

# THE SENTINEL

## Guest Commentary: Proposition 10 and First 5 Kings County

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Fifteen years ago this month, voters approved Proposition 10, The California Children and Families Act, affirming their support for a guaranteed revenue stream dedicated to the benefit of young children.

Prop 10, championed by actor/director Rob Reiner, creates a “children and families commission” in every California county to manage the investment of tobacco tax revenues “for the purposes of promoting, supporting and improving the early development of children from the prenatal state to five years of age.”

Kings County joined other California counties and embarked on a journey through uncharted Proposition 10 waters. With the creation of a county commission designed to respond to the needs of our young children, Kings County champions and stakeholders designed a plan benefiting local families.

Ultimately, Kings County has experienced advancements in the areas of early education, child health and family support. These improvements have had great impact and produced positive, measurable change in the lives of Kings County residents.

Utilizing best practice research and tailoring practices to meet local needs, First 5 Kings County has greatly increased the communication practices with our target communities and practitioners, ensuring we continue to be responsive to their ever-changing needs. For example, our school readiness program connects with families each year by providing transition activities and



experiences to families and school personnel, as well as providing thousands of children in our community a backpack with school readiness materials, ensuring that they will be ready to learn on the first day of school.

Another example is through our special needs initiative, where we serve our most vulnerable constituents by intervening early and often with the appropriate responses and resources. Finally, with the development and implementation of our Family Resource Center Initiative, thousands of families have experienced one-stop shopping for services and activities for our young children.

Each of these endeavors have strengthened the connection we have with our target population and established First 5 Kings County as local subject matter experts for progress and services for families with children zero to five.

First 5 Kings County has invested millions of dollars in the infants, toddlers and preschoolers of Kings County over the last 15 years. In addition, as the voters mandated, all expenditures are for supplemental programs for children and families, accessing monies that would not have otherwise been available and funding programs and services unavailable from any other source. This unprecedented investment in California's youngest children — and in its future — has made First 5 one of the most significant and effective funders of early childhood development programs in the state.

Since 1998, First 5 Kings County has been honored to partner with Kings County, public and private schools, nonprofit service providers, faith-based and philanthropic leaders and local businesses to serve and support the young children of Kings County. As tobacco tax revenues decline, we will be increasingly working on outreach and advocacy, building community partnerships and supporting the capacity of other community organizations to serve the children and families of Kings County.

With one in four California children living in poverty, there is still much work to do. We look forward to working with the community over the next 15 years to ensure that every child has the opportunity for good health, an exemplary education and the full support of its family and community.

*Tim Bowers is the Kings County superintendent of schools and chair of the First 5 Kings County Commission.*