

## Marin Voice:

# First 5 Marin's 15 years of investing in kids

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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. Proposition 10, championed by actor/director Rob Reiner, created 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 stage to five years of age."

The statewide program is now known as "**First 5**," in reference to the tremendous importance of the first five years of a child's life, when 90 percent of brain development occurs. The value of investment in these early childhood years has been well-documented — for individuals as well as for society — in the form of better health outcomes, higher economic productivity, and reduced spending on foster care, special education, and crime.

Professor James Heckman won the Nobel Prize with his research showing a return on investment of \$7 for every \$1 spent on young children. All across California First 5 commissions are working to make these life-changing investments in support of the optimal development of all children.

Proposition 10 established three priorities: children's health, school readiness and family support. But the law also prioritized local control, authorizing each county commission to determine the particular needs of the young children in their own community as well as the best way to help meet those needs.

In our county, **First 5 Marin** has directed our portion of the Proposition 10 tax revenues for a wide variety of programs over the years, including:

- **Health insurance** — paying premiums for those children who don't qualify for other publicly-funded programs.

- **Health care outreach and enrollment** — helping families apply for health care and utilize their benefits.
- **Developmental Screening** — funding a highly successful program to screen young children for disabilities and developmental delays as well as intervention and support services for children with special needs.
- **Dental care** — providing oral health screenings, fluoride treatments and teeth cleaning for kids in preschool and child care.
- **Summer Bridge/Kinder Academy** — funding free, five-week kindergarten preparation classes for children without preschool experience, serving about 200 children each year.
- **School Readiness Programs** — offering year-round programs to help children and their families become ready for school and prepared for success in kindergarten and beyond.

First 5 Marin has also supported numerous programs and projects in local communities, including: the Garden of Eatin' at the North Bay Children's Center in Novato, Picklewood Preschool in the Canal neighborhood of San Rafael, family activities in Marin City and West Marin, and countless pieces of playground equipment, art supplies and books at dozens of preschools and child care centers across the county.

We have also supported training for pediatricians, promotoras, community outreach workers, health advocates, child care and preschool staff and technical assistance for their offices, agencies or employers.

First 5 Marin has invested millions of dollars in the infants, toddlers and preschoolers of Marin. And as the voters mandated, all expenditures are for supplemental programs for children and families, accessing money that would not have otherwise been available and funding programs and services unavailable from any other source.

This unprecedented investment in our 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.

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 family and community.

*Amy L. Reisch is the executive director First 5 Marin Children and Families Commission. For more information, visit [www.first5marin.org](http://www.first5marin.org) and join First 5 Marin on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/first5marin](http://www.facebook.com/first5marin).*