



FIRST THINGS FIRST

4000 North Central Avenue, Suite 800
Phoenix, Arizona 85012
Phone: 602-771-5100
Fax: 602-274-7040
www.aztf.gov

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May 24, 2010

The Honorable Jan Brewer
Governor of Arizona
1700 West Washington
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Dear Governor Brewer:

On behalf of First Things First—Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board, I want to express our support for and commitment to Arizona's Race to the Top application.

Research throughout the past decade has reinforced that learning begins at birth and that 90% of a child's brain is developed by age five. Through rich language experiences, access to health care and strong relationships with parents and caregivers, young children have a far better chance to meet the heightened demands of a rigorous academic program that now begins in kindergarten.

In 2006, the voters of Arizona approved a new tax on tobacco products to begin First Things First (FTF). Our mission is to ensure that all Arizona children start kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed. To that end, FTF funding supports:

1. Access to affordable, high quality child care.
2. Professional development for those in the early care and education field.
3. Family support services with an emphasis on literacy.
4. Preventative health services.
5. Coordination among and between early care and education funding, programs and services.
6. Parent education and awareness.

FTF's statewide program combined with funding in local regional partnership councils ensure that there is the necessary balance between statewide accountability while maintaining a commitment of local flexibility.

Current FTF funding addresses three of the four Race to the Top assurance areas:

Standards and Assessments: The Arizona Early Learning Standards were developed by the Department of Education to provide a framework for quality curriculum for all children 3 to 5 years of age. The standards are aligned with the K-12 learning standards and the Head Start Child Outcomes and cover a broad range of skill development that provides effective school readiness for children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse abilities. First Things First integrates the dissemination and utilization of these standards throughout early care and education settings including standards for pre-K expansion and in Quality First!, Arizona's quality improvement and rating system. Quality First! includes evidence of use of the early learning standards as an indicator of high quality and Quality First! coaches assure that early care and education participants are introduced to these standards and are



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assisted to reflect the standards in all early education curricula. In September, First Things First will complete work on companion program guidelines for infants and toddlers.

- **Data Systems to Support Instruction:** The longitudinal impact study of the early childhood system to support school readiness is being undertaken by a University Consortia (University of Arizona, Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University) with monitoring by the First Things First's Evaluation Division. The first of two studies has begun data collection on over 8000 children (3500 infants and toddlers, 2800 preschoolers, 2200 kindergartners). Each participant will be assessed every other year on constructs including height and weight, language/math skills, child development, family and home environment, parenting, child care, child health, use of services, and household income. Measurements include the Battelle Developmental Inventory, Parent-Child Interaction Scale, Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening, Preschool Language Scale, Research-based Mathematics Assessment, measures of height and weight and a parent interviews on health status. Measures will occur at nine months, preschool age and at Kindergarten.
- **Great Teachers and Leaders:** T.E.A.C.H is a comprehensive scholarship program designed to increase the educational levels and skills of the early care and education workforce and was funded and approved to begin implementation in March 2008. T.E.A.C.H.® Arizona provides access to college coursework leading to a national Child Development Associates (CDA) Certificate, certificate of completion or an Associate degree in early childhood education. T.E.A.C.H. also supports an equitably paid and stable early childhood workforce by providing a financial incentive in the form of a bonus or raise upon completion of college coursework. As of March 31, 2010, 450 early care and education teachers and caregivers have been awarded T.E.A.C.H. scholarships. Nearly 70% are enrolled in spring semester classes; they have taken 1583 credits at 15 of Arizona's 19 community colleges that offer coursework, degrees or certificates in early care and education.

Though FTF is only a couple of years into implementation we have developed rich partnerships with the K-12 community—both through the Arizona Department of Education and in local school districts where we are collaborating on a wide variety of initiatives. Working with stakeholders across the state we can ensure that all children have the solid foundation they need to be successful in school and life.

Sincerely,

Rhian Evans Allvin
Executive Director