



# COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

## SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

### Category: School Readiness

Santa Cruz County in California, home to more than 21,000 children under the age of 5, recognizes the importance of quality early education to foster reading skills and educational success. The county has been dedicated to school readiness efforts through a number of different initiatives to combat the maltreatment of young children, increase health insurance coverage and utilization and encourage positive parenting styles. These efforts have helped to more than double the number of Santa Cruz children on track to be grade-level readers by the end of third grade.

The county has launched Families Together, a differential response program; the Positive Parenting Program, a population-based approach to parent education; and a community-wide Child Welfare System Improvement Plan resulting in the decrease of the rate of substantiated allegations of child maltreatment in the county from a high of 15.8 (per 1,000) in 2004 to 7.6 (per 1,000) in 2010. Santa Cruz has also improved child and community health by promoting insurance coverage and a healthy primary care relationship between parents and their children's doctors, starting at birth. Almost every new parent in the county now leaves the hospital knowing that his or her infant has health coverage and how to reach their doctor's office.

Data have also indicated a significant downward trend in the number of infant emergency department visits per quarter at local hospitals since the launch of the county's child health initiatives in 2009. This decrease is especially significant at Watsonville Community Hospital, where emergency department visits per quarter for infants have dropped from more than 600 to fewer than 350 since the launch.

Another county initiative, SEEDS of Early Literacy, is a relationship-based literacy program that has transformed Santa Cruz's early education system. From 2010 to 2011, almost 100 percent of early educators serving low-income children demonstrated high levels of support for language and literacy development, and the percentage of SEEDS preschool classrooms assessed as providing high-quality literacy support for children increased from 16 percent to 92 percent.

Children in SEEDS classrooms increase their vocabulary and phonological awareness, both of which are considered to be predictors of future literacy. Between the first and last assessments of the year, the percentage of SEEDS children scoring at or above the target level of literacy increased dramatically, demonstrating that more than double the number of children are school-ready.

#### STRATEGIES

- Decreased rate of allegations of child maltreatment by more than 50 percent
- Decreased number of infant emergency visits per quarter from 600 to 350 at Watsonville Community Hospital
- Implemented SEEDS of Early Literacy program to train educators serving low-income children
- More than doubled the number of SEEDS children scoring at or above the target level of literacy