



SUCCESS BY 6
AUSTIN/TRAVIS COALITION

SUCCESS BY 6

A 2000 DAY JOURNEY

STRATEGIC PLAN | 2019-2023



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Every day, an average of 38 babies are born in the Austin area. Thirty-eight new babies. Every. Day.

And those 38 vulnerable little human beings are born into wildly diverse circumstances. Some are healthy, some are not. Some have huge extended families full of experienced caregivers, some do not. Some are born into situations that include secure income and abundant resources, some are not.

But regardless of their individual situations, each of these 38 brand-new Texans is equally deserving of loving care and the opportunity to thrive.

This is exactly what the Success By 6 [SX6] Coalition is working to ensure.

We are a coalition of child and family advocates – providers, parents, policymakers, philanthropists, civic leaders, business leaders, and early childhood experts – working together on a community plan that reflects our collective wisdom and amplifies our collective voice. For the past seven years, SX6 has led this strategic plan [formerly the School Readiness Action Plan], designed to coordinate our efforts and give every baby born in Austin the best possible first 2,000 days.

Why a 2,000-day journey? Because research has proven that the first five years of a child's life strongly influence the rest. Ninety percent of brain development happens within the 2,000 days from birth to Kindergarten, so an early childhood full of rich experiences is essential for happy, healthy children who are ready to succeed in school and in life.

A child who begins Kindergarten ready to succeed is set on a path that predicts their third-grade reading level, high-school graduation, justice system involvement, college perseverance, and adult earning potential. So community investment in early childhood programs results in not only more successful individual citizens, but also significant economic benefits for the community as a whole.

To date, we have made substantial progress as a coalition, but we still have much to do.

Today, only about half of all babies born in Austin and Travis County enter Kindergarten 2,000 days later with the firm foundation they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

This SX6 strategic plan builds upon the work begun with the first two iterations of the plan [2012-15 and 2015-18], this time looking forward into our next 2,000 days. It plots a bold path onward, outlining the coalition and the community's activities to achieve our ambitious goals – healthy beginnings, supported families, high-quality care and education, and safe and stimulating communities for all Austin-area children.

SX6 is making solid strides to help these babies grow into contributing, productive, thriving members of our community – but we can't walk alone. **We invite every Austin-area organization and each individual community member to join us in prioritizing, investing, and acting over the next 2,000 days to give our little ones all they need to succeed.**



Cathy McHorse
Vice President, Success By 6
United Way for Greater Austin
and the Success By 6 Coalition
Leadership Team



The Foundational 2,000 Days

The first 2,000 days of every person's life are foundational. Studies have shown that a child's experiences during those early years literally build the architecture of their brain.

Richer early childhood experiences, science has discovered, lead to even more neural connections, which help set children up for lifelong success. So we want to make the most of every child's 2,000-day journey from birth to Kindergarten.

Success By 6

Seven years ago, a coalition of child and family advocates – providers, parents, policymakers, civic leaders, and experts – came together under the banner of United Way for Greater Austin to transform Austin/Travis County's early childhood system through a strategic plan, originally called the School Readiness Action Plan.

Today, our Success By 6 [SX6] Coalition has grown, strengthened, and continues to build upon its achievements. This third installment of the strategic plan looks forward to our next 2,000 days and how we can continue to coordinate our actions to help ensure every child born in the Austin area receives the support and care they deserve during their essential 2,000 days.



90% of all
brain
development
happens within
the **first five**
years of life



The Opportunity Gap

It doesn't matter what circumstances a baby is born into – every child is equally deserving of loving care and the opportunity to thrive.

But the truth is, children born into households with low income often don't have access to the same quantity or quality of resources as their higher-income neighbors.

Decades of research prove that the disadvantages begin the moment these kids come into the world; children born into poverty are disproportionately born early, at low birth-weight, or with chronic illnesses. They are less likely than their peers to be ready for or to be successful at school.

SX6 is working to bridge this still-substantial opportunity gap with our community-wide plan to ensure all Austin children, families, and communities have access to the resources and support they need and deserve.

39%
of children from households with low income
**begin Kindergarten ready
to learn and succeed.**

34,000
children under 6 in Travis County

**live in households
with low income.**

34%
of children under four from
households with low income
are receiving any early learning
services at all.

More than **one in three**
children under six living in Travis County
**live in households with
low income.**

90% of children under
six from households
with low income are
children of color.





Our Values

The SX6 Coalition:



believes all children and families have inherent worth and an immense capacity to learn and thrive;



values diversity and strives for equity in everything we do;



honors the primary and vital relationship between parents/caregivers, families, and their children; and



agrees early childhood professionals should be provided with respectable working conditions and a living wage for their important work.

Seven Successful Years

Since the first strategic plan launched in 2012, the SX6 Coalition's work teams have accomplished much, delivering more and more each year for Austin/Travis County young children and their families.

More Money

SX6 secured more than an additional

\$1 million

from the City of Austin to help fund family support services and direct childcare spots.



More Coordination



Through the Ready Families Collaborative, United Way and its partners now have access to individual-level data

from eight agencies

helping the collaborative better coordinate services and serve Austin/Travis County families.

More Honors



In 2018, our coalition's strategic plan received

Mission Capital's Aligned Impact Award

celebrating a cross-sector collaborative creating system-wide change and accomplishing targeted progress through collective power.

More Quality

3,000%



Increase in children enrolled in AISD Pre-K3

81%

increase in children served through subsidies enrolled in quality-rated centers

49%

increase in high-quality centers

More Programs



Play and Learning Strategies (PALS)

Developed by United Way and funded by the City of Austin, this parent-child education program is offered through multiple partners – including Camp Fire, KLRU, and People's Community Clinic – and introduces tablet technology to help bridge the digital divide.

Through the Literacy Coalition of Central Texas and modeled on University of Texas Health Science Center curriculum, this bilingual parenting program provides parents with the skills they need to prepare their children for Kindergarten.

Play To Learn

Plan Goals & Framework

The long-term goal of SX6 is to ensure – at the end of each child's first 2,000-day journey – that they are happy, healthy, and ready to succeed in school and in life.

To achieve this goal for all Austin/Travis County children, our coalition used a four-pillar framework that outlines our current objectives related to each foundational pillar for children and their families, as well as for the program itself and associated public policy.



What does “ready” really mean?

A child who has completed their first 2,000-day journey and is happy, healthy, and ready to succeed in school and in life has the foundational experiences to ensure they’re ready to learn – they have physical wellbeing, social-emotional skills, at-level knowledge, and an optimistic attitude.



What does that look like?



A school-ready child:

- interacts positively with others;
- is curious and loves learning;
- can focus and pay attention;
- is generally happy and can manage their emotions; and
- has age-appropriate thinking, language, and physical skills.



Our Vision

The SX6 Coalition envisions the Austin/Travis County public and private sectors working together to ensure that our children's first 2,000-day journey becomes and remains a top priority for our community. By the time our children complete this foundational journey, they will possess the physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language skills necessary for them to thrive in a classroom environment – and beyond.

Investing for Our Future

Providing support and services to Austin's underprivileged young children isn't just about giving kids a fair chance at a level playing field. It's also about the future of our community as a whole.

Research has proven that children who begin Kindergarten school-ready are three times more likely to read at grade-level in third grade – and that kids who read at grade-level in third grade are more likely to graduate from high school, avoid the juvenile justice system, persevere through

college, and earn more as an adult. So early investment today produces economic benefits tomorrow – such as better community health, higher graduation and employment rates, better wages, and lower crime rates.

Studies show investments in early childhood not only are more effective than later interventions, but also have a positive long-term impact – reducing future social costs and boosting future economic prosperity for our whole community.

In fact, every \$1 invested in early childhood programs

results in \$7 return-on-investment



And, the earlier we invest in a child, the greater impact we make, and the greater ROI we enjoy. If we invest early, then we won't have to invest as often.

When we support our youngest, most vulnerable citizens, our entire community benefits. We must ensure early investment in early childhood – not just for Success By 6, but for the future success of Austin and Travis County.



Healthy Beginnings

SX6 Goal

To ensure all 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.

SX6 Initiatives

Expand Family Connects Texas. Austin Public Health offers a home visit from a Registered Nurse to every family in Travis County with a newborn. These visits result in better parenting behaviors, safer home environments, higher-quality child care, less maternal anxiety, and more connections to community services and resources.

Increase mental health services in early-learning settings. Austin Child Guidance Center and The University of Texas at Austin's Department of Educational Psychology work with early-learning centers and teachers to empower staff with social-emotional learning strategies and interventions, and to educate them about early childhood trauma.

Increase the number of children who are screened for developmental delays and refer children with delays to specialized services. E3 Alliance's Early

Childhood Results Count – the Developmental Screener Referral Data Project – will make it easier for providers and case managers to follow up on referrals for young children.

Screen families for negative early experiences and refer them to community supports as necessary. People's Community Clinic has developed a screener that includes negative early experiences, making it easier for them to refer their patients to effective community supports.

Expand nutrition programs for young children in early-learning settings. Go! Austin/Vamos! Austin helps parents and early childhood caregivers work together to access nutritious food, physical activity equipment, and other building blocks young children need to build a foundation of healthy habits.

Today in Austin

14,000 babies are born in Austin/Travis County each year.

95%

of families have physical, mental, or social-emotional health needs within the first few weeks of a baby's birth.

15%

of African-American infants born in Austin/Travis County are born early, and 13% are born at low birth-weight.

1 in 5

children under 18 experience food insecurity.



Nurse-Nurturing for Newborn Families

Day 1

Born at healthy birth weight

Day 14

Has returned to original birth weight

Day 20

Has formed an attachment with a caring adult

“As a first-time mom, I really didn’t know what to expect.”

Dawn Dao and her partner, Joshua Heater, had their first child – daughter Carson – via an unplanned C-section birth. But that surprise was just the beginning of their parenting concerns.

“You begin worrying about every little thing they do or don’t do,” Dawn confesses.

“Making sure she’s breathing all the time, making sure she’s sleeping right.”

A home visit from Registered Nurse Felicia Watson through Family Connects Texas

helped put the new parents’ minds at ease.

“We’re doing measurements, vital signs, making sure baby is gaining enough weight,” explains Felicia. “We’re also checking in on Mom, making sure she’s healing properly, and seeing what sorts of emotions she’s experiencing post-delivery.

Above all, we want to make sure they’re functioning well as a family.”

Studies show that 95% of families with newborns have physical, mental, or social-emotional health needs within the first few weeks of a birth. Family Connects Texas is a partnership between United Way and Austin Public Health to offer every Travis County family with a newborn a home visit from a Registered Nurse.

Six months following these visits, families who participated were 34% less likely to need infant emergency care and 28% less likely to report

symptoms of maternal anxiety. Overall, every \$1 invested in the program results in a \$3 return in healthcare savings.

Felicia answered Dawn and Joshua's questions and gave this new family a clean bill of health – and some much-appreciated encouragement.

"It gave us so much comfort knowing we're on the right track," Joshua notes. "To hear we're doing a good job, you don't know how valuable that is until you hear it."

"I let parents know – every day, you're going to learn more and more about your baby. You are the expert of your baby and your family," affirms Felicia. "I'm just empowering them and letting them know their baby is going to have a great start!"

For families to raise healthy children, communities must continuously improve conditions – addressing obstacles like economic security, work flexibility, parenting information and support, and quality child care needs. Barriers to accessing helpful programs and services must be removed for ALL children.

Pritesh Gandhi, MD, MPH

Associate Chief Medical Officer & Director of Adult Medicine
People's Community Clinic





Supported Families

SX6 Goal

To ensure families have access to and use the resources that provide them with the knowledge, skills, confidence, and social supports to positively nurture the health, safety, and development of their children, and develop greater financial stability.

SX6 Initiatives

Connect families to basic needs. The Early Childhood Resource and Referral Program is a collaborative referral network that serves to connect Travis County families with the resources they seek, to collect data for identifying community needs and service gaps, and to create a robust communication network among providers for better cooperation and response.

Increase participation in family support services, such as home visiting and parent education. Any Baby Can of Austin helps run the Ready Families Collaborative, a group of ten partner agencies providing a continuum of family services, from home visitation programs to parenting skills classes to two-generation programs designed to help strengthen family stability.

Integrate workforce development for parents into family support services. The Goodwill Excel Center is Texas' first free public charter high school, offering adults ages 18-50 the opportunity to earn their high-school diploma, complete an in-demand professional certification, and begin their post-secondary education. The Center also provides free, quality child care for its student-parents, so they can make the most of this educational opportunity.

Ensure families and young children have books in their homes. BookSpring brings free books into households with low income. Research proves that having at least 20 age-appropriate books in the home can improve a child's educational success.

Today in Austin

33%

of two-parent families with low income have both parents working.

80%

of single-parent families with low income are working and are still unable to meet their basic needs.

Only 8% of children 0-3 receive research- and evidence-based home visiting or parent-education services.

1,200

children younger than six are confirmed victims of child abuse or neglect.

Comfort, Connections, and Help for the Whole Family

**Day 365**

Plays games like peek-a-boo and patty-cake

Day 730

Points to things and/or names objects in a book

Day 1,095

Carries on a conversation

“I was nervous, but now I see he is developing.”

Leticia Mendieta’s son Andy began experiencing significant speech development delay, and at the age of two, he began receiving individual speech and occupational therapies through Any Baby Can. When Andy’s therapists referred him to AVANCE for beneficial group interactions, Leticia and her husband weren’t sure what to expect.

“My husband and I were both scared, because we didn’t know anything about it,” Leticia remembers. “But the first day, I sat down for orientation, and they asked me how I was feeling. They were concerned about me and took time to talk to me.

“When we left AVANCE, Andy was smiling and laughing and trying to talk and tell me things,” she continues. “They really took the time to make sure we were both OK.”

AVANCE is an Austin-based nonprofit organization that works to help families with low income and young children via parent training and high-quality early childhood education programs. AVANCE provides regular screeners to track Andy’s progress, and supports Leticia with child-development information, ESL classes, community-resource information, and social connections with other families.

Working with AVANCE for several months, Leticia today is feeling much more confident, and says Andy is clearly progressing – socializing more, trying new things, and becoming more independent.

“There are little things he does now where I can see him developing,” notes Leticia. “They’re little, but they’re significant to me.”

“ Language is words, listening, talking, and reading in dynamic interaction together with your environment. Reading together creates that rich learning environment, and develops a meaningful bond between parent or caregiver and child. The book serves as a vehicle for that. ”

Emily Ball Cicchini
Executive Director, BookSpring





High-Quality Care and Education

SX6 Goal

To ensure 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.

SX6 Initiatives

Improve the quality of early-learning environments in public and private settings.

Workforce Solutions Capital Area is helping improve the quality of care available to families with low income by providing mentoring and professional development to child care providers who serve children from these families.

Increase enrollment in high-quality early-learning settings. New Pre-K classrooms were initially funded through a cohort of philanthropists; today, the city is helping to cover startup costs for new Pre-K classrooms.

Support the recruitment, development, and retention of highly qualified early educators.

The Jeannette Watson Wage Supplement Project – funded by the City of Austin, Travis County, and Workforce Solutions Capital Area – is a salary-

supplement program for early educators who have furthered their study of their field and who work with children from families with low income. Administered by Workforce Solutions Child Care Services, this program helps educators afford to keep working in a field where wages aren't commensurate with other professional positions.

Launch a shared-services alliance for community-based early-learning providers.

Since 2015, Austin ISD has partnered with child care centers to provide high-quality Pre-K in community settings. In 2019, the AISD Board of Trustees voted to authorize an innovative management organization led by United Way that will formalize this work and serve as the start of a shared-services alliance.

Today in Austin

The cost of high-quality infant care ranges from \$15,000 per year on Austin's east side to \$20,000 on the city's west side.

45% of programs serving children from households with low income are high quality.

Child care workers earn \$10.67 to \$14.07 an hour, but our city's living wage is \$15.

1 in 4

potential students are served by Austin ISD Pre-K3, and children from families with low income who attend Pre-K are more than twice as likely to be school ready.

Early Education Options for Everyone

**Day 280**

Learns to
manage
separation

Day 1,095

Might get
upset with
changes in
routine

Day 1,500

Prefers to play
with other
children, rather
than alone

“I was unsure of how my babies would feel and how they would be treated.”

Life was already kind of crazy for mother-of-two Monica, who was already caring for her infant son, Lorenzo, and toddler daughter, Melody. When she realized she needed to find full-time child care for her children so she could return to work, Monica was overwhelmed.

“It was difficult to even begin to search for child care,” Monica recalls. “It took several months to find the right spot for us – at Mainspring Schools.”

Mainspring Schools is a nonprofit organization working to provide high-quality early education for families all over Austin who represent diverse backgrounds, ethnicities,

and socio-economic levels; 75% of the school’s students receive tuition subsidies. Mainspring is a highly-rated early education center, but that didn’t keep Melody from missing her mom during her first days at the school.

“Mommy was all she had known,” Monica confirms. “So we both used to cry through drop-off every morning – but nowadays, she’s smiling big-time when I pick her up in the afternoon.”

The staff at Mainspring is very caring, hardworking, and patient. They listen to my concerns and reassure me my babies are safe with them – and they are!”

Meanwhile, mom Sonia has four daughters, ranging in age from 3 months to 13 years. She was lucky enough to find public-school care for her middle girls; they're currently enrolled in Austin ISD Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 programs.

"Finding child care in which the children are enriched and developed is one of the biggest struggles facing young families today," notes AISD Pre-K3 teacher Dolores McDonald, who taught one of Sonia's daughters last year, and is teaching her sister this year. "Children should begin their education in a positive, engaging way – in a way that gets them excited about learning."

Just like Monica, Sonia remembers clearly how she felt the first day her now-teenager started preschool.

"We were both scared and happy at the same time," Sonia recalls. "I was worried she was too little to start school, but I was hopeful she'd begin learning more. And she adapted to preschool quickly; she was always happy to go to school."

Sonia's eldest daughter's positive attitude about learning is apparently rubbing off on her younger siblings; both are enjoying going to school every day alongside their big sister.

"The older one has developed in all areas at school," notes Sonia. "The younger one has become less timid, more social. And I think I may be feeling just a little less tired."

A high-quality early education provides innumerable benefits to children who participate. And, not only do these advantages appear immediately, but they also last a lifetime, and often have a positive effect on future generations.

Albert Black
Executive Director, Child, Inc.





Safe and Stimulating Communities

SX6 Goal

To ensure 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.

SX6 Initiatives

Create and support business and civic champions for early childhood. Early Matters Greater Austin is a coalition of businesses working to promote investment in young children by influencing public policy, encouraging family-friendly workplaces, and advancing innovation.

Engage family leaders in all elements of the 2,000-Day Plan. Over the course of the next 2,000 days, the SX6 Coalition will build on the work of individual coalition members to develop a community-wide Family Leadership Initiative.

Raise awareness about early childhood brain development. As part of the statewide Start Smart Texas campaign, United Way and KLRU – in partnership with the Texas Education Agency, United Ways of Texas, and Texas PBS – support

Bright by Text, a messaging platform with tips for parents and info on Austin-area resources.

Integrate early childhood services into all youth-serving City/County departments. City of Austin Libraries are promoting Bright by Text sign-ups and Pre-K registrations, as well as working with WIC on opportunities to co-locate services.

Launch an Early Childhood Resource and Referral Program. This SX6 program is a collaborative referral network that serves to connect Travis County families with the resources they seek, to collect data for identifying community needs and service gaps, and to create a robust communication network among providers for better collaboration and response.

Today in Austin

Austin/Travis County invested

\$220

in early childhood last year per child under 6 from low-income households.

San Antonio invested

\$419

per capita

\$935

per capita

Denver budgeted

Portland spent

\$965

per capita

\$1,141

per capita

Philadelphia invested

more than 5x what Austin spends

Businesses Invest in Families and Benefit the Bottom Line

**Day 450**

Immunization
and well-child
visit

Day 1,500

Engages in
dramatic play

Day 2,000

Ready for
Kindergarten

“Early childhood development today is critical for our workforce tomorrow.”

“I was just 17 when I had my daughter,” begins Jeanette Ward, Chief Operating Officer of Texas Mutual. “I had already been accepted at The University of Texas, so I moved us to Austin and put myself through school – I found affordable housing, I had transportation, I did find child care, and I just put one foot in front of the other every day and got through college.”

At 23, Jeanette was hired as a receptionist by Texas Mutual, and has spent the past quarter-century building a highly successful career with the insurance firm. But over

the past few years, she’s come to realize that young women today in similar starting situations can’t do the same.

“I don’t know how you do it in today’s environment,” Jeanette affirms. “Austin especially has such huge affordability challenges – housing, transportation, child care. That’s why I’m trying to lend a helping hand, because I believe everyone deserves the opportunity to move up in life.”

Jeanette is involved in Early Matters Greater Austin, a coalition of local businesses working to promote investment

in young children by influencing public policy, encouraging family-friendly workplaces, and advancing innovation.

According to Jeanette, one of the first things employers can do to better their business is to support employees in their role as parents – provide them with the flexibility to take proper care of their children’s health, and make sure they have dependable, quality child care.

“If your employees can’t access affordable child care, then they’re coming to work worried about their kids,” she notes. “You want your employees there, present, giving their best, and if they can’t do that because of family concerns, that’s bad for business.”

At the same time, businesses need to be investing in today’s young children, to ensure they get on the right path to school and career success.

“We know now that a child’s earliest years – from birth to Kindergarten – are so, so important in terms of their development; it can impact their learning for the rest of their lives,” concurs Jeanette. “So if we as a business community don’t tackle Austin’s affordability issue, then we won’t have a skilled and ready workforce in the future.”

The City of Austin invests in early childhood programs because we want every child in this community to have the opportunities, education, and resources they need to thrive.

Kathie Tovo

Austin City Council Member, District 9



Jeanette Ward
Chief Operating Officer of Texas Mutual

Your Influence on the Journey

Each individual and every organization here in Austin/Travis County has the power to help shape the next 2,000 days – both for SX6’s work and for our youngest children. All you have to do is care, engage, and act.

Together, we can do so much to build up our community, its future success, and every one of the 38 babies coming into this world daily as fellow Austinites. **Begin today.**

If you’re a parent or concerned member of the public

Play every day. Research confirms that children learn better when adults talk, sing, and read with them daily. Support early learning through positive, engaging, fun interactions with the children in your life. Get parenting tools and techniques appropriate to your child’s age by signing up for Bright by Text – just text Text SMARTATX to 274448 to begin receiving parenting tips and local resources in English or Spanish.

If you’re a service provider

Join the Success By 6 Coalition. Collaborate, innovate, and empower family voices, while aiming for access, equity, and quality. Together we can make a meaningful, systemic, and sustainable impact for our children, our families, and the community we serve.

If you’re a business leader

High-quality early learning can transform the economic trajectory of our region. Investing in early education is an investment in the workforce of today AND the workforce of tomorrow. Join Early Matters Greater Austin – invest in early learning, influence public policy, create family-friendly workplaces, and advance innovation. To join EMGA or to learn more, please visit earlymattersgreateraustin.org

If you’re a policymaker

Prioritize policies that address the needs of families and young children. Recognize that policies and funding for early childhood have the highest return-on-investment for communities. Strong early childhood systems and infrastructure create better education, health, social, and economic outcomes, increasing revenue and reducing the need for costly social spending on services and supports later. Human capital is a critical part of our community’s infrastructure, and that foundation is laid in our children’s first 2,000 days.



If you’re a philanthropist

Consider opportunities to seed innovation; build capacity to research, pilot, and scale programs; improve systems to enhance coordination; and connect our Coalition to resources to make this happen. With your help, we can reach more disadvantaged children in their foundational first 2,000 days.



SUCCESS BY 6

AUSTIN/TRAVIS COALITION

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Greater Austin

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