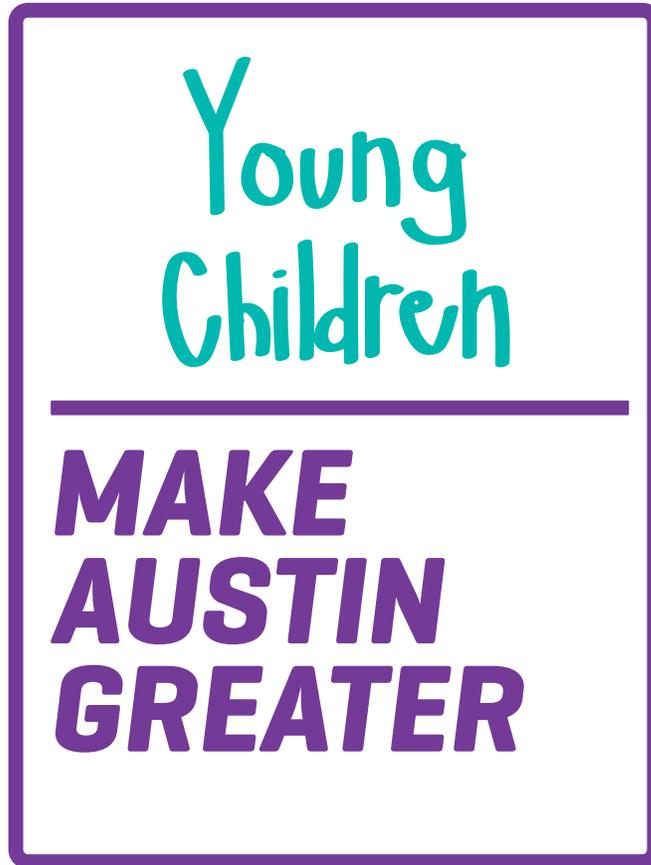




*SUCCESS
BY 6*

2015-2018

***SCHOOL
READINESS
ACTION PLAN***



United Way for Greater Austin

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“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

Frederick Douglas

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, early childhood stakeholders began work on a new edition of the School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County.

The 2015-18 School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County represents the collective work of an inspired, thoughtful, and dedicated coalition of parents, providers, advocates, public servants and civic leaders. It follows and builds on the work started with the first edition of the Action Plan, which was published in 2012 and concluded with great pride in early spring 2015.

The 2015-18 School Readiness Action Plan (SRAP) sets out the community’s vision and goals for an early learning community that is second to none in our great nation. Because Austin/Travis County embraces research, innovation, and technology, the Plan has a robust combination of proven strategies and cutting edge solutions, as well as a reliance on performance measurement and demonstrated outcomes. We not only want to sustain the progress we’ve made over the past three years, but to accelerate the work so that more children and families can reap the benefits that we are seeing in interventions across the County.

This year, the SRAP Leadership Team developed tools and expectations for the many work teams that are implementing the Plan. Strategies were honed and tactics built that will accelerate meaningful improvement in the conditions for young children and their families in the next few years. We believe that by working together collaboratively, we can continue to advance system alignment and coordination, improve quality programming and maximize outcomes for children.

We welcome your participation in the process. Join the movement to make Austin and Travis County even greater for families!

Sue Carpenter

Vice President, Success By 6

United Way for Greater Austin

Our Vision

Public and private sectors in Austin/Travis County will work together to ensure that school readiness becomes and remains a top priority. By the time children enter kindergarten, they will have the cognitive, physical, social, emotional and language skills needed to thrive in an educational setting.

Ready Families

+ Ready Early Education Services

+ Ready Health and Mental Health Services

+ Ready Communities

= Ready Children

2015 HIGHLIGHTS

2-years of PreK have stronger and longer impacts on children

Nearly 800 Travis County three-year-olds are receiving PreK services through Austin ISD and Manor ISD in 2015-16—a significant increase in programming for the youngest preschool-aged children in our community. Research indicates that 2-years of PreK have stronger and longer impacts on young children, so this uptick in service levels will have long-term, positive education implications for our region. Significantly, AISD provided some of the PreK services in partnership with high-quality early childhood centers and Child Inc. Head Start. Eligible children in these partnership programs receive full-day services with the same educational quality offered in public school settings as well as the comprehensive services Head Start provides including additional screenings for health and development, family goal setting and social services. Start-up funding for the PreK3 classrooms launched in AISD in 2015 was provided by local business leaders including Eric Stumberg, John Cullen and Sandy Gottesman.

60 teachers with at least an associates degree were hired in the fall of 2015 and deployed through the Child Inc. system

Child Inc. Head Start continued to strengthen their workforce and made additional quality improvements in their operations over the past year, evidenced by receiving NAEYC accreditation at additional sites and an influx of teachers with college degrees in early education. Sixty teachers with at least an associates degree were hired in the fall of 2015 and deployed throughout the Child Inc. system. In addition, early Head Start slots for infants and toddlers were expanded in Child Inc. facilities and through a unique child care partnership with Mainspring Schools.

Networking opportunities expand for Austin's early childhood leaders

The National League of Cities provided technical assistance and national networking opportunities for a cadre of Austin's early childhood leaders led by the City of

Austin. Webinars and conferences in Florida and Tennessee provided opportunities for learning from other communities and for sharing Austin successes with others.

Volunteer with the Mayor's office leads early childhood working group

The Mayor mobilized an early childhood working group which identified a "big goal" for the Mayor to amplify – "All 3- and 4-year-olds in Austin will have access to high-quality preschool experiences in public or private settings." Joene Grissom, a volunteer with the Mayor's office, is leading the early childhood working group, and plans for moving this forward are underway. The early childhood goal fits into the Mayor's larger education plan, which is currently being vetted and finalized.

Total funding of HHS social service contracts increased this fall

This fall, a continuum of high-quality parent education and family support services were greatly expanded through HHS grant funding from the City of Austin. Ten agencies work together in collaboration, sharing utilization data and referral systems so that more families can be served with targeted research-based interventions at the appropriate time. In addition, the total funding for HHS social service contracts was increased this fall, which will likely result in further expansion of programming for young families.

Higher quality rating set for early care and education centers

The new Texas Rising Star early care and education center rating scale was launched this year. The new standards set a higher bar for quality than in the past, and also set higher reimbursement rates for centers that achieve the highest rating. As expected, the overall number of centers participating in the system decreased because of the higher expectations, but a number of local centers met the new high bar for quality and will be receiving better compensation as a result.

2015 HIGHLIGHTS

New “Child Care Continuity” program funded through Travis County to Workforce Solutions

Travis County provided funding to Workforce Solutions for a new “Child Care Continuity” program. The funding provides a case manager for parents seeking child care and fills in gaps that are inherent in the state child care subsidy system. For example, the County dollars will pay for child care, while a parent, who has completed job training, looks for employment. This innovative program exposed a real need in the community, and to date, has helped over 250 families, with nearly 500 children, secure and/or maintain high-quality care during challenging transition times.

Two Pay for Success feasibility studies conducted

Two Pay for Success feasibility studies were conducted this year, elevating the likelihood of this public/private financing method launching in Austin. One of the studies was shepherded by the City of Austin and it reviewed strategies to reduce teen pregnancies. The other study was commissioned by United Way for Greater Austin, and it examined the potential return on investment for an expansion of Nurse Family Partnership in the Austin area. Both studies are on-going, and plans for implementation are being considered.

Literacy Coaching project generates impressive results

Preschoolers participating in a Literacy Coaching project developed and administered by United Way made 17 months of receptive language gains in a seven-month period. The literacy coaching project targets low-income youngsters enrolled in early education programs, many of whom are far below norms in their language development. The classroom coaches are a mix of full-time AmeriCorps volunteers supported by the Literacy Coalition of Central

Texas, and part-time employees funded by a local philanthropist.

Bi-lingual Outreach Specialists helps with community outreach

A new bi-lingual Outreach Specialist was hired in the fall of 2015 by United Way to let families know about all of the community’s early childhood services available to them. The Specialist is traveling to apartment complexes, churches, schools, libraries, and other places where families gather to share information about the full continuum of free services – along with how to enroll.

E3 Alliance leads changes on improving attendance of PreK students

E3 Alliance leads the charge on improving school attendance – with a goal of reducing absenteeism in PreK over the next several years. Compelling data has been compiled this year that has been reviewed by the E3 School Readiness Goal Team and will inform action in the coming year.

SCHOOL READINESS

Predicted, but unfortunate, kindergarten readiness data for 2015

Annually, E3 conducts a regional school readiness assessment with multiple school districts. The assessment looks at multiple domains of development, and it has been demonstrated to have good predictive validity. This year, children who were born in 2011 entered kindergarten. Beginning in 2011, local and state funding for early childhood services took a dramatic dive, significantly reducing the number of families who had access to research-and evidence-based programming in their children's youngest years. Not surprisingly, the percentage of children who entered kindergarten prepared for school success hit a new low – only 43% overall and even lower for children living in low-income families.

Fortunately, in no small part due to the efforts of persistent SRAP advocates, local funding for early childhood services has rebounded in the last year. More families are receiving intensive services early in their children's lives. By 2018, we believe the downward movement in school readiness will reverse, and more children will begin kindergarten happy, health, and prepared for success.

A kindergarten-ready child:

- Interacts positively with children and adults
- Is curious and loves learning new things
- Can focus and pay attention to adults, other children, a book or task
- Is generally happy and can manage his or her emotions
- Has age-appropriate language, thinking and physical skills

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

STRATEGY UPDATES

READY FAMILIES

Goal

Over the past year, work teams have been honing the strategies for each goal of our plan. This update reflects the current state of strategies that guide the work of the teams.

Strategies

1. Expand capacity and participation in research-based, culturally competent home-visiting, parent education, and family support services for families with children under 6.
2. Provide high quality professional development opportunities for family support professionals that are aligned with School Readiness Action Plan.
3. Integrate and coordinate high-quality workforce, adult education and/or parent education programs for adults with high-quality early care and education services for children.
4. Increase awareness of and access to adult literacy services for parents of young children.
5. Increase access to and use of financial stability resources by parents of young children.
6. Increase families access to basic needs services.

“It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts he is not ready to assimilate.”

– Rachel Carson

READY SERVICES: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Goal

Children and families are informed and able to access high quality early learning environments that demonstrate positive developmental outcomes for all children (including children with unique developmental and cultural needs) through competent, responsive, and caring relationships.

Strategies

1. Increase the availability of very high quality early care and education centers for low-income families in Travis County.
2. Increase the number of eligible children birth to 3 years old served by Early Head Start.
3. Maintain the number of eligible 3 year old children served in Head Start.
4. Increase the number of eligible 3 year old children enrolled in Public Pre-K in Travis County school districts and other high-quality early education settings.
5. Increase the percentage of eligible 4 year old children enrolled in full-day Public Pre-K in Travis County school districts.
6. Recruit and retain qualified teachers and administrators.
7. Incentivize parents to choose quality early care and education.
8. Integrate and coordinate high-quality workforce, adult education, and/or parent education programs for adults with high quality early care and education services for children.

“How you make sense of your childhood experiences has a profound effect on how you parent your own children.”

– Daniel J. Siegel

READY SERVICES: PREVENTATIVE PRIMARY CARE & MENTAL HEALTH

Goal

Children receive early and regular developmental screenings and immunizations and are linked to accessible, coordinated, integrated, and responsive basic needs, physical, dental, and mental health services, including services for children with developmental delays.

Strategies

1. Increase the number of family serving agencies that use developmental screeners to identify delays and make appropriate referrals.
2. Engage and orient the child health provider community to early childhood and the School Readiness Action Plan.
3. Expand the number of providers that have knowledge about (social emotional) trauma.
4. Increase number of early childhood education centers that use health consultants and mental health consultants.
5. Partner with Go Austin/Vamos Austin (GAVA) to address early childhood obesity and nutrition issues.

“One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child.”

– Maria Montessori

READY COMMUNITIES

Goal

Public and private sectors in Austin/Travis County work together to ensure that the community has the resources and infrastructure to deliver services to children and their families, and to provide a safe and healthy environment in which to raise children.

Strategies

1. Ensure progress on the School Readiness Action Plan.
2. Sustain and expand partnerships with City and County systems, neighborhood improvement initiatives, and private funders to align policy with the School Readiness Action Plan.
3. Foster partnerships to align current spending and to increase resources for the School Readiness Action Plan.
4. Promote a shared system of measurement for common early childhood outcomes.
5. Create opportunities for community engagement and leadership in School Readiness Action Plan design and implementation by parents, caregivers, and early care and education providers.

“Live so that when your children think of fairness, caring, and integrity, they think of you.”

– H. Jackson Brown Jr.

READY CHILDREN

Goal

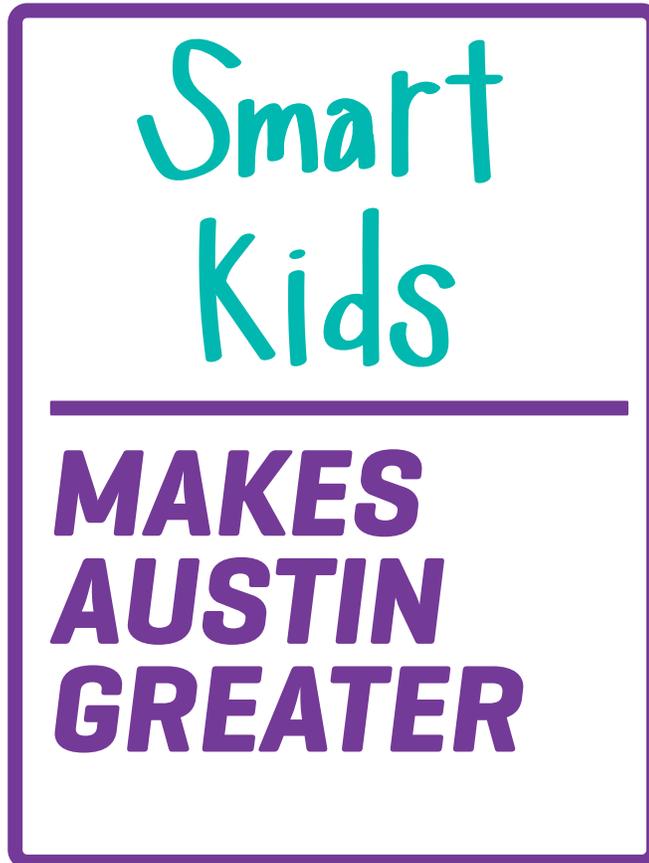
Low-income Travis County children ages 0–5 are happy, healthy and prepared for school success.

Strategy

Measure and report children’s developmental status on multiple domains using developmentally appropriate tools. The purpose is the improvement of programmatic and community efforts, not to evaluate individual children or teachers.

“When students have a strong start, they have a strong future.”

– Dr. Paul Cruz



United Way for Greater Austin

GLOSSARY

<i>Parent</i>	In the School Readiness Action Plan the term ‘parent’ is used in a broad sense. It refers to the parent, legal guardian, and/or the primary caregiver.
<i>School readiness</i>	Children are school ready when by the time they enter kindergarten, they have the cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language skills needed to thrive in the educational setting (SRAP, “Our Vision” p.4). In order for children to be ready for school success, their families, the early education services, the health systems, and communities need to be ready (SRAP formula).
<i>Low-Income</i>	In the School Readiness Action Plan, low-income is defined as 200 percent of poverty as this is a commonly used and accepted threshold (Sawhill, I. 2003. One percent for the kids: New policies, brighter futures for America’s children. Washington DC: Brookings).
<i>Eligible</i>	When “eligibility” is used in the School Readiness Action Plan, it refers to the specific thresholds or eligibility requirements that are used to determine eligibility of the program. The measurement is adjusted based on the level of eligibility used in the program.

Ready Families

<i>Home visiting services</i>	Voluntary home visiting services match parents with trained professionals to provide information and support during pregnancy and throughout their child’s earliest years – a critical developmental period. Quality, voluntary, evidence-based home-visiting programs cultivate healthy prenatal behaviors and parenting attitudes, engage infants in meaningful learning activities, create a positive adult-child bond, promote family self-sufficiency, and provide a link to various social support services (The Pew Charitable Trust, www.pewstates.org/projects/home-visiting-campaign-328065).
<i>Parent Education Services</i>	Parent education programs focus on enhancing parenting practices and behaviors, such as developing and practicing positive discipline strategies, learning age-appropriate child development skills and milestones, promoting positive play and interaction between parents and children, and locating and accessing community services and supports (Child Welfare Information Gateway, www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/programs/types/parented.cfm).

Financial stability

In order for individuals to be financially stable, they must first learn the knowledge and skills that enable them to earn an income and manage their money. They then use that income to take care of basic living expenses, pay off debts, and save for future purposes. As savings grow, households can invest in assets that will appreciate over time and generate wealth and income. Throughout the cycle, access to insurance and consumer protections help households protect the gains they make (CFED's framework of financial security, http://cfed.org/knowledge_center/household_financial_security_framework/).

Ready Services: Early Childhood Education*Two-generation programs*

Programs that provide high-quality services for children and their parents. Adult services may include workforce development, adult education or parenting skills.

Very high-quality in early care and education settings

Program standards set by widely recognized professional organizations for adequate structural characteristics and high-quality adult-child interactions.

APPENDIX

School Readiness Action Plan Leadership Team

The School Readiness Action Plan Leadership Team is comprised of early childhood planners and funders that focus on the City of Austin and Travis County. The committee's primary functions are to oversee and monitor the cyclical School Readiness Action Plan process, coordinate resources across entities, generate and monitor agreements at respective entities to invest in the shared plan, and align policy and funding decisions when possible.

Members also meet one or more of the following specific criteria: significant funder of early childhood programming; taxing entity; sole designee of federal funding (i.e. Child Inc.); collect and/or provide data and analysis; influential in policy and/or research.

SRAP Leadership Team Members

Raul Alvarez, Community Advancement Network
 Alison Bentley, Ph.D., United Way for Greater Austin
 Tonda Brown, Manor ISD
 Tara Carmean, Travis County HHS&VA
 Sue Carpenter, United Way for Greater Austin
 Michelle Crawford, Workforce Solutions
 Cathy Doggett, KLE Foundation
 Jessica Dominguez, United Way for Greater Austin
 Mary Dunlap, Child Inc.
 Cindy Gamez, City of Austin HHS
 Suzanne Hershey, Project HOPES
 Kyle Holder, Chair of the COA ECC
 Aletha Huston, PhD, retired, University of Texas
 Laura Koenig, E3 Alliance
 Ben Kramer, Ph.D., KLRU
 Susan Millea, Ph.D., Children's Optimal Health
 Laura Olson, United Way for Greater Austin
 Meg Poag, Literacy Coalition of Central Texas
 Jacquie Porter, Austin Independent School District
 Patrick Sanders, Child Inc.
 Stacey Shackelford, Ph.D., Austin Community College
 Brook Son, Travis County HHS&VA
 Chris Tarango, Cultural Strategies
 Elwyn West, Austin Association for the Education of Young Children

City of Austin Early Childhood Council (2015- 2016)

Cathy Doggett
 Larry Elsner
 Kyle Holder, Chair
 Aletha Huston, Ph.D.
 Roscoe Overton, Sr.
 Rhonda Paver
 Jacquie Porter
 Monica Sanchez
 Brook Son
 Sebastian Wren, Ph.D.

