



PLAYBOOK FOR BECOMING AN EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITY

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The President's Early Learning Agenda at a Glance

In his 2013 State of the Union Address, President Obama proposed a comprehensive early learning agenda and called on Congress to expand access to home visiting, high quality child care, and preschool for every child in America. In 2014, he repeated that request, and called together “a coalition of elected officials, business leaders, and philanthropists willing to help more kids access the high-quality pre-K they need.” Scientists and economists alike agree—investing in high-quality early learning is the best human capital investment we can make as a nation.

An overwhelming body of research from scientists, economists, public health, and education experts agree that the foundation for success in life begins during pregnancy and is built well before a child enters a kindergarten classroom. Leading economists agree that high-quality early learning programs can help level the playing field for children from low-income families in developing the cognitive and social and emotional skills necessary to help children succeed and stay engaged in school. Research has shown that taxpayers receive a high average return on investments in quality early childhood education. Economic studies have documented a return of \$7 or more for each dollar invested, through a reduced need for spending on other services, such as remedial education, grade repetition, and special education, as well as increased productivity and earnings in adulthood.

President Obama's comprehensive early learning agenda invests in a continuum of high-quality early learning for young children, starting at birth and continuing through preschool, which will prepare them for school and beyond. By giving children the strong start they need for success in school and life, families and communities—the very building blocks of a productive society—can be strengthened for generations to come.

Purpose of this Playbook

1. To support state, local, and tribal elected officials in conveying the importance of high-quality early learning to stakeholders in their communities;
2. To offer a snapshot of strategies, promising practices, and innovative ideas being employed in communities across the country;
3. To provide an overview of existing federal government and other resources that can support local efforts;
4. To encourage state, local, and tribal elected officials to assume leadership of building early learning plans in their communities, using their reach and relationships to engage business, philanthropic and nonprofit leaders, educators, and families; and
5. To promote the use of the most up-to-date data to drive decision-making and provide a framework for tracking and reporting-data moving forward.

Making the Case: Topline Talking Points

An Early Learning Community works together to deliver measurable improvements in the lives of its youngest children. It provides all children, regardless of what zip code they live in, an equal opportunity at success by implementing a continuum of high-quality early learning services. These communities demonstrate momentum in the following three priorities:

1. Significant public investments and private or nonprofit partnerships that catalyze greater investment in early learning;
 2. Clearly articulated goals to reach and serve additional children with high-quality early learning services; and
 3. A commitment to high-quality early learning services across the continuum from birth through age five.
- A continuum of high-quality early learning starts with good prenatal care for mothers; support for new parents; high-quality early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers; high-quality preschool; and full-day kindergarten. It requires community-buy in, partnerships, and a strong commitment to an investment in our youngest children.
 - Economists and scientists alike agree: The beginning years of any child's life are critical for building the early foundation of health and wellness needed for success in school and later in life.
 - During these years, children's brains are developing rapidly, influenced by the richness of their early experiences and the interactions they share with their families, caregivers, teachers, peers, and in their communities.
 - What a child *hears* has direct and dramatic consequences for what a child *learns*. Children who hear fewer words have vocabularies that are half the size of their peers by age three, putting them at a disadvantage before they even step foot in a classroom.
 - In addition to promoting language development, talking to one's child promotes *brain development* more broadly. Every time a parent or caregiver has a positive, engaging verbal interaction with a child—whether it is talking, singing, or reading—neural connections of all kinds are strengthened within the child's rapidly growing brain.
 - A child's early years set the trajectory for the relationships and successes they will experience for the rest of their lives, making it crucial that all children are afforded the high-quality early learning experiences they need to thrive.
 - The Obama Administration is committed to working with Congress, states, and communities on establishing a continuum of high-quality services for children from birth through age five that would provide learning opportunities to young children across America, from day one.
 - Working with Congress, the Administration has increased investments for infants and toddlers by expanding Early Head Start and funding Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program, and the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge.

- The Administration has also enhanced the quality of Head Start and, with Congress, funded the Preschool Development Grants. These State grants will make high-quality pre-k a reality for tens of thousands of 4-year-olds across America.
- Just last month, the President signed the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act that Congress passed a few days earlier, with strong bipartisan support.
- This law will improve the quality of child care by requiring more training for caregivers and more enrichment for children; improve child safety by instituting background checks for staff and better inspection of facilities; and promote continuity of care, all of which will give working parents a little more peace of mind and will give children the stable and reliable care that they need to develop and learn in their early years.
- Differences in early development and achievement by family income and education are evident as early as nine months of age, and widen with age. If we want to close the achievement gap, we must start long before the first day of kindergarten.

STRATEGIES FOR TAKING ACTION

STEP #1: MOBILIZE KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Elected officials know that any effort to make lasting change in the community requires a coalition of partners to collectively own and implement a robust community-wide strategy. Multiple partners including parents, educators, civic organizations, philanthropists, businesses, and faith-based groups must feel empowered to champion the cause and can play key leadership roles in building support for increased access to high-quality early learning services. While there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to success, below are some strategies for how to initiate and develop this type of buy-in, paired with examples of successful strategies that communities have used.

Strategy 1: Use the convening power of a local elected office to establish a taskforce, comprised of a diverse group of leaders and stakeholders that will champion the cause. Start by conducting a phone-tree and call time to recruit business leaders, faith leaders, educators, law enforcement, parents, teachers’ unions, public and private early learning program administrators, non-profit representatives, and other elected officials in the area to join in this important cause. Make the case using the well-established science and economic benefits of universal high-quality early education. Consider organizing a “Preschool Day” where community leaders visit early learning programs across the community.

Strategy 2: Build public support. Work with a cadre of cross-sector volunteers to kick off a public awareness campaign. Host a series of town halls for parents, teachers, community-based organizations, businesses, philanthropists, and others to discuss early learning and its impact on children, families, and the broader community, including potential impacts on high school graduation rates, the economy, and reductions in crime, as have been demonstrated in research literature.

Strategy 3: Conduct a series of listening sessions with local experts and stakeholders to assess community need and the direction the initiative should take. Work with school board members, district Superintendents, and elementary school principals and teachers to identify the learning gaps that children have when they enter Kindergarten, and develop a vision for reform.

Most importantly, leaders should think about what strategies might work best in their own communities. Each local area has unique needs, characteristics, and select groups of players that influence how stakeholders mobilize around a common cause.

STEP #2: USE DATA TO SHARE THE BASICS ON YOUNG CHILDREN IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Use publicly available data to lay the foundation for understanding the need for and benefits of a robust early learning initiative. State and local elected officials need and expect reliable data from which they can advance sound policies and increased investments that benefit children, families, and the broader community. Leaders want to know how many children, by age group, live in the community and how many of those are in high- and low-quality early learning settings. In order to advance robust policies and increase investments, policy leaders and private sector partners must understand the landscape of existing services and the gaps in quality and access. Other compelling information includes the number of low-income children in the community, math and reading proficiency gaps between different subgroups of children, and the correlation in access to early education and academic achievement.

Communities have a variety of options to turn to for reliable community- and state-level data sources. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a data source on family and child wellbeing, with information presented nationally by state, city, and district. The database contains many indicators by which communities can search, including:

- The number of 3- and 4-year-olds in the state or city's highest poverty communities enrolled in high-quality preschool;
- The number of children under 6 whose parents had concerns about their development;
- The number of children under 6 who received a developmental screening;
- The percentage of 4th graders who scored below proficient reading level;
- The percentage of 8th graders who scored below proficient math level; and
- The percentage of high school students not graduating on time.

The U.S. Department of Education's **Civil Rights Data Collection** reports biannually, at the school district level, on a variety of information including, student enrollment and educational programs and services, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, sex, limited English proficiency and disability. This important resource also reports data on the number of children enrolled in preschool and the number young children suspended and expelled from preschool programs each year.

The Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) is a public dataset that provides comprehensive data on the services, staff, children, and families served by Head Start and Early Head Start programs nationwide. All grantees and delegates are required to submit PIR data for Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Communities can use **State Child Care Licensing Databases** to identify the landscape of child care programs, including how many programs are licensed, accredited, or meeting quality standards. Some states also have child care workforce databases.

The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) has three longitudinal studies that can provide national data on children's development and experiences starting at birth and continuing through the eighth grade. One of the longitudinal studies from NCES is the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), from which communities can use data to analyze the relationships between individual, family, school, and community-level variables and children's development, early learning, and performance in school.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) Yearbook is another source of data, presented at the State level. This annual report profiles state-funded pre-K programs in each state including the number of 3- and 4- year-olds in Head Start, state-funded preschool and special education programs, and includes indicators of program quality and costs.

Many cities and states that have experienced recent successes in their early learning initiatives have effectively used data to help build the case for funding and continuous early learning quality improvements, including Indianapolis, Seattle, and San Antonio.

Indianapolis, Indiana

Approximately 30,639 at-risk 4-year-olds who live in Indiana are not currently enrolled in publicly-funded early education programs. Indianapolis leaders decided to do something about this. In order to better understand and address their county's challenge, policy leaders collected the following data:

- *The average cost of quality preschool:* They found that in their community, a quality preschool slot costs between \$4,708 and \$6,972 per child, per year.
- *Affordability of Early Learning for Families at or Below Poverty:* The federal poverty level for a family of four is \$23,850. About 37% of all children ages 0-5 in Indianapolis meet this criterion. Taking into account the cost of a high-quality early learning slot, these families would have to dedicate between 20-29% of their income to afford a high-quality slot for their child. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers child care affordable if it does not exceed 10% of family income.
- *Affordability of Early Learning for Middle Class Families:* The mean income in Indianapolis is \$41,800 for a family of four, therefore \$4,180 would be an affordable total cost for two children to attend preschool (\$2,090 per child). Indianapolis found that high-quality programs (absent a federal child care subsidy) were not affordable for families earning median income levels or below.
- *Availability of High-Quality Early Learning:* The community found that only 15% of Marion County's 800 licensed centers, licensed homes, and registered ministries in preschool providers are considered high-quality.

These data were used to demonstrate the need for greater access to high-quality early learning services for all of Indianapolis' children, especially those living in families with earnings at or below the median family income level.

Seattle, Washington

The City of Seattle's Office for Education (OFE)—soon to be the Department of Education and Early Learning—conducted a gap analysis in access to quality early learning services for young children for the Seattle City Council. The analysis demonstrated the following:

- The estimated number of children in child care was between 7,800 and 9,000 – approximately 63% to 73% of 3- and 4-year olds.

- Conversely, between 4,480 and 3,280 3- and 4-year-olds were not in formal preschool care.
- Higher-income families were more likely than lower-income families to have their children enrolled in formal preschool programs.
- For families earning less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, about 1,700 (54%) were in formal care while 1,500 were not.
- Children with foreign-born parents were significantly less likely to be enrolled than those with U.S. born parents.
- Federal, state, and city-subsidized programs provided early learning services for approximately 2,000 3- and 4-year-olds, or about 17% of that age group.

In addition, OFE noted that for the 2012-13 school year, only 40.5% of young children entering Seattle Public Schools exhibited skills at or above what is considered typical for kindergarteners in all six domains assessed on the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills.

On November 4, 2014, Seattle voters approved Proposition 1B, a \$58 million property-tax levy to adopt and fund a four-year pilot of the newly designed Seattle Preschool Program. This initial phase will build toward serving 2,000 children in 100 classrooms by 2018. This winter, OFE will host a series of community meetings to increase awareness about the various elements of high-quality preschool and solicit input from key stakeholders on how each element should be implemented and supported.

STEP #3: DEVELOP A COMMUNITY-WIDE STRATEGY OR PLAN

Several local leaders have established working groups or taskforces to review policies, programs and practices and create new or improved early childhood education policies that would better serve their community. The results of these reviews are often used to inform clearly articulated community-wide early learning plans, target goals, and outcomes. Strong plans encompass a continuum of services, starting with providing prenatal and postnatal support for parents and infants, providing early learning experiences for infants and toddlers, ensuring access to high-quality preschool, and implementing full-day kindergarten.

In replicating these efforts, communities can ensure success by engaging a working group or taskforce that includes a broad spectrum of leaders to help conduct the review, create a comprehensive strategy or plan, attain widespread buy-in for that plan, and facilitate implementation. Each community must determine the strategy that best meets the needs of its community. Communities can seek support from their State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care (SACs) who are charged with developing a high-quality, comprehensive system of early childhood development and care, ensuring statewide coordination and collaboration among the wide range of early childhood programs and services in the State. These programs include home visiting, child care, Head Start, IDEA preschool and infants and families programs, and pre-K programs and services. Working with partners at both the local and state level can enable communities to build stronger and more coordinated efforts.

Strategy 1: Identify all of the funding streams and services provided to young children in your community, starting prenatally and extending to kindergarten entry. Organize them by target age group. For example, a variety of programs may be offered to expectant mothers, new parents, and infants and toddlers, including child care subsidies, home visiting, or community-based parenting education programs, as well as Early Head Start. Head Start, child care, public and private preschool programs, as well as parenting classes or other parenting programs may be offered to 3- and 4-year olds and their families.

- Strategy 2:** Once the landscape of local services are mapped, use data to identify gaps and community needs. Work with the SAC to access additional data. Use the data to determine, for example, the percentage of infants and toddlers that are in high-quality early learning programs and the percentage of 3- and 4- year olds in high-quality preschool. What are the areas of greatest need in access to high-quality early learning?
- Strategy 3:** Consider and articulate how to enhance quality across settings and across the early learning continuum. What quality components should be targeted first? What settings will be targeted first, and for what age groups? Quality enhancement may include credit-bearing training and education for the early learning workforce, investing in an evidence-based curriculum paired with coaching and professional development, increasing compensation for early educators, and health and safety improvements across all early learning centers.
- Strategy 4:** Articulate a plan to expand access to high-quality early learning for children from birth to school-entry. Based on data-informed community need and available resources, communities may start by increasing access to infant toddler care in community-based settings or by expanding access to high-quality preschool programs, both in local schools and in community-based settings. Universal access to high-quality early learning requires in most communities an innovative mixed-delivery system.
- Strategy 4:** Establish a timeline and prioritize what gaps to tackle first, second, and third, based on community need and data.
- Strategy 5:** Ensure that the plan includes a system to track data, evaluate effectiveness, and engage in continuous quality improvements.
- Strategy 6:** Continue to update and expand the plan as the community progresses to achieve greater depth and reach in becoming an early learning community that provides every child with a strong early childhood education.

Los Angeles County, CA

Los Angeles County has 650,000 children ages birth to five and more than 41,000 child care providers and educators. With funding from a 1998 ballot initiative to increase cigarette and tobacco taxes, First 5 California was formed, which subsequently developed 58 local agencies around the state, including First 5 LA, to support the development of young children from birth to age five. After the creation of a Universal Preschool master plan, First 5 LA established Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), an independent, non-profit organization. Today, LAUP manages preschool programs in over 600 sites serving more than 22,000 children per year in LA County.

On October 21, 2014, Secretary Duncan joined over 130 organizations that gathered in Los Angeles as participants in an early care and education forum, part of a series of White House early education events across the country in the fall of 2014. The forum was called “Children: LA’s Greatest Investment,” sponsored by LA n Sync, and presented in partnership with LAUP, First 5 Los Angeles, The LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment, The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, Scholastic Inc., the Annenberg Foundation and The California Community Foundation. The forum initiated a process to create the “Los Angeles County Early Care and Education Blueprint for Quality, Policy and Investment.” The Blueprint will serve as a roadmap for the County to fulfill specific goals in four major priority domains established by the state of California in 2012, including expanding access to high-quality early learning; enhancing the quality of early learning programs; improving the workforce; and strengthening family partnerships. The October forum was the genesis of this process, which to date has engaged

dozens of stakeholders and deep philanthropic interest toward the adoption of a county-wide plan within 15-18 months.

San Antonio, TX

The City of San Antonio made early childhood a high priority for the City and their first step was to convene a blue ribbon task-force, “The Brainpower Taskforce”, comprised of Chief Executive Officers, Superintendents, and education professionals. The Taskforce was charged with identifying the most effective method for improving the quality of education in San Antonio. Based on local data, The Brainpower Taskforce recommended the development of a program focused on high-quality pre-K services for 4-year-old children. The group determined that in order to fund the program, a tax increase was necessary. In November, 2012, voters in San Antonio passed the Pre-K 4 SA initiative, increasing the sales tax by one-eighth of a cent and generating about \$31 million a year to fund a full-day preschool program for 22,400 4-year-olds. The program includes experienced teachers, high-quality curriculum, and options for bilingual education. Although only a year old, the program is showing promising outcomes. Preliminary results show achievement gaps for children who attended the program have been reduced by at least 25% in language, 33% in math, and 90% in literacy, when compared to kindergarten students who did not participate. There also appears to be a significant reduction in special education placement and grade retention of between 20% - 40%.

STEP #4: DETERMINE FUNDING MECHANISMS THAT WORK BEST FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

After garnering community-buy in and developing a data-informed early learning plan, communities should identify the most appropriate financing strategy. Federal, State, local, and private funds can be leveraged to fund an early learning initiative that establishes a high-quality continuum of early learning services to young children, from birth. The financing strategy will vary from community to community, depending on available resources and involved stakeholders, with some being primarily publically funded and others supported by public-private partnerships.

Examples of federal early childhood funding streams include the Child Care and Development Fund, Early Head Start and Head Start, the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program, IDEA Part B and C programs, Title I, Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grants, the new Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, and Preschool Development Grants. At the State and local levels, investments may come from state or local taxes. Private sector investments from individuals, businesses, or philanthropies can augment or create new services for children. Communities should consider all potential funding streams and leverage them according to community need, and in accordance with their early learning plan. Special attention should be paid to ensuring funding is directed toward enhancing existing program quality and expanding access to high-quality early learning.

- Strategy 1:** Identify existing Federal, State, local, and private funds used for early learning programs in the community. Use data and your early learning plan to identify which parts of the continuum are under-funded, based on community need.

- Strategy 2:** Conduct an analysis to identify untapped public or private funding sources that can be used to enhance funding in areas of need along the early learning continuum. Areas of need can be determined by defining access to high quality services by age group. What percentages of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers have access to affordable high-quality early learning programs?

Strategy 3: Work with stakeholders, businesses, philanthropists, and elected leaders to develop innovative partnerships and efficiencies such as using a Shared Services model. Shared Services is a business model that enables a group of center- and family child care providers to team up and consolidate administrative costs and services, and to collaborate, coordinate, and learn from each other.

Strategy 4: As resources, investments, and community needs shift, analyze investments and shift funding allocations, as needed. For example, if the state is investing in expanding high-quality preschool to serve a large segment of the 4-year-old population, transfer funds to serve additional infants and toddlers. In such cases of preschool expansion, Head Start programs may consider shifting funds downward and converting Head Start slots to Early Head Start slots to serve a greater number of infants and toddlers.

New York City, New York, Tulsa, Oklahoma and Chattanooga, Tennessee are just three communities that have developed their own strategies, appropriate for their communities, to fund high-quality early learning.

New York City, New York: A Strong Public Investment

New York City has taken the transformative step of nearly doubling what is now the biggest public pre-K program in the country, enrolling well over 50,000 4-year-olds in the 2014 school year in high-quality, full-day pre-K, with an ambitious plan to increase that number to 70,000 children next year. The pre-K program is operating in 600 public schools and 1,100 community-based organizations across the City. City funds raised through the Personal Income Tax increase will be used in their entirety to fund expansion and quality enhancements of new and existing pre-K programs.

Given the new influx of local public investment in pre-K for 4-year-olds, the City is working to leverage its Federal funds to expand high quality services to younger children, namely infants and toddlers. As more 4-year-olds transition to public pre-K settings, Head Start funds will be shifted downward to serve more infants and toddlers. This strategy effectively leverages local and Federal funds to ensure a high quality continuum of early learning experiences, starting prenatally and extending to school entry, enabling tens of thousands of the City's youngest children to start school healthy, happy, and ready to excel.

Tulsa Educare - Tulsa, Oklahoma: Robust Public-Private Partnerships

The Tulsa Educare model, in Tulsa, Oklahoma is an example of what communities can accomplish when the public and private sectors team up for children and families. Tulsa Educare provides high-quality, full-day, full-year early learning, family engagement, and health promotion services to low-income children and their families, from birth to age five. Tulsa Educare is part of the larger Educare network that currently consists of 21 Educare schools across the country.

Private funding, primarily from the George Kaiser Family Foundation, investment income, and other donations, has been foundational to building the Educare model. Private funds have enabled construction of early childhood centers adjacent to heavily attended elementary schools in neighborhoods with at-risk children, truly bringing these critical services to places in the community where they are needed most. Though private funding has been critical to this exemplary effort, public funding has been equally essential. The program uses a combination of federal funds, from Early Head Start, the Child Care and Development Fund, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program; State funds from the Oklahoma Department of Education; and local funds from the Tulsa early childhood stimulus fund, among others, to fund significant portions of their operating costs, including salaries and benefits for a highly qualified staff, supplies and equipment to scaffold children's learning, and nutritious foods to ensure that children are well-nourished and ready to learn. The robust public-private funding strategy that Tulsa's Educare

model uses is leveling the playing field, narrowing the opportunity gap, and enabling some of Oklahoma's most in-need children to get the early experiences they need to get ready for school and thrive.

Chattanooga, Tennessee: An Innovative Shared Services Model

Many local communities across the country are designing and implementing innovative funding strategies to increase access to high quality early learning services. For example, a coalition of early childhood experts in Chattanooga, Tennessee is adopting the Shared Services approach to financing high-quality early childhood services. Affiliated programs jointly fund a hub that centralizes costs and services, that may include research and data collection, professional development and training, human resource services such as recruitment and payroll services, bulk purchasing of supplies, and comprehensive services, such as health or family engagement supports. Sharing the costs of these critical components of high quality early learning programs reduces the amount of time and resources each individual program spends on the services and in turn, enables them to spend more time and resources on direct child and family services.

In Chattanooga's model, a large nonprofit child development center, the Children's Home/Chambliss Shelter, provides comprehensive management services to 10 independent nonprofit child care centers. This cost-saving model has allowed the affiliated programs to raise teacher wages and benefits, decrease staff turnover, and raise the quality of services provided to young children and families. The "hub" agency, in this case the Children's Home/Chambliss Shelter, and its child care affiliates, use public funds, such as Federal Child Care and Development Funds, as well as private funds, from United Way and others in the community.

By leveraging public and private funds to adopt an innovative funding strategy, early childhood programs in Chattanooga were able to increase the quality of early care and education their youngest children received, setting them up to excel in school and beyond.

STEP #5: DEVELOP A DATA TRACKING SYSTEM

Sustainable funding for early learning programs requires demonstrated progress. In order to zero in on strategies that are working, it is helpful to implement transparent data tracking systems to monitor progress on early learning community goals and coordinate services across programs serving young children and families.

Strategy 1: Aspiring early learning communities should consult with similar communities that have successfully established a coordinated early childhood data tracking system to garner lessons learned.

Strategy 2: Develop a diverse coalition of champions to garner buy-in from organizations providing early learning services, and other social services, to young children and families in your community. Establish contracts or agreements with as many service providers as possible to ensure their participation in the data system.

Strategy 3: Develop a universal intake process and/or tool to be used across services that have similar eligibility criteria. This will reduce burden on families and provide a common data point across services.

Palm Beach County, Florida, Cumberland County, North Carolina, and the White Earth Nation have all made significant gains in designing and implementing coordinated data systems that meet the needs of their communities.

Palm Beach County, Florida

The Children's Service Council (CSC) of Palm Beach County is an independent special district of local government, authorized in 1986 by a ballot initiative, that provides a plethora of services to young children and families, including maternal and child health, early identification and intervention, quality and affordable early care and education and after school programs, parenting education and support, teen pregnancy prevention, and mentoring. The CSC was reauthorized by voters this year with an 85% approval rate, the highest percentage achieved by any countywide ballot issue in over a decade.

From the beginning, the CSC was eager to demonstrate impact for the County's investments and ensure that services for young children and families were well coordinated. This prompted them to develop a comprehensive data system, referred to as the Healthy Beginnings Data System (HBDS). The HBDS holds data on the over 60 programs that provide services per the CSC, and on all children and families served through those programs. The system allows the Council to track the services each child and family receives and outcomes associated with those services, enabling them to demonstrate impact and continuously improve programs in a data-driven way. In turn, it allows programs across sectors, including the health, family intervention, and early childhood sectors to identify what additional services the families that they are serving are receiving, facilitating coordination and smooth transitions, and preventing duplication. The CSC is also in cooperation with the local School District, and has implemented a process to issue student identification numbers at birth with parent consent, further enabling the County to demonstrate impact for investments longitudinally. The data system is centralized at CSC and is affordable to maintain, particularly considering the wealth of invaluable information it affords the City and voters of Palm Beach County.

Cumberland County, North Carolina

Partnership for Children (PFC) of Cumberland County is the nonprofit organization charged with implementing North Carolina's Smart Start and pre-K programs in Cumberland County, serving over 30,000 children and families last year alone. Services are provided through a variety of coordinated programs, including child care subsidies, early learning services and family support programs.

Given the diversity of services offered to meet the unique needs of young children and families in Cumberland, PFC set out a vision to develop an integrated data system for collecting, reporting and using child outcomes data. This would enable the County's several service organizations to have access to cost-effective, user-friendly data tracking and evaluation support. The effort has not only led to a coordinated shared data system, it has also resulted in a strong community of practice among service providers in the County. In addition to sharing data, providers across service sectors are now sharing evaluation methods, such as using common measurement tools, which will enable them to more easily track child and family outcomes across sectors, longitudinally. In addition to providing a centralized data hub, PFC is also building the capacity of organizations to use their own data for evaluative and continuous quality improvement purposes. The model was so well received in the County, that to date, 21 other counties have joined the effort. It is expected that the number of counties will grow in the coming months, with funds from the Federal Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge grant.

White Earth Nation

The White Earth Nation, also known as the White Earth Band of Chippewa, located in northwest Minnesota, has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting a high quality continuum of early learning services for young children and families. White Earth receives federal Early Head Start and Head Start, home visiting, and child care funds to provide young children and their families with high quality early learning services. In 2012, White Earth was awarded a Tribal Early Learning Initiative (TELI) grant, intended to coordinate early learning services across the reservation. TELI funds contributed to the development of WECARE, (White Earth Coordination, Assessment, Resources, Education), a coordinated family-centered case management model

that facilitates the partnering of all Tribal agencies to better address the diverse needs of young children and families.

The goal of WECARE is to decrease duplication while increasing services, referrals, resources, communication, and coordination between tribal programs in order to bring about widespread change in how tribal programs work with families and achieve common goals. The philosophy of WECARE is that there is no wrong door through which families can enter services, prompting the creation of universal intake and confidentiality forms to be used across tribal programs. The WECARE service network will provide uninterrupted services in transportation, employment, substance abuse prevention, mental health, safety, child care/early childhood, Head Start, home visiting, child protection, education, elders, housing, health care, energy, and finance.

As part of WECARE, the Nation has invested in Rite Track, a software system that allows all tribal early childhood programs, including home visiting, Head Start, child care, and other tribal programs (e.g., housing, health, enrollment), to manage and share family and child data for those served, pending family permission. Through the WECARE service system, White Earth Nation can evaluate program outcomes; create a feedback loop that reports data back to management for use in improving and refining program offerings; and cultivate a culture of success rooted in passion, accountability, leadership, and teamwork.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT AND EXPAND ON YOUR PLAN

After devising a plan, complete with key stakeholder buy-in, a strong and sustainable funding strategy, and a comprehensive data system, communities can move forward and implement their plans to become a strong early learning community. Communities will all start at different places, using different strategies, but once implementation begins, partners should diligently evaluate progress, continue to expand their plan, and enhance services. Communities can strive for higher quality early learning programs, consisting of a highly skilled workforce, evidence-based curriculum paired with workforce coaching, strong partnerships with families, established connections to community partners that provide health, mental health, and social services, and inclusive programming that meets the needs of all children, including those with and at risk for disabilities. As quality continues to improve, communities should also work toward universal access to early learning for children, starting at birth and extending to school-entry.

Strategy 1: Set up a feedback loop of continuous evaluation and program improvement. Communities should analyze their data to ensure progress and identify gaps in quality. For example, if communities first ensured that all early learning teachers met a set of competencies, as a second step, they can focus on ensuring that all teachers have access to coaching to continually improve their practice.

Strategy 2: Continue to expand access to high-quality services. If your community started their efforts by opening preschool classrooms in public schools, the next step may be to implement a mixed-delivery system, where early learning services are offered in schools *and* community-based organizations. Similarly, if the community started their plan by targeting community-based settings, the next step may be to engage local school districts and establish preschool classrooms in schools. If most of the focus started on infants and toddlers, the next step may be to focus on preschool services.

Below are two examples of communities that have started implementation and continue to expand their plans, while evaluating their progress, setting them on the path to becoming model early learning cities for the nation.

Boston, Massachusetts

In 2005, the City of Boston launched a citywide, universal pre-K program in Boston Public Schools (BPS) for 4-year-olds that combined two features of early childhood education: research-based integrated and thematic curricula and quality professional development informed by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) quality standards and practices. Today, the BPS high-quality pre-K program serves over 2,300 4-year olds and research shows it is making a big difference. Evaluations of the program, including a Harvard Graduate School of Education evaluation of over 2,000 students, show that regardless of race and income, children who participate in the BPS pre-K program benefit in language, math, executive functioning and self-regulation.

The next step the effort took was expanding beyond a school based program to include community-based programs, given the importance of having a mixed delivery system and the lack of capacity to meet the needs of all of the City's 4-year-olds in schools. BPS leveraged funding from several sources to provide the same pre-K program that was successful in schools, to a pilot group of community-based organizations, in an effort called the Boston K1DS demonstration project. In addition to supplying the community-based programs with similar training and curriculum, they increased the salaries of their teachers. While the pilot and its evaluation are still underway, preliminary results look promising, showing gains in instructional quality in math and language and literacy. Boston Public Schools and its partners in the Boston K1DS effort recently received additional funding to expand the project to select Head Start classrooms in the City. In addition to the curriculum, materials, and coaching support, this new Head Start project will build Head Start's internal capacity for classroom mentoring and coaching.

As successful as Boston's Pre-K program has been, the City recognizes that in order to truly close the achievement gap, they need to not only increase access to high-quality early learning services for 4-year-olds, but also improve access to high-quality services and education for children before- and after pre-K.

In 2008, Boston launched Thrive in Five, a public-private partnership between the City of Boston and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay. Thrive in Five identified the school readiness needs of the community and developed a five-pronged strategy to meet those needs. They chose to target their efforts on Ready City that will prioritize school readiness across sectors; Ready Educators, that will be supported by a high quality professional development system; Ready Systems, that will bring together health, intervention, and support services to ensure early detection and intervention for young children; Ready Families, that will have the information and resources they need to achieve school readiness and family wellbeing; and Ready Children, who will be tracked to ensure school readiness. The effort brings together a strong coalition of stakeholders to continue expanding Boston's plan, by attaining community buy-in, tracking outcomes, setting goals and strategies, and increasing alignment and collaboration across a variety of early childhood services and providers and schools.

To tackle the latter part of the learning continuum, the City is now working with several renowned academic experts to develop a curriculum and adequate supports for kindergarten through third grades. For Boston, starting with 4-year olds in the school system made the most sense. After a successful implementation and evaluation demonstrating effectiveness, they began to extend out to community-based settings. They also established Thrive in Five to continue to lead the City's strategy into its next stages. As those processes are underway, they are working with expert partners to fill in the rest of the continuum, starting at birth and continuing through third grade. Their efforts to implement a strong continuum of early learning for kids, will ultimately result in more of Boston's children thriving, no matter what zip code they live in, solidifying the City's status as a model early learning City.

San Francisco, California

In March 2004, San Francisco voters ushered in a new era for the City's children and families, creating one of the nation's first city-funded universal preschool programs, Preschool for All (PFA). With the passage of Proposition H, the City and County of San Francisco formed a new Public Education Enrichment Fund with dedicated resources for expanding high-quality preschool to all 4-year-olds in San Francisco. Ten years later, children's preschool participation is at an all-time high and kindergarteners are starting school with better academic and social skills. PFA's universal mixed delivery approach has brought opportunity to neighborhoods and populations, which previously had the least access to high-quality early education.

Key to San Francisco's community-wide planning and implementation success were:

- Investing in children and families;
- Interagency planning and partnership;
- Blending and braiding funding; and
- Allowing the time it takes for innovation.

San Francisco's plan and ultimate implementation has included four primary agencies that provide a wide range of services and support to young children and families. First 5 San Francisco works to improve child health, enhance child development, strengthen families, and improve systems of care for the first five years of a child's life; the Department of Children, Youth & Families creates and facilitates innovative city wide policies and projects; the San Francisco Human Services Agency administers child welfare programs and offers a range of employment, food, and shelter support for families; and the San Francisco Department of Public Health runs a groundbreaking Healthy Kids program that guarantees health insurance for every San Francisco child. Additionally, the San Francisco Unified School District's Early Education Department is focused on preschool through grade three solutions to close achievement gaps. The newly established Mayor's Office of Early Care and Education will join forces with the existing players to continue building on the early education effort. San Francisco's philanthropic community has also taken a leadership role by investing in early learning program and service quality enhancements. Through public-private partnerships and funding, integrating a Quality Rating and Improvement System, using data and evaluation for continuous improvement, weaving together health, mental health, inclusion, and family support within early education settings; and aligning with kindergarten through grade three, PFA has made significant progress in improving educational outcomes for thousands of children in San Francisco.

RESOURCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES THAT CAN ASSIST COMMUNITIES WITH EXECUTING A COMPREHENSIVE EARLY LEARNING PLAN

Funding

- **Shared Services Model that enables early learning providers to share costs and deliver services in a more streamlined and efficient way:**
 - Tools and Resources:
<http://opportunities-exchange.org/approach/shared-services-overview/>
- **Conversion of Head Start Slots into Early Head Start Slots:** As expansion of pre-K for 4-year-olds continues across the country, Head Start programs that serve 3- and 4-year olds, can begin to shift resources down to serve additional infants and toddlers through Early Head Start. The Program Instructions below provide guidance for Head Start programs on converting Head Start slots to Early Head Start slots.
 - https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/pi/2014/resour_pri_002_061814.html

Model Early Learning Communities

- **Invest in US.** Invest in US is a new organization focused on working with public and private partners, business leaders, philanthropists, advocates, elected officials and the community to expand high-quality early childhood education programs for children birth through age five. Communities interested in becoming an Early Learning Community can reach out to Invest in US for help with technical assistance. As additional resources become available, Invest in US will connect communities interested in becoming an Early Learning Community with its partners including the Alliance for Early Success, the Build Initiative, the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, Early Childhood-LINC, the National Association of Counties, the National Governors Association, the National Institute for Early Childhood Education Research, the National League of Cities, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, who will help connect leaders with resources, planning grants, technical assistance (TA), communities and states of practice opportunities. To learn more about additional model Early Learning Communities and to access its resources, visit www.investinus.org.

Enhancing Quality of Early Learning Services for Children Birth to Five

Supporting parents and guardians: Parents and families are children's first and most important teachers, nurturers, and advocates. The following resources can be shared with parents in the community to help foster children's development from birth to school entry.

- <http://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/>
- <http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources.htm>
- <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/eecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive/families>
- <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family>

Professional Development: Teachers and staff are the core of high quality programs. The following resources can be used to bolster professional development for the critical early learning workforce.

- <http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources.htm>

- <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/watchmetraining/index.html>
- <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>
- <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health>
- <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family>

Developmental and Behavioral Screening: Developmental and behavioral screening is an imperative component of ensuring that children arrive at school healthy and ready to learn. Early detection is critical to ensuring that children who need additional supports, get them as soon as possible.

- <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/watchmetraining/index.html>
- <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health>

Social Emotional and Behavioral Health: Social-emotional and behavioral health are key to ensuring children arrive at school ready to learn. This important domain of development is predictive of school readiness, relationships with peers, and behavioral outcomes later in life. The following resources help programs support children’s social emotional and behavioral health, which can also assist in reducing suspensions and expulsions, a pressing problem in the field.

- <http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/67637.html>
- <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>
- <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive>
- <http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/>

Enhancing Early Learning Services for Infants and Toddlers

- **Clearing Your View: Staying Objective in Observation.** This podcast explains how to observe babies and record what is seen in an objective way that will help staff understand the meaning of the child’s behavior.
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/cde/saeo/ClearingYourVie.htm>
- **Look at Me! Using Focused Child Observation.** This podcast introduces viewers to using focused observation with infants and toddlers and gives the viewer an opportunity to practice techniques of observation.
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/cde/saeo/LookatMeUsing.htm>
- **Spending Time Outdoors Matters for Infants and Toddlers!** This podcast shares some of the benefits that infants and toddlers gain by spending quality time outside.
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/cde/learning-environments/SpendingTimeOut.htm>
- **Home Visitors Help.** This podcast features EHS families, describing how home visiting has positively impacted their children and family.
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/poi/home-based/HomeVisitorsHel.htm>
- **Approaches Toward Learning—Foundations of School Readiness Parts I, II and III.** This series defines the school readiness domain of approaches to learning for infants and toddlers, and describes how to understand the domain in the context of learning.
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/school-readiness/nycuschoolread01.htm>
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/school-readiness/nycuschoolread02.htm>

- <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/school-readiness/nycuschoolread03.htm>
- **Foundations of School Readiness: Cognition and General Knowledge:** This resource provides staff working with infants and toddlers with strategies to support learning through intentional, meaningful interactions.
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/school-readiness/nycucognition.htm>
- **Foundations of School Readiness: Social Emotional Development:** This resource discusses the importance of relationships and how they support infants and toddlers emerging social and emotional development.
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/school-readiness/nycusocialemo.htm>
- **Individualizing Care for Infants and Toddlers:** Developed primarily for management level staff, these resources provide clarification and in-depth information on *Individualizing Care for Infants and Toddlers* as well as guidance and strategies for putting the information to practice. The resources share information about why individualizing care is important; offer considerations for providing such care; and describe program structures and practices to support staff in this work.
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/docs/ehs-ta-16.pdf>
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/docs/ehs-ta-17.pdf>