

LA County To Expand Family Place Centers

The County of Los Angeles Public Library (CoLAPL) will develop ten more early childhood education centers and a new librarian training center, thanks to a grant from the child advocacy organization First 5 LA (www.first5la.org). The nearly \$600,000 grant was the result of more than two years of discussions between Penny Markey, CoLAPL's coordinator of youth services, and First 5 LA. It will include funding for the creation of California's first Family Place training center, to be located at CoLAPL's Carson branch, said Markey.

The new Family Place Centers will build on the library's existing 25 centers, which launched four years ago and have been hugely successful, attracting families from "every ethnic and socioeconomic group" in the area, said Markey.

Based on the Family Place project launched by the Middle Country Public Library in Centereach, NY, and Libraries for the Future, the centers provide families and their pre-K and younger kids with early childhood information, parent education, emer-

gent literacy programs, and family support. The idea behind it is that good health, early learning, parent involvement, and supportive communities play a critical role in young children's growth and development. "Parents of young children tend to be isolated," said Markey. "Family Place helps families connect with each other and the rest of the community."

The library started with six centers and also operates one-hour parent-child workshops for five consecutive weeks, which offer various play stations, early childhood resources, and a professional (such as a nutritionist, pediatric dentist, or a child development specialist) to speak to parents, Markey said. "The literacy skills that children gain in early childhood help form a foundation on which future learning is built," said Evelyn Martinez, First 5 LA's executive director.