was compiled to provide a picture of the status of children and the scale and capacity of the existing system of early care and education programs. Throughout the process, partners learned about the core elements of a QRIS and the emerging California standards for quality early learning programs. Together these activities shaped the resulting plan that sets the course for the launch of a QRIS in San Bernardino County.



QRIS IN SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

San Bernardino County's QRIS Strategic Plan establishes the vision, purpose, and values that will guide the design and launch of a QRIS in the coming years.

MISSION

Build a comprehensive quality improvement system of services to support early childhood educators, parents, and caregivers to provide high quality early learning environments that will nurture the whole child and promote school readiness for children 0-5 in San Bernardino County.

VALUES

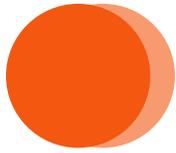
- **Innovation:** We utilize the latest research and best practices in child development and early childhood education with a focus on innovation.
- **Educator Knowledge:** We recognize and apply the professional expertise of early childhood educators.
- **Inclusiveness:** We are inclusive of all types of childcare settings and honor their quality pedagogy and practices.
- **Diversity:** We reflect the cultural, linguistic, economic, and geographic diversity of our county.
- **Cradle to Career Alignment:** We adopt and align developmentally appropriate standards & practices within an educational continuum from cradle to career.
- **Family-Centered:** We embrace parents and caregivers as their child's first teacher.
- **Community-Owned:** We engage educators, parents, caregivers, and the broader community as champions of high quality early learning experiences for all children 0-5.

VISION

All children, birth through age 5, are in high quality early learning environments and are prepared to achieve their fullest potential in school and in life.

The planning process has resulted in a number of significant outcomes including:

- A clear vision and a framework to advance quality improvement across San Bernardino County
- A partnership of long-standing and new champions for quality early learning committed to contributing to the design, launch and successful implementation of the QRIS
- A clearly defined governance structure for the QRIS that is inclusive and flexible to adapt as needs change
- Shared organizational leadership to provide the short-term and long-term operational infrastructure
- The county is well positioned to draw new resources for early education to build a stronger workforce and support children's optimal development



STRATEGIC GOALS

Achieving the vision that all children, birth through age 5, will be in high quality early learning environments will require a shift in thinking across the community about the importance of quality early education. It will also take a willingness to change and transform our educational systems to build a strong workforce that can prepare young children for the future. Through the QRIS strategic planning process the following systems goals were established to make this vision a reality:

Goal 1: Sustainable System - Establish the Operational Infrastructure for a Long-Term & Highly Effective Quality Rating & Improvement System

Goal 2: Qualified Workforce - Enhance Early Educator’s Skills to Provide High Quality Early Education and Care for Children

Goal 3: Systems Alignment - Integrate and Collaborate with Systems that Impact the Education, Health and Well-Being of Young Children

Goal 4: Collective Advocacy - Catalyze Community-Wide Action by Informing Key Leaders & Empowering Parents, Caregivers, and Providers to Support High Quality Early Learning

Goal 5: Results-Focused - Establish & Implement Clear Measures of Impact & Progress



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Within each of the 5 Strategic Goals for QRIS, objectives have been developed that will serve as milestones for achieving the strategic goals of the QRIS.

Goal 1: Sustainable System - Establish the Operational Infrastructure for a Long-Term & Highly Effective Quality Rating & Improvement System

Objective 1.1: Establish an interim operational structure for the QRIS by June 2016

Objective 1.2: Have a long-term operational structure in place for the QRIS that is aligned with the K-12 educational system by July 2017

Objective 1.3: Engage & inform stakeholders to secure resources to support the design, launch and ongoing operations of the QRIS

Goal 2: Qualified Workforce - Enhance Early Educators’ Skills to Provide High Quality Early Education and Care for Children

Objective 2.1: Increase awareness of the QRIS among early childhood educators across the county

Objective 2.2: Engage & enroll at least 181 sites serving children 0 to 5 in the QRIS by June 2018



Objective 2.3: Increase the coordination of education, training and professional development resources to support quality improvement among QRIS participants

Goal 3: Systems Alignment - Integrate and Collaborate with Systems that Impact the Education, Health, and Well-Being of Young Children

Objective 3.1: Develop and implement communications strategies to inform educational leaders, business leaders, and policy makers of the importance of high quality early education programs and the link to positive educational, economic, and social outcomes

Objective 3.2: Develop an action plan with goals and action steps for increasing the alignment between high quality entities serving children ages 0 to 5 and the TK-12 system with at least one school district in each region of the county (for QRIS participants in their district) by June 2018

Objective 3.3: Establish at least one comprehensive services partnership that supports improved health and well-being for children enrolled in QRIS sites by January 2017

Goal 4: Collective Advocacy - Catalyze Community-Wide Action by Informing Key Leaders & Empowering Parents, Caregivers, and Providers to Support High Quality Early Learning

Objective 4.1: Develop a comprehensive communications plan for the QRIS

Objective 4.2: Develop a community advocacy and education agenda to inform key audiences and establish specific calls to action for their contribution to achieving the vision of the system

Objective 4.3: Develop a messaging campaign to increase the public's awareness of the importance of high quality early learning and to increase parents' knowledge of what to look for in early care and education settings

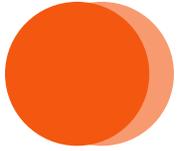
Objective 4.4: Build a core group of at least 3 or more visible community champions for high quality early education in each region by September 2016

Goal 5: Results-Focused - Establish & Implement Clear Measures of Impact & Progress

Objective 5.1: Design an evaluation plan with indicators of impact and progress for the QRIS

Objective 5.2: Launch a QRIS users group to capture the experiences of providers and to shape the design of the QRIS

Objective 5.3: Develop and implement a consistent communications strategy to share the impact and the results of the investment in quality



SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY'S QRIS INFRASTRUCTURE

A key accomplishment of the planning process was agreement on the initial structure that would support the development of the QRIS. This included both the decision-making of the broad partnership or "Consortium," as well as initial ideas around the operational structure. It is understood that these structures will adapt to the changing needs of the system and can be revisited as the system is launched.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

Over the course of the planning process, organizations have been identified that may have the capacity to play a role in the operational structure. The final determination of this structure on both an interim basis or for the long-term will continue to be discussed over the course of the development of the QRIS.

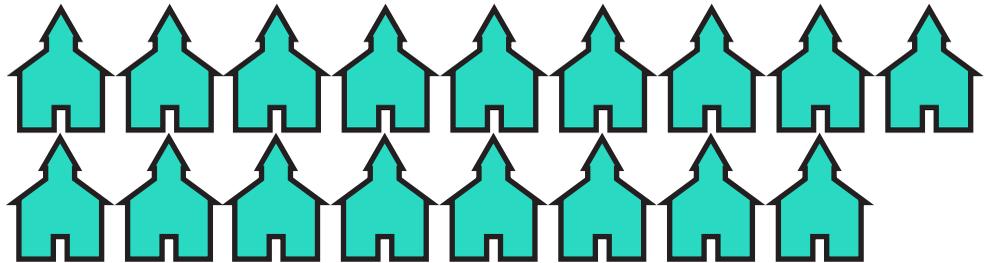
Through the strategic planning process participants emphasized the need to build a system that was both centralized for consistency and efficiency, but also responsive to the geographical size and diversity of the communities of the county. Going forward the design of the QRIS will take into consideration the need for a QRIS structure with both centralized and localized components to support high quality care for children across the county.



THE EARLY LEARNING LANDSCAPE IN SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

1,740

Total number of licensed early care and education programs¹¹

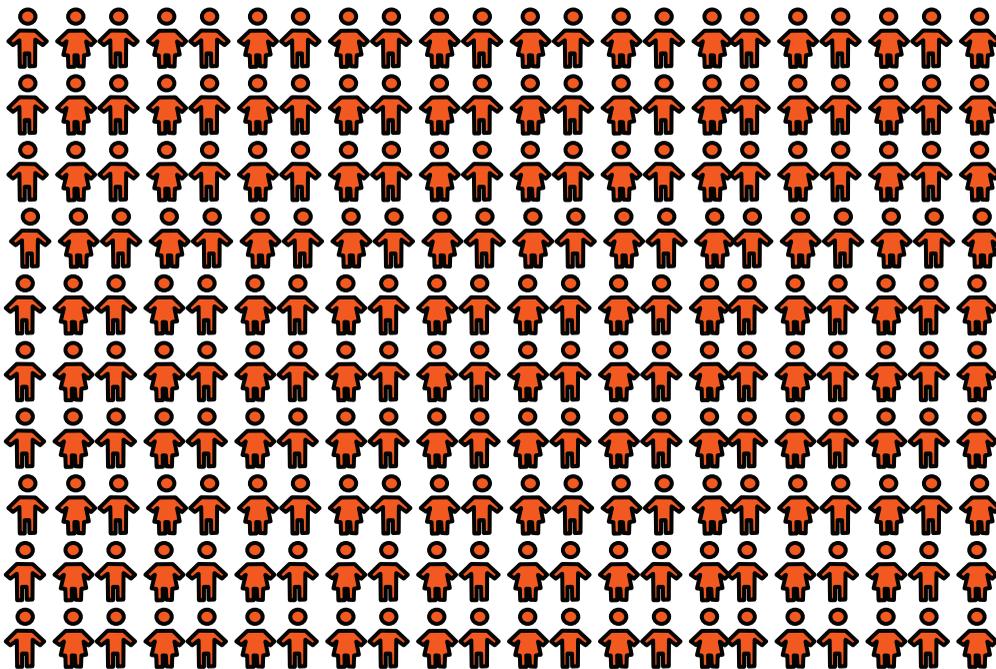


453

Total # of licensed **Child Care Centers** in San Bernardino County¹²

1,287

Total # of licensed **Family Child Care** homes in San Bernardino County¹³

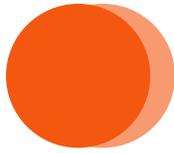


44,172

Total number of licensed early care and education spaces for children in San Bernardino County¹⁴

Total # of licensed early care and education spaces for children within **Family Child Care** homes¹⁵ **12,990**

Total # of licensed early care and education spaces for children within **Child Care Centers**¹⁵ **31,182**



NEXT STEPS & OPPORTUNITIES TO GET INVOLVED

The QRIS Strategic Plan represents tremendous progress in developing an entirely new system in the county. The QRIS strategic planning process has been a unique opportunity to mobilize cross-sector partnerships to:

- Build upon the existing early learning investments and resources in the county
- Create a more systemic approach to early learning that aligns with the cradle to career educational continuum
- Create accessible pathways for a high quality ECE Workforce
- Inform parents of the importance of a quality early learning experiences & how to select an experience that meets the needs of their family
- Activate coordinated advocacy for early care and education

Using the strategic plan as a roadmap for the coming years, the early learning champions of the county are now charged with advancing the work through participation in one or more of the following ways:

- As members of the QRIS Consortium
- As members of the Steering Committee
- As Operational Partners
- Through active participation in workgroups charged with advancing the goals of the strategic plan
- As ambassadors for QRIS and champions of high quality early care and education

The success of the QRIS will be seen in the ongoing commitment of partners for quality—educators, parents, funders, policy makers, and anyone who sees the value of children having the opportunity to learn and grow in healthy environments with adults who care and nurture their full potential.





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

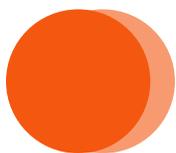
First 5 would like to thank and acknowledge the many community members who contributed their time and expertise over the course of the planning process:

Sue Rhoades, Apple Valley Unified School District
 Cherie Ward, Cal State University San Bernardino
 Eugene Wong, Cal State University San Bernardino
 *Mark Agars, Cal State University San Bernardino
 Tomas Morales, Cal State University San Bernardino
 Juan Herrera, Cal State University San Bernardino
 *James Moses, Child Care Resource Center
 Jesse Pineda, Child Care Resource Center
 Nancy Boyd, Child Care Resource Center
 Susan Savage, Child Care Resource Center
 Betty Chambers, Children’s Fund
 *Chrystina Smith-Rasshan, First 5 San Bernardino
 *Cindy Faulkner, First 5 San Bernardino
 *Deborah Sims, First 5 San Bernardino
 *Karen Scott, First 5 San Bernardino
 Margaret Hill, First 5 San Bernardino
 *Mary Jaquish, First 5 San Bernardino
 *Scott McGrath, First 5 San Bernardino
 Darcy Whitney, Fontana Unified School District
 Joelle Greene, Harder + Company
 Jessica Soto, Hesperia Unified School District
 Linda Jones, Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino
 Becky Murillo, Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino
 Lavinia Johnson, Inland Regional Center
 Treva Webster, Inland Regional Center
 Brenda Mason, Ontario Montclair School District
 Delia Castaneda, San Bernardino City Unified School District
 Cynthia White-Piper, San Bernardino City Unified School District
 Dennis Warman, San Bernardino City Unified School District
 Shawna Hoover, San Bernardino City Unified School District
 Travon Martin, San Bernardino City Unified School District
 **Danny Tillman, San Bernardino City Unified School District
 **Mike Gallo, San Bernardino City Unified School District
 **CaSonya Thomas, San Bernardino County Department of Behavioral Health

**Ken Johnston, San Bernardino County Department of Public Health
 Kathie Resendez, San Bernardino County Local Child Care Planning Council
 *Diana Alexander, San Bernardino County Preschool Services Department
 Edward Amaya, San Bernardino County Preschool Services Department
 Marilyn Caldwell, San Bernardino County Preschool Services Department
 Nihett Ahmed, San Bernardino County Preschool Services Department
 Randi Hopper, San Bernardino County Preschool Services Department
 *Phalos Haire, San Bernardino County Preschool Services Department
 David Berry, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
 Serena Straka, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
 Marion Carter, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
 Mary Ellen Johnson, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
 Randy Elphic, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
 Robin Mclver-Brown, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
 Becky Thams, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
 **Ted Alejandro, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
 Nathaniel Rodriguez, San Bernardino County Transitional Assistance Department
 Sandy Harmsen, San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board
 Bradley Gates, San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board
 Linda Drew, Teddy Bear Tymes Child Care Center
 Sylvia Greenberg, Volunteers of America Southwest
 Crystal Coleman, WestEd

*QRIS Strategic Planning Committee Member **Key leader interviewee

Strategic planning consultation and facilitation provided by Nicole O. Tanner and Karina Rivera, VIVA Strategy + Communications.



SOURCES

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² “Lifetime Effects: The HighScope Preschool Study Through Age 40.” Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Perry.
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⁷ “We Can Do Better: Child Care Aware of America’s Ranking of State Child Care Center Regulations and Oversight.” Child Care Aware, 2013.
⁸ CA Dept. of Finance & U.S. Census Bureau via Kidsdata.org, 2015
⁹ CA Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, 2015
¹⁰ CA Child Care Resource & Referral Network, California Child Care Portfolio, 2015
¹¹ Ibid



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