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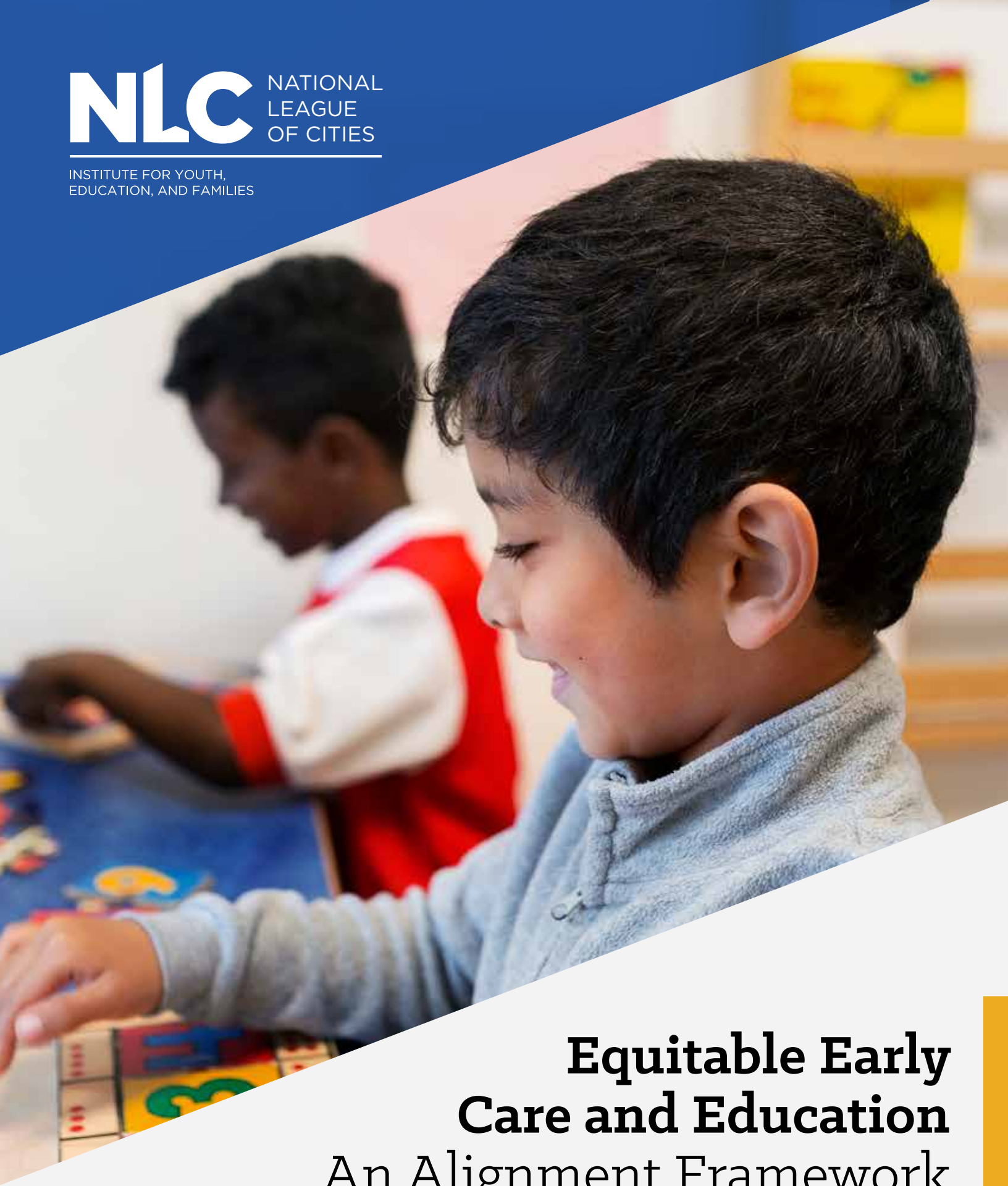

Equitable Early Care and Education

An Alignment Framework

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

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Introduction

The City Buy-In

Our understanding of how young children grow and develop is rapidly changing. A growing body of research now supports an inescapable conclusion, one that many city leaders and their community partners have long suspected: the learning experiences and opportunities that are available to children early in life play a powerful role in shaping their future academic success and wellbeing.

The implications for mayors and other municipal officials are profound. Over the long term, a host of key city priorities, including economic development, public safety, civic engagement and the stability of families and neighborhoods, all hinge at least in part on whether infants and toddlers thrive and young children enter kindergarten ready to succeed in the early elementary grades. Reaching critical benchmarks such as reading at grade level by third grade enables children to develop to their full potential during the school years and graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education and a career.

The challenge for city leaders is that most communities do not have an aligned and equitable system of early care and education that consistently produces these results for all children. Historically, a patchwork quilt of programs that serve young children and their families have developed independently from each other and the resulting fragmentation frequently impedes and limits their effectiveness. This lack of alignment can result in:

- Gaps in services and an inability to ensure adequate supply and access in all neighborhoods;
- Diminished ability to build upon gains as young children grow and move from one program or provider to the next; and
- Lack of citywide strategies for improving program quality over time through professional development, consensus regarding key quality standards, and related accountability measures.

For all of these reasons, more municipal leaders are turning their attention to how city government can support the alignment of equitable early care and education policies and programs. Through alignment, city leaders can prevent duplication of services, increase program quality, improve outcomes for children and create a more equitable early care and education system.

Alignment through a City Lens

City leaders know how important it is to have high-performing systems. They work every day with transportation systems to plan and improve their roads, bridges and mass transit. They oversee their law enforcement and emergency medical systems to keep residents safe and to provide

help in times of crisis. They manage water and sewer systems to protect the environment and public health. And they partner with the leaders of their school systems to educate the next generation.

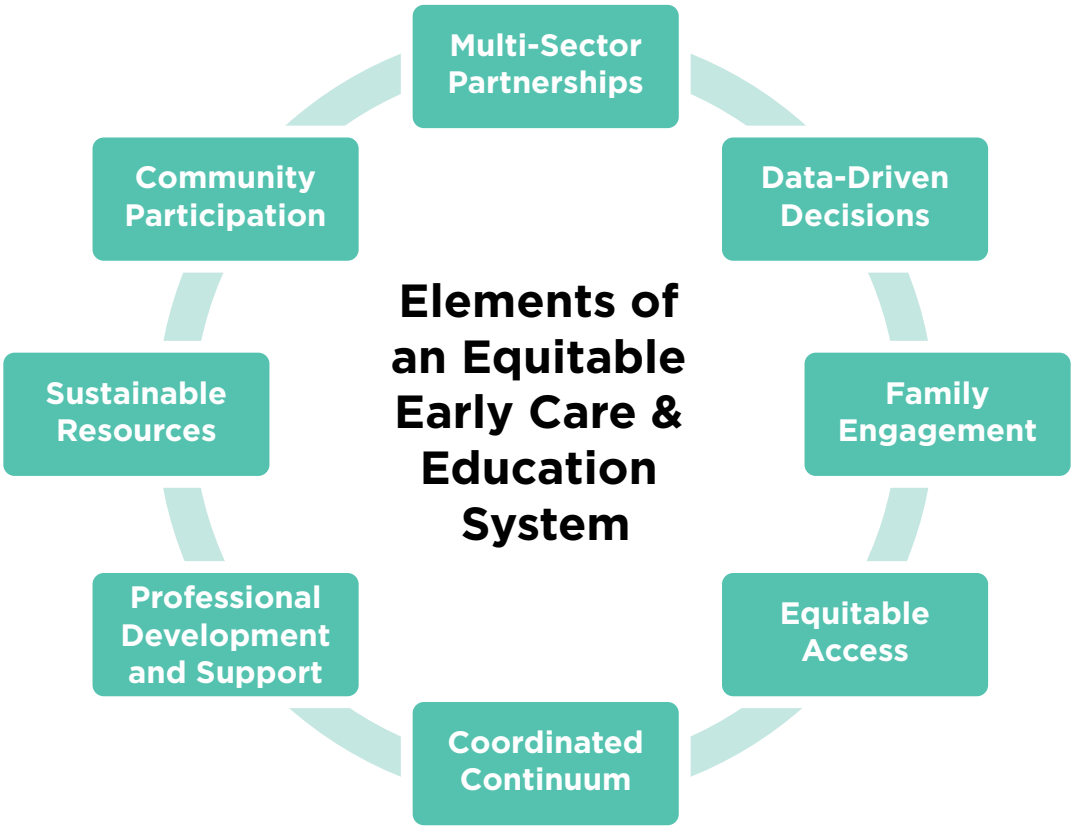
In all of these areas, mayors and councilmembers have a way of seeing the big picture. Thinking about the entire system enables them to make strategic choices, increase the impact of their policies and investments, and drive toward better outcomes.

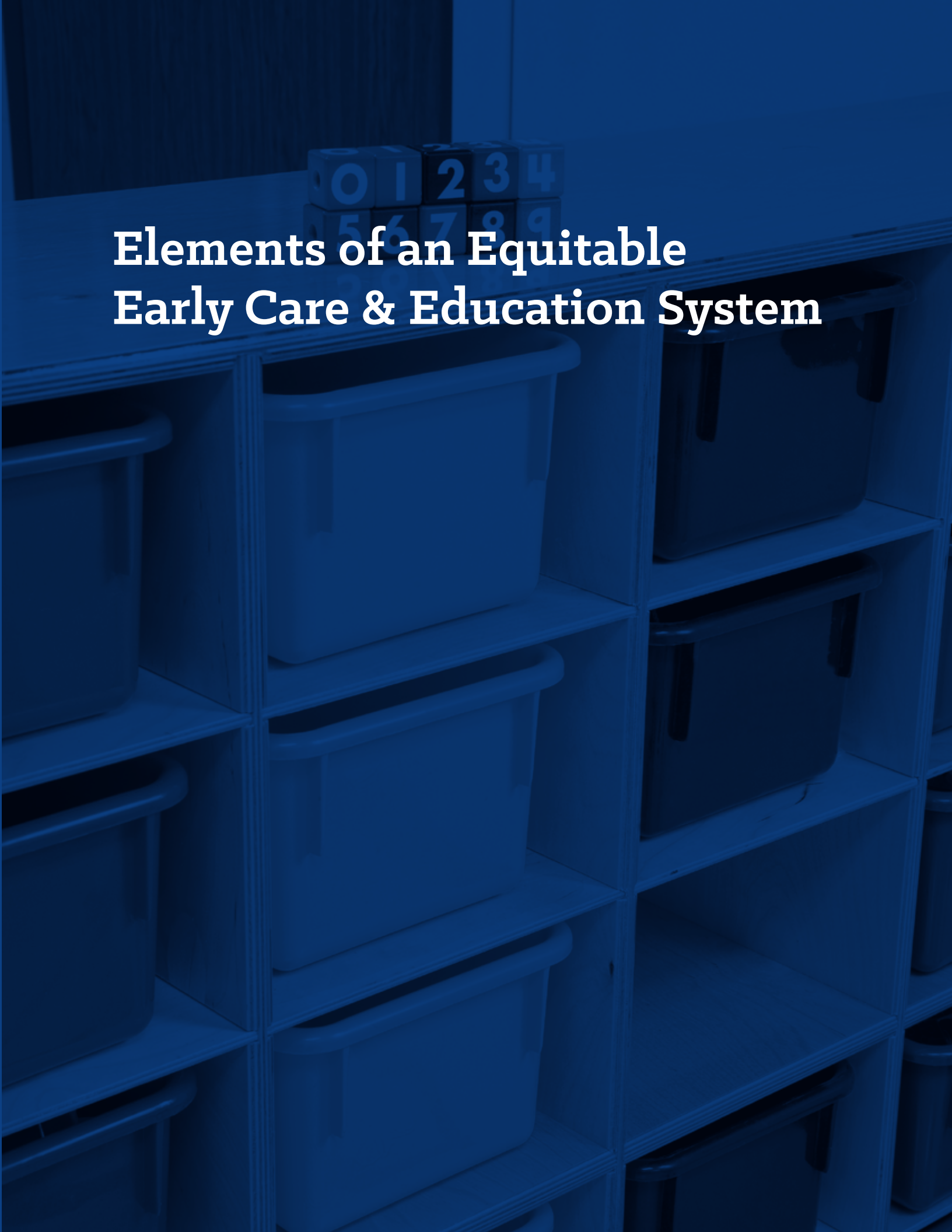
Because every community's early care and education system will include a diverse mix of public and private initiatives, an effective alignment process necessarily begins with a commitment to work across sectors to assess current needs, identify shared goals and then take and adjust actions in a highly coordinated manner. Aligning early care and education systems for young children can take a variety of forms and functions. What is essential is that city leaders and their community partners come together collaboratively to determine what early childhood alignment may look like in their community and how to achieve it. In focused practice, alignment efforts on behalf of young children from birth to age eight go well beyond the classroom to include strengthening connections within communities, addressing barriers to opportunity and linking families to a broad range of supports. When successful, the result is an early childhood system with young children and families at the center, a system that bridges divides, engages and supports families, improves the wellbeing of young children and creates opportunities for all to reach their potential.

The new NLC alignment framework described in this guide is designed to help mayors and other city leaders achieve that goal. The framework consists of eight key elements. Each element has a vision statement, a list of components and attributes, ways that cities may provide support, equity questions to consider and city examples that illustrate what is possible.

- The vision statement is a high-level vision of what the element would look like if it were fully realized within a city. A brief discussion follows the vision statement and provides insight and learnings from the revision process.
- The components and attributes provide specificity and deepening of the element definition.
- The city support section suggests potential ways city leadership and municipalities can take action to achieve this element.
- The equity considerations section provides questions to consider in order to build equity into all elements and aspects of early care and education.

These sections can be used by local coalitions and city staff to reflect on the current early childhood landscape within their city and consider areas of opportunity. The list of components, options for city support and equity considerations are not intended to be comprehensive, recognizing that the context of cities varies greatly and the science of early childhood continues to advance.





Elements of an Equitable Early Care & Education System

Cities Taking Action

Mayors, city councilmembers and municipal staff all can play key roles in developing an aligned and equitable early care and education system in their communities. They can start with a commitment to children and families and the use of a process of continuous improvement, one that includes regular evaluation and reflection on the shared vision, strategies and achievements that become the basis for adjusting actions to reach shared goals. City leaders can promote an inclusive and equitable approach, seeking to authentically engage families and the community in the process and courageously addressing underlying disparities and bias. Municipal officials can also use data strategically to understand needs, advocate for change, identify strategies, track actions and monitor impact. More specific examples of roles for city leaders include:

- Advocate for and support the early care and education system by using the bully pulpit, building awareness and leveraging city resources and finances;
- Be a strong partner in family engagement, and integrate services that support children and families;
- Leverage city departments, resources/finances, policies and practices to support children and families (including zoning, funding and programs);
- Use influence to convene stakeholders to align early care and education plans, definitions, goals and expectations; and
- Share and use data to identify needs, drive action and monitor progress.

All city leaders want vibrant, thriving communities – cities that are desirable places to live, learn, work and play. Families want to live in cities where they and their children can thrive and reach their full potential. One key attribute of thriving cities that support families and young children is an aligned and equitable early care and education system.

NLC's Alignment Journey

In 2010, responding to growing national interest in literacy, kindergarten readiness and reading by third grade, the National League of Cities (NLC), through its Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, conducted a landscape review and case studies of five cities that were leaders in aligning the Pre-K and K-3 age groups within the early care and education system. From this review, NLC detailed ten elements in the framework titled Educational Alignment for Young Children (EAYC). The EAYC framework provides a basis for bringing multi-sector groups together to align efforts, programs, services and policies to support young children and families and ensure all children reach their potential. Since its development, NLC has worked with cities across the country, supporting city leaders as they use the framework to align the early care and education systems in their cities.

NLC has seen cities make significant progress in aligning their prekindergarten (Pre-K) and K-3 elementary education systems and work to align the entire early childhood period, from birth to age eight. However, over the past seven years, the early care and education landscape has changed, including an increased national interest in the earliest years. Additionally, there have been many learnings from the city experience. NLC felt it important to revisit and revise the framework to reflect the new understanding of what it takes for cities to align their early childhood system, birth to age eight to create an equitable system. With the revision, NLC wanted to update the framework format so that it is both robust and easily digestible.

As a result, in 2017, the YEF Institute, in concert with city leaders, revised NLC's 2010 Educational Alignment for Young Children Framework. The revision process included a survey of 21 cities, a review of lessons learned from prior and current early childhood success projects and a roundtable workgroup meeting with officials representing ten cities, which are considered leaders in aligning efforts to advance early childhood. Two elected city officials, who are champions of early childhood locally, also participated in the roundtable meeting to provide a policymaker's perspective. The result is an alignment framework that reflects the key elements for an equitable early care and education system. It represents what it takes for cities and communities to align their early care and education system so that it works for all young children, birth through age 8, and families.

1 Partnerships with multi-sector, collaborative structures

Vision Statement

Public and private sectors work together to ensure the community has the policies, resources and infrastructure for creating an aligned and equitable early care and education system.

In advancing alignment there is the need to deepen partnerships beyond coordination to the identification of shared goals and accountability among partners for outcomes. Some cities use letters of commitment or Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to bring strength and sustainability to partnerships. The governance structure of the partnerships will depend on what works best for each community with community members and families helping to shape how it is formed. Partnerships consisting of a diverse stakeholder group, including early care and education providers, social services, local governments and schools are making advancements in equity and outcomes for children. Additionally, these partnerships are engaging nontraditional stakeholders in early care and education collaboratives, such as the health system and healthcare providers, local foundations, business leaders, law enforcement, city planning, parks and recreation, libraries, parent advocacy groups and faith-based organizations. Schools, including elementary, secondary and higher education, have a key role in the alignment process and are actively participating in early care and education collaboratives and addressing issues of the entire early childhood period, prenatal to grade 3, and not just kindergarten and pre-K.

Components and Attributes

- **Broad coalitions:** Early care and education partnerships include broad coalitions of all sectors within the community, including providers, schools, school districts, health and business sectors as well as family and community representatives.
- **Includes decision makers:** Decision makers or representatives who have been given decision making authority are included in partnerships and coalitions addressing issues of early childhood.
- **Dedicated staff:** Partnerships have staff dedicated to supporting the partnership and advancing its work.
- **Long-term commitment:** Stakeholders and partners are committed to issues of early childhood and committed to working together, long term and collaboratively.
- **Trust:** There is trust between partners, stakeholders and the community that includes an understanding that their work together is for the benefit of the community and not one specific organization.
- **Shared vision and goals:** Partners develop city-wide shared vision, goals and strategies and adjust and align their actions to achieve their

shared early childhood goals.

- **Community and family:** Community and family representatives are involved and included in decision making.
- **Intentional governance structure:** Partnerships have a governance structure which supports collaboration and shared responsibility, including defined roles, responsibilities and bylaws.
- **Accountability:** Partners and stakeholders hold themselves accountable for the work of their partnership and early childhood outcomes.

City Support

- **Active partner:** City leaders and staff should engage in local early care and education collaboratives as active partners.
- **Dedicated staff:** City leaders can appoint dedicated staff to participate in and work collaboratively with local early childhood coalitions and be committed to implementing policy and practices that support young children and families.
- **Committed leadership and support:** City leaders can prioritize early childhood as a key aspect to building and maintaining a thriving community, and can provide support and direct their departments to consider how they can address the needs of young children and their families.
- **Policies:** City leaders and departments can pass new and review existing city policies, practices and resolutions that address gaps and are supportive of young children, families and the early childhood workforce.
- **Use influence:** City leaders can use their influence to convene stakeholders to align early care and education plans, definitions, goals and expectations.

Equity Considerations

- Does your coalition include diverse stakeholders, including parents, providers, social services, local governments, schools, non-profits, the health system and healthcare providers, business leaders, law enforcement, city planning, parks and recreation, and faith-based organizations?
- Are all income and education levels represented, including pre-K, elementary, secondary and higher education?
- Are partnerships and coalitions reflective of the demographics in the community?
- Is every child in the community receiving what he or she needs? (Note: This may not mean that all children are getting the same thing.)
- Is equity and the elimination of disparities reflected in the shared vision, goals and strategies of your partnership?

City Example

In **Fort Worth, Texas**, the Early Learning Alliance uses Letters of Commitment (LOCs) as a way of bringing strength and sustainability to partnerships. Additionally, Alliance members make a financial contribution based on organizational revenues to the collaborative to further demonstrate their commitment. The LOCs ensure partnerships and resources are sustainable while giving key staff the leverage and authority they need to carry out this work. *See the Elements in Action section to read the full summary.*

2 Data-driven practices, policies and strategies that inform policy and support equitable outcomes

Vision Statement

A shared system for data collection, analysis and reporting informs the decisions of all stakeholders.

Data is key for successful practice and policy advancement. Cities are using data to understand issues, define gaps, advocate for support, identify strategies and monitor outcomes. In some cities data are shared across competitors and stakeholders to understand and monitor changes in the early care and education system to facilitate a more seamless system for children and families. Local coalitions are identifying key metrics to monitor and assess the condition of the early childhood system with all partners understanding the data definitions and sources of each metric. Data sharing and setting shared metrics increases data transparency. Data mapping and disaggregation are methods used to understand how resources and outcomes vary based on geographic location, race, ethnicity, gender and income. The use of data and mapping tools have been successful in beginning and continuing equity conversations and spurring action to eliminate disparities.

Components and Attributes

- **Use data:** Stakeholders and the community strategically use data and defined common metrics to understand the landscape and identify gaps and needs, determine strategies, policies and practices, monitor implementation and impact to ensure all children and families have what they need using a continuous process improvement approach.
- **Shared:** There is a process and/or system to share data across stakeholders and organizations for data collection, analysis and reporting that informs all stakeholders and leverages existing data systems.
- **Continuous process improvement:** The early care and education system are engaged in an iterative process of identifying and understanding the connections, pathways, programs, practices and policies of the current system and using data and feedback, working across sectors to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the early care and education system.
- **Disaggregated:** Data are disaggregated and reporting respectfully reflects demographic, neighborhood and/or cultural context of the community analysis and includes standards that incorporate equity.
- **Accuracy, integrity and transparency:** The data collected, used and reported on are accurate and consistent. The process of collection, analysis and reporting is transparent.
- **Clearly defined and relevant:** Data variables and metrics are relevant and clearly defined for collection and reporting.

- **Access:** Families have access to the data collected and reported, including both summary reporting and their own child(ren)'s data and information.

City Support

- **Leverage city departments:** Cities can leverage the expertise of city departments to support data monitoring and evaluation.
- **Share:** Cities can share data that is currently collected by the city and its departments with community partners and stakeholders.
- **Convene:** City leaders can use their influence to convene stakeholders to align plans, identify shared metrics and share data collection and reporting.
- **Outcomes based approach:** City leaders can use an approach for city policy, practice, and budgeting, which is based on community identified priorities and outcomes and is informed and monitored by data.
- **Data informed decisions:** City leaders can use data to inform decision making so that city policies and practices authentically address the needs and the desired outcomes of the community in an equitable manner.
- **Map:** City leaders and departments can support the use of mapping as a method in understanding and identifying current city and community assets, resources and needs.

Equity Considerations

- Does your early childhood data help you understand what the needs of your community are; are your strategies implemented as designed; and are the strategies having the impact you intended?
- Are your data and reporting disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, location (neighborhood) and income?
- Are you using data to advocate for equity in resource allocation?
- How do stakeholders utilize data to assess needs and implement differentiated service delivery?
- Are you meeting the needs of your young children and families in an equitable manner?
- Which children and families within your city are not thriving?
- Does the data consider cultural preferences and norms?

City Example

City leaders in **Santa Monica, California,** are using data to drive change for young children and their families. Its Youth Wellbeing Report Card serves as the city's and community's call to action. The report card provides a format to track metrics; assess, plan and implement improvement strategies; and monitor outcomes. The Building Blocks For Kindergarten initiative seeks to support improvement in outcomes highlighted in the report card. *See the Elements in Action section to read the full summary.*

3 Family engagement and support

Vision Statement

Families are fully engaged partners and cities foster relationships that fully engage families and children in successful, equitable early learning experiences.

Family engagement begins with the recognition that parents and families are children's first and forever teachers and that family structures and context are varied and highly valued. Unfortunately, many families struggle to meet their basic needs, which increases stress and limits opportunities. While resources to assist families exist within cities, at times it is difficult for families to know what resources are available and how to navigate them. Gaps in resources and access can also exist within cities, particularly in predominately minority neighborhoods and in areas of poverty. To improve the early learning system and address these gaps and barriers, many city leaders are starting with the assumption that parents want to be engaged and are reassessing how they are engaging parents and families. Cities are re-aligning services around young children and families to improve connections and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of services. Cities are asking, "Are families engaged? How are we engaging families?" Cities are including families and communities in decision making, moving from informing families about resources toward co-developing programs and policies with families.

Components and Attributes

- **Parents are children's first and forever teachers:** All partners, stakeholders and community members recognize and respect parents and families as children's first and forever teachers.
- **Families are engaged:** All partners and stakeholders start with the assumption that families are engaged and continue to work to decrease barriers which limit family participation and engagement.
- **Outreach:** Institutions and stakeholders reach out to families and develop an affinity with them.
- **Inclusion:** Families are included in early childhood coalitions and participate in decision making.
- **Mutual respect:** There is mutual respect between families and professionals with recognition that parents are experts on their children and professionals bring their own expertise to the table.
- **Empowers families:** The system, stakeholders and providers empower families and those families feel empowered.
- **Young children and families at the center:** Young children and families are at the center of service delivery and system supports, and families experience "no wrong door" with the

system providing seamless connections and transitions.

- **Opportunity:** Professionals help families recognize their opportunities, treat parents as experts on their own children and work with parents and families as partners in their children's development.

City Support

- **Strong partner:** City leaders and staff should embrace families as equal partners, by reaching out to them where they are, making sure their voices and concerns drive priority setting.
- **Community outreach:** City leaders can join families in their neighborhoods and experience service delivery alongside them, and by participating in community outreach, conducting "Walking Town Halls," and visiting neighborhoods and child care centers.
- **Convene:** City leaders can use their influence to convene providers, stakeholders and city departments to align services for families.
- **Policies and practices:** City leaders and staff can review current public policies and practices to understand the impact they have on young children and families, as well as advocate for improvements that create equitable opportunities for families.
- **Family friendly:** City leaders can be the example for community organizations and businesses by having city employee policies and benefits that are family friendly.

Equity Considerations

- How are you engaging families and young children?
- Are services and information provided culturally sensitive? Are they available in the languages and literacy levels reflective of your city? Are they available, affordable and accessible to all neighborhoods?
- How are families involved in local decision making? Is there equal power?
- Is there equity in all services provided to young children and families, considering language, race, ethnicity, gender and location?
- Are families included in leadership roles?
- Are policies, strategies and programming co-developed with communities and families?

A Parent's Story

Developing an aligned equitable early care and education system requires embracing families, with their lived experience, as the experts. In **Danbury, Connecticut,** the Parent Leadership Training Institute provides the training and support that many parents need to emerge as strong community leaders and change agents. *See the Elements in Action section to read the full summary.*

4 Access to affordable, high-quality early care and education

Vision Statement

All families have access to affordable, diverse, high-quality early care and education environments.

Access to early care and education is multi-faceted with equity as a central tenant. In an equitable system, all families have access to affordable, high-quality early care and education environments that are available when needed and in convenient locations. This type of system calls for differentiation in effective, research-based teaching methods and services to meet the needs of children and families, and allows families to access high-quality care in multiple settings, including different types of formal and informal care and educational opportunities. Understanding where young children and families live, the locations of providers and the quality of early learning settings provide valuable insight into the current system and progress achieved over time. A clear shared definition of high-quality which is based on early learning standards and addresses multiple domains – academic, social-emotional and physical – provides a basis for measurement. Availability of care and education impacts accessibility. While it is currently challenging for many families to find and access affordable, high-quality care during typical business hours, it is even more challenging for families to identify options "after-hours." Affordability presents another challenge and a significant barrier for many families, including low- and middle-income families. Even with financial supports, the cost of early care and education can negatively impact the financial stability of families.

Components and Attributes

- **Available and Affordable:** Early care and education (ECE) options meet the needs of all families, are available when needed and affordability is not a limiting factor in families accessing high-quality care and education for their children.
- **Formal and informal providers:** The ECE system recognizes and both formal and informal care and education and providers are supported by the city, community partners and stakeholders, including family, friend and neighbor care.
- **High Quality:** High-quality ECE is defined and monitored, and measurements of quality reflect desired outcomes for children and families.
- **Diverse learning:** The ECE system provides diverse learning methods and locations to meet the needs of children and families.
- **Elevates Early Childhood:** The community elevates and highlights the lifelong impact of ECE on children's future achievement and wellbeing.

- **Developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive:** Young child and parent and family education is developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive.
- **Easy choice:** High-quality ECE is the easy choice for families, with a system without barriers that is easy to navigate with and identify and access high-quality options.

City Support

- **Advocate:** City leaders can elevate and highlight the lifelong impact of early care and education on children's future achievement and wellbeing and advocate for access for all children.
- **Leverage city resources and assets:** City leaders can consider how current and future city resources and assets can be used to support and facilitate early care and education, such as funding of programs; use of city facilities for infant and toddler play groups or pre-school locations; and availability of public transportation to child care centers.
- **Respond to family needs:** Cities can align city facility hours of operation with times that correspond with families' needs.
- **Land use and zoning:** City leaders and departments can consider using land-use patterns and zoning codes to incentivize development of early care and education facilities where there is need within the community.
- **Family friendly:** City leaders can develop human resource policies and benefits that are family friendly and support city employees' early child care and education needs, and call upon the business community to provide similar policies and benefits.
- **Incentivize:** Cities can provide support to and incentivize early care and education providers to achieve and maintain high-quality services, credentials and research-based practices.
- **Support families:** Cities can provide supports for families to access and afford high-quality early care and education through tuition support or by subsidizing childcare providers.

Equity Considerations

- Is high-quality care and education for young children available and affordable at the times and locations needed by parents and families?
- Are quality measures reflective of cultural practices and preferences?
- Is information on access, availability, affordability and quality available in various languages and literacy levels of families in the city?
- Do the early care and education providers/teachers reflect the culture and background of the children and families the community?

City Example

The City of **Dayton, Ohio,** is expanding access to preschool through its Preschool Promise program by educating the community on the importance of high-quality preschool; expanding quality through efforts to drive program improvement and increase the number of highly-rated (or Star Rated) preschools; and assisting families with finding and paying for high-quality preschool. Critical to the launch of the program was Mayor Nan Whaley's advocacy and support. *See the Elements in Action section to read the full summary.*

5 Coordinated continuum of developmentally appropriate care and education

Vision Statement

The continuum of care in each community is aligned and offers developmentally appropriate care and education to its children.

Early care and education that is coordinated across the learning continuum results in smooth transitions across programs and learning environments. A coordinated learning continuum is collaborative and responsive to the needs of children and families and the various contexts, settings and cultures, with purposeful alignment of curriculum, standards, instructional methods, practices and assessments. This coordination considers the entire learning continuum and acknowledges that each step/phase/grade builds on the next, with the ultimate goal of each child receiving the care and education he or she needs so that every child is prepared to succeed at each step. An equitable and aligned system considers the needs of the whole child and provides care and education that is developmentally appropriate, evidence-based and, addresses academic, physiologic, cognitive, social and emotional development. Many providers and cities are providing comprehensive developmental screenings to identify concerns and refer children and families to services when needed and many are using a trauma-informed approach to provide services and engage families. Cities, providers, educators, school districts and higher education all have roles within the early care and education system.

Components and Attributes

- **Seamless transitions:** The ECE system has seamless connections and transitions for young children and families across educational and care programs and settings.
- **Collaborative aligned structure:** Across the learning continuum and within the ECE system, there is intentional alignment, both vertically and horizontally, of curricula, standards, practices and assessments which supports the whole child and prepares each child for success in his or her next step in the learning continuum.
- **High Quality:** Evidenced-based, high-quality instructional practices and curricula are utilized and results are monitored.
- **Responsive and tailored:** The curriculum, standards, practice and assessments used are responsive and tailored to the various ages, contexts, settings and cultures.
- **Schools and city policies and engagement:** Leadership from school districts, higher education and the city are involved in early childhood credential advancement and ongoing knowledge growth - with city, school and organizational policies supporting learning across the continuum.

- **Trauma informed:** Teachers, providers and the community use a trauma-informed approach when working with and for young children and families.
- **Comprehensive screening and support:** Screening of young children is inclusive, comprehensive and, when indicated, links children and families with supports. The system recognizes that early identification and early connection to services improves outcomes. It also recognizes the importance of culturally sensitive screenings and supports.
- **Developmentally appropriate:** Curriculum and instructional practices used by teachers and providers are developmentally appropriate, grounded in research and include physiologic, cognitive, social and emotional development.
- **Young children and families at the center:** Young children and families are at the center of learning with the education and care system and are included in decision making. Families are supported and participate in their child(ren)'s education. Leaders, stakeholders, partners and providers acknowledge the impact of and consider the community context and family conditions which impact child and family wellbeing.

City Support

- **Align standards:** City leaders can work with community partners and stakeholders to align early childhood curricula, standards, instructional methods, practices and assessments.
- **Leverage existing resources:** City leaders and city departments can leverage existing resources to support all stages of the learning continuum and the transitions of children between those stages.
- **Incentivize high quality:** City leaders and departments can incentivize high quality programs and coordination among teachers and providers through city service contracts.
- **Trauma informed:** City leaders and staff can learn how trauma can impact wellbeing, become a trauma informed community and support effective interventions and approaches.
- **Integrate services:** City leaders and departments can work together with the community to develop a seamless delivery of services so all children and families receive the care, education and support they need to reach their potential.

Equity Considerations

- Are children receiving the curriculum, programming and services they need?
- Are all children ready to succeed at each transition?
- Are transitions coordinated and smooth for all children throughout all levels/grades?
- Is curriculum and instruction differentiated to meet the needs of all the young children and families within the city?

City Example

The City of **Hartford, Connecticut**'s Pre-K programs, Hartford Public Schools, and the Capitol Region Education Council are aligning their assessments, curricula and instructional practices. With strong support from Mayor Luke Bronin they are implementing policies and practices to ensure a more equitable and coordinated system. *See the Elements in Action section to read the full summary.*

6 Professional development and support for the early childhood workforce

Vision Statement

The early learning workforce is elevated and valued for its contribution and is appropriately compensated, trained and supported to give high-quality learning experiences to all children.

Many still equate early care and education with "babysitters" and "play groups," while research tells us that the early years of a child's life are filled with rapid growth and development – physically, cognitively, socially and emotionally. The professionals who care for and educate our young children have a lifelong impact on children's future achievement and wellbeing. Recognition of early childhood providers and educators as a profession, along with workforce support and professional development is a key element of an aligned, equitable early care and education framework. In an equitable system the early care and education profession is elevated and recognizes educators and providers for their knowledge, skills and competencies and the impact they have on families and children. The system recognizes how the work of educators and providers contributes to the vibrancy of the local economy by supporting the current and building the future workforce. The professional development and supports provided are accessible to in multiple settings, cultural and linguistic contexts and in both formal and informal types of care, with the goal of all providers having the knowledge and skills needed to provide high-quality care and education to children. Providers are supported in delivering developmentally appropriate, holistic and trauma-informed care and education. Barriers to a sustainable early care and education workforce include high-turnover, low-compensation and a lack of career pathways.

Components and Attributes

- **Knowledge and skills:** Early care providers and educators have the knowledge, skills and competencies they need to care for and educate all children.
- **Diverse workforce:** The early childhood workforce reflects the diversity of the children it cares for and educates.
- **Valued:** Early caregivers and educators are adequately compensated and have the resources they need, including adequate planning and professional development time to provide high quality care and education for all children.
- **Differentiated:** Professional development addresses differentiated instructional practices that consider the context, settings and culture of children and families within the city. The curriculum and instructional practices are data-driven, research-based and developmentally

appropriate. The system also provides a coaching model for individualized professional development and support that is provided in the linguistic and literacy levels of all providers.

- **Professional development:** Professional development curriculum embraces diversity; is culturally relevant and actionable; is supported by best practice, as well as improves and supports providers' capacity to care for and educate young children. Professional development opportunities are available for formal and informal care and education providers and include peer-to-peer learning.
- **Formal and informal workforce:** The early care and education system recognizes and supports both the formal and informal workforce.
- **Career Pathways:** Teaching standards, professional development, higher education and career pathways are clearly laid out for teachers and early care providers – this includes leadership training and business model development.
- **Shared resources:** Support and professional development for the early care and education workforce are provided through shared resources and training opportunities, leveraging the resources of the city, community partners, stakeholders, schools and institutes of higher education.

City Support

- **Value the workforce:** City leaders and departments can leverage city resources to show they value the early childhood workforce, as well as support the professional development of both the formal and informal providers.
- **Business community:** City leaders can call upon and engage the business community to support the early care and education workforce and its professional development.
- **Advocate:** City leaders and staff can trumpet the value of early educators and providers, and build community support for the workforce.
- **Wage parity:** Cities can fund wage supplements for early childcare providers and teachers.
- **Collaborate:** Cities can work with local school districts and higher education institutions to provide affordable educational advancement and professional development opportunities.
- **Data:** Cities can use data regarding provider and teacher credential levels, child outcomes and the quality level of sites and providers to inform decision making.

Equity Considerations

- Is there pay and benefit parity among early care and education providers in school and community settings?
- Are early care and education providers equitably compensated?
- Do teachers and providers reflect the demographics of the children and students they care for and educate?
- Is the level of training and credentials of providers and teachers

equitable across neighborhoods and care and education settings?

- Are you engaging informal care providers from all neighborhoods?
- Do professional development opportunities and support offered reflect the linguistic, literacy and cultural settings of providers and neighborhoods?
- Are professional development offerings research-based, developmentally appropriate, data-driven, accessible, affordable and available for all providers and teachers?

City Example

In **Jacksonville, Florida**, the Jacksonville Children's Commission through its *CoachJax!* program is raising the professional status of the early childhood workforce. This robust coaching program focuses on developing teacher skills to support early literacy development in children, beginning in infancy. *See the Elements in Action section to read the full summary.*

7 Sustainability and coordination of sufficient resources, funding, policies and practices

Vision Statement

Strong, sustained and coordinated community support on behalf of children and families ensures sufficient resources and funding.

A sustainable, equitable and aligned early care and education system has sufficient resources and funding necessary to achieve the city's shared vision, and includes policies and practices that support young children and families. Partners are committed to coordinating resources and funding. Many cities are taking an asset-based approach when reviewing what is currently available within their communities. This includes considering new and alternative ways of using city and community assets, as well as adapting policies and practices to meet families' needs. Sustainability oriented cities are taking a holistic approach which doesn't focus just on the dollars but looks first to existing community resources, policies and practices. Additionally, early childhood coalitions are considering how resources and funds impact the early care and education system community wide and not just by individual programs or organizations. Many cities, partners and communities are leveraging their assets and blending, braiding and pooling funding sources. This includes leveraging all city agencies and resources in support of the early care and education system. Policy and practice changes can create sustainable change within cities and communities by changing the way cities and communities support, care for and educate young children.

Components and Attributes

- **Asset based approach:** The early care and education (ECE) system uses an asset based approach to build on what is working well within the community and identifying available resources, funding, policies and practices in support of all children.
- **Community-wide perspective:** The ECE system considers resources and funding needs across the community and not just at the program or organizational level.
- **Funding strategies:** The ECE system seeks sustainable funding sources and has the ability to braid, blend and pool funding.
- **Demonstrates success:** The ECE system is able to demonstrate success in achieving shared goals using data related to progress, outputs, outcomes and impact.
- **Philanthropic institutions engaged:** Philanthropic institutions are involved throughout the improvement process and are considered partners in advancing early care and education.
- **Capacity:** The ECE system has the capacity to meet the needs of young children and families, including adequate and dedicated staff.

- **Policy and Practice:** The ECE system recognizes and uses policy and practice changes as a method to create sustainability.

City Support

- **Bully pulpit:** City leaders can use the bully pulpit to build awareness and gain broad support for high quality early care and education programs and policies.
- **Dedicated staff:** City leaders and departments can appoint dedicated city staff to support city-wide early care and education advancement.
- **Policies and practice:** City leaders can use existing city department policies and practices to positively impact children and families (including zoning, funding and programs).
- **Provide support:** City leaders can leverage city resources and finances to support and work with local community partners to address gaps, provide services and improve outcomes in neighborhoods and communities most in need as identified by data and mapping.
- **Dedicated funding:** City leaders can create dedicated funding sources for early care and education programs, which along with city funds can include state, philanthropic and federal resources.
- **Review:** City leaders and staff can review city-wide and departmental policies and practices to understand the impacts on children and families.

Equity Considerations

- Are resources and funding allocated in an equitable manner to meet the needs of all young children and families, considering race, ethnicity, age, gender and location?
- Do organizational, institutional and city policies and practices support all young children and families?
- What structural and institutional biases exist? How are they impacting children and families?

City Example

The City of **Seattle, Washington**, promotes the sustainability of its early childhood efforts by focusing on community awareness, coordination and an asset-based approach. The city's commitment to addressing issues of early childhood began in 1972 and has expanded steadily since that time. In 1997, Seattle voters first approved the Families and Education Levy, which continues to funnel dedicated local tax revenues to ECE programs and other key child and family services. *See the Elements in Action section to read the full summary.*

8 Community awareness and engagement

Vision Statement

An equitable early care and education continuum is a priority for all elected officials and community stakeholders.

Every community is unique and local improvements happen when communities and city leaders are aware of the needs; engaged in the issues; and invested in solutions. In a fully engaged community, early childhood collaboratives are advocates for young children and families; communicate needs; highlight disparities; and co-develop strategies for improvement with the community. Awareness and engagement are realized when there is commitment from all stakeholders, including local neighborhoods and families, with city leaders and school districts engaged and active in advancing early childhood. Communicating the importance and benefits of early care and education to every segment of the community is one of the most important things we can do to ensure that programs and services continue to be available for parents and young children across this nation. Raising awareness about the benefits and success of early care and education may convince people to support services with their heart, time and money. When city leaders focus attention on early childhood issues they can be important catalysts for change. Local elected officials can capitalize on their influence and visibility with the general public and other policymakers to foster widespread support for local action on early care and education.

Components and Attributes

- **Awareness:** The benefits of early childhood care and education and the knowledge, skills and competencies of the early childhood workforce are universally understood and supported by both the community and city leaders, including public, private, business and healthcare leaders.
- **School districts and educators:** School districts and educators support and are actively engaged in efforts to improve outcomes of early childhood.
- **Active participation:** City leaders, stakeholders, schools, partners and families actively participate in early childhood coalitions and leverage their resources and expertise in support of young children and families.
- **Clear message:** Early care and education messaging is aligned across partners and stakeholders and clearly articulates the city's shared vision, goals, strategies and desired outcomes, with messaging available in linguistic, literacy and cultural formats reflective of the city.
- **Priority:** Investments in early childhood are a priority of city leaders and the community, with a shared vision and goals.

- **Accountability:** City leaders, stakeholders and the community are all responsible for the wellbeing and outcomes of young children, providing needed supports and working together to improve the wellbeing of all children.
- **Authentic:** Community engagement is authentic, respectful and inclusive, with community members and families as partners in decision making.
- **Realistic:** All leaders, stakeholders, community members and families have accurate information and understanding of shared goals and expected outcomes.

City Support

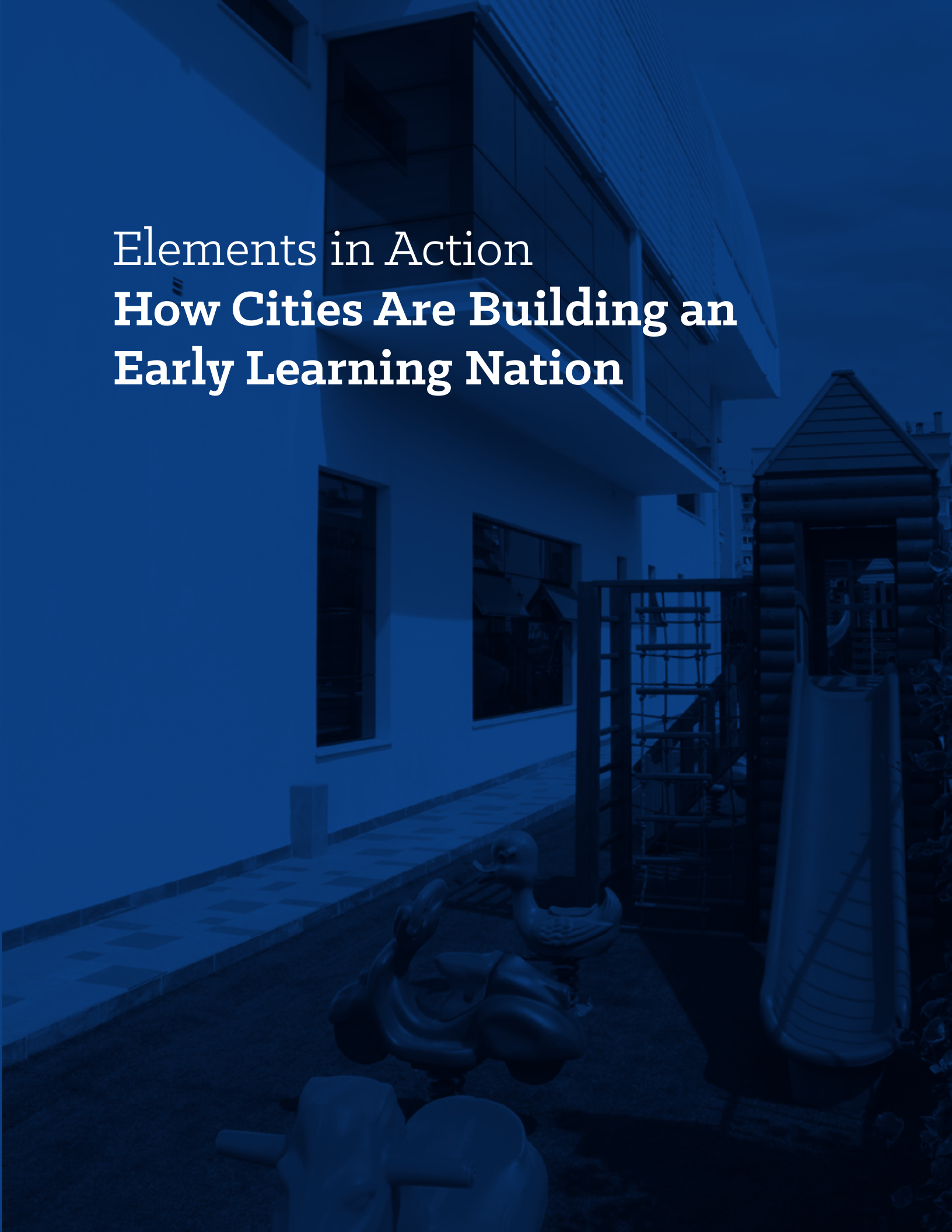
- **Priority:** City leaders can include early childhood as a stated priority of the city and create an early care and education policy agenda.
- **Dedicated staff:** Cities can dedicate staff to participate in early care and education collaboratives to advance and align the early care and education system, with all city officials and staff promoting a shared commitment to support young children and families in their policies and practices.
- **Outreach:** City leaders and departments can reach out to the community to listen and learn about their issues and concerns.
- **Inclusive:** Cities can work to ensure that families with young children are included in early childhood coalitions and decision-making processes.
- **Accountability:** City leaders and department heads can hold themselves accountable for the wellbeing and outcomes of children and families.
- **Communicate and Advocate:** City and community leaders can clearly communicate the importance of early childhood and advocate for community support to address gaps in early care and education, including leveraging public messaging formats.
- **Convene:** City and community leaders can use their influence to bring the community together to create shared definitions, goals and expectations with the goal of aligning early childhood plans.

Equity Considerations

- Are city leaders, partners, stakeholders and community members aware of the local disparities in outcomes for children?
- Are communications and information sharing available in linguistic, literacy and cultural formats reflective of the city?
- Are all families able to access affordable, high-quality services, considering, race, ethnicity, age, gender and location?

City Example

In **San Antonio, Texas,** broad community and civic leaders' awareness, engagement and support are keys to the city's success in creating Pre-K 4 SA, an initiative to develop a highly skilled workforce in one generation through high quality early childhood education that benefits all children in the city. Pre-K 4 SA is building and maintaining community and leadership support through communications efforts that highlight the goals of the program and the returns on investment generated through the program's support for young children and their families. *See the Elements in Action section to read the full summary.*



Elements in Action

How Cities Are Building an Early Learning Nation

How Cities Are Building an Early Learning Nation

Cities across the nation are taking action to align their early care and education systems within their communities. Included below are examples of cities' steps to advance early childhood through actions taken within a specific element of an aligned and equitable early care and education system. The summaries demonstrate attributes and components of the element. While each summary focuses on a particular element, the summaries also highlight how the elements are woven together in aligning the early care and education system.

1 **Fort Worth, Texas:** Partnerships with multi-sector, collaborative structures

Fort Worth's summary demonstrates attributes and components of partnerships, including intentional governance; shared vision and goals; long-term commitment; broad coalitions; and dedicated staff. Additionally, this summary highlights the elements of data-driven practices, policies and strategies; family engagement; sustainability and coordination; and community awareness and engagement.

Program Details

Fort Worth's school readiness partnerships began more than 10 years ago through the Fort Worth Public Library's early childhood initiative, Early Childhood Matters, which provided resources for families to support healthy development and kindergarten readiness. In October 2013, after the Fort Worth Public Library was awarded a technical assistance grant from the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, the library activated an existing network of early childhood stakeholders, the school district, city and county leaders and foundations, to form the Early Learning Alliance (ELA). ELA energized and convened organizations, institutions and individuals to coordinate efforts, streamline processes and create new solutions that will have a positive impact in the lives of children from birth to age eight.

Without a strong, cohesive union, the collaboration may not achieve its full potential, so the Alliance formed a core structure with a leadership team of chief executives and three priority area subcommittees. This structure built a sense of intentionality and common direction among partners. The members committed to meet quarterly as a full team and monthly as subcommittees. The leadership team also meets monthly. Members attended a full day retreat to talk about what they each wanted for Fort Worth's youngest children and how this fit into each organizations' missions. Then, as a group, they developed their collective vision: a community united to provide a strong start for all children.

With the partners working toward the same goal, they needed to figure out how they were going to achieve it. Each subcommittee created goals and action plans focused on their respective topics: family engagement, assessment and data sharing, and professional development. The leaders of these subcommittees also came together to form the Governance Team, where they would develop common definitions and goals that aligned across all the teams and partners. In 2014, these plans came together under a shared strategic plan called "A Plan for the Next One Thousand Days" with a total of 50 Early Learning Alliance members and partners adopting the plan. The plan was supported by local funding from the North Texas Community Foundation, which aligned their "toolbox" grants with ELA's goals. The Alliance recognized the role that race, ethnicity, income and gender can play in early childhood success, and created a

Racial Equity Task Force to identify and eliminate disparities that undermine child wellbeing.

The Early Learning Alliance soon became "the table to be at" for all things early childhood. ELA continued to reinforce the message that there was room at the table for all. Member organizations began to use ELA as the structure for coordinating their individual actions, avoiding duplication of efforts and developing new initiatives.

In 2015, with the Early Learning Alliance structure in place – including a shared vision and goals, as well as a plan of action – the members drafted a letter of commitment. By signing the letter, each organization committed to attend regular meetings, participate on a subcommittee and provide resources to ELA through dues or in-kind services. They agreed that "each organization has a better chance of achieving its own mission and has a broader community reach" by being a member of the Alliance. Twenty-eight partner organizations and individuals signed the letter and contributed a total of $60,550 in dues as Founding Members. A fee-based approach to membership was new in collective work, but represented a commitment beyond words. Dues are adjusted on a sliding scale based on organizational revenues.

Forming a formal alliance does not come without challenges. Before a governance structure could be established and letters of commitment signed, a sense of trust and community among partners needed to be established. Partners were required to come to the table with open minds and not let previous experiences and perceptions of partners hinder their ability to collaborate. Once at the table, the leadership team needed to remember which hat they were wearing to ensure the Alliance's interests, as a collective, were the priority and not the individual needs of their respective organizations. The North Texas Community Foundation offered to serve as the fiscal agent for the collaborative.

After a year and a half of work together, the Alliance decided to evaluate how effectively the coalition was working for the partners and for the community. A consultant studied the partner experience and community outcomes. Partners were surveyed on whether the members and the architecture of the partnership were functioning well. Cultivating the partnership and making sure the partners were happy and getting what they needed out of it was going to be critical to ELA's long-term success. The Alliance also wanted to make sure the coalition was really improving outcomes for Tarrant County children. As the work progresses, partners will study changes happening in the larger community, including changes in culture, policy, relationships among the stakeholders and demographics to learn how these variations result in better achievement for children ages birth to eight. The group will then be able to modify its path and actions in response to the data to improve its work and relationships with each other. In 2015, the Early Learning Alliance hosted an introductory training session, conducted by Leon Andrews, Director of the National League of Cities' Racial Equity and Leadership (REAL) initiative, for its members, partners and community leaders.

In 2016, ELA updated its strategic plan, the "Next 1,000 Days Plan," which identi-

fies four focus areas: elevating early childhood professional quality; elevating early childhood program quality; engaging with families; and sharing data and research, with a highlighted focus on children from birth to age five. This plan was endorsed by the Fort Worth City Council, elevating early learning to one of its top three policy priorities.

In 2017, ELA released "Transforming Vision into Action,' a plan that highlights ELA priorities and strategies for driving collective impact for quality early childhood care and education. Furthermore, ELA specifically determined that it did not want to become a new nonprofit organization, but recognized the need for a defined structure. The Alliance determined that it was shaping itself to become a 10-year movement designed to advance and accelerate better outcomes for young children. Connected to a sense of urgency, ELA also adopted Results-Based Accountability processes to improve its ability to monitor community impact.

In 2017, ELA collaborated with the REAL initiative to bring another two-day workshop to community leaders. This year also saw a philanthropic commitment to ELA – with foundations joining the ELA and providing additional financial resources.

Using a shared vision and a co-developed theory of change and logic model, the Alliance has an inclusive governance style and commitment by members to the larger community. There is allowance for members differing of opinion on issues and positions. For example, an ELA position about policy or legislative action is signed by the Alliance with supporting partners listed. This allows a partner to opt-in or opt-out of position statements, supporting a diversity of opinions. Monthly meetings end with group reflection that includes the following questions: "What did you like about today's meeting?"; "How can we improve?"; and "Who is missing (are there early childhood stakeholders that are currently not part of the Alliance)?". ELA members also mention having a dedicated coordinator position within ELA as key. Through a partnership with FWISD, the Alliance secured funding for a full-time coordinator. A coordinator provides leadership and dedication, engenders trust among partners and provides a glue to hold the partnership together as it forms.

2 **Santa Monica, California:** Data-driven practices, policies and strategies that inform policy and support equitable outcomes

Santa Monica's summary demonstrates attributes and components of data-driven practices, policies and strategies, including strategic use of data; common metrics shared and relevant data; and access. Additionally, this summary highlights the elements of partnership; family engagement; coordinated continuum; sustainability; and community awareness.

Program Details

Santa Monica, California has been addressing issues of early childhood for decades and data has long been a part of its work. In 1980, the Child Care Task Force was established, bringing together the city, school district and other sectors of the community. In 1990, the City of Santa Monica created a dedicated early childhood position within the city government. In 1991, in its city Child Care Policy, Santa Monica identified child care needs as a shared responsibility within the community. As a result, the city increased advocacy for child care. That year, the Child Care Master Plan was adopted by the City of Santa Monica, Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District and Santa Monica College, setting out a framework and a long-term plan. The focus of the work during these two decades was primarily on access to child care, including capacity and quality.

In 2001, the city, school district, Santa Monica College, the Child Care Task Force, the local chamber of commerce, RAND Corporation, community based organizations and residents developed the Early Childhood Initiative Plan which set in place a shared vision and strategies for the city. The City of Santa Monica identified the opportunity to coordinate multiple data systems, citing "…an abundance of data that exists in the community with no formal way to capture and leverage that data." Leveraging technical assistance from RAND, the plan included a strategy to design a preliminary data system by bringing together multiple data systems with the goal of sharing and capturing baseline data for future monitoring. The plan acknowledged this would be a long-term project and looked to include data collecting and indicator identification as part of the evaluation process.

"How are our children doing?" was the driving question for the city, community, school district, Santa Monica College and local non-profit partners. This central question, along with the focus on data, systematized the network and strengthened the partnerships. The search for best practices in early childhood data, led to the Early Development Instrument (EDI) from the Offord Center at McMaster University and licensed to University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities. The instrument measures five domains of readiness and provides a pop-

ulation level assessment. In 2010, Santa Monica, as part of a UCLA initiative, piloted the EDI assessment in a small number of kindergarten classrooms.

In 2011, the city launched the Santa Monica Cradle to Career (smC2C) initiative, a public-private partnership to address child wellbeing. The initiative developed a data driven understanding of youth wellbeing with the release of the Data Snapshot of Santa Monica Youth and Families. With kindergarten readiness a goal of the initiative and with the success of the initial pilot, the City of Santa Monica funded a local resource and referral agency to annually assess all children in the public-school kindergarten classrooms using EDI.

Embracing a data-driven approach, smC2C released their 2012 Youth Wellbeing Report Card, which incorporated the EDI data and quantified overall kindergarten readiness. The report card provides a format to track metrics to assess, plan and implement improvement strategies and monitor outcomes. The Youth Wellbeing Report Card was updated in 2014 and 2017.

Santa Monica was surprised by the 2012 EDI results, which indicated that while the majority of children were on track for kindergarten, an unexpected number were not on track in one or more developmental areas. Spurred by this data, the Santa Monica Cradle to Career Workgroup and the Child Care and Early Education Task Force brought together a diverse partnership to address the findings. From this effort, the Building Blocks For Kindergarten Work Group was formed to look at the data and determine what was needed in their community, as well as to examine

best practices. Adapting an existing strategy from Santa Clara County, California, they developed a new campaign, Building Blocks for Kindergarten.

Launched in 2014, the Building Blocks For Kindergarten initiative works to create a community of learning by increasing the knowledge of parents, providers and the community on what skills children need to be kindergarten ready in addition to outreach and professional development resources. Each year, the initiative – which is in year three of the program and year six of using EDI data – has expanded its reach and is currently reaching out to pediatric and local services providers. Its focus, while starting with the pre-school age children has expanded to focus on children from birth to 3-years-old. From these, EDI results have shown a steady increase in the percentage of children ready for kindergarten, with more at-risk children achieving readiness. The initiative is currently focusing on the cohort of children identified as vulnerable, whose EDI results have shown minimal increase in readiness. The City of Santa Monica is exploring this and working with RAND to dig-deeper into the data and understand what is showing statistical significance.

Using data to drive change for young children and their families, the Youth Wellbeing Report Card serves as the city's and communities' call to action for the cradle to career initiatives. The early childhood initiative, Building Blocks For Kindergarten (school readiness initiative), resulted from using the EDI. The Early Development Instrument (EDI) assesses kindergarten readiness and is included in the Youth Wellbeing Report Card.

In addition, the city, with its open data policy, is moving towards an outcomes-based budgeting process. During the past year, using data and community engagement, the city identified five strategic goals and for each goal is utilizing a wellbeing framework for performance management. Building Blocks For Kindergarten is part of Santa Monica's performance management approach within the goal, Learn & Thrive, with the EDI data informing and showing the impact of the city's efforts.

3 **A Parent's Story:** Family engagement and support

This summary demonstrates the attributes and components of family engagement, including families and parents as champions; programs that are family centered; and the empowerment of families to take action. Additionally, this summary highlights the elements of partnership and community engagement.

Family engagement begins with understanding and believing that parents and families are their children's first and forever teachers and want the best for them. Taking action to improve your community on behalf of children and families can be daunting and difficult. Parents want to lead change for children but may lack the civic skills to do so, asking: "How do I advocate for my child(ren)?"; and "How do I improve my neighborhood?" Likewise, cities and communities ask, "How do we engage with parents and families?"

A Parent's Story of Family and Civic Engagement

Being active in her community is not new for Liz Quiñones. Her choice of work in her country of origin and in her current community in the United States, has always included working within the community and empowering others.

As the Community Coordinator with Danbury's Promise for Children Partnership, Quiñones works with the public-private partnership to ensure that Danbury, Connecticut's children are healthy and ready for school. Engaging families while ensuring they have resources, tools and skills is part of the partnership's strategic plan. The partnership engages families in multiple ways that reflect respect for parents and involves them as partners in the work. One way is through Community Cafés. These two-hour sessions bring together neighborhood families in facilitated conversations and offer information on different topics, the opportunity to connect with neighbors and explore and share resources available within their community. The partnership works with the Danbury Public Library to offer MIND in the Making workshops, a series of 4 sessions dedicated to supporting children's positive development of the seven essential life skills. A third program is The Community Messengers. This program, through six-weeks of training, connects selected parents and community members with community agencies to build their knowledge of all the resources that are available in their community and how and where to access the resources. These trained and informed parents and community members are Community Messengers and make a six-month commitment to share their learnings with their neighborhood members and in their networks. Quiñones says her work with the Partnership helps parents recognize he or she can "do small things for big change." She has seen and believes in "the power of communication and information."

Quiñones participated in the family civics leadership initiative called The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) of-

fered for free in Danbury recently. PLTI is a model that trains parents in the civic process and builds their capacity to lead change on behalf of children and families in areas local and beyond. Started twenty-five years ago in Connecticut, it is now a national and international initiative working in cities, towns and counties with local leaders, and increasing capacity for community change by empowering parents to be their children's advocates. It is a 20-week program, now offered through local affiliates, in two phases of training. The first phase builds participants' knowledge and skills to work collaboratively, understand community and perceptions on leadership. The second phase deepens participants understanding of policy, program evaluation and how local government works.

Even with her prior work in communities, Quiñones says, "After the program everything changed. I am very passionate about change I can make in my community." She said that in the program she saw the face of her city, noting the participants in the program represented the diversity of the city, provided an opportunity to meet new people and learn and hear different perspectives. The program "just empowered me to do something else," she said. Her PLTI community project focused on improving access to quality infant and toddler care because of the difficulty she experienced in finding affordable and quality childcare for her own child. She chose to reach out to unlicensed care providers and connect them with professional development opportunities and information regarding the licensing process. With the support of PLTI mentors, the United Way of Western Connecticut, the City of Danbury and the Connecticut Office of Early Learning, Quiñones offered a workshop to 28 providers. Following the workshop, 11 providers are now in the process of obtaining their licenses. The PLTI program works to improve communities by engaging parents, increasing their knowledge of and skills to create change and supporting their civic engagement.

Quiñones continues to be a leader in her community, reaching out to families and taking action in civic projects to improve her neighborhood.

4 **Dayton, Ohio:** Access to affordable, high-quality early care and education

Dayton's summary demonstrates attributes and components of access, including availability and affordability; high-quality; and easy choice. Additionally, this summary highlights the elements of partnership; family engagement; coordinated continuum; sustainability; and community engagement.

Program Details

Dayton, Ohio, has a long history of working collaboratively to improve the lives of young children and their families. Dayton is the city center of Montgomery County and, in 2007, the Montgomery County Commission and a private foundation provided anchor funding to launch an early learning initiative then called ReadySet*Soar.* In 2010, ReadySet*Soar* began working closely with the countywide cradle-to-career initiative known as Learn to Earn Dayton, which is focused on improving educational outcomes for young people from birth to college and career.

Among ReadySet*Soar*'s first tasks was collecting data around kindergarten readiness, specifically surveying kindergarten parents in Montgomery County's 16 school districts about the experiences their children were having before coming to school. Working with the University of Dayton, ReadySet*Soar* analyzed which experiences correlated with better kindergarten readiness scores. This information was powerful in showing the impact of preschool because especially low-income children who attended preschool had stronger readiness scores.

These surveys continue to be administered annually to all in-coming kindergarten families, and they inform the Dayton region's work to understand gaps and create strategies to improve kindergarten readiness.

In response to the daunting number of young learners who were testing not ready for kindergarten, educators, child-care providers, a local resource and referral agency and other community stakeholders came together in 2013 to begin work on creating the Preschool Promise program that would help make preschool more affordable and accessible to families.

The Kettering City School District offered to be a pilot site, and Montgomery County generously provided financial support. The school district and the City of Kettering also helped fund the initiative, which began in the 2014-15 school year. For two years, the pilot offered tuition assistance for low-income families within the Kettering school district, for half-day preschool at programs that are rated under Ohio's Step Up to Quality Star Rating system.

During the second year of the Kettering pilot and at the urging of County Commissioner Debbie Lieberman, Montgomery County convened a group of stakeholders and advocates, including leaders in Dayton, to develop recommendations

for taking the Preschool Promise program countywide.

This Preschool Promise Steering Committee was led by the president of Dayton Children's Hospital and the regional president of PNC Bank. The committee looked at existing models and explored best practices in designing a Preschool Promise program that would "promise" families one year of affordable quality preschool.

Three pillars were recommended for a Montgomery County/Dayton Preschool Promise:

- Educate the community on the importance of high quality preschool;
- Expand quality by helping programs improve and increasing the number of Star Rated preschools;
- Assist families with finding and paying for high quality preschool.

Based on the recommendations to the County Commission in November 2015, and with broad support from Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, Preschool Promise moved into the demonstration phase, expanding to a second area in Northwest Dayton neighborhoods in the 2016-2017 school year.

As the Preschool Promise pilot was taking place, Learn to Earn Dayton developed an advocacy and awareness campaign called "Preschool Power" to build community support for the Preschool Promise program. Efforts were strategic and targeted.

Also, critical to the effort was Mayor Whaley's advocacy that Dayton become a "City of Learners." In her first speech after being elected mayor, she forcefully called for getting preschoolers ready to start school on track, not behind. Two years later in 2016, the mayor and City Commission proposed a ballot initiative that would take the Preschool Promise program citywide. The proposal passed easily, with 56 percent of the vote.

Preschool Promise is increasing access to preschool with tiered tuition assistance for all children and comprehensive quality improvement efforts. These efforts include personalized and intensive coaching for Preschool Promise teachers, continuing education and in-depth professional development, and funding for preschools to purchase important resources and curriculum.

The keys to success for increasing access to high quality preschool in Dayton include the public-private collaboration and strong support from the City of Dayton and Montgomery County leaders.

5 **Hartford, Connecticut:** Coordinated continuum of developmentally appropriate care and education

Hartford's summary demonstrates attributes and components of a coordinated continuum, including seamless transitions; collaboration; high-quality care and education; responsiveness; and engagement. Additionally, this summary highlights the elements of partnership; data-driven practices; professional development; sustainability; and community engagement.

Program Details

Alignment is not new to Hartford, Connecticut. Bringing together stakeholders, breaking down silos, identifying a shared vision, coordinating activities and using data to drive change is part of Hartford's milieu. In July 2011, the mayor formed Hartford's Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation (DFCYR) bringing together three separate city units under one aligned department. Within this department, the Division of Young Children focused on early childhood from birth through age eight. The DFCYR's assistant director and the department director are staff on the Mayor's Cabinet for Young Children.

The city of Hartford's DFCYR spearheaded efforts to streamline and increase the effectiveness of services and supports for children and families. Strong leadership at the city level in combination with a central department serving children and families has provided opportunities for collaboration and improved outcomes beyond city hall. This is evident in how the city has partnered with FirstSchool, a program that organizes professional development workshops for early childhood educators to improve teaching in Hartford. FirstSchool has found that teachers and leaders who are informed by data and research and given opportunities to work together can better articulate their practice; gain the respect of their colleagues and mentors; feel empowered to make changes and become inclined to make more. FirstSchool sees individual growth and works to make those changes more comprehensive, and more reflective of an entire school culture.

This collaboration is especially important in a community where early education is offered via two separate school districts, the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) and Hartford Public Schools (HPS), in addition to community-based providers, such as private child care centers and family child care homes. While school choice is a great asset for parents and students, it also creates numerous challenges for collaboration among school districts and community-based programs. In 2013, the mayor brought together leaders from CREC, HPS and community-based providers to align instructional practices, promote seamless transitions and ensure that regardless of where a child receives their education, each child's experience is one of high quality, aligned education.

The city and education partners looked for best practices and identified First-

School. The mayor dedicated general fund dollars to complement state funds to the initiative, and the partners brought in researchers from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill to speak to the early childhood education community. FirstSchool addresses achievement gap challenges and instructional practices, as well as providing a framework for educators to teach all children, especially low-income and minority students. The framework focuses on developing high quality learning environments; using data to motivate change; bridging the gap between Pre-K and kindergarten by uniting community and school-based Pre-K with elementary schools; and implementing policies and practices to ensure a more equitable system.

FirstSchool implemented a pilot project, certifying 12 coaches as FirstSchool observers. FirstSchool observers in HPS and CREC are literacy coaches; in community-based providers they are administrators, teachers and/or literacy coaches. These observers use EduSnap, a data tool that helps coaches track progress and see trends in teaching practices. The data reflects the context and setting of learning, students' approaches to learning, along with teachers' approaches to instruction. The EduSnap data tool is being used to implement changes in teaching practices in HPS, CREC and community-based classrooms. By bringing FirstSchool to Hartford, the city cemented new collaborations among administrators, teachers, community-based providers and the city

itself. The work is time consuming, but once results from the first pilot project came in, partners realized the project's impact and saw the importance of the time invested. With a successful approach, each year Hartford has expanded the number of classrooms and increased local capacity to align instructional practices using the FirstSchool approach and EduSnap data.

Through this project, data that was not accessible through the city-wide early childhood data system is being collected and used to improve practices in the classroom and influence policy at the local level. Educators increased their knowledge in topics such as working effectively with boys, project-based learning, developmental science, self-regulation and play. The FirstSchool project has led to changes at the classroom, school, district and community level.

This project would not have been possible without the leadership and support of the city. At the beginning of the project, partners needed to establish trust and a shared vision within the group. As they collaborated, partners were able to put aside their own agencies' priorities and consider what was best for the children of Hartford. The city then was able to blend monetary resources from HPS, the CREC and city general funds to bring FirstSchool to Hartford.

In addition, the assistant director for the Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation used her role at the city to ensure all voices were included in the project. She worked to include both school districts as well as the often left-out community-based programs. In addition, the city developed spaces for collaboration beyond the FirstSchool pilot, including a forum to connect early childhood administrators, an early childhood network, peer learning groups and a dedicated WikiSpace for educators and leaders to share resources and updates in one central location.

The FirstSchool partnership brought research and a sense of urgency to the work, catalyzing the collaborations among the partners. The city has broken down siloes and built spaces for the early childhood community to collaborate, share ideas and pursue professional development opportunities together.

6 Jacksonville, Florida: Professional development and support for the early childhood workforce

Jacksonville's summary demonstrates attributes and components of professional development, including knowledge and skill; valued workforce; shared resources; and intentional professional development. Additionally, this summary highlights the elements of partnership; coordinated continuum; sustainability; and community awareness.

Program Details

The Jacksonville Children's Commission (JCC), an autonomous entity of the City of Jacksonville, was created in 1994 by then-Mayor Ed Austin. Having a city entity with a significant focus on early learning has helped anchor and strengthen the work around early care and education, including around the early childhood workforce, in Jacksonville. Early learning has enjoyed strong support in Jacksonville for many years. In 2004, then-Mayor John Peyton launched a book club that gave backpacks full of books to 4-year-olds in Duval County, to help develop emergent literacy skills for young children and bring increased attention to the importance of early learning. Within Jacksonville and the JCC, there is a recognition that high quality early learning experiences for children depend on the training and supports that early care and education providers receive. Due to this recognition, training and professional development support is a key part of the JCC'S work.

Initially, the JCC early learning team served as program monitors for providers participating in the state-funded subsidized child care programs. As the State of Florida's licensing and credentialing requirements increased, the JCC early learning team offered training and technical support to help the early childhood workforce meet the state requirements. When the industry focus shifted to early literacy, JCC then moved from a monitoring and technical assistance role to developing a robust coaching program that focused on developing teacher skills to support early literacy development in children beginning in infancy. The coaching program, now called CoachJax!, and is a formal partnership of local agencies that includes the Early Learning Coalition of Duval, the regional agency that administers Duval County's regional Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The CoachJax! coaches work with teachers to help them meet the quality standards for staff qualifications and effective instruction, measured by the Guiding Stars QRIS system.

Early Learning teachers receive coaching during the year their program is in the validation or revalidation process of Guiding Stars. New programs are coached for two-years to prepare for their first validation. There is a three-year cycle for program validation in Guiding Stars, with CoachJax! providing teacher development and support to more than 400 teachers in more than 100 centers and family child care homes each year.

The funding for CoachJax! is provided by a city investment, averaging $3 million per year. JCC's funding for this coaching has continued to be allotted through several mayoral administrations and varying funding priorities. The 25 coaches come from the JCC early learning team and through a contracted agency, currently long-time partner Episcopal Children's Services. The CoachJax! coaches are trained and certified by the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida. In some centers, CoachJax! has been able to train the center directors as learning leaders, who become coaches to their staff using a strengths-based approach to support teacher development.

Leaders in Jacksonville emphasize that having existing relationships with the early childhood providers that began when JCC had the monitoring role, allowed JCC to step into the coaching role after already building trust with early childhood professionals. It was important that JCC coaches communicated that they were there to help the teachers grow and centers to reach quality goals, not to criticize or evaluate. With the intensive coaching model providing positive outcomes in teacher skill development, leaders in Jacksonville feel like they have begun to make progress toward raising the professional status of the early childhood workforce in the eyes of the community.

7 **Seattle, Washington:** Sustainability and coordination of sufficient resources, funding, policies and practices

Seattle's summary demonstrates attributes and components of sustainability and coordination, including an asset-based approach; funding strategies; and policy and practices. Additionally, this summary highlights the elements of partnership; data; and community engagement.

Program Details

Seattle, Washington created sustainability in its early childhood efforts by focusing on community awareness, coordination and using an asset-based approach. Through weaving of public and private resources and community support, Seattle has created a strong and sustainable early childhood infrastructure that has endured through decades and multiple city administrations.

In 1972, Seattle began addressing issues of early childhood by focusing on child care affordability. Subsequently, the city expanded its efforts and addressed other issues of early care and education, including quality, access and kindergarten readiness. Seattle's efforts acknowledged the various early care and education provider types, including family, friends and neighbor care (FFN care).

In November 1990, Seattle voters approved a groundbreaking initiative for the future of the city's children. The Families and Education Levy, which provided support to children and their families both in and out of school, was designed to help all Seattle's children "be safe, healthy, and ready to learn." The levy has been renewed several times, in 1997, 2004 and

2011 by voters, showing the communities continued support to ensure all children thrive. Beginning in 2004, the levy became more focused on having children ready for kindergarten, succeed academically and graduate from high school. At that time, the levy increased financial support and sustainability to Seattle's early childhood programming. The levy is administered by the Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning.

Programs funded by the levy are intended to be aligned with the Seattle Public Schools priorities, and have identified outcome measurements and goals. The levy funds are more flexible than state and federal funding and are often used to fill gaps in services and resources. In 2005, a formal partnership agreement between the city and Seattle Public Schools was created, outlining the roles and expectations of each partner and specifying the types of numeric targets for levy-funded programs. The partnership agreement outlines, in a variety of areas, ways in which both the city and the school district work collaboratively toward better results for children and youth, such as standards for family support services, facility use, health service operating practices and an evaluation of the feasibility of developing and implementing a school readiness measurement system. Along with the partnership agreement, the city and SPS have a data-sharing agreement that allows for all data to be provided to the city for students participating in most programs that are funded by the Families and Education Levy.

While the long-term financial support, through the levy, has been a key factor in sustainability of Seattle's early childhood efforts, it is not the only factor. Seattle and community partners are coordinating their resources and talents to maximize their efforts to support young children and families.

There have been many collaborative initiatives in Seattle aligning the early childhood system and filling the gaps. In 1999, the City of Seattle launched Project Lift-Off, an initiative to support youth through creation of an early care and education system, as well as out-of-school activities. The early care and education strategies focused on access, school readiness, affordability and quality. With the mayor and city council's support, the Project Lift-Off team looked at existing research on child and out-of-school time care, created a partnership with the School District to reach more parents, and made a special effort to reach out to communities of color. The team, led by the city's Human Services Department, leveraged the assets and organizations already present in Seattle. The partnership included the school district, research community, business community, faith-based organizations, community based organizations, public agencies, the Governor's Commission on Early Learning, the NW Grantmakers' Forum and others. This was built as a city-wide initiative. In 2003, the United Way of King County Children's Initiative merged with the countywide Project Lift-Off. The merged initiative, known as SOAR – Helping Kids Reach for the Sky, offers school readiness workshops and training to parents and early childhood professionals.

The collaboration and coordination in Seattle led to the city convening the Seattle Early Education Collaborative (SEEC) in 2008. This multi-sector collaborative, using its shared vision, provided strategic planning and coordination for Seattle's early childhood efforts.

Building from the Step Ahead Preschool Program implemented in 2004 to augment federal and state funded preschool for low-income families, in November 2014, voters approved a four-year, $58 million Seattle Preschool Services Levy to fund the Seattle Preschool Program (SPP) Action Plan. The purpose of the program is to expand access to affordable, high quality preschool for Seattle's 3- and 4-year-olds so they enter school prepared to succeed and the academic opportunity gap for children is eliminated. The levy funds a demonstration phase of the Seattle Preschool Program that began in 2015 and will grow to serve between 1,425 and 1,615 children by the 2018-19 school year.

The SPP closely follows the recommendations of national experts and consultants who advised the city to develop an evidence-based program which builds on community partnerships and the existing network of preschool providers; is accessible to all families; and is realistic and practical.

Department of Education and Early Learning staff oversee implementation of the SPP by contracting for services with Seattle Public Schools and community providers, directly providing coaching for preschool directors and teachers, as well as investing in capacity building (such as tuition support for teaching staff to attain required educational credentials, facility construction and renovations, and other organizational supports).

Finally, the city is undertaking the development of a more comprehensive birth to age five strategy to expand on its funding for the Nurse Family Partnership and the Parent Child Home visitation program.

8 **San Antonio, Texas:** Community awareness and engagement

San Antonio's summary demonstrates attributes and components of community awareness and engagement, including active participation and clear messaging. Additionally, this summary highlights the elements of partnership; data; family engagement; access; and sustainability and coordination.

Program Details

The City of San Antonio, Texas has a long history of addressing issues of early childhood through public policy and philanthropy. This commitment, engagement and support, along with the broader community and civic leaders' awareness, are keys to San Antonio's workforce development success and the launch and continued success of Pre-K 4 SA, the city's initiative to develop a highly skilled workforce in one generation through high quality early childhood education that benefits all young children.

In 1999, the city sought to reframe its disparate early childhood, college scholarship and workforce training efforts as a unified economic development strategy. The Better Jobs Campaign focused on improving the skills and quality of San Antonio's labor force. The Better Jobs Campaign's early childhood task force brought together key partners, including the local workforce board, the United Way, the University of Texas, San Antonio school districts, KLRN-TV, a corporate collaborative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and community-based organizations. This task force, with staff leadership from the city's Department of Community Initiatives, developed school readiness guidelines; sought to facilitate successful transitions to school; increased access to professional development for child care professionals; and improved the quality of child care environments. The task force also launched the successful Early ON media campaign to help educate new parents and other community members about the importance of supporting child development and offer resources to help them do so. This campaign increased community awareness and engagement in early childhood issues.

In 2006, San Antonio's mayor held an education summit to craft an agenda across the educational pipeline from cradle-to-career and established the P16 Council to collaborate across the many education agencies. In 2008, this cradle-to-career initiative expanded to include the surrounding county with the creation of P16 Plus Council of Greater Bexar County to improve and better align early childhood within the full educational pipeline.

In 2009, a new mayor, who campaigned on an explicit education agenda, took office and immediately called for the establishment of the first two Very Early Childhood Centers in San Antonio, for young children from birth to 5-years-old. In the Fall of 2010, the mayor convened SA2020, a visioning process that

resulted in six shared community goals. Education emerged as the community's top priority, with a key education goal focused on achieving significant increases in kindergarten readiness with 95 percent of third grade students reading at grade level by 2020.

With the SA2020 plan in place, the P16 Plus Council committed to working closely with the Mayor's Office, the City of San Antonio and the United Way to lead the education implementation component of the newly established SA2020 entity to press for better alignment and reporting of kindergarten readiness across the 15 school districts located within San Antonio. In May 2011, the mayor formed the Brainpower Task Force, composed of the most highly respected community and business leaders, to identify what works in education, with a particular focus on early learning, dropout prevention and college readiness. After nearly a year of study, the task force determined the best way for San Antonio to improve the city's workforce was to invest in high quality preschool. From this recommendation, Pre-K 4 SA was developed.

Before the program could be implemented, the city sought financial support through a tax levy. To build community support for Pre-K 4 SA and the levy, the task force developed and conducted an awareness and educational campaign. The campaign included traditional political, social media, advocacy and grassroots strategies. Proponents of Pre-K 4 SA established political action committees to finance the campaign. Business and community leaders used their influence to garner support for the program. Community members walked door-to-door to talk with residents. In November 2012, the levy was approved by voters. During the next 10 months, Pre-K 4 SA was established and launched with the first two centers opening in August 2013.

Communications, along with building and maintaining community support, is a focus of Pre-K 4 SA. During the first years of the program, communication centered primarily on awareness of the program and enrollment, focusing on prospective parents. In 2015, Pre-K 4 SA continued to diversify their communications strategy for building community support. It identified three focus areas for public education and communications: 1) prospective parents, so they know how to enroll in one of the Education Centers; 2) educators, so they are aware of the professional learning services Pre-K 4 SA offers and the role Pre-K 4 SA plays within the early childhood landscape; and 3) the broader community, to build awareness of the program and its impact on the city. Pre-K 4 SA is building and maintaining community and leadership support through its communications by focusing on the goals of the program and the return on investment it has had in supporting young children and families to build San Antonio's workforce of today and workforce of tomorrow.

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The National League of Cities is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the National League of Cities, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities.

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