

# EDUCATIONAL ALIGNMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN



PROFILES OF LOCAL INNOVATION



## About the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families

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The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) is a special entity within the National League of Cities (NLC). NLC is the oldest and largest national organization representing municipal government throughout the United States. Its mission is to strengthen and promote cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance.

The YEF Institute helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth and families in their communities. NLC launched the YEF Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders can play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

Through the YEF Institute, municipal officials and other community leaders have direct access to a broad array of strategies and tools, including:

- Action kits that offer a menu of practical steps that officials can take to address key problems or challenges.
- Technical assistance projects in selected communities.
- The National Summit on Your City's Families and other workshops, training sessions, and cross-site meetings.
- Targeted research and periodic surveys of local officials.
- The YEF Institute's website, audioconferences and e-mail listservs.

To learn more about these tools and other aspects of the YEF Institute's work, visit [www.nlc.org/iyef](http://www.nlc.org/iyef).



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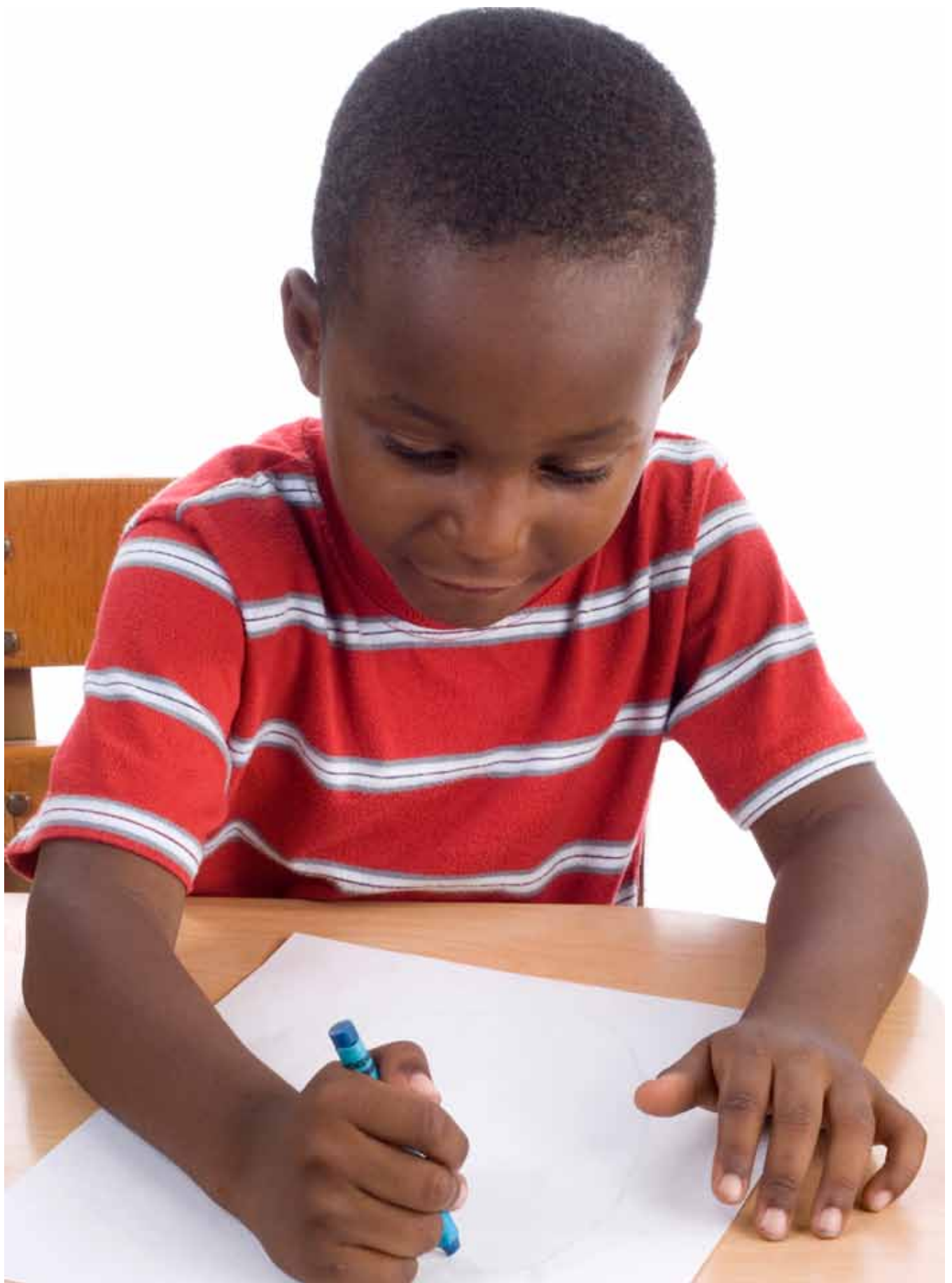
PROFILES OF LOCAL INNOVATION





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, new research has produced a sea change in our understanding of children’s educational development. Municipal leaders are increasingly aware that the learning experiences and opportunities available to children early in life are key predictors of their future academic success and well-being.

They also possess a ground-level perspective on the profound impact that school readiness and achievement gaps have on the lives of young people and the prospects for their cities. The development of human capital through high-quality early learning and K-12 education is becoming ever more critical to the long-term vibrancy of communities as economic trends continue to reward individuals with skills and education. Key city priorities such as economic development, public safety, civic engagement and the stability of families and neighborhoods all hinge on whether children enter kindergarten ready to succeed, develop to their full capacity during the school years and graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education and a career.

In order to fulfill a vision in which every child is prepared for success, community leaders have recently begun paying greater attention to one particularly important indicator of future academic achievement: reading at grade level by the end of third grade. Students who do not meet this milestone are left behind when classroom learning shifts from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” These students are more likely to require expensive remediation in higher grades, to drop out of high school and to suffer the long-term consequences of a poor education, such as reduced earning potential and increased reliance on social services. Moreover, those left behind are disproportionately children of color, perpetuating an achievement gap that undermines our nation’s commitment to equal opportunity. More than 80 percent of all African-American, Latino and American Indian children were reading below grade level, according to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress, compared to just over half of white and Asian-American children. Sadly, these statistics are correlated with a broad range of indicators that are critical to stu-

dent success, from proficiency in other subjects to child health indicators.

This publication highlights an emerging city strategy for ensuring that more children are succeeding by the end of third grade: the alignment of early care and education programs with K-12 education systems. Historically, these systems have developed independently from each other despite sharing a common purpose. Researchers, practitioners and policymakers increasingly believe that a more seamless educational pipeline that addresses a range of academic, behavioral, health and family issues could serve young children more effectively. While early childhood investments are the starting point for a high-quality, aligned educational pipeline, the benefits of a high-quality early education can dissipate if these programs are not designed to meet the public schools’ standards for school readiness or if children transition into elementary schools that do not adequately support their development. Furthermore, insufficient communication and coordination among systems and programs for young children can make these transitions difficult and lead to missed educational opportunities.

City officials are working to move the needle on grade-level reading by improving both the *quality* and the *alignment* of early childhood and elementary school learning experiences. At the same time, they recognize that reading at grade level is just one important indicator of future success, rather than the sum total of our aspirations for young children. As a result, their alignment efforts on behalf of young children from birth to age 8 go well beyond the classroom to include strengthening connections within their communities and linking families to a broad range of supports and opportunities that help them thrive. Their experiences show that a high-quality, well-aligned educational system for young children that bridges the divide between early childhood programs and K-12 schools can improve outcomes for children, engage and support families, strengthen the local workforce and economy and enhance their cities’ quality of life.

# Elements of an Aligned System for Young Children

Based on a review of the most advanced city efforts to align education for young children from birth through third grade, the National League of Cities (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute) identified 10 common elements of effective systems alignment. This report contains case studies of local efforts in Boston, Hartford, San Antonio, San José and Seattle that provide examples of how cities are incorporating each of the following elements into their alignment strategies:

- **Formal partnerships or governance structures** to develop common definitions and goals and take joint action to implement a high-quality, aligned system. In Hartford, this element took the form of a Mayoral Cabinet on the Young Child, with a designated local government office to carry out the work. In San José, the city and county teamed up with local school districts and other key stakeholders to implement the countywide early learning master plan, with two leadership groups focused on civic engagement and program development.
- **Access to quality early education** in a variety of settings to ensure that young children enter school prepared to succeed. San Antonio is establishing Very Early Childhood Centers to bring together Head Start and Pre-K programs and extend training and resources to area child care providers. By braiding several funding streams, Seattle supports quality improvement initiatives and child care subsidies to improve access to high-quality center-based child care and preschool programs. Both communities complement these efforts with outreach and training programs for family, friends and neighbors who care for children.
- **School quality and organization** to improve access to full-day kindergarten, support developmentally appropriate room designs and teaching practices and promote communication and collaboration across the early grades. Boston has promoted access to quality early education through the establishment of a voluntary preschool program in the public schools (called K1), followed by full-day kindergarten (K2). In San Antonio's Edgewood School District, grade-level reading by

fourth grade has been on the rise due to enhanced professional development, expanded support for leveled guided reading and other research-based reading interventions and individualized “reading success” plans that take into account academic, health and other pertinent data for every child in the early grades who is reading below grade level.

- **Communication and data sharing** to provide parents, early educators, teachers and service providers with access to common information that will improve how each supports the learning and development of the children in their care. In Seattle, preschool and afterschool providers work with school teams to complete an Alignment Partnership Plan each spring for implementation in the fall. In exchange for rent-free lease agreements in school buildings, these community-based providers specify how they intend to work with the schools to support children's learning before, during and after school and commit to ongoing communication throughout the year. Data were used to conduct longitudinal research to inform local efforts in San José, while Hartford is piloting a system that would enable sharing of data among early childhood providers, family support centers, home visiting providers and schools to better meet the needs of young children and families.
- **Qualified teachers and administrators** in both early childhood and elementary school settings. When the City of San Antonio, the local Head Start grantee, made local school districts the academic leads in providing Head Start services, the proportion of Head Start teachers in the program with a bachelor's degree jumped from 10 percent to 100 percent. In 2010-11, Seattle Public Schools offered a Coaching Institute focusing on the core habits of teaching and learning for Pre-K, kindergarten and first grade teachers and created a tool to promote peer observation and instructional practice discussions.
- **Alignment of standards, curricula, teaching practices and assessments**, with a focus on both social competence and academic skills, to build on what children have learned and how they have learned it from one level to the next. Seattle developed a common definition of school readiness, aligned multiple readiness frameworks, identified



appropriate measurement tools, created a citywide assessment process for all 4-year-olds and trains Pre-K through first grade teachers to use the assessment data to improve instructional practices. Hartford's 2010 *Connecting the Dots of Teaching & Learning* guide, along with city-led professional development, helps early childhood providers better understand and align their curricula to state preschool curriculum and assessment frameworks.

- **Parent engagement and family supports** to ensure that parents are empowered to be their child's first teacher and most important advocate, and to connect families with the diverse supports that they need for a safe, healthy and economically secure household. Hartford's Family Civics Initiative promotes parent engagement, including parent leadership training and professional development for family support workers. In addition, a robust Welcome Center program within the schools engages parents in their children's education even prior to school entry and helps families address barriers to attendance, such as chronic health issues or transportation. In San José, the Franklin-McKinley Children's Initiative offers a family resource center to help connect parents to needed services, and the county's inclusion collaborative offers a "warm line" to answer questions from and offer support to parents of children with special needs.
- **Programs to facilitate smooth transitions to school** by helping families understand school registration processes and making children and parents feel comfortable and welcome in the new school environment. Boston's Countdown to Kindergarten initiative helps parents navigate the school selection and enrollment process, promotes school readiness activities and events, works with child care providers and schools to ensure that children and families know what to expect when they start kindergarten and engages the entire community in visible, family-friendly events that promote the transition to Boston Public Schools. Hartford has launched an effort to clarify school registration procedures, promote early registration and test models of transferring standard information from early education programs to kindergarten teachers.

- **Public awareness of the importance of early education** to increase the value that is placed on the first segment of the educational pipeline and demonstrate how the success of young children is integral to the long-term success of the city. Early childhood success emerged as one of the top priorities in San Antonio's recent SA2020 visioning process and Mayor Julián Castro has made it a highly visible objective through the establishment of Very Early Childhood Centers and a community-wide conversation on educational alignment. Mayor Thomas M. Menino in Boston has similarly been a longstanding advocate for children and youth. He has supported public education efforts by Thrive in Five Boston, Boston Children's Museum, Countdown to Kindergarten ReadBoston and other partners, which raise awareness through the "In the Know" early childhood blog and meet regularly to coordinate other public awareness campaigns.
- **Creative funding strategies** to allow communities to provide a more comprehensive and collaborative system of support for children and families. For more than two decades, Seattle has benefited from a voter-approved levy that supports programs for children and their families, allowing the city to take a more coordinated approach and address needs that are not covered through other state or federal funding sources. In San José, public funds through the city and county, along with First Five funds from the state tobacco tax, have been crucial to local efforts. In San Antonio, dollars from external sources have been critical to the neighborhood initiatives described below — including an Annie E. Casey Foundation Making Connections investment in the Westside and a new Promise Neighborhood implementation grant in the Eastside — and the mayor has proposed a one-eighth cent sales tax to fund his new Brainpower Initiative to improve the full educational continuum.

## Structure of the Report

This report focuses on the efforts of five cities to create a high-quality, aligned system of education and support for young children and their families. The first page of each case study provides a summary of the high points of each city's work, followed by the full case study and the local and state context surrounding their efforts. The case studies describe the most interesting and relevant activities in each of the communities, organized around the ten elements described above. Understanding that these efforts are continually growing and changing, these profiles offer a snapshot of local progress as of July 2011. However, we have attempted to note major changes or developments that occurred during the latter half of 2011 as this report was being written.

While the majority of what is described in each section focuses on systemic changes or programmatic interventions, all of the city efforts ultimately aim to make a difference in the lives of local children as they grow and

develop. To highlight the human element to these initiatives, each case study concludes with a fictional story that seeks to paint a picture of how these structural changes could lead to real, positive changes in outcomes for individual children and families. While it is unlikely that any one child would be touched by the full range of services, supports and initiatives described in the stories, they offer an aspirational vision of how all of these efforts, if taken to scale, could impact a whole family.

Leaders in the cities profiled in this report recognize that there is more to do and that many challenges lie ahead. However, their efforts to date provide a rich array of ideas for strengthening the first segment of the educational pipeline. It is our hope that these case studies will offer inspiration for other city leaders who are similarly committed to ensuring that young children have the key assets they need — knowledge, skills, confidence, health and a stable, engaged family — to get off to a strong start in education and in life.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The YEF Institute serves as a resource to municipal leaders on a wide array of issues, including early childhood, education, out-of-school time programming, community wellness, family economic success and reengaging disconnected youth. The Educational Alignment for Young Children project built on a decade of experience promoting municipal leadership in both the early childhood arena and the K-12 education system.

In the first half of 2010, the YEF Institute interviewed representatives of more than a dozen cities to learn about their efforts to help young children succeed by age 8. These interviews examined existing local practices to align early childhood programs and elementary education in ways that increase the likelihood that children will be poised for educational success by the time they reach the third grade.

Following this exploratory phase, the YEF Institute took a multi-pronged approach to support local leadership for young children. Starting in July 2010, the YEF Institute began hosting a peer learning community for the cities participating in the scan process. This learning community brought local leaders together on a quarterly basis to learn more about innovative approaches to each of the major components of educational alignment for young children. Topics included:

- community mobilization efforts to improve early literacy;
- initiatives to address absenteeism in the early years;
- an overview of efforts to build and sustain a quality early education system in Providence, R.I.; and
- comprehensive approaches to promote positive child outcomes.

In the late summer and fall of 2010, the YEF Institute provided assistance to four cities to design and implement “community conversations” focused on engaging key stakeholders and building consensus around a concrete action agenda. These conversations took place in Seattle (August 12-13), Petal, Miss. (August 18), San Antonio (in conjunction with the White House Initiative for Excellence in Education for Hispanic Americans) and Richmond, Va. (September 22).

Finally, through site visits and in-depth interviews, the YEF Institute documented “birth through third grade” initiatives in five cities where alignment efforts are effectively changing the early childhood, family support and education systems. Teams from each of these cities presented their work to one another in March 2011, allowing for further exploration of themes of interest to other cities. The case studies that follow represent the culmination of this project, offering a detailed analysis of exactly how these efforts are designed, who is involved, funding strategies and how the city (or program) is tracking impact over time.



## | CASE STUDIES

### Boston, Massachusetts

Under the leadership of Mayor Thomas M. Menino, the City of Boston and Boston Public Schools (BPS) have launched a number of innovative efforts to support early learning and help children transition into elementary schools. These efforts formed the foundation for a strong collaborative partnership among the city, schools, United Way and community members called Thrive in Five. Key elements of Boston's educational alignment work include:

- **Collaborative planning and accountability through Thrive in Five**, a 10-year effort to ensure that all children will be ready for sustained school success. Thrive in Five serves as the coordinator and convener of the city's early childhood programming, knitting together four different components — ready schools, a ready city, ready systems and ready families — essential to promoting school readiness for all of Boston's children.
- **Access to high-quality early education in a variety of settings**, including universal Pre-K (called K1) operated by BPS and a robust system of high-quality, community-based care is available for the majority of preschool aged children. Boston also boasts a high rate of accreditation, with a growing number of center-based, Head Start and public Pre-K programs holding National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and other national accreditations.
- **Qualified teachers for young children through targeted professional development:** Thrive in Five and its partners are implementing an ambitious plan to provide professional development to every early learning caregiver in the city and achieve universal accreditation of all programs, including those that are family-based, center-based or operated by BPS. They are starting with a focus on providing individualized professional development plans and access to career coaches to early childhood providers within the city's "Circle of Promise," where needs are the greatest.
- **Parent engagement in both early childhood and elementary school settings:** Through Countdown to Kindergarten's Talk, Read, Play campaign and Play to Learn groups, the Boston Children Thrive in Five community engagement initiative and BPS's Parent University and parent engagement coordinators, Boston is equipping parents to be their child's first teacher and sustaining that involvement into the school years.
- **Countdown to Kindergarten to ensure smooth transitions:** Countdown to Kindergarten (CtK) provides information and support to parents and children to promote a smooth transition from early childhood to elementary school. CtK helps parents navigate the school selection and enrollment process, promotes school readiness activities and events, works with providers and schools to ensure that children and families know what to expect when they start kindergarten and engages the entire community in visible, family-friendly events that promote the transition to school.

Since its inception in 2008, Thrive in Five has had significant impacts in a variety of sectors. In the last two years, Thrive in Five has generated \$23 million in new resources for Boston's early childhood community, more than 95 percent of which has been granted to local organizations to improve and expand services for families. Based on an external evaluation, there is also evidence that Boston

parents feel less isolated, are increasingly aware of community resources and are becoming more informed and engaged in their children’s healthy development. Local partners have also promoted accreditation, with 56 community-based early care and education providers, 27 family child care educators and 12 BPS early education classrooms achieving or maintaining accreditation from NAEYC or the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC).

In addition, Thrive in Five and other key partners, in response to a need for a comprehensive, common school readiness measure, have initiated and advanced work on the School Readiness Pipeline Project. The project will create a holistic, citywide measure of school readiness, which will supplement the strictly academic DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) scores that are currently used, and facilitate aligned data sharing. The outcomes listed here represent only a portion of the work encompassed by Thrive in Five. (See the Contacts and Resources section of this document for links to more information about how Thrive in Five is impacting early childhood and education).

## Historical Context

Mayor Menino has been a leader in strengthening early learning and K-12 education throughout his 19-year tenure as mayor. With the superintendent of schools reporting directly to the mayor, the push for quality early learning is connected to school reform efforts designed to nurture sustained school success.

Under former BPS Superintendent Thomas Payzant, BPS launched a comprehensive school reform strategy called Focus on Children, a two-phase, 10-year plan for reform. This effort was based on five primary elements: clear expectations for what students should learn; a common, rigorous curriculum; common instructional practices; extensive support for teachers; and appropriate assessments that both provided feedback to teachers to tailor their teaching strategies and tracked outcomes for accountability. Impacts of the reform efforts include improved student performance in math and English language arts through the fourth grade; increased rates of postsecondary enrollment for BPS graduates; establishment of district-wide common curricula and pedagogical approaches for literacy and math; and enhanced professional development for teachers and administrators, including school-based coaching.

Current Superintendent Carol Johnson has built on this foundation of reform with her own roadmap for improvement, the Acceleration Agenda. The Acceleration Agenda continues the systemic reform approach instituted by Payzant, with emphases on improving instruction and assessments, supporting teachers and school leadership and establishing aligned K-5 curricula. The agenda also focuses on improving school organization and strengthening parent, student and community engagement. Recently, BPS launched

### CITY PROFILE

#### LEADERSHIP:

**Mayor:** Thomas M. Menino (since 1993)

**Superintendent:** Carol R. Johnson (since August 2007; serves as a member of Mayor Menino’s cabinet)

**Population:** 645,169

**Percent Population 0-5:** 6 percent (36,422); approximately half are infants/toddlers

**Percent Population School-Age, 6-8:** 4 percent (23,000)

**Poverty Rate:** 19.6 percent (31.2 percent of young children live in poverty)

Among households with young children, 43 percent are foreign born, and English is not the native language for 47 percent of households with children ages 0-5, which is higher than the city rate of 33 percent.

**On-Time Graduation Rate:** 63.2 percent (Source: Boston Public Schools)

**Grade 3 Students at or above Reading Proficiency (2009 MCAS):** 31 percent

**Grade 3 Students at or above Math Proficiency (2009 MCAS):** 33 percent

### CITY DEMOGRAPHICS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

White	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Other
58.9%	25.7%	16.1%	8.6%	9.1%

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-08 American Community Survey. Margin of error +/-2.642)

Parent University, a program designed to give parents the tools they need to be involved in and advocate for their children's education.

In 2004, Mayor Menino called on BPS to provide full-day prekindergarten (referred to as K1) for every Boston 4-year-old, and the following year, BPS created a Department of Early Childhood Education. The BPS Pre-K program has grown to serve 2,000 children annually over the last six years and will continue to expand access to quality early learning opportunities. Some resulting concerns from community-based preschool providers who saw a dip in their enrollment as families took advantage of the publicly-provided Pre-K led to advocacy for investments in early care and education more broadly. This momentum, coupled with a consistent, growing awareness among the mayor's administration and other key stakeholders of the need to "start early" in order to close the achievement gap, catalyzed the creation of Thrive in Five, a public-private partnership working to ensure that all children will be ready for sustained school success.

## STATE CONTEXT

On July 1, 2005, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts established an independent Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. It combines the functions of the Office of Child Care Services with those of the Early Learning Services Division at the Department of Education. By bringing together the people, services and resources of the two former agencies, Massachusetts cities, towns and school districts are able to access more streamlined and comprehensive supports for their work. The overall goal of the Department of Early Education and Care is to build a new, coordinated, comprehensive system of early education and care in Massachusetts.

The Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) grant program provides resources to existing early education programs to help them meet and sustain quality standards. Since its creation by the state legislature in the fiscal 2007 state budget, UPK has received \$30.67 million in cumulative funding and benefits more than 6,000 children annually in cities and towns across the commonwealth.

## Promoting Educational Alignment for Young Children in Boston

With a long history of municipal support for early childhood and education issues, strong local partnerships and city control over the public school system, Boston is well-positioned to implement initiatives that improve educational outcomes for young children.

Thrive in Five, which is described in more detail below, serves as the coordinator, convener and catalyst for the city's early childhood programming, knitting together the components essential to promoting school readiness for all of Boston's children. More than two years into its work, Thrive in Five and its partners are improving the coordination of existing initiatives and have put in place important new structures to support the development of young children.

BPS, through its Department of Early Childhood Education, continues to expand access to its high-quality Pre-K program for 4-year-olds. Through its ongoing system-wide reform efforts, BPS has also taken strides toward improving quality and outcomes. While these efforts have not focused specifically on K-3 alignment, the district is implementing many positive changes that will better equip children to succeed from kindergarten on.

Highlights below relate to the following key elements of an aligned system:

- Partnerships and Governance Structures
- Access to High-Quality Early Education
- Qualified Teachers and Administrators
- Parent Engagement and Family Support
- Smooth Transitions to School

## Partnerships and Governance Structures

Launched in 2008 by the City of Boston and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, Thrive in Five is a 10-year initiative that aligns the efforts of families, educators, health care and human service providers, the private sector and city departments — working in collaboration with state agencies — to ensure that all children will be ready for sustained school success. Thrive in Five’s work is driven by Boston’s School Readiness Roadmap developed by more than 100 parents and community leaders during Thrive in Five’s planning process. The roadmap outlines goals and strategies to strengthen existing child and family-serving systems; creates new supports and alter systems where needed; coordinates and aligns work across systems citywide; and measures and sustains progress over the long term.

The roadmap is based on a school readiness “equation,” which outlines the components necessary for children to achieve sustained school success: family support and engagement, early education and care, health and early intervention systems and community-wide engagement.

### BOSTON’S SCHOOL READINESS EQUATION



To develop the roadmap, and eventually launch Thrive in Five, Mayor Menino appointed a 65-person School Readiness Action Planning Team (APT) to design a citywide, cross-sector plan to ensure universal school readiness and sustained school success for all of Boston’s children. The APT, selected from more than 250 nominees, included a wide variety of local leaders, as well as representatives from relevant state departments. The sectors represented on the APT included early education and

care; early childhood advocacy; research and higher education; K-12 education; health and mental health; community-based, immigrant and multi-service organizations; parenting, education, family support, family literacy and early intervention; basic needs and human services; parent advocacy and family engagement; faith, arts, culture and recreation; and foundations and the private sector.

During the APT planning process, a Ready City subcommittee was formed to help shape the actual structure of Thrive in Five and define the city’s role. Based on best practice models of other school readiness initiatives, the Ready City subcommittee proposed what is now the current structure of Thrive in Five.

Thrive in Five is staffed by an executive director, who is housed in the United Way, and managers for each sector. In addition, the mayor’s office helped recruit a cross-sector leadership team to serve as a governing board for Thrive in Five. The governing board provides general oversight and leadership on resource development, policy and advocacy. The Ready City Manager also co-manages a Data and Research Team (DART), and is made up of data and evaluation experts from multiple disciplines. During the Thrive in Five planning process, the DART was created to ensure that planning was based on data, research and best practices. DART also developed Boston’s School Readiness Progress Indicators to track readiness on all levels, including the readiness of families, educators, systems and the city as a whole. Currently, DART serves as an advisory group to support continuous quality improvement, evaluation and tracking the progress indicators.

Each component of Boston’s School Readiness Equation has a goal and set of strategies that were developed through the APT planning process. Well-defined measures of success are attached to each component, with a broader set of community-level indicators established for all components as a way to track progress over time and provide a picture of the state of school readiness in Boston.

In the first years of implementation, each component was supported by a lead partner organization with strong connections to key stakeholders in that field. A component manager, housed at the lead partner organization, convened and facilitated an implementation partnership, a group of community leaders and stakeholders responsible for providing support and feedback on implementation of that component's strategies. Implementation partnerships met regularly and were open to anyone interested in getting involved. This broad stakeholder engagement helped sustain the strong community buy-in that has characterized Thrive in Five's work.

In late 2011, Thrive in 5 went through a restructuring process designed to break down silos and streamline its staffing and resources. Thrive in 5 continues to shape its work around its school readiness equation, but has realigned each of the four equation components — schools, parents, educators and health systems — to fall into two broader buckets. Now, the work is structured under the umbrellas of: 1) place-based initiatives and programming; and 2) policy and systems change. Rather than being housed at separate organizations, the staff leading Thrive in 5's work are now housed collectively within the United Way and the mayor's office, though their funding streams continue to come from other diverse sources. Thrive in 5 has also increased staffing and resources to support the functions of communications, fundraising and rigorous evaluation of their community programming.

The city has been engaged in all of the Thrive in Five teams, though their primary leadership has been focused on the Ready City team. The Ready City Manager maintained an active engagement with city departments and other key entities that are involved in policies and programming that overlap with early childhood. The mayor's office coordinated city initiatives with projects implemented by Thrive in Five and provided technical assistance to city departments to further the goals of Thrive in Five. For example, as community partners work to implement the Circle of Promise initiative, a place-based effort focused on turning around failing K-12 schools and promoting equitable access to vital services for residents, the Thrive in Five Ready City Manager collects data on the capacity for providing early childhood services in those neighborhoods, and advocates for increased emphasis on school readiness as the initiative continues to evolve. The city also leverages its wide-ranging influence to partner with initiatives that address transportation, housing, safety, adult education, employment, substance abuse and economic security. For example, when the Boston Housing Authority targets new neighborhoods for redevelopment, Thrive in Five works with it to identify local partners who can provide early childhood and family support services in that area.

Parents provide regular input into this work through a standing parent advisory group, which built upon the Parents APT that was created during the planning process. Currently, there are 18 Boston parents and caregivers on the parent advisory group. In addition to providing input and guidance, members of the advisory group serve as ambassadors for Thrive in Five's work. Parents also serve as key members of the Thrive in Five Leadership Council and many implementation partnerships. In this capacity, they review proposals, make funding decisions and participate in professional development opportunities.

## THRIVE IN FIVE STRUCTURE

### READY FAMILIES

**Goal:** Ensure parents have the skills, confidence and knowledge they need to be leaders in their children's learning and development. Help communities increase capacity through well-coordinated resources and broad stakeholder involvement to support children's healthy development starting at birth.

### READY EDUCATORS

**Goal:** Make available the highest quality early education and care systems for all young children — infants, toddlers, preschoolers and kindergartners — in all settings: family child care; private/community-based centers; Head Start/Early Head Start; and school-based early education.

### READY SYSTEMS

**Goal:** Succeed in earlier detection by health care, early intervention and other systems to respond more effectively to barriers to child development and school readiness.

### READY CITY

**Goal:** Promote collaboration among the many sectors in Boston to ensure children's school readiness becomes and remains a top priority.

### READY CHILDREN

**Goal:** Ultimately, ensure young children will be ready for sustained success in school.

Thrive in Five enjoys a blend of public and private funding. Initial funding came from local foundations, local health care organizations, the city and United Way to pay for strategic planning and infrastructure. All of these partners continue to provide support for infrastructure in a variety of ways. The city, for example, houses staff and provides in-kind contributions. United Way also houses staff and contributes direct funding to staffing and infrastructure.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has provided the bulk of implementation funding, though Thrive in Five is strategically working to expand its funding base. Since 2009, the Kellogg Foundation has funded a significant portion of Thrive in Five's programming by supporting efforts to:

1. Build neighborhood capacity to support parents and to support school readiness for all children, with a special focus on those most at risk.
2. Ensure continuous quality improvement for Boston's early childhood programming.



Thrive in Five has sub-granted the majority of the Kellogg Foundation funding directly to its five Boston Children Thrive (BCT) sites. Described in greater detail below, BCT is a family support and community engagement initiative that is being implemented in five neighborhoods across the city. Each site is locally driven by neighborhood-based organizations that have used the Kellogg Foundation funding in a variety of ways, such as hiring parent ambassadors and identifying and engaging family care providers.

In addition, several state and federal grants also fund different components of the work. For example, the Ready Systems work, which is focused on health, is largely funded

by federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) grants, disbursed to the state and administered in Boston. This funding pays for some infrastructure and staffing, but mostly funds strategy implementation work done by the Ready Systems partners. In 2010, Thrive in Five also received an Educator and Provider Support Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care to fund the Ready Educators work focused on improving quality of care through universal accreditation and professional development.

## Access to High-Quality Early Education

BPS has made significant investments to strengthen and expand early childhood programming since 2005. Most notably, BPS created a Department of Early Childhood Education in 2005 in response to Mayor Menino's push to "provide all 4-year-olds in the city with full-day school within five years." At the time, full-day kindergarten was provided for all 5-year-olds, but BPS was only able to provide early childhood preschool programs through six Early Learning Centers across the city. The push to provide preschool (K1) in addition to standard kindergarten (K2) through BPS was a strategy for improving the quality of early learning services and increasing access to learning opportunities.

In addition, Boston is home to the highest number of professionally accredited, school-based, center-based and family child care providers. According to a 2009 community profile of early care and edu-



cation in Boston published by Boston EQUIP, 42 percent of Head Start/center-based programs, 14 percent of family child care centers and 8.5 percent of BPS K1 classrooms in Boston were accredited. Forty-five percent of BPS K1 classrooms are working toward accreditation. While not all families have equal access to care, the city, school system and community-based organizations have been and continue to be successful in providing professional development, supporting the environmental quality of care and promoting high-quality early learning services throughout the community. Boston's work on accreditation is described in more detail below.

### *Providing Universal Pre-K in all BPS Elementary Schools*

With initial funding provided solely by the City of Boston, BPS began the process of establishing high-quality preschool, or K1, classrooms for 4-year-olds throughout all of the city's elementary schools. Under the direction of the BPS Early Childhood Education Office, elementary school principals were gauged for interest and ability for receiving Pre-K classrooms in their schools. Schools then had to be retro-fitted to create an age-appropriate classroom, which often involved installing a bathroom or a sink, and creating other environmental components that are proven quality markers for high-quality early childhood programming.

BPS then conducted a demographic analysis to determine which school zones had the highest concentration of 4-year-olds — and would have the highest concentration in the future based on birth projections — and began implementing the Pre-K program in the corresponding elementary schools. In addition, BPS used facility maps and the evaluations of cross-functional teams who examined the environmental quality of the school space to determine which schools were most suited for the addition of Pre-K classrooms. Finally, in implementing the program, BPS attempted to add at least two preschool classrooms to each elementary school, in order to ensure a professional community of early educators within the elementary school and promote opportunities for collaboration within the school. The Early Childhood Education Office also took care to select effective, evidence-based curricula for the Pre-K program — including Pearson's Opening the World of Learning (OWL) for language and literacy skills and the Building Blocks math curriculum — and is implementing them uniformly in all K1 classrooms.

During the first year of Boston's public preschool program (2006-07), the program served 750 children in 38 classrooms. For the 2009-10 year, the program enrolled approximately 2,100 children in 110 classrooms across 66 elementary schools, encompassing nearly 85 percent of BPS elementary schools. Currently, BPS serves approximately 21 percent of Boston's preschool-aged children through K1. Demand for the program grows at an estimated 25 percent each year. BPS and its partners do not conduct any type of strategic outreach, given the high demand for the program. Countdown to Kindergarten provides detailed information about the K1 program through its citywide school transition and parent engagement campaign.

The city's investment of \$22 million per year in the K1 program, along with support from federal grants and private foundations, appears to be paying off for children in Boston. In 2006, BPS and the Massachusetts Department of Early Care and Education contracted with Wellesley University to study the Pre-K program, creating a baseline evaluation of the quality of its early childhood environments and instructional practices of teachers. In 2008, they conducted the same environmental and instructional practice evaluation, but also added child outcome measures to begin gauging the effectiveness of the preschool classrooms in improving children's healthy development and school readiness. The study revealed that children who participated in the K1 program out-performed their peers significantly and substantially on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. The study also demonstrated that children were doing significantly better in programs that were either NAEYC-accredited or pursuing accreditation.

In 2010, one outside evaluation found that children in Boston's public preschool program received higher marks in vocabulary than children who do not enroll in a Boston K1 program. Also in 2010, BPS began looking at assessments of several child outcome measures beyond vocabulary (e.g., mathematics, self-regulation, memory and executive functioning). In all measures, students who attended the BPS K1 program significantly outperformed their peers. BPS data also revealed that while the gains diminish, they do appear to have a significant and lasting impact up to third grade. In addition, for the 2010-11 school year, 64 percent of BPS kindergartners scored high enough on the DIBELS assessment to be considered kindergarten-ready, and a smaller percentage of children who attended a K1 class were identified as needing additional interventions when they entered school (9.6 percent compared to 17.4 percent in kindergarten and 15.9 percent compared to 22.5 percent in second grade). BPS will continue to conduct this evaluation every two years to ensure quality, measure ongoing impact and determine potential adjustments to the program.

### *Accreditation and Professional Development in BPS*

Using the public school system as the delivery mechanism for public preschool is a strategy that complements the city's overall efforts to raise the quality of early learning services and ensure equal access and diverse classroom settings. By locating the preschool program in the public school system, teachers and administrators receive more competitive wages and quality professional development opportunities through the infrastructure and funding streams provided by BPS.

The 2006 Wellesley University evaluation showed that high-quality measures in Pre-K classrooms, such as teacher education requirements and positive environmental factors, were increasing in BPS K1 classrooms, but the same effect was not recorded in kindergarten (K2) classrooms. To address this and improve quality, BPS determined to pursue NAEYC accreditation for kindergarten classrooms. BPS now pursues a goal of obtaining NAEYC accreditation for all K1 and K2 classrooms by 2020.

Staff are currently working toward accreditation for 45 percent of all K1 and K2 classrooms. Using mostly private funding, BPS spends approximately \$5,000 per classroom for accreditation. This



covers the cost of classroom materials and environmental needs, plus funding for a mentor to visit schools twice per year to work with administrators and educators.

The primary strategies employed by the BPS program to ensure high-quality services include:

- Provision of direct classroom coaching for all preschool teachers (one coach per 10 classrooms for three years);
- Requiring all BPS early childhood staff to have a bachelor's degree and to attain a master's degree within five years of entering the school system;
- Ensuring consistent and targeted professional development;
- Supporting NAEYC accreditation of all preschool classrooms and kindergarten classrooms;
- Offering a professional early childhood fellowship for elementary school principals;
- Conducting literacy assessments of Pre-K through second grade students; and
- Conducting biannual classroom quality measures and child outcomes using a variety of assessment tools (ECERS-R, CLASS, ELLCO and PPVT-III).

### *Access to High-Quality Community-Based Pre-K*

Based on information from Boston birth records between 2002 and 2007, there are enough early care and education “seats” to provide care for 24 percent of the city’s infants and toddlers and 70 percent of preschool age children through school-based, center-based and family care providers combined. While Boston does have a high rate of accreditation, not all providers offer high-quality services, and many families cannot access them due to prohibitive costs, long waiting lists or lack of extended day care for parents who work. To address these challenges, both BPS and Thrive in Five have developed strategies to increase the city’s capacity to provide high-quality community-based care. One of their major strategies, discussed in more detail below, focuses on increasing professional development and other supports to ensure universal, citywide accreditation.

Another strategy to increase access to high-quality care is a BPS pilot project to test strategies for supporting and subsidizing community-based providers to offer the BPS K1 program. BPS Pre-K does not offer full-day care, which is often needed by working parents, but many community-based programs are able to offer this service.

In 2006, the Boys and Girls Club of Dorchester (BGCD) and BPS partnered to open the city’s first community-based, 4-year-old prekindergarten classroom. The pilot project serves 18 children, many of whom have been enrolled in BGCD’s early education programs since two months of age, creating strong connections with the children and their families. Teachers in the classroom have access to BPS’ professional development opportunities, including training on the district’s curriculum and assessment tools, as well as increased compensation on par with that of a BPS teacher. Both partners benefit from an organizational perspective as well: BCGD is able to supplement the cost of its full-day 4-year-old program by combining BPS funding for the classroom with out-of-school time resources; BPS is able to expand prekindergarten services without investing in new or remodeled school buildings.

While this model has had a high take-up rate and is showing the same positive student outcomes as school-based K1 classrooms, it has not been expanded to other sites. Funding is cited as a constraint for both BPS and BGCD, as BPS only provides dollars to cover teacher salaries and hours of care equivalent to the length of the school day.

## Qualified Teachers and Administrators

During Thrive in Five's APT planning process, stakeholders set a goal to pursue universal NAEYC accreditation across all early education and care settings in the city. The Ready Educators implementation partnership, as well as key stakeholders involved in a Regional Professional Development Collaborative funded by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care's Educator and Providers Support Grant, have been working to create a concrete strategy to provide the supports and resources needed to ensure not just citywide accreditation, but also highly qualified educators and the highest quality of care across all settings, including infant and toddler care and family, friend and neighbor (FFN) providers. Over the last two years, the proportion of all programs — BPS, FFN and community-based — that have achieved or maintained accreditation has increased from 32 percent to 36 percent.

To begin the process for this area of Thrive in Five's work, the Ready Educators group convened the three major accreditation support organizations in the city: Boston Alliance for Early Education, Associated Early Care and Education and BPS to form a planning team. Collaboratively, they determined to focus future resources for the accreditation process in the Circle of Promise neighborhoods. The Circle of Promise is an education initiative in the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain and South End, an area of the city that is home to 31 public elementary schools and more than 300 family child care providers. These neighborhoods are among the most impoverished in the city and are home to a disproportionately large number of the district's failing or "needs improvement" schools. After gathering data to determine how many child care providers in the area were not accredited, the team then developed a plan to achieve universal accreditation in these neighborhoods. While the group has engaged a local funder, they are continuing to seek funding to support the plan so that they can fully move forward with the work.

During the initial APT planning phase, stakeholders made a key observation that has helped direct another emerging strategy for high-quality care in Boston. In order to meet NAEYC accreditation standards, Head Start standards and state QRIS standards, early educators need more education and professional development supports. Many early educators lack not only access to these development opportunities, but also find it difficult to obtain the credentials they need without a clear educational plan and career coaching to accomplish their goals. Thrive in Five and the Ready Educator partnership acknowledge that their focus on the NAEYC accreditation goal must include professional development supports.

With the support of state funding and within the context of efforts to develop a similar statewide professional development system, Boston has crafted a strategy to provide career coaching for all early education staff across the city. By developing an individualized professional development plan (IPDP) for every early educator in the city, the city can create a database showing current education levels and what kind of education providers need or would like to pursue to meet their future goals. Based on an analysis of their individual need, they will select or be assigned to an appropriate career coach.

Currently, this citywide coaching function exists in two agencies: Boston Alliance for Early Education and Associated Early Care and Education. The more than 100 early childhood programs (both in community-based centers and public schools) that are receiving accreditation support from these two agencies are the only providers that currently have access to this career coaching function. Career coaches provide professional development and education support to Boston's early care providers, including information about FASFA assistance for a professional wanting to pursue a four-year degree, advice on what early childhood classes to take or where one could get language tutoring to help them excel in coursework, assistance transferring credits for a degree or community resource referrals

for transportation to get to class or to a professional development opportunity. The coaches generally provide between one and two hours of support per month to each professional.

The goal is to increase the number of career coaches available to provide this service and the level of support to educators by offering group or cohort coaching and professional development. Local partners have developed a common intake form for professional development coaches to use when working with clients, which will allow them to offer professional development in a more targeted and efficient way. For example, if one neighborhood has a critical mass of educators who would like to pursue a B.A. in early childhood education, a coach could be sent to provide a class on how to complete the FASFA, or partners could engage representatives from a local university to come to the neighborhood and offer a relevant class for college credit.

Funding has been a significant constraint in moving forward, as in-person coaching is resource-intensive and there is limited capacity with only two organizations providing the service. Thrive in Five and the Regional Professional Development Collaborative have been working closely with a local funder to centralize funding for this work. Instead of the three organizations each receiving separate funding for provision of coaching services, the goal is to direct one concentrated stream of funding toward this goal of providing universal professional development services, and eventually, universal accreditation.

## Parent Engagement and Family Support

Family engagement and support strategies are a key component of Boston's connected system of early childhood and education services, as they serve to equip parents to be their child's first and ongoing teacher, facilitate involvement with their child's educators and help children and parents access the full-range of services they may need, including health care, work supports, parent education and job skills.

### *Boston Children Thrive in Five*

As part of its Ready Families strategy, Thrive in Five has launched a family support and community engagement initiative called Boston Children Thrive in Five (BCT): Connecting Families, Building Community. This model is built on the premise that a child exists in the context of a family, families exist in the context of a community and that all of these players must contribute to supporting the growth and education of children. The goal of BCT is to strengthen communities' capacity to engage families in their children's learning and healthy development starting at birth by increasing families' access to early childhood information and resources.

Boston Children Thrive in Five has three major areas of work:

1. Supporting families in fostering healthy development and age-appropriate learning.
2. Working with providers to enhance service delivery so that young children and their families can easily access and engage in high-quality services.

## BROMLEY-HEATH CHILD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Since 2007, Associated Early Care and Education has been working toward the goal of constructing a state-of-the-art child and family development center, providing comprehensive services for children and families and professional development opportunities to providers. In April 2010, the Boston Housing Authority announced an agreement to locate the new center in the Bromley-Heath public housing development on land leased to Associated for \$1 per year. Joint and aligned professional development work will be one of the cornerstones of a new Child and Family Development Center, set to begin construction in the summer of 2012 if fundraising goals are met.

Situated on the border of the Jamaica Plain and Roxbury neighborhoods, the Bromley-Heath Center would support young children and their families in a comprehensive and holistic manner, providing early childhood education, parenting support, health care services, computer labs and family economic self-sufficiency training for parents. The proposed \$10.5 million facility will include everything from a rooftop greenhouse to early childhood classrooms with viewing windows for researchers and students to unobtrusively observe the classroom. Standards, curricula, teaching practices and assessments will be aligned with the Boston Public Schools and Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, and the center will measure and evaluate child and family outcomes to inform quality improvements.

Not only will the center seek to improve child outcomes for children in program, but it will also serve as the City of Boston's technical assistance and training hub. The center will house a Quality Improvement Institute (QII), which will serve as a practice-oriented training model and will provide technical assistance to providers across the city to improve young children's language and literacy competency. The QII will support the Thrive in Five goal of increasing the proportion of kindergartners scoring proficiently on the DIBELS assessment from 54 percent to 75 percent by 2014.

3. Building a movement in support of young children and their families that engages the whole community, including individuals, organizations and businesses.

BCT is being implemented in five neighborhoods, with a goal of reaching every neighborhood in the city by 2018. Each BCT initiative is coordinated by a “hub agency” within the neighborhood that works in collaboration with a variety of community partners. The hub agencies in each neighborhood also convene a School Readiness Roundtable composed of parents, businesses, community organizations and other interested stakeholders. Each BCT site was selected by Thrive in Five and receives funding through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Perhaps one of the most unique strengths of the BCT model is its focus on holistic community engagement — building on the everyday relationships and interactions that children and families have with the institutions in their neighborhoods. For example, a grocery store can join the School Readiness Roundtable and have access to free informational resources about early childhood services and supports from BCT to provide at their store. With support from Boston Children Thrive in Five, a local employer could host a family-friendly activity such as a free book give-away at their business.

In East Boston, the BCT initiative plans to focus on strengthening connections between families and businesses by creating a Parent Partner Business program. The School Readiness Roundtable is developing a set of standards for local businesses to meet in order to become a Parent Partner Business (PPB), and then will create a branded decal for businesses to display at their sites. Examples of PPB standards include having family-friendly environments, such as changing tables in bathrooms. East Boston Children Thrive in Five is also enhancing parent and community engagement through their Parent Partners. They will provide stipends to five diverse linguistic minority leaders (Parent Partners) to represent families with young children and articulate cultural issues.

### *BPS Parent Engagement Strategies*

BPS has a Family and Student Engagement Office led by Assistant Superintendent Michelle Brooks and funded through Title I that continues to engage parents as their children grow. Key efforts include engagement coordinators at many of the BPS schools, Parent University and the Office of Welcome Services.

The Office of Family and Student Engagement supports full-time Family and Community Outreach Coordinators (FCOC) in 31 BPS schools. The FCOCs are responsible for developing school-based family engagement systems and activities that create strong supports for teaching, learning and student achievement. They also provide support for School Parent Councils and School Site Councils in reaching out to families, communicating priorities and goals of the school and engaging parents in the decision-making processes within the school. FCOCs have access to ongoing professional development. Several of these staff are specially trained to work with families with limited English proficiency and families with special needs children.

In addition, the Office of Family and Student Engagement works with all BPS schools to help organize School Site Councils, plan activities to engage families in their children’s learning and help parents and school staff communicate with each other. One of its more recent projects was the development and publication of Family Learning Guides, which are brief, user-friendly booklets that help teachers and parents understand the expectations that are set for students in every grade, starting with Pre-K.

Launched in the fall of 2009, Parent University is a year-long training and education program to help Boston parents support their children’s personal and academic growth. Parent University provides free workshop sessions (including several Saturday sessions for working parents) that focus on child development, what children are learning in schools, parent advocacy and leadership and effective parenting

skills. Parents can accumulate credits through workshop attendance, and at the end of the year BPS hosts a Parent University graduation for those with enough credits.

In December 2008, BPS created the Office of Welcome Services (OWS) to support Boston families with the information they need to choose, enroll and transition successfully at all grade levels. OWS is a major partner in the Countdown to Kindergarten (CtK) program and works closely with CtK staff, as well as the broader community. OWS functions as the front door to BPS for many families. In addition to CtK, the Office of Welcome Services is involved in a variety of other initiatives, such as Middle O!, a summer celebration event to engage families as their children transition to middle school.



### *Countdown to Kindergarten*

Since 1999, the city's Countdown to Kindergarten (CtK) initiative has worked to engage families, educators and the community in a citywide effort to enhance early learning opportunities and to support children and families in their transition to kindergarten. CtK is a collaborative effort of the City of Boston, BPS and more than 20 local organizations, from the Boston Public Library to the YMCA. Together, the partners implement a year-round school readiness campaign to help families actively participate in their children's education right from the start. CtK has developed a variety of materials that help parents and caregivers learn about the public school system and the benefits of enrolling their children, as well as how to choose schools and register their children. Two important parent engagement/support components of CtK include:

- **Play to Learn:** Launched in 2006 with support from BPS, BNY Mellon, Boston Children's Hospital and local foundations, weekly Play to Learn groups are free, two-hour structured playtimes for parents (or informal caregivers) and their children ages 1 to 3. Led by early childhood professionals, Play to Learn groups teach parents to foster nurturing behaviors and model developmentally appropriate activities in which parents can engage with their young children. The Play to Learn groups focus on parent education and connections to other resources in the community, along with early intervention and identification of developmental delays. Groups are located in economically distressed neighborhoods and hosted at local schools, making them accessible to families with limited resources. At the same time, access is universal, yielding greater diversity and a richer learning experience for children and families. The groups are fully enrolled and typically have waiting lists. Regular participation is required, a program component that staff have cited as particularly important. Regular attendance allows parents to develop supportive networks with other parents and caregivers. It also ensures that they have the opportunity to learn a comprehensive set of skills to promote child development that they are able to take home with them. Rather than this being a burdensome requirement, CtK has found that families are committed and often stay with the group for multiple years.

In the 2010-11 school year, Play to Learn groups served about 625 families at 10 different sites, each of which hosted an average of four play groups. Pre- and post-participation evaluations of the children and families in their groups have shown that parents participating in the program are able to replicate demonstrated developmental activities at home and that children in those families have a greater ability to share, transition easily from one activity to the next and settle into routines. In addition, the percentage of parents who cited being knowledgeable of how to register their children for BPS increased from 45 percent in 2007 to 66 percent in 2009.

- **Talk, Read, Play Campaign:** Based on needs identified through the Play to Learn groups, this campaign reinforces that parents are their child's first teacher and should talk, read and play with their kids to prepare them for kindergarten. Talk, Read, Play was launched in November 2008 with a kick-off event that included the mayor. As part of the campaign, the organizers (including ReadBoston, Community Partnerships for Children, teachers, parents and child care providers) offer parent education and engagement materials to providers who have contact with families, such as pediatricians and child care providers. This information includes developmental milestones, free and reduced-price activities and other resources that help parents support healthy development. The Talk, Read, Play Campaign's first major resource was a Milestones Guide, which is designed to give families a sense of what is developmentally appropriate in their children and provide ideas for activities that can be done at home to support development. The campaign also supports a content-rich website with frequently updated information on events and activities throughout the city, activity guides for healthy development and information on connecting to other community resources. New funding is allowing the campaign to create more materials and blanket neighborhoods with posters and flyers, as well as host a Talk, Read, Play Day to raise the profile of parents as a child's first teacher.

## Smooth Transitions to School

Initiated by Mayor Menino in 1999, Countdown to Kindergarten (CtK) provides information and support to parents and children to promote a smooth transition from early childhood programs to elementary school. As noted above, some of these activities include helping to engage parents as their child's first and most important teacher through the Talk, Read, Play Campaign and Play to Learn groups. In addition, CtK works to equip and empower parents to make the best school choice for their children.



For many years, Boston's school choice program favored the most well-informed and connected parents who knew that kindergarten registration starts in January and quickly secured slots in the most sought-after schools. In response, Mayor Menino created CtK to explain the school choice system, encourage families to take advantage of free BPS kindergarten, empower parents to choose a school that best fits their children's needs and successfully navigate the registration process.

Over the past decade, CtK has grown to a staff of six and now provides a wider array of supports to help families prepare their children to make a smooth transition to kindergarten. They also quickly realized that if they really wanted to equip families to access kindergarten, they would need to engage a diverse set of partners, such as the public libraries and the children's museum, and work very closely with the schools to change how they reach out to families.

Each year, the campaign starts in October with a big kick-off event to garner public attention. Families also receive important information to help them begin navigating the school choice and registration process. They receive enrollment information sheets (available in eight different languages), which break down kindergarten registration into five easy steps and provide a detailed timeline to help families navigate the process. They also receive BPS zone maps, school preview schedules (when families can visit prospective schools), a glossary of terms and a kindergarten handbook.

Families can then begin the process of visiting schools, gathering needed registration materials and preparing for enrollment. During the school visit season (approximately October to February), CtK works with principals to make sure families are welcomed into schools for preview visits and provides a checklist of questions parents might want to ask to ensure that they find a school that is a good fit. In its early stages, CtK was intentional in addressing common barriers that prevent many families from participating in school preview visits, such as inflexible work schedules. CtK negotiated with city agencies and 30 public and private sector employers to offer four hours of paid leave for families to visit schools as part of the public school enrollment process. CtK continues to consider ways to reduce barriers that may prevent working parents from being fully involved in the school transition process.

After school preview visits, families must select a school and register their child. In March, families are notified about whether or not their child got into the school they wanted. For families who did not get their first choice, CtK works with the parents to select another school if they feel their assigned school is not a good fit. Throughout the following months, as children wait to start kindergarten, CtK provides welcome bags for families that contain a rich set of resources and community referral information designed to help parents prepare their children for school, from monthly activities that help parents build on the learning skills that children will further develop in kindergarten, to information about accessing community resources like their local BPS Parents Advisory Council or the Mayor's Health Line. Families are also encouraged through CtK materials to visit their local library and sign up for a library card. CtK provides information on age-appropriate summer reading programs and a summer reading guide for families.

To culminate the almost year-long process of selecting and enrolling in school, CtK hosts Kindergarten Community Days events in all of Boston's neighborhoods to bring together kids who are preparing to go to kindergarten. Many of the partner organizations also sponsor complementary activities for children and parents. For example, as part of CtK's campaign, the Children's Museum offers families of incoming kindergarteners a free, one-year membership and sponsors a celebration at which children can ride on a school bus and families of kindergarteners can ask questions and meet the mayor and superintendent.

In 2011, CtK is developing transition workshops on the kindergarten curriculum and how it relates to developmental milestones. It is also using the BPS kindergarten report card to create activities families can do at home to support the different developmental domains it covers.

## Alignment in Action: A Fictional Portrait

*Boston's early childhood initiatives now reach a large number of children in families in one way or another. At this time, 56 community-based early care and education providers, 27 family child care educators and 12 BPS early education classrooms are accredited by NAEYC or the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), and more than 2,000 children (approximately 21 percent of the city's preschool population) participate in K1 programs in the public schools. The Talk, Read, Play campaign and aspects of the Thrive in Five initiative are broadly available throughout the community, and 625 families participated in Play and Learn groups in 2010-11. While Marco Moncayo and his family are fictional characters and not all families receive the full range of programs and services described here, this story illustrates the vision of the Thrive in Five equation — ready families, ready systems, ready schools and a ready city — and the positive impact it can have on a child's outcomes.*

Allyce and Cesar Moncayo live in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood with their son Marco, who is 7. Both Allyce and Cesar work full-time jobs in downtown Boston. Their long hours, plus commuting time, mean that they need full-day care for their children. Even with both parents working, the Moncayo family struggles to make ends meet from month to month.

Allyce and Cesar both grew up in Dorchester and are familiar with many of the community-based services in their neighborhood. When Marco was an infant, Allyce and Cesar struggled to find care for him, a common issue in Boston, with the city only having the capacity to serve about 24 percent of



infants and toddlers with quality care. Because they could not find center-based care for him, Allyce and Cesar put Marco in a family child care provider setting. By using a neighborhood resource booklet distributed by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Dorchester, they were able to find a family provider accredited by NAFCC. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides significant resources for promoting accreditation at the local level and boasts the highest number of accredited care centers in the country.

When Marco was a toddler, his parents started asking around in the neighborhood about preschool programs. They had been noticing fliers in their local grocery store — a partner of Dorchester’s Boston Children Thrive initiative — that had interesting facts about child development and the importance of quality early learning. While they were happy with Marco’s family child care provider and could afford it, they began discussing whether it was offering him the highest quality early education experiences he could get and considering other options.

One day while at a medical appointment at the Dorchester House Multi-Service Center, Allyce’s nurse asked her about Marco, who had accompanied her to the appointment. When Allyce mentioned they were looking for preschools for him, the nurse handed her some information from Boston Children Thrive that listed accredited neighborhood programs and tips for choosing the right preschool program. Allyce and Cesar used the information to pick a few preschools to visit, and after a few weeks decided that Paul R. McLaughlin Child Care Center at the Boys and Girls Club of Dorchester (BGCD) — located in the Savin Hill neighborhood of Dorchester, within walking distance from their home and several public elementary schools — was where they wanted to send Marco. His parents had wanted to enroll him in the BPS Pre-K program, but because BPS does not offer extended-day care, it was not a feasible option for their son given their work schedules. The Dorchester K1 classroom, however, operates on the same schedule as the rest of the center, providing care from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Because he was still a toddler, they placed him on the waiting list.

Again using resources from Dorchester’s Boston Children Thrive initiative, Allyce and Cesar also found information on child care subsidies and located an agency that helped them apply to the state for this financial assistance.

When Marco turned 4, Allyce and Cesar were able to enroll him in K1 (a Pre-K classroom) at BGCD and get the support they needed to pay for it. It was fortunate that his parents were prompted to start thinking about preschool early, as many families find themselves on long waiting lists for both program slots and child care subsidies.

All of BGCD’s early childhood programs are accredited by the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC), ensuring that they are of high quality, with safe, developmentally appropriate learning environments, and teachers in every classroom who have either obtained a four-year degree in early education or are working toward it. In Marco’s case, because he was enrolled in the BPS K1 program offered at BGCD, his teachers had four-year degrees and had access to BPS’ professional development opportunities, including training on the district’s curriculum and assessment tools, as well as increased compensation on par with that of a BPS teacher. Marco’s teachers used a curriculum that was aligned with the BPS K-5 curriculum, and was also assessed with instruments familiar to professionals in the BPS system.

When it was time to leave BGCD, Marco could not wait to go to kindergarten. His teachers took his class on a field trip to the model classroom at Boston’s Children Museum and to a nearby BPS elementary school to help their students understand what kindergarten will be like. They also took the students to community-wide Countdown to Kindergarten events, like the Kindergarten Days Parade. Using Countdown to Kindergarten materials, Marco’s teachers helped Allyce and Cesar navigate the

entire kindergarten enrollment process. They also signed a consent form allowing BGCD to share important information about Marco with his future kindergarten teacher. In addition to providing copies of all of his assessments, BGCD also provided a “transition sheet” highlighting important information about Marco, such as his routines and likes/dislikes, which helped his kindergarten teacher understand how to create the best learning environment for him.

Once in kindergarten, Marco learned in a classroom that was also NAEYC accredited, thus ensuring a connected continuation of high-quality early education practices and environments. BPS is working to achieve NAEYC accreditation for all Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms, and has reached approximately 85 percent of the goal.

The curricula that Marco has experienced since preschool has, for the most part, been appropriately aligned. His BGCD classroom used BPS curricula. Once in the BPS system, Marco is now benefiting from a new common K-5 literacy curriculum, which was developed as part of the Acceleration Agenda, BPS’ school reform plan. The K-5 reading curriculum is being implemented district-wide and all teachers receive professional development tailored to the curriculum in order to help ensure that children are reading and writing proficiently.

Through Countdown to Kindergarten and the knowledgeable Dorchester BGCD staff, Allyce also learned about Parent University, a BPS-wide family engagement program that provides parents and caregivers with information about their vital responsibility in shaping their children’s lives. Allyce participated in several workshops on child development, what children are learning in school, advocacy, parent leadership and effective parenting skills. Allyce talked with staff at the Parent University about how she could use BPS’s new Family Learning Guides to support Marco at home. These brief, user-friendly booklets helped her understand the expectations that are set for students in every grade. Allyce has begun to implement some of the “Learning at Home” tips in the guides, like having Marco, now in second grade, write every day by sending e-mails to his friends about his day. He is excited to be using his new skills, both in and out of school.



# CASE STUDIES

## Hartford, Connecticut

In 2004, the City of Hartford — working with Hartford Public Schools, a state commission and a community foundation — launched a strategic planning process that resulted in the Hartford Blueprint for Young Children. The Blueprint is a comprehensive, five-year plan to enable Hartford’s children to achieve success in school and in life. Guided by this plan, the city has made progress in aligning diverse programs and services for a more coordinated system of policymaking and investment for families with young children. This case study focuses on several innovations that have resulted from this multi-year effort:

- Institutional leadership for young children within city government:** The Mayor’s Cabinet for Young Children advises the mayor on all policy matters affecting young children and their families, and until recently the city’s Office for Young Children (OFYC) performed the day-to-day planning, coordination and implementation of early learning and family support policies and programs. OFYC also served as the interdisciplinary lead agent on the implementation of the Blueprint and advised the mayor on issues related to children from birth to age 8. In July 2011, the city consolidated leadership and services for families, children, youth and recreation into a single department to improve coordination, with a division on young children within this department.
- Greater alignment of early childhood curricula and assessments with state frameworks:** A *Connecting the Dots* publication, which helps local early education programs follow state early learning frameworks, clearly outlines requirements that local programs must meet to ensure that children are ready for school entry.
- An emerging initiative to facilitate smooth transitions to school:** The city, in partnership with the schools and the civic organization Achieve Hartford, is offering greater clarity about school registration, promoting earlier registration and working to transfer standard information from early education programs to kindergarten teachers to facilitate a seamless transition from preschool to kindergarten.

### CITY PROFILE

#### LEADERSHIP:

**Mayor:** Pedro E. Segarra (since June 2010)

**Superintendent:** Dr. Christina Kishimoto (appointed February 2011; Dr. Steven J. Adamowski served as superintendent between November 2006 and June 2011)

**Population:** 123,925

**Percent Population Below Age 5:** 7.6 percent

**Percent Population Ages 5-9:** 7 percent

**Poverty Rate:** 29.1 percent (Source: 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates)

**On-Time Graduation Rate:** 42 percent (Source: Hartford Public Schools)

### CITY DEMOGRAPHICS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

White	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Other
30.2%	37.2%	41.4%	2%	19.4%

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-08 American Community Survey. Margin of error +/-2.642)

Hartford Public Schools serves more than 21,000 students, 14 percent of whom are English Language Learners. The public schools offer parents an intra-district choice system of theme-based and neighborhood schools, with a nine-member board (five of whom are appointed by the mayor) responsible for selecting the superintendent of schools.

(Source: Hartford Public Schools)

- **Parent engagement and support through the city and school system:** A partnership between the Connecticut Commission on Children and the City of Hartford has helped leverage state and local funding for a Family Civics Initiative, including parent leadership training institutes and professional development for family support workers. In addition, the Hartford Public Schools Welcome Center reaches out to all parents in the community to promote healthy child development, helps parents get more involved in their children's education and serves as a resource when parents or students face challenges related to school.
- **Data sharing through an Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) pilot:** Already being utilized for older youth, Hartford is designing an ETO system developed by Social Solutions to share child and family outcomes data among early childhood providers, family support centers, home visiting program providers and schools to better meet the needs of young children and families.

Since he was sworn into office in June 2010, Mayor Pedro E. Segarra has exercised high-level leadership for early childhood education in the city. Under his leadership, Hartford is developing a second Blueprint to guide the city's work for the next five years and elevating the city's work on behalf of young children as a critical part of the full educational pipeline.

Results for children attending Hartford Public Schools continue to improve. According to a November 2010 report on the state of the schools by former Superintendent Steven Adamowski, student performance on state standardized tests improved for the third consecutive year in 2010, with average third grade reading scores up by 8 percent — the largest improvement since the inception of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test. Furthermore, test scores in mathematics rose for every grade level in the public schools. Overall, Hartford students' academic achievement as measured by state test scores improved at more than double the rate of the rest of Connecticut in 2010, and the number of schools testing at the highest achievement category doubled, from five to 10.

## Historical Context

Hartford's investment in early childhood education has increased significantly over the past two decades. Both the city (through the Department of Health and Human Services' City Day Care program) and Hartford Public Schools (through its "lower kindergarten" Pre-K program and elementary schools) have been serving young children and families for more than 50 years. In 1997, Hartford became one of 14 initial communities funded by the newly created School Readiness Program in Connecticut (see State Context).

Hartford took this work to a new level in 2004, when then-Mayor Eddie Perez asked the Hartford Public Schools, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Connecticut Commission on Children to develop a citywide system to promote the healthy growth and development of young children and families. In doing so, he prompted the creation of a team to strengthen and coordinate existing policies, programs and services for Hartford's children ages birth to 8.

This team discovered a fragmented system of public and private early childhood programs and policies. Many essential ingredients were missing, including visible leadership, adequate resources, a clear strategy for distributing available funds, alignment between early education and the schools and the ability to track student outcomes. In May 2005, after seven months of work, the team crafted the Hartford Blueprint for Young Children, recommending a significantly changed organizational leadership structure for the city to drive implementation of the plan.

Later that year, the Blueprint became reality: the mayor established a Cabinet for Young Children and a Mayor's Office for Young Children, which began working on the plan's recommendations. By 2007, the office was administering more than \$10 million in school readiness funds for 1,412 child care slots for young children, had released its first Progress Report on Young Children and held its first Early Childhood Conference with more than 500 early childhood professionals in attendance. In the summer of 2011, the Office for Young Children became part of a consolidated Hartford Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation, which seeks greater coordination of services for all young people and their families.

Since his inauguration in June 2010, Mayor Pedro E. Segarra has made a strong commitment to improving early childhood education. His immediate support for the Office for Young Children (OFYC) and the original Blueprint reflect his background in social work and early childhood education as a young professional. Mayor Segarra sees these efforts as critical to one of his four key goals for Hartford: creating jobs and improving the quality of education for the city's children and adults, recognizing the critical importance of early education to long-term student success and the city's ability to attract businesses.

Local leaders are now developing a second Blueprint to guide changes to the early childhood system in Hartford over the next five years. This new plan will place greater emphasis on the full birth through age 8 spectrum, community participation, family engagement and access to health care, among other building blocks for early childhood success. Working in concert with national experts in higher education, state officials and local residents, the new document will promote cutting-edge best practices for the field.

## STATE CONTEXT

The State of Connecticut's School Readiness Program (SRP) provides funding for early childhood programming. According to the Connecticut State Department of Education's School Readiness 2011 report, Hartford received \$11.4 million in SRP funds in fiscal year 2011 to provide preschool programming for 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds who have not yet started kindergarten. Jointly funded by the Connecticut Departments of Education and Social Services, SRP is designed to significantly increase the number of full-day, full-year spaces in high-quality early learning programs to better meet the needs of all families, particularly those with financial need. SRP is also designed to spread the costs for school readiness programs among the state, communities and families.

The Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet, state agency partners and the national Data Quality Campaign are working to design and implement a Connecticut Early Childhood Information System (ECIS). The state has also been developing and implementing different components of a statewide longitudinal data system for K-12 schools since 2006. The state Department of Education produced the Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF), a curriculum-embedded tool for assessing 3- and 4-year-old children in preschool classrooms. Likewise, the Preschool Curriculum Framework (PCF) specifically delineates what skills children must attain by the end of preschool in order to be ready for kindergarten.

## Promoting Educational Alignment for Young Children in Hartford

In developing the first Hartford Blueprint for Young Children, the city and its partners sought to articulate the building blocks of a comprehensive early childhood framework, create organizational leadership and capacity within the city to implement the Blueprint and engage key stakeholders in the process. This effort was designed to be outcomes-focused, with accountability toward short- and long-term targets. The Blueprint also focused on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of programs by consolidating city and school services for young children where appropriate.

The Blueprint set forth six interrelated building blocks for a comprehensive continuum of early childhood services and programs for all of the city’s children from birth to age 8, including:

1. Newborn screenings and home visiting for families;
2. Neighborhood-based family supports;
3. Child care and early childhood education;
4. Transition from preschool to kindergarten;
5. Educational excellence and school success in the early grades; and
6. Universal access to and use of primary health care.

The 2005 Blueprint was the first comprehensive plan of its kind for any municipality in the state. Division of Young Children staff are currently updating the Blueprint to craft an equally valuable plan of action for the next five years.

This case study examines some of the innovative initiatives that have been developed during the implementation of this plan, representing key components of an educational alignment strategy for young children:

- Partnerships and Governance Structures
- Alignment of Curricula and Assessments
- Programs to Facilitate Smooth Transitions to School
- Family Civic Engagement
- Communication and Data Sharing

## Partnerships and Governance Structures

The mayor, his Cabinet for Young Children, and the Office for Young Children — recently reorganized as the Young Children Division within the Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation, but hereafter referred to as OFYC in this case study — play important leadership roles in coordinating services for Hartford families and children. They help develop common definitions and goals and initiate joint plans of action to implement a high-quality, aligned system with blended funding from a variety of sources. OFYC is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the policies recommended by the Cabinet.

### *The Mayor’s Cabinet for Young Children*

The Mayor’s Cabinet for Young Children, which meets six times each year, produces high-level policy recommendations for the mayor and OFYC and oversees citywide fiscal allocations for programs that serve young children. Members of the Cabinet are appointed by the mayor and represent the city, schools, medical professionals, parents, community-based organizations, higher education institutions, philanthropic organizations, state-level officials and the business community. The Cabinet also fulfills the state-required School Readiness Council function in Hartford.

### *Hartford’s Office for Young Children*

With a goal of improving the availability, affordability and accessibility of high-quality early care and education for Hartford families with young children, OFYC provides direct support to 49 preschool sites with state school readiness dollars and assists with monitoring for compliance. OFYC also collects and analyzes data and young children and offers professional development focused on the use of quality assessment, planning, instruction and curriculum.



Since 2008, the office has administered and operated seven early learning centers that were formerly operated as day care centers by the city's Department of Health and Human Services. The change in name from day care centers to early learning centers reflects a new emphasis on professionalism, best practices grounded in current research and child-focused outcomes at each site. Under OFYC, these centers have been recognized as exemplary workplaces for professional educators, in which children and families participate in learning experiences guided by robust curricula, standards, assessments and outcomes.

An Early Childhood Provider Network composed of approximately 50 early care and education professionals meets monthly under the auspices of OFYC to strengthen coordination among center-based programs and promote collective problem-solving. OFYC also convenes a separate Family Support Network made up of professionals in 16 local family support centers and a Home Visiting Network, which works to promote collaborative endeavors and increase awareness of existing services.

OFYC provides staff support to task forces composed of diverse, volunteer stakeholders (e.g., school administrators and teachers, parents, health care professionals, social service agencies, child protective services, home visiting programs, early care and education providers, higher education institutions and professional development consultants). These groups provide strategic advice on implementation of each of the six Blueprint building blocks and suggest additional programmatic opportunities. In order to ensure effective outreach to the broader community, OFYC task forces convene numerous community forums to ensure that their work reflects local priorities.

Due to its tangible progress toward fulfilling the vision outlined in the Blueprint, OFYC was established as a bona fide city department, separate from the mayor's office, in 2009. While the move solidified the city's agenda for young children, it also placed OFYC in direct competition with other city departments, which are subject to the priorities of the mayor and city council during budgeting processes. However, OFYC benefits from sizeable state and philanthropic funding awards and manages its funds efficiently, providing high-quality services with less than 5 percent of the city's general funds.



Public accountability, with a keen focus on quality of life outcomes, is an important function of OFYC, which has documented a snapshot of Hartford's early childhood landscape in its *Progress Report for Young Children in Hartford*, and major achievements in its *Our Accomplishments* report.

As part of its mission of uniting Hartford's early childhood programs in a cohesive system, OFYC has engaged key stakeholders in results-based accountability training. The training has helped these individuals reach consensus on citywide quality of life indicators on which the allocation of financial resources and the development of collective strategies and measures of progress will be based. Hartford early childhood leaders are focused on the following six population indicators:

- Increase the percentage of kindergarten children who enter school with a high-quality preschool experience.
- Increase the percentage of third-grade students who perform at or above grade level on the CMT.
- Increase the percentage of pregnant women receiving adequate prenatal care.
- Decrease the percentage of substantiated child abuse and neglect cases.
- Increase the percentage of children receiving adequate well-child health care visits.
- Increase the percentage of parents of young children receiving formal parenting education.

## Alignment of Curriculum and Assessments

Key leaders in Hartford recognized that when curriculum objectives and research-based instructional practices are aligned with established state standards, everyone — young children, students, teachers, parents, administrators, policymakers and school board members — has a uniform method for supporting and measuring progress. Stakeholders working to promote quality early care and education and successful transitions to school took note of the need to collect data that proves the effectiveness of preschool and guides kindergarten instruction.

When OFYC leaders began developing a common child report card based on state standards to bridge the early childhood system and the public school system, they quickly realized that preschool

administrators and teachers knew little about the key state frameworks despite a state requirement that school readiness programs align instruction with state standards. As a result, the curricula objectives and assessment practices implemented in individual programs were not appropriately linked to either the Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF) or the Preschool Curriculum Framework (PCF).

In response, OFYC developed a citywide professional development system designed to



promote a full understanding of the PCF and PAF and strengthen the use of effective instructional practices (e.g., Cycles of Intentional Teaching) as well as research-based interventions (e.g., Recognition and Response). OFYC collaborated with the Capitol Region Education Council to implement these professional development initiatives — including the OFYC Instructional Leaders Institute and an OFYC Administrators Forum — over the course of three years. Each group meets on a monthly basis and is composed of approximately 25 early care and education administrators representing school readiness, child care and Head Start programs.

These professional development activities contributed to the development of a new OFYC resource in 2010, entitled, *Connecting the Dots of Teaching & Learning: An Alignment Between the CT Pre-school Curriculum & Assessment Frameworks to Early Childhood Curricula Objectives*. This resource outlines the opportunities that comprehensive preschool programs should provide for children to enter kindergarten prepared for success. The document, which took about one year of consultation to prepare, helps existing programs assess and align their curriculum's objectives with state standards and use research-based instructional practices that promote higher order thinking skills. The Connecticut Department of Education offered input to OFYC throughout the process of developing the resource. The department also indicated that significant changes will not be made to the state standards for a minimum of two or three years, allowing OFYC to link the document with its complementary professional development activities for a sustained period of time.

The *Connecting the Dots* document describes all five of the curricula implemented in various preschool programs in Hartford as well as two other assessment systems that correspond to state PAF standards. The document also highlights instances where particular curricula objectives do not align with a state standard, thereby drawing attention to areas where programs can substitute instructional opportunities that address that standard.

*Connecting the Dots* was carefully designed to provide teachers with the tools they need to understand, identify and achieve developmentally appropriate learning gains for children in their classrooms. For example, the document outlines what specific learning opportunities must be offered in order to meet developmental goals, and then illustrates what skills or behaviors children are expected to develop when offered these opportunities. *Connecting the Dots* also addresses the needs of professionals at different levels of sophistication by carefully organizing the sometimes overwhelming number of standards so that those most critical to kindergarten entry are clearly highlighted.

With the new document in place, OFYC is on the verge of being able to report child progress across the city, using a reporting tool that will display the number of children with either emerging skills in a particular benchmark or mastery of those skills. Further, through extensive professional development focused on state standards and best practices, the instructional methods that teachers use in preschool classrooms are more intentionally aligned with what will be required of students in grades K-3. By providing a mechanism to report child outcomes, *Connecting the Dots* has increased accountability and has empowered preschool teachers by lending the field more credibility. In addition, institutions of higher education and early childhood consultants throughout the state are using the document for training purposes in child development coursework, and other municipalities have purchased the resource to begin thinking about alignment in their own communities.

The Connecticut Department of Education has used the Common Core State Standards since July 2010 to design rigorous K-12 mathematics and English language arts curricula. Developed after the state's adoption of the Common Core State Standards, *Connecting the Dots* aligns early childhood curricula and assessments with standards and curricula in Hartford Public Schools K-3 classes and with the Common Core State Standards, which 43 states and U.S. territories have adopted.

## Programs to Facilitate Smooth Transitions to School

The transition to kindergarten is significant for both children and parents. Traditional public school settings vary significantly from preschool, center-based child care or home environments, and require parents to be more informed and involved in their child's education. Hartford has implemented transitional practices that support young children and families as they begin their K-12 education, including convening public forums, providing informational materials, arranging visits to schools for families and improving school registration procedures.

One of the six building blocks of the Blueprint focuses on the transition from preschool to kindergarten. In 2006, only 40 percent of Hartford children were registered for kindergarten before the first day of school. In response, an OFYC Transition Task Force issued recommendations that include:

- establishing and maintaining a comprehensive community and parent-centered engagement strategy;
- developing agreement among center-based early childhood education providers and the Hartford Public Schools to use a common set of measures to assess each preschool student's progress as the child nears kindergarten entry; and
- investigating the feasibility of a citywide, individualized "pre-enrollment exchange" initiative that would facilitate a personal exchange of information prior to the start of school involving the family of the new kindergartener, the preschool program from which the child is transitioning, and the receiving school administrator and kindergarten teacher.

Due to changes in public school leadership and funding constraints, OFYC has not been able to im-



plement all of the recommendations. However, with guidance from the OFYC Transition Task Force, extensive community input and financial support from philanthropic and state Quality Enhancement funds, OFYC has made significant progress in developing a uniform, citywide system for improving transitions to kindergarten.

In order to ensure maximum community engagement, OFYC sponsored 12 public forums between April and June 2006 in three elementary schools located in various parts of the city. The forums elicited input from preschool teachers, principals, early care and education directors, kindergarten teachers and parents about ways to improve the kindergarten transition process for Hartford children. Approximately 120 parents, community residents, teachers and other stakeholders participated in each session, leading to several recommendations for better preparing children to enter kindergarten.

### *School Readiness Brochure*

Forum participants agreed that parents of young children and preschool teachers require a better understanding of the skills and knowledge the Hartford Public Schools expect kindergartners to attain in order to successfully enter kindergarten. Session attendees provided feedback that helped Hartford Public Schools leaders finalize a colorful and easy-to-read brochure entitled *Preparing for Kindergarten*. All preschool professionals now provide this brochure to parents of children entering kindergarten at least one year prior to the start of school. The brochure informs parents that over the course of the year, preschool teachers and parents will partner to provide instructional activities that will help prepare their children for kindergarten.

### *Assessments of Rising Kindergarteners*

Preschool and kindergarten teachers appreciated the opportunity to talk with each other and learn more about each other's work at the forums, thereby facilitating greater mutual respect for one another. Preschool teachers, who take great pride in the information they gather to assess enrolled children, expressed frustration with kindergarten teachers who did not look at the information and therefore felt kindergarten teachers did not value their work. Kindergarten teachers expressed a strong interest in reviewing such information, but reported that they typically received it after the start of school and that information varied from program to program, was too voluminous and was not easy to understand.

With a heightened understanding of each other's work demands and conditions, forum participants recommended creation of a uniform, brief Child Report Card completed by preschool programs and forwarded to elementary school principals and kindergarten teachers toward the end of the school year prior to kindergarten entry. The *Connecting the Dots* document will help ensure that all preschool programs have a common understanding of the child development elements included on the Child Report Card.

### *Early Registration Initiative*

Another common theme identified throughout the forum sessions was the challenge of getting families to register their children for kindergarten or submit lottery applications in the spring so that the school district, elementary schools and teachers could better plan for their arrival.

The citywide lottery school choice program initiated by Hartford Public Schools added new complications to the registration process. Under this system, parents select schools for their children to attend, a change from the previous arrangement in which a family's residence dictated the neighborhood school their children would attend. However, Hartford Public Schools made this dramatic change abruptly in the midst of the 2009-10 school year. The new kindergarten registration process required parents of entering kindergarten children enrolled in community-based preschool programs

to submit a lottery application. Since many Hartford parents were in the habit of waiting until the first day of school to register their children, the requirement to submit kindergarten applications approximately six months prior to the start of school left many children unregistered and without a space in their neighborhood school.

OFYC immediately responded by convening a School Choice and Magnet School Fair in collaboration with the Hartford Public Schools and the Regional Magnet School Office. However, this too created some confusion because the Hartford Public Schools and the magnet schools required separate applications. Parents interested in a magnet school were also required to complete a choice school application in order to secure a place for their child in a public school should they not be chosen by the magnet school lottery. OFYC also quickly organized numerous meetings with community-based preschool providers in order to help them understand the new process and convey accurate information to parents. Most parents of preschool children who would be entering kindergarten were able to submit applications due to the proactive work of their preschool providers, but many parents of children not enrolled in preschool were left in the dark.

Over the course of several years, the new kindergarten registration process has become more familiar to parents. In addition, with the appointment of a new superintendent coupled with extensive PCF/PAF professional development trainings, OFYC is now poised to reinstate its transition to kindergarten system. Such a system will enable parents and entering children to visit their designated schools well before the start of school. Principals and teachers will intentionally assign children to diverse learning classrooms best suited to their needs, and effective instruction can begin on the first day of school.

## Family Civic Engagement

The Hartford Family Civics Initiative (FCI), a collaboration between OFYC and the Connecticut Commission on Children, is designed to more closely align state and city resources to improve the health of young children and their families and to reduce the quality of life gap between Hartford and the rest of the state. OFYC and the Commission are committed to ensuring that parents and other caregivers have opportunities to develop the knowledge and leadership skills to be essential partners in formulating policy, allocating resources and implementing programs that address the well-being of their families.

Within OFYC, the initiative comprises three strategic areas:

- A continuum of opportunities for parent engagement, education and leadership development such as the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), People Empowering People (PEP) and Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parent SEE).
- A unified professional development plan for the staff of family-serving agencies, with an emphasis on supporting families' self-reliance and interdependence with the community. The Family Development Credential Training Program is an important component of this plan.
- A family civics database that benchmarks levels of parent leadership and advocacy activities and professional development of family support staff, and measures the impact of these efforts on child development outcomes.

FCI addresses the second Blueprint building block of neighborhood-based family support. OFYC formed and convened a Family Support Network (FSN) Task Force composed of residents, early childhood and family support providers, Hartford Public Schools Welcome Center staff and mental health professionals who lead efforts to ensure that needed support services are available for families with young children.



Using a results-based accountability framework, the FSN Task Force reached consensus on what they considered the single-most important indicator for supporting parents: increasing the percentage of Hartford’s parents of young children who receive formal parenting education, which was defined as “programs, services and resources designed to increase parents’ and caregivers’ knowledge of effective child-rearing practices for keeping their children safe, healthy and prepared to achieve early success.” They also agreed on three strategies for achieving this result: standardizing parenting education curricula, supporting the professional development of family-serving staff and establishing assessment tools for tracking progress.

An in-depth survey of Hartford’s 16 leading providers of services to families resulted in the publication of *The Landscape of Formal Parenting Education Resources in Hartford*, a comprehensive document designed to increase coordination and effective referrals among providers and help parents access services in convenient locations. In May 2010, the document was presented to the community at a forum for participating service providers. OFYC also trained parent ambassadors who possessed knowledge of the neighborhoods to distribute the *Landscape* report and *Parents Guide* (printed in both English and Spanish) to neighborhood organizations and to individual parents at neighborhood gatherings.

### *Professional Development for Family-Serving Staff*

Beginning in June 2011, each of the organizations profiled in the *Landscape* report had the opportunity to participate in OFYC’s professional development program for family support staff. Empowerment Skills for Family Workers is an 80-hour, strengths-based professional development model used in 18 states.

The goal of the training is for family service workers to develop the competencies necessary to be effective change agents in their work with families and in collegial relationships with each other. As family workers make a paradigm shift to empowerment-based family development, they engage in a learning process that enables them to partner with families more effectively. A core premise of the training is that a family support worker’s respect for a family’s right to make choices and determine

what is in the best interest of their children is a critical ingredient in a parent's ability to be a leader within his or her family and community. Developed by Cornell University in the 1990s, the Family Development Credential Curriculum includes:

- the core principles of family development;
- helping families develop a sustainable route to healthy self-reliance;
- communicating with both skill and compassion;
- the importance of balance and self-care in the family support worker's life;
- diversity, language and cross-cultural competence;
- guiding a family's access to specialized services;
- making effective home visits;
- facilitating family conferences, support groups and family meetings; and
- recognizing the challenges and rewards of effective collaboration.

### *The Hartford Public Schools Welcome Center*

The Hartford Board of Education and the Hartford Public Schools superintendent seek to foster parent engagement throughout the school year. The district's parent engagement policy encourages regular, two-way communication with parents about student academic achievement and other school activities. An illustration of this commitment is the Hartford Public Schools Welcome Center established by the superintendent in 2007 and subsequently governed by the school board's Constituent Services Policy that was adopted in April 2008.

The Welcome Center is the entryway for all constituents — families, school staff, community organizations, governmental agencies — to access information regarding school system processes, policies and procedures and to provide mediation and conflict resolution services for concerns and complaints. The Welcome Center structure provides a friendly and professional environment where families are treated with respect and individual attention. The Welcome Center has become parents' first resource for school registration, vaccinations, uniforms, transportation and providing feedback to administrators.

The Welcome Center does not just serve current HPS students; the Welcome Center director also reaches out to pregnant women in the community to promote healthy births and offer parents of young children ideas about preparing their children for school, such as tracking a child's growing vocabulary and helping them continue to add new words. The director of OFYC and the director of family services at The Welcome Center also collaborate on a number of initiatives to connect parents in early education centers with key information about neighborhood schools and what is expected of parents and their children once they enter school. These two leaders utilize the Welcome Center's parent tracker system to encourage school attendance and heighten the accountability of parents.

This partnership between OFYC and the Welcome Center also facilitated a review of the Parental Involvement Policy and 27 parent forums to inform families of curriculum standards and Connecticut Mastery Test guidelines and to support children's learning at each grade level and during the testing process.

Stronger connection with parents has allowed for small improvements that can have a large impact on families. After using the system and noticing high rates of absenteeism due to chronic illness, the Welcome Center recommended that schools provide asthma treatments on site. When the Welcome Center staff learned from parents and students that students' attendance often suffers because they



are unable to wake up on time in the morning, they approached Timex Group, USA, which donated 8,000 watches to the Hartford Public Schools, all pre-programmed to sound a 6:00 a.m. alarm.

### *Parent Leadership and Advocacy*

In many communities, parents are an untapped voice when children's issues are discussed. Strategies to engage parents can help them advocate for all children in the community, including their own. Through specialized leadership training, parents build the skills they need to be actively engaged in community and civic affairs. Parents who are more knowledgeable and confident about engaging in public matters can become strong partners in improving schools and neighborhoods.

OFYC has sponsored two Parent Leadership Training Institutes (PLTI), including one for 15 parent/community leaders in 2010. The 16 participants who graduated in June 2011 will join the class of 2010 to establish Hartford's PLTI Alumni Association, which will recruit future participants and harness the collective power of parent/community leadership in the city.

PLTI is a 20-week, evidence-based curriculum developed by the Connecticut Commission on Children in the 1990s. Launched with a retreat to develop group trust and communication, the program integrates child development leadership and democracy skills into a parent curriculum. During the second half of the class, participants apply the civic skills they are discussing in class through real, self-designed advocacy projects. The PLTI curriculum includes:

- understanding personal history and its impact on perceptions of leadership;
- thriving and working with diversity;
- assessing and defining problems;
- utilizing the media;
- speaking publicly;
- utilizing benchmarks and outcome measures;
- forming useful coalitions and building community;
- understanding policy and program budgets; and
- becoming familiar with city, state and federal law.

Through the Hartford Public Schools Welcome Center, parents also have access to resources and materials that help them be active partners in supporting their children's education and, in some cases, serve as a source of expertise and support for municipal or school-led projects.

While Hartford has not yet conducted an evaluation of the impact of its PLTI program, statewide results indicate that the model does make a difference in engaging parents as advocates for children. All participants engage in a community project as part of the training, ranging from the creation of an open gym program for preschool children to helping improve a school website. Pre- and post-training surveys also show that half of PLTI alumni increased their service as community or parent representatives to advisory committees and 92 percent stated that "when problems arise within my community, I do something about them."

## Communication and Data Sharing

Building on a successful initiative for sharing data on older youth in Hartford, OFYC and Metro Hartford Information Services (MHIS) are working to modify Social Solutions' Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) software to gather citywide information on selected early childhood indicators and

demographics. This initiative will consist of three phases in which the city will extend its data system to various groups: first to Hartford early care and education programs; then to its Family Support Centers; and finally to its home visiting providers. Once all partners are using a common data system, cross-agency data sharing will be possible.

OFYC has conducted a successful pilot project for phase one of its plans to connect early care and education programs with the ETO system. OFYC will implement this phase citywide following training and technical assistance for all providers, who are eager to use the new system. Early childhood providers and other community stakeholders worked together to identify and define the data elements and indicators that will be tracked and measured.

The rollout of the data collection system for early childhood providers will begin with school readiness programs and sites funded by the OFYC and the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS), and will then expand to include Head Start and remaining DSS-funded providers. Currently, the MHIS data programmer and the OFYC assistant director are meeting with individual programs to tailor the software to their specific needs. Upon completion, the MHIS data programmer will repeat the same process with Family Support Center representatives and home visiting program providers.

To date, the system assigns unique identifiers to each child and captures:

- Child and family demographics;
- Child health/medical and insurance information;
- Family engagement activities;
- Child attendance (frequency and intensity);
- Program funding sources and slot utilization rates;
- Accreditation information;
- Child developmental and educational progress over time;
- Child and family mobility among programs;
- Staff credentials and qualifications, attendance and mobility rates;
- Referral activity to other related and family support services;
- Family income and fee determination information;
- Monthly school readiness and semi-annual Pre-Kindergarten Information System (PKIS) reports; and
- Child and Adult Care Food Program information needed for reporting.

There is widespread consensus among providers that this system will improve the services they offer and help them document the outcomes of their work in a powerful way.

## Alignment in Action: A Fictional Portrait

*Though not all young children and families in Hartford take advantage of the available services, the city's many programs for young children are reaching a growing number of residents each year. Hartford's OFYC spearheaded an initiative to serve 638 more preschool children within its initial three-year operating period. The 2006 OFYC Family Fair drew a record attendance of nearly 1,600 participants. In 2008, OFYC held its first citywide Early Childhood Conference for 500 attendees. With its expanded reach, the City of Hartford is helping more families have positive, well-aligned experiences like the fictional Joan Hayes and her son Jerome described in this story.*



Jerome resides with his mother, Joan, in a North End neighborhood of Hartford, a few blocks from where his mother and her three brothers grew up in a single-parent household. The family matriarch, Ms. Aretha, never graduated from high school but had always conveyed her belief in education and fostered a love of reading in her children. Unfortunately, her two jobs kept her out of the house for many hours each day, and the negative influence of her daughter's peers grew over time. In 11th grade, Joan discovered that she was pregnant and dropped out of high school to care for Jerome.

When Joan became a new mother, she attended the Mayor's Family Fair for the first time. This year, Mayor Segarra's Family Fair at City Hall attracted many other families to a fun-filled yet educational event, where they learned about the programs and services available to families with young children and the benefits of registering early for kindergarten. Jerome especially enjoyed the jugglers and stilt

walkers while Joan learned about a computer training program at the library and received a backpack for her son. At the fair, Joan also discovered OFYC and was referred to a family support worker employed by an early care and education program. She did not know what to expect, but was very surprised both by the kindness of the woman on the phone and the availability of so many services that Joan desperately needed.

With one-on-one support and direction from the early care and education program staff, Joan enrolled her four-month-old son Jerome in the Women's League Child Development Infant and Toddler program. From the moment of enrollment, staff encouraged Joan to be actively involved in her child's education, even at four months old, by talking, singing and reading to him at home. They even helped Joan research her family tree and put together a collage with Jerome at the center.

At age 3, Jerome graduated to the preschool program at the Women's League, and Joan began attending the monthly Circle of Parents peer support sessions. Joan also enjoyed the parenting courses offered by the Women's League and began for the first time to think about the importance of a high-quality education for Jerome.

Jerome looked forward to attending the annual Family Fair, and by this time, Joan had become acquainted with some of the OFYC staff from their interactions over the previous two years. They encouraged Joan to enroll in Hartford's new Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) program and she jumped at the chance. At PLTI, she met like-minded parents who wanted to make the community a better place for their children.

Joan excelled through the 20-week sessions and emerged as a natural leader. For her graduation project, she worked with staff at the Hartford Public School Welcome Center to help get school registration information out to parents of entering kindergarteners. Joan also attended the city's transition to kindergarten forums sponsored by OFYC at Martin Luther King elementary school to provide feedback about ways to improve the transition process for Hartford children.

Jerome's teachers at the Women's League were highly supportive, and his love of reading and school blossomed through the Book Buddies program. In line with the curricular standards put in place by OFYC, teachers at the Women's League used the Big Math for Little Kids research program to ensure math success and to build Jerome's confidence and competency. Jerome's teachers now have access to materials and strategies that create learning opportunities and generate excitement in the classroom.

It was clear that his teachers benefited from the strong focus on professional development, which better prepared them to challenge Jerome to excel. Many of the teachers and staff were working toward additional degrees and certifications. Professionals in the field also attend the annual OFYC Early Childhood Conference, where Jerome's teachers, along with educators across the city, were able to attend workshops addressing the needs and interests of administrators, teachers, consultants and family support workers. Teachers frequently brought back specific strategies to help them create lessons plans and better reach children at different development stages.

As the end of the school year approached, and Jerome graduated from the Women's League Center, Ms. Aretha beamed with pride. Not only was her grandson excited about going to kindergarten, he was proficient in foundational math and reading skills. The Women's League Child Development Center and local elementary school held an open house to welcome Jerome to his new classroom. Finding Jerome's assigned kindergarten classroom was an easy task, because OFYC and Hartford Public Schools coordinated to ensure all incoming kindergarteners were assigned to specific schools and teachers before the end of the current school year. Joan appreciated the intentional effort to maintain communication among families, schools and early childhood providers. When Ms. Aretha, Joan and

Jerome met Jerome's new teacher, she already had all of his preschool testing data and evaluations in hand, and Joan felt confident that they could work together to ensure a successful kindergarten experience for Jerome.





## | CASE STUDIES

### San Antonio, Texas

San Antonio Mayor Julián Castro is passionate about strengthening the educational continuum from birth through college, viewing early childhood development as a critical foundation for the success of children, families and neighborhoods. Building on a long history of innovative work to support early childhood success in the city of San Antonio, Mayor Castro has launched Very Early Childhood Centers (VECCs) to collocate services for young children — including early education providers, public schools and key wraparound services — in two high-need neighborhoods: Eastside and Westside.

### Westside/Making Connections

Over the past decade, the city and the Edgewood Independent School District (EISD) have been key partners in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative in San Antonio's Westside. Through this effort, they are focusing not only on ensuring high-quality academic experiences and smooth transitions for the district's 11,000 students, but also providing wraparound support for their families. Major efforts related to educational alignment for young children include:

- **School commitment to healthy, well-prepared students:** EISD hired a specialist to focus on ensuring that all children are healthy and prepared for success in school. Some of the components of this work include enhanced professional development for early educators, expanded support for leveled guided reading and other research-based reading interventions, and individualized “reading success” plans that take into account academic, health and other pertinent data for every child in the early grades who is reading below grade level.
- **Access to high-quality early care and education in all settings:** Efforts include a new Head Start contract that includes the school system, professional development and substitute teachers for center-based and registered family child care homes, outreach to informal child care providers — family, friends and neighbors — and citywide training and supports.
- **Parent engagement and access to family supports:** Through the Families and Schools Together program, parents participate in an eight- to 10-week family support program, gaining expert advice and sharing parenting ideas with their peers. Family Service Association also provides health and developmental screening, works with families to make sure they have health insurance and a medical home, and connects parents to resources that support workforce participation and asset development.
- **Universal reviews prompting needed referrals:** The sharing of data about individual students enables school personnel to identify what supports are — or are not — available to families of children who are falling behind. As a result, there is increased communication among schools and family-serving entities and more targeted service referrals.

As a result, the number of children ready for school in the neighborhood increased from 25.9 percent in the 2005-06 school year to 38.7 percent in 2008-09, and participating schools saw improvements in grade-level reading in third grade in 2008-09.

## CITY PROFILE

### LEADERSHIP:

**Mayor:** Julián Castro (elected in May 2009)

**Superintendent:** There are 15 school districts within the city limits of San Antonio. The two school districts profiled here include:

San Antonio ISD (Superintendent Robert Durón, 55,327 students)

Edgewood ISD (Superintendent Jose A. Cervantes, 12,292 students)

**Population:** 1.3 million

**Percent Population Below Age 5:** 8.3 percent

**Percent Population Ages 5-9:** 7.5 percent

**Poverty Rate:** 14.5 percent

**On-Time Graduation Rate:** 62.9 percent (citywide)

## CITY DEMOGRAPHICS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

White	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Other
68.9%	6.6%	61.2%	2%	19.4%

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-8 American Community Survey. Margin of error +/-2.642)

The City of San Antonio operates under a council-manager form of government. The city is divided into 10 council districts designed to ensure equal population distribution across all districts. Each district elects one person to sit on the city council with the mayor elected on a citywide basis. All members of the city council, which includes the mayor, are elected to two-year terms; term-limits increased for members elected after November 2008 from two terms to four terms.

Each year, San Antonio educates more than 300,000 students across the 15 school districts within San Antonio, more than 30 private and charter schools and 31 higher education facilities. San Antonio high school graduation rates remain among the lowest in the country, and the city's urban high schools have dropout rates above 40 percent.

## Eastside/Promise Neighborhood

Through the Promise Neighborhood initiative on the Eastside, the city is partnering with United Way, the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD), the San Antonio Housing Authority and other key stakeholders to improve educational outcomes and revitalize the neighborhood. The Tynan Very Early Childhood Center (VECC), a new family-school-community hub, serves almost 260 children in school, at least 100 FFN and their parents and caregivers, offering:

- **Collocation of high-quality early childhood programs:** Head Start, Early Head Start and Pre-K programs at the Tynan VECC and across SAISD utilize a HighScope curriculum for consistent, developmentally appropriate early learning.
- **Tynan VECC as a professional development hub:** Early education teachers within the VECC hold at least a bachelor's degree, and the Tynan VECC has become a professional development hub, promoting initiatives such as the Model Classroom Project.
- **Parent and informal caregiver engagement and family support:** Families and informal caregivers have access to Play and Learn groups, health services, parenting classes and adult education at the Tynan VECC. The city, United Way and now through Promise Neighborhood, have committed to relocating additional wraparound services, including dental, health, library, financial education and parenting programs to this location, establishing Tynan as a comprehensive, community-linked campus.

In addition to the unique efforts in each of these communities, the VECCs in both locations help

leverage citywide programs and services for neighborhood residents, such as a \$450,000 general fund investment in professional development for early childhood caregivers; the Born to Read public awareness and literacy promotion campaign; and a well-developed initiative for family, friend and neighbor (FFN) caregivers, including an annual FFN Training Institute, and community-based Play and Learn groups.



## Historical Context

In 1988, the City of San Antonio, area school districts, colleges and universities, San Antonio-based corporations and key community organizations such as Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) and Metro Alliance joined together to create the San Antonio Education Partnership to address the issues of low high school graduation numbers and low performance rates of at-risk students in San Antonio. COPS and Metro Alliance subsequently led the charge for city funding of afterschool programming, and the city remains a primary funder of out-of-school time providers in San Antonio, allocating more than \$3 million annually from the general fund to the After School Challenge program, which primarily serves low-income elementary school students.

In 1999, the city sought to reframe its disparate early childhood, college scholarship and workforce training efforts as a unified economic development strategy. The “Better Jobs Campaign” focused on improving the skills and quality of San Antonio’s labor force. The initiative outlined both short- and long-term workforce development needs by providing training to the existing workforce and better preparing the future workforce by enhancing educational opportunities, particularly during early childhood. The vision was to ensure that:

- All children have access to high-quality early childhood education;
- Every student graduates with the skills necessary to secure a job;
- Business and education coordinate to prepare students for their careers; and
- The workforce is well-trained and highly educated, with the city attracting higher-level and higher-paying jobs.

The Better Jobs Campaign’s early childhood task force brought together key partners, including the local workforce board, United Way, University of Texas, San Antonio school districts, KLRN-TV, a corporate collaborative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and community-based organizations. This task force, with staff leadership from the city’s Department of Community Initiatives, developed school readiness guidelines, sought to facilitate successful transitions to school, increased access to professional development for child care professionals, improved the quality of child care environments and launched a successful Early ON media campaign to help educate new parents and other community members about the importance of supporting child development and offer resources to help them do this. A Better Jobs sales tax initiative was proposed but due to technicalities was not placed on the ballot.

### HEAD START, CHILD CARE & PRE-K

For decades, the City of San Antonio has been the Head Start grantee and has also managed local spending of federal Child Care Development Block Grant dollars. Eight contracted agencies provide Head Start services to 6,789 children in 14 school districts in the city of San Antonio and Bexar County. Of these eight agencies, three school districts provide the educational components of Head Start programming, while the additional community-based providers manage the parent engagement and family support elements.

Many of the Head Start Centers are co-located with state-funded Pre-K programs. The Head Start Program and school districts are working together to provide an integrated approach to early education by aligning curriculum, instructional techniques, assessment and other program services between both programs.

The collaboration between Head Start and state Pre-K programs assures full-day services for those children enrolled in both programs. Children enrolled in the Head Start Program on school district campuses are automatically eligible for the state Pre-K Program, which facilitates program planning and leveraging of funding for these families who are most at risk.

In 2006, then-Mayor Phil Hardberger held an Education Summit to craft an agenda across the educational pipeline from cradle to college. A key recommendation was the establishment of a P16 Council to collaborate across the many education agencies. The P16 Plus Council of Greater Bexar County was created in 2008 to improve and better align early childhood with the full educational pipeline.

Mayor Julián Castro campaigned on an explicit education agenda, and when he took office in May 2009, he immediately called for the establishment of a one-stop college access and advising center (Café College) and the first two Very Early Childhood Centers. Over six months culminating in March 2011, Mayor Castro convened SA2020, a visioning process that resulted in six shared community goals. Education emerged as the community's top priority, with a key education goal focused on achieving significant increases in kindergarten readiness so that 95 percent of third grade students read at grade level by 2020.

A re-emergent P16 Plus Council has committed to playing a leadership role in building a more integrated early education system, developing a citywide assessment of kindergarten readiness and helping establish stronger data systems and partnerships. The council will work closely with Mayor Castro's office, the City of San Antonio and United Way to lead the education implementation component of the newly established SA2020 entity to press for better alignment and reporting of kindergarten readiness across the 15 school districts located within San Antonio.

## STATE CONTEXT

The State of Texas has a Pre-K requirement stipulating that if a school district has 15 or more eligible children who are at least 4 years of age, it must provide a public Pre-K program, with funding coming through the state's Pre-K Early Start program. Every legislative session in recent years has expanded the number of Pre-K slots. As a result, Texas had the largest total enrollment of any state-funded Pre-K program in 2007-08, with most of San Antonio's urban districts offering full-day programs. However, many districts are contemplating reverting to a half-day program in response to anticipated drastic state budget cuts, which would be a significant setback for working families in the central core of San Antonio.

Texas also offers the Texas School Ready! Model (formerly known as the Texas Early Education Model), which promote partnerships among Pre-K, Head Start and child care providers to provide cost-effective programming for young children. Key areas for collaborative activities include professional development, evaluation, child progress monitoring and technical assistance.

Texas has also missed opportunities to receive federal support for education. Texas was one of a handful of states that refused to participate in the federal Race to the Top competition, and a standoff between Governor Rick Perry and U.S. Representative Lloyd Doggett about whether new federal funds could supplant existing state education commitments led to a withholding of \$830 million in federal funding.

## Promoting Educational Alignment for Young Children in San Antonio

Under Mayor Castro's leadership, San Antonio has launched a pilot project to develop Very Early Childhood Centers (VECCs), which provide services for children ages 0-5, serve as community resource and referral centers to the surrounding neighborhood, and ultimately strengthen the educational pipeline for young children. Working in partnership with San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD), Edgewood Independent School District (EISD) and other agencies, the city opened two VECCs in 2010. The mayor remains committed to expanding this model to other neighborhoods despite state budget constraints that have temporarily delayed these plans.

In each of these centers, the collocation of key programs and services are designed to test whether braided services in a poor community can increase child and family outcomes and promote revitalization. Each VECC will also work with other providers in the neighborhood on teacher training, quality standards, training for FFN caregivers and curriculum development. The model was developed collaboratively with input from numerous stakeholder groups, such as school districts, Head Start providers, nonprofits providing wraparound services, public libraries, United Way and a local university. One key finding that emerged from these stakeholder groups was that the early childhood providers would like to serve as a more coordinated “feeder system” into the K-12 public school system.

Through this comprehensive, place-based strategy, San Antonio is bringing together and building upon important citywide initiatives to promote early childhood success, such as:

- A citywide transition from one delegate Head Start agency to eight contracted agencies, with three school districts providing the educational component of Head Start. This change raised the percentage of Head Start teachers with at least a college degree from 10 percent to 100 percent;
- A \$450,000 general fund investment in professional development for early childhood caregivers;
- The Born to Read public awareness and literacy promotion campaign, launched by the San Antonio Public Library and the San Antonio Public Library Foundation in 2001, which sends every new mother home from the hospital with a book bag, a new bilingual board book, materials about child health and the importance of reading, a child’s bedroom door hanger listing key child development milestones and a library card application; and
- A well-developed initiative for FFN caregivers, including an annual FFN Training Institute and community-based Play and Learn groups.

This case study examines two specific neighborhood alignment efforts that have adopted the VECC model. Each is analyzed with an eye to the same framework categories employed in the citywide case studies and serves as a robust example of what alignment can look like at the neighborhood level.

## EDGEWOOD/MAKING CONNECTIONS

*Making Connections, a 10-year initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, was an intensive effort to improve outcomes for children living in disadvantaged neighborhoods by addressing the many factors that can contribute to family vulnerability, including low levels of literacy, educational attainment and job skills. Making Connections-San Antonio (MC-SA) focused on San Antonio’s predominantly Hispanic Westside corridor, one of the poorest neighborhoods in the country. MC-SA is led by the San Antonio Department of Community Initiatives (DCI), with Catholic Charities serving as the fiscal agent and Family Service Association as the service lead for children and families. MC-SA serves the Edgewood School District, with a particular focus on the Roosevelt, Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) and Loma Park schools, which together serve approximately 2,000 students.*

Beginning in 2001 with a series of neighborhood family summits in five sections of San Antonio’s Westside, MC-SA has worked to better align early learning opportunities, including public Pre-K, child care, afterschool programs and Head Start. Through this initiative, the Making Connections partners not only focus on ensuring high-quality education and smooth transitions for children, but also offer wraparound support for their families, addressing issues such as job placement, free tax preparation and easier access to information and needed services.

As a result, MC-SA reports significant improvements in kindergarten readiness. The number of

children ready for school increased from 25.9 percent in the 2005-06 school year to 38.7 percent in 2008-09. In addition, the participating schools saw improvements in grade-level reading in 2008-09 as assessed by the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in third grade. Roosevelt, LBJ and Loma Park were the top three performing elementary schools in meeting standard reading performance in the district, representing three of the four schools on the commended level. In Texas, students must pass the state's third-grade reading test to be considered proficient and pass to the fourth grade; those who score commended are considered to be reading above grade level. Combined, the schools outperformed the district average by 4.4 percent on the standard level and 6.5 percent on the commended level. Loma Park Elementary achieved a nine percentage point increase in the proportion of third grade students scoring at the commended level (from 20.8 percent in 2004-05 to 29.8 percent in 2007-08).

Key alignment strategies that have been implemented in Edgewood are discussed below:

## School Quality and Organization

EISD hired a Children are Healthy and Prepared to Succeed in School (CHAPSS) specialist to work with and support early childhood classrooms and to break down barriers and promote communication. This individual was charged with:

- serving as a liaison between the schools and the MC-SA partners;
- enhancing literacy, health and financial supports available to students and their families in EISD elementary schools;
- working to increase student access to school-based and out-of-school time programs and services to foster good health and bolster reading proficiency;
- helping to increase and better align EISD resources and policies to support key strategies in the targeted schools;
- utilizing data to support planning, implementation and improvement of district services for striving readers and their families; and
- facilitating peer learning among all elementary schools in the district.

Some significant steps were taken through the CHAPSS collaborative to improve school quality and support the success of young students. For example, school administrators and teachers in Roosevelt, LBJ and Loma Park receive professional development from Foundations, Inc., including instructional coaching and opportunities to learn from one another.

The Book Room program, started at Loma Park Elementary, offers shelves of both English and Spanish books at a range of reading levels from kindergarten through eighth grade. The Book Room fosters guided reading, expands the range of available leveled readers beyond what might be stocked in individual classrooms and allows students to participate in small group instruction tailored to their interests and abilities. Many of the books and activities available in the Book Room correspond to lessons being taught in the elementary classrooms.

In addition, students are offered enrichment programs in the early grades, during afterschool and summer learning programs -- from an Archdiocese Reading Mentoring Program to a dance program that boosts attendance and promotes physical wellness.

## Access to High-Quality Early Learning

The Edgewood/Making Connections community is working to improve the quality of all types of early learning settings. As noted above, the quality of Head Start services was improved significantly by a decision in recent years to switch subcontractors. In this process, the city made better use of different organizations' capabilities, allowing the schools to handle the educational component, while organizations like Family Service Association (FSA) oversee the family/community component of Head Start.

FSA works with child care centers to provide professional development and training to directors, teachers and caregivers by offering Child Development Associates and other higher education credentials and degrees. They also provide technical assistance and support on developing model classrooms for center-based programs and registered family child care homes, and train local residents to be substitute child care teachers through the ANGELS program.

There are a number of citywide efforts that reach children in family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care (see below). The CHAPSS initiative in Edgewood is working to increase the number of informal caregivers using a learning curriculum and expand access to and utilization of Play-N-Learn.



## Parent Engagement and Family Support

Families and Schools Together (FAST) has been strengthening families — particularly those whose children are at risk of school failure — and providing parent leadership training in San Antonio since 1993. Staffed by FSA, FAST provides support and education to parents to improve family functioning and communication, reduce stress and increase parental participation in the schools. FAST also helps build self-esteem in children by assisting them with homework, providing tutoring, engaging them in school activities, rewarding them for good attendance and grades and teaching them to mentor their peers.

Through FAST, parents participate in an eight- to 10-week family support program, gaining expert advice and sharing parenting ideas with their peers. Speakers work with families on establishing roles and family management rules for children, improving communication within the family, creating an environment that promotes learning and accessing school district and community resources. Through facilitated discussions, parents strategize about specific challenges and circumstances they experience within the family. In addition, this type of peer support creates opportunities to share cultural practices and provide emotional or practical help to each other.

Six of the 10 schools in the Edgewood District — including three with Head Start centers — participate in FAST, and the CHAPSS program seeks to increase the number of child care centers that feed into targeted schools' kindergarten classes that are using FAST. Each year, an average of 20 families participate at each site. Program-administered surveys reveal that parents who have been through the FAST program are more likely to volunteer at school, participate in the PTA, participate in parent-teacher meetings and principal coffee meetings and advocate for their children at school.

Parents who have completed the program move on to a two-year follow-up support group called FASTWORKS. Through FASTWORKS, parents continue to meet together on a monthly basis for a meal and family outing and to use leadership skills they developed in FAST. These parents also work together to continue serving the school or community through various mutually agreed-on projects, from establishing a community garden to advocating for school district policy changes. Parents are also encouraged to participate in Parents and Children Together (PACT), which offers educational workshops for parents and caregivers on child development.

In addition, FSA has a health initiative that works to ensure that children have health insurance, developmental screenings and a medical home. They partner with the San Antonio Food Bank to make sure they are reaching children most at risk of falling through the cracks. They also work with Christus Santa Rosa Hospital's pediatric mobile health unit to provide pediatric health screenings at schools and other neighborhood sites, and they seek to improve communication with Head Start to flag ongoing health service needs as children transition into kindergarten.

FSA and the Making Connections collaborative are taking a two-generation approach, providing asset-building and work and earnings supports for parents in the schools. Promotoras — trusted women from the community who have been trained to reach out to neighbors — have proven effective at educating and engaging residents on a variety of issues, including health, the Earned Income Tax Credit and related financial security strategies, child development and available community supports.

## Communication and Data Sharing

Through the Making Connections project, partners on the Westside have been working to improve communication and data sharing over the past six years. After deciding what population indicators they wanted to track and what performance measures would help them mark their progress, they began talking with the schools about sharing relevant data to understand which students were struggling and what services might benefit them. After roughly two years of discussion to work through privacy concerns, the strong leadership of the city's director of community initiatives and the school superintendent in the Edgewood district propelled the project forward to implementation.

Guided by a memorandum of agreement signed by the school district, the city, FSA and Catholic Charities, city and community providers share information with the school district, where it is stored and analyzed in the Pinnacle data system within the school district's firewall. In exchange, the school district provides referrals of children who are struggling and are not currently utilizing the services of these agencies.

## FAMILY, FRIEND AND NEIGHBOR INITIATIVE

Understanding that informal care by family, friends and neighbors (FFN caregivers) is the most common type of child care for low-income children under the age of 6 with working parents, San Antonio launched an initiative in 2000 to connect FFN caregivers to support and professional development opportunities that can help them prepare the children in their care for school.

A one-stop resource binder provides information on community resources available for FFN providers, and a resource library allows FFN caregivers to both access and share information with other participating members.

With support from the city and United Way, Family Services Association, KLRN (public television), San Antonio Children’s Museum and AVANCE host community-wide Play and Learn groups in various sites across the city. They also are piloting Shop-N-Learn, a program that seeks to integrate early learning while families shop. For example, the HEB regional grocery store chain will offer literacy centers in stores, put books in the hands of parents and provide a reading curriculum with rewards for caregivers.

Since 2006, the city has contracted with community-based “delegate agencies” in all 10 city council districts to host workshops for FFN providers. The following year, the city and its partners began hosting an annual FFN Training Institute for agency staff and FFN caregivers. Workshops cover topics such as fostering language and literacy development to addressing the needs of children with disabilities

To engage informal caregivers, community-based organizations conduct door-to-door outreach and distribute materials announcing the trainings in key public venues where families and providers frequently gather. Since the launch of the FFN initiative, the city has been able to provide training and support to 3,600 informal caregivers in the city.

This information sharing has been institutionalized and now happens through an individual case management process called the universal review system. The target schools have incorporated the use of individualized “student success plans” — with academic, health and other pertinent data for every child in the early grades who is reading below grade level — to make sure that all of the relevant school personnel (e.g., the principal, assistant principal, teacher, social worker, parent advocate and community schools personnel) recognize how they can help that child succeed in their early school experiences. These new relationships have also made it easier to work together toward the goal of ensuring that all children have the supports in and out of school that they need to succeed.

## EASTSIDE PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD

San Antonio’s Eastside, a cluster of contiguous neighborhoods just east of downtown, was the traditional African-American base of the community. In recent generations, the area has become more ethnically diverse, now containing a Hispanic majority with an increasing Mexican immigrant population. However, evidence of African-American culture remains strong. The neighborhood lies within the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) and contains five schools and the Tynan Early Childhood Center. Bowden, Pershing and Washington Elementary Schools, along with Wheatley Middle School, are considered low-performing and Sam Houston High School is a persistently lowest-achieving school with a dropout rate of 54.1 percent. More than 3,700 children and youth (0-18 years old) live in the area, and the five schools serve approximately 2,500 students.

The Eastside Promise Neighborhood project is based upon the premise that school and neighborhood revitalization are inextricably connected. Building on the city’s Eastside summits, in which residents expressed a powerful interest in making the community a safe, healthy place for children to grow up and prosper, this initiative seeks to create a seamless transition from Early Head Start through elementary school and beyond. An extensive parent engagement agenda and a commitment to rethinking the way educational services are delivered are key to this effort to improve student achievement. United Way leads the collaborative in partnership with entities such as the City of San Antonio,

SAISD, the San Antonio Housing Authority, CI:Now, City Year, P-16 Council and Family Service Association. SAISD Superintendent Robert Duron and leaders from the key partners serve on the advisory committee for the Eastside Promise Neighborhood, along with numerous residents, parents and principals. The desired result is to integrate disparate education and neighborhood revitalization efforts to create a neighborhood characterized by small, high-quality schools, engaged parent leaders and stable housing.

Key components of this effort related to young children and their families include:

## Parent Engagement and Support

What was once Tynan Elementary has been transformed into a VECC and a Family-School-Community Partnership hub. The Family-School-Community Partnership, pioneered with United Way funding in partnership with Presa Community Center and Family Service Association since 2006, includes parent engagement, leadership and resiliency training that is offered to strengthen and stabilize families and build enthusiasm for educational achievement. The city has relocated wraparound services, including dental, health, library, adult education, financial education and parenting programs to this location, establishing Tynan as a comprehensive community-linked campus.

Similar to the promotoras in the Westside (described above), parent engagement specialists housed in the schools are also working effectively in the Eastside. These specialists are parents who have been trained to reach out to other parents and connect them to needed services and advice, either at the school or through home visits.

FSA also offers the FAST program (described above) in the Eastside for parents of children in preschool and elementary school. A “Baby FAST” program targets young parents and their infants and toddlers (0-3), providing a more assertive coaching approach than in other FAST models and actively drawing fathers, grandparents and other caring adults into the process of supporting the child’s development.

The United Way has also directed additional investments to Tynan to position the VECC as a community nexus so that children not enrolled in early education will take advantage of additional educational opportunities, such as a proposed intensive kindergarten preparation program, and health services prior to kindergarten entry. For example, United Way expanded Play-N-Learn groups for parents and FFN caregivers at Tynan to bring more families into the center and encourage utilization of available services.

Understanding the importance of family economic security to child outcomes, Tynan also offers a set of workforce training opportunities for parents of the Tynan community. Parents can access job skills training, GED programs and computer skills training to improve their skills and gain new credentials. These classes also emphasize interview skills, recognizing that this has been a barrier for parents in their job searches. The city is also currently negotiating with a company that would train and certify parents to be Child Development Associates (CDAs), which could offer them opportunities to become early learning providers.

Finally, extensive outreach has been conducted to reduce the incidence of lead poisoning, a prevalent problem for young children in this community. Children’s medical records are examined for signs of lead poisoning and teachers also receive training to identify early signs in their students’ speech.



## Access to High-Quality Early Learning

Tynan Early Childhood Center provides Head Start, Early Head Start and Pre-K programs, as well as Play and Learn child development programming, for young children in the Eastside neighborhood.

The SAISD early learning programs have all adopted the interactive, discovery-based HighScope curriculum. This curriculum, based on the highly successful Perry Preschool Project, provides active, participatory learning, emphasizing the “plan-do-review” sequence in small group, large group and outdoor settings. The Tynan Early Childhood Center has also impacted the quality of early childhood opportunities throughout San Antonio. Mayor Castro is seeking to replicate the Tynan model in centers across the city and has dedicated city funding to reach this goal. In early 2012, the city released a request for proposals to create 16 additional new centers.



## Qualified Teachers and Administrators

SAISD was one of the first Texas school districts to take advantage of state Pre-K funding to improve school readiness and offset enrollment losses. Under contract with the city, SAISD now operates five federally funded Head Start centers, and additional Head Start students receive services at elementary schools, guaranteeing that Head Start participants have college-educated teachers. Moreover, all of SAISD’s Head Start and Pre-K teachers have been trained and certified in the HighScope curriculum.

The city hopes that the VECCs can become a hub for professional development of early childhood educators in the same part of the city as the centers, and possibly facilitate the adoption of high-quality curricula such as HighScope in neighboring centers. Head Start training and technical assistance funds support professional development in these centers.

The Eastside Promise Neighborhood Collaborative is also partnering with SAISD and others to expand professional development opportunities in the Promise Neighborhood. For example, SAISD is

looking into training teachers in the STEM curriculum (science, technology, engineering and math) for both early childhood and K-3 teachers. Increasing the availability of this type of resource will enhance teacher and administrator effectiveness and the use of evidence-based curricula such as the HighScope curriculum to all Eastside K-12 campuses and the Tynan Early Childhood Center.

Further, Promise Neighborhood plans to implement a Model Classroom Project, a learning community for early education caregivers to foster staff development, utilization of evidence-based practices and alignment of early education and elementary content for children ages 0 to 8.

Early childhood educators and K-3 teachers also participate in joint professional development sessions, which are designed to foster communication between the two groups. The first of these sessions took place in April 2010. These sessions lack an official agenda but are instead guided by the teachers to facilitate sharing of information and identify key strategies for working together. One outcome from these sessions was the decision to conduct similar sessions for school administrators. Teachers felt this was equally important as their own discussions in ensuring that personnel within the two systems gain a deeper understanding of each other's work.

## Data Sharing

As part of the Eastside Promise Neighborhood Initiative, stakeholders are working to facilitate seamless sharing and integration of information by building a platform that will allow all partners to contribute and access data. Working with SAISD and Community Information-NOW (CI-NOW), City of San Antonio, Promise Neighborhood and United Way are designing a data repository, which will start with early childhood programs and will extend the interface to all grade levels and adult interventions. The goal is to expand the system over time to providers of all levels of education to yield longitudinal, qualitative and quantitative data that will foster greater accountability. Data sharing will be designed not only to drive programming improvements in real time, but also to inform policy-making by the schools, the city and among partner organizations. The school district has expressed support for this effort, which will include appropriate safeguards for student privacy.

In addition, San Antonio seeks to link this data repository to an integrated data system that allows sharing of individual data among community partners co-located at all Promise Neighborhood schools. Such a system would help local partners efficiently assess, monitor and address family needs in the areas of housing, job training, social services and education and connect them to the Eastside Promise Neighborhood resources.

Finally, the city hopes to utilize the Results Scorecard provided through the Promise Neighborhoods Institute to present an accessible data dashboard that will allow it to regularly report results to the community.

## Looking Ahead

San Antonio is the nation's largest Hispanic majority city, a working class city that has achieved impressive gains in household income over the past two decades but sees that progress threatened by low educational levels. The city's college graduation rate is among the lowest in the country. Moreover, poverty is intensely concentrated in neighborhoods in which many adults have not had positive experiences with the school system.

The place-based strategies described above are being unveiled in tandem with coordinated, citywide, collaborative efforts to raise educational attainment. New citywide efforts to promote grade-level reading and educational alignment for young children include:

- San Antonio Reads, a partnership of San Antonio Youth Literacy, Literacy San Antonio and Rotary International focused on struggling second grade readers.
- Born to Read, a public awareness and literacy promotion campaign launched by the San Antonio Public Library and the San Antonio Public Library Foundation in 2001, which sends every new mother home from the hospital with various materials on literacy and child health and development.
- The Mayor's Summer Reading Program, a revitalized effort to engage all public school students in the libraries' summer reading program.
- Excel Beyond the Bell, a campaign to inform low-income parents about summer learning loss and the reading and enrichment opportunities that work against it.
- Enhanced opportunities for early education and out-of-school time providers to collaborate to provide a more seamless and consumer-friendly experience for parents.

Ideally, the deeper level of engagement and alignment in the Westside and Eastside neighborhoods will inform citywide and school district-wide policy changes. As successful, research-based interventions are introduced into the Very Early Childhood Centers, it will be possible to measure their suitability and scalability for other areas of San Antonio.

These lessons and promising practices will also inform Mayor Castro's Brainpower Initiative. Led by two local business leaders, the Brainpower Initiative Task Force is charged with determining what works in education, with a particular focus on early learning, dropout prevention and college readiness. In November 2012, Mayor Castro will seek approval by voters of a one-eighth cent sales tax increase to raise \$24 million annually for key components related to the Brainpower Initiative Task Force and relevant sections of the SA2020 plan.

## Alignment in Action: A Fictional Portrait

*The Children are Healthy and Prepared to Succeed in School (CHAPSS) initiative focuses primarily on Pre-K and K-3 students in three schools in the Edgewood ISD: Loma Park, LBJ and Roosevelt Elementary Schools. CHAPSS reaches most students at these schools to some extent. For example, 1,200 children received school supplies and a similar number attended a health fair. Because of limited resources, CHAPSS can only provide its most intensive services to a subset of the schools' population. At its most established site, Loma Park, CHAPSS provides the comprehensive continuum of services for about five students in each Pre-K to third grade class. Therefore, while our fictional story of Maria Santana is not representative of what CHAPSS does for every child, San Antonio is working to make Maria's experience more common for children and families in need.*



Maria Santana, age 7, lives with her parents, Carlos and Juanita, her 10-year-old brother, Rafael and her maternal grandmother, Elena. While she is bilingual, Maria grew up with Spanish as the primary language at home and throughout the predominantly Hispanic Edgewood community. Carlos works on construction projects throughout the city and Juanita works part-time at a local grocery store. Together Maria's parents earn approximately \$30,000 per year and the family lives in a small house that they rent. Neither of her parents has more than a high school education, but they both want to ensure that their children have better opportunities than they did.

When Maria and Rafael were young, their parents often heard about an Early ON School Readiness program on local television stations and saw messages on bus placards on the way to work. These announcements, delivered in their native language, stressed the importance of quality early education. The mayor and their city councilmember even talked about the importance of quality early education at a neighborhood gathering that the Santanas attended. The Santana family knew without a doubt that the key to a better life for their children was directly tied to quality educational opportunities.

During one of their weekly visits to the public library, Juanita flipped through the city's One-Stop Resource Binder. There she found information about a Play and Learn group taking place near their home in the Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Café at the Neighborhood Place-Edgewood. She brought her mother along and they both learned about child-centered activities that could support literacy development. While staff from Family Service Association provided child care, Juanita and Elena learned about developmentally appropriate practices and ways to teach the children through everyday household chores and interactions.

At the FFN Café, they learned about other interesting resources, such as a “Shop-N-Learn” workshop that provided her with strategies to teach Maria and her brother about letters, numbers and colors while they shopped in the grocery store. The family also received information about the Children Healthy and Prepared to Succeed in School (CHAPSS) program and got connected to the Stafford Early Childhood Center (ECC), a Head Start location close to her home.

At age 4, Maria enrolled in Head Start. Her teacher had received training from CHAPSS on the importance of comprehensive services in child care and encouraged Juanita to participate in a constituent program of Making Connections-San Antonio: Families and Schools Together (FAST).

Through FAST, Juanita was able to meet the parents of Maria's classmates. She received eight weeks of education on parenting and taking initiative in the community. With other parents, Juanita then led a multi-family effort at the formal conclusion of the FAST program to plant more trees around the neighborhood and school.

After she turned 5, Maria enrolled in kindergarten at her local elementary school, Loma Park. Her Head Start and elementary school were both located in Edgewood Independent School District, which facilitated the transition for Maria. Through the CHAPSS initiative, early education and afterschool program coordinators were working with school staff to promote better cross-system alignment.

When Maria was struggling with reading in first grade, her teacher worked to develop an individualized “reading success” plan for Maria. Maria received tutoring and mentoring by a high school senior fulfilling his high school's community service requirement, an arrangement that was negotiated through CHAPSS. Staff in the Loma Park Book Room also helped Maria with guided reading geared to her reading level and interests.

Maria received developmental health screenings through a pediatric mobile unit. Health professionals from Christus Santa Rosa Children's Hospital visited Loma Park to make regular health care checkups convenient for Maria and her family. At one particular screening, the nurse identified vision problems that were interfering with Maria's ability to read, and CHAPSS staff then helped her secure eyeglasses.

Every nine weeks, Maria's progress was evaluated through the district-wide Universal Review System. Her classroom teacher identified her as potentially at risk. Maria's family was then assigned a parent educator. A subsequent assessment included the parents' education, training and career desires; their asset and debt situation; and their children's school success plans. Ultimately, a multidisciplinary team — the teacher, principal, social worker and a neighborhood advocate through the *promotoras* program

— worked with Carlos and Juanita to create a developmental plan. When Elena was diagnosed with cancer, Maria found it hard to concentrate and CHAPSS connected the family to counseling services.

Through their interactions with city, school and Making Connections programs, Carlos and Juanita gained confidence, learned more about how to support their children's education and received needed guidance and support to improve the quality of life for their family. Most important, Maria has successfully transitioned into second grade and is excited to be reading at grade level.





## | CASE STUDIES

### San José, California

Through the leadership of San José Mayor Chuck Reed and Santa Clara County Office of Education Superintendent Charles Weis, Santa Clara County developed an Early Learning Master Plan. The Early Learning Master Plan provided the basis for San José 2020 (SJ2020), an initiative with one unifying standard of success: All students will test as proficient or advanced on grade-level state assessments. In working to close the achievement gap in San José by focusing on early learning, San José leaders have created a network of partnerships intent on significantly improving educational outcomes for young children.

This case study focuses on some key elements of these local efforts, including:

- **An Early Learning Master Plan implementation team:** Local stakeholders are mobilizing an advanced “system of systems” with two leadership groups focused on civic engagement and program development and six programmatic working teams addressing the early childhood workforce, quality, parent engagement and leadership, articulation and alignment, data management and facilities.
- **Access to quality early education, particularly for students with special needs:** The city’s Smart Start San José program helped construct or renovate early childhood spaces for nearly 7,000 children and has trained more than 450 family child care providers. First 5 Santa Clara launched the Power of Preschool (PoP) project, serving children in four high-need school districts, and manages the CARES program to reduce turnover among early educators through education and wage supports. Finally, the Inclusion Collaborative has been working to support families with special needs children by answering questions and offering referrals through a website and “warm line,” training library staff and early educators and creating a unified referral system.
- **A longitudinal analysis of school readiness and third grade success in Santa Clara County:** This research informs the efforts of early childhood and school leaders and helps motivate community support by demonstrating the link between school readiness gaps and large achievement gaps on third grade reading assessments.
- **Leveraging funding streams** to enhance services to children and families and to tap additional government and philanthropic funding sources.

Because San José contains 19 independent school districts, some of the most innovative efforts to improve educational alignment for young children have emerged at the school district or neighborhood level. The neighborhood-based Franklin-McKinley Children’s Initiative stands out as an especially promising approach modeled on the Harlem Children’s Zone. Funded with a large planning grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, it is designed to coordinate existing educational, health, social service, housing, neighborhood and economic development programs to ensure all children are prepared for kindergarten and that schools are ready to receive and serve young students.

According to a report on SJ2020 issued in early 2012, third grade scores in both English language arts and mathematics rose between 2007 and 2011 for students in San José. The achievement gap also narrowed between 2007 and 2011, from 43 percent to 37 percent in English language arts and from 41 percent to 32 percent in mathematics. During the same period, however, teacher reports indicated a decline in kindergarten readiness, with up to 40 percent of entering kindergarteners not considered

## CITY PROFILE

### LEADERSHIP:

**Mayor:** Chuck Reed (since 2007)

**Superintendent:** Dr. Charles Weis, Santa Clara County Office of Education

**School Districts within San José:** There are 19 independent school districts within the city limits of San José, including some that are unified K-12 districts and others that are specifically elementary or high school districts. The school district profiled at the end of this case study is the Franklin-McKinley Elementary District, led by Superintendent John Porter, which has 10,044 students.

**City Population:** 958,789

**County Population:** 1,781,642

**Percent Population Below Age 5:** 8 percent

**Percent Population Ages 5-9:** 6.7 percent

**Poverty Rate:** 10.2 percent (13.5 percent for Santa Clara County)

**Graduation Rate in Largest San José School District:** 86.7 percent (San José Unified)

## CITY DEMOGRAPHICS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

	White	African American	Hispanic*	Asian	Other
City	31.8%	2.9%	31.9%	30.6%	2.8%
County	55%	3.2%	25.7%	32.2%	11.7%

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-8 American Community Survey. Margin of error +/-2.642)

While Santa Clara County ranks second in California in median household income, adult educational attainment and children's academic achievement, there remains a stark achievement gap based on race and ethnicity, and nearly half of all public school students do not achieve grade-level proficiency on state tests.

\*Hispanic or Latino of any race

ready for school. The city and county are working to develop a standard kindergarten readiness assessment to more reliably track school readiness.

## Historical Context

The City of San José, Santa Clara County and the State of California have all led efforts over the past two decades to raise the quality of early care and education and provide a roadmap for advancing educational alignment for young children.

Responding to research showing the critical importance of the earliest years of life to brain development and long-term success, the City of San José created an Early Care and Education Services Unit in 1988, which now includes 10 staff members. Its purpose at that time was to facilitate the expansion of child care in San José. The Early Care and Education Services Unit administers the Smart Start San José programs, which include a 10-month Family Child Care Training program funded by federal Community Development Block Grants, funding for child care facilities construction and renovation using redevelopment and grant money and professional development and public education events such as the annual Smart Start Conference and San José Children's Faire. The Smart Start Conference provides information on current trends and best practices in child development to more than 500 early educators, administrators and parents. The Children's Faire draws more than 5,000 participants each year, and more than 40 local community organizations, businesses and governmental agencies provide resource information to parents and a fun, hands-on activity for children.

Smart Start San José further raises the visibility of these issues and makes a long-term strategic impact

by increasing access to quality early education and setting quality standards for all organizations receiving city funding under this initiative. These standards include:

1. Licensing standards and regulatory compliance;
2. Program environmental rating scales;
3. Developmentally appropriate care;
4. A curriculum that meets kindergarten readiness criteria and the use of a recognized kindergarten readiness assessment tool;
5. Ongoing parent participation in programs;



6. Regular communication with local elementary schools;
7. Access to computers and technology for children;
8. An inclusive environment that meets the needs of children who are at risk of or who have identified special needs; and
9. Cultural competency, diversity and equity.

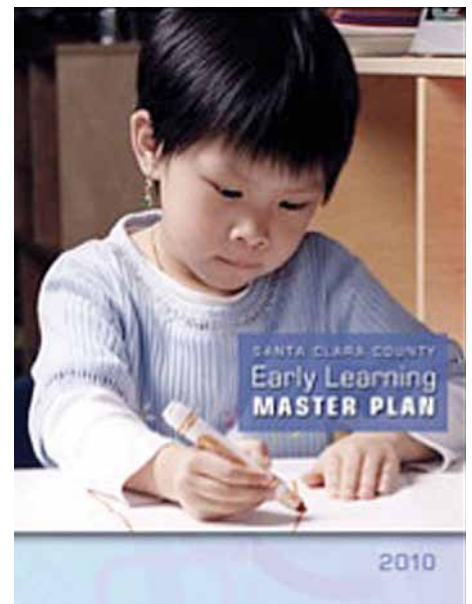
In addition, the city council appoints an Early Care and Education Commission made up of San José residents who meet monthly to provide input to the council and city department heads on issues concerning young children ages 0-5, child care and early education. In 2000, the commission developed the city's first Early Care and Education Strategic Work Plan with public input that lays the foundation for the city's and commission's work. That work plan has since been revised twice, with the current work plan covering the years 2009 through 2014.

As the first Early Care and Education plan was being developed in 2000, First 5 Santa Clara County began providing important leadership and funding for a new collaborative system in the early learning field. This county commission was part of a statewide network supporting early education initiatives based on community needs that was funded by a dedicated tobacco tax and led by a state commission. Given the work that had already been done in the community — including more than 10 separate efforts to address early learning and preschool prior to the launch of First 5 — First 5 Santa Clara County became the leading innovator in the state for the delivery of services to children ages birth to 5.

In 2002, the California Master Plan for School Readiness further enhanced the push for a more effective system of early care and education, calling for an array of programs serving young children that would be well aligned with K-3 curricula. Santa Clara County emerged as the first locality in the state that attempted to truly adhere to the state master plan. As a result, the work in the county is rooted in the developmental continuum, emphasizes innovation in system design and programs, encourages systems-level change through collaboration, values equity through access and includes a diverse (private, public and faith-based) delivery system.

In 2009, Mayor Reed and Superintendent Weis initiated San José 2020 to close the academic achievement gap between lower-performing Hispanic and African-American students and higher-performing Asian and white students by 2020. The strategies to close this achievement gap include the provision of high-quality preschool programs that are accessible to all children and that will prepare them to be successful in kindergarten.

The Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE), in close collaboration with the San José Mayor's Office, played the lead convening role in the planning process that led to the county's Early Learning Master Plan, which guides the implementation of the San José kindergarten readiness strategy within San José 2020. In March 2009, SCCOE hosted more than 100 early educators, community stakeholders, civic leaders and child development advocates for the first in a series of four meetings designed to develop the county's Early Learning Master Plan. Meetings were intentionally broad-based and collaborative, encouraging contributions from a variety of stakeholders while promoting consensus building. Initial meetings aimed to secure the agreement and buy-in of all engaged and to guarantee stakeholders would be invested in the outcome and in the implementation of the new system for early education. Participants were faced with the challenge of contemplating an approach that would capture what the community had learned from years of prior early learning pilot projects.



Partners developing the Master Plan were first responsible for identifying and taking inventory of the local asset base that will be deployed as part of the plan. Planners identified key assets that could support the infrastructure of a targeted preschool system. Work group members also conducted a quantitative analysis of Santa Clara County's demand for preschool space and services, and mapped this against the current supply using geographic information systems (GIS) technology. The group then identified overall gaps in supply and services and catalogued instances that would require capital outlays and operating subsidies, prioritizing communities by economic need.

By November 2009, the meeting process was complete, and the planners had coalesced around a common vision, mission and key programmatic goals, with desired outcomes by 2017 in 14 separate domains, and metrics to track progress over time. With financial support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, SCCOE has begun implementation of the work outlined in the Early Learning Master Plan.

## STATE CONTEXT

First 5 California is a statewide initiative to promote school readiness through a comprehensive system of education, health services and child care. Established in 1998 by voter approval of Proposition 10, a tobacco tax provides funds to the state's 58 counties to administer their own local First 5 commissions as well as a variety of school readiness programs.

In 2002, the school readiness working group of California's Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education - Kindergarten Through University developed a 20-year California Master Plan for School Readiness with 14 recommendations to improve young children's readiness for and success in school and life. Among other things, the plan called for publicly funded universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds, full school-day kindergarten, inclusive and effective placement of young children with disabilities and continuity between the standards and curricula for preschool and kindergarten.

On January 22, 2008, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell formally released the California Preschool Learning Foundations, which provided the child development field with research-based competencies — knowledge and skills that most children can be expected to exhibit in a quality program as they complete their first or second year of preschool. The foundations were developed over a three-year period using an inclusive and deliberative input process, including four statewide stakeholder meetings, 53 public input sessions held throughout the state and four public hearings, along with ongoing public comment. In an effort to partner with parents in the education of their preschool children, key sections of the publication are available and have been translated to support parents' understanding of the preschool learning foundations, their purpose and what they describe as the knowledge and skills that children typically attain at 48 and 60 months of age. The translations include traditional Chinese, simplified Chinese, Hmong, Korean, Filipino (Tagalog), Spanish and Vietnamese, and are based on the prevalent non-English languages spoken by parents of preschool children in California.

In 2010, the California State Department of Education released the California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1, as a companion to the foundations, providing an overall approach for teachers to support children's learning through environments and experiences that are developmentally appropriate, reflective of thoughtful observation and intentional planning, individually and culturally meaningful and inclusive of children with disabilities or other special needs. The framework presents ways of setting up learning environments, encouraging and building upon children's self-initiated play, selecting appropriate materials and planning and implementing teacher-guided learning activities. Both of these first volumes of preschool foundations and frameworks focus on the domains of social-emotional development, language and literacy, English language development and math. Visual and performing arts, physical development and health foundations are being developed, with history/social science and science to follow.

In 2010, the California Assembly enacted Senate Bill 1381, also known as the Kindergarten Readiness Act, which changes the kindergarten entry date from December 2 to September 1 over a three-year period, and provides children born between September and December with the opportunity for a first year of a two-year kindergarten experience. This additional year of kindergarten will be developmentally appropriate and provided by school districts.

On July 1, 2011, the state cut its preschool and toddler care program for low-income families by 15 percent, or \$140 million, and also tightened eligibility requirements. For state preschools, including 42 in Santa Clara County, the cuts will close doors and force numerous programs to turn away families. A deeper cut of \$124 million, or 10 percent, to reimbursement rates could follow.

# Promoting Educational Alignment for Young Children in San José

Developed through a collaboration of education professionals, community members, civic leaders and child development advocates, the 2010 Santa Clara County Early Learning Master Plan is a seven-year action planning tool, implementation guide and resource for greater accountability.

The master plan has harnessed the collaboration and innovation that are hallmarks of San José's ongoing work to develop an early learning system — representing the first segment of a birth-to-career education pipeline — that will help mitigate the achievement gap through improvements in kindergarten readiness. The plan is focused on improving access to high-quality learning experiences in a diverse array of center- and home-based programs, with attention to needed linkages between programming for children from birth through the preschool years and into early elementary school. The plan is designed to incrementally increase academic performance over each subsequent year among student populations who traditionally perform below proficiency in reading and math. In San José, this population includes approximately 40,000 students, which is nearly half of all public school students tested.

While much of the implementation of this plan still lies ahead, the work that has been occurring through the city's Smart Start San José initiative and its partnerships with First 5 Santa Clara County and SCCOE provide the scaffolding for this more intensive and intentional alignment effort. Highlights of these efforts are described below, focusing on the following key elements:

- Formal Partnerships and Governance Structures
- Access to Quality Early Education
- Data Sharing and Communication
- Leveraging Funding

As in San Antonio, which also has many school districts within the city's borders, some of San José's efforts have played out at the neighborhood level. An example from the Franklin-McKinley school district is highlighted at the conclusion of this case study.

## Formal Partnerships and Governance Structures

As noted above, San José has a long history of collaboration and planning in the area of early education. The implementation of the Early Learning Master Plan is currently the primary vehicle for partners to provide input and work together to achieve the key goals they set forth in the plan.

### *Early Learning Master Plan Implementation Structures*

As partners in San José and Santa Clara County transitioned from the planning phase to implementation of the Early Learning Master Plan, they selected SCCOE as the lead convener based on its organizational infrastructure and stature in the local education community. SCCOE created a Department of Early Learning Services and appointed a full-time director to manage the department and engage the plan's stakeholders in the early learning and K-12 sectors. Among the department's specific responsibilities are the Local Early Education Planning Council (LPC), the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN), Head Start, Parkway State Preschool Program and the Inclusion Collaborative (the Warmenhoven Institute for Inclusion). SCCOE participates in every significant effort to enhance early education in the county. Together with San José's Early Care and Education Services Unit, SCCOE supports the Partnership for School Readiness projects, local school district initiatives,

First 5 Santa Clara County initiatives and San José 2020, the mayor’s effort to eliminate the achievement gap.

The Early Learning Master Plan includes a roadmap to implementation, which illustrates the implementation structure as one of many partners in a loose federation of interests. Coordinated by SCCOE, all of these partners are committed to the superordinate goal of eliminating the achievement gap through an early learning system. Two high-level advisory committees lead the on-the-ground work, each responsible for achieving specific groups of goals:

- The Civic Engagement Leadership Group focuses on widening stakeholder engagement and increasing interest in early learning beyond the traditional early education community. The committee will develop a plan for facilities, data management, workforce/business engagement and funding development.
- The Program Development Leadership Group facilitates early implementation priorities, develops plans for family child care inclusion and creates the task teams to propose ideas for certain system mechanics.

A visual representation of the top-level roles and responsibilities of the advisory committees is presented below.



Twice yearly, the advisory groups hold a joint convening with the community to provide a status update.

In addition, the Early Learning Master Plan calls for six work groups to focus on critical policy areas:

- Workforce
- Quality
- Parent Engagement and Leadership
- Articulation and Alignment
- Data Management
- Facilities

Each work group, led by co-chairs from SCCOE and a partner organization, produced a seven-year plan for its designated area, while recognizing points of overlap among the topics addressed by these groups. The work group co-chairs include representatives from the City of San José, the Institute for Advancing Excellence in Early Education (E3-WestEd), Local Early Education Planning Council, Partnership for School Readiness, Kids in Common and Estrella Family Services. Members of each work group represent stakeholders from a variety of areas critical to these topics, such as health, early education, community college, facility design and construction and philanthropy.

With this partnership and implementation structure driving the work, local stakeholders are mobilizing an advanced “system of systems,” where preschool more effectively serves as the bridge between early childhood experiences and the classroom environment of elementary education.

### *SJ2020*

The San José 2020 (SJ2020) initiative is a collaborative effort of the city, SCCOE, school districts and other educational institutions, businesses and nonprofit organizations. As the initiative has taken shape, the partnership has grown to include parents, philanthropies, First 5 Santa Clara County, family child care providers, K-12 charter schools, Franklin-McKinley Children’s Initiative and the higher education community. SJ2020 focuses on the following strategies:

- Provide high-quality preschool programs that are accessible to all children and that will prepare them to be successful in kindergarten;
- Create a culture of success that includes high standards for all students;
- Engage students in reflection and provide feedback to inform them of what they know and what they need to work on;
- Recruit, develop and retain high-quality teachers and effective leaders;
- Use regular assessments to inform instruction;
- Employ extended learning time strategies (i.e., longer school days, a longer school year and preschool attendance);
- Involve parents in their children's education;
- Utilize a multi-disciplinary approach and curriculum that is relevant to the real world beyond high school (e.g., career and technical education); and
- Unite the community to support students and families holistically.

Because the initiative aligns with the Early Learning Master Plan's goals, local leaders decided that, to avoid two parallel projects focusing on infancy through third grade, the Early Learning Master Plan would be the SJ2020 early learning implementation strategy. Ultimately, SJ2020 aims to eliminate the achievement gap by the year 2020, and early results do show a narrowing of that gap between 2007 and 2011 in both English language arts (from 43 percent to 37 percent) and mathematics (from 41 percent to 32 percent) for third graders in San José.

### *San José Schools/City Collaborative*

Mayor Chuck Reed made rejuvenating the San José Schools/City Collaborative a priority early in his administration. Under the mayor's leadership, the collaborative brings together the city, SCCOE and San José's 19 school superintendents to identify and address issues that impact San José schools and the community as a whole. As co-chair of the collaborative, Mayor Reed is able to encourage dialogue around cooperation between the city and the public school system. Other participating members of the collaborative include city department heads and staff and members of the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force. Meeting three times each school year, the collaborative focuses on current issues that may include joint use agreements, neighborhood services, school safety, gang prevention, teacher recruitment or others issues that fall outside the classroom. Regular communication between the collaborative and SJ2020 coordinators ensures alignment of efforts.

Some recent accomplishments of the collaborative include city support of local funders and community organizations to provide a summer lunch program for students. More than 5,000 meals per day are served by this program. The Teach Here, Live Here program supports the schools' efforts to recruit teachers from outside the San José area by subsidizing new teachers' moving costs and first month's rent through funds from the housing department and the Silicon Valley Education Foundation.

## Access to Quality Early Education

### *Smart Start San José*

The city's Smart Start San José initiative has added or improved early education spaces for nearly 7,000 children with funding from redevelopment and federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars and foundation grants for facility construction and renovation, family child care business development and training and program quality improvement projects. Fifty-six centers and

family child care homes have received funding for facility construction and renovation or program quality improvement. Examples of these projects include the conversion of a liquor store into a Montessori preschool for 84 children, construction of a center for the children of young parents attending San José Conservation Corps training and a Head Start center for 48 children on the campus of an elementary school.

More than 450 family child care providers have graduated from the 10-month Smart Start Family Child Care Training program since 2000. The providers participate in 80 hours of academic coursework, workshops and technical assistance to support program quality and improve business skills. Program quality standards were established as part of the Smart Start program. In the fall of 2010, the city received a \$300,000 federal grant to support a culture of continuous quality improvement in Smart Start San José's early education facilities by providing sites with the tools and resources needed to assess and improve the quality of programs serving children ages 0-5. This Smart Start Program Quality Guidelines project is noted as an "early win" for the county's Early Learning Master Plan.

This fall, Smart Start will be offering all San José licensed child care sites the opportunity to become affiliated with the Smart Start San José program (current Smart Start sites have had to receive some type of funding from the city such as redevelopment funds or program quality improvement grants and are under a formal contract). This affiliation will require sites to meet the Basic Quality Strategies of the Smart Start guidelines for each of the nine Smart Start standards. These strategies include ensuring regular communication with elementary schools, ongoing parent engagement, inclusion of children with special needs, cultural competency and children's access to technology. Local partners hope that this will increase the quality of early education programs in the city and give families a way to make more informed program choices.

### *First 5 Santa Clara County and WestEd-E3 Institute*

First 5 Santa Clara County has been a source of innovation for services to children ages birth to 5 over the last decade, and served as a catalyst in stressing the developmental continuum concept. Since 2001, First 5 Santa Clara County has funded several efforts that will impact the long-term organization and delivery of services in the county. These efforts include an Early Learning Initiative, Quality Early Learning Opportunities Initiative and High-Risk Research and Design Initiative. This last effort is an exemplar for converting research-based strategies to fully implemented programs.

Launched through a partnership with the WestEd E3 Institute (Advancing Excellence in Early Education), the High-Risk Research and Design Initiative identified several risk factors associated with poor outcomes for children, researched where those factors were geographically located and then generated zip code and school district maps to depict the areas of highest cumulative risk for children and families. The Power of Preschool (PoP) project was created to serve these high-need areas. Since 2006, PoP has served more than 800 children per year in four high-need school districts. First 5 California evaluates the program, which has been identified as a highly effective pilot for the state.

Another successful model of program collaboration led by First 5 Santa Clara County has been in the area of workforce development. The county's CARES (Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards) program blends funding from First 5 California, First 5 Santa Clara County and the California Department of Education, and has funded \$22 million in workforce development supports to 5,800 providers who comprise more than 89 percent of Santa Clara County's early educators. Additionally, San José State University, with CARES support, developed a cohort program for early care and education transfer students, which provides tuition, books, university fees, academic advising, a class schedule tailored to working professionals and peer support as they pursue their B.A. degrees.

In the coming months, First 5 Santa Clara County will be launching the Learning Together Initiative

(LTI), a place-based approach to services for families. The goal of the LTI is to increase the capacity of families and communities to ensure young children are healthy and prepared to enter school.

First 5-funded grantees provide school readiness, health and oral language development information to families with children prenatal through age 5 at family resource centers and the community worker program throughout Santa Clara County.

### *Inclusion Collaborative*

In addition to coordinating the overall Early Learning Master Plan, SCCOE also has responsibility for the Inclusion Collaborative. The Inclusion Collaborative is focused on the successful inclusion of children with special needs in child care, preschool programs and the community through education, advocacy and awareness. Among the many resources the Inclusion Collaborative offers, support for education professors and their students, teachers and administrators, as well as individual and group professional development and coaching, most directly impact children with special needs in early learning classrooms and schools. In the 2009-10 program year, the Inclusion Collaborative assisted more than 10,500 families.



Of particular use to families and caregivers is a service of the Inclusion Collaborative, the 24/7 “Warm Line,” which invites parents and early educators to call a dedicated phone number or send an email and leave a message. The Inclusion Support Warm Line is a free support, information and referral service regarding the inclusion of children with special needs and disabilities in the Santa Clara County community. Any call or email left on the Warm Line will be answered within one working day by a Warm Line specialist who is a parent of a child with special needs, usually with more than five years of experience working with parents and providers in special education and general education. In 2009-10, more than 460 individuals were assisted via the Warm Line. The Warm Line provides:

- Advice to educators who are making their programs more inclusive, or who want to develop a model for inclusion;
- Suggestions and resource referrals to providers with questions regarding children in their programs displaying challenging behaviors;
- Answers to questions from parents regarding inclusion programs;
- Resources for transitions between programs (e.g., hospital to home, home to child care/Early Start, Early Start to preschool, preschool to kindergarten, etc.);
- Links to resources, agencies and services in the community; and
- Referrals to an inclusion coach based on needs.

In partnership with the Inclusion Collaborative, the First 5 Santa Clara County website provides parents and caregivers with information about services for children with special needs. The site includes a wide range of special education resources as well as disability advice and materials for parents, teachers and others working with children. This is just one of many portals to the Warm Line that parents can access.





Additionally, the Inclusion Collaborative provides training to staff at the San José Public Library. All San José public libraries have Inclusive Storytimes, which give both young children with special needs and typically developing children an opportunity to interact with each other and with a number of different literacy-based experiences. The training that the Inclusion Collaborative provides to the library staff includes how to provide visual schedules and cues, how to create a welcoming environment (cooling rooms, defined sitting spaces, fidget toys) and ways to encourage parent communication.

Other recent accomplishments during the 2010-11 school year include on-site coaching at more than 16 sites in more than 24 classrooms for approximately 480 children, professional development and training to more than 3,100 participants and coordinated development of a centralized referral system called KidConnections for the First 5 System of Care, which processed 872 referrals.

Within the Early Learning Master Plan planning process, one of the stated goals is: “Program attributes include full inclusion for children with special needs and providers are supported in meeting those.” To that end, the idea of having a separate committee or work group on the inclusion of children with special needs was discussed. Ultimately, it was decided that each committee should integrate and foster inclusion within its work domain.

## Data Sharing and Communication

In December 2010, the Santa Clara County Partnership for School Readiness released *School Readiness and Student Achievement: A Longitudinal Analysis of Santa Clara and San Mateo County Students*, to motivate community support for early childhood efforts by demonstrating the link between school readiness gaps and large achievement gaps on third grade reading assessments. This report, prepared by Applied Survey Research (ASR), underscores that school readiness is an important predictor of third grade success, but also emphasizes that what happens in the early elementary grades matters as well.

The study used a new tool to measure school readiness, called the Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF), which balanced the sometimes competing needs for a high-quality, valid and reliable instrument to measure readiness levels and a “teacher-friendly” tool that is sensitive to the measurement challenges inherent in a typical kindergarten classroom setting. The KOF rates the proficiency of each child across 24 readiness skills.

Analysis of the school readiness data collected with the KOF has found evidence of four primary dimensions of readiness (known as the Basic Building Blocks of readiness), including: self-care and motor skills; self-regulation skills; social expression skills; and kindergarten academics. The kindergarten entry skill profiles of more than 1,330 children who entered school in 2004 in Santa Clara County and 2005 in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties were matched with the academic achievement trajectories of children who enter local schools with different skill profiles. ASR used this information to address questions such as the child and family factors linked to third grade academic success, the academic pathways of the most- and least-ready kindergarteners and whether or not students who were less ready for school at kindergarten were able to close the gap by third grade.

The study highlighted a few key outcomes that will provide the basis for thinking about next steps in Santa Clara County:

1. The children who are most likely to be successful in third grade are strong in both kindergarten academics (e.g., letters, numbers, rhyming, counting) and self-regulation (e.g., following directions, focusing attention, controlling impulses);
2. Thirty-nine percent of the children entered school with strong performance in both of these skill sets, and 68 percent of these children were proficient in both reading and math by third grade; and

3. Twenty-eight percent of the children entered school significantly behind — with low skills in both kindergarten academics and self-regulation — and 80 percent of them were below proficiency on at least one of the third grade tests. Half were below proficiency on both tests.

According to the Partnership’s director, Loretta Burns, “The direct connection between school readiness and student achievement outlined in this report builds a strong case for the value of school readiness measurements in helping to understand how to improve the quality and alignment of the early learning systems that are serving our young children in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties.”

This important longitudinal analysis of the link between school readiness and third grade success in Santa Clara County informs early childhood and school leaders and helps motivate community support for early childhood efforts. In response, Pre-K-3 alignment is an emerging focus of Smart Start San José. As part of the Smart Start program quality standards, regular ongoing communication between Smart Start sites and feeder elementary schools has been required. The newly created program quality guidelines provide strategies to enhance the quality of this communication. For example, the guidelines for basic quality suggest that programs provide families with copies of child progress to share with kindergarten teachers or elementary schools, while the guidelines for advanced quality suggest that program staff and local elementary school staff participate in joint meetings, site visits and trainings to improve kindergarten readiness and transitions for children.

## Leveraging Funding

A key strength of educational alignment partners in Santa Clara County is their ability to utilize some core, flexible funding streams both to enhance services and leverage additional funding from governmental (local, state and federal) and philanthropic sources.

The San José-based First 5 Santa Clara County initiative commits more than \$30 million in annual funding raised through the Proposition 10 tobacco tax to advance critical issues such as children’s health insurance, high-level training for early childhood teachers, parenting skills and domestic violence prevention, mental health services for children and their caregivers and arts and early literacy. The Santa Clara County Board of Commissioners appoints nine commissioners to oversee this work. First 5 Santa Clara County has provided the primary funds for initiatives in the areas of school readiness, children’s health, family court programs, family resource centers, therapeutic services and the local Infant Neuro Developmental (IND) Clinic.

The city contributes funding and staff time through the Smart Start San Jose program. For example, the City of San José Redevelopment Agency provided nearly \$5 million and leveraged more than \$10 million to support the construction and renovation of child care facilities in underserved areas of the city.

While the majority of SCCOE’s funding is categorical (*e.g.*, \$22 million in Head Start and Early Head Start funding and more than \$4 million in state preschool funds), in FY 2012, SCCOE has some critical funding flexibility, including approximately \$350,000 and two full-time staff members for the administration of early learning services and the early learning master plan, \$225,000 for pilots and strategic planning related to transitional kindergarten and the discretionary portion of the Inclusion Collaborative’s nearly \$500,000 budget.

This “glue money” allows the city and county to be more creative in its approaches to programmatic operating funds and fill in gaps that cannot be funded by specific programs. This core funding — and the collaborative approach these partners have taken — also helps position San Jose, Santa Clara County and First 5 Santa Clara County to leverage additional grants. First 5 Santa Clara County has

frequently provided matching funds for local, state and federal grants for its partners. Its partners make reciprocal commitments so that First 5 Santa Clara County can apply for grants from First 5 California. For example, since the launch of the Early Learning Mast Plan/SJ2020, First 5 California awarded First 5 Santa Clara County and the WestEd-E3 Institute a three-year grant totaling \$750,000 to support workforce development for early learning professionals in the county. In addition, local and statewide foundations, such as the Silicon Valley Education Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, have funded many projects benefitting young children, including facilities improvement, professional development opportunities and pilot projects.

## THE FRANKLIN-MCKINLEY CHILDREN'S INITIATIVE

Inspired by the success of the Harlem Children's Zone's, local leaders founded the Franklin-McKinley Children's Initiative (FMCI) in 2009 to create a lasting solution to gang-impacted, blighted neighborhoods with poorly performing schools. Using a focused, block-by-block intervention strategy requiring new systems of collaboration among local government, schools and the community, the FMCI will create a continuum of cradle-to-career, evidence-based strategies to support children and their families, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that all children graduate from college and begin a self-sustaining career.

Active and participating FMCI members include SCCOE, City of Jose, Eastside Union High School District, San Jose/Evergreen Community College District, Catholic Charities Santa Clara County, Franklin-McKinley School District (FMSD), San José State University, First 5 Santa Clara County, the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, Santee Property Owners Association, Santee Neighborhood Association, several nonprofit organizations and residents of the Santee neighborhood of East San José. These partners represent a mix of education, government, social services and community perspectives.

Funded by a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, FMCI is implementing a comprehensive, 18-month planning process in the Santee/Fair/Yerba Buena community. The planning phase began in the Santee-Fair community, the most highly impacted neighborhood in FMSD. Local partners plan to replicate the community-based FMCI model in other high-risk neighborhoods within the district, eventually developing FMSD into a birth through eighth grade school district. Through this initiative, FMCI leaders will:

Implement supportive programs for key academic transitions from preschool to kindergarten, elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school with focused support for parents and children;

- Address English language needs;
- Significantly increase opportunities for parent education and parent involvement;
- Implement a full-service community school model in Santee in the 2011-12 academic year through a partnership with a community college that will bring social, emotional and mental health services to two campuses;
- Identify and partner with a community-based organization to bring critical recreation and play opportunities to the children of Santee; and
- Design and implement an evaluation system.

SCCOE's McKinley Preschool Program provides high-quality early learning opportunities for low-income preschoolers residing in FMSD. The primary funds to operate the program come from the California State Preschool Program overseen by the California Department of Education. Additional funds (such as from Head Start, Smart Start and PoP) are then braided with the California State Preschool Program funds to support program quality and comprehensive services to children and families. The result is a high-quality preschool program model that is frequently featured in statewide training videos for the California Preschool Learning Foundations.

Part of the continuing implementation of the Early Learning Master Plan and the FMCI includes the establishment of an Educare center, a high-quality, full-day, year-round program for children ages 0-5 and their families that is designed to help eliminate the achievement gap. A public-private partnership involving First 5 Santa Clara County, FMSD, the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, SCCOE and many other partners, the Educare school will be an invaluable addition to the development of universal early learning opportunities for children and families residing in the Santee neighborhood. Not only will the Educare school provide an outstanding program for children and families, but it will also provide a concrete demonstration of the impact of high-quality early learning and advance local and state policies that support universal access to these opportunities.

## Alignment in Action: A Fictional Portrait

*The City of San José and its county-level partners, including SCCOE and First 5, have been working to change systems of care for young children in the community. For example, all expectant mothers and new parents are offered a new parent kit free of charge from First 5 Santa Clara County and more than 10,500 families who care for children with disabilities were helped in some way by the Inclusion Collaborative in 2009-10, with almost 500 utilizing the Warm Line. While not all families in San José can utilize the Franklin-McKinley Family Resource Center each year, 15 new family resource centers have been launched under the Early Learning Master Plan, allowing families in other neighborhoods to access the same types of supports. Oscar and Olivia, the fictional twins in this profile, may have utilized a greater number of programs than a typical child. However, an increasing number of children in San José are benefitting — in ways large and small — from the community’s longstanding commitment to early childhood and growing focus on educational alignment for young children.*



Olivia and Oscar are twins, now in second grade. Their parents are from the Philippines, and they came to San José a couple of years before the children were born. Like many Filipinos who have immigrated to California over the last decade or two, Olivia and Oscar’s parents work in the health care industry; their father is a phlebotomist at the local Kaiser Permanente hospital and their mother is a certified nurse’s assistant, also at Kaiser, who works while she pursues her nursing license at San José State University. While their first and second languages are Filipino and Spanish, Olivia and Oscar’s parents learned rudimentary English in the Philippines and have gained in fluency since moving to the U.S.

When the twins were born, their parents received a First 5 Kit for New Parents before being discharged from the hospital. The kit was filled with information on nutrition, safety, quality child care, health, discipline and early learning.

At their first well-child check-up, Olivia and Oscar's parents learned from their pediatrician about the major developmental stages the twins were going to go through over the first five years of life. The pediatrician also suggested they visit their neighborhood Family Resource Center (FRC) located in the McKinley Elementary School. There they found classes on parenting and child development, as well as assistance locating child care and assessing housing options that might allow them to move into a slightly larger apartment to accommodate their expanded family.

In fact, it was due to the close relationship Olivia and Oscar's mom had developed over time with some of the staff members at the FRC that she felt comfortable discussing the very different ways that Olivia and Oscar were developing. Oscar's development hewed closely to the timeline his parents had been using to mark milestones. Olivia's development, however, seemed to have significantly slowed down around 22 months. She started to withdraw from her parents' and brother's touch, she stopped meeting their gaze on a regular basis and she found comfort in rocking back and forth when she was upset. Her parents were very concerned. Staff members at the FRC connected Olivia's mom with the Santa Clara County Office of Education's Warm Line phone number to access free resources and information regarding inclusion of children with special needs or disabilities. The Warm Line staff connected Olivia's parents with a free assessment of Olivia's developmental abilities. Shortly thereafter, Olivia was assessed and diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. High-functioning, but moderately autistic, Olivia would need special educational services.

After learning about Olivia's diagnosis, a parent at the FRC whose child also had autism suggested that the family head over to their local library for Inclusive Storytimes, which provide adaptations as appropriate to support all children, including children with special needs and English language learners. Upon visiting their first Inclusive Storytime, Olivia's and Oscar's parents met other parents of young children with special needs, found specially trained librarians who helped them learn more about autism and learned about great preschool programs for Oscar, like the summertime reading program, "Books for Little Hands."

Having found welcoming and inclusive communities at the FRC and the library, Olivia's and Oscar's parents learned more about both twins' needs and began to look for appropriate early learning programs. They knew they wanted to mainstream Olivia eventually, but decided to separate the twins until kindergarten. Olivia still needed to grow and learn with other children with special needs, and Oscar was ready to spend time with other typically developing children.

McKinley Elementary School, which housed the FRC, was also home to the McKinley Preschool. McKinley braided funding from Head Start, the school district, the state preschool program and federal child care funds to offer an array of quality early childhood programming. It was a model site for the State of California Learning Foundations, a state preschool and a San José Smart Start site, with a Power of Preschool (PoP) program funded by First 5 onsite. Oscar benefitted from the highly trained teachers who emphasized hands-on learning. Like many of their colleagues, two of Oscar's teachers were taking advantage of the Santa Clara CARES 2.0 to help them improve their early childhood development skills through a college degree program. As Oscar's parents needed to work during the day, the preschool's extended hours allowed Oscar to stay with his friends and teachers.

Oscar's mom was surprised that his Pre-K program felt like such a part of the elementary school campus. She was delighted to hear that the elementary school principal and the preschool director were in constant communication. With their neighborhood FRC on site, the whole family spent a lot of time in and around McKinley Preschool.

When Oscar was in his final year at the preschool, he and his classmates had the opportunity to learn what it is like to be in kindergarten by visiting the teachers in McKinley Elementary School. He also participated in Summer Arts Alive, a fun transition program for incoming kindergarteners and their parents during the summer between preschool and kindergarten.

Meanwhile, during the preschool years, Olivia was enrolled in a preschool for children with special needs across the street from McKinley Preschool. Olivia's parents continued to use the Warm Line when they had questions about additional supportive services and her transition to kindergarten, including the development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) during the summer prior to school entry. Since Santa Clara County has such a strong record of inclusion, Olivia and Oscar were able to start kindergarten together at McKinley Elementary. Olivia began elementary school with a one-to-one aide, as specified in her IEP. However, since she was enrolled in the same kindergarten class as her brother, and the familiarity of having him around was calming, by the end of kindergarten, she was able to share the aide with several of her special needs classmates.

As Oscar and Olivia progressed through the early elementary grades, their teachers continued to work closely with their parents and the staff at the FRC. Olivia's and Oscar's parents continued to improve their English skills, and eventually felt comfortable volunteering at the Warm Line, speaking with other parents of autistic children. They developed a play group for autistic children and their siblings around Olivia's and Oscar's age. Oscar and Olivia were on grade level for reading as they entered the second grade, due in part to all of the resources available to their family, from before birth through the elementary school years.



## | CASE STUDIES

### Seattle, Washington

In November 2010, the City of Seattle, the Seattle Public Schools (SPS) and community partners completed their most ambitious city-school district joint planning effort in 20 years. Building on the city's investments in the quality and availability of Pre-K, the school district's ongoing efforts to improve elementary schools and the New School Foundation's example of Pre-K through third grade alignment at the South Shore School, the resulting Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Five Year Action Plan seeks to prevent or eliminate the achievement gap for future generations. Key assets in this educational alignment work include:

- **Joint leadership and a shared commitment to collaboration:** The Seattle Early Education Collaborative (SEEC), composed of early childhood stakeholders and preschool providers, enables systematic planning across Pre-K and K-3 education and helps institutionalize a shared commitment to collaborative action, both before and after school entry, to help all children achieve grade-level success by third grade. The director of the new SPS Department of Early Learning provides critical leadership within the school system and as a member of the SEEC.
- **Structured communication between early childhood and out-of-school time (OST) providers and public elementary schools:** The SPS Community Alignment Initiative promotes regular communication among OST and early learning providers and public school staff, as well as collaborative efforts to support student success. In conjunction with school principals, OST program directors develop alignment agreements that outline in detail how their programs' activities will support school readiness or student learning goals.
- **Access to quality early learning opportunities:** By braiding several funding streams, Seattle supports quality improvement initiatives and child care subsidies to improve access to high-quality center-based child care and preschool programs. A strong family, friend and neighbor caregiver program, led by Child Care Resources, helps support early learning for the large number of children in informal care.
- **Parent engagement and support in a culturally diverse context:** Responding to the fact that close to 20 percent of residents are foreign-born, Seattle has created cultural task forces and a network of immigrant and refugee family support programs to ensure that all families can access high-quality care and find ways to engage in and support their children's education.
- **Alignment of standards, teaching practices and assessments rooted in the use of data to improve student outcomes:** Culturally responsive assessments of classroom quality and child outcomes are used in more than 100 classrooms at all Seattle preschool programs operated by SEEC's 22 partner agencies. Training and coaching helps teachers interpret and use assessment data to tailor their teaching practices to improve child outcomes, while the school district's professional development for Pre-K through first grade teachers is improving and aligning instructional practices, particularly related to literacy development.
- **Flexible funding through the Families and Education Levy:** For more than two decades, Seattle has benefited from a voter-approved levy that supports programs for children and their families, allowing the city to take a more coordinated approach and address needs that are not covered through other state or federal funding sources. Levy programs, which support children

## CITY PROFILE

### LEADERSHIP:

**Mayor:** Mike McGinn (since January 2010)

**Interim Superintendent:** Dr. Susan Enfield (since March 2011)

**City Population:** 571,293

**County Population:** 1,851,255

**Percent Population Below Age 5:** 5 percent

**Percent Population Ages 5-9:** 4 percent

**Poverty Rate:** 12.5 percent

**Graduation Rate:** 68 percent (on-time graduation rate in Seattle Public Schools for the 2008-09 school year)

## CITY DEMOGRAPHICS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

White	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Other
71.3%	8%	5%	13.2%	2%

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-08 American Community Survey. Margin of error +/-2.642)

The percentage of foreign-born residents has increased significantly in the last three decades, nearly doubling from 11 percent in 1980 to approximately 20 percent in 2010.

and families both in and out of school, provide needed “glue money” to create a more strategic and unified Pre-K through third grade effort.

Education is a top priority for Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn, the Washington Department of Early Learning and Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the public-private Thrive by Five Washington initiative. All are highly supportive of collaborative efforts to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

According to the 2009-10 Families and Education Levy Annual Report (published in February 2011), more than 1,600 (unduplicated) elementary school students are now meeting grade-level standards who had not done so prior to the 2004-05 school year.

## Historical Context

The City of Seattle’s Pre-K to third grade efforts build upon a long history of cutting-edge strategies to support quality education for young children. While the city started its child care work in 1972 with a focus on affordability, local initiatives expanded over time to encompass quality, access and supply as well. In 1999, Seattle and King County leaders launched Project Lift-Off as a community-wide partnership to create new and improved child care, education and OST activities for youth ages birth to 18. With sup-

port from elected leaders and in partnership with the school district, Philanthropy Northwest and the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Project Lift-Off created a community-wide action plan that led to new and improved programs for more than 23,000 children and youth. Project Lift-Off created three key strategies: the Alignment Initiative (described in detail in this case study); the Getting School Ready Initiative, including Getting School Ready Teams that are now active throughout King County; and Seattle’s nationally recognized Family, Friend and Neighbor Care Initiative.

In 2003, the United Way of King County Children’s Initiative merged with the countywide Project Lift-Off. The merged initiative, known as SOAR - Helping Kids Reach for the Sky, offers school readiness workshops and training to more than 9,000 parents and 9,500 early childhood professionals. Additionally, kindergarten readiness teams are in 30 elementary schools where 94 percent of participating teachers report to SOAR improved transition processes and relationships.

The 2004-12 Families and Education Levy focuses on kindergarten readiness, improved student learning and high school graduation. Through this levy, a new Step Ahead Preschool Program has been established, along with Community Learning Centers in three elementary schools and a revitalized family support worker program in Seattle Public Schools (SPS). Preschool outcomes include classroom quality, school readiness and third grade student test scores. The city’s work to implement Step Ahead and the new focus on preschool outcomes set the groundwork for the city’s 2008 effort to convene the Seattle Early Education Collaborative (SEEC).



## STATE CONTEXT

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State of Washington's chief school official, has been a proponent of collaboration among educators, students, families, communities, business, labor and government to ensure the success of all learners. In 2006, the creation of the Washington Department of Early Learning and a public-private partnership called Thrive by Five Washington brought a new level of energy and commitment to early learning efforts within the state.

The Washington Department of Early Learning develops, implements, coordinates and provides oversight for early learning policies and programs to create safe, healthy and nurturing learning experiences for children statewide. Thrive by Five Washington engages education, government and business leaders. Its primary goals include: 1) helping create the environment to support early learning and positive child development; 2) making effective early learning programs more readily available; and 3) being a voice for, and assisting in building, early learning systems.

In 2009, the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington Department of Early Learning and Thrive by Five Washington signed a joint resolution to work together to create a cohesive early learning system. This collaborative effort resulted in the September 2010 release of the Washington State Early Learning Plan, a comprehensive, 10-year roadmap for building the early childhood system through third grade. Other key state initiatives related to Pre-K through third grade alignment include:

- The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS), piloted in the fall of 2010, provides the first statewide kindergarten assessment information across multiple domains of child development and achievement. Teacher assessments of 1,760 children beginning in kindergarten suggest that more than one third of students enter kindergarten below expected skill levels, with an even greater lack of school readiness in the areas of language, communication and literacy, and large gaps between economically disadvantaged children and their peers.
- Statewide Early Learning and Development Benchmarks offer early learning guidelines that are helpful in understanding what young children may know and do at different ages. The Washington Department of Early Learning is currently working to offer support for culturally appropriate adaptation and provide training to its staff and other stakeholders on the benchmarks.

Key leaders felt it was time to align the work of local stakeholders and current funding resources for Pre-K through third grade. In late 2009, the city, SPS, the New School Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation joined forces to create the Seattle Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> Partnership Action Plan. Along with members of SEEC, these entities comprise the Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> Advisory Committee.

With the belief that educational alignment is a key ingredient to improving educational attainment for young children, a diverse, 16-member Partnership Group developed a Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Five-Year Action Plan. This plan was introduced to local and state partners for discussion and input at the Seattle Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> Partnership Roundtable in August 2010. Following the release of the plan in November, the New School Foundation, the city and SPS began defining concrete, actionable alignment components and strategies with clear accountability measures and designing a new governance structure to ensure effective implementation.

In February 2010, the Seattle Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> Partnership met with state and city leaders to discuss potential areas for collaboration and mutual learning, such as data systems, professional development and full-day kindergarten. These talks lay the foundation for not only programmatic change at the local level, but also the opportunity to influence state and local policy to better serve young children.

## Promoting Educational Alignment for Young Children in Seattle

Seattle's Pre-K to third grade plan is organized around five goals: expand access to quality preschool and full-day kindergarten; increase quality across the Pre-K to third grade continuum; develop and align learning standards, assessment tools and data systems; create seamless transitions; and increase support and interventions. Recognizing that Seattle is poised to make significant additional reforms

to promote educational alignment for young children, this case study will focus on some highlights of the city's efforts to date related to the following elements of an aligned system:

- Partnerships and Governance Structures
- Communication
- Access to Quality Early Learning Opportunities
- Parent Engagement and Support
- Alignment of Standards, Curricula, Teaching Practices and Assessments
- Funding Strategies

## Partnerships and Governance Structures

At the time of this report, the city is in the process of designing a governance structure to oversee its Pre-K to third grade efforts. Nevertheless, existing partnerships and structures and those developed during the planning phases of this work are noteworthy in their own right. These include the City of Seattle/Seattle School District Partnership Agreement, the SEEC memorandum of understanding and the SPS Excellence for All strategic plan.

### *City/School District Families and Education Levy Partnership Agreement*

In 2005, a formal partnership agreement focused on implementation of the 2004-12 Families and Education Levy was created, outlining the roles and expectations of each partner and specifying the types of numeric targets for levy-funded programs. The partnership agreement outlines, in a variety of areas, ways in which both the city and the school district work collaboratively toward better results for children and youth, such as standards for family support services, facility use, health service operating practices and an evaluation of the feasibility of developing and implementing a school readiness measurement system.

Along with the partnership agreement, the city and SPS have a data-sharing agreement that allows for all data to be provided to the city for students participating in most programs that are funded by the Families and Education Levy. Participants in levy-funded programs provide student IDs that are matched to academic data in ways that comply with state and federal confidentiality requirements. The city and SPS can then determine whether programs are serving children most in need of support and whether services are having an effect on academic achievement. Work is underway to more efficiently develop this effort for the Pre-K to third grade initiative.

### *Seattle Early Education Collaborative (SEEC)*

In 2007, SEEC was formed to bring stakeholders together to create a shared vision for early learning in Seattle and to work together to achieve greater gains for children. Partners include the city, SPS, Child Care Resources, Thrive by Five Washington, the public health and public library departments, Seattle Community College District and the University of Washington. All five Seattle Head Start/Early Head Start grantees, the state-funded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program providers, the levy-funded Step Ahead preschools and the city-funded Comprehensive Child Care Program leaders are members of SEEC.

SEEC provides a structure for multiple stakeholders to bring their resources to a common table for greatest impact. For example, through the structure of SEEC, the city office for education, city human services department and the five Head Start grantees are able to combine resources to leverage funds for professional development and assessment from the Families and Education Levy, city

general funds, Washington Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP) and the Office of Head Start.

SEEC also provides a coordinated structure for joint decision making and operates three working groups to delve deeper into three key alignment issues: professional development, assessment/data collection and kindergarten transition.

- The Professional Development Work Group, formed in January 2007, plans teacher and director training and makes policy recommendations to improve Seattle's professional development system. Representatives from Head Start, ECEAP, SPS, Child Care Resources, Seattle Central Community College and the University of Washington meet monthly. The meetings are co-facilitated by the city and Head Start, and the city provides staff support for this work group. All professional development activities are driven by data and aligned with SEEC standards, core competencies and kindergarten readiness standards.
- The Assessment Work Group, formed in 2008, is composed of representatives of the same organizations as the Professional Development Work Group. The city facilitates two meetings of this group per month. As described in more detail below, the group has developed and vetted common standards for school readiness that are culturally and linguistically relevant.
- The Kindergarten Transition Work Group, also formed in 2008, includes staff from the city, family support workers, enrollment staff and early learning staff from the school district. Through monthly meetings led by city and SPS staff, the group works to create a transition process that improves on-time kindergarten enrollment of all eligible children and ensures that academically at-risk children and their families receive ongoing support into the primary grades. While still in the early stages, the SEEC considers it a priority to expand transition services and identify support services for academically at-risk preschool children transitioning into the primary grades.



### *SPS Department of Early Learning*

The SPS *Excellence for All* strategic plan, adopted in June 2008, included early learning and led to the creation of a new Department of Early Learning within SPS in December 2009. The SPS Department of Early Learning is charged with creating and organizing district programs and services to effectively support the development of a high-quality, cohesive Pre-K to third grade early learning continuum. The department has created a Pre-K through first grade professional development cohort model, organized programs that support early learning partnerships together in one department (Head Start, Community Alignment Initiative and full-day kindergarten) and designated staff to participate with the city in developing a systems approach to Pre-K to third grade. Since its inception, the department has:

- Launched a successful Pre-K to third grade professional development program bringing together Pre-K teachers and coaches with elementary teachers and literacy, special education and English language learner (ELL) coaches to learn common instructional strategies;
- Created a permanent home for the Community Alignment Initiative, which assists in developing new and existing support for Pre-K, before-school and afterschool programs in schools; and
- Conducted a survey of kindergarten programs in Title I buildings across the district and used Title I to create a Pre-K partnership model.

The early learning director sits on the leadership team for the Teaching and Learning Department and is supervised by the chief academic officer. This affords regular access to the executive directors working in schools to ensure integration of early learning in district planning. The department has organized a cross-departmental early learning team with representatives from key departments to identify critical intersections in planning and program design. As one of the district's five priorities, early learning has specific goals and accountability measures related to Pre-K through third grade and, of greater significance, it is one of the areas on which the superintendent is evaluated. Not only is this commitment a strong indicator of the priority the district places on early learning — particularly in the face of sizable budget deficits — but these steps create a leadership structure that fosters improved educational alignment for young children.

## Communication

In 2001, the SPS Office for Community Learning, now part of the SPS Department of Early Learning, launched the Community Alignment Initiative to increase students' academic success through partnerships with on-site children's care programs. Recognized nationally as a model of district and community partnership, preschool and afterschool providers work with school teams to complete an



Alignment Partnership Plan each spring for implementation in the fall. This plan specifies how they intend to work together to support children's learning before, during and after school. Collaborating partners include 93 on-site early learning, afterschool and health programs in 75 K-12 schools (with 55 of these in elementary schools), as well as the city's human services and parks and recreation departments, Public Health – Seattle & King County and School's Out Washington.

The Learning Partners Group, a multi-disciplinary advisory committee made up of staff from the SPS Department of Early Learning, the city, School's Out Washington and school-based afterschool and preschool program providers, reviews proposed alignment plans. Approved plans entitle the provider to receive a rent-free lease agreement with the school district, which can be renewed based on demonstrated alignment through an annual evaluation. In the 2010-11 school year, teams further refined and revised the indicators of success for early learning and afterschool programs based on principal and provider input.

Current participants in the Community Alignment Initiative include all 26 school-based Pre-K programs, 58 school-age licensed child care providers, Community Learning Center (CLC) sites (six elementary school CLCs and 10 middle school CLCs), OST programs at 10 K-8 schools and health centers in 14 middle and high schools.

This initiative requires ongoing communication between the program and school. By engaging in the partnership agreement, the school agrees that:

- The school principal will participate and/or designate school staff members as preschool liaisons and school-age liaisons to participate in all aspects of the alignment implementation.
- The school principal and provider will share alignment goals/plans with school staff at a staff meeting in spring and/or fall.
- The school principal or liaison will meet at least monthly with the program provider.
- Schools will ensure that the provider has the opportunity to coordinate with school staff during the school day to share information about children's academic and social needs.
- Information will only be exchanged about the child's academic and social needs, as approved by the parent or guardian within the existing FERPA confidentiality laws and policy.
- The school principal will consult with the Office for Community Learning, as well as the Office for Program Placement, regarding any space issues that may arise that might impact the after-school and/or preschool program (including non-dedicated program space) prior to a decision being made or actions taken.
- The school principal will share the Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP) with the program to discuss and support the provider partnership in developing a plan for addressing the school's key academic strategies.

Schools include providers in school-based and district training opportunities when appropriate. Also, both schools and their alignment partners agree to participate in all aspects of the initiative's evaluation. Provider and school partners are invited to participate in training and take advantage of technical assistance offered through SPS, School's Out Washington and SEEC where applicable.

Elementary school-based, non-CLC sites are expected to meet Washington state child care licensing requirements, as well as program requirements for the city's Comprehensive Child Care Program (or, in the case of parks and recreation sites, Seattle Parks and Recreation Department requirements). These programs are also expected to accept Washington State and Seattle Human Services Department child care subsidies (or parks and recreation scholarships for parks and recreation sites) for eligible parents who need assistance affording child care.

Through the alignment partnership plan, the school principal and the program director identify how they will support children in getting ready for and being successful in school. Program staff communicate with the principal, teachers and the family support worker to help children and families and to support children's transitions. Program activities are included in the school's CSIP as strategies for enhancing student literacy and math skills.

In the 2009-10 school year, 15,595 students participated in an estimated 80,000 hours of additional learning on campus outside of school time. SPS teachers reported that an average of 65 percent of students regularly attending community learning centers demonstrated improvements in homework completion, on-time submission of homework, increased academic performance and increased class participation. This initiative also increased the number of meetings with parents at the schools.

The 2010 Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> Action Plan will revise the Alignment Initiative partners' annual alignment agreement process. Revisions will connect the renewal process and goal setting with the district's CSIP that each school is required to complete, strengthening the connection between the alignment program activities and the goals of the schools.

## Access to Quality and Affordable Early Learning Experiences

The type of care families choose — whether center-based child care, preschool or home-based care — is influenced by family values, affordability and availability. Preschool programs such as Head Start, Step Ahead and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Preschool (ECEAP) programs together serve 1,500 3- and 4-year-olds and provide low-income parents with affordable, high-quality preschool options. In addition to Washington State's Working Connections child care subsidies, the city's Child Care Assistance Program helps families pay for child care at one of the 135 participating Seattle child care programs. Child Care Resources and SEIU Local 925 provide support to the informal family, friend and neighbor caregivers, where almost half of young children in Seattle spend sufficient time to influence their development. The city has made a lot of progress in this arena. In 2007, 47 percent of eligible Head Start and ECEAP children were served and a projected 1,641 were unserved. In addition, the vacancy rate for child care slots in Seattle in 2010 was 0.5 percent.

### *Preschool Programs*

Operating from September to June, the Seattle Step Ahead Program offers either part-day or full-day, culturally and linguistically appropriate preschool opportunities that are free or low-cost for eligible 4-year-olds. The goal is to help participating children develop the skills they need to be successful in school and acquire a passion for lifelong learning. Teachers provide daily opportunities for children to improve skills in language and literacy, math concepts, science, social studies, arts, physical development and social and emotional development.

In the 2009-10 school year, data were collected on 645 4-year-olds who participated in SEEC-supported programs, including Step Ahead preschools. Step Ahead was supported by an investment of \$1.8 million of Families and Education Levy funds and participating agencies were selected through a competitive process. As a result of this investment, 350 of the 645 children served were school ready, as measured by achieving the curriculum-embedded assessment standard across all developmental domains.

In the same school year, 330 children participated in the Seattle ECEAP Program in either part-day preschool or full-day integrated services. The ECEAP program emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first teacher, and works to ensure through home visits, family nights and the parent policy

council that families have access to information and resources that help support their children's development. ECEAP provides:

- Nurturing staff who are well-trained in fostering each child's sense of security, confidence and readiness for kindergarten;
- Developmentally and culturally appropriate classroom activities designed to support the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of each child;
- Health, nutrition and developmental screenings to support healthy growth and development;
- Inclusive services for children with disabilities;
- A safe and healthy environment for children; and
- Additional support for families including parent education and referrals for needed resources.

Funding for this program is provided by the Washington Department of Early Learning and the city, through the Seattle Human Services Department. For the 2009-10 school year, the Human Services Department provided close to \$2.4 million in combined state/city funding to nonprofit, community-based organizations operating ECEAP classrooms.

### *Child Care*

Through the two-pronged Comprehensive Child Care Assistance Program, the city boosts the quality of child care and provides financial assistance on a sliding scale to help low- and moderate-income working families pay for child care for children ages one month to 13 years. Agencies apply to participate and receive a quality assessment conducted by city early learning specialists. Those who are successful then receive access to a modest amount of professional development and periodic quality check-ins. Participating programs are eligible to provide care for families with city child care vouchers.

Families can use a voucher to choose from more than approximately 135 licensed family child care homes and centers in Seattle, which have vendor agreements with the city to provide high-quality and affordable child care. The city typically pays between 25 percent and 80 percent of a standard rate, and the family is responsible for paying the difference between the city child care assistance and the provider's regular monthly rate. The Seattle Human Service Department allocated more than \$2 million in 2010 for child care assistance payments.



## *Quality Initiatives for Informal Care*

An estimated 44 percent of children ages birth to 5 in Washington State are in informal care prior to school entry, according to a 2002 University of Washington report. Understanding the importance of bolstering the development of this large group of children, the city provided early support to the Family, Friend and Neighbor Care Project led by the local Child Care Resources (CCR) agency.

Through this initiative, which is funded primarily by private foundations and CCR's unrestricted funds, CCR has partnered with a variety of community-based organizations to create a system of support for family, friend and neighbor caregivers in Seattle and King County. Resources and information are reaching caregivers through a variety of sources, such as library systems, parent education programs, family and community centers, faith communities, employment specialists and public health programs.

CCR has developed an extensive Play and Learn Network in Seattle/King County to serve parents and informal caregivers. Eleven community-based organizations sponsor nearly 40 Play and Learn groups serving many different neighborhoods. Children learn through play with the guidance of group leaders, caregivers and parents. Additionally, the caregivers and parents enjoy spending time with each other and participating in scheduled, facilitated discussions. More than 20 different organizations belong to the Play and Learn Network as sponsors or partners. Sponsors provide facilitation and organizational "ownership" of a Play and Learn group; partners provide facilities, equipment or other resources. CCR brokers community collaborations and provides technical assistance, including facilitator training and curriculum support.

According to an independent evaluation of the Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregiver Project for the 2007 calendar year, these Play and Learn groups achieved three outcomes: 1) changes in knowledge; 2) changes in behaviors; and 3) decreased isolation. Adults participating in Play and Learn activities better understood the role they play in supporting school readiness for young children and showed increased knowledge or skills in areas such as developmental stages and appropriate expectations, child-friendly and child-centered activities and literacy development strategies. Results suggest that consistent, longer-term participation is closely related to achieving outcomes.

Play and Learn groups serve a diverse group of participants. While many Play and Learn participants are parents, nearly one-quarter are friends, neighbors, grandparents and other extended family members caring for young children. In addition, nearly one-third of the participants completed a translated survey, showing that organizations are reaching diverse cultural groups.

## **Parent Engagement and Support**

While the city seeks to engage and support all families of young children, it has been particularly innovative in reaching out to families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Major strategies include child care task forces for special populations and family support programs for immigrants and refugees.

### *Culturally Specific Child Care Task Forces*

In 1990, the city formed the African-American Child Care Task Force to advocate for quality child care for African-American children in Seattle and King County and to address the disparities in quality among early learning providers serving this population. In collaboration with the National Black Child Development Institute, the task force developed an action agenda in 1991. In the years following the successful release of this agenda, the city formed Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino, Native American, Gay and Lesbian and Homeless Task Force groups to conduct similar participatory research and action agendas.



The early work of the culturally specific task force groups helped to create advocates for the early learning community, neighborhood classes, culturally-relevant training and national support for providers who are on the accreditation pathway. The task forces were the first to urge support for family, friend and neighbor caregivers, a strategy that is now widely recognized as important and is well established in Seattle. In addition, task force members provide local and national leadership in support of a wide variety of government and private initiatives intended to increase resources for children of color. The African-American and Gay and Lesbian Child Care Task Forces continue to be active today.

### *Immigrant and Refugee Family Support Programs*

The Seattle Human Services Department launched the Immigrant and Refugee Family Support Program in 2006 to provide high-quality, bilingual and culturally appropriate family support services to English language learners in order to:

- Increase parent and guardian involvement in their children’s school activities;
- Overcome barriers to school success; and
- Prepare parents and guardians to effectively guide their children so they will be prepared to enter and ultimately graduate from school.

Of the 2,581 refugees who arrived in Washington State in 2010, almost half (1,249) came to Seattle. The 2010 total represents a more than 100 percent increase from 2007 when Seattle received 614 refugees. With annual city funding of more than \$300,000, community-based organizations receiving these grants are able to serve more than 500 new immigrants and refugees each year.

Contracted agencies in southeast and southwest Seattle have culturally and linguistically skilled staff available to provide parents who are learning English as a second language with the information, assistance and skills they need to connect with schools and participate in school-based, academic-related activities. The agencies seek out and develop partnerships with schools to provide effective services for families, and sometimes provide services at school sites. The agencies also offer courses during the summer to help parents increase their knowledge and understanding of school issues and their children’s success in school.

### *Community-Based Cultural Organizations*

A variety of independent, community-based nonprofits operate programs for specific cultural groups within Seattle, in some cases with funding from the city. Some examples include:

- The Chinese Information Service Center (CISC) provides a wide array of services supporting immigrant families. Services range from early learning programs, before-school and afterschool programs for school-age children, services to engage parents in their children’s education, case management and family support services for resettlement, economic development, housing and other social services. CISC operates on a “family-centered” model with wraparound services to address the whole family’s needs. All staff have linguistic capacity to serve their target population. One example is the CISC parent involvement program, which hosts family nights with family dinners, age-appropriate activities for children and time for parents to learn more about school issues and how to access OST programs. Additionally, members of the staff connect parents to community resources and inform them about different events occurring within the city. Staff are also available to serve as translators during parent/teacher conferences in the elementary schools and provide training for school staff on working with Chinese immigrant parents and youth.

- The Afrique Service Center provides critical linkages between families and the early learning, afterschool and elementary education systems. The Afrique Service Center promotes social welfare for African refugees, immigrants and minorities in the region. The center provides afterschool programs focused on reading, writing and math and an East African Girls group. The center also focuses on ensuring that its early education services are coordinated and connected with local public schools. In addition to a summer program, the center convenes a popular weekend school for parents and children. Parents learn about the school environment, skills needed for student success and literacy and math activities for young children. The weekend school is staffed by an educator from a local early childhood program and an elementary school teacher, with volunteer support from other educators and city staff. These sessions are aligned with the activities and lessons that are employed in the elementary school. The school principal regularly visits the weekend program in order to create stronger connections with participating families. While the center does advertise, much of the program's recruiting success derives from word-of-mouth at local mosques and among networks of women.

## Alignment of Standards, Teaching Practices and Assessments

In Seattle, city, school and community leaders are working toward a seamless learning experience with aligned standards, assessments and instructional practices within and across grade levels. The SEEC Assessment Work Group has already:

- Developed a common definition of school readiness;
- Created kindergarten readiness guidelines by aligning multiple frameworks;
- Identified measurement tools; and
- Created a citywide assessment process for all 4-year-olds.

Beginning in 2008, the SEEC Assessment Work Group thoroughly reviewed the existing state, Head Start and school district kindergarten benchmarks, performance standards and guidelines. Work group members then collaborated to articulate agreed upon assessment purposes, tools and processes.

The work group also makes recommendations to the city based on the review and analysis of data. Assessment data are presented to the Assessment Work Groups to analyze and make recommendations for quality improvement, assessment tools, milestones, standards and targets, professional development for teachers and agencies and additional support for children. In addition, the Assessment Work Group recommends the types and intensity of teacher training, including training about how to appropriately use assessment tools and conduct data analysis. In 2008-09, this process led to a three-day institute training focused on assessments and accountability, as well as meetings with directors, teachers and coaches to discuss their data and develop action plans. The Assessment and Accountability Institute was well received, helping participants understand the fundamentals of assessment, such as key features and appropriate uses of different assessment tools (e.g., the PPVT-4 and the ECERS), how to analyze data resulting from the assessments and how to use data to develop quality improvement plans and get results for a program, classroom or individual child.

The SPS Early Learning Department initiated a new literacy training for a cohort of kindergarten and first grade teachers in Title I elementary schools and invited preschool teachers to participate in this professional development in 2009. Out of a total of 300 SEEC preschool teachers, 19 teachers from Head Start, ECEAP and Step Ahead initially joined teams of teachers at the elementary schools where the preschool children would soon enter kindergarten.

In 2011, participation grew to three cohorts of professional development and reflective practice with 166 Pre-K, kindergarten and first grade teachers, coaches and specialists:

- In the capacity building cohort, participants will continue to focus on data-driven and instructional decision-making conversations. Teachers share classroom practices through lesson observation, site visits and student work.
- A second and third cohort of participants will learn how to implement an early learning team at their school site, focus on instructional core habits and improve literacy implementation along a developmental continuum.

In 2010-11, SPS offered a “Coaching Institute” for instructional services coaches to discuss the core habits of teaching and learning.

Early outcomes include the capacity building cohort’s creation of a “Reflective Walkthrough Tool” to use with colleagues in observing and discussing instructional practice. The ultimate purpose of the tool (in addition to observing one another’s instruction) is to elevate the level of teacher practice in the classroom and build teacher-leaders. The tool was created by and is being used by teachers in pairs or groups of three to observe one teacher conducting a lesson. The observers then use the guide to foster dialogue about student learning with the intention of improving practice.



## Funding Strategies: Families and Education Levy

In November 1990, Seattle voters approved a groundbreaking initiative for the future of the city's children. The Families and Education Levy provides support to children and their families both in and out of school, and was designed to help all of Seattle's children become school ready, succeed academically and graduate from high school. The levy-funded programs proved so effective in schools and communities throughout Seattle that voters renewed the levy in 1997, and expanded it in 2004. The \$69 million, seven-year levy supported programs in five areas, contributing to the success of children around the city.

While the 2004 levy continued to fund many of the programs instituted in the past, there was a sharper focus on preparing children to be ready for school, improving overall academic achievement and reducing the achievement gap for children of color and helping students complete school. All levy-funded programs have outcomes directly associated with this academic focus, with an emphasis placed on serving students and schools that have traditionally underperformed. Levy-funded investments are aligned with SPS Strategic Plan goals and scorecard measures.

The Seattle Office for Education administers the levy. The levy-funded preschool, SEEC professional development and assessment, elementary school community learning centers, kindergarten transition and family support workers in elementary schools are all key levers for improving alignment across Pre-K and K-3.

Levy funds are invested in critical stages of child development, starting with the Parent/Child Home Visitor Program for 2- and 3-year-olds and continuing through high school. As one of the few initiatives that touch children and families at so many ages, the levy provides a foundation for building a Pre-K through third grade system. Levy funds can fill gaps in services — such as providing preschool to 4-year-olds in families with earnings of up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level — and can be used to leverage state and federal funds, as has been the case with professional development.

Free of many of the restrictions placed on state and federal funds, levy resources can be flexibly applied where needs are greatest. The current emphasis on professional development grew out of a recognition that expanding access to preschool classrooms was not as critical as improving the quality of early learning for the most disadvantaged children.

All levy-funded programs have established targets for their academic outcomes on an annual basis. During this process, the city and its partners, including the school district, are able to identify key areas of emphasis and improvement for the upcoming school year. This nimbleness in allocating levy funds helps cement the Pre-K to third grade efforts into a more strategic and unified system. In November 2011, the residents of Seattle approved a new seven-year levy that nearly doubled overall funding to \$232 million from 2012 through 2018.

## Alignment in Action: A Fictional Portrait

*The City of Seattle, SPS and other community partners have reached many children in the community over the past two decades. A 2009-10 annual report on the Families and Education Levy noted that in the prior five years alone, the Families and Education Levy had invested in programs that have provided preschool support for approximately 4,000 children, out-of-school time programming and tutoring to more than 20,000 students, parent engagement and family support to at least 12,000 students' families, academic support and intervention to 19,000 students, and physical and mental health services to more than 40,000 students. Nevertheless, many of the programs and services in Seattle are still not universally available. This profile examines the experiences of a fictional boy named Jin, not to portray the experience of a "typical" child in Seattle, but to show what can happen when families experience a continuum of support as their children grow. Seattle continues to be committed to extending this type of experience to children and families throughout the community.*



Jin is in third grade at the South Shore School, a public Pre-K to eighth grade school in southeast Seattle. Like Jin, nearly one-third of the student population is Asian/Pacific Islander, but almost half of his friends are black, and others are white or Hispanic, reflecting the diversity of the school. He receives reduced-price school lunches, as do many children in his neighborhood.

When Jin was born, his mother asked her sister to watch him at her home three days per week so she could work. His aunt regularly attended a Play and Learn group at the local community center, and learned about many activities that were not only fun, but also helped Jin learn and develop. Jin played with other children of the same age and had opportunities to engage in a variety of developmental games and activities. Jin's aunt saw how the children could learn through play and was able to follow the group leaders' example to promote early literacy and school readiness through everyday activities at home.

Through the Play and Learn group, Jin's aunt also heard about the South Shore School's preschool program and encouraged her sister to enroll Jin. When Jin's mother and father visited the school, the principal shared with them that South Shore had received support from the New School Foundation for nearly a decade, which had helped shape its unique focus on early learning, particularly prekindergarten to grade three. She emphasized that the school creates a loving community of purposeful learning that honors the whole child — physically, emotionally and academically.

Jin's parents felt very welcome in the school and were especially impressed with the small class sizes, full-day Pre-K and kindergarten, active involvement of families, a curriculum that aligns and builds across all grade levels and significant professional development opportunities for Pre-K and elementary school teachers alike. They also liked that the school had a wellness team that monitored individual students' social, emotional and academic progress and used the Response to Intervention model to determine what types of interventions would be most effective for students of concern. This careful monitoring of students' progress and tracking of the effectiveness of interventions helped South Shore have a smaller number of students referred for special education when compared to other schools in the area.

When Jin entered Pre-K, his teacher was a fully certified member of the teaching staff, and was one of two in a Seattle Public Schools literacy training program, learning side-by-side with kindergarten and first grade teachers in five two-day trainings throughout the year. At end of the year, "step up" meetings gave Jin's Pre-K teacher a chance to share information about him and his classmates with the kindergarten teachers to determine the best placements for the year to come and prepare them to meet the students' individual needs. In addition, Jin's parents had the opportunity to have input into this process, helping them feel like active participants in their child's education.

Jin was excited to enter kindergarten and already felt at home in the school. Moreover, he eagerly engaged in the High/Scope approach to learning, which put the interests and choices of Jin and his classmates at the heart of his school activities. Within the daily plan-do-review sequence, he frequently enjoyed direct, hands-on experiences with people, objects, events and ideas. His parents also felt welcome and very connected to the school. They attended the back-to-school barbeque and a home visitor came to meet with them, as they did with all of the other Pre-K and kindergarten parents.

The aligned curriculum across all grade levels at the school gave Jin a greater sense of predictability as he transitioned into first grade. His work built on what he had already learned in Pre-K and kindergarten, helping him to feel like he was challenged but had the skills and knowledge to meet that challenge.

In second grade, Jin's teacher benefitted from feedback from one of two instructional coaches, two full-time counselors, a focus on social emotional learning using the Second Step curriculum, two family support workers, Powerful Readers tutoring for struggling readers in K-2, three academic support specialists who work with students in small groups and support teachers in their classrooms and bilingual staff (one certified teacher and three instructional assistants) offering in-classroom support in the 2009-10 school year. South Shore also budgeted for regular grade-level team meetings, and the second through fifth grade teachers, along with the math academic support staff, worked together on

math planning and ensured that when Jin began falling behind, he received additional math instruction to get him back on track. Beyond stronger academics and increasingly effective teaching, such a coordinated approach meant that more adults were informed about and invested in Jin's and each child's success.

Jin's third grade teacher reported that his class was one of the best of her 30-year career. In sharing this with the principal, however, she did not attribute this to individual students or to an overall classroom personality, but rather to the small class sizes, early childhood focus and intentional, active partnership between teachers and students — the High/Scope approach — utilized by the South Shore School and supported by the New School Foundation. All of these components had facilitated a strong personal connection with her students and their families. She noted that, as a result, her third graders at South Shore functioned differently from the students she had taught at other South End schools over the years. They were stronger readers and writers and more capable learners. As for Jin, he was excited about school and felt confident in his abilities to take on new challenges as he prepared to move on to fourth grade.





What will it take to forge deeper connections between early education programs and elementary schools to ensure that more children are prepared for a lifetime of learning? How can city leaders ensure that the fictional portraits of alignment in action allow all children in the community to receive the support and opportunities available to Marco, Jerome, Maria, Oscar, Olivia and Jin?

While each city in this study was unique in its approach, some common themes and lessons emerged across all of the cities:

- In each of these cities, it is clear that **strong leadership from the mayor and key city staff** can help spur new partnerships, structures and policies to create a better aligned system of education and support for young children from birth to age 8.
- In order to overcome the inherent challenges of breaking down silos and sustaining cross-sector efforts, cities need **collaborative bodies** with accountable working groups and solid work plans.
- Because it spans multiple program areas, alignment efforts are most effective when there is “**glue money**” available that can piece together funding — federal, state, local or philanthropic — that is brought to the table by collaborative partners and help fill in the gaps.
- Even in cities where this work is quite advanced, there is a great need for **better data** to allow the city to understand what is working and what is not. Cities are eager to develop new systems to collect and analyze existing data, develop common data systems, use data to improve programs and policies, and communicate outcomes to the public.
- **High-quality, developmentally appropriate programs** — in both the early childhood and elementary arenas — are crucial to sustained educational success for young children.
- **Joint professional development** at multiple levels (including policymakers, administrative leadership and teachers) is needed to build on the strengths of each system and create a common language among the fields of early childhood, education and human services.
- **Smooth transitions**, with as much information and consistency as possible, are critical for young children and can help families make the best choices for their families.
- Children need **wraparound programs and services** to facilitate and reinforce learning in the classroom, including parent education and training programs, access to health care and behavioral health services, aligned afterschool and summer learning programs and safe neighborhoods to call home.

While these case studies focused on children from birth to age 8 and the critical milestone of reading at grade level by the end of third grade, the cities recognized that these efforts are part of a larger educational pipeline that continues to have important milestones along the way. As a result, their initiatives for young children were typically embedded in, or coordinated with, a broader P-20 agenda. This framing helped increase buy-in among administrators and teachers in the K-12 education sector, demonstrating the importance of focusing on the front end of the educational pipeline in order to achieve desired results for children as they grow.

The cities in this study also highlight the balancing act between instituting citywide policies and programs and creating neighborhood initiatives that seek to improve and align young children's early childhood and elementary school experiences. Not surprisingly, cities with multiple school districts placed greater emphasis on the neighborhood approach, but all of the cities had a healthy mix of both approaches.

Local officials in each of these five cities acknowledge that there is much more to be done. Few of these efforts are happening at the scale to which city leaders aspire and each faces the ongoing challenges of sustaining momentum, leadership and funding over the long term. Nevertheless, Boston, Hartford, San Antonio, San José and Seattle — along with numerous other communities large and small across the country — offer compelling examples of what educational alignment can look like on the ground and the potential impact of concerted community efforts to give all children the foundational skills and supports they need to succeed.

# | CITY CONTACTS & RESOURCES

## BOSTON

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### RESOURCES:

Boston Public Schools' Accelerated Agenda: <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/agenda>

Countdown to Kindergarten: <http://www.countdowntokindergarten.org/>

Boston Quality Inventory 2010: Community Early Care and Education Programs:

<http://www.bostonequip.org/index.php/publications/recent-publications/>

Thrive in Five: Boston's School Readiness Roadmap:

[http://thrivein5boston.org/bostonuniver/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/TN5\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://thrivein5boston.org/bostonuniver/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/TN5_Full_Report.pdf)

Thrive in Five Year Two Report:

<http://thrivein5boston.org/resources-reports>

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### RESOURCES:

Connecticut State Department of Education – School Readiness, 2011:  
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=320740>

Hartford Blueprint for Young Children report:  
<http://www.hartfordinfo.org/issues/wsd/education/projectreportBlueprint.pdf>

Hartford Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation website: <http://ofyc.hartford.gov>

Hartford Public Schools Welcome Center website: <http://www.hartfordschools.org/for-parents/>

Parent Leadership Training Institute website: [http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/plti\\_about.htm](http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/plti_about.htm)



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## RESOURCES:

East Side Promise Neighborhood website: [www.eastsidepromise.org](http://www.eastsidepromise.org)

KLRN School Readiness resources: <http://klrn.org/Learning/EarlyChildhood/schoolreadiness.aspx>

Making Connections San Antonio website: <http://www.mc-sa.org/>

San Antonio 2020 report (see section on education): [http://sa2020.org/pdfs/SA2020\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://sa2020.org/pdfs/SA2020_Final_Report.pdf)



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### RESOURCES:

Applied Survey Research, School Readiness and Student Achievement: A Longitudinal Analysis of Santa Clara and San Mateo County Students. December 2010:

[http://www.sccpsr.org/Partnership\\_for\\_School\\_Readiness/Latest\\_Report\\_files/Longitudinal%202010%20FINAL%2012.13.10%20%28PCF%29.pdf](http://www.sccpsr.org/Partnership_for_School_Readiness/Latest_Report_files/Longitudinal%202010%20FINAL%2012.13.10%20%28PCF%29.pdf)

First 5 Santa Clara County website: <http://www.first5kids.org/>

Santa Clara County Early Learning Master Plan (November 2010):

[http://www.sccoe.k12.ca.us/depts/preschool/docs/Master\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.sccoe.k12.ca.us/depts/preschool/docs/Master_Plan.pdf)

Santa Clara County Early Learning Master Plan PowerPoint presentation (June 2011):

[https://sccoe.org/depts/preschool/elpm\\_docs/SJ\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_ED.pdf](https://sccoe.org/depts/preschool/elpm_docs/SJ_Early_Childhood_ED.pdf)

Santa Clara County Inclusion Collaborative, Annual Report 2010-11:

[http://www.sccoe.org/programs/inclusion-collaborative/docs/Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://www.sccoe.org/programs/inclusion-collaborative/docs/Annual_Report.pdf).

(Note: the 2009-10 report served as a resource in the preparation of this case study)

Santa Clara County Office of Education, SJ2020: Eliminating the Achievement Gap, February 3, 2011:

<http://www.sccoe.k12.ca.us/sj2020/>

SJ2020 Annual Report – 2012: [http://www.sccoe.org/sj2020/docs/Annual\\_Report\\_2012.pdf](http://www.sccoe.org/sj2020/docs/Annual_Report_2012.pdf)

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### RESOURCES:

City of Seattle/Seattle School District Families and Education Levy Partnership Agreement:  
<http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/education/PartnershipAgreement.pdf>

Evaluation of the Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregiver Project:  
<http://www.childcare.org/ffn-care/FFN-final-report-013108.pdf>

Families and Education Levy Annual Report 2009-10:  
<http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/education/documents/FELAnnualReport2009-2010i.pdf>

Richard N. Brandon, et. al., Understanding Family, Friend and Neighbor Care in Washington State: Developing Appropriate Training and Support. University of Washington Evans School of Public Affairs Human Services Policy Center, February 2002:  
<http://earlyeducationresearch.org/childcare/resources/2369>

Seattle's Aligned Kindergarten Readiness Guidelines (prepared by the SEEC Assessment Work Group): <http://www.seecwa.org>.

Seattle Pre-K to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Five Year Action Plan:  
[http://newschoolfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/PreK3rd-Action-Plan\\_20105.pdf](http://newschoolfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/PreK3rd-Action-Plan_20105.pdf)

State of Washington Early Learning and Development Benchmarks:  
<http://www.del.wa.gov/development/benchmarks/Default.aspx>

State of Washington Early Learning Plan: [http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-qris/docs/ELP\\_Exec.pdf](http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-qris/docs/ELP_Exec.pdf)

Washington Kids Early Learning Readiness Assessment:  
[http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/development/docs/WaKIDS\\_UW%202010PreliminaryReport.pdf](http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/development/docs/WaKIDS_UW%202010PreliminaryReport.pdf)





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