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Local Child Care Provider Races to the Top!

Nancy Garcia, Director of The Learning Center in North Stockton, reached Tier 5 in *Raising Quality!*, the county's quality rating and improvement system for early learning and development programs.

This rating system, which launched in 2013, is designed to help parents find high-quality child care and early learning opportunities for young children – and to help ensure all children develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life. The rating system includes five tiers, with Tier 5 signaling the highest level of quality.

The development and implementation of the *Raising Quality!* rating system have been funded through Race to the Top (RTT), a federal grant designed to support states' efforts to improve early learning programs. The San Joaquin County region will receive \$2.4 million over the course of the four-year grant, with local Race to the Top efforts being coordinated by First 5 San Joaquin.

"The launch of *Raising Quality!* represents a pivotal step in ensuring positive outcomes for our youngest learners," said Lani Schiff-Ross, Executive Director of First 5 San Joaquin. "This new rating system will help providers develop and help parents identify high-quality child care for their infants, toddlers and preschoolers."

The new preschool and child care rating system is voluntary. Unlike current child-care licensing inspections, which only evaluate whether basic health and safety guidelines are met, *Raising Quality!* looks more closely at the learning and development opportunities a program provides: what level of education a teacher or caregiver has, for example, and whether a curriculum is in place to support school readiness.

"I have been very fortunate to be a part of RTT," said Garcia. "Being in this program has definitely helped raise the overall quality of my program. RTT has given me that nudge to improve in all areas of my environment to better meet the needs of the children. In the Early

Childhood Education field we know that early intervention is the best. So if we as child care providers can reach children even before they go to preschool . . . what an incredible service we are providing for that child, parent, family and our entire community!”

Any licensed family child care home, or public and private center serving low-income children, non-English speakers, and/or children with special needs, ages 0-5 are invited to participate in *Raising Quality!* at no cost. Participants are eligible for support to assist in improving their programs, and cash incentives for achieving high levels of quality.

For more information on *Raising Quality!* contact First 5 San Joaquin at (209) 953-5437 or check out their website, www.sjckids.org.

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About First 5 San Joaquin

Research shows that a child’s brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child’s growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. First 5 San Joaquin allocates Prop. 10 revenues to programs and services that meet local needs. For more information on First 5 San Joaquin, please visit www.sjckids.org, call (209) 953-5437 or email sjckids@sjgov.org.