Building from Strength
We value a strength–based approach in support of our families, staff, board, and volunteers by building on their inherent skills and abilities – to foster confidence, growth, and success.

Empowering Families
We empower the families we serve by connecting them to community resources and encouraging lifelong learning.

Advocating for Children
With compassion and each child’s best interests at heart, we endeavor to meet an array of needs and partner with parents and caregivers to leverage their passion and determination to be strong advocates for their children.

Partnering with the Community
We work with our community to build strong, positive partnerships in an effort to provide the best ideas and practices, resources, and direct services to better serve our children and families.

Honoring Diversity and Inclusion
We value diversity and inclusion by honoring and respecting the traditions, heritages, and experiences of our families, staff, board, and volunteers.

Excellence in Our Work
We are committed to excellence by providing high quality programs and services, and operating a successful, nimble, and well–managed organization. We strive to demonstrate fiscal responsibility, transparency, effective collaboration with all stakeholders, integrity, and gratitude.
In a time where isolation, fear, social unrest, and uncertainty exacerbates toxic family stress, parents have been forced to guide their children through this unknown landscape, attempting to replicate our world virtually and bring as much normalcy to their children’s lives as possible. They do this all while struggling to manage their own emotional response.

The negative impacts of the COVID-19 health crisis have disproportionately impacted the communities we serve. Job loss, housing and food insecurity, overcrowded living spaces, and challenges of distance learning have compounded the daily stress associated with poverty, language barriers, and a lack of resources, leaving parents feeling disempowered and hopeless.

In these unprecedented times, underserved children are at highest risk for learning loss and elementary school readiness delays. If left without support, our families may be forced to prioritize unmet basic needs rather than their children’s education. We know that if these children don’t enter kindergarten on a level playing field, it’s almost impossible to catch up and by 3rd grade, their trajectory for success is diminished.

Standing with families when they need us the most is our driving force in preventing learning loss, educational delays, caregiver stress, and family trauma. We are actively providing:

- Learning Kits to stimulate little ones’ creativity
- Computers for virtual learning
- Tutoring to supplement school work
- Counseling to help families cope with the stress of this new reality
- Groceries to provide nourishment

Family Connections’ continuum of early and ongoing childhood education and family empowerment, as well as our added level of care during COVID-19 provides the emotional support, partnership, and resources needed to help our families navigate these uncertain times.
Resilient Communities
Parents and caregivers build lifelong connections with other parents, forming their own supportive communities that last beyond Family Connection’s programs, and go on to participate in Parent–Teacher Associations and other leadership activities where they advocate for their families and communities.

Empowered Parents
Parents and caregivers build from their own strength and learn side by side with their children in a parent-participatory classroom setting, as well as engage with other parents through parent nights and parent education workshops.

Engaged Fathers
We work to align parent nights and activities to father-friendly schedules, hosting “Daddy and Me” events 1–2 weekends a month: a space just for fathers to engage with their kids through barbecues, field trips, and more.

Developmentally Appropriate Learning Environments
We offer a birth–5th grade parent-participatory early learning continuum where children can play, explore, develop emotional and social resilience, and build cognitive and motor skills; all while creating a strong foundation for the future.

Cultural Humility in the Classroom
All family services and programming are conducted with a focus on celebrating diversity. Families share games, songs, stories, food, and traditions from their culture.

Supported Families
We focus our resources on providing deep, consistent support to families through community-based care: working with families to provide counseling or visits where they are comfortable, whether it be their home, a safe place in the community, at our sites, or virtually.
Claudia is pregnant for the first time. She has so many questions and feels isolated with minimal access to resources and support.

By 3 yrs old, he’s ready for Pre-K! Claudia supports her son as he learns science, math, and English, while working with other families, empowering one another to be advocates for themselves and their children.

Together with their teacher and other parents, Claudia and Ricky connect through play and interactions with peers. Claudia learns important benchmarks for child development and grows her confidence around parenting.

After her second child, Claudia struggles with the stress of supporting a larger family. She connects with an FC clinician for weekly therapy, where she is supported in navigating her concerns and taking time to care for herself, fueling her natural ability to care for her family.

Sometimes things get hard, but Claudia has the tools, confidence and connection to overcome life’s challenges, support her children, and lean on a community that supports her.

By 3 yrs old, he’s ready for Pre-K! Claudia supports her son as he learns science, math, and English, while working with other families, empowering one another to be advocates for themselves and their children.

Claudia is proud when Ricky graduates from Thriving Families, ready for Kindergarten! Claudia engages with Family Connections’ Young Scholars program where her family can build on the progress they have made, so Ricky can continue to meet or exceed educational benchmarks.

After 27 years of growing our family learning community, we are proud to share how participating in our programs is helping families thrive:

87% of families felt they achieved a better understanding of why it is important to build healthy relationships with their children.

89% of families acquired a better knowledge of why it is important to participate in their children’s education.

100% of participating families reported that father figures had increased quality time and engagement with their children.

97% of both moms and dads felt that their relationship with their child had strengthened.

100% of families with children over 3 years old indicated their child was more ready for Kindergarten.

100% of families reported that they now know how to find help in their communities when they need it.
Young Scholars began in 2014 with the goal of paving the road to higher education for San Mateo County’s underserved children. Young Scholars supports Pre-K graduates and their families as they forge ahead into the uncharted territories of kindergarten and elementary school. Family Connections is here to ensure that families have the tools they need not only to navigate the system, but to succeed in the system and take on leadership roles in their community. Young Scholars families volunteer in the classroom, become Teacher’s Assistants, and join the PTA of their child’s school, continuing to be active participants and advocates in their child’s education.

Young Scholars students receive weekly tutoring services in the common core subjects, provided by generous students in our community from the Crystal Springs School and other area schools.

Young Scholars families also come together for monthly workshops on important and timely topics such as Building Friendships at Different Ages, Bullying, Safety at Home and on the Street, and Media and Screen Time. Parents and caregivers participate in Parent Education nights and Parent Support Groups, as well as maintain access to Family Connections’ host of counseling and referral services.

What’s next for Young Scholars?

Currently virtual, Young Scholars is transitioning to an open study session format, so that any student may join to receive homework help and make connections with other students. Family Connections will also be introducing the following new workshops in 2020: Technology, Staying Healthy in the Age of COVID-19, Race and Bias.
The core mission of First 5 San Mateo County is to promote positive outcomes for young children and their families through strategic investments, community leadership, and effective partnerships. Family Connections is one such partner in this mission. In fact, Family Connections’ emphasis on providing high impact, parent-participatory early childhood education combined with mental health support for the whole family is what inspires First 5 San Mateo to continue the robust partnership First 5 and Family Connections first built 7 years ago.

First 5 San Mateo County’s priorities for the coming years include providing a safe and healthy environment for young children, ensuring children have access to high-quality early care and education settings, supporting healthy attachments to between children and their parents and caregivers, and access to healthcare services needed to meet childrens’ health and developmental needs.

Family Connections’ close alignment with these priorities makes for a close and effective partnership – together, First 5 and Family Connections are working towards a brighter future for San Mateo County’s families and children.

“All photos shared in this annual update are of current or alumni families. We thank them for allowing us to share their photos with our community.”

Michelle Blakely
Program and Planning Managing Director,
First 5 San Mateo County

“Family Connections is unique in how they regularly engage families while providing leadership on parent participatory early education and mental health to our community.”
Our Community

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And a Special Thank You
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