

Harold Edwards - First 5 "Celebrity" Reader



This past May, Harold Edwards, Limoneira CEO was a "Celebrity Reader" for First 5 Ventura County at the ABC preschool in Santa Paula. Limoneira is committed to supporting our community in every way possible - in this case, as part of the Ventura County Star and First Five Ventura County's READ TO THE KIDS campaign. Harold said "It was a great

experience for me, and it was a great experience for the kids"

About First Five Ventura County

Teachers and school administrators, along with First 5 Ventura County and the Ventura County Regional P-16 Council, know that too many children enter Kindergarten ill-prepared to succeed. Claudia Harrison, the Executive Director of First 5 Ventura County and a proud member of the Ventura County Regional P-16 Council says "Our K-12 system is then hard-pressed to overcome a costly achievement gap that began as a school readiness gap. It's a problem that impacts all of us".

Harrison says that we cannot afford to invest in pre-school and provides three compelling reasons for doing so:

Reason 1. Far too many children enter Kindergarten unprepared. High-quality preschool programs give children the social, academic and physical skills they need to be successful learners in Kindergarten and far beyond. Although significant progress has been made with more than 1,400 new preschool spaces created under the leadership of First 5 Ventura County, there are still too few children who have access to a high-quality early education program.

Children who are most likely to benefit, such as low income and minority children, are least likely to attend. Countywide, approximately 50% of our children don't attend preschool; often the same children who are less likely to graduate high school and college.

Reason 2. Children who start behind tend to stay behind. 85% of a child's brain is developed by age 5. But researchers have found that developmental disparities between lower-and higher-income children are evident early on. By age 3, a child from a lower-income family likely will have about 1/3 the vocabulary of middle to higher income children. This is especially troubling because early literacy skills are a predictor for later school success or failure; a recent study found that out of 50 first graders who have problems reading, 44 still have problems reading in fourth grade.

Reason 3. Preschool is a long-term economic and workforce investment and the earlier we make investments, the greater our return will be. James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, found that early interventions for disadvantaged children are more economically efficient and produce higher returns than programs targeted to help teenagers and young adults catch up later on. Cost-benefit analyses show that high-quality early childhood education offers one of the highest returns of any public investment - \$7 to \$16 for every dollar spent - returns generated by higher earnings, less remediation needed and less long-term reliance on social services.

Ask any business leader; competitiveness in the global economy requires problem solvers, innovators, higher-level thinkers, and strong communicators. Attracting and retaining businesses to Ventura County is closely linked with a sufficient local, skilled labor pool and quality of life assets, including access to quality early education.