

EDUCATIONAL ALIGNMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN



PROFILES OF LOCAL INNOVATION



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)



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.



| 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.



| 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;



| 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-3rd 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).

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.

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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

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



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RESOURCES:

East Side Promise Neighborhood website: 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



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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

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

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

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.

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

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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 3rd Grade Five Year Action Plan:

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-gris/docs/ELP_Exec.pdf

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http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/development/docs/WaKIDS_UW%202010PreliminaryReport.pdf

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