

Thriving Together

First Up 2025 Annual Report

Collaboration. Connection. Community.



First Up
Champions for Early Education

Your Guide to This Year's Impact Report

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Dear Friends and Partners,

As we reflect on the past year at First Up, I am proud to share our 2025 Annual Report, [Thriving Together](#). This theme captures the essence of our work and the spirit of our mission: empowering early childhood educators, families, and communities to ensure every child from birth to age eight has access to high-quality care and education.

As you explore this report, you'll see the impact of our work with [Professionals, Programs, Systems, and Families](#), all guided by a strong [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging](#) (DEIB) lens. We remain committed to partnering with communities that have long been overlooked and under-represented.

At First Up, we believe that early childhood education is not just a profession, it's a calling. For over 50 years, we have stood alongside educators and caregivers, offering best-in-class training, coaching, and advocacy to elevate the field of early childhood education across Southeastern Pennsylvania. In 2025, our programs reached over 58,800 professionals and families, and our statewide grassroots advocacy network continued to grow, amplifying the voices of over 26,675

individuals and organizations committed to shaping public policy for our educators and youngest learners.

This year's theme reminds us that our greatest strength lies in [Collaboration, Connection, and Community](#). Whether through our Annual Conference, which welcomed over 600 attendees, or through one-on-one coaching and mentorship, we have seen firsthand how collaboration fuels innovation, resilience, and growth. Together, we are building a future where early childhood professionals are valued, families are empowered, and children thrive.

I invite you to celebrate the achievements of our community and to envision the possibilities ahead. Thank you for being part of our journey. Your partnership, passion, and commitment make our shared vision a reality.

With gratitude and hope,



Carol Austin
Executive Director



Impact Video



Champions for Early Education

First Up's impact
across the early
education sector



|  First Up

Click the video to open YouTube (external link)

First Up's Impact

By the numbers

These numbers reflect the breadth of First Up's work and the collective impact we're making for children, families, and educators.

They also tell the story of how we are **thriving together**—by **strengthening professionals, advancing programs, uplifting families, and advocating for systems** that ensure every child has the best possible start.



3,316

**EARLY CHILDHOOD
PROFESSIONALS**

participated in
First Up's high-quality

TRAINING SESSIONS



50,000+

CHILDREN

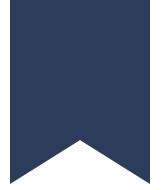
received high-quality
education thanks to
First Up's

**COACHING AND
ADVOCACY PROGRAMS**



First Up

First Up's Impact



26,675

SUPPORTERS
participated
in
First Up-led

ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

117

CAREGIVERS
participated
in
First Up-led

**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
WORKSHOPS**

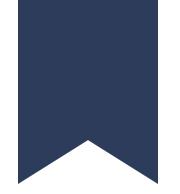
1,516

brand new culturally
responsive
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
were

**GIFTED TO FAMILIES
BY FIRST UP**



First Up's Impact



138
**EARLY CHILDHOOD
PROGRAMS**
were assisted by
First Up's highly-trained

COACHES

487
EARLY EDUCATORS
attended and
participated in
First Up's

**RACIAL EQUITY
PROGRAMS**



Our Program Highlights





Strengthening Early Education Professionals



Great teachers change lives.

This past year, thousands of educators turned to First Up for support—from earning credentials and passing certification exams to embedding anti-bias practices and strengthening positive racial identity in the classroom. Through collaborative training, partnerships, and new opportunities, we help early childhood professionals grow in confidence, expand their skills, and deliver the high-quality care and education all children deserve.

2025 Highlights

Learn and Earn

This program helps us expand career pathways in early childhood education through alternative credentialing and apprenticeships, supporting degree attainment and workforce growth. With three new partnerships and expansion to 91 childcare sites, the program created multiple entry points, increased mentorship opportunities, and provided classroom materials to strengthen high-quality learning environments.



First Up



“Working with First Up has changed everything because without them, I wouldn't be able to continue my education. I am able to go to college for free and continue to improve upon being a teacher. First Up helps educators become more than they thought they would be able to.”

— Rebeckah Dotter, preschool teacher



2025 Highlights

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In-Person & Virtual Professional Development

First Up's certified instructors delivered 397 trainings, providing over 1,200 hours of professional development to 7,137 participants.

Covering topics from advocacy and anti-bias education to trauma-informed practice and leadership, these research-based sessions gave educators practical tools they could immediately apply to strengthen classrooms and child outcomes.

Infant Toddler Proficiency Certification

Through partnerships with Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), Delaware County Community College (DCCC), and Esperanza, teachers completed three college-level courses toward the Infant Toddler Proficiency Certificate. Graduates demonstrated the highest matriculation rates into associate degree programs, with First Up support giving them confidence to continue their education and strengthen their credentials as early childhood professionals.



Pennsylvania Educator Certification Test (PECT)

First Up supported 28 teachers working toward Department of Education certification through 98 hours of PECT preparation. Participants reported the training improved classroom practice, boosted collaboration with co-teachers, and gave them critical tools to achieve certification while growing as confident, effective early childhood educators.



2025 Highlights



Anti-Bias Education Trainings

First Up expanded access to anti-bias education by offering trainings in Spanish and leading communities of practice for 22 professionals. Overall, 332 educators participated in these trainings, while learning circles and family pop-ups extended the impact to caregivers, strengthening inclusion and equity across classrooms and communities.



Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education (P.R.I.D.E.) in Philly

Teacher Village

The P.R.I.D.E. Teacher Village fostered a supportive community for 15 early childhood professionals in its fourth annual cohort. With strong classroom application and alumni engagement, participants reported 100% satisfaction with facilitator support as they advanced positive racial identity development for young children in classrooms and learning communities.

Training Sessions

Through arts-based approaches, 218 educators participated in P.R.I.D.E. trainings designed to move principles into practice. Nearly all participants rated the sessions highly effective, with 96% eager to return. These sessions equipped teachers with practical resources and lesson plans to support positive racial identity development in classrooms.



Impact Video



Community Centered

First Up's impact across the early education sector



Click the video to open YouTube (external link)



First Up



Advancing Programs



Strong programs lead to strong beginnings.

This past year, First Up's initiatives expanded opportunities for children to thrive—raising program quality, enriching classrooms with cultural experiences, building social-emotional supports, and uplifting home-based educators. Each effort strengthens and connects the environments where young children learn and grow, ensuring they have the best possible start.

2025 Highlights

Pathways to Positive Connections

Pathways to Positive Connections expanded this year, reaching 10 new classrooms in 6 programs. Educators implemented social-emotional learning strategies, improving confidence and classroom climate. In total, 18 programs, 40 teachers, and 350 children benefited, with one program advancing to embed positive behavior supports systemwide.



“My center, it literally **feels like we're partners with First Up**. There is always an educator there helping us. There are so many resources so whenever we do anything, we're like let's call First Up and see what they are offering or what training they are doing right now. And that has been really good for us.”

— Tamika Little, preschool teacher



2025 Highlights

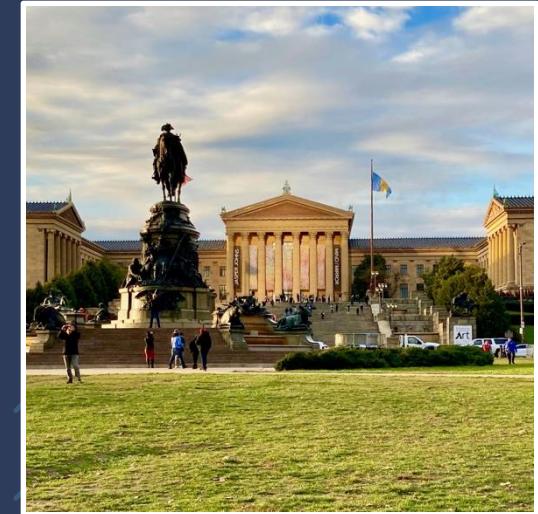
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Museums-to-Go

Museums-to-Go brings cultural experiences like art, science, and music directly into early learning classrooms or through field trips. Thanks to generous funding from Lois B. Cohan's husband, Bob Cohan, and their children, this program provides up to \$600 in support to accepted early learning programs in Philadelphia.

Additionally, transportation assistance is available. The program reached 1,364 children in 2024, including 545 this year, and engaged 59 home-based educators in providing enriching opportunities for young learners.



Practice Based Coaching

First Up supported 44 infant/toddler teachers with coaching, professional development, and training via Schoology. Together, they enhanced practices in 25 classrooms, directly benefiting 88 children. Coaches partnered with teachers to set goals, strengthen skills, and provide ongoing support for high-quality infant and toddler care.



2025 Highlights

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Early Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP)

The Early Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP), funded by the William Penn Foundation and implemented by First Up, is designed to strengthen the quality and sustainability of Keystone STAR 2 early learning programs across Philadelphia. Through strengths-based coaching, targeted professional development, and support around business practices, EQUIP empowers programs to enhance classroom environments, build leadership capacity, create sustainable business practices, and make measurable progress toward achieving higher STAR designations.

Over the past two years, EQUIP has supported 45 early childhood programs, directly improving the learning environments and teaching practices that impact 588 children and 87 educators across 37 classrooms. As a result of these efforts, 37 programs successfully advanced to a Keystone STAR 3 or higher, demonstrating significant gains in program quality. Additionally, 12 programs secured expanded funding through initiatives such as PHLpreK, Early Head Start, and Pre-K Counts, increasing access to high-quality early learning opportunities for Philadelphia's children and families.

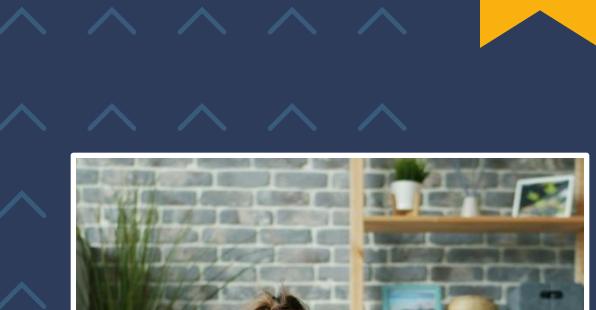


2025 Highlights



Home-Based Child Care

Through the *Right from Home!* initiative, First Up provided home-based educators with critical supports to strengthen their programs and leadership. Thirty-eight educators graduated from the Family Child Care Business series with individualized coaching, while others advanced through the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation training and the *Leading for Change* leadership course. Advocacy was also a focus with 20 educators participating in legislative training and Family Child Care Awareness Day, ensuring families and providers alike had a voice in shaping early learning systems.



Impact Video



Rebeckah's Story

First Up's impact across the early education sector



Click the video to open YouTube (external link)



First Up



Uplifting Families



|  **First Up**

Learning starts at home.

First Up helps families thrive alongside their children. This past year, our initiatives supported parents, grandparents, and caregivers as leaders, nurturers, and advocates. From building emotional resilience and affirming cultural identity to strengthening learning at home, First Up's family-focused programs created powerful connections that uplift both children and the adults who love them.

2025 Highlights

Parents Growing Together

Piloted in partnership with United Way and Children First, Parents Growing Together uplifted over 100 families this year. Through 30 workshops, 112 caregivers, including parents, grandparents, and extended family, built skills in parenting, emotional awareness, and resilience. 100% of the participants reported positive change, reflecting the program's ability to help families heal, connect, and strengthen relationships with their children.

“I think it awoke something in me that I need to be more intentional about what I share with her. Yes there are lot of hard parts and lot of sad parts, but there is also lot of resilience, there is also a lot of strength, and I look for opportunities to share that with her and embrace that.”

— Laila Burns, parent



2025 Highlights



Roots: Family of Black Children Affinity Groups

Roots engaged families of Black children ages 0–5 in five-session groups exploring race, culture, and identity. Co-facilitated by First Up Family Engagement Specialists and seven local Black teaching artists, families participated in hands-on activities, received culturally affirming resources, and built skills to celebrate their children's identity. This year, 28 caregivers participated, and 147 resource bags were distributed to support families beyond the sessions.

Project Bridge

Offered in English and Spanish, Project Bridge is a literacy program that strengthens the bond between families and educators through bilingual workshops, home learning kits, and libraries of diverse children's books. This year, 37 caregivers participated, representing a wide range of family roles. In total, 1,516 culturally responsive books were gifted, ensuring families had the tools to foster literacy, identity, and learning at home.





Advocating for Systems



Real change requires community driven advocacy.

First Up works alongside families and educators to ensure their voices drive the policies and systems that shape early childhood education, strengthening the workforce, expanding access, and building a brighter future for children across Pennsylvania.

2025 Highlights

Capitol Caravans

First Up led eight Capitol Caravans and two rallies to Harrisburg, connecting 132 providers and families directly with legislators in 157 meetings. These powerful conversations humanized the challenges facing early education and earned bipartisan support, helping to shape policies that strengthen the workforce and expand access to high-quality care.



2025 Highlights



ECE Fellowships

Offered in English and Spanish, First Up's five-month Advocacy Fellowships empower early childhood leaders to champion change. In 2024–2025, 26 fellows, including four home-based educators, completed the program. Fellows advanced their advocacy through legislative visits, public writing, and professional development, with many extending their leadership by presenting at conferences and engaging colleagues.

Get Out the Vote

Through 10 workshops across Southeastern Pennsylvania, First Up equipped families and educators with tools to connect voting and advocacy for children. Caregivers spoke about voting with their children in mind, while teachers shared their challenges. These conversations emphasized one truth: children can't vote, they rely on adults to carry their voices.



2025 Highlights



Southeastern Pennsylvania Early Childhood Coalition

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Early Childhood Coalition (SEPECC) unites organizations across Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties to champion high-quality early childhood services for all families. Our diverse membership, spanning child care centers, family child care programs, advocacy groups, training agencies, support organizations, and funders, collaborates to expand public support for early care and education. Led by volunteers from the early childhood community with support from First Up, SEPECC continues growing as a trusted regional resource. This year, First Up hosted 10 meetings with an average of 142 participants and welcomed 6 new volunteers to our leadership committees, bringing our total to 30 dedicated leaders.



Public Policy Partners (3P)

First Up's 3P coalition unites advocates across Philadelphia to align on priorities and amplify impact. This year, 3P played a key role in the National Day Without Childcare, which drew strong turnout and City Council participation. Within weeks, 3P members testified before Council, urging the creation of a childcare task force.



First Up Annual Conference



| First Up



Beyond the Classroom

Inspiring lifelong learning & development

HILTON PHILADELPHIA CITY AVENUE
APRIL 25-26, 2025

The First Up Conference delivered on its promise to be more than just professional development. It was a transformative experience that invited educators to step back from their daily routines and invest deeply in their personal and professional growth. Over two inspiring days, participants embraced the opportunity to reflect, recharge, and reimagine their roles both within and beyond the classroom.



First Up

Beyond the Classroom

Inspiring lifelong learning & development

The conference positioned attendees at the center of the learning experience, with each session thoughtfully designed to help educators explore their own journey of growth.



The core philosophy, that investing in yourself creates ripples of positive impact, resonated throughout every session, encouraging participants to be curious, reflective, and open to connection.



| First Up



Outcomes



Collaboration. Connection. Community.

626
attendees



29
exhibitors



44
sessions taught

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Collaboration. Connection. Community.



Foundations of Progress

Financials, Sponsors, Leadership, Looking Ahead

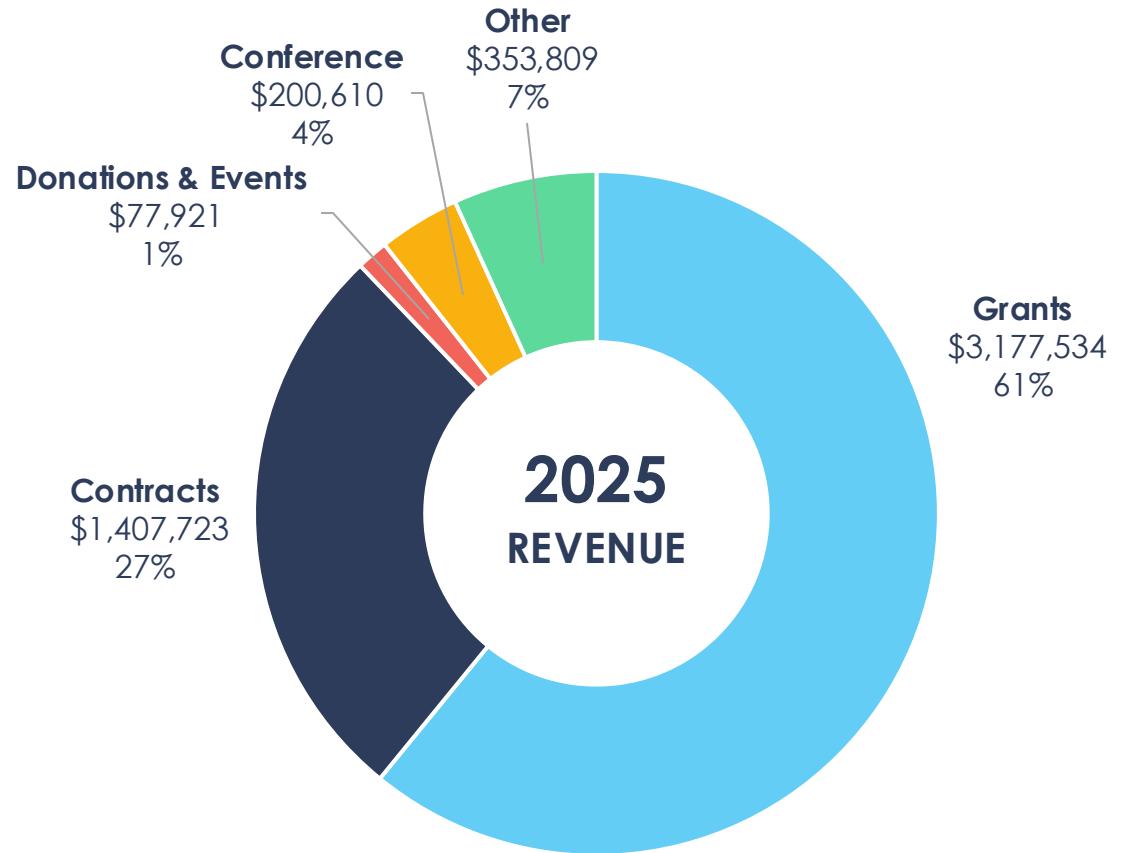


Financial Stewardship

The generosity of our donors, partners, and supporters sustain everything we do

Our financial results reflect the collective commitment to ensuring resources are directed where they matter most: supporting educators, empowering families, and creating lasting change for young children through high quality early education programs.

In Fiscal Year 2025, First Up realized revenues in the amount of **\$5,217,597**.

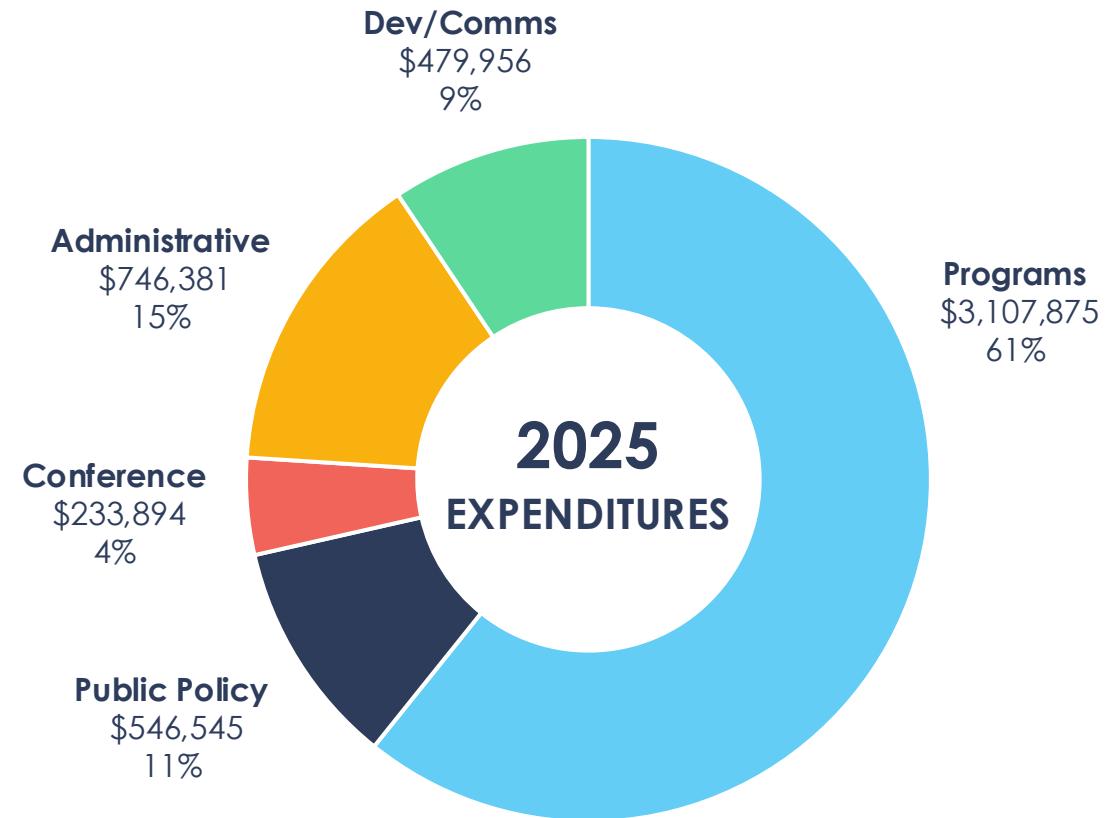


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During the same fiscal period, the organization's expenditures totaled \$5,114,651 with **\$0.75 of every dollar being spent on programming** – coaching and professional development; quality improvement; public policy and advocacy.



Champions for Early Education

First Up's work is powered by a community of donors and partners who believe in the promise of every child.

Thank you for investing in a future where families, educators, and children thrive.



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Child Care Business Consortium



First Up's Leadership

The heart of First Up's success lies in the leaders who stand behind our mission.

Our Board of Directors and Senior Leadership Team bring diverse perspectives and expertise, united by their belief in the power of early learning to transform lives and strengthen communities.



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First Up's Leadership

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Our Board of Directors and Senior Leadership Team bring diverse perspectives and expertise, united by their belief in the power of early learning to transform lives and strengthen communities.

Senior Leadership Team

Carol Austin

Executive Director

Lisa Browne

Director of Early Learning & Equity Advancement

Caroline Campana

Director of Workforce Strategy & Professional Learning

Ray Coxe

Director of Finance & Operations

Drew Martin

Director of Program Operations

Tyrone Scott

Director of Government & External Affairs



Looking Ahead

We couldn't do this work without you.

Thriving Together reminds us that progress is something we create collectively with our community, and we look forward to continuing this work in the coming year.

Every step forward, whether strengthening **Professionals**, advancing **Programs**, uplifting **Families**, or advocating for **Systems**, is made possible through your support of First Up.

We are excited about our upcoming First Up Annual Conference "**Thriving Together: Collaborating & Connecting in Community**," which will take place on March 6-7, 2026 at The Hilton Philadelphia City Avenue.



SCAN THE QR CODE FOR FULL DETAILS

This year's theme celebrates the power of working side by side to create meaningful change. Together, we're not just delivering information; we're cultivating a vibrant community that elevates classroom practice, deepens family engagement, and grows strong leadership, all with the understanding that early childhood education thrives when the whole community is involved.

Together, we can build a community where children, families, and educators don't just succeed. They thrive.



First Up

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Thank you.

Collaboration. Connection. Community.



**First Up**
Champions for Early Education