FRAMEWORK FOR
EARLY CHILDHOOD SUCCESS
IN
FORT WORTH AND TARRANT COUNTY
VOLUME I
OUR VISION:
- Every child in our community prepared for success in school and life.
- Every family supported to promote their child’s health, safety and learning at all stages of growth and development.

The early years of a child’s life are vital when it comes to development, and the effects last a lifetime. Early experiences shape the brain’s architecture and provide the building blocks for educational achievement, economic productivity, responsible citizenship, lifelong health, strong communities and successful parenting of the next generation. With the crucial period for brain development occurring between pregnancy and age three, interventions are needed well before a child may enter preschool.
THE CHALLENGE

Fort Worth and Tarrant County leaders across all sectors recognize that the first years of a child’s life shape future learning, behaviors and health, but too many children are not reaching these goals. Traditional approaches are not preparing our children for future success, and the ramifications can be seen in homes, hospitals, schools and businesses throughout the region. Without basic social, emotional, early literacy and critical thinking skills, too many kindergarten children quickly fall behind and never catch up. Over time, as students become discouraged, require additional resources or drop out of school altogether, the financial costs escalate. According to Nobel Laureate James Heckman, a $1 investment in early education today produces a $7 return on investment over the long-term by saving costs in remedial education, welfare and the criminal justice system.
We now understand that the physical, mental and social well-being of a child is largely determined by whether he/she is brought up in a nurturing, low stress environment that exposes them to healthy activities and positive social interactions. According to our survey of national best practices in the field, the greatest returns-on-investment are generated by policies and investments that focus on improving the family and community environments in which children grow up. The most effective strategies trust and empower families while ensuring that they have adequate financial resources and access to quality health care, the right nutrition, high-quality early childhood programs and K-12 education.

**OUR RESPONSE**

In Tarrant County, nearly 50 non-traditional partners have responded to the challenge by coming together to work across the boundaries of individual organizations, boards and budgets to coordinate a new approach for impact at scale. The alliance, “Educational Alignment for Young Children,” is united in its determination that improving outcomes for all Fort Worth and Tarrant County children requires a comprehensive approach that involves targeted investments, cross-sector policies and comprehensive service strategies. As a result, this FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS unites public and private programs and investments around core components and accelerators to build a cohesive, coordinated system that will deliver results for our children and our community.

Fort Worth and Tarrant County are “can do” communities. We have developed many important assets in our community as long-term investments in our future, such as downtown Fort Worth, the Trinity River and our world-renowned cultural institutions. Now is the time to develop our most important asset – our youngest Texans – who will be our greatest legacy.
Our Children & Families

Fort Worth’s population grew 42% between 2000 and 2013, with the number of children between 0-8 years of age increasing to 117,000. Evidence indicates that too many of our children are in crisis from an early age.

Tarrant County has the highest infant mortality rate among large Texas counties. The national rate is 6 deaths per 1,000 live births, but in parts of central, southeast and southwest Tarrant County, the infant mortality rate is around 9.9 deaths per 1,000 live births, and it rises as high as 12 in certain zip codes.

Our families are stretched to provide the most basic necessities. The National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that “workers need an hourly wage of $15.29 and an annual income of $31,803 to afford the rent of a two bedroom apartment at fair market rent in Tarrant County.” In 2014, 70% of Fort Worth ISD’s families earned less than $30,000 annually.

Our System

Early childhood remains a kind of “un-system” in Fort Worth, in Tarrant County and in Texas. Federal and state funds trickle down to communities without a coordinated plan leaving critical gaps in service. Among available resources, the growing demand for early childhood services is outstripping our limited supply. In Tarrant County, 75,461 low-income families are eligible for assistance with child care costs, but existing funding supports just 5,846 families annually.
While Pre-K is expanding in enrollment, vast numbers of 4-year olds still lack access to quality early childhood education. Nationally, 57% of funding for early learning and child care comes from parent payments - and many parents of young children struggle to afford the high costs of quality programs. Half of all infant-care options cost more than $8,000 per year, which is more than the average cost of college in Texas ($7,745). For a single mother, childcare represents 24% of total income. Tarrant County has 630 licensed child care programs and only 10% participate in the STAR system for rating quality. Too many of our early childhood teachers lack the professional credentials and training critical for the delivery of quality services.
LOCAL ASSETS

Fort Worth and Tarrant County are rich in civic assets. Private and public organizations and agencies have demonstrated commitment to the success of early childhood. We can point to many successful initiatives and resources that provide a strong foundation for coordinated efforts:

Leadership

• Tarrant County enjoys strong economic growth, diversity in key industries and a low unemployment rate.
• Mayor Betsy Price, Fort Worth City Council and Fort Worth ISD’s School Superintendent have identified early learning as a top priority.
• Public school superintendents across Tarrant County are committed to quality early learning and coordination.
• The Community Foundation, Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce and United Way are poised to provide support for strategies that work.
• Our local Workforce Board is committed to providing quality early learning environments for the children of newly-employed parents.
• Local foundations are supporting and aligning investments in evidence-based high quality early learning programs.
• Tarrant County has a strong sense of civic pride, a can-do attitude and a willingness to partner to achieve community goals.

Coordination

• 46 organizations serving children 0-8 have joined forces to improve outcomes for children through the collaboration Educational Alignment for Young Children (EAYC).
Programs

- Programs providing high-quality coaching and professional development to early childhood teachers.
- Organizations that have adopted evidence-based engagement, early literacy and health programs.
- Innovative nonprofit agencies working on the cutting edge to address systemic problems, including foster care redesign and juvenile justice systems.

Resources

- Seven school districts providing Pre-K to 20,000+ children, and experience delivering public Pre-K through school-community partnerships.
- Federal and state funding for 5,846 reduced-cost child care slots for income-qualifying, working parents; 2,014 quality early learning Head Start slots and 368 Early Head Start slots.
- Multi-year Healthy Start grant to improve women’s health throughout pregnancy and support families in caring for their infants through the first two years of life.
- Multi-year Home Visiting grant for FWISD parents of young children.
- Blue Zones health and well-being initiative.
- First-class hospitals, including Cook Children’s, JPS, THR, and Baylor/All Saints.
- Cook Children’s Center for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment.
- University experts at UNT, TCU, Texas Wesleyan, Tarleton State and Tarrant County Community College focused on school leadership and teacher training.
- Access to data from Children at Risk and Cook Children’s, among others.
- Engaged funding community ready to support collective solutions.
- Vibrant faith community.
FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS

We envision a future where all children and families in Fort Worth and Tarrant County thrive. This vision is only achievable with sound building blocks in place. We have developed this Framework for Success to help inform execution, funding and capacity-building strategies.

The Framework for Success has three key elements – target populations, core components and accelerators. We have chosen to include all children and families in our target population because everyone can and should benefit from our collective work.

However, we have delineated three separate sub-groups as areas of focus – all children, children at risk and children most at risk (e.g. homeless, foster care). The higher in the pyramid, the greater the effort required for children to succeed in school and life.

**Equity**

Equity lies at the foundation of all our work. We aim to eliminate the social and economic barriers that impede the development of our families and their children. Despite our best efforts, significant inequities exist across our community. In many regions across the country, the zip code into which a child is born, as well as his/her race/ethnicity, is a strong predictor of that child’s future. By incorporating an equity lens to our work, we aim to address the root causes of these inequities and ensure that being born in Tarrant County is a strong indicator of future success.
Accelerators

We also identify “Accelerators” – analyzed data, sound policy, prioritized investments and building on what works. These accelerators help create an adaptive and continuously improving “system” that delivers high quality services for our children and maximizes the return on investment for the public and private sectors.
FAMILY LEADERSHIP & SUPPORTS

A family is a child’s first teacher and most powerful advocate. Strategies should include engaging opportunities for families to increase their strengths and knowledge while providing meaningful opportunities for leadership and influence. Families can be powerful advocates at school and leaders in the home to help support child success. They can and should guide leadership, policy and program decisions at the highest levels.

INVESTMENT PRIORITY

Support parents and families as their child’s first teacher and best advocate.

1. Expand a range of evidence-based programs that support families with children 0-8.
2. Build the capacity of organizations to integrate parental leadership within their parent and family programs.
3. Disseminate clear information to assist families in being a child’s first teacher and best advocate. Make available in dual language and at accessible literacy level. Offer scholarships to incent participation.
4. Support “wrap-around” services, including nutrition, health and counseling, that complement and are aligned with effective instruction.

Example of Work Underway:

The Miles Foundation, the Morris Foundation, and the Rainwater Charitable Foundation have launched a multi-year parent engagement in collaboration with multiple agencies and community partners in the Morningside community. The efforts are focused around providing access to dual generational, quality parent engagement programming at community sites throughout the Morningside neighborhood. In its first year, the collaborative engaged over 200 families and 450 children employing an in-depth, mixed-method approach to program evaluation.
HEALTH & WELLNESS

Pregnant mothers, infants, toddlers and preschoolers need health supports to develop strong minds and bodies. Critical opportunities exist to integrate health and educational efforts.

INVESTMENT PRIORITY

Support targeted families with health and development interventions that optimize their children's holistic development.

1. Build the capabilities of adults in families in order to achieve significant outcomes for children in their care.
2. Connect all families with a medical home.
3. Conduct health screenings across diverse settings and systems.
4. Ensure access to quality social, emotional and behavioral healthcare.
5. Provide home visitation to those in highest need.
6. Increase access to affordable healthy foods.
7. Accelerate efforts that reduce infant mortality.

Example of Work Underway:

Cook Children’s and the Community Foundation of North Texas are exploring the feasibility of Tarrant County birthing hospitals providing “Baby Boxes” to every mother who gives birth to a child in Tarrant County. These portable “cribs,” coupled with educational information and products, have helped decrease infant mortality rates in other communities and show promise for reducing postpartum depression and shaken-baby syndrome.
EARLY LEARNING

Children’s learning begins well before they enter elementary school. Early learning occurs daily with families at home as well as in a diverse array of public and private programs that support children in environments with responsive professionals. By providing quality training to teachers and connecting community programs with schools, children can begin to learn in programs and classrooms that develop the social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills needed for success in school and life. Strong aligned curriculum, retaining well qualified staff and improved teacher/child ratios are all keys to program success.

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

1. Create a pipeline for developing early childhood professionals.

1. Develop an integrated career pathway for early childhood educators that is cross-sector and offers a pipeline of professionals who enter the field, secure credentials and degrees and receive ongoing coaching and training.
2. Provide mechanisms that help ensure a competitive wage to early childhood professionals.
3. Enhance early childhood degree attainment with articulation agreements, stackable credits and practicum experience.

Example of Work Underway:

While Fort Worth benefits from an array of professional education opportunities, from one-time workshops to graduate degrees in higher education, these are disconnected and the system is full of gaps. EAYC partner organizations are developing a career pathway for early childhood professionals that ensures trainings count towards degree attainment and establishes a pipeline for ensuring strong early childhood professionals in the field.
2. **Strengthen public and private systems of early care and education.**

1. Advocate for seamless support and participation in early learning programs.
2. Ensure consistent progress towards early literacy through 3rd grade reading for all children, including dual-language learners.
3. Analyze education data and integrate with community data to inform decisions and drive quality improvement.
4. Utilize a clear measure of kindergarten readiness and develop a community dashboard of key success points.
5. Develop a community supply of quality-rated early learning programs, especially in targeted elementary school catchment areas.

**Examples of Work Underway:**

Early Head Start offers early care and educational support for infants, toddlers and their families. Two-generation approaches are emerging in our community as Early Head Start programs partner with adult programs such as Arlington ISD’s teen parent programs.

Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County and community partners are using data and community mapping to ensure quality early learning programs exist and thrive in neighborhoods susceptible to academic underachievement. Child care subsidy assistance can help ensure working families have equal access to quality early learning within a reasonable vicinity.
RESPONSIVE SCHOOLS

Schools provide environments where children’s growing minds and curiosities are nurtured, families are involved in the learning process and at-risk families are connected to community resources. Strong school leadership helps ensure these environments are the norm for our families.

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

Support elementary schools as they move towards providing holistic supports to young children and families.

1. Provide professional development for principals and administrators in leadership and best practices that support children 0-8.
2. Create a coordinated system of Pre-K recruitment and enrollment to increase enrollment and to better support families.
3. Engage parents as leaders and partners.
4. Align curriculum, assessments and supports between community-based programs and elementary schools.
5. Support children’s social and emotional learning within schools.
6. Support data sharing among schools and community programs.
7. Create an environment of mutual respect and collaboration among families, school staff and early learning professionals.

Examples of Work Underway:

FWISD is deploying a $5.2 million multi-year grant to provide home visiting services to families of young children.

In four FWISD classrooms a pilot project is underway to integrate social and emotional development into the Pre-K/Kindergarten curriculum.

Head Start partnerships for joint Pre-K classrooms with elementary schools are ensuring children are receiving supports and services for the family.
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. If parents, early educators, teachers and service providers have access to common information about the children in their care, they can make better informed decisions. Organizations and institutions need to know what works so they can support those strategies most likely to succeed – and fix those that are ineffective.

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

Support and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions.

1. Assist Educational Alignment for Young Children (EAYC) with building capacity, tools and support.
2. Develop a data approach that collects and analyzes data across systems and facilitates data-driven decision-making.

Examples of Work Underway:

46+ organizations serving children 0-8 have joined forces through EAYC to align around common goals and outcomes.

A major redesign of the foster care delivery system for North Texas is in progress, prioritizing geographic proximity, family support and meaningful assessments.
PUBLIC AWARENESS & POLICY

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 can play key leadership roles in building support for increased access to high-quality early learning services.

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

Generate public awareness and support to accelerate outcomes for pregnant mothers, infants and toddlers and their families.

1. Produce events and forums to convene non-traditional partners and the general public.
2. Provide actionable information to local business and community leaders, as well as public officials at city, county, state and national levels.
3. Serve as a local incubator for next practices and policies that can scale statewide.

Examples of Work Underway:

“Raising of Fort Worth” is bringing together quarterly 200+ representatives from business, health and academia to develop and execute action plans for supporting children and family success.

Texas Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium is a group of 30+ grantmaking foundations committed to advancing public policies that support children. Early Learning is a top priority for the 2017 Legislative Session.
WHAT’S NEXT?

Fort Worth and Tarrant County have a rich history of coming together to advance important projects and goals. This Framework builds upon the years of work undertaken by dozens of public and private sector partners, as well as our research on promising practices across the United States. We know what works. The data proves that our existing system will not support increasing demand. Our community is engaged more than ever before. Now is the time to make an investment in the future of our community – our children.

We stand poised to ensure educational success for every child and student by developing a seamless delivery system of child outcomes from cradle to career. Experience, research and science indicate that by dedicating significant energy, resources and know-how, we can build upon what works and see real impact for our children. We look forward to working with you to make sure that living in Fort Worth and Tarrant County is the best predictor of our children’s future success.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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COMMUNITY PARTNERS
AB Christian Learning Center, ACH Child & Family Services, BRIT, Camp Fire Fort Worth, Center for Transforming Lives, Child Care Associates, Child Study Center, Children at Risk, Children’s Oral Health Coalition, Clayton YES!, Community Foundation of North Texas, Cook Children's Hospital, DFPS Child Care Licensing, East Fort Worth Montessori, Educational First Steps, Family Child Care, first3years, FitWorth Wellness Foundation, Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Fort Worth Library, Fort Worth Library Foundation, Fort Worth Parks & Community Services, Fort Worth SPARC, Fortress Youth Development Center, Fort Worth ISD, HW Research, JPS Hospital, Kinderplatz of Fine Arts, Lena Pope Home, Literacy United, Miles Foundation, MHMR of Tarrant County, Morningside Children’s Project, Morris Foundation, Rainwater Charitable Foundation, SafeHaven of Tarrant County, Sunrise Early Learning and Development, Tarrant County AgriLife Extension, Tarrant County College, TCU College of Education, The Parenting Center, TLCCA, United Way of Tarrant County, UNTHSC – Healthy Start, UTH Children’s Learning Institute and Workforce Solutions.

FUNDING PARTNERS

NATIONAL PROMISING PRACTICES
City of Pasadena’s Early Childhood Development Policy, King County (Seattle)’s Best Starts for Kids, Harvard University’s Center for the Developing Child and Frontiers of Innovation, Hartford’s Accelerate Success and BUILD Initiative’s Early Childhood System.
EDUCATIONAL ALIGNMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN