



FIRST THINGS FIRST

READY FOR SCHOOL. SET FOR LIFE.
2015 ANNUAL REPORT

EDUCATION STARTS WHERE LEARNING BEGINS



90% OF A CHILD'S CRITICAL BRAIN DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS BEFORE KINDERGARTEN,

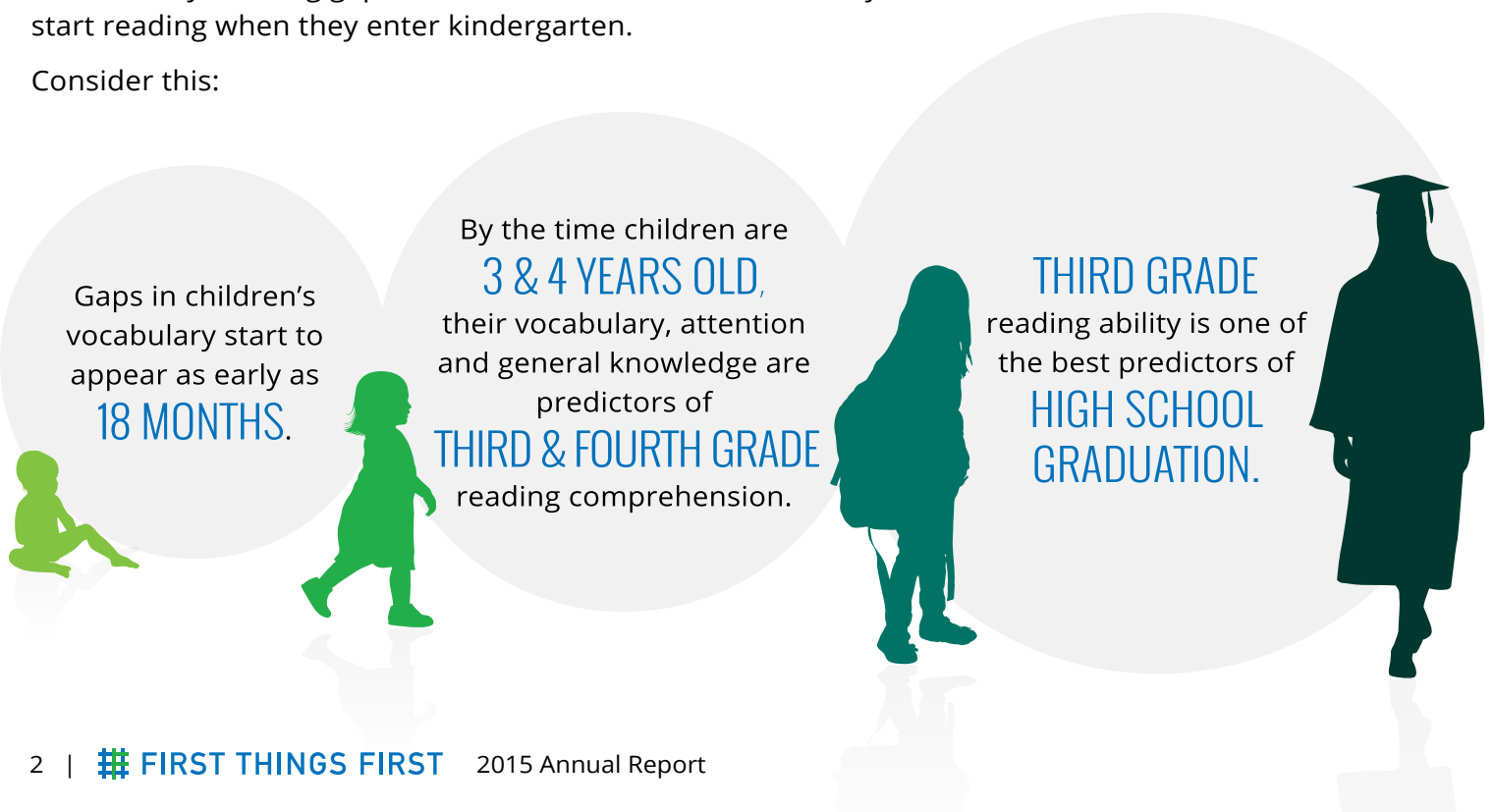
so early experiences lay the foundation for success in school and in life. Arizonans created First Things First (FTF) to give more children the tools they need to arrive at school prepared to meet our state's high expectations.

FTF provides resources and professional expertise, then combines it with local decision-making to build on the work of community organizations impacting children and families. Much like a block grant system, funds are allotted to communities based on their population of young children, and local volunteers – parents, educators, business professionals, faith leaders and philanthropists – decide how the funds will be used to best improve school readiness for children in their area.

THE JOB OF GETTING KIDS READY FOR SCHOOL STARTS THE DAY THEY ARE BORN

Early literacy and its impact on school success is one of the best examples of the return on investment in early childhood. High quality early learning experiences, rich in language and literacy, reduce early learning gaps and ensure that children are ready to start reading when they enter kindergarten.

Consider this:



INVESTING EARLY YIELDS BIG RETURNS

EARLY CHILDHOOD IS ONE OF THE SMARTEST INVESTMENTS A STATE CAN MAKE TO IMPROVE EDUCATION OUTCOMES

As an early childhood system partner, First Things First invests in proven programs and innovative strategies that: strengthen families in their role as their child's first teacher; improve the quality of early learning environments like preschool and child care, and expand access to those programs; and, promote prevention and early identification of health problems that could impact learning later on.

Research by Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman showed that every \$1 invested in early childhood can yield returns between \$4 and \$16.

By getting more Arizona kids ready for school, FTF helps put children on a path to academic success that benefits them, our communities and our state.

\$1 
**INVESTED IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD YIELDS UP TO A
\$16 RETURN**

INCREASED



High School Graduation



College Matriculation



Economic Development and Personal Income

DECREASED



Special Education/Remediation



Dependence on Social Welfare



Crime-Related Costs and Incarceration Rates

INVESTING IN SCHOOL READINESS FOR ARIZONA'S CHILDREN

First Things First is the only public funding source dedicated exclusively to the beginning of the education continuum. Emphasis is placed on getting resources directly to children and families through a network of community providers. Administrative expenditures are kept low – only about 8% in FY15. In addition to creating or expanding programs that prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond, FTF investments are a crucial part of the education infrastructure in Arizona, helping to bring millions of dollars in federal funds to Arizona to expand early learning options and leveraging relationships to help other educational initiatives succeed (see page 9 for additional details).

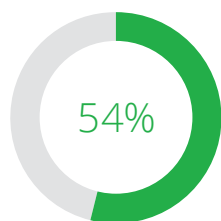
FY2015 PROGRAM EXPENDITURES

QUALITY PRESCHOOL AND CHILD CARE

\$80,248,366

Children exposed to high quality early learning do better in school and are more likely to graduate.

FTF funds research-based quality improvements that help children thrive, including learning environments rich in language and literacy, coaching for early learning professionals to better engage young learners, and developmentally appropriate learning materials. Scholarships also are funded to help more babies, toddlers and preschoolers access quality early learning.

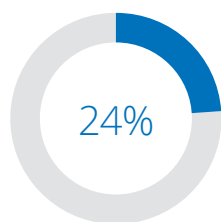


STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND EARLY LITERACY

\$34,806,635

Families are a child's first and best teachers.

FTF programs give parents choices when it comes to supporting their child's health and learning. Services are voluntary and provided at levels that meet the family's needs, from community-based parenting education to in-home coaching to address tough situations like parenting a child with special needs or dealing with multiple births.

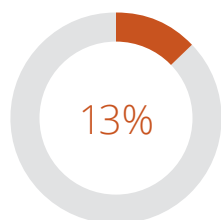


PREVENTIVE HEALTH

\$19,569,928

Undetected or untreated health issues can impact learning later on.

Left unaddressed, developmental delays and chronic medical conditions can become serious learning problems that require more costly remediation. FTF funds preventive screenings, parent education and referrals to existing services to ensure that kids arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed.



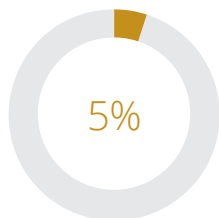
INVESTING IN SCHOOL READINESS FOR ARIZONA'S CHILDREN

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

\$6,886,650

A child's relationships with early caregivers impact whether her brain will develop in ways that promote learning.

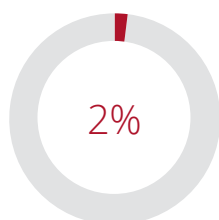
Children 5 and younger learn differently than school-age students. The quality of early learning depends on the education and skills of the teacher. FTF funds scholarships and training to expand the skills of professionals working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers.



PARENT AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS

\$3,125,890

We all have a shared responsibility to help children arrive at school prepared to succeed. FTF works with families, caregivers and community leaders to build awareness of the importance of early childhood and steps they can take to support the education and health of young children in their neighborhoods.

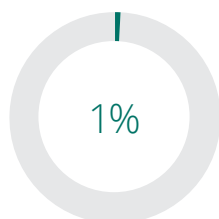


RESEARCH AND ACCOUNTABILITY

\$2,018,747

Measuring effectiveness and promoting continuous quality improvement rely on robust, accurate data.

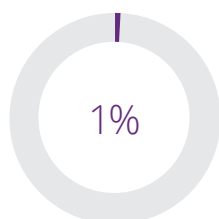
Data collected by FTF are used to inform decision-making, monitor grantee performance, enhance program effectiveness and measure improved outcomes resulting from the collective investments of Arizona's early childhood system.



SYSTEM COORDINATION

\$1,363,677

Collaboration among system partners maximizes resources and effectiveness. FTF works with early childhood system partners – like the child welfare system and juvenile courts – to maximize funding, reduce duplication, and ultimately improve outcomes for young children.



TOTAL: \$148,019,893

FY15 IMPACT ARIZONA'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND EARLY LITERACY



140,763

Families accessed early childhood information, education or referrals through family resource centers.

75,040

Families of newborns left the hospital with tools to help them support their child's health and learning.

8,678

Families received voluntary in-home visits from trained providers to enhance their parenting skills and deal with specific challenges, including first-time parenting, parenting a child with special needs, or dealing with multiple births.

6,925

Parents and other caregivers completed a voluntary series of community-based classes on topics like parenting skills, brain development, early literacy and nutrition.



QUALITY PRESCHOOL AND CHILD CARE



50,651

Children had access to a higher standard of early learning through preschool and child care programs participating in Quality First.

16,601

Infants, toddlers and preschoolers received scholarships to access high quality early learning through preschool or child care.

415

Early childhood teachers received scholarships to expand their skills working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers.



PREVENTIVE HEALTH



45,031

Fluoride varnishes applied to protect against dental decay.

31,090

Screenings completed to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues in young kids and prevent learning challenges later on.

17,145

Children benefited from trainings for child care providers to help them meet the social-emotional needs of kids in their care.

KIDS' EARLY SUCCESS CONTINUES IN K-12



EARLY LITERACY EXPERIENCES LEAD TO THIRD GRADE READING SUCCESS

Marlencia Benally started taking her son, Raivis, to story time at the San Carlos Library when he was around one and a half years old.

A librarian told Benally about the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, a program funded in part by First Things First that mails a free book each month to children until they turn 5. As the first books began to arrive, Benally and her husband began reading to Raivis every night. Benally was hopeful reading the books would help her son's speech, since he had developed a slight stutter.

The books started with simple stories, then got more complex as Raivis grew. Soon, he was asking for books to be read throughout the day and in the evening. Benally took cues from what she was hearing during story time at the library and began asking Raivis questions about the books they were reading, which expanded his vocabulary, imagination and critical thinking.

When Raivis was around 3 years old, the family was in the car, approaching a stop sign. "Mom, look, S-T-O-P, you have to stop," Raivis said. Benally was surprised. "I didn't know he was already learning to read," she said.

Benally noticed that Raivis had a larger vocabulary than many of his peers. She also thinks reading helped his confidence. When he started kindergarten, he loved to model proper reading behavior to his classmates and his teacher as well. Raivis, who is now 7, continues to be a voracious reader and is doing well in school, to his mother's delight. "I didn't think that this is where reading would be able to take him."



SUPPORT FOR GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

Cathy Grant's grandson had a rough start in life. When he and his younger sister came to live with Grant, Jacob was almost 4. Yet he had speech delays and was extremely hyperactive. Grant, who had not cared for young children in 30 years, was at a loss.

Her pediatrician recommended Healthy Steps for Young Children, funded by First Things First. Healthy Steps customizes services to meet individual family needs and goals, including: enhanced well-child care, home visits, informational material, parent groups and links to community resources.

"They helped by giving me age appropriate materials for Jacob, so I would know what to expect and help him reach his goals to catch up with his age group," Grant said.

She also learned what to do to deal with frequent temper tantrums, including how to stay in control and model good behavior. And, a developmental screening for Jacob helped get him early intervention to special education services.

Grant said she doesn't know where Jacob - now 7 and entering 2nd grade - would be without Healthy Steps. "He's so close to being caught up to his age group," she said. "Healthy Steps was instrumental in Jacob's coming along as well as he did; the program got him interested in books and colors and prepared him for school."

KIDS' EARLY SUCCESS CONTINUES IN K-12



QUALITY PRESCHOOL PUTS FIRST GRADER AT TOP OF CLASS

Maria Jesus Cervantes' initial experience with a child care center left her toddler crying every time she dropped her off. Through Quality First – First Things First's early learning quality improvement and rating system – Cervantes researched other potential child care settings for her child and found Phoenix Day, which has achieved a Quality Plus rating.

Cervantes' fears were quickly alleviated. Natalia quickly learned all of her colors and shapes and had a smile on her face when she was dropped off and when she was picked up at the end of the day. "There was instruction going on every day; there was a plan and I had meetings with her teachers," Cervantes said. "I was amazed that they were teaching her science and math."

Natalia also gained confidence every day as she shared new information with her mother of things she had learned. As Natalia moved on to kindergarten, she excelled in her class. The first grader is reading Junie B. Jones books. At her age she is expected to read around 20 words per minute, Natalia is reading 80, Cervantes said.

"She looked forward to go to school every day, she was ready for kindergarten," Cervantes said. "Early education makes a huge difference in preparing kids for school," Cervantes said. "Natalia is testament to that."



FAMILIES BUILD CONFIDENCE IN ROLE AS THEIR CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER

Angie Hitt had been an elementary school teacher for eight years before she had her first child. She enrolled in the Parents as Teachers home visiting program when her daughter, Delaney, was 6 months old, and was surprised when she started learning more about the tremendous amount of brain development that happens before age 5.

"I probably underestimated the importance of focusing on 0 to 5 years old," Hitt said. "I think I viewed that time in their lives as less structured. Having kids and learning more, it really is important to have more structure. Not in a way that limits creativity, but it's important to know those brain connections are built through those experiences."

Hitt said the program is especially helpful for parents who don't have a background in education. "Very young children learn differently than school-aged children," Hitt said. "Sometimes people try to push certain learning styles on young children, because that's what they remember from elementary school."

Delaney is going to be a second grader this year and is reading at a third grade reading level, Hitt said. Aside from academics, Hitt said the program helped Delaney prepare socially for kindergarten.

"An advantage to her being in the program was that when she came to school, she was socially and emotionally ready to learn," Hitt said. "Delaney wasn't intimidated by being at school. Those are things that are really important, too."



ARIZONA'S EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE

In addition to creating or expanding programs that prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond, First Things First investments are a crucial part of the education infrastructure in Arizona, helping to bring millions of dollars in federal funds to Arizona to expand early learning options and leveraging relationships to help other educational initiatives succeed.

Examples include:

ENSURING LOW-INCOME CHILDREN ARE SAFE AND LEARNING WHILE PARENTS WORK

Due to state budget cuts, Arizona's ability to draw down about \$37 million per year in federal child care funds was jeopardized. For the past five years, First Things First has partnered with the Department of Economic Security (DES) - through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) - to count \$34 million per year in FTF expenditures related to improving the quality of and access to preschool and child care as the state's match for the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). CCDF funds help ensure low-income working families have access to safe, reliable child care. Since this MOU has been in place, DES has been able to draw down \$190 million in federal child care funds. This partnership has ensured tens of thousands of children have access to early learning opportunities because many children access preschool and kindergarten through their child care providers. In addition, this collaboration has enhanced child safety because children are not left to be cared for in unsafe environments and foster families do not face added financial burdens for young children in their care. Data from DES indicate that approximately one in three children participating in the child care subsidy system is in the child welfare system.



EXPANDED HIGH QUALITY PRESCHOOL IN HIGH-NEED COMMUNITIES

This year, Arizona was one of five states that received a federal Preschool Development Grant totaling \$80 million over the next four years. The goals of the grant are to: expand high quality preschool in underserved areas; implement state-level infrastructure and quality improvements; ensure strong partnerships between school districts and other early learning providers; align preschool programs with a birth-through-third-grade continuum of services; and, create sustainable programs by coordinating existing early learning funds. Through a partnership with the Arizona Department of Education, First Things First will include the new preschool development sites in its Quality First program, giving those programs access to resources that will: ensure their settings are rich in language and literacy opportunities; expand teachers' skills working with young learners; enhance the program's ability to meet the social-emotional needs of students; promote the inclusion of children with special needs; and, provide developmentally appropriate learning materials. Through this partnership, quality preschool options will be enhanced in 15 communities for thousands of young children.



ENHANCING EARLY LITERACY OPPORTUNITIES STATEWIDE

As a founding partner in Read On Arizona, First Things First has helped expand early literacy opportunities statewide. First Things First is part of all 24 Read On Arizona Communities statewide; in many cases, volunteers or staff from First Things First lead the collaborations in their area. Through Read On Arizona, stakeholders working with children from birth to age 8 come together to build awareness of the importance of early literacy, expand literacy opportunities and interventions available in their area; and, ensure that families have access to information and resources to support early literacy and language development with their children. As a leader in Read On Arizona collaborations statewide, FTF contributed to the following outcomes in the past year:



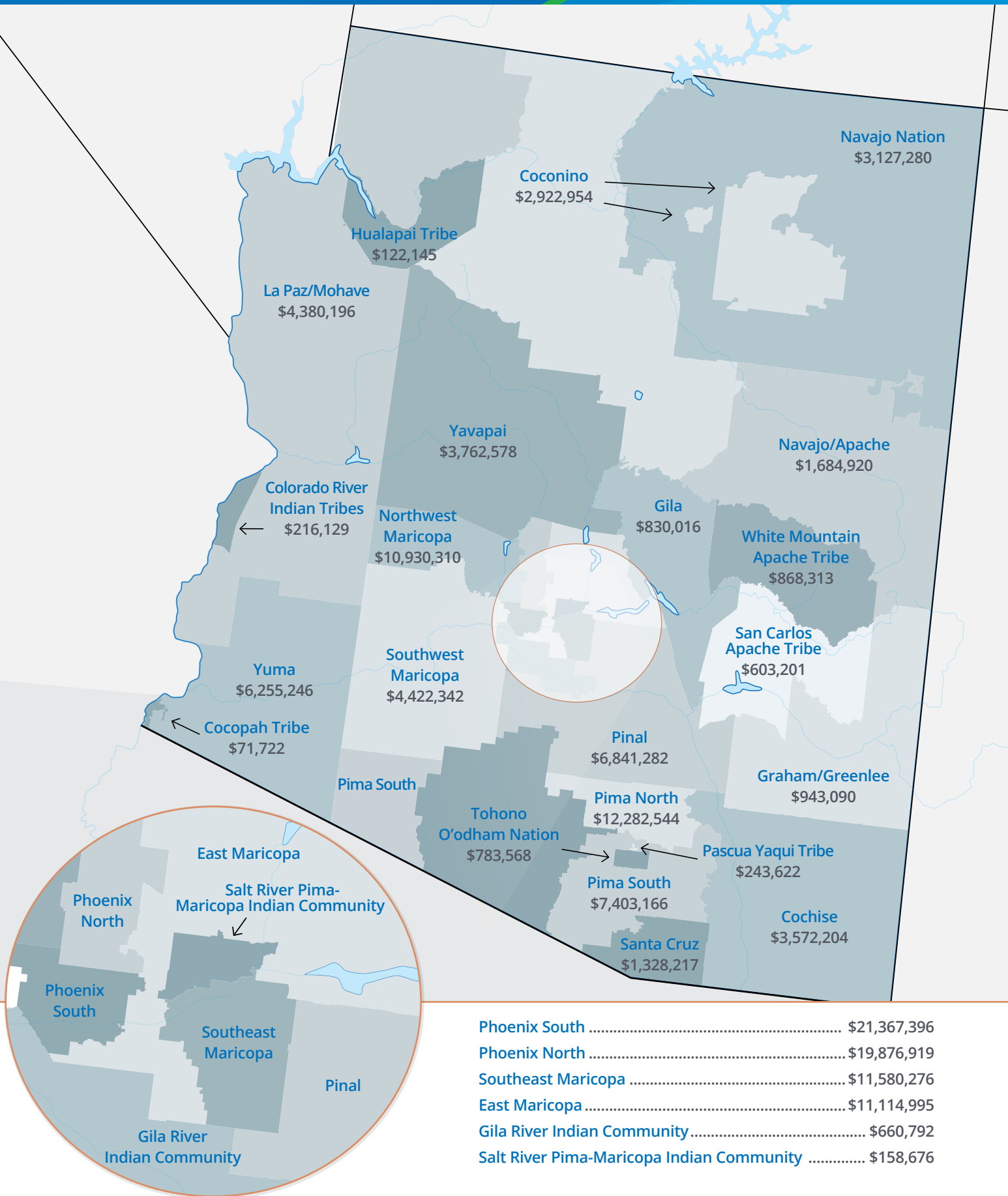
- **253,314+** low-income children reached by Read On Arizona communities;
- **150,000** copies of the *Early Literacy Guide for Families*; printed and distributed to families;
- **581,300** hours read over the summer of 2014; and,
- **4,820** copies of *Developing a Thriving Reader From the Early Years: A Continuum of Effective Literacy Practices* distributed to early educators to ensure a comprehensive approach to teaching early literacy skills from birth to 8 years old.

LEVERAGING NATIONAL FOUNDATION SUPPORT TO EXPAND PARENT EDUCATION EFFORTS



The W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan is investing \$300,000 to help enhance and expand the parenting education resources available to all Arizona families through First Things First. Through this year-long project, First Things First will work to more fully integrate existing early childhood parenting programs and to research and develop innovative approaches for providing more parenting information to families. This includes taking advantage of new parents' changing communications preferences by offering an array of web-based parenting resources through a variety of digital platforms. Once completed, this project will give Arizona parents of young kids ready access to credible early childhood information that is engaging, user-friendly and adaptable to their needs.

FY15 INVESTMENTS ACROSS ARIZONA



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MATTERS TO...

LOCAL COMMUNITY LEADERS



“Early childhood development is a critical component of the long-term academic and social success of children, adolescents and young adults. By ensuring that quality community resources are available to children and their families, we prepare them with the tools necessary to succeed.”

Mayor Georgia Lord
City of Goodyear



“As both a mayor and a father, I believe it is extremely important to ensure our youngest in the community have every opportunity to succeed in life. Actively participating in early childhood development and education from day one is key to building strong families, and strong families are a vital component to building strong communities.”

Mayor Douglas Nicholls
City of Yuma



“The difference in the reading ability of third graders is dramatic. You can tell which children have received early support, encouragement and exposure to reading.”

Mayor Jerry Nabours
City of Flagstaff



“The early years lay a very important foundation for a child’s development. The more support that the family can provide for the children, the better it is for everybody. The family is a very important unit in society, and we need to make sure we do all we can to strengthen it, especially in the early years.”

Hon. Richard Weiss
Superior Court Judge, Mohave County

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MATTERS TO...

K-12 EDUCATORS



"We know from research that most brain development takes place from birth to age 5, making early education critically important to set the stage for future success. The social and personal experiences that children receive from early childhood specialists in a preschool program provide a solid foundation for later academic excellence."

Dr. Denton Santarelli
Superintendent, Peoria Unified School District



"Kindergarten has become much more rigorous, and not just the academic stuff. Kids have to get used to being away from their family for long days, sitting and listening to a story, taking turns in line - the social and emotional things. When students have had those experiences before coming to my class, you can see that. I think that quality preschool is more important than it ever has been."

Michelle Novelli
Kindergarten Teacher, W.F. Killip Elementary School,
Flagstaff Unified School District

FAITH COMMUNITIES



"Explore, learn. Play, learn. Laugh, learn. Cry, learn. Get dirty, learn. Clean up, learn. With your child, the smallest interaction creates a memory you will cherish, the learning experience that develops your child."

Reverend Pete Imus
Pastor, Consuming Fire Christian Church, Peach Springs

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MATTERS TO...

LAW ENFORCEMENT



"I believe it is extremely important for the community to support early childhood education because the statistics are clear. Children form impressions of who they are before the age of 6. What they learn in those early formative years goes a long way toward helping them establish their own identities. Early education and secondary education is vital to helping young people make positive choices for their lives."

Frank L. Milstead
Director, Arizona Department of Public Safety



"Those persons who had a solid upbringing, with sound moral principles instilled in them at a young age, are proven to be less likely to be involved in negative activities making them the focus of our attention. For this reason, programs like First Things First have a huge impact on the positive direction of our society and the future of America as a whole."

Sheriff Mark J. Dannels
Cochise County



"The Phoenix Police Department understands the correlation between strong families and a strong community. Actively participating in early childhood development and education are key components in building strong families. Because the foundation of this collaborative relationship must begin early, we encourage everyone to read, speak, and engage with their children from day one."

Commander Matthew Giordano
Phoenix Police Department



"Many people who are now incarcerated in our jails and prisons lack the basic education skills to acquire and retain a job. It is clear that early childhood education is an issue that extends into adulthood and to our criminal justice system. We must be willing to create programs that will provide every child the opportunity to receive quality education at an early age. If we refuse to fund education, we will most certainly be funding more jails and prisons."

Sheriff Bill Pribil
Coconino County

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MATTERS TO...

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS



"We have all our brain cells when we're born, but we don't have all the connections. It's through a child's intense experiences with their caregivers and with their environment that those brain connections are actually made. And it's easier to encourage positive development in a child's first five years, when the brain is most flexible, than to change circuitry later, as an adult."

Dr. Kathleen Vedock
Pediatrician, Palominas-Hereford Rural Health Clinic



"90% of a child's brain develops before kindergarten. As a pediatrician, I know that positive, nurturing experiences in a child's first five years lay the foundation for a lifetime."

Dr. Lyndy Jones
All About Kids Pediatrics, Tempe

BUSINESS



"A child's capacity to learn to read develops when caregivers read, talk, sing and play with them. The earlier that language and literacy skills are attained the better, which leads to better academic outcomes for students, a more qualified workforce and a stronger Arizona."

Renee Levin
Community Engagement Manager, Intel Corporation



"Critical thinking skills begin in early childhood. Teaching children to listen and engage and seek answers for themselves sets the foundation for their ability to learn and grow into healthy, productive adults."

Catherine Arvizu
Vice President, National Bank of Arizona



First Things First partners with parents and communities to strengthen families and give all Arizona children the opportunity to arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed.

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