

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Colorado River Indian Tribes Region

IMPACT REPORT 2021



FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Colorado-River-Indian-Tribes

90%

of a child's brain growth happens before kindergarten.

Early childhood matters.

First Things First partners with families and communities to help our state's youngest children prepare for kindergarten and beyond.

Many young children in Arizona face challenges that threaten their healthy development and learning. In the FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Region, there are **739 children** (under age 6) with **50% living in poverty**.

Here is how FTF is working to support young children and their families in this region.

“Early language learning is so important to your child's development. Talk to them, sing to them, ask questions and don't be afraid to use 'big words,' beginning from the time they are born. Hearing your language and learning to understand it is critical to their brain development – even as a new born. Babies perceive their world not only through their eyes, but also with their ears. All of this is critical to a child's later success in school and life.”

Norma Ray

Vice Chair of FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council

FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Region Strategic Priorities



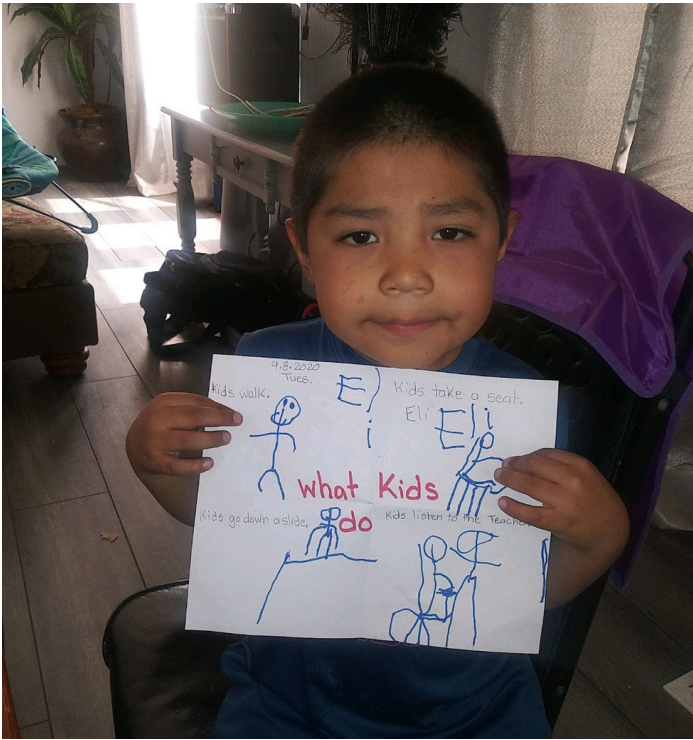
Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Colorado River Indian Tribes region give parents choices for how they want to support their child's health and learning. Parents can attend educational **family activities** to help support their child's healthy development and improve their parenting skills. The region also **distributes books** to families with children from birth to age 5 to encourage parent-child interaction and reading. In an effort to connect families to resources and services, the region funds **service coordination** to help children get the support they need to thrive.



Quality Preschool and Child Care

Children who attend high-quality early learning programs go on to do better in school and are more likely to graduate. The Colorado River Indian Tribes region provides funding for child care providers and preschool programs to participate in FTF's **Quality First**. Providers benefit from training, coaching and a wide range of evidence-based supports to improve the quality of their early learning programs in ways that help children learn, grow and thrive. The region also funds a **transition to kindergarten** program so children starting school can learn how a classroom works and how to prepare for kindergarten.



Parker library provides early literacy support during COVID-19 to young boy online and at home

Every week, Martha Alvarado cared for her grandson, Eli, and her other three grandchildren when her daughter went to work.

One of her favorite activities to do was to take Eli, age 5, to the Colorado River Indian Tribes Library in Parker for storytime to help him develop language and social skills.

“When I first took him, he would fight with the other kids and have problems sitting and paying attention,” said Alvarado. “Eventually he learned to socialize, sit and listen.”

Eli also learned to share with other children and follow directions by doing art projects after storytime. When it was time to go home, he got to check-out a book.

“I would use the books to teach him to express himself,” she said. “The books they give out are colorful and capture his attention. He’s learned new words.”

The library’s Early Literacy Coordinator, Laura Puentes-Lopez, created these weekly events to support local families with young children. The First Things First Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council funds her position to help increase early literacy in the area and prepare children for kindergarten.

When the library closed for the COVID-19 pandemic, Puentes-Lopez continued to find ways to engage families. She moved storytimes online to Zoom and placed links on the library’s Facebook page.

Puentes-Lopez also surveyed parents to find out how she could best support them. She found that many of them didn’t have good internet connections, so she created activity packets to mail or drop off to parents who signed up. She sent out hundreds of packets during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alvarado became one of the participants and received packets with books, finger puppets and activities for children in the home.

“When I first took him, he would fight with the other kids and have problems sitting and paying attention. Eventually he learned to socialize, sit and listen.”

—Martha Alvarado, grandparent

“They had one activity that hid objects in the house,” Alvarado said. “And then encouraged parents to describe where the objects were located, like the block is under the couch or on top of the chair. They encouraged us to describe colors, like the red backpack. My grandkids loved it.”

Puentes-Lopez also organized drive-through events, where families could pick up an activity packet and meet Colorado River Indian Tribes tribal leaders or fictional characters, like Dr. Seuss characters, such as the Cat in the Hat.

“In our community we don’t have a lot of resources, so for her to organize these events, it’s awesome,” said Alvarado. “For the Dr. Seuss parade, we didn’t have to get out of the car. Eli and my other grandkids got hats, stories and bookmarks. They were so happy. It was really good. People need to go out, but they don’t know what to do, so this was really needed.”

With the children being homebound from the COVID-19 pandemic, Alvarado really appreciated the packets with projects to keep her grandchildren occupied and learning. She saw that it really helped Eli to develop his ability to focus.

“Children learn by being hands on,” said Alvarado. “Children who can’t sit still or have minds that wander, they don’t learn. Eli started to learn to direct his attention. Now he’s learning.”

Alvarado believes that with the support of the library, Eli is getting socially and cognitively ready to succeed in kindergarten.

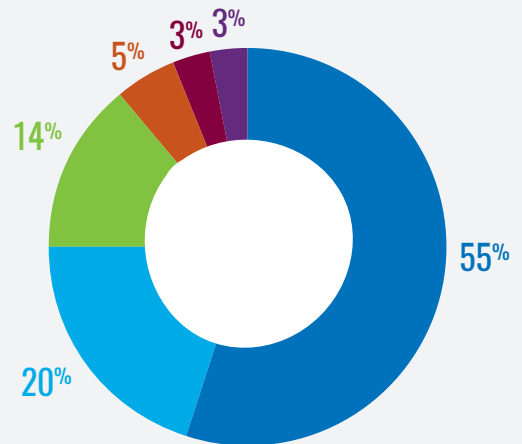
FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council is made up of volunteers who study the unique needs of the local community and decide how funds should be used to best support the healthy development and early learning of young children birth to age 5. FTF invests

in proven programs and innovative strategies through grants to community organizations that provide services to children and families. Some of the programs in this region include parent outreach and awareness, expansion of child care and service coordination.

FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool	\$173,222
Strengthening Families	\$65,696
Preventive Health	\$44,778
Coordinating Care	\$12,366
Parent and Community Awareness	\$10,000
Research and Evaluation	\$9,546
Total	\$315,608



FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair
Elvira Aspa

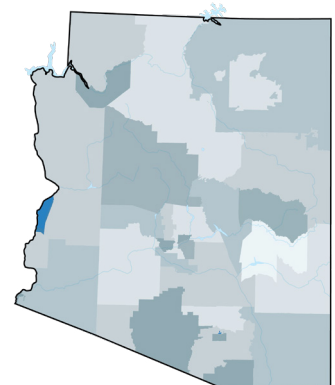
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The **FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Region** is defined as the Arizona part of the Colorado River Reservation, including the town of Parker. The region lies entirely in La Paz County. The FTF Colorado River Indian Tribes Region includes Legislative District 4. Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.

Learn more at
[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Colorado-River-Indian-Tribes](https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/Regions/Colorado-River-Indian-Tribes)