All Children Learn & Thrive

Building First 10 Schools and Communities

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Key Findings: Overview

First 10 Schools and Communities bring together school districts, elementary schools, and early childhood programs to improve the quality and coordination of education and care for young children and their families. They work to improve teaching and learning, deepen partnerships with families, and provide comprehensive services for children and families.

First 10 initiatives take two basic forms. **First 10 School Hubs** are anchored by a single elementary school, which provides direct support to families and collaborates with nearby early childhood providers. **First 10 Community Partnerships** bring together multiple elementary schools, school district leaders, and early childhood programs to improve the quality and coordination of early childhood education and care throughout a geographic area or community.

Key findings:

1 First 10 Schools and Communities are aligning prekindergarten and elementary school education and reworking curricula, assessments, and instruction.

2 First 10 School Hubs are providing influential supports to families and other caregivers of children ages 0–4 and then continuing those supports throughout elementary school.

3 First 10 Community Partnerships demonstrate that communities can develop **and implement** ambitious plans to improve the quality and coordination of education and care for young children and their families.

4 First 10 School Hubs and First 10 Community Partnerships operate on different levels and have complementary strengths and weaknesses; together they suggest a combined model that has great potential as a further innovation.

5 First 10 Schools and Communities present an alternative approach to improving children's experiences in the early years, one that contrasts with the way many communities are attempting to improve early childhood and elementary school education.

6 First 10 Schools and Communities encounter common challenges, including structural barriers, lack of capacity and/or commitment, and sustainability.

7 States play a critical role in supporting First 10 Schools and Communities by creating a conducive policy environment and providing financial support, technical assistance, and networking opportunities.

Executive Summary

> A growing body of research has identified specific causal links between poor educational outcomes and cognitive, health, environmental, and other factors correlated with poverty. (Henig, Riehl, Rebell, & Wolff, 2015, p. 20)

The first decade of a child's life provides the foundation for later learning, growth, and development. Too many children, however, face a number of obstacles from a very young age, particularly those who struggle with the effects of poverty and ongoing opportunity gaps. A movement is underway in the United States to improve children's experiences during these critical early years. In many communities, elementary schools, early childhood centers, and community organizations are forming partnerships to focus on the needs of young children and their families. The communities at the forefront of this movement are developing coherent and mutually reinforcing sets of strategies that include:

- **effective teaching and learning** sustained over many years
- **strong partnerships** with families
- **comprehensive health and social services** for both children and families

This combination of supports and services is among the most powerful strategies we have to address yawning opportunity gaps, ensure educational equity, and raise achievement for low-income children.

First 10 Schools and Communities: An Emerging Improvement Strategy

Decades of research confirm that young children need **continuity of high-quality experiences** throughout early childhood in order to realize their potential. *Continuity* here refers both to alignment of care and learning as children grow older and to the coordination of programs and services at each stage of development. Experiences should build on previous ones as children increase their knowledge and skills, and programs and services should be coordinated in order to have the largest impact (National Research Council [NRC], 2015; Reynolds & Temple, 2019; Tout, Halle, Dailly, Albertson-Junkans, & Moodie, 2013).

Model programs, such as the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, have demonstrated the longitudinal impact of combining effective teaching and learning in the early grades, family engagement and partnership, and comprehensive supports for children and families (Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Arteaga, & White, 2011). On a larger scale, communities such as Union City, New Jersey, and Montgomery County, Maryland—as well as a pilot project in several communities in Hawai'i—have shown greatly reduced achievement gaps while improving outcomes for all. These communities have made significant investments in improving teaching, learning, and family support in the early years and then sustaining these efforts over a period of years (Kirp, 2013; Marietta, 2010; Marietta & Marietta, 2013; Zellman & Kilburn, 2015).

This research, coupled with practitioner assessments of local needs, has influenced the school and community initiatives described in this study. These initiatives are ambitious, comprehensive, and multifaceted in that they combine improvement efforts inside classrooms with extensive family engagement and comprehensive supports for children and families. In doing so, they draw on two reform approaches:

- **P–3 educational improvement**, which focuses on improving the quality and alignment of programs and services across the early childhood–elementary school continuum (Guernsey & Mead, 2010; Kauerz & Coffman, 2013; Ritchie & Gutmann, 2014; Takanishi & Kauerz, 2008).

- Community schools and related models of **comprehensive services** that connect children and families to a range of supports, including health and mental health services, after-school and summer programs, parent education programs, food banks, and other crisis management and basic needs assistance (Moore et al., 2017).

The innovations these communities are implementing suggest the outlines of a promising model, here called **First 10 Schools and Communities** (see Figure 1). This study follows Reynolds and Temple (2019) in adopting a broad definition of early childhood as including the first 10 years of life (i.e., "First 10"). *First 10 Schools and Communities* refers to the combination of high-quality teaching and learning, family engagement and partnership, and comprehensive services for children and families. **First 10, understood here as roughly the first decade of children's lives**, signals the importance of collaboration between school districts, elementary schools, and early childhood programs—and it sets as a priority improving quality and continuity across the early childhood—elementary school continuum.[1]

FIGURE 1: **First 10 Schools and Communities:**
P–3 Educational Improvement Plus Comprehensive Services

P–3 Educational Improvement	Comprehensive Services
• High-Quality Teaching and Learning • Transitions and Alignment	• Physical Health • Mental Health • After-School Programs • Parent Education • Basic Needs
Family Engagement and Support	
Focus on Equity	
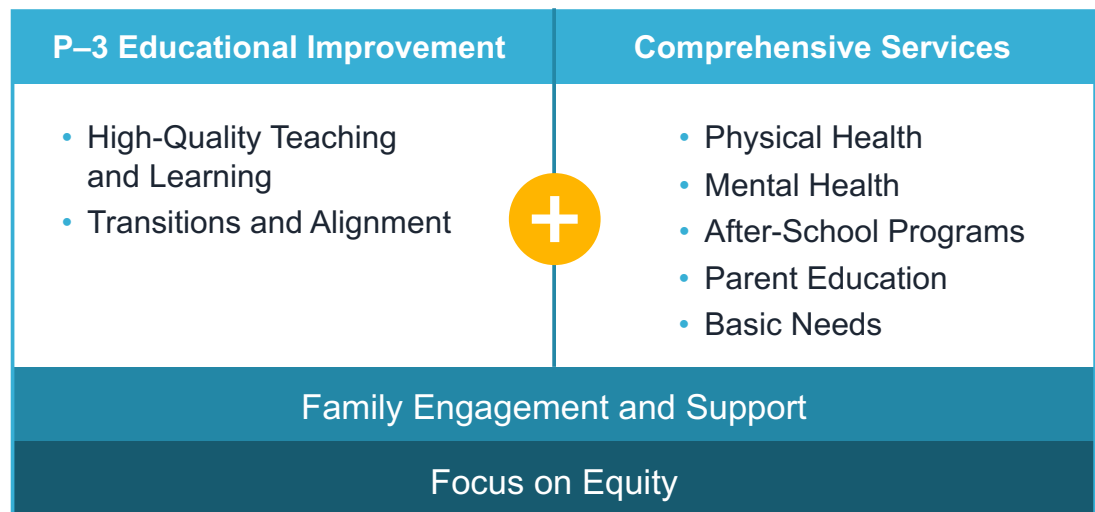
The First 10 Schools and Communities described in this study are all attempting to address **educational equity** with the goal that **all** children receive what they need in order to develop to their full academic and social potential. These schools and communities all serve large numbers of low-income children and families and large numbers of children and families of color. While no community is addressing all areas of need across the full continuum, each has exemplary areas of strength. Together, these innovations suggest a wide range of strategies that other communities can learn from and draw on as they design similar initiatives.

[1] The benefits of using the term *First 10 Schools and Communities* are discussed in greater detail in the Introduction.

Two First 10 Structures

First 10 Initiatives are emerging in two main forms: **First 10 School Hubs** and **First 10 Community Partnerships** (D. Jacobson, 2016).

First 10 School Hubs (see Figure 2) are anchored by **a single elementary school**. With school district support, they place special emphasis on ensuring that teaching and learning in the early grades are developmentally appropriate and of high quality. They provide comprehensive services not only to school-age children but also to young children ages 0–4 and their families—thereby strengthening partnerships with these families. They partner with family childcare providers, Head Start programs, and early childhood centers in their catchment areas on quality, alignment, and transitions.

FIGURE 2: **First 10 School Hub**
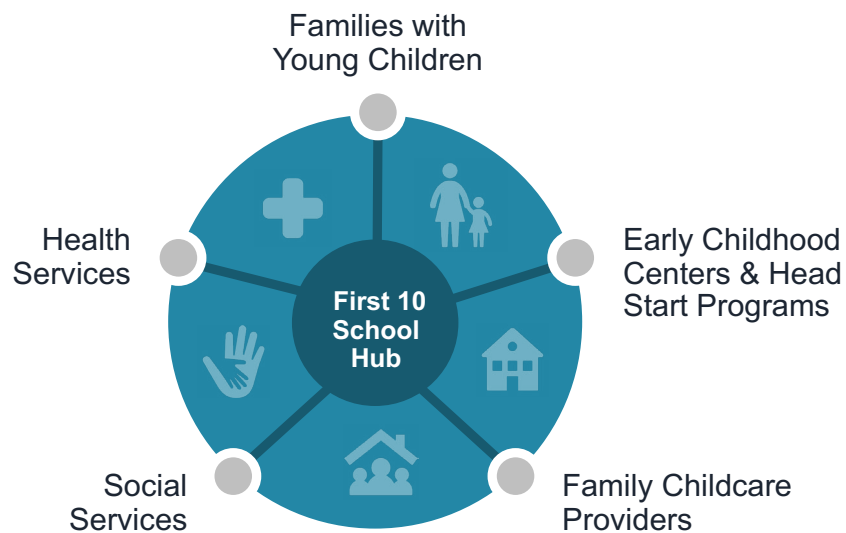
First 10 Community Partnerships (see Figure 3) bring together **multiple** elementary schools, district leaders, family childcare providers, Head Start programs, early childhood centers, and other community partners to improve the quality and alignment of programs and services in systematic ways **throughout a geographic area or community**, which could be a county, a city or town, or a neighborhood.[2]

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[2] In small communities with only one elementary school, the distinction between a First 10 School Hub and a First 10 Community Partnership blurs significantly.

FIGURE 3: **First 10 Community Partnership**
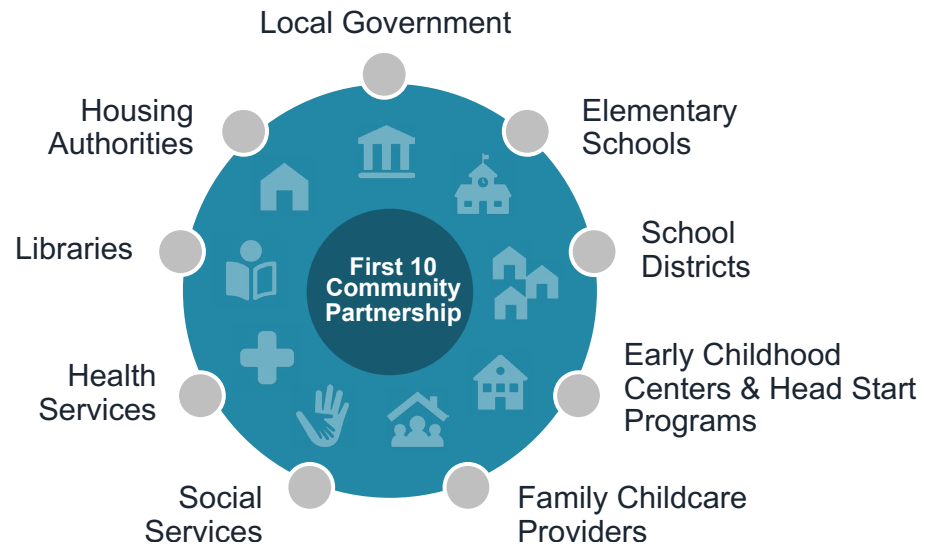
A First 10 School Hub might run weekly play-and-learn groups in the school for neighborhood families with infants and toddlers; develop trust and relationships with the families and then build on those relationships to connect families to health and social service agencies; work with nearby family childcare providers and early childhood centers on the transition to kindergarten; and provide coaching to early-grades teachers on early literacy, early math, and/or social-emotional development.

In contrast, a First 10 Community Partnership might select a high-quality play-and-learn group model to be used throughout the neighborhood or community; organize a common foundation of professional development for all the home visitors working in the area; design a quality improvement initiative for cohorts of family childcare providers and/or early childhood centers; develop a community-wide transition-to-kindergarten plan; and implement new curricula and professional development in the early grades **across a school district**.

School districts play important roles in supporting First 10 School Hubs and coordinating First 10 Community Partnerships. First 10 Community Partnerships are being formed at the county and regional levels as well, supporting local communities within their jurisdictions.

An Exploratory Study of First 10 Schools and Communities

This study was funded by the Heising-Simons Foundation. It takes as its starting point the above-mentioned conclusions of the early childhood research community regarding fragmentation and continuity (NRC, 2015; Reynolds & Temple, 2019; Tout et al., 2013). The implication for child-serving organizations is that they must master and coordinate three strategies: high-quality teaching and learning, family engagement and partnership, and comprehensive services for children and families.

Researchers have formally evaluated components of the First 10 approach. Studies of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, Boston's prekindergarten curriculum and coaching model, a pilot project in five communities in Hawai'i, and of some community school models have found positive results (Moore et al., 2017; Reynolds et al., 2011; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013; Zellman & Kilburn, 2015). External evaluators are currently evaluating some of the community initiatives described in this study, including the efforts in Normal (Illinois), Omaha, Boston, and Cambridge.

There is a long history of initiatives to align early childhood education with elementary school and to improve the transition to kindergarten. Similarly, there is much precedent for building early childhood systems, and community schools have been part of the American education landscape for at least a century. A central premise of this study is that **First 10 Schools and Communities represent an important new wave of efforts to improve the quality and coordination of programs and services for children**. This study investigates the two main types of First 10 structures described above: school hubs and community partnerships.

This study aims to gather, analyze, and share information regarding First 10 Schools and Communities during this important early stage in their development in order to inform future efforts.

A second premise of this study is that **First 10 Schools and Communities are at a point in their development where formative implementation research can be especially useful**. Formative implementation research focuses on three core questions: (1) What is happening?, (2) Is it what is expected or desired?, and (3) Why is it happening as it is? (Werner, 2004).

This study aims to gather, analyze, and share information regarding First 10 Schools and Communities during this important early stage in their development in order to inform future efforts.

The author conducted a national scan of communities by interviewing a range of national experts, interviewed leaders in 18 communities, and conducted site visits to 6 communities: Normal, Illinois; Multnomah County, Oregon; Omaha, Nebraska; Boston and Cambridge,

Massachusetts; and San Francisco, California. Of the communities described in this study, with the exception of some of the work in Boston and Cincinnati, all the initiatives in this study were funded with **public funding**, as indicated in each case study.

Summary of Key Findings

1

First 10 Schools and Communities are aligning prekindergarten and elementary school education and reworking curricula, assessments, and instruction.

An integral component of improving the full early childhood–elementary school continuum is specifically addressing the quality and alignment of teaching and learning from prekindergarten through third grade (preK–3). Improving preK–3 teaching and learning requires three broad tasks:

- Establishing the early years as school and district priorities and working to align prekindergarten and K–3 education—both within elementary schools and between elementary schools and community-based prekindergarten programs.

- Making substantive changes in instructional approaches in order to most effectively educate young children, including balancing teacher-centered and student-centered teaching and learning, increasing teacher-child interactions, and incorporating social-emotional learning.

- In elementary schools, incorporating this special focus on the early grades into a coherent overall schoolwide system, supported by school districts, that promotes quality teaching and learning throughout the elementary grades (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).

2

First 10 School Hubs are providing influential supports to families and other caregivers of children ages 0–4 and then continuing those supports throughout elementary school.

In addition to working to improve preK–3 teaching and learning, First 10 School Hubs support children and their families—beginning with expectant mothers, infants, and toddlers, and continuing through elementary school. Several different models in different parts of the country have had significant success in building strong, highly supportive relationships with families of children ages 0–4 through supports such as play-and-learn groups and home visits and by connecting families to health and social services.

First 10 School Hubs also develop partnerships with nearby family childcare providers and early childhood centers to work on quality improvement, teacher professional learning, and/or family engagement and partnership.

3 First 10 Community Partnerships demonstrate that communities can develop **and implement** ambitious plans to improve the quality and coordination of education and care for young children and their families.

First 10 Community Partnerships develop and implement strategic plans designed to improve prenatal care, infant and toddler care, center-based and district prekindergarten, and the early grades of elementary schools. These broader partnerships bring together the child-serving organizations in a community for both within-sector and cross-sector collaboration. Common elements of successful First 10 Community Partnerships include:

- A clear equity agenda that focuses on low-income children and their families and children of color and their families

- The development of ambitious strategic plans that include improving early education quality and alignment, partnering with families, and providing comprehensive services for children and families

- New organizing structures to manage and coordinate collaboration between school districts, city and/or county agencies, and community-based programs

- The use of implementation benchmarks that are conscientiously implemented, monitored, and adjusted

4 First 10 School Hubs and First 10 Community Partnerships operate on different levels and have complementary strengths and weaknesses; together they suggest a combined model that has great potential as a further innovation.

First 10 School Hubs' specific strengths stem from the direct relationships they build with families and early childhood providers in their neighborhoods or catchment areas.

First 10 Community Partnerships operate across broader geographic areas—and often across school districts—to promote consistency and coordination and to build capacity around common approaches, systems, and processes.

To date, some communities have developed elementary school First 10 School Hubs, and others are building First 10 Community Partnerships. The potential, however, of **combining the two models** is significant. In a combined model (depicted in Figure 4 below), a community would develop a community-wide First 10 Community Partnership to work on improving quality across organizations and programs, improving systems, and coordinating transitions. Included in this work would be systems of support for elementary schools functioning as First 10 School Hubs, serving young children, their families, and early childhood providers in the schools' catchment areas or neighborhoods. In this combined model, First 10 Community Partnerships and First 10 School Hubs each work to improve teaching and learning in preK–3 classrooms.

FIGURE 4: **First 10 Community Partnerships with School Hubs**
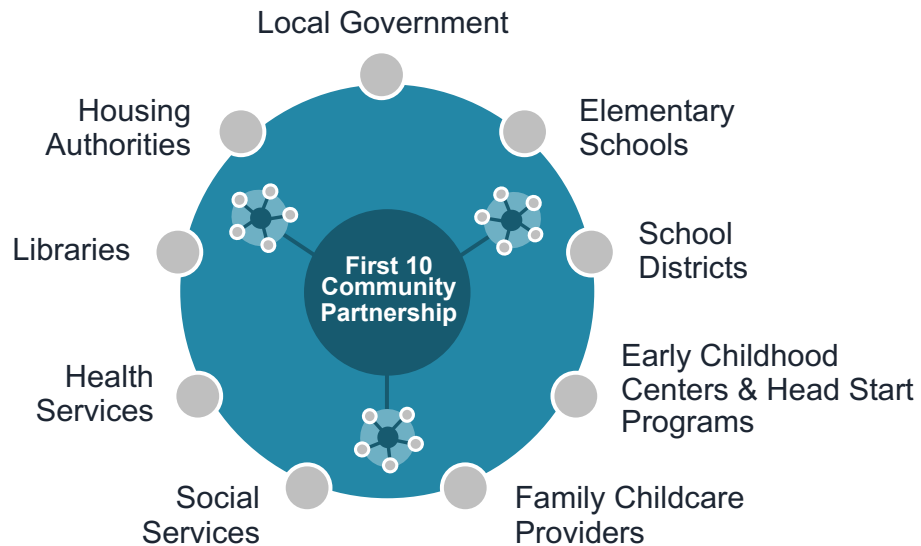
First 10 Community Partnership diagram with central hub labeled "First 10 Community Partnership" surrounded by: Local Government, Elementary Schools, School Districts, Early Childhood Centers & Head Start Programs, Family Childcare Providers, Social Services, Health Services, Libraries, Housing Authorities.

5

First 10 Schools and Communities present an alternative approach to improving children's experiences in the early years, one that contrasts with the way many communities are attempting to improve early childhood and elementary school education.

Cross-sector partnerships focused on education are proliferating across the United States, and most of these collaborations include goals for kindergarten readiness and third grade proficiency. These partnerships are often referred to as *cradle to career* and/or *collective impact* initiatives (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2016; Henig, Riehl, Houston, Rebell, & Wolff, 2016; Henig et al., 2015). Prominent examples include the StriveTogether network, the Harlem Children's Zone, and Promise Neighborhoods (discussed further in Chapter 3). First 10 initiatives share some similarities with these partnerships, yet they differ from the way that most collective impact and cradle-to-career initiatives are currently structured in several important ways.

The most consequential difference revolves around the relationship between the public schools and early childhood organizations. Whereas most cradle-to-career initiatives create separate teams to work on kindergarten readiness and early-grades reading, **First 10 initiatives form partnerships to work on quality, coordination, and alignment across the full early childhood–elementary school continuum**, beginning with prenatal care and extending through elementary school.

6 First 10 Schools and Communities encounter common challenges, including structural barriers, lack of capacity and/or commitment, and sustainability.

First 10 Schools and Communities are designed to bridge the gaps between early childhood and elementary school education and between education, health, and social services. The communities described in this study are developing new structures, strategies, and processes to improve quality, coordination, and alignment, but, as one would expect, they have encountered significant challenges as they attempt to change entrenched systems, patterns, and behaviors.

The challenges that First 10 Schools and Communities face include implementing developmentally appropriate, standards-aligned instruction; bridging early childhood education and K–12 education; engaging school districts and principals in First 10 work; tailoring implementation to match district priorities in multi-district initiatives; improving racial and cultural competence; assessing impact; and sustaining initiatives over time.

7 States play a critical role in supporting First 10 Schools and Communities by creating a conducive policy environment and providing financial support, technical assistance, and networking opportunities.

Developing First 10 systems at the state level requires changes in both state policy and state support for community-level First 10 initiatives. Expanding access to high-quality early childhood services, including prekindergarten and childcare for children ages 0–3, is an important component of the state role. First 10 state policy also includes aligning standards and assessments, improving and aligning data systems, and improving career and leadership development (D. Jacobson, 2016).

States can support First 10 improvement at the community level by providing initial financial and technical support for a "backbone" organization to convene and coordinate First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships (Waters Boots, 2013). Important questions that follow from this study and that states must address are how to support First 10 School Hubs, how to support First 10 Community Partnerships, and how to support the combined partnership-hub model depicted in Figure 4 above. A related question is whether regional entities will provide support to communities around First 10 improvement.

Also important is building the community's capacity to develop, monitor, and adjust strategic plans as needed (Bornfreud, Cook, Lieberman, & Loewenberg, 2015; D. Jacobson, 2016). The experiences of the communities described in this study suggest three additional areas in which states can provide targeted support for First 10 improvement:

- Developing and/or identifying curricula, assessments, and instructional guidance that integrate academic and social-emotional learning in developmentally appropriate ways aligned to how young children best learn

- Promoting collaboration between school districts and community-based early childhood centers

- Developing the capacity of school districts, elementary schools, and early childhood centers to deliver high-quality teaching and learning, engage families in meaningful partnerships, and provide comprehensive services for children and families

The Role of First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships: A Theory of Action

In addition to these seven findings, the cases described in this study suggest the **goals and objectives** that First 10 Schools and Communities should support, the **kinds of schools and community institutions** they are trying to build, and the **roles these partnerships play** in supporting these goals. In doing so, the cases inform a **theory of action** for First 10 Schools and Communities.

A *theory of action* tells a story about how a package of strategies is expected to lead to positive outcomes, creating what some have called a *causal story line*. In effect, a theory of action is a hypothesis, as in, "If we implement these activities, these outcomes will result." These hypotheses can be tested over time. In this way, the theory serves as a guide or framework for implementing a group of strategies deliberately, coherently, and consistently (Argyris & Schön, 1978; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009).

Theories of action are often summarized as "if-then" statements that convey the causal storyline underlying the expected link between action and outcomes. The First 10 Theory of Action is summarized below and depicted graphically in Figure 5. It outlines how First 10 initiatives can create a *virtuous circle* among families, schools, and communities—an ongoing cycle in which each strengthens the others.[3] (A more detailed explanation of the First 10 Theory of Action, illustrated by examples drawn from the study, can be found in the Conclusion.)

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[3] A *virtuous circle* is the opposite of a *vicious circle*.

FIGURE 5: **A Theory of Action for First 10 Schools and Communities**

Effective Schools

Professional Collaboration to Improve Teaching and Learning

Coordinated, Comprehensive Services

All Children Learn and Thrive

Culturally Responsive Partnerships with Families

Strategic Leadership and Ongoing Assessment

Nurturing Families   **Strong Communities**

The First 10 Theory of Action

If First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships perform four roles:

- Support professional collaboration to improve teaching and learning
- Coordinate comprehensive services for children and families
- Promote culturally responsive partnerships with families
- Provide strategic leadership and ongoing assessment

with the explicit aim of promoting a virtuous circle of collaboration and improvement among:

- Effective schools
- Nurturing families
- Strong communities

then communities will promote educational equity and close opportunity gaps, and all children will learn and thrive.

The goal of First 10 Schools and Communities is for **all children to learn and thrive**. Realizing this goal of **educational equity** requires that communities do the following:

- Ensure that all children have opportunities and supports to enable their educational success
- Eliminate the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with any social, economic, or cultural factor, including race
- Identify and end inequitable practices
- Create inclusive environments for both adults and children[4]

To the extent that communities that implement First 10 initiatives are successful, children will experience a succession of coherent, high-quality experiences; families will engage in meaningful partnerships with schools in support of their children; and communities will be strengthened through better schools, more effective programs, improved coordination, deeper social connections, and expanding social trust.

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[4] Adapted from The National Equity Project (http://nationalequityproject.org/about/equity).

Introduction

> A growing body of research has identified specific causal links between poor educational outcomes and cognitive, health, environmental, and other factors correlated with poverty . . . And other research showed that **what is critical is the complementary relationship between what goes on in school and what goes on outside of and around it** [emphasis added] . . . For disadvantaged children to obtain a meaningful educational opportunity, they need *both* important school-based resources like high quality teaching, a rich and rigorous curriculum, adequate school facilities, and sufficient, up-to-date learning materials, and, in addition, the complementary resources needed to overcome the impediments to educational achievement imposed by the conditions of poverty. The most important of these are (1) early childhood education; (2) routine and preventive physical and mental health care; (3) after-school and other expanded learning opportunities; and (4) family engagement and support. (Henig et al., 2015, p. 20)

As suggested in this quotation, there is broad agreement that early childhood education and care is an important component of addressing poverty and the needs of low-income and working-class families more generally. Yet this quotation also suggests that improving educational outcomes is no easy matter. This multidimensional work requires both within-school and outside-of-school components: quality teaching and learning in classrooms,

strong family engagement and partnership, and comprehensive health and social services. These supports need to start early and continue throughout a child's education.
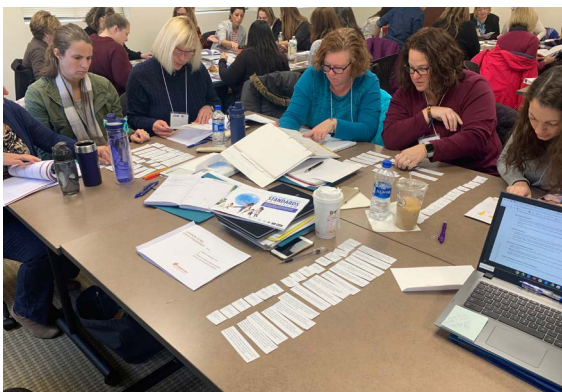
Further, improving early childhood education and care is complex in its own right. **Increasing access** to parenting supports, home visiting, childcare for children ages 0–3, prekindergarten for three- and four-year-olds, and full-day kindergarten is an important component of this work. **The quality of early childhood programs** is also critical, which requires higher compensation for teachers in a field beset by low wages.

Another major obstacle to addressing gaps and improving children's health and learning outcomes, one that may be less familiar to the general public, is the **fragmented state** of the programs and services that serve young children and their families in the United States. Too frequently these programs and services suffer from a lack of coordination and

consistency, resulting in a widely diverse (and often conflicting) array of approaches to children's learning and care. For this reason, there is a critical need to develop **coherent systems of early education and care** (Bruner, 2012; Clifford, 2012; National Research Council [NRC], 2015; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012a, 2012b; Kagan, Tarrant, & Kauerz, 2012).

The school and community strategies described in this study are in effect responses to the fragmented state of the programs and services that serve young children and their families. In implementing their new strategies, the communities in this study are drawing on two education movements—the prenatal through grade 3 (P–3) movement and the community schools movement. The new structures, strategies, and practices developed by these communities represent a convergence of the two movements. These emerging structures and strategies are at a relatively early stage of development and raise a number of important questions that this study seeks to address.

Poverty, Achievement Gaps, and a "Purple Agenda" for Early Childhood Education and Care

> Pre-k does not happen in a vacuum. It builds on the base provided by children's prior levels of development and experiences, which vary widely within and across homes and classrooms. (Phillips et al., 2017a)

Forty-five percent of children under age 6 live in low-income families (Koball & Jiang, 2018). Research shows that many families in the bottom 30–40% of the income distribution typically experience a complex "stew" of adverse conditions, including economic and housing insecurity, food insecurity, family instability, and dangerous or chaotic neighborhood and school environments (Putnam, 2015). Robert Putnam (2015), a Harvard political scientist, examined the impact of these conditions on families and identified a clear pattern: Across multiple domains, including family stability, parenting, schooling, and community, the gaps between the conditions experienced by low- and high-income children have grown since the 1970s.

Across multiple domains, including family stability, parenting, schooling, and community, the gaps between the conditions experienced by low- and high-income children have grown since the 1970s.

This divergence in conditions parallels growing achievement gaps. Stanford sociologist Sean Reardon (2013) reports that gaps between low-income and affluent children born in the early 2000s were 40% greater than for those born in the mid-1970s.[5] Gaps in college completion, civic engagement, and social trust have grown as well. Further, Reardon notes **that the full extent of achievement gaps are present when children enter kindergarten.**

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[5]   Reardon also found that school readiness gaps narrowed modestly from 1998 to 2010 (Reardon & Portilla, 2016)

Schools do not significantly increase gaps; in fact, they may reduce them somewhat—only to see the gaps widen again each summer (Reardon, 2011, 2013).

Addressing these deep gaps requires multifaceted responses across multiple domains. Comprehensive approaches encompass a range of strategies, including earned income tax credits, low-income housing, community economic development, and job training.

A broad consensus has emerged among experts, politicians, and the public on supporting investment in early childhood.

Virtually all experts include improving education—and early education in particular—as a critical component of any response to inequality and poverty. Both the large body of research on brain development and the economic returns of investment in early education and care support this conclusion (Heckman, 2013; National Research Council [NRC] & Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2000).

A broad consensus has emerged among experts, politicians, and the public on supporting investment in early childhood. For instance, not only do Putnam (2015), Reardon (2013), and the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution (Phillips et al., 2017a) call for expanded early childhood education, but so do the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute (The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research & Brookings Institution, 2015a) and the Bipartisan Policy Center (Miller et al., 2017). The First Five Years Fund reports that 78% of Donald Trump supporters and 97% of Hillary Clinton supporters favored federal action to increase access to early childhood education (First Five Years Fund, 2016). Even in a context of extreme political polarization, a convergence is emerging between many liberals (blue) and conservatives (red) in support of whole-child development, family engagement and support, and neighborhood and community development, setting the stage for a **"purple agenda" for early childhood education** (Jacobson, 2017; see also Kirp, 2007).

Continuity and Fragmentation

> Currently, a diverse and usually uncoordinated "system" of funding streams, agencies, and organizations has responsibility or authority over services and supports for young children. This fragmentation can result in inconsistent expectations for children's learning, conflicting approaches to instructional practice, lack of coordination among services for children, failure to build on learning gains, and inadequate support for children's achievement.
> (NRC, 2015, p. 225)

In 2015, a blue-ribbon panel of early childhood experts assessed the needs of the birth through age 8 workforce. Their analysis became the landmark report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (NRC, 2015).

Transforming the Workforce drew on an exhaustive review of the "science of early childhood" regarding what young children, and especially low-income children, need in order to thrive. In addition to highlighting issues of access, quality, and workforce development, the report identified the fragmented nature of early learning and care in the United States—the strong contrast between what we know children need and the state of the services designed to meet those needs—as a fundamental obstacle to improving child outcomes. Other comprehensive assessments of early childhood research reach similar conclusions (Reynolds & Temple, 2019; Tout et al., 2013).

> **The report identified the fragmented nature of early learning and care in the United States—the strong contrast between what we know children need and the state of the services designed to meet those needs—as a fundamental obstacle to improving child outcomes.**

Decades of research suggest that all children require "continuity of high-quality experiences" (NRC, 2015, p. 210). Two aspects of *continuity* are crucial:

- **Vertical continuity** takes place over time as children grow and transition across programs, grade levels, and services. Ideally, each high-quality program contributes to children's learning and development by building on the competencies developed in the previous programs, rather than "stagnating or slipping backwards" (NRC, 2015, p. 210).

- **Horizontal continuity** ensures consistency across the same types of programs and grade levels; each program and service that children experience at any given time is coordinated with the others, and together they are mutually reinforcing.

Transforming the Workforce explicitly endorses community partnerships and system-building initiatives that promote "continuity of care and education" across the early childhood continuum. Further, the report draws attention to a particularly entrenched and problematic divide: **the gap between the relatively enclosed worlds of early childhood education and K–12 education**.

The Early Childhood–Early Elementary School Education Divide

> Following pre-k, children are exposed to widely divergent k-12 experiences that can either support or undermine the gains made in pre-k.
> (Phillips et al., 2017a, p. 5)

In most American communities, coordination between early childhood and early elementary school education is minimal. While some early childhood programs have produced gains that were sustained through high school and even into adult working lives, the prekindergarten gains produced by other programs have "faded out" (Heckman, 2013; McCoy et al., 2017; Phillips et al., 2017a; Reynolds et al., 2011; Stipek, 2017b; Yoshikawa et

al., 2013). Early childhood experts attribute fade-out over the first few years of elementary school in part to the **lack of continuity** between children's experiences in prekindergarten and their experiences in the early years of elementary school (Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007; Phillips et al., 2017a; Ritchie & Gutmann, 2014).

A team of distinguished early childhood researchers led by Deborah Stipek, a Stanford University professor and former dean at the Stanford Graduate School of Education, recently synthesized the research literature on continuity across the preK–3 years in particular, with a focus on instructional continuity (Stipek, Clements, Coburn, Franke, & Farran, 2017). Among their findings was that children tend to follow typical progressions as they learn new concepts and skills in both literacy and math. When teachers know and understand these progressions, they are better able to target the next step for individual children, placing children in their "zone of proximal development," which in turn leads to more motivated students who are neither bored by tasks that are too easy and familiar, nor overwhelmed by tasks that are beyond their capabilities. Sequencing learning in this way helps children build on their previous knowledge, which promotes successful learning (Stipek et al., 2017).

Researchers have found that the kindergarten curriculum too often repeats the concepts and skills children learned in prekindergarten, rather than reinforcing and advancing them.

Early elementary school teachers have an opportunity to build on the foundation laid in prekindergarten. However, researchers have found that the kindergarten curriculum too often repeats the concepts and skills children learned in prekindergarten, rather than reinforce and advance them. The more that kindergarten teachers (and teachers in every grade, for that matter) know about the skills students learned the previous year—including social-emotional skill development, which is often a priority in prekindergarten—the better able they are to explicitly build on those skills (Stipek et al., 2017).

As Stipek concludes in a 2017 *Education Week* commentary,

> If we want to sustain the effects of preschool, we need to look at what happens *after* children enter school. Clearly, the quality of schooling they receive in the early elementary grades matters. Poor instruction can undo the effects of high-quality preschool experiences. But instruction has to be more than good to sustain preschool effects; it has to build strategically on the gains made in preschool. Currently, instruction in the early elementary grades is typically not well aligned with—and therefore does not make effective use of—the advantages high-quality preschool confers. (2017b, ¶3)[6]

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[6] For additional support of this argument, see the consensus report published by Brookings and Duke University: *Puzzling It Out: The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-kindergarten Effects—A Consensus Statement* (Phillips et al., 2017b).

Two recent studies provide additional evidence to support the Stipek team's position. Ansari and Pianta (2018a, 2018b) found that **prekindergarten effects were consistently sustained only when the quality of elementary school education was high**.

The literature on continuity is further reinforced by research on a related topic: the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten.[7] This transition represents a significant change in the lives of children and families, one that requires adjustments and can produce stress. Research shows that practices designed to ease this transition are associated with improved academic achievement, better behavior, and increased family involvement, and that these effects are strongest for low-income families (Cook & Coley, 2017; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2007; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).

Many communities establish a transition team to develop and oversee a transition plan. An effective prekindergarten-kindergarten transition plan:

- helps children prepare for kindergarten and then transition smoothly to their new schools
- establishes relationships between families and both schools
- promotes communication, collaboration, and alignment between early childhood centers[8] and elementary schools
- connects schools and families to community resources (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)

Two Converging Movements

Two place-based movements have emerged to address the fragmented state of early learning and care, with the aim of providing continuity of high-quality experiences for young children and their families:

- The **P–3 movement** focuses on improving the quality and alignment of programs and services across the early childhood–elementary school continuum (Guernsey & Mead, 2010; Kauerz & Coffman, 2013; Ritchie & Gutmann, 2014; Takanishi & Kauerz, 2008)
- The **community schools movement** (and other models of comprehensive supports) addresses the coordination of programs and services for young children and their families.[9]

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[7] Major federal transition-to-kindergarten initiatives since the 1960s are discussed in Chapter 3.

[8] Early childhood centers provide childcare and/or prekindergarten programs.

[9] Both movements are part of a broader pattern of cross-sector collaboration for education that also includes *collective impact* initiatives (cross-sector community partnerships that commit to a common agenda and common measures and that are convened by a "backbone" organization). How First 10 initiatives fit into the broader context of cross-sector cradle-to-career and collective impact initiatives is discussed in Chapter 3.

Prenatal Through Grade 3 (P–3) Improvement

The P–3 movement draws on earlier generations of initiatives focused on transitions and alignment of prekindergarten and elementary school (Kagan & Neuman, 1998).[10] The P–3 movement began in the early 2000s, led by the Foundation for Child Development, the PreK–3rd Institute at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (now the National P–3 Center at the University of Colorado–Denver), the Early and Elementary unit at the New America Foundation, and the FirstSchool model at the University of North Carolina (Bornfreund, McCann, Williams, & Guernsey, 2014; Guernsey & Mead, 2010; Magnuson et al., 2007; Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007; Ritchie & Gutmann, 2014; Ritchie, Maxwell, & Clifford, 2007; Takanishi & Kauerz, 2008).

P–3's initial focus was on quality and alignment of teaching and learning across prekindergarten and the early grades of elementary school. The National P–3 Center's P–3 framework lists eight areas of focus: cross-sector work, administrator effectiveness, teacher effectiveness, instructional tools, learning environments, data-driven improvement, family engagement, and continuity and pathways (Kauerz & Coffman, 2013).

Publications such as From *Neurons to Neighborhoods* (NRC and IOM, 2000) and the work of Harvard's Center for the Developing Child and other institutes have made clear the importance of early brain development during ages 0–3 and the risks posed by trauma and adverse childhood experiences. What began for many as a preK–3 focus has extended to include the earliest years of life and is now referred to as prenatal through third grade (P–3), birth through third grade, or birth (or 0) to 8.

Whether at the school or the community level, P–3 initiatives typically involve partnerships between elementary schools, early childhood centers, Head Start programs, and in some cases other early childhood stakeholders, such as home visiting programs, family childcare networks, United Way programs, community foundations, early intervention, libraries, hospitals and health clinics, housing authorities, and/or museums.

Motivated by practitioner assessments of fragmentation and discontinuity and accumulating research on the importance of quality and continuity, communities, states, and the federal government have developed a wide range of P–3 initiatives and policies during the past decade or so (Bornfreund et al., 2014; D. Jacobson, 2016; Takanishi, 2016; Tarrant, 2015). Successful examples of P–3 work include the FirstSchool model at the University of North Carolina,[11] a foundation-supported effort in

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[10]   This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

[11]   FirstSchool (https://firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/) is a framework for improving the preK–3 experience for African American, Latino, and low-income children and their families, working in collaboration with districts, schools, administrators, and teachers to close achievement and opportunity gaps.

five demonstration sites in Hawai'i,[12] and the much-heralded success stories of Union City, New Jersey,[13] and Montgomery County, Maryland,[14] each of which has produced some of the best results for low-income children in the country (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009; Kirp, 2013; Marietta, 2010; Marietta & Marietta, 2013; Ritchie & Gutmann, 2014; Zellman & Kilburn, 2015).

In practice, P–3 initiatives often focus, at least initially, on aligning educational practices at the "seam" between prekindergarten and early elementary school (Jacobson, 2016). Some initiatives expand their focus to work on childcare for children ages 0–3 and/or in grades 1–3 as well (Manship, Farber, Smith, & Drummond, 2016; Waters Boots, 2013). Family engagement is also typically a priority in P–3 efforts, yet the more comprehensive child and family supports found in community schools are not common in P–3 efforts. The framework of the National P–3 Center focuses on alignment of educational practices and does not emphasize comprehensive health and social services. (Kauerz & Coffman, 2013; K. Kauerz, personal communication, June 8, 2017).

Community Schools and Comprehensive Services

The community schools movement has a long history of coordinating health and social services on-site at the schools and developing schools as "community hubs" in their neighborhoods (Rogers, 1998). Head Start has also provided comprehensive services from its inception, as do some early childhood centers (Schilder, 2004; Schilder, Kiron, & Elliott, 2003).

Integral to all these efforts is an emphasis on significantly deepening relationships and partnerships with families and engaging them in the life of the school and their children's education.

The Coalition of Community Schools estimates that there are more than 5,000 community schools in the United States (Blank & Villarreal, 2015). A recent Child Trends study found

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[12] With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, a collaborative of state organizations in Hawai'i launched a P–3 initiative in 2007, with the goal of having children read at grade level by third grade. The initiative was implemented in five demonstration sites. According to an evaluation by the RAND Corporation (2015), "Our evaluation finds evidence that more years of participating in the P–3 initiative raised student reading scores modestly but significantly and increased the likelihood of scoring proficient on the state reading test. . . . Viewed another way, over the seven-year period covered by the data, the gap in scores between schools that never participated in P–3 and those that did narrowed by four points on the HSA reading score. This impact is comparable to estimates of the effects of nine additional weeks of schooling and is higher than an estimate of the average effect size for elementary school interventions for mainstream students" (p. 3).

[13] Union City's approach includes a common curriculum used in all district and community-based prekindergarten classrooms, district "master teachers" who provide coaching support to community-based early childhood centers and to district prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms, a districtwide focus on supporting English learners, high-quality curricula in all grades, and continuous improvement in teacher teams (Kirp, 2013; Marietta & Marietta, 2013; A. Birne, personal interview, January 3, 2018).

[14] Montgomery County is profiled in Chapter 3.

consistently positive impacts from several community school models (Moore et al., 2017), and a 2017 research review published by the Learning Policy Institute states:

> We conclude that well-implemented community schools lead to improvement in student and school outcomes . . . and sufficient research exists to meet the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) standard for an evidence-based intervention. (Oakes, Maier, & Daniel, 2017, p. 1)

Community schools at the elementary level might include a prekindergarten or childcare facility on-site, but until recently most community schools had not established relationships with early childhood centers or conducted outreach to families with children ages 0–5. A number of communities, including Multnomah County (Oregon), and Cincinnati,[15] are now extending the community school model to include early childhood and are making efforts to support children and their families before the children enter school—work that is both innovative and atypical.

Movements Converge at the Leading Edge

Many communities across the country are drawing on both the P–3 and the comprehensive services movements to meet the needs of the children and families they serve. These initiatives include a focus on quality, alignment of programming across the P–3 continuum, and the provision of integrated, comprehensive services for children and families. In these communities the two movements are converging, and the communities discussed in this study represent the leading edge of that convergence (see Figure 6):

- P–3 initiatives—for instance in Normal (Illinois), Omaha, and Cambridge[16]—are combining quality and alignment activities, deeper partnerships with families, and comprehensive health and social services supports for children and families (Waters Boots, 2013).
- Community school initiatives, such as those in Multnomah County (Oregon) and Cincinnati, are extending their integrated child and family supports to families with young children before they enter school; many are also working on quality improvement and alignment (L. Jacobson, Rollins, Brown, & Naviasky, 2016; R. Jacobson, L. Jacobson, & Blank, 2012).

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[15] Multnomah County and Cincinnati are each profiled in Chapter 1.

[16] Normal and Omaha are discussed in more detail in Chapter 1; Cambridge is featured in Chapter 3.

FIGURE 6: First 10 Schools and Communities:
P–3 Educational Improvement Plus Comprehensive Services

P–3 Educational Improvement	Comprehensive Services
• High-Quality Teaching and Learning • Transitions and Alignment	• Physical Health • Mental Health • After-School Programs • Parent Education • Basic Needs
Family Engagement and Support	
Focus on Equity	
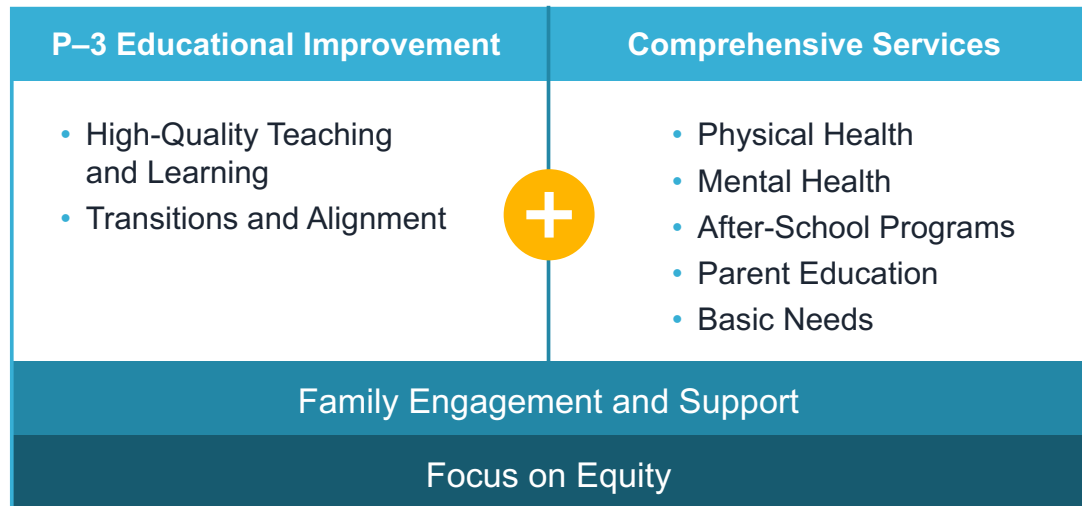
Longitudinal evidence supports this convergent model—as seen most notably in the study of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (see sidebar). The **multidimensional nature** of this convergent model—combining teaching and learning, family engagement and partnership, and comprehensive community services—is also consistent with seminal research on high-performing elementary schools serving low-income students in Chicago. This study found that strong partnerships with families and communities were an essential component (along with strong leadership, a coherent instructional system, high professional capacity, and a student-centered climate) in raising achievement for low-income students. (Bryk et al., 2010). The essential role of this combination of factors has been validated for early prekindergarten programs as well (Ehrlich, Pacchiano, Stein, & Luppescu, 2016; Pacchiano, Wagner, Lewandowski, Ehrlich, & Stein, 2018).

PREK–3 PLUS COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES: THE CHICAGO CHILD-PARENT CENTERS

Launched in 1967 by the Chicago Public Schools with Title 1 funds, the Child-Parent Centers model begins at prekindergarten and continues through third grade at a nearby elementary school.

The original model included structured curriculum components (to promote instructional continuity), high teacher-to-child ratios, staff development opportunities, home visits, health and nutrition services, and extensive activities to foster family engagement (Reynolds et al., 2011). These components were maintained across the preK–3 continuum, creating continuity in instruction, curriculum, family engagement, and family support.

Research done by University of Minnesota professor Arthur Reynolds shows the progress of children who attended the centers in the mid-1980s (who were 28 by the time of the study). Compared to children in a control group, center attendees exhibited significantly higher academic achievement through high school, advanced further in their education, and had higher earnings as adults. They were less likely to need special education services, be involved in the juvenile justice system, commit crimes as adults, or experience abuse, neglect, or depression. A cost-benefit analysis of the program yielded a return on investment of $10 for every $1 invested (Reynolds et al., 2011).

In 2012, Reynolds and his team won a prestigious I3 (Investing in Innovation) grant from the federal government and updated the Child-Parent Center model as a school reform strategy—now called CPC P–3. Becoming implementers as well as researchers, the University of Minnesota team currently supports 35 sites in three Midwestern states with tools, guidance documents, and technical assistance.

First 10 Schools and Communities

> We adopt a broad definition of early childhood as the entire first decade of life, from prenatal development up to age 10 . . . The historical convention of the preschool period from ages 3 to 5 as defining early childhood has encouraged an unfortunate classification of programs and experiences that limit integration. The focus on the continuum of experiences supports a more complete spectrum of services and research approaches.
> (Reynolds & Temple, 2019, p. 13)

The innovations these communities are implementing suggest the outlines of a promising place-based model, here called **First 10 Schools and Communities** (see Figure 6, above).[17] This study follows Reynolds and Temple (2019) in adopting a broad definition of *early childhood* as including roughly the first decade of life (see sidebar).

The First 10 Schools and Communities described in this study are all attempting to address **educational equity**, so that **all** children receive what they need in order to develop to their full academic and social potential. They all serve significant numbers of low-income

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[17] This study uses the term *First 10* to refer to improving teaching and learning, family engagement and partnership, and comprehensive services throughout the early childhood–elementary school continuum. *P–3 and Birth to 3rd Grade* are used when a community uses these specific terms to refer to its initiatives. *PreK–3* refers to efforts to improve teaching and learning in prekindergarten through grade 3 classrooms.

children and families and significant numbers of children and families of color. While no community is addressing all areas of need across the full continuum, each has exemplary areas of strength. Together, these innovations suggest a wide range of strategies that other communities can learn from and draw on as they design similar initiatives.

Some communities described in this study have made more progress on preK–3 teaching and learning quality and alignment (e.g., Boston), and some on integrated child and family supports (e.g., Cincinnati). Further, these communities have structured their First 10 work in different ways. How elementary schools support children ages 0–4 and their families varies, as does the role of the family resource coordinators hired to coordinate these services. The variation in structures, strategies, and roles found across these communities presents a number of options for communities who are interested in designing their own First 10 initiatives. These variations may also inspire innovations, adaptations, and new approaches.

THE RATIONALE FOR "FIRST 10"

Using the term **First 10 Schools and Communities** to refer to this convergent model offers several benefits:

- The school and community initiatives described in this study suggest the need for a term that refers to the combination of three essential supports and services: high-quality teaching and learning in the early grades, family engagement and partnership, **and** comprehensive services for children and families.

- "First 10," **understood as roughly the first decade of life**, signals the importance of school district and elementary school collaboration with other early childhood programs. School principals, district leaders, and leaders of other child-serving organizations are all critical to improving the quality and alignment of teaching, learning, and care across the full early childhood continuum, yet terminology that leaves out fourth and fifth graders is an obstacle for many elementary school principals.*

- The elementary schools discussed in this study demonstrate the importance of incorporating early-grades improvement work into schoolwide improvement strategies. They also illustrate the potential of First 10 initiatives as a whole-school change approach. For example, that principals in Metro Omaha think of their schools as "Birth Through Grade 5" hubs suggests the level of buy-in that is possible with this work and the extent to which it can become part of a school's identity.

- While some children transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" as they move from grade 3 to 4, there is and should be much continuity in teaching and learning practices, family engagement and partnership, and comprehensive services as children transition to fourth grade and beyond.

* While most elementary schools go up to fifth grade (ages 10 and 11, typically), some go up to sixth grade and some to eighth. The latter often have a separate unit dedicated to grades 6–8

Two First 10 Structures

First 10 initiatives are emerging in two main forms: **First 10 School Hubs** and **First 10 Community Partnerships** (D. Jacobson, 2016).

First 10 School Hubs (see Figure 7) are anchored by **a single elementary school**. They place special emphasis on ensuring that teaching and learning in the early grades are developmentally appropriate and of high quality; they provide comprehensive services not only to school-age children but also to young children ages 0–4 and their families, thereby strengthening partnerships with these families; and they partner with family childcare providers, Head Start programs, and early childhood centers in their catchment areas on quality, alignment, and transitions.

FIGURE 7: First 10 School Hub
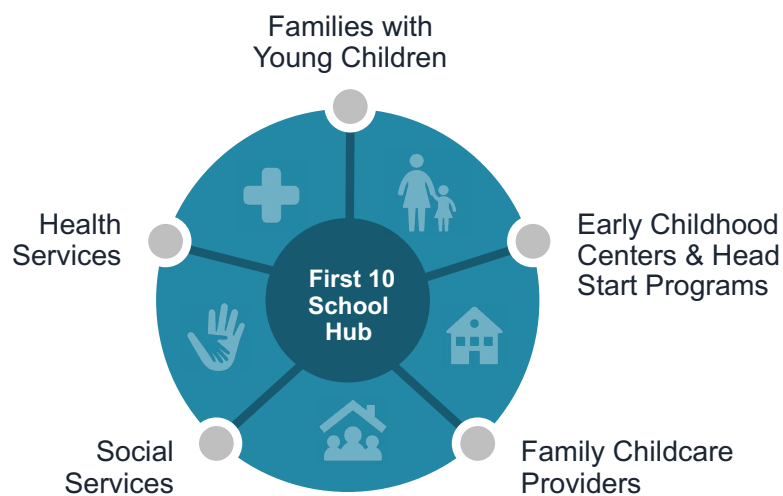
First 10 Community Partnerships (see Figure 8) bring together **multiple elementary schools,** district leaders, family childcare providers, Head Start programs, early childhood centers, and other community partners to improve the quality and alignment of teaching, learning, and care in systematic ways **throughout a geographic area or community**, which could be a county, a city or town, or a neighborhood.[18]

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[18] In small communities with only one elementary school, the distinction between a First 10 School Hub and a First 10 Community Partnership blurs significantly.

FIGURE 8: First 10 Community Partnership
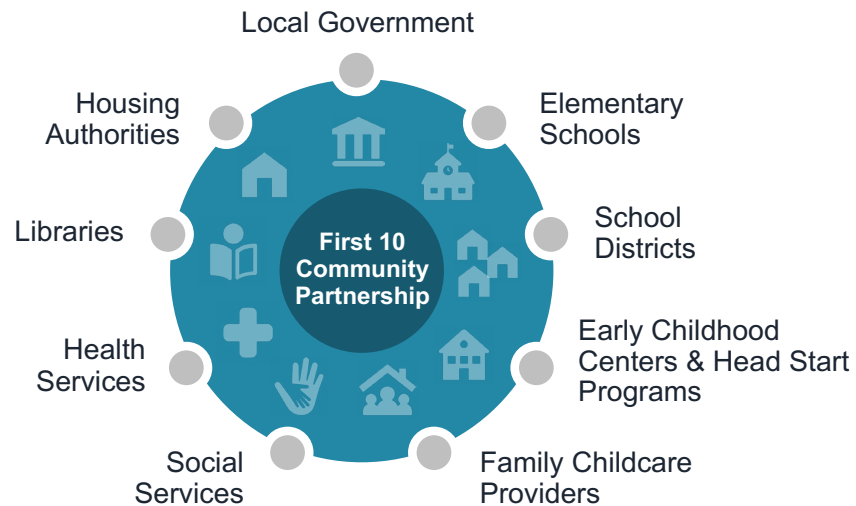
Integral to both models is improving **PreK–3 teaching and learning in classrooms**. Improving classroom practice in the early grades involves implementing teaching strategies that are both developmentally appropriate and aligned to state standards, integrating district prekindergarten classes into K–5 structures, coordinating alignment and transitions across early childhood centers and elementary schools, and developing coherent packages of schoolwide teaching supports across all grades.

A First 10 School Hub might run weekly play-and-learn groups,[19],[20] in the school for neighborhood families with infants and toddlers; develop trust and relationships with these families and then build on that trust to connect the families to health and social service agencies; work with nearby family childcare providers and early childhood centers on the transition to kindergarten; and provide coaching to early-grades teachers on early literacy, early math, and/or social-emotional development.

In contrast, a First 10 Community Partnership might select a high-quality play-and-learn group model to be used throughout the zone or community; organize a common foundation of professional development for all home visitors working in the area; provide parenting education programs; design a quality improvement initiative for cohorts of family childcare providers and/or early childhood centers; develop a community-wide

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[19] In addition to singing, playing, and story-telling, play-and-learn sessions incorporate information about child development and school readiness.

[20] The First 10 School Hubs discussed in this study use play-and-learn groups, home visiting, and family engagement activities to support families with young children. For a school hub that uses a parenting program, see Highland Elementary School's (Lake Worth, Florida) use of the Triple P program (https://www.triplep.net/glo-en/home/), a parenting and family support program designed "to prevent behavioral, emotional and developmental problems in children by enhancing the knowledge, skills and confidence of parents" (Waters Boots, 2013, p. 20).

transition-to-kindergarten plan; and/or implement new curricula and professional development in the early grades across a district, beginning in kindergarten classrooms.

First 10 Initiatives are being formed at the county and regional levels as well, supporting local communities within their jurisdictions. The potential for a **combined model—a First 10 Community Partnership that includes and supports School Hubs**—is discussed in the Conclusion.

Addressing the Full Early Childhood Continuum

A strength common to many First 10 School Hubs and First 10 Community Partnerships described in this study is that they address multiple parts of the full early childhood–elementary school continuum. While many other initiatives have aspired to address the full early childhood continuum, for practical reasons they often begin at the prekindergarten-kindergarten "seam"—the gap between early childhood and K–3 education—and risk never expanding to incorporate infant and toddler care and K–3 education (D. Jacobson, 2016).

The family childcare providers and early childhood centers referenced below and throughout this study serve infants and toddlers as well as three- and four-year-olds. No initiative in this study addresses all possible program services across the full early childhood continuum, yet many of them address several parts of the continuum simultaneously (and aspire to broaden their work over time). For example:

- **Prenatal Care.** School-based home visitors in Metro Omaha's School as Hub for Birth–Grade 3 pilot begin supporting mothers when they learn the mothers are expecting; Cambridge runs a Baby University that includes expectant parents.

- **Children Ages 0–3.** Cambridge organizes intensive quality improvement initiatives for family childcare providers and early childhood centers and is designing a broad range of supports to improve all home visiting programs across the city. The P–3 pilot in Multnomah County, Oregon, supports families with children ages 0–4 through play-and-learn groups and comprehensive services, and provides supports to family childcare providers and family, friend, and neighbor caregivers as well. Metro Omaha's pilot reaches families with children ages 0–3 through home visiting and parent-child interaction groups, and families with children ages 3–8 through family supports and parent-child interaction groups. The rural Blue Mountain region of Oregon includes family childcare providers and teachers from early childhood centers in its professional learning teams.

- **PreK–Elementary School.** Boston, the Metro Omaha pilot, the Omaha Public Schools, Normal (Illinois), and Cambridge are all working to improve the transition to kindergarten and the quality of teaching and learning in prekindergarten and kindergarten. Boston, the Metro Omaha pilot, and Cambridge are extending this

work to include at least grades 1 and 2 as well. Elementary schools in Multnomah County are combining focused work on improving pedagogy in the early grades with comprehensive supports for families with young children and deep family engagement. Schoolwide instructional practices, family engagement activities, and comprehensive family supports that begin before kindergarten in Normal, Metro Omaha, Cincinnati, and Multnomah County continue throughout elementary school.

An Exploratory Study of First 10 Schools and Communities

This study was funded by the Heising-Simons Foundation. It takes as its starting point the above-mentioned conclusions of *Transforming the Workforce* regarding fragmentation and continuity.[21] Children need to experience quality and continuity throughout the early childhood–early elementary school continuum in order to realize their full potential. This includes vertical alignment of programs and services as children grow, and coordination of the programs and services that children and their families experience at any given point in time. Child-serving organizations must therefore master and coordinate three strategies: high-quality teaching and learning, family engagement and partnership, and comprehensive services for children and families.

Components of the First 10 approach have been formally evaluated. Studies of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, Boston's prekindergarten curriculum and coaching model, a pilot project in five communities in Hawai'i, and some community school models have found positive results (Moore et al., 2017; Reynolds et al., 2011; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013; Zellman & Kilburn, 2015). Of the community initiatives described in this study, the efforts in Normal (Illinois), Omaha, Boston, and Cambridge are currently being evaluated by external evaluators.

There is a long history of initiatives to align early childhood education with elementary school and to improve the transition to kindergarten. Similarly, there is much precedent for building early childhood systems, and community schools have been part of the American education landscape for at least a century. **A central premise of this study is that First 10 Schools and Communities represent an important new wave of efforts to improve quality and continuity for children.** As discussed above, this wave draws on both the P–3 and the community school movements. This wave is distinguished not by any one factor but rather by a combination of factors:

- The goal to address the full early childhood continuum, beginning with prenatal care and extending through elementary school

- The goal to improve teaching and learning, family engagement and partnership, and comprehensive services for children and families

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[21] See Tout et al. (2013) and Reynolds and Temple (2019) as well.

- The goal for teaching and learning in the early grades to be both developmentally appropriate and aligned to state standards

- Local ownership of and commitment to the initiative

- Deep collaboration between elementary schools, school districts, and early childhood organizations—particularly early childhood centers and family childcare providers, but also libraries, health and behavioral health programs, and other child- and family-serving organizations

- The use of a central convening or "backbone" organization and/or coordinating staff members to drive and facilitate collaborative work (Waters Boots, 2013)

This study is an exploratory investigation of First 10 School Hubs and First 10 Community Partnerships. A second premise of this study is that **First 10 initiatives are at a point in their development where formative implementation research can be especially useful.** *Formative implementation research* focuses on three core questions: (1) What is happening?, (2) Is it what is expected or desired?, and, (3) Why is it happening as it is? (Werner, 2004).

This study aims to gather, analyze, and share information regarding First 10 initiatives during this important early stage in their national development in order to inform future efforts.

A study of several decades of ambitious community change efforts by the Aspen Institute found that it is critical for formative implementation research to inform local and regional "knowledge development to practice to policy" cycles **while** programs are being implemented and in the interim before formal evaluation results are available (Auspos & Kubisch, 2004, p. 26–29). This study aims to gather, analyze, and share information regarding First 10 initiatives during this important early stage in their national development in order to inform future efforts.

With this conception of formative implementation research in mind, the following research questions guided the inquiry of this study:

- In what ways do First 10 Schools and Communities support children across the full early childhood—elementary school continuum? What strategies are implemented in order to achieve this goal?

- What structures, staffing arrangements, and practices are First 10 Schools and Communities implementing?

- What do First 10 initiatives regard as successes and early evidence of positive change?

- In what contexts and with what resources are First 10 initiatives being implemented?

- What obstacles and challenges are First 10 Schools and Communities encountering, and how are implementers responding to these challenges?

The study began with a literature review and a national scan to identify leading-edge communities implementing First 10 initiatives as defined by the combination of factors noted above. None of the communities are implementing all possible program services across the full early childhood continuum, but they are all implementing significant parts of it.

The author conducted interviews with the leaders of national organizations that support communities in improving early childhood and early elementary school education and care, including the National League of Cities, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, the RAND Corporation, the Coalition of Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and StriveTogether, as well as a number of experts in state departments of education.

The national scan led to interviews with leaders of relevant initiatives in 18 communities (listed in the Acknowledgments). Based on these interviews, the author conducted site visits to seven communities: Normal, Illinois; Multnomah County, Oregon; Omaha, Nebraska; Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Oakland and San Francisco, California. The profiles of the Blue Mountain region (Oregon) and Lowell (Massachusetts) are based on earlier research by the author, the profile of Cincinnati is based on multiple phone interviews, and the case study on Montgomery County (Maryland) is drawn from published resources. Of the communities described in this study, with the exception of some of the work in Cincinnati and Boston, all the initiatives in this study were funded with **public funding**, as indicated in each case study.

This study builds on the work of many other case studies and implementation research studies noted throughout the text (for example, Childress et al., 2009; Geiser, Horwitz, & Gerstein, 2012, 2013; L. Jacobson et al., 2016; Kirp, 2013; Manship et al., 2016; Marietta, 2010; Marietta & Marietta, 2013; Moore et al., 2017; Nyhan, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2007; Waters Boots, 2013; Williams & Garcia, 2015). It also draws on a number of related implementation research projects led by the author, including *Building State P–3 Systems: Learning from Leading States* (D. Jacobson, 2011, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2015, 2016).

Organization of This Study

Chapters 1–3 are organized according to the two First 10 structures:

- **Chapter 1** explores the structures and strategies implemented by school leaders to develop First 10 School Hubs for young children and their families and for early childhood providers. A key component of this work is the role of the staff charged with spearheading these critical family engagement and support activities.

- **Chapter 2** addresses an integral component of both First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships: improving teaching and learning in preK–3 classrooms. Both within-school and across-district components of improving and aligning curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development are examined.

- **Chapter 3** analyzes two broader First 10 Community Partnerships and their work to effect improvement and alignment across entire neighborhoods or communities in ways that individual schools acting as hubs cannot. These partnerships address the quality and coordination of home visiting programs, the quality of family childcare and early childhood centers, teaching and learning in K–3 classrooms across a district, the provision of early childhood mental health consultation, community-wide transition plans, and community-wide professional efforts around a number of related topics, such as trauma-informed care, literacy, math, and science. The two community partnerships featured each drew on strategic plans focused on key goals and a coherent set of core strategies that they implemented over several years.

The **Conclusion** summarizes lessons learned from the previous chapters and the design considerations suggested by the communities profiled in the study for those who are developing First 10 initiatives. It also outlines a **theory of action**, informed by the experiences of the communities profiled in this study, that specifies the roles that First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships play.

It is important to emphasize the **multifaceted nature of the capacities and strategies** most of the schools and early childhood centers discussed in this study are developing—both around family engagement and integrated child and family supports (discussed in Chapter 1) and around aligned teaching and learning (discussed in Chapter 2). To be effective with low-income students, it is **essential** that schools and early childhood centers build this multifaceted capacity (Bryk et al., 2010) and that districts and communities support these essential capacities (Chapter 3). Although addressed in different chapters, what is most promising about the schools and early childhood centers featured in this study is that each is developing structures and strategies to promote quality teaching and learning, family engagement, **and** child and family supports.

CHAPTER 1

Elementary Schools as First 10 Hubs

> **Using schools as hubs, community schools bring together educators and community partners to offer a range of opportunities and supports to children, youth, families, and communities.** (R. Jacobson & Blank, 2015, p. 2)

Building on the idea of school-as-hub promoted by the community schools movement, in 2014 the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) published a reconceptualization of elementary school leadership in a report titled *Leading Pre-K–3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice*. The report makes the case for schools to serve as **hubs for early learning** in their communities. NAESP calls on elementary school leaders to engage deeply with the early childhood organizations and families with young children in their neighborhoods. Schools should collaborate with their feeder prekindergarten programs and with social services agencies, churches, and other early childhood providers to ensure that children are supported at each stage of development and that schools meet "the social, emotional, academic, and physical needs of their students and their families" (NAESP, 2014, p. 54).[22]

NAESP also emphasizes the importance of developing **peer connections among families** (i.e., establishing *social capital*—networks and connections among individuals in a community—and norms of reciprocity and trust). Peer connections are an especially important resource for low-income families, who are more likely to be isolated (Office of Head Start, 2011; Putnam, 2015; Small, 2009).[23]

First 10 School Hub Examples: A Range of Designs

First 10 initiatives can take place at the school and neighborhood level or at the community level or both. Variation found among First 10 initiatives suggests that communities must also determine whether to (1) provide direct support to families, (2) focus on collaboration between schools and community-based organizations, or (3) do both. Figure 8 illustrates these different configurations of First 10 work.

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[22] At its annual conferences, NAESP has verbally extended its vision to include children ages 0–3.

[23] See also Ruby Takanishi's *First Things First! Creating the New American Primary School* (2016). In addition to supporting schools as hubs for young children and their families, Takanishi incorporates a **two-generation model** in which high-quality childcare and prekindergarten are combined with family literacy and workforce development programming.

FIGURE 9: Communities by Form and Type of Support

	First 10 School Hubs	First 10 Community Partnerships
Direct Support to Families	• Sugar Creek Elementary School • Multnomah County P–3 Pilot* • Metro Omaha School as Hub for Birth–Grade 3 Pilot • Cincinnati Early Childhood Coordinators*	• Find It Cambridge • Cambridge's Mental Health Wellness Campaign (planned)
Collaboration Between Schools and Providers	• Blue Mountain Professional Learning Teams • Lowell Communities of Practice	• Boston Public Schools' Collaboration with Early Childhood Centers • Montgomery County's Early Childhood Plans • Cambridge's Birth to Third Grade Plan

Note: Asterisks (*) indicate that the First 10 School Hubs in these communities support family childcare providers and/or early childhood centers in addition to providing direct support to families.

This chapter describes the examples listed in the First 10 School Hubs column. (The examples in the First 10 Community Partnership column are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). Three main case studies illustrate a range of structures, strategies, and practice pioneered by early leading-edge First 10 School Hubs:

- **Sugar Creek Elementary School** in Normal, Illinois, is one of 35 sites in the Midwest that are part of the CPC P–3 network, the updated version of Chicago's Child-Parent Centers. Sugar Creek combines extensive professional learning for teachers in the early grades with a family coordinator position. The family coordinator provides a range of supports to families, including home visiting services, especially for prekindergarten families.

- **Multnomah County**, Oregon, has developed a P–3 pilot project in nine elementary schools, building on the county's well-developed system of 90 community schools. The pilot extends supports to children ages 0–5 and their families through school-based P–3 coordinators who run weekly play-and-learn groups, coordinate comprehensive services for families, and support nearby family childcare providers and family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

- A pilot in 10 schools in **Metro Omaha**, Nebraska, is a collaboration among 11 districts across two counties, funded by a levy. This pilot combines home visiting for children

ages 0–3, a family facilitator for children ages 3–8, and instructional alignment coaching for the early grades of elementary school. Staff in these positions are supported in role-alike communities of practice.

These three case studies are followed by three brief examples of specific innovations:

- The **Blue Mountain Early Learning Hub** in rural Eastern Oregon brings together family childcare providers, community-based prekindergarten teachers, and early elementary school teachers in professional learning teams that meet monthly to learn about specific topics.

- An initiative in **Lowell**, Massachusetts, combined a community-wide alignment team with clusters of programs that included a hub elementary school, an early childhood center, and nearby family childcare providers. The initiative then supported aligned assessments, quality improvement, and the development of common family engagement approaches in each cluster.

- The **Cincinnati Public Schools** serves as an example of a **citywide system of support** for community schools that includes citywide networks of specific kinds of partner organizations (e.g., health, behavioral health, after-school). As in Multnomah County, this system of support is now being leveraged by a local nonprofit to support early childhood coordinators in pilot elementary schools.

The strategies, structures, and practices pioneered by these six communities suggest a range of design considerations for communities considering a First 10 approach, as discussed at the end of the chapter.

The First 10 School Hub at Sugar Creek Elementary: Supporting Families *and* Improving Teaching and Learning in the Early Grades

Sugar Creek Elementary School serves a low-income and working-class student population in Normal, a Central Illinois town of just over 50,000 residents that is surrounded by corn fields.

Beth Kelley is Sugar Creek's family coordinator. On one of her first home visits, she went to the home of a three-year-old boy, a Sugar Creek prekindergarten student. The boy was being raised by his grandmother, who met Kelley in front of their apartment. The grandmother's social security funds had been stolen, so she was behind on her rent and was about to be evicted. Kelley helped the grandmother get new housing and showed her how to navigate the public transportation system in her new location. Kelley also connected the grandmother with a community organization called Faith in Action, which supports grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Faith in Action helped the grandmother with her rent, which allowed her to buy her own car.

A few years later, the grandmother's health took a turn for the worse. Kelley and her Sugar Creek colleagues worked with the Department of Child and Family Services to place the boy in a foster adoptive home, but in such a way that the grandmother is still involved and maintains a close relationship with him. As Kelley says,

> You know, he came in at three years old, and now he's in fourth grade, and I'm still a big support for this family. I was the first one Grandma called when something happened.

Sugar Creek was able to hire a family coordinator as part of a federal innovation grant for CPC P–3 sites; a few years later, two other McLean County schools became CPC P–3 sites. Each school installed a family coordinator to build relationships with families; serve as bridges between families, teachers, and administrators; and connect families to a range of services and supports, both by bringing programs into the school and by referring families to programs in the community.

The school district has found the family coordinator position to be so effective, it is now funding—**through district resources, rather than the federal innovation grant for CPC P–3 sites**—six additional family coordinators at four other district elementary schools that serve high numbers of low-income children.

Kelley and the other family coordinators spend much of their time doing home visits, focusing particularly on families with prekindergarten children. They bring simple games that families can play with their children, and work to develop relationships with the parents and grandparents. They organize monthly breakfasts for each class and regular "Lunch and Learn" gatherings on parenting topics, host family events such as the winter extravaganza, coordinate food bags that are sent home and a monthly free farmers market, and organize Love and Logic® parenting workshops and workshops on nutrition. They also attend IEP meetings with parents to provide support and to advocate for the families. They have arranged for dental and health services that are carried out at their respective schools, and refer many children to the Butterfly Project, a program of a partner organization that supports children who have witnessed violence, including domestic violence.

One of Kelley's colleagues describes the family coordinator role as "making school a safe and fun place." Kelley says that her goal is to help families have a good feeling about school and to value school, which in turn helps not only with family engagement and partnership in general but also very concretely in reducing absences. Nikki Combs, Sugar Creek's principal, adds that it is important that the relationships with families begin with children in prekindergarten:

> For a lot of our families, it takes a while to build that trust, for them to open up, for them to admit to us perhaps what assistance they need. So I feel like we lay a lot of groundwork at the early learning ages. And then we're not starting all over again with kindergartners. A lot of our kindergartners, we already know them, we already know the families. And so that continuity, I think, is where I've seen the biggest impact.

Sugar Creek has taken a number of steps to improve teaching and learning for its youngest children and their families. The school includes several prekindergarten classrooms, which, as is often the case in elementary schools, used to operate very separately from the K–5 program. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers are now co-located in an early-learning wing of the school, prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers meet to align curriculum and instruction, and the early-grades teachers participated in an extensive program of professional development on age-appropriate classroom practices designed by the Erikson Institute in Chicago. As a result of these alignment efforts and in response to an increase in behavior problems in kindergarten, Sugar Creek kindergarten teachers are participating in a district initiative to improve social-emotional learning through guided play.

Multnomah County's P–3 Pilot: Play-and-Learn Groups, Family Childcare, and Comprehensive Services

Multnomah County encompasses the Portland Public Schools and five nearby school districts in Oregon. The Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Service System is a partnership between the county and the six school districts. The county is the managing

SUN SERVICE SYSTEM THEORY OF CHANGE
(Excerpted from Schools Uniting Neighborhoods, 2014, pp. 1, 2)

We recognize the need to eliminate disparities based on race, ethnicity, national origin, English language proficiency, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, source of income, geographic location of residence, familial status, disability, age, physical and mental illness, and other factors. We focus on racial justice particularly, but not exclusively, in our commitment to equity because of the level of disparities that exists between White communities and communities of color across all indicators and institutions. . . .

We believe that **all children and youth have the ability to learn** and that we have an ethical and moral responsibility to ensure the opportunities and supports across our community that ensure educational success.

We believe **our lives are interconnected and we have a shared destiny**—we are all impacted when some experience hardship and inequities, and we all benefit when members of our community are successful and healthy. (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods, 2014)

partner for the SUN Service System, which supports 90 community schools across Multnomah County. Unlike the other communities in this study, in Multnomah County, SUN contracts with nonprofit agencies that in turn hire and support full-time community school site managers. **The SUN Service System has mandated that over 60% of these nonprofit agencies be culturally specific organizations with the linguistic and cultural expertise to effectively support diverse families.** The site managers work with school staff and community partners to align resources, including after-school programming, with the school's academic and social-emotional goals. The site managers also support family engagement and advocacy and coordinate resource referrals for families' basic needs and other services.

In recent years, Multnomah County has extended its community schools work to include early childhood programming. This work began through SUN's participation in the Early Childhood Community School Linkages Project, a project of the Coalition of Community Schools funded by the Kellogg Foundation. In addition to increasing the number of prekindergarten classrooms in its schools, the county has implemented a highly regarded three-week summer early kindergarten transition class across many of the community schools, launched a vigorous kindergarten registration campaign, and supported home visits by kindergarten teachers. The Linkages Project, and the projects it supported, helped the county develop relationships that served as a good foundation as it began to design its P–3 pilot[24] (Geiser et al., 2012; Geiser, Horwitz, et al., 2013; Geiser, Rollins, Gerstein, & Blank, 2013). Earl Boyles Elementary School, described in the text box below, was another source of inspiration for Multnomah County's P–3 pilot.

Multnomah County's P–3 pilot is taking place in a larger context of P–3 work in Oregon. In 2013 the Oregon state legislature approved the creation of a Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation (KPI) grant fund. Through this fund, overseen by the P–3 specialist at the Early Learning Division, Oregon supported local P–3 partnerships with $4.5 million in 2014, rising to $9.1 million in 2015, a level of funding that has since continued (Green et al., 2017; D. Jacobson, 2016).

SUN's P–3 pilot is funded with KPI funds from Early Learning Multnomah, the regional state-funded early learning hub and part of the United Way of Columbia Willamette.

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[24] While Multnomah County uses *P–3* to refer to its pilot, it serves as a good example of a First 10 initiative as defined in this study.

The P–3 Pilot Design

SUN's community school and early childhood leaders decided that the county was already working with Head Start programs and early childhood centers in other initiatives and that the large number of children not enrolled in prekindergarten had the greatest needs. Thus, as a matter of equity, SUN chose to focus its nine-school P–3 pilot on providing direct outreach and support to children ages 0–4 and their families in its first year, and to expand its scope in subsequent years to include family childcare providers and family, friend, and neighbor caregivers in the neighborhoods around the participating P–3 pilot elementary schools. Many of the children served by the participating caregivers are infants and toddlers.

SUN's P–3 pilot places a P–3 coordinator (also funded with KPI funds) in each of the nine participating elementary schools. The P–3 coordinator conducts outreach to families in the area, often working through culturally specific community groups. The P–3 coordinator leads at least two play-and-learn groups per week at the school, and one of these is dedicated to a culturally specific group or conducted in a language other than English. The P–3 coordinator builds trust with the participating families and, working with the community school site manager as a team, leverages SUN's system of comprehensive supports for community schools to connect families to needed resources, including adult education, health and social services, and support for basic needs, such as food and utilities.

Beginning in the second year of the pilot, P–3 coordinators began developing relationships with nearby licensed family childcare providers and family, friends, and neighbor caregivers.

Beginning in the second year of the pilot, P–3 coordinators began developing relationships with nearby licensed family childcare providers and family, friends, and neighbor caregivers. These caregivers also participate in play-and-learn sessions, as well as relevant trainings organized by the P–3 coordinator. If any family, friend, and neighbor caregivers are interested in becoming licensed family childcare providers, the P–3 coordinators connect them to SUN specialists who can support them through the process.

The P–3 Pilot at Sacramento Elementary School

Sacramento Elementary School in the Parkrose School District in Portland, Oregon, provides a good example of Multnomah County's P–3 pilot after its first year in action. Sacramento Elementary has developed a coherent approach to improving teaching and learning in classrooms: It is a showcase school for the national AVID program,[25] its teachers use the National Geographic *Reach for Reading* curriculum, K–2 teachers supplement the

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[25] The AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) elementary school program supports students' organizational, study, and communication skills and self-advocacy. Students are taught to take structured notes, to go beyond routine answers when answering high-level questions, and to pose their own high-level questions.

literacy curriculum with a set of teaching routines developed by the University of Oregon, and the teachers work in both grade-level teams and professional learning communities.

Sacramento has been a SUN community school for three years. The SUN site manager, Jenna Sjulin, runs the after-school program. Sjulin and her colleagues explicitly try to recruit children who need extra help and to incorporate academic learning into the program in fun ways, such as a "Mad Science" program. Other community school supports include a fresh food pantry, a Friday food backpack program, a mentoring program, a reading club, and on-site health and mental health consultation two days a week.

In Sacramento's three years as a community school, Sjulin and her colleagues have made a concerted effort to engage families from all the ethnic groups who make up the school's community. In addition to frequent community dinners, the team has organized a series of parent cafes that began as culturally specific groups but over time have evolved into multicultural gatherings. These activities have created a context of good relationships with families and community groups, setting the stage for the P–3 pilot.

Sacramento's P–3 coordinator, Manisone Xaybanha, began getting to know the families with young children by hosting coffees in the school's community room, conducting a survey in multiple languages on parent needs and interests, and engaging in extensive outreach to the cultural groups and churches that serve the neighborhood's families. Xaybanha began running play-and-learn groups for children ages 0–4 and their families in the school. The community-based organization that Xaybanha works for, the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, provides dual-language books for participating families. Xaybanha has also organized family visits to museums, the zoo, and puppet shows, as well as swimming lessons for the children.

Sjulin's and Xaybanha's work has led to growing attendance at all family events. School staff perceive a deepening sense of community in the school generally, and at the family events in particular, as teachers and parents interact more and as connections among parents grow. Says Katie Barrett, principal of Sacramento Elementary:

> We had a family multicultural night last night that we had over 270 people come [to] . . . So many students made presentation boards of their family heritage. We had a dance performance by a Hmong dance group. Our own school's choir did a performance. It was a great night last night.
>
> I wouldn't be able to do those things if I didn't have the support of Jenna and Mani to help organize and put those things together, and having Jenna be able to provide resources like the backpack program and food pantry, Mani having her P–3 groups here. That's really bringing in families that someday will be at Sacramento, but they're already getting used to being in the school. It's not a place that's unfamiliar to them by the time their students, their kids, start here. I just think it's the most valuable thing ever. As a principal, I just feel I'm very, very lucky to have those resources for our staff and students and families.

Earl Boyles Elementary School—A Laboratory to Inspire Statewide Change

> We wanted to create a new vision for education that connects early learning, the primary grades, and health. This vision was conceived as community driven with deeply engaged families, and based on new partnerships to leverage public funding. Data-driven decision making and a culture of continuous quality improvement are central to our efforts.
>
> —Swati Adarkar, Children's Institute President and CEO (Takanishi, 2016, p. 93)

Earl Boyles Elementary is one of two P–3 learning laboratories supported by the Early Works initiative of the Children's Institute, an Oregon nonprofit. The Children's Institute promotes an expansive understanding of P–3 in Oregon that includes early learning, family engagement, and health supports. The impetus for developing the Early Works demonstration sites was to make the idea of a comprehensive P–3 system real—to give policymakers, including legislators and superintendents, and the broader education community something to "look at, see, touch, and experience," says Dana Hepper, Children's Institute Director of Policy and Programs.

With the support of a voter-approved bond and private donations, Earl Boyles added an early learning wing and neighborhood center to its facility, complete with a vegetable garden and an early childhood playground. Earl Boyles now serves as an illustrative example of a P–3 community school that **combines a strong academic program for its largely low-income student population with on-site programs for infants, toddlers, prekindergarten children, and elementary school children; extensive collaboration with community partners in support of children and families; and deep partnerships with families.**

Earl Boyles has successfully implemented the David Douglas School District's successful Language for All approach to English language learning, a "push in" English language development model in which all students engage in explicit English language instruction (Williams & Garcia, 2015). David Douglas's teaming structure—including professional learning communities, a variety of progress-monitoring meetings, a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports team, and a site council—is central to how Earl Boyles operates as a school. According to Principal Ericka Guynes, "The team is the mechanism through which we look at data and make decisions here. We are really thoughtful about how we do that for all of our kids. Our staff is aware of that, and oftentimes they sit on a variety of committees and teams."

The Earl Boyles facility includes space for representatives from community agencies that support the school's children and families, including the community school site manager, a community health worker, and representatives from a financial capabilities program, a housing and family advocacy program, the Native American Youth and Family Center, and an infant and toddler play-and learn group. Families provided input into the design of the school facility, which includes a lending library operated by parent volunteers trained by the Multnomah County Library.

The school's prekindergarten classrooms are a collaboration between Head Start, Early Intervention, and the district, each of which funds a third of the costs. All teachers are dual-certified in early childhood and special education, and all classrooms meet Head Start performance standards. The prekindergarten teachers have recently begun monthly vertical team meetings with kindergarten teachers. Different community organizations operate play-and-learn groups for children ages 0–3 and their families in a space designed for this age group, and Earl Boyles has recently begun working with these programs as a group to engage in shared learning.

Earl Boyles has cultivated a particularly strong and vibrant parent group, Padres Unidos/Parents United, which began as a group for Latino parents but is now working with translators and becoming a multicultural group for the whole community. The group organizes regular family nights, and they now incorporate academics into these events—fifth graders recently did presentations on the importance of reading at home and shared best practices on reading to children.

Earl Boyles and the Children's Institute have trained four bilingual community ambassadors who meet bi-weekly with the school's community health worker and provide additional connections and support for the school community. In response to a 49% food insecurity rate, parent volunteers staff an on-site food bank; former students who are now in high school return to volunteer as well. The school takes pride in creating a welcoming environment, with pleasant music playing on food bank day.

Principal Guynes reports that the school's kindergarten benchmark data have improved to their highest rate ever. Kindergarteners who complete prekindergarten at Earl Boyles score significantly better than school, district, and state averages on interpersonal skills and knowledge of letter sounds, and better than state and district averages on self-regulation skills. In the 2014–15 school year, 73% of kindergartners met mid-year benchmarks—a significant increase from previous years (Williams & Garcia, 2015).

Consistent with the Children's Institute's original vision for Earl Boyles, the school receives many visitors, including state and local officials; has influenced state policy through the KPI legislation; and has been profiled in several publications on innovative early childhood projects (Manship et al., 2016; Williams & Garcia, 2015).

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan in Metro Omaha, Nebraska: Home Visiting, Family Support, and Instructional Alignment

> Our basic belief, drawn from the research of the past half century, is that persistent efforts in the early years will result in persistence of long-term effects for children.
>
> —Samuel J. Meisels, Founding Executive Director, Buffett Early Childhood Institute[26]

The Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan in Metro Omaha is a collaboration among the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, the superintendents of the 11 school districts that make up the Learning Community, and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska. The Learning Community is an 11-district structure the Nebraska Legislature put in place in 2007 to address achievement gaps in innovative ways throughout the Greater Metropolitan Omaha area while reducing conflicts over district boundaries. The Superintendents' Plan was developed in response to legislation (LB 585) passed in 2013 that directed the Learning Community Coordinating Council to enact an early childhood program created by the Metro Omaha superintendents for young children living in high concentrations of poverty, with the goal of reducing or eliminating social, cognitive, and achievement gaps.

The Learning Community funds the plan, including the support positions described below, through a half-cent levy, which results in annual funding of approximately $2.9 million per year. The Learning Community contracts with the Buffett Early Childhood Institute to support the plan's implementation.
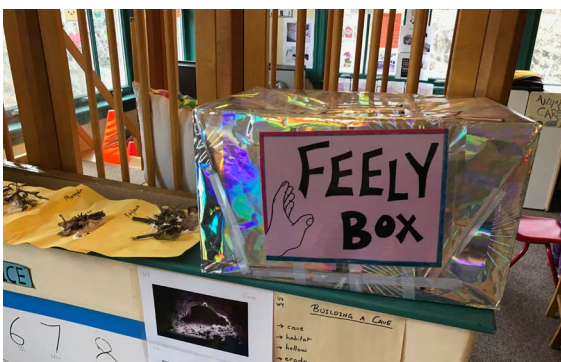
The Superintendents' Plan includes three interrelated opportunities for early childhood programming and capacity-building by school districts and their community partners: Professional Development for All, Customized Assistance (for participating districts), and Full Implementation of the School as Hub for Birth–Grade 3 Approach, a pilot in 10 elementary schools across the region.

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26 Buffett Early Childhood Institute. (2016, November). *Our First Three Years* (p. 59). Retrieved from https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/-/media/beci/docs/buffett-institute-three-year-report-pdf.pdf?la=en

The pilot schools all serve low-income children. The Superintendents' Plan is guided by six "big ideas":

- Birth Through Grade 3
- School as Hub
- Developmental Change
- Parent and Family Support
- Professional Growth and Support
- Persistence

"Evidence assures us that the earlier we begin working with children and families placed at risk, and the more persistent, consistent, and well-designed our efforts are, the more likely it is that children will be launched on a path toward life success."

By "developmental change," the Superintendents' Plan means, "Sustained learning does not occur in isolated fragments." By "persistence": "Evidence assures us that the earlier we begin working with children and families placed at risk, and the more persistent, consistent, and well-designed our efforts are, the more likely it is that children will be launched on a path toward life success" (Buffett Early Childhood Institute, 2017, pp. 8-9).

The aim of the School as Hub for Birth–Grade 3 approach is to build a continuum of supports for children's learning and family engagement, beginning at birth and extending through grade 3 and beyond. The pilot includes three components: home visiting for children from birth through age 3, high-quality prekindergarten for three- and four-year-olds, and aligned kindergarten through grade 3 for five- to eight-year-olds.

Funded by the Learning Community, each pilot school hires a full-time home visitor who supports families with children ages 0–3 and a family facilitator who supports families with children ages 3–8. These two positions report to the school principal. Each school is also supported by an educational facilitator who functions as an instructional preK–3 coach and who supports teachers in improving and aligning academic and social-emotional learning. Each educational facilitator serves two schools (working half-time at each), and this position reports to the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. The home visitors and family facilitators receive coaching from a Buffett Institute specialist and meet in role-alike communities of practice each month. Site visits and interviews at 5 of the 10 pilot schools suggest that the three positions work closely together as a team. Principals also receive coaching from a Buffett Institute program administrator and meet in a cross-district community of practice.

Each home visitor has a caseload of 15 families, whom they establish relationships with by conducting home visits and organizing parent-child interaction groups in the schools.

Home visitors work with their school colleagues to select families, using criteria aimed at identifying the youngest and neediest children. While some participating families may already have older children attending the elementary school, home visitors also work to identify mothers before they are part of the school community. (One home visitor was described by her colleagues as a "baby finder.") The home visitors use a home visiting program to structure their home visits, and this component of their work begins with a needs assessment and input from the family regarding what specific needs and interests they would like supported. Several principals remarked on the importance of choosing the right individual to fill the home visitor position, noting that the ability of the home visitor to recruit families, develop relationships, and foster trust with them is crucial.

The home visitor and family facilitator collaborate on organizing two parent-child interaction groups each month: one for children ages 0–3 and their families, and one for children ages 3–4 and their families. In addition to helping each other staff the groups, this arrangement allows the family facilitator to start to get to know families before the children turn 3, and for the home visitor to maintain contact after children turn 3, thus improving the transition experience. Through the interaction groups, the home visitors and family facilitators develop relationships and trust with families and are then better able to connect families to needed resources, as well as to other families for peer connections and support.

"There are a lot of resources. It's just, a lot of the families struggle with not knowing . . . those are available. It's the biggest thing."

Both positions play important roles in coordinating resources and comprehensive services for families, much like the site managers in Multnomah County and the family liaisons in Normal, Illinois. In Metro Omaha, home visitors and family facilitators connect families to health and mental health resources, help families navigate bureaucracies such as WIC, organize trips to libraries, and address food insecurity through free farmers markets or food pantry programs. Family facilitators send books home in backpacks every Friday. The DC West Elementary School runs cooking and nutrition classes that have become very popular with its families. Echoing part of the rationale for site managers in community schools, one family facilitator shared, "There are a lot of resources. It's just, a lot of the families struggle with not knowing . . . those are available. It's the biggest thing."

The home visitors and family facilitators make a special effort to connect families to one another, encouraging peer connections and peer groups. Mothers at Gomez Elementary reach out to new parent-child interaction group members and share advice about pediatricians, child-rearing, and community resources. The parents at Sandoz Elementary asked the school to organize Friday morning coffees so they could socialize with one another more regularly. Sandoz has also connected grandparents who are raising grandchildren with one another, creating an informal support group.

The School as Birth–Grade 3 Hub pilot home visitors and family facilitators are part of each school's staff and, for instance, share lunch duty responsibilities with their colleagues. Principals emphasize that this is important in helping these staff develop relationships with teachers. The home visitors and family facilitators are also visible presences when helping families drop off children in the mornings, further cementing these relationships. They are often the first members of the school community to know when a mother is expecting another child.

In the Metro Omaha pilot, the home visitors and family facilitators play the roles most closely related to the School as Hub focus of this chapter, but the educational facilitator position is also a core part of the pilot's approach and an important member of each pilot school's Birth–Grade 3 team. The educational facilitators are charged with supporting teachers and instructional alignment and quality in the elementary schools. Their work is driven by each school's school improvement plan and the issues that the school leadership have determined to be instructional priorities.

- All the educational facilitators support individual teachers, using results from the CLASS assessment in ongoing coaching conversations.[27]

- One educational facilitator is supporting school implementation of the Omaha Public School's *Transforming Kindergarten* initiative (discussed further in Chapter 2), while also working with teachers on increasing classroom opportunities for student talk.

- Several educational facilitators are facilitating an increased focus on social-emotional learning and the integration of social-emotional learning with academic instruction.

- The educational facilitator often runs each school's monthly Birth–Grade 3 team meeting and in some cases is considered part of the school's leadership team, sitting on various school committees.

As a result of their participation in the pilot project, several schools are including strategies targeting children ages 0–4 in their school improvement plans. Several principals of Metro Omaha's pilot hub schools suggest that they think of themselves as leaders of prenatal- or birth-through-fifth grade schools. The principal of DC West Elementary School says that **"children are part of DC West from the time they are born,"** and the principal of Gomez Elementary expresses similar feelings. Dawn Marten, principal of Sandoz Elementary, states:

> From the moment you walk in that door all the way to our fifth grade classrooms, from our home visiting families and our youngest Tigers [the school mascot] in the area, they learn here.

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[27] From the website of the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia (https://curry.virginia.edu/classroom-assessment-scoring-system): "The Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ (CLASS™) . . . is an observational instrument to assess classroom quality in preK–grade 12 classrooms. It describes multiple dimensions of teaching that are linked to student achievement and development and has been validated in over 2,000 classrooms."
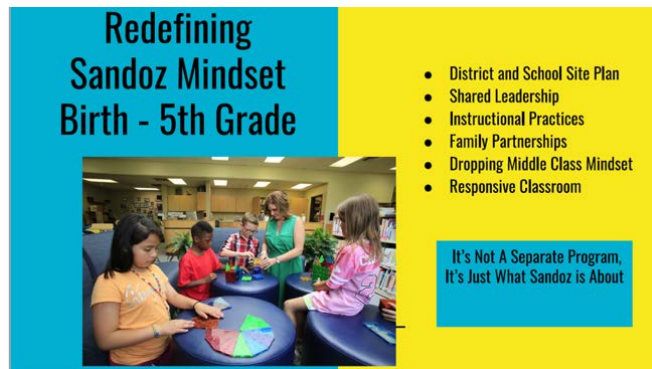
The staff at Sandoz Elementary emphasize that becoming a Birth–Grade 3 Hub pilot school has changed their mindset. Marten introduces herself as the principal of a Birth Through Fifth Grade school and adds, "This is just how we do business here at Sandoz." Sandoz has re-organized its library to include a more welcoming family space. The children in the school understand the broadened scope of the school as well—they hear announcements of activities for younger children and frequently suggest to parents and school staff that their younger siblings come to play-and-learn activities.

Like several other hub schools, including Earl Boyles and Sugar Creek, Principal Marten of Sandoz Elementary reports that many families are making great efforts to keep their children at Sandoz, even when they move from their current housing, and Marten has seen Sandoz's student mobility numbers decline.

John Campin, principal of Gomez Elementary, made a point of shadowing his home visitor on home visits one day. This turned out to be such an important personal learning experience for him that he and his home visitor led a school staff meeting to share their experiences. It was also key to changing Campin's perspective on the school's mission and the importance of early childhood education. The principal is playing a key leadership role in attempting to establish a large, multipurpose early childhood center next door to Gomez Elementary—a collaboration between the Omaha Public Schools, a community health center, the Learning Community, and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. When asked about the implications of having a home visitor reporting to him in his school, Campin replies,

> I guess, when I first think about it, I just think of the future . . . it will be exciting when we see those little ones in kindergarten and when they leave in fourth grade, where they're at and what we've all done in those kids' lives and their families' lives to get them where they're at.

Researchers at the Buffett Institute and at two other centers at the University of Nebraska are conducting a multi-year evaluation of the Superintendents' Plan and of the 10

pilot schools in particular. The 2016–17 report presents findings from the second year of implementation (Buffett Early Childhood Institute, 2017):

- In the qualitative component of the report, evaluators found that the plan is widely embraced by the 10 school sites, that participants have high levels of awareness that early childhood begins at birth and continues through third grade, and that schools are placing more emphasis on family partnerships and community connections. Families report that their experiences with teachers are positive and that their relationship with their child's school is collaborative.

- In the quantitative component, evaluators found that children are demonstrating age-appropriate levels of development and change and gains in vocabulary, general academic skills, social-emotional skills, and executive function skills. The evaluators note, "Particularly encouraging is the percentage of children progressing beyond the lowest percentile ranks on each measure over time" (p. 5). CLASS scores in K–3 classrooms have improved, with the largest gains seen in instructional support (which typically has the lowest scores of the three CLASS domains).

Schools as Hubs for Early Childhood Centers and Family Childcare Providers

In addition to serving as hubs for children and families directly, elementary schools can also function as First 10 hubs for early childhood centers and other early childhood organizations.[28] Two examples illustrate how First 10 School Hubs can play this role:

- The regional Blue Mountain Early Learning Hub in Eastern Oregon supports professional learning teams (PLTs) of educators—anchored by an elementary school—focused on family engagement, alignment, kindergarten transition, and cross-sector professional learning.

- The Lowell (Massachusetts) model creates neighborhood clusters that include a school, early childhood centers, and family childcare providers and supports the clusters with an aligned system of assessment tools for both within-sector and cross-sector communities of practice.

BLUE MOUNTAIN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TEAMS

The Blue Mountain Early Learning Hub is one of Oregon's 16 regional hubs that receive KPI grants. The Blue Mountain Hub serves three very rural counties in the eastern part of the state. With the KPI funding, the Hub has supported a number of PLTs across the three counties for over three years. PLTs consist of early educators from an anchor school,

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[28] Chapter 3 includes additional examples of collaboration between school districts and community-based early childhood providers in First 10 Community Partnerships that do not employ the school-as-hub model.

Head Start programs, community childcare providers, and in some cases family childcare providers. The Hub organizes two-day professional learning conferences in the fall and the spring; each PLT also meets monthly for approximately an hour. A Hub staff member helps to coordinate and facilitate the monthly meetings and organizes cross-site classroom observations.

The PLTs work to increase alignment between prekindergarten and early elementary school, engage in joint professional development, and support the use of the *Conscious Discipline* classroom management approach, a program that emphasizes social-emotional learning and self-regulation. (One of the early PLTs had success with *Conscious Discipline*, which caught the interest of the other teams; in response, the Hub rolled out materials and training to all participating PLT educators.)

Participants say that the structured collaboration they experience in the PLTs gives them "a sense of shared purpose, mutual respect, and collaboration" and "fosters greater cross-sector understanding" (Mitchell, Burton, Green, Patterson, & Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services, 2017). PLTs have increased the alignment of curricula and instructional practices and led to both positive behavioral changes in children and a reduction in problematic child behaviors, due to the use of the *Conscious Discipline* program. Participants also report implementing new strategies in a number of areas, including aligning assessments, differentiating instruction, literacy teaching, and math teaching (Green et al., 2017; Mitchell, Burton, et al., 2017; Mitchell, Green, Burton, Reid, & Patterson, 2017).

Participants say that the structured collaboration they experience in the PLTs gives them "a sense of shared purpose, mutual respect, and collaboration" and "fosters greater cross-sector understanding."

THE LOWELL MODEL: NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Spurred by a Birth Through Third Grade partnership grant from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, the city of Lowell developed a school hub model that includes significant collaboration between the school district, elementary schools, early childhood centers, and family childcare providers.[29]

Lowell formed a broad leadership alignment team to pursue a community-wide school readiness agenda, comprising elementary school principals, leaders of center-based programs and Head Start programs, representatives from family childcare systems, and members of the Lowell Early Childhood Department.

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[29] For more information on the Lowell model, see Jacobson, 2014a, 2014b, and 2016.

The Lowell partnership also developed a pilot focused on two (and eventually three) low-income neighborhoods. Each neighborhood cluster included an elementary school, a community-based early childhood center, and family childcare providers.

As part of the pilot, CLASS observations were conducted in all participating family childcare settings, community-based centers, and elementary school classrooms, and the results were used to inform professional development opportunities and school improvement plans.

During the first phase of the project, family childcare providers and center-based prekindergarten programs worked in separate communities of practice with a coach, using environmental rating scale tools to frame professional learning around quality improvement. During the second phase, each neighborhood formed a cross-sector community of practice that developed a common approach to family engagement to be implemented across all settings. Participants valued the communities of practice during both phases, and the cross-sector communities in Phase 2 fostered new ties among schools, early childhood centers, and family childcare providers.

Systems of Support for First 10 School Hubs

The Coalition of Community Schools promotes the idea of a "system of community schools," referring to communities and school districts that develop the infrastructure to support a number of schools throughout a community (Melaville, Jacobson, & Blank, 2011). Multnomah County provides such a system of support to community schools through the

SUN Service System and its network of contracted community organizations that support community school site managers. It supplements this system for the P–3 pilot through early childhood personnel who support the P–3 coordinators. The Buffet Early Childhood Institute plays a similar role in Metro Omaha, supporting specialists who provide coaching not only for teachers, but also for principals, home visitors, and family facilitators. The Institute also organizes communities of practice for principals, home visitors, and family facilitators. Cincinnati serves as another good example of a community that has developed a robust system of support for community schools and that is piloting a First 10 approach through an early childhood resource coordinator role.

CINCINNATI'S COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

The Cincinnati Public Schools are all community schools, known as Community Learning Centers (CLCs), and most have full-time resource coordinators. Cincinnati turned to the CLC model in the late 1990s during a period of dramatically declining school enrollment. The city and the district embarked on a robust multi-year community outreach effort that led to a long-term plan for rebuilding the schools. As a result of this plan, Cincinnati has designed space in many schools for community participation and for community partners who provide a range of supports to children, youth, and families.

Community partners who support the CLCs convene in citywide networks, organized by the specific type of supports (health, behavioral health, after-school, etc.) they provide, to work on the quality and consistency of their services.

Today, community engagement continues to be a high priority in Cincinnati's CLCs. The focus of each CLCs varies, depending on the needs and priorities of each neighborhood. Somewhat distinctively, CLCs in Cincinnati are not only located in low-income neighborhoods but also serve affluent families— again, tailoring their community partnerships to meet the needs of their families.

The Cincinnati Public Schools support CLCs through a Community School Partnership manager. Community partners who support the CLCs convene in citywide networks, organized by the specific type of supports (health, behavioral health, after-school, etc.) they provide, to work on the quality and consistency of their services. These networks play an important role in Cincinnati's system of support for CLCs.

Similar to the P–3 pilot in the SUN community schools in Multnomah County, Cincinnati's CLCs are now expanding to serve as hubs for children before they enter kindergarten. The district has begun increasing the number of prekindergarten programs housed in elementary schools, giving younger children access to the same supports as K–12 students, including health clinics and vision and dental services. Further, a local nonprofit, the Community Learning Center Institute, has begun piloting early childhood resource coordinators at CLCs who support families with young children to ensure that they also have access to CLC resources. These coordinators, supported currently with private funding, work in collaboration with local community partners to improve school readiness and the transition to kindergarten.

First 10 School Hub Design Considerations and Challenges

The initiatives in Normal, Multnomah County, and Metro Omaha all support family coordinator roles, yet each community has structured how these positions support families with young children differently:

- In addition to comprehensive supports, such as mental health consultation, trauma-informed care, and food programs, the family coordinators in Normal devote much of their time to home visits with families who have children enrolled in the school, with a special emphasis on prekindergarten children.

- The P–3 coordinators in Multnomah County's P–3 pilot focus on reaching out to culturally specific groups, organizing multiple weekly play-and-learn groups for young children and their parents, and supporting family childcare providers through play-and-learn groups and training opportunities. They also organize field trips and engage families in events with the broader school community.

- The staff in Metro Omaha's School as Hub for Birth–Grade 3 approach organize two parent-child interaction groups each month, one for children ages 0–3 and one for children ages 3–5. Each pilot school incorporates home visits for 15 children ages 0–3 and their families, and each school is supported by a half-time educator facilitator.

Likewise, Multnomah County, the Blue Mountain region, and Lowell demonstrate different ways of supporting early childhood centers and/or family childcare providers.

In addition to these variations in the structure of the hub facilitation roles, the initiatives also tailor their work in other ways. Most address food insecurity with Friday food backpacks, food pantries, and/or free or low-cost farmers markets. Most connect families to health or mental health resources—whether on-site in the school or through referrals. Some are fortunate in having spaces in which to host children and families for meetings and events; others make do without dedicated space. SUN and the community-based agencies it contracts with have placed great priority on reaching culturally specific groups and including all members of their highly diverse communities in multicultural activities. The Buffett Institute supports the new roles created in the Metro Omaha pilot through staffed communities of practice that encourage exchange of best practices and problem-solving collaboration for home visitors and family facilitators. Networks of community school partner organizations—organized by the types of services they provide—promote quality and consistency in Cincinnati.

The variation in the approaches discussed in this chapter present communities with a range of models to consider as they design and implement their own strategies to promote quality, alignment, and integrated supports across the early childhood–elementary school continuum (discussed further in the Conclusion).

As one would expect, the leaders of the First 10 School Hub initiatives described in this chapter encountered a range of challenges associated with bridging early childhood and elementary school education, deepening family engagement, providing comprehensive services for children and families, and changing organizations. These challenges include:

- Engaging district leaders in First 10 work and maintaining district commitment to First 10 priorities[30]

- In multi-district initiatives, tailoring First 10 work to individual district priorities[31]

- Changing teaching and learning practices, especially in grades 1–3

- Deepening the awareness of disparities in opportunities for children of color, and then addressing these disparities

- Engaging principals in systematically incorporating family engagement and comprehensive services into the life of elementary schools, and moving beyond introductory family engagement activities

- Incorporating family coordinators into the life of schools—in particular, successfully incorporating coordinators of color in elementary schools with majority white teaching staffs[32]

- Deepening principals' knowledge of early childhood education

- Addressing leadership turnover, including of principals

- Engaging and establishing trust with all families

In all of the approaches, implementers use the First 10 School Hub model to complement effective and aligned teaching and learning in classrooms. Research on effective elementary school education strongly supports the idea that comprehensive supports alone are not adequate to the task of significantly improving educational outcomes for low-income children (Bryk et al., 2010). How school districts and elementary schools improve teaching and learning in all classrooms while paying special attention to the early grades is the topic of Chapter 2.

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[30] For more on engaging districts in early learning, see *Why the K–12 World Hasn't Embraced Early Learning* (Regenstein, 2019).

[31] Regarding building on district priorities, see Schilder, 2018.

[32] In some of the school hubs discussed in this chapter, family coordinators of color have become valued members of their school communities and provide leadership on cultural competence and addressing the needs of diverse students. In others, family coordinators of color have not yet been fully integrated into their school communities.

Improving Teaching and Learning in Prekindergarten Through Grade 3 Classrooms

> The challenge is how to unite early childhood, elementary, and special education in PreK-3rd classrooms so their power to transform young lives is fully realized. (Clifford, Crawford, García, & Cobb, 2014, p. 2)

When communities set about improving and aligning preK–3 teaching and learning, they encounter two fundamental pedagogical questions: **What should children learn in early-grades classrooms, and (especially) how should they learn it?** (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; National Research Council, 2000).

At issue is a perceived divide between what is sometimes referred to as an *early childhood paradigm* that prioritizes student-centered learning, play-based approaches, and social-emotional learning, and an *academic paradigm* that emphasizes literacy and math skills and a preponderance of teacher-centered pedagogy. In recent years, under pressure to improve scores on third grade tests, many districts have gravitated toward more academic approaches in kindergarten, sometimes pushing first grade practices down into kindergarten (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). According to Richard Clifford and colleagues (2014), "The result is that many children have been forced to leap a pedagogical gulf at a critical period in their development when seamless transitions between environments can be the key to early school success" (p. 3). Many early educators are concerned that this push toward academics may results in "rote or shallow" instruction and less time for play and social-emotional learning, leading to classrooms that are "overwhelming, stressful, or boring" for young children (Bassok, Claessens, & Engel, 2014, p. 24).

Recent research has made clear how important social-emotional learning is to academic, health, and life success, which has led to much interest from both practitioners and policymakers (Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). Journalist Paul Tough's widely read books on social-emotional learning (see, for example, Tough, 2012) have highlighted economist James Heckman's findings on non-cognitive skills (Heckman, 2013) and Angela Duckworth's research on grit (Duckworth, 2016), among other relevant research. A 2011 meta-analysis of studies on social-emotional learning found that social-emotional learning produces significant positive effects, including "improvements in academic performance, SEL [social-emotional learning] skills, prosocial behaviors, and attitudes toward self and others (e.g., self-esteem, bonding to school), as well as reductions in conduct problems and emotional distress (e.g., anxiety, and depression)" (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015, p. 12).

Many educators point out that academic learning, social-emotional learning, and developmentally appropriate practice need not be in conflict (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2014). According to Bassok and colleagues (2014):

> This presumed dichotomy—that preschool and kindergarten must either be geared toward play and socioemotional development or focused on rigorous academic instruction—is false. . . . Rather than focusing on whether academic content has a place in early-childhood classrooms, let's focus on how to teach it in a way that is tailored to young learners. Let's focus on creating engaging, fun, developmentally appropriate learning experiences for all kindergartners, acknowledging the importance of embedding enriching language and numeracy experiences within those environments. (p. 24)

Similarly, Deborah Stipek (2017a) suggests that the dichotomy can be addressed through **playful instruction**: instruction that is intentional, goal-oriented, aligned to standards, and playful in the sense that children enjoy it.

Recent research has also shown the importance of oral language development, vocabulary, and subject-matter content in science and social studies (Lesaux, 2012, 2013) and math (Duncan et al., 2007). Also critical is using informal and formal assessments to identify student skill levels and then differentiate instruction accordingly. Teachers and administrators working on improving preK–3 teaching and learning in communities around the country are attempting to respond to this new research, as well as to the Stipek team's findings regarding alignment across the grades (i.e., the more that teachers know about the skills students learned the previous year, the better able they are to explicitly build on those skills) (Stipek et al., 2017).

First 10 initiatives typically lead to a rethinking of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the early grades, along the lines suggested by this research.[33] The school, district, and community efforts described in this study suggest that improving preK–3 teaching and learning requires three broad tasks:

- Schools and school districts must establish the early years as a priority and work to **align prekindergarten and K–3 education**. This is a significant challenge within many elementary schools—one that becomes more challenging when community-based early childhood centers are included.

- As a result of prioritizing and attending to the early grades, schools and districts often realize that to be most effective with young children, they need to **make substantive changes in their instructional approaches**, such as adopting developmentally appropriate, student-centered practices (e.g., exploratory centers and guided play

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[33] For further reference on early-grades teaching and learning, see also Chapter 5: Improving Instruction in *FirstSchool: Transforming PreK–3rd Grade for African American, Latino, and Low-Income Children* (Ritchie & Gutmann [Eds.], 2014). See *FirstSchool* also for a strengths-based approach to ensuring the success of children of color.

in prekindergarten and kindergarten), and placing more emphasis on vocabulary, content knowledge, higher-order questioning and thinking, and social-emotional learning in all grades (Manship et al., 2016).

- Alignment and developmentally appropriate practices are necessary but not sufficient by themselves to substantially improve teaching and learning and to improve outcomes for low-income children. Elementary schools and school districts also need to **institutionalize coherent schoolwide strategies of professional learning and instructional improvement**.

The collaboration between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers at Sugar Creek Elementary School (see sidebar) is a good example of one school's efforts to achieve these three tasks. Other school and community examples include the following:

- San Francisco's experience integrating prekindergarten classrooms into schools
- Omaha's work on better integrating prekindergarten into elementary schools into and transforming kindergarten practice
- Boston's development of an aligned, developmentally appropriate, and standards-based preK–grade 2 curriculum, coaching, and professional development model
- In Oregon, Cherry Park Elementary School's implementation of a coherent package of strategies that includes setting early learning as a priority, instituting schoolwide improvement systems, and providing comprehensive supports

Each is discussed in more detail below.

RECIPROCAL LEARNING AT SUGAR CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

As described in Chapter 1, Sugar Creek Elementary School in Normal, Illinois, brought together its prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers for a series of discussions about expectations, and then placed both groups of teachers together on the same hallway. In response to an uptick in behavior problems in kindergarten, a group of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers began to meet to examine the data and conduct cross-grade observations. The coordinator of the district's early learning program, Kris Pennington, describes these visits as "eye opening." Kindergarten teachers were surprised by the extent of the literacy instruction they observed in prekindergarten classrooms and by how intentional the early learning teachers were in facilitating play to promote learning.

As a result of this professional collaboration, an expert coach is now working with prekindergarten teachers on turning themes into investigations focused on big essential questions as well as on open-ended questioning and concept development. District leaders have worked with the kindergarten teachers to organize a kindergarten pilot project on play-based learning. The pilot team has read books on play together, discussed ways to make play an "intentional" learning experience, and designed a 60-minute block for play. The participating teachers are very enthusiastic about the new block so far, and are particularly pleased with how the students, with some facilitation support from their teachers, are engaging in conversations and learning to work out problems at the free choice centers on their own.

Incorporating Prekindergarten Districtwide in San Francisco

> I've always liked the pre-K . . . To service the children in our neighborhood and then to have them just transition into our kindergarten was attractive and made sense, so that they start at Sheridan from the beginning and then come right on over. And we include pre-K in all that we do.
>
> —Dina Edwards, Principal, Sheridan Elementary School, San Francisco

In San Francisco, public school principals with prekindergarten classrooms must learn an additional set of regulations and procedures intended to ensure the safety of these very young children. As a result, not all principals are eager to take on prekindergarten classes. Yet from her earliest days as principal of Sheridan Elementary, Dina Edwards welcomed the opportunity to locate prekindergarten classrooms in the school. Sheridan now houses two special education prekindergarten classrooms, one general education prekindergarten classroom, and one "transitional" kindergarten classroom (a California designation for classrooms that serve children who are not quite old enough to meet the cutoff birthday date for kindergarten—September 1—but who will turn five by December 2).

Prekindergarten teachers at Sheridan collaborate with kindergarten teachers on aligning instructional practices and, for instance, have adapted practices and terminology used in kindergarten to their classrooms. The staff has worked collectively to visually map standards in grammar and parts of speech, math, and reading from prekindergarten through grade 5.

This alignment work took place within a larger context. In 2004, San Francisco voters called for universal preschool. In 2008, the district's superintendent identified the city's achievement gap as the district's biggest challenge and included preK–3 alignment as a priority in the district's 2008–2012 strategic plan (Nyhan, 2015). The district hired a new leader of its early education program and set about improving the prekindergarten program and aligning it with K–12 education, both within schools such as Sheridan Elementary and in stand-alone district-run early learning centers.

Prekindergarten classrooms housed in elementary schools are called *co-located sites*, distinguishing them from stand-alone programs but also suggesting two separate programs in the same location rather than one integrated whole. In prioritizing prekindergarten and launching a preK–3 initiative, the district identified a clear need to bridge "two worlds" and create "a seamless education experience" (Nyhan, 2015, p. 15) in which curriculum, instruction, and assessment are all aligned.

Building on the work of Sheridan Elementary, the Early Education Department has since implemented a number of related strategies at the district level:

- Aligning prekindergarten standards with the California K–12 Common Core-aligned standards

- Integrating prekindergarten into one overarching professional development system, using common coaching and instructional strategies across the grades

- Aligning pyramid behavioral models

- Extending the district's data-driven continuous improvement process to prekindergarten teaching teams

- Aligning formative assessments across prekindergarten and kindergarten

The district made a deliberate decision to focus first on improving and integrating district prekindergarten education. The Early Education Department is now beginning to collaborate with community-based early childhood centers on curriculum, instruction, and the transition to kindergarten (Nyhan, 2015).[34]

Transforming Kindergarten: From "Shorter Versions of Their Future Selves" to "Places Full of Joy"

The Omaha Public Schools is working to more fully integrate prekindergarten into elementary schools and to "transform" kindergarten across its 63 elementary schools. In her first three years as Director of Elementary Education, Donna Dobson has streamlined the district's approach to teaching literacy and math and has led two major initiatives to address the prekindergarten-kindergarten divide.

"We're saying that prekindergarten, Head Start, and kindergarten are as important as any other piece."

One initiative was straightforward: creating written curriculum and pacing guides for prekindergarten classrooms that mirror the guides the district provides for all other grades. Referencing education expert Robert Marzano (2003), Dobson says that the purpose of these guides is to provide a "guaranteed and viable" curriculum for all students throughout the district. The guides have symbolic value as well. In Dobson's words, "We're saying that prekindergarten, Head Start, and kindergarten are as important as any other piece."

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[34] Interview with Meenoo Yashar, Chief, Early Education Department, San Francisco Unified School District, January 10, 2018.

Luisa Palomo Hare, a kindergarten teacher and teacher leader in the district, reflects on the importance of these guides:

> I think so often, as a classroom teacher, pre-K was disconnected, right? Pre-K was in their own little land, and then everything, whether it was [professional development] or school initiatives, was K–6, K–5 . . . Regardless if you're a Head Start teacher or a pre-K teacher, you now have access to the same materials and support from our curriculum department. Instead of a pre-K teacher trying to piece things together and trying to figure out, "What does the pacing look like? What am I trying to introduce at what times of the year?", our central offices help streamline that for everybody . . . That really, I think, helps make it consistent for all of our students.
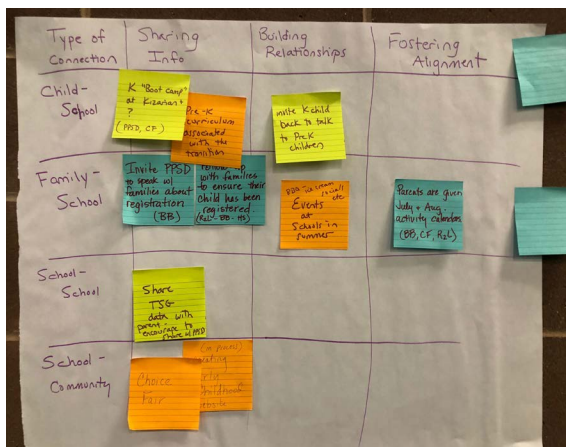
Palomo Hare also describes an early childhood conference that took place a few years ago in which a number of kindergarten teachers were complaining about the academic nature of kindergarten and about the district not trusting their professional judgment. Dobson stood up in the large meeting and said, "I'm here to support you. You need to know that I'm here with you." The kindergarten teachers appreciated Dobson's declaration, which led to another early learning initiative: an effort to transform kindergarten across the district.

To launch the Transforming Kindergarten initiative, Dobson, Palomo Hare, and other teachers formed a learning circle of 10 educators. They met twice a month for six months, read research articles compiled by central office staff, investigated best practices in reading and writing, and, in Palomo Hare's words, "tore apart everything about kindergarten." The goal of this work was to transform kindergarten from a place where kids are treated "like shorter versions of their future selves" into, as Palomo Hare says:

> . . . the place we knew kindergarten could be, a place full of joy, a place where students love learning and teachers love teaching, a place where teachers still felt like they were able to spend time on the floor playing with kids.

The kindergarten learning circle solicited input on its plans from approximately 100 kindergarten teachers and then created a *Kindergarten "Look Fors"* document that outlines best practices in literacy, math, the physical environment, and high-quality purposeful play, among other domains. The document was vetted by teachers and other curriculum experts and then shared with all district administrators.

Next, the learning circle tackled a bigger project: bringing "intentionality" to kindergarten play centers by creating an *Omaha Public Schools Guide for Play*, which includes a Play Pacing Guide and the "First 20 Days of Play." The guide outlines suggested activities, materials, questions, and vocabulary for classroom centers organized by four sequential Big Ideas, one for each quarter of the year: Connections, Our World, Construction, and Changes. These activities are aligned to Nebraska standards and the district's math and literacy goals. For each Big Idea, the guide provides essential questions (e.g., How and why do things change?), questions related to each content area (i.e., math, reading, writing, social studies, and science), and suggested literature. Palomo Hare expounds on the importance of questions for each content area:

> For every center, we talk about the purpose of the center, the materials of the center, what it would look like and sound like, but then something that we were really passionate about was putting higher-level questions in. . . . We have questions posted in each of the areas, and right when you walk in my room there's a note that says to any visitor, "You're going to see questions, and they're not for my kids, they're for you." They're for you who are new to my room to engage with my kids so that you don't just walk into the block center and say, "Hey champ, how's it going?" but instead you're able to really engage with students with high-level questions.

The guide also includes 20 lesson plans for the beginning of the year on how to do center time, how to introduce new centers, and how to introduce new materials to centers. Each lesson is organized into four parts—Whole-Group Modeling, Shared Practice, Guided and Independent Practice, and Share and Reflect—and includes suggested activities for each part. These lessons suggest that significant forethought and planning is required to successfully guide learning through play.

These lessons suggest that significant forethought and planning is required to successfully guide learning through play.

The learning team has made it a priority to involve kindergarten teachers at every step of their process, and they have now engaged a broad cross-section of colleagues in designing a kindergarten curriculum day in which teams of kindergarten teachers will present on best practices in kindergarten teaching and learning.

PreK–Grade 2 Curriculum, Coaching, and Professional Development in Boston

As Dobson and her colleagues were investigating these best practices, they used a video about Boston's kindergarten curriculum to show kindergarten teachers what intentionally structured and facilitated play tied to thematic units could look like. Dobson and a colleague also visited the Boston Public Schools (BPS) to learn about their early childhood curricula.

The impressive outcomes of BPS's *Focus on K1*[35] prekindergarten curriculum and coaching model have received much attention in early childhood circles (Bardige, Baker, & Mardell, 2018; Bornfreund & Loewenberg, 2018; Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Mongeau, 2016). The BPS Early Childhood Department has followed up on this work by supporting implementation of *Focus on K1* in community-based early childhood centers in the city and extending its curriculum and coaching model to kindergarten and grades 1 and 2, providing another important example of improving and aligning preK–3 teaching and learning.

During a visit in February 2018, students in the age-4 classroom at Paige Academy, a community-based early childhood center in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, were working at four different activity centers: one on building a cave, one on self-portraits, and two on classroom maps (this center was especially popular that week, so the teachers set up a second table for map-making). The centers were part of a thematic unit on "The World of Color," the fourth of six units explored throughout the year. At one table, children drew self-portraits while looking in mirrors; children at the map-making centers created maps with color-coded keys (a red X for treasure, blue for water, etc.), sometimes consulting the maps of the classroom, the city, the zoo, the state, and the United States taped onto the tables.
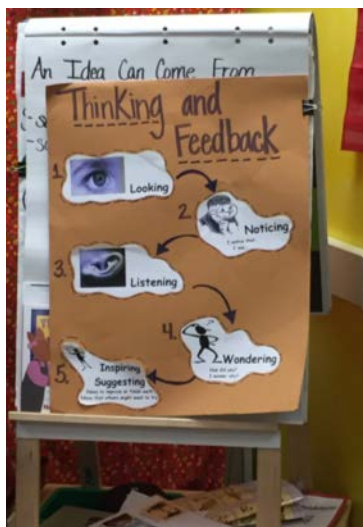
Thinking and Feedback chart from Traka Smith's kindergarten classroom at the Curley K–8 school

At the end of center time, an assistant teacher identified two students who agreed to present to the class about what they had done at their centers, using the Thinking and Feedback protocol they use every day to conclude center time. One girl, Kaisha, shared her self-portrait. Her classmates quietly looked at it (step 1) and then noted the eyebrows, the eyes, and the smile on Kaisha's face in her picture (step 2: Noticing). Students listened (step 3) as Kaisha described the picture, pointing to several features. One student asked what "the green thing" was, and another asked how Kaisha made the picture (step 4: Wondering). Kaisha explained the steps she took in drawing the picture. Finally, the children said they liked Kaisha's picture and suggested places where she could add more color (step 5: Inspiring and Suggesting).

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35 In Boston, prekindergarten for four-year-olds is called K1; kindergarten is called K2.

Paige Academy has been implementing BPS's *Focus on K1* prekindergarten curriculum for several years. The BPS Early Childhood Department created the curriculum after a study by the Wellesley Centers for Women found that many K1 classrooms throughout the district were characterized by low quality as measured by the ECERS-R, CLASS, and SELA tools (Bardige et al., 2018). The department integrated the *Opening the World of Learning* literacy curriculum and the *Building Blocks* math curriculum and added their own guidance materials to form a coherent whole.

Focus on K1 has several noteworthy features:

- Longer, more structured thematic units
- High-quality literature
- Three to four read-alouds of each book, with different purposes for each read-aloud
- Professional development focused on mathematical understanding (part of the *Building Blocks* curriculum)
- 60-minute centers connected to books on the current theme
- 15–20-minute small-group work[36]

The Early Childhood Department supports implementation of the curriculum with a robust set of coaching and professional development supports, drawing on the capacity of its large and highly competent early childhood staff.

A rigorous Harvard study of *Focus on K1* in BPS classrooms found large effects on literacy and math and small but significant effects on executive function. These findings are the largest positive effects of any large-scale (over 2,000 students) prekindergarten program in the United States (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). The study has received much attention from researchers, the press, and other communities in the United States and other countries (Bardige et al., 2018; Bornfreund & Loewenberg, 2018). On the strength of these results, BPS has supported approximately a dozen community-based programs in implementing the *Focus on K1* curriculum and professional development model.

Melissa Ryan is the lead teacher in a prekindergarten classroom at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Dorchester in Boston, Massachusetts. Although an employee of a community-based organization, Ryan has used BPS's prekindergarten curriculum since 2006.

Ryan appreciates the thematic organization of *Focus on K1*. Her students enjoy investigating the Big Ideas of each unit over a number of weeks, and Ryan believes that the sustained focus on a topic and its related vocabulary leads to deeper learning.

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[36] For more information on the *Focus on K1* curriculum, see "The Boston K1DS Project: Implementing a New Curriculum in Community-based Preschools," a post on *The P–3 Learning Hub* blog (https://p3learninghub.org/2014/03/18/the-boston-k1ds-project-implementing-a-new-curriculum-in-community-based-preschools/), and "Teaching a New Curriculum in East Boston (Boston K1DS at the East Boston YMCA #1)," a series of posts on the experience of a two community-based teachers implementing the curriculum (https://medium.com/@jacobsondl/teaching-a-new-curriculum-in-east-boston-9b1b13283256). Guidance documents for *Focus on K1* can be found on the BPS website (https://www.bpsearlylearning.org/).

The curriculum includes significant time for both small-group work and free choice centers. Ryan and her colleagues support the small groups and work with individuals on specific tasks during these times. The curriculum also helps Ryan "branch out" and pursue topics students are interested in, such as a study of Arctic animals as part of the unit on habitats.

Both Ryan and Mary Kinsella, director of the Boys and Girls Clubs' early education care program, believe that the connection with BPS has been important. Ryan says that now she and her colleagues know what BPS "is looking for from us," and "we know that [our curriculum] is melding into [their curriculum]." According to Ryan, kindergarten "has transformed too, and I think that's been a huge benefit for children." The collaboration has impacted not only Ryan's classroom but all the program's classrooms. According to Kinsella, **even the teachers of infants and toddlers are more intentional in monitoring student progress and, based on their observations, changing practice over the course of each year—making them more responsive to children's growth over time**.

Children in participating community-based early childhood centers who meet specific criteria (e.g., residency requirements) will be guaranteed admission into connected elementary schools.

BPS is now working on developing a Connector System in which community-based programs are linked to specific elementary schools. Children in participating community-based early childhood centers who meet specific criteria (e.g., residency requirements) will be guaranteed admission into connected elementary schools, easing family concerns about placement and promoting continuity for children, families, and teachers.

The responsibilities of the Early Childhood Department have grown over time, and it is now in charge of curriculum, coaching, and professional development for prekindergarten through grade 2. The Department numbers approximately 25 staff members.

Based in part on their experience of creating the K1 curriculum, the Department created a kindergarten curriculum and coaching model called *Focus on K2*, which is characterized by these features:

- 90-minute free choice interdisciplinary activity centers that begin with a brief but important "Introduction to Centers," in which new activities are described (and promoted) to students, and conclude with the Thinking and Feedback protocol

- Four thematic units: Our Community, Animals and Habitats, Construction, and Our Earth

- 50 minutes for work on foundational literacy skills, including phonics, whole-group shared reading, and literacy stations

- Approximately 10 minutes daily for story-telling and/or story-acting

- A math period using TERC math, the district's math program

- Emphasis on extended discourse and culminating projects for each unit

After developing *Focus on K2*, the Department returned to *Focus on K1* and revised it based on new research and lessons learned from developing the kindergarten curriculum. They replaced many of the read-aloud books with the aim of improving the quality of the literature, introduced the daily Thinking and Feedback protocol they developed for *Focus on K2*, and created more opportunities for projects within the units. In making these changes, they furthered the alignment between the two curricula; children who experience *Focus on K1* arrive in kindergarten familiar with the idea of providing and receiving feedback from peers and working on projects together.

The Early Childhood Department then collaborated with Harvard literacy expert Nonie Lesaux in designing *Focus on First*, a first grade curriculum, and is now piloting *Focus on Second*. In another example of alignment, after working with Lesaux on *Focus on First*, the Department revised *Focus on K2* and strengthened the emphasis on foundational literacy skills through the "Working on Words" component of the curriculum.

Early childhood researchers are excited about Boston's prekindergarten curriculum as an example of a "real life" curriculum that has been implemented on a large scale, one that is consistent with numerous experimental studies showing that curricula focusing on a specific skill area (e.g., literacy, math, self-regulation) have better results than "global curricula" (Jenkins & Duncan, 2017).

BPS's work on the *Focus on Early Learning* curricula illustrate one approach to improving quality in preK–3 teaching and learning: an emphasis on curriculum plus coaching and professional development. In addition, the *Focus on Early Learning* curricula are interdisciplinary in that the literacy components include science and social studies content (and the Early Childhood Department is working on further strengthening the science components). The curricula are designed by early childhood specialists and incorporate significant time for free choice, structured play, and exploration in centers in prekindergarten and kindergarten (and in "Studios" in first and second grade). The curricula are also designed with alignment in mind, and the flexibility of the small-group work and center time encourages differentiation, such that children who enter with *Focus on K1* skills can continue to advance, while students who did not have that experience can develop needed skills.

Focus on K2 is currently being evaluated, so its impact on learning is not yet clear, but kindergarten teachers are reporting gains in students' vocabulary development, discussion skills, questioning skills, and engagement in learning.

The efforts to improve teaching and learning in prekindergarten and the early grades in Boston, Normal, and Omaha are responses to the need to teach "academic" content in developmentally appropriate ways, and they offer initial "proof points" that integrated approaches are both possible and promising.

The Package: Focus on Early Learning, Schoolwide Improvement, and School as Hub

Kate Barker is the principal of Cherry Park Elementary School in the David Douglas School District, located in East Portland, Oregon. Approximately 75% of Cherry Park's students are economically disadvantaged, and 33% are English learners, speaking 26 different languages. Yet despite its high percentage of low-income students, Cherry Park's students perform better than the state average in reading and math, and significantly better (by 12–13 percentage points) than state-determined "like" schools.

Cherry Park's success is driven by three broad strategies: a focus on the early grades, disciplined attention to schoolwide instructional improvement, and the school-as-hub model.

Cherry Park's success is driven by three broad strategies: a focus on the early grades, disciplined attention to schoolwide instructional improvement, and the school-as-hub model. In this respect, it is a good example of the multidimensional nature of First 10 school improvement.

Barker and her colleagues at Cherry Park have placed a high priority on early education, partly in response to data indicating significant readiness gaps among entering kindergartners. Barker has advocated to the district to locate as many prekindergarten classes as possible in the building. She is motivated by the idea that the earlier children begin at Cherry Park, the more time the staff have to address gaps in learning.

Cherry Park houses four sections of LEAP prekindergarten. LEAP (Learning Experiences and Alternative Program for Preschoolers and Their Parents) is a classroom model supported by the University of Colorado that is designed for classes that combine autistic and typically developing children.[37] LEAP emphasizes a culture of inclusion and incorporates a range of practices to support all children's development, including structured routines, home visits, positive connections, explicit practice of communication skills, and clear visuals. Each child with special needs is assigned three typically developing friends as support throughout the academic year, and Barker maintains the foursomes as the children transition to kindergarten. Barker has been a vocal champion of the LEAP model and presents on it with the lead classroom teacher at various conferences.

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[37] For more on LEAP, see "LEAP Preschool Model" (https://morgridge.du.edu/pele-center/leap/).

Barker has also devoted extra time to improving the quality of kindergarten teaching and learning by collaborating with the kindergarten teaching team. She explains her commitment to the early grades:

> Our state assessment scores, they don't simply belong to third graders, fourth graders, and fifth graders. They belong to all of us. And so, part of the reason [we're successful] is that we're concentrating on it early. We have explicit systems, structures, strategies, and a whole lot of love starting when the children are 3 and continuing throughout the grades.

Barker is the kind of leader who cheerfully walks around the school hugging children, and she has organized a "cheerleading club" of staff assigned to individual students who are working on increasing their positive connections to both adults and students. Each participating staff member, including herself, touches base with his or her assigned student at least once a day to provide encouragement or, in Barker's terms, to "talk them up and love them up." Yet Barker is also a believer in systems, routines, protocols, and high expectations for students and staff.

Barker's combined commitment to personal warmth, personal and organizational supports for whole-child development, high expectations, and clear systems infuses the structures the school has developed, including teacher collaboration, the use of data to improve teaching and learning, Response to Intervention, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and a vigilant attendance committee. Grade-level teams at Cherry Park have common planning time every day, and teachers participate in scheduled collaboration meetings twice a week in which they examine data and plan lessons. Vertical team meetings between adjacent grades take place monthly.

Barker describes the lesson planning practices she has introduced into each team's professional learning team (PLT) time:

> During our PLT time, we look at data, we pick standards, we micro-plan a particular lesson, we talk about what pre-assessment are we going do, what post-assessment we are going to do, and what kind of feedback we will provide our students in between.

Like all teachers in the David Douglas School District, Cherry Park's teachers meet for "100% meetings" three times a year to discuss each student, monitor his or her progress, identify skills for that student to work on, and make decisions about flexible groupings and the use of the school's daily 30-minute intervention slot. Teachers also meet every six weeks for "20% meetings," in which they review the progress of every student below the benchmark in reading and math.

Like Earl Boyles and Sacramento Elementary, Cherry Park is a SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods, a partnership between the county and six school districts) community school in Multnomah County, Oregon. Cherry Park runs the two-week Early Kindergarten Transition program in the summer and participates in a Multnomah County home visiting project, in which teachers are trained and supported to do home visits to build relationships with families. Barker considers the home visiting program to be "a game changer." She describes the experience of being a SUN community school:

> I think partnerships are key in order to support the whole child and the whole family. It's really, really important that our families are feeling connected to our school and that they're feeling a deep partnership with us in growing their child. It all starts with relationships, and it ends with relationships. I am constantly encouraging staff to create positive connections with both students and their families. Many of our parents did not have a positive school experience, so we need to work diligently to shift their mindset that our school is their home too.

Heather Mackris is Cherry Park's SUN site manager. (SUN contracts with nonprofit agencies that hire and support the full-time community school site managers in consultation with principals.) She runs the after-school program, which, in addition to a range of fun activities, now includes a math intervention session. This is especially helpful for those children who use the school-day intervention time for literacy support but also need time to address gaps in math. Mackris sits on Cherry Park's attendance and behavior committees, where she is able to provide additional information about the children who participate in the after-school program. She also attends the parent site council meetings and culturally specific parent groups and supports parents in advocating for their children.

Cherry Park houses an outside counseling agency, which, as Barker notes, eliminates a transportation barrier that would be an obstacle for many of the school's families. The school offers food insecurity supports in the form of an Urban Gleaners program and the Oregon Food Bank, and holds financial literacy and family cooking classes that focus on meal preparation, nutrition, and cost-effectiveness. After the 2016 presidential election, Cherry Park started a Latino parent group in response to parent concerns, including about potential bullying of immigrant children. Cherry Park has also started a baby-toddler play group, during which Mackris does art projects with the parents, includes a time for family reading, invites guest speakers, and works with a colleague from her agency to offer family cooking classes to the parents of babies and toddlers.

Barker summarizes her overall approach:

> It all starts with high expectations and meaningful relationships. Next comes developing systems and structures. It is important to create predictable protocols and [establish] the predictability of, "We're going try this, and we're going really give it our all, and then we'll see if it works." It is one thing to develop a comprehensive plan, but the real movement comes with *knowing* your students and your staff.

The Multifaceted Nature of School Improvement

Cherry Park's combined strategies, the CPC P–3 model at Sugar Creek Elementary, and Metro Omaha's School as Birth–Grade 3 Hub model all bring together a focus on improving and aligning the early grades, schoolwide improvement practices, strong partnerships with families, and extensive supports for children and families through partnerships with community-based organizations. This multifaceted approach is supported by a rigorous longitudinal study of 200 Chicago elementary schools that has become influential in the field (Bryk, 2010). The Chicago study evaluated the factors differentiating Chicago elementary schools that significantly improved achievement for low-income students from those that did not. The researchers found that the high-performing schools were characterized by five "Essential Supports"—"essential" in the sense that only schools that provided all **five supports**, rather than only some of them, were successful at raising achievement for low-income children (Bryk, 2010; Bryk et al., 2010). The five Essential Supports are:

- A coherent instructional guidance system (i.e., curriculum, assessment, and instruction)
- High professional capacity (including how teachers collaborate with one another)
- Strong parent-community-school ties
- A student-centered learning climate
- Leadership that drives change

All the high-performing schools discussed in this study combine these essential supports with a focus on the early grades.

These factors have been shown to be an effective combination for prekindergarten programs as well (Ehrlich et al., 2016; Pacchiano et al., 2018).

All the high-performing schools discussed in this study combine these essential supports with a focus on the early grades—prioritizing and aligning the early grades while attempting to fashion learning experiences that take

advantage of how young children best learn, develop children's social-emotional skills, and prepare them for future standards-based academic learning. These schools have developed coherent instructional guidance systems and well-implemented teacher teams that function as professional learning communities (Manship et al., 2016).

Often, the "coherent instructional guidance system" is anchored by one or two instructional approaches that a school develops deep expertise in and implements schoolwide. At Sugar Creek in Normal, Illinois, and Sheridan Elementary in San Francisco, the workshop model plays this role. Sacramento Elementary in Parkrose, Oregon, has

placed a priority on schoolwide implementation of AVID practices and deep implementation of a set of literacy practices developed at the University of Oregon. Gomez Elementary in Omaha has developed broad capacity in facilitating guided reading groups and employing active engagement strategies, and is now working on integrating play and social-emotional learning. Earl Boyles Elementary in the David Douglas School District (Oregon) has implemented an innovative approach to English language development[38] that is used throughout the district.

Three Fundamental Challenges

The examples discussed in this chapter suggest three fundamental challenges for schools, districts, and communities attempting to improve preK–3 teaching and learning:

- Developing and/or identifying curricula, assessments, and instructional guidance that integrate academic and social-emotional learning in developmentally appropriate ways aligned to how young children best learn

- Facilitating collaboration between early childhood centers and school districts

- Developing the multi-functional capacity of elementary schools and prekindergarten to deliver high-quality teaching and learning, engage families in meaningful partnerships, and provide comprehensive supports

All three are formidable challenges, and addressing them requires leadership and support from school districts, community organizations, and municipal agencies—the subject of Chapter 3.

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[38] Earl Boyles's approach is based on Systematic ELD (English language development), developed by Susana Dutro (http://www.elachieve.org/systematiceld.html).

CHAPTER 3
First 10 Community Partnerships

While some aspects of improving quality, alignment, and coordination are best addressed at the school level, others are best initiated through district and/or community action. Omaha's Transforming Kindergarten initiative and Boston's preK–2 curriculum and coaching model are good examples of the district's important role in improving teaching and learning in elementary school classrooms and, in Boston's case, of a district partnering with community-based prekindergarten programs.

School hubs can establish home visiting programs, as seen in the School as Birth–Grade 3 Hub model in Metro Omaha discussed in Chapter 1. Yet there is also a need in many communities to ensure quality and promote consistency and continuous improvement **in all** of the home visiting programs across a community (and to streamline recruitment and referral processes).

Further, while school hubs can work with nearby early childhood centers and family childcare providers, this type of collaboration does not replace the myriad benefits gained by forming cohorts of community-based early childhood centers or family childcare providers from across a community to work together on improving quality and on learning new teaching strategies.

First 10 Community Partnerships can develop community-wide transition plans that guide transitions across **all early childhood centers and elementary schools in a community**. They can sponsor joint First 10 professional development opportunities—for instance, on early literacy, early STEM education, social-emotional learning, or trauma-informed care— that support alignment and consistency across settings and foster a common language, leading to better understanding and collaboration among educators. Thus, while some communities are developing the First 10 School Hub models discussed in Chapter 1, others are developing broader First 10 Community Partnerships that include such partners as school districts, libraries, hospitals, early childhood centers, networks of family childcare providers, home visiting programs, early intervention programs, pediatricians, after-school providers, and housing agencies (D. Jacobson, 2016, 2018).

The two models are not mutually exclusive: First 10 Community Partnerships can easily set supporting First 10 School Hubs as a priority.

The two models are not mutually exclusive: First 10 Community Partnerships can easily set supporting First 10 School Hubs as a priority, as evidenced by the systemwide structures developed in Multnomah County, Omaha, and Cincinnati.

Both schools as First 10 School Hubs and First 10 Community Partnerships are part of a larger trend of *cross-sector collaboration for education*—including collective impact, cradle-to-career, and early childhood system-building initiatives (Henig et al., 2015).

This trend is an important component of the context from which First 10 Schools and Communities are emerging. Yet, although many cross-sector community collaborations include an early childhood component, there is nonetheless a large disconnect between these broader community efforts and First 10 initiatives. Whereas the former typically treat kindergarten readiness and third grade proficiency as separate goals addressed by separate teams, First 10 initiatives address these goals as part of a continuum. As a result, they develop plans and strategies and build capacity in ways that are integrated and holistic in design.

Cross-Sector Collaboration for Education and Cradle-to-Career Initiatives

In 2016, a research team led by Jeffrey Henig of Columbia University conducted a national scan and identified 182 community "cross-sector collaborations for education." To be included in the count, a collaboration needed to be formal, to involve multiple sectors that included the school district, to encompass an entire municipality, and to focus on education. Note that this definition is a relatively narrow one that, for instance, would not include many of the cross-sector collaborations discussed in this study. Thus, the 182 found instances are a conservative estimate that are nonetheless indicative of a national trend (Henig et al., 2016).

"[P]roviding access to all of these resources, services, and supports in a coherent manner will have the greatest cumulative effect on educational outcomes."

In a companion report, *Putting Collective Impact in Context* (Henig et al., 2015), the Columbia researchers suggest that these contemporary cross-sector collaborations are taking a holistic approach that rejects the "artificial dichotomy" between within-school and out-of-school factors in determining educational outcomes. This approach thus moves beyond the debate between, on the one hand, a "no excuses," "it's all about the schools" view of improving educational outcomes, and, on the other hand, reforms that emphasize social services, such as after-school programs, health and mental health services, and parent education programs. A significant body of research supports comprehensive approaches that include both education reform and integrated social service supports and are premised on the idea that "providing access to all of these resources, services, and supports in a coherent manner will have the greatest cumulative effect on educational outcomes" (p. 20).

Cradle to career initiatives attempt to improve supports across the full spectrum of a young person's life within a specified geographic area, and in this respect they are "place-based."

Examples of cradle-to-career initiatives include the Harlem Children's Zone[39], the federal Promise Neighborhoods program,[40] and the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network, a national nonprofit network of 70 community partnerships.

> StriveTogether works to ensure that every child succeeds from cradle to career, regardless of race, income or zip code . . . StriveTogether was founded on a simple principle: Those who care about a community's children—from parents and educators to civic leaders and local employers—can accomplish more by working together than by working apart.[41]

StriveTogether's original Strive initiative in Greater Cincinnati was an inspiration for the well-known *collective impact* approach. In collective impact initiatives, community organizations, government agencies, and the business community come together in a partnership and operate according to five conditions: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and *backbone support* organizations (organizations that convene and coordinate the partnerships) (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Many of the 182 cross-sector collaborations for education identified by Henig's team use "collective impact" terminology in describing their work (Henig et al., 2016).

The United States has a long history of cross-sector community collaborations. The settlement house movement began in the late 19th century, inspired by Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago. At the beginning of the 20th century, influenced by Addams, John Dewey called for rethinking schools as community institutions that incorporate social services. Since the 1960s, there have been several waves of interest in cross-sector community development—though these federally funded initiatives often were complicated projects involving housing and urban development and typically *not* involving education, or if so only superficially (Kubisch et al., 2002).

According to Henig and colleagues (2015), the current wave of interest in collective impact and cradle-to-career initiatives is distinguished from earlier ones chiefly in its clear focus on education and on improving educational outcomes for children and youth in low-income families. Not only does education serve to narrow the scope of objectives and focus cross-sector efforts, but the use of educational outcomes as a goal makes it easier to use data to monitor progress, inform adjustments, and provide accountability. More explicit and informed use of backbone organizations to coordinate efforts, and

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[39] The nonprofit Harlem Children's Zone (https://hcz.org/about-us/) provides "comprehensive supports, offering exceptional education and social services, stabilizing families, preventing homelessness, and promoting healthy lifestyles throughout the Zone."

[40] From the U.S. Department of Education website (https://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html): "The vision of the program is that all children and youth growing up in Promise Neighborhoods have access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career."

[41] StriveTogether [Website]. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved from https://www.strivetogether.org/about/

the emergence of networks of communities to promote cross-community learning and exchange are two important features that further differentiate current community collaborations from previous efforts.

Cross-Sector Collaboration on the Transition to Kindergarten

Since the 1960s, the federal government has funded a number of programs to smooth the transition from prekindergarten to elementary school, which is in effect a specific type of cross-sector collaboration especially relevant to contemporary First 10 initiatives. Some of these programs were narrower efforts that focused mainly on curriculum (e.g., Project Follow Through and Planned Variation in Head Start), while others suffered from weak implementation designs and a disconnect between federal aims and local capacity (e.g., Project Developmental Continuity)—and in most cases the initiatives' evaluations were plagued by methodological problems (Bond & Rossario, 1982; Kagan, 2010; Kagan & Neuman, 1998). However, one federally funded initiative—the Head Start Transition Project, which began in 1986—found a number of encouraging results, including a correlation between the frequency of transition activities and school readiness, reduced child stress levels, and higher levels of resilience at the beginning of school (Kagan, 2010).

The leading-edge First 10 initiatives described in this study differ from earlier transition efforts in a number of respects.

The leading-edge First 10 initiatives described in this study differ from earlier transition efforts in a number of respects. Broadly speaking, current efforts are characterized by deeper school and district leadership and commitment, they entail significant quality improvement efforts at both the early childhood and the early elementary school levels, they are more comprehensive, they involve families and community organizations to a greater degree, and they explicitly build capacity through the use of backbone organizations, such as the SUN Service System in Multnomah County, the Buffet Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, and the Boston Public Schools Early Childhood Department.

Cross-Sector Collaboration in First 10 Community Partnerships: Distinctive Elements

Almost all cross-sector collaborations for education include some common elements, particularly in their focus on the early years. For instance, Promise Neighborhoods, Early Learning Communities,[42] and Campaign for Grade-Level Reading communities[43] all promote diagnostic screening for all young children and access to high-quality prekindergarten. However, there are also differences in focus. What distinguishes First 10 efforts is (1) the full participation of elementary schools and school districts, and (2) a commitment to improving quality, transitions, alignment, and family partnerships on both sides of the early childhood–early elementary school divide—that is, along the First 10 continuum.

Most cradle-to-career and collective impact initiatives set benchmark goals and assemble teams to improve supports for young children and their families, and many of their strategies overlap with those of First 10 initiatives. Most cradle-to-career initiatives, however, establish separate teams to work on kindergarten readiness and third grade literacy, respectively, with little or no emphasis on coordinating the teams' work by focusing on First 10 alignment, transitions, and joint professional development.[44] Further,

in practice, collective impact and cradle-to-career initiatives tend to focus mainly on developing consensus around shared measurements (White, Blatz, & Joseph, 2019).[45] Finally, First 10 initiatives tend to set third grade academic and social-emotional proficiency as a broad goal, in addition to kindergarten readiness, rather than focus only on grade 3 literacy outcomes, as some cradle-to-career and collective impact initiatives do.

First 10 Community Partnerships require new organizing structures to coordinate their cross-sector work. Many examples discussed in the previous chapters are

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[42] The National League of Cities and the Center for the Study of Social Policy developed the notion of an Early Learning Community (O'Connor, 2017; U.S. Executive Office of the President, 2014) as a place "committed to the goal of all young children reaching their full potential," where "children and families have access to the opportunities, aligned services and supports they need" in "neighborhoods where children can grow up safe and healthy" and where "local policies create a broad framework of support for families with young children" (Whitehouse, O'Connor, & Meisenheimer, 2018, p. 5).

[43] From *Campaign Overview* on the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading website (https://gradelevelreading.net/about-us/campaign-overview): "The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading supports communities in raising the number of low-income children who are proficient in reading by the end of third grade through three community-based solutions: Addressing the Readiness Gap (readiness for school), the Attendance Gap (chronic absenteeism), and the Summer Slide (summer learning loss)."

[44] Personal interviews with Jeff Edmonson of StriveTogether, May 23, 2017; Amy Neal of Metro United Way, Louisville, Kentucky, May 1, 2017; and Scott McLeod of United Way of Salt Lake City, Utah, September 26, 2017.

[45] Personal interview with Jeff Edmonson of StriveTogether, May 23, 2017.

spearheaded by innovative organizing structures, including Multnomah County's SUN Service Agency (a partnership between a county and six school districts), Metro Omaha's two-county Learning Community and Superintendents' Plan, and Oregon's Blue Mountain Early Learning Hub. Further, although narrower in scope, the partnerships in Boston and Lowell, Massachusetts, are examples of structures that facilitate close working relationships between school districts and early childhood centers.

Two examples further illustrate the scope, structure, and strategies of community-wide First 10 Community Partnerships:

- Beginning in 1999, the Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools implemented a range of reforms, including a new focus on early childhood and early elementary school education, which led to significantly improved outcomes for low-income children. This approach garnered much national attention and was studied extensively by researchers (Childress et al., 2009; Marietta, 2010; Marietta & Brookover, 2011).

- In 2015, the City Council and School Committee of Cambridge, Massachusetts, initiated a Birth to 3rd Grade Partnership, including education and comprehensive health and social services. In the intervening three years, Cambridge has followed a comprehensive strategic plan to implement an impressive set of strategies: developing quality improvement pilots for both early childhood centers and family childcare providers; designing a home visiting system to connect all the city's programs; building consensus around a citywide understanding of family engagement; augmenting parenting education and early childhood mental health consultation programs; providing prekindergarten scholarships to low-income families; improving the transition to kindergarten; and improving early elementary school curriculum and instructional practices.

Both initiatives feature strategic plans and ambitious goals; both involve work that individual schools could not address on their own, including significant collaboration with the county's community-based early childhood providers; and both were able to draw on considerable financial resources in their communities in order to invest in First 10 improvement. Each initiative is explored in more detail below.

Montgomery County, Maryland:
A District Focus on the Early Years

> Once we fixed the system, the kids were suddenly okay. Same kids, just a different system. And we started at the beginning of the education value chain—early learning.
>
> —Jerry Weast, Superintendent of Schools (Marietta, 2010, inside cover)

The Montgomery County Public Schools initiative illustrates the effective use of two complementary strategies:

- Improving district and district-funded preK–3 teaching and learning through a focus on curriculum, instruction, and family engagement

- Collaborating with the early childhood community on improving curriculum, instruction, alignment, and comprehensive services for children and families

[T]he idea that each stage in a child's educational trajectory is an opportunity for learning and growth and that these stages need to be articulated and linked.

Montgomery County is the 16th largest school district in the United States, and 50% of its families classify as low-income. Under the leadership of Superintendent Jerry Weast from 1999 to 2011, the district received national attention in part due to an impressive set of results: By 2010, 90% of kindergartners were entering first grade with essential literacy skills, 88% of 3rd graders were reading proficiently, 90% of 12th graders were graduating from high school, and 77% of graduating seniors were enrolled in college (Childress et al., 2009; Marietta, 2010).

By *education value chain* in the above quotation, Weast refers to the idea that each stage in a child's educational trajectory is an opportunity for learning and growth and that these stages need to be articulated and linked.

Weast set an ambitious goal for Montgomery County: college readiness as defined by SAT and ACT scores. The district then worked backward from this goal to determine key benchmarks and priorities. The district identified two zones within the district—a primarily affluent "green" zone and a primarily low-income "red" zone—and devoted more resources to the red zone.

Central to Montgomery County's success was the development and implementation of two plans: **a district strategic plan** and, in collaboration with county agencies and early childhood stakeholders, **a county early childhood plan**.

The district strategic plan, "Our Call to Action: Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap," set the two ends of the value chain as priorities: more-demanding high school classes and better-prepared elementary school students. The strategic plan in turn led to an "Early Success Performance Plan" that integrated early learning and early elementary school programming. Key components of the Early Success plan and its implementation included:

- Full-day kindergarten, beginning with red-zone schools
- Lower teacher-student ratios in the highest-need schools
- Expanded after-school and summer learning opportunities
- Revised curricula for the early grades
- New preK–grade 2 diagnostic assessments
- Greater priority on allowing children in early learning programs to remain in the same school for K–5 education
- Monthly meetings between Head Start, prekindergarten, and early elementary school teachers who work in the same school
- Substantially increased parent involvement and support through improved communication, parent leadership, staffing for family service workers, and home visits

The district also worked with nonprofit umbrella organizations to develop the "Montgomery County Early Childhood Comprehensive Plan" aligned to both the district's strategic plan and the Early Success plan. **The Early Childhood Comprehensive Plan became the vehicle for collaboration with the county's 1,000 family childcare providers and 450 early childhood centers.** The plan guided Montgomery County's attempts to build a coherent early childhood system that included the following:

- Incorporating two state-funded centers that offer comprehensive, wrap-around services to low-income families in partnership with community partners and early childhood providers
- Expanding full-day Head Start and district-funded prekindergarten
- Developing a common curricula and diagnostic assessments to be used throughout all Head Start and district prekindergarten classrooms

The district works with a large number of early childhood stakeholders to coordinate registration in the district's prekindergarten and kindergarten programs. Once families register, a family service worker guides families through the process and refers them to community services, as in the school-as-hub model. For example, in the 2009–10 school year, approximately 1,000 referrals were made (Childress et al., 2009; Marietta, 2010).

Montgomery County's work under Superintendent Weast is an influential success story (a book and two case studies have documented Montgomery County's early learning and care strategies and outcomes—see Childress et al., 2009; Marietta, 2010; and Marietta & Brookover, 2011). Its successful community-wide approach—involving change both in classrooms and to systems of support for families—has influenced First 10 improvement efforts across the country, including the Birth to 3rd Grade Partnership in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Building a Citywide Birth to 3rd Grade System in Cambridge

> We are aware that building a coherent system is more time consuming and less flashy than just adding more slots or more dollars to an existing system. But we have an opportunity to . . . build a system that coherently knits together our existing resources and thoughtfully brings in new resources to meet the needs of our youngest residents.
>
> —Richard Rossi, City Manager, Cambridge, Mass. (2015)
>
> This is about as important as it gets, frankly. Achievement gaps do not begin in the fifth grade or the third grade. They begin much earlier. The right way to reduce and eventually eliminate achievement gaps is to start early . . . I believe whole-heartedly that with this effort to get there, we can make that difference. It is about coherence. The adults have to come together.
>
> –Jeff Young, Superintendent of Schools, Cambridge, Mass.,
> speaking to a joint meeting of the City Council and School Committee (2015)

Cambridge is a city of approximately 100,000 residents. Along with an affluent population, Cambridge has a significant percentage of *high-need* and low-income families. In 2015, 46.6% of Cambridge's public school students were identified as high need by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and 27.7% were identified as *economically disadvantaged* (D. Jacobson, 2015). In 2014, in response to appeals from City Council and School Committee members to increase the availability of prekindergarten for four-year-olds, the City Manager collaborated with the Superintendent of the Cambridge Public Schools to convene an Early Childhood Task Force. After conducting a needs assessment (2 surveys and 11 focus groups), the task force identified a number of core issues:

• Lack of access to information: One Cambridge parent said, "It takes a while to get plugged in and know about everything that exists. You have to be aggressive to find out what exists."

- Inconsistent quality across programs: A family childcare provider noted that "quality varies from program to program."

- Services that are neither aligned nor coordinated: "We have the entities, but they are not linked together," said one preschool director. "Cambridge should make a commitment that education begins prenatally—before birth. That would create value for preschool, as it would be part of a continuum of services."

- Critical gaps in services: A prekindergarten teacher noted, "It appears as though many of the children are coming to us needing greater support than we can sometimes accommodate."

- Affordability and access: "Waiting lists and costs are barriers," said a Community Engagement Team Outreach member (Cambridge Early Childhood Task Force, 2015).

Though its original charge was to increase access to high-quality prekindergarten, after conducting the needs assessment, reviewing research, and learning about work underway in other communities, the task force committed to a broader set of overarching priorities:

- **Start early** and attend to the entire prenatal through grade 3 continuum.

- Recognize that **quality is essential** to improving outcomes. Expanding access without ensuring quality is short-sighted.

- Build a **coherent, coordinated, and aligned mixed-delivery system** across the full range of service providers, including the public schools (Cambridge Early Childhood Task Force, 2015).

The task force organized its recommendations around five broad goals (note that *improving access to information* runs throughout all five goals):

- Increase **Access to and Affordability of** Early Education and Care Services

- Continuously Improve **Program Quality** for Birth Through Third Grade Programs and Services

- Build **Partnerships to Promote Strong Family Engagement and Support**

- Coordinate with Healthcare Providers to Ensure **Access to Quality Healthcare Services**

- Develop an Effective Birth Through Third Grade **Governance and Leadership Structure** (Cambridge Early Childhood Task Force, 2015)

The recommendations were crafted with all children in mind but **with particular emphasis on addressing the needs of the city's significant number of high-need and low-income families**. On November 16, 2015, the City Council and School Committee of Cambridge approved the task force's recommendations for building a citywide Birth to 3rd Grade system.

To carry out these recommendations, Cambridge established a new role to lead the effort (the Early Childhood Director), convened a Birth to 3rd Grade Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of the plan, and formed three sub-committees of the Steering Committee (Family Engagement and Partnership, Health, and Access and Quality) to help inform, design, and implement the plan's strategies. The Early Childhood Director reports jointly to the city's Assistant City Manager for Human Services and the school district's Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Schools. Two staff members support the Early Childhood Director, who has also hired consultants to provide technical assistance on specific topics (e.g., home visiting).

At this writing Cambridge's innovative Birth to 3rd Grade Partnership is in its third year of operation.[46] This comprehensive community-wide approach encompasses home visiting, family childcare, center-based care, family engagement, parenting education, the transition to kindergarten, kindergarten teaching and learning, and promoting access to information regarding resources.

The city has made sizable investments in this work, committing approximately $1.3 million in year 1, $2.3 million in year 2, and $3.3 million for year 3.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: CAMBRIDGE'S BIRTH TO 3RD GRADE PARTNERSHIP

Whole child: Consider all areas of a child's growth, development, and learning – including cognitive, social and emotional, language and communication, and physical development and well-being.

Age range: Consider children's needs and well-being from birth through third grade.

All, some and few: Ensure a continuum of services that provides programs that serve *all* children and families, targeted programs that serve *some* children, parents and families who may need extra support, and specialized programs for the *few* for whom significant levels of support are needed, including families in crisis.

Build on strengths: Build on the existing strengths of the rich set of services and programs already in place in

Cambridge as well as the strengths of children, parents, families, caregivers, and early education and care professionals.

Equity and preparation gap: Address the lack of equity of opportunity that many children and families face because of race, family income, and the preparation gap that stems from a variety of risk factors.

Cultural competence: Ensure that programs, services, and supports for children and families are relevant to and respectful of their culture and language.

Families as partners and parent choice: Value parents as partners in care and learning and parent choice in selecting settings and services for their children.

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[46] The Partnership officially began on July 1, 2016.

Access and Quality

The largest component of the Partnership's implementation and funding efforts has been in the area of access and quality. The Partnership is conducting a large pilot project, modeled in part on a quality initiative in Philadelphia (Warner-Richter, Lowe, Tout, Epstein, & Li, 2016), to support nine early childhood centers in moving up in Massachusetts' Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The centers have been supported as a cohort, with mentoring for directors, coaching for teachers, communities of practice, professional development workshops and courses, and program improvement funds (largely for classroom furniture and instructional materials). After the first year of implementation, **all nine programs significantly improved their ECERS and CLASS scores**—in fact, they have qualified in that important dimension of the rating system for moving up a QRIS level. The Partnership has now begun a similar pilot with licensed family childcare providers.

The Partnership also developed a scholarship program to **support low-income children in attending high-quality early childhood centers**. With input from the Access and Quality Sub-Committee, the Partnership developed criteria for selecting families and early childhood centers for this program. Cambridge also expanded its financial support for Baby University, a 16-week program for expectant parents and parents of infants and toddlers that includes workshops, play-and-learn groups, and home visiting, modeled after the Harlem Children Zone's Baby U.

The Access and Quality Sub-Committee is currently developing a plan to support children and families with the **transition to kindergarten**. Key elements of the draft plan are as follows:

- Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers understand the differences between prekindergarten and kindergarten expectations, program schedules, and curricula
- Joint professional development is offered to prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers
- A common transitions form developed by a cross-sector group of prekindergarten and kindergarten educators is used citywide
- A cross-sector workgroup of prekindergarten and kindergarten educators develops a menu of transition activities
- Prekindergarten teachers use data on former students' kindergarten assessment scores to make adjustments to their programs

Complementing the significant collaboration between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers called for in the transition plan are two improvements efforts already underway in Cambridge's elementary schools:

- Most kindergarten teachers are implementing **Boston's *Focus on K2* kindergarten curriculum**, which they learned about through a number of institutes organized by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

- Teachers in prekindergarten through elementary school have engaged in **significant coaching and professional development** regarding best practices in early literacy, math, and science

Health

The Health Sub-Committee conducted a needs assessment of the city's home visiting programs, examined home visiting best practices in other cities around the country, and began developing the components of a **citywide home visiting system**. This system will be rolled out over three years and will include the following:

- A task force focused on home visiting as a subsidiary of the Health Sub-Committee
- Guiding principles for a home visiting system of care
- Shared outcome measures for home visiting programs
- A citywide system for recruitment and matching of families and programs
- Professional development offerings for all programs, aligned to the guiding principles and best practices
- A pilot project to test the use of shared outcome measures, referrals, and best practices

The Health Sub-Committee is in the beginning phases of planning a **citywide mental health wellness campaign** and has expanded funding for early childhood mental health consultation services in support of early childhood centers across the city. The sub-committee also supports the Department of Public Health's ongoing work on citywide health and nutrition.

Family Engagement and Partnership

In its first two years, the Family Engagement and Partnership Sub-Committee developed and disseminated a citywide "Commitment to Family Engagement" (see sidebar), informed by a common reading of the literature and input from stakeholders across the city. The sub-committee also conducted a needs assessment of the city's parenting education programs, identifying gaps and recommending which types of programming need to be expanded and in what parts of the city. Related to the work of the Family

Cambridge's Commitment to Family Engagement

Children and teens thrive when policy makers, schools, and city and community organizations **partner** with families to actively support children's learning and development. It is our **shared responsibility** to engage each other in meaningful and culturally respectful ways. This effort is **continuous** across a child's life from birth to adulthood and carried out **everywhere** they learn and grow.

Engagement and Partnership Sub-Committee, the City of Cambridge designed a new **online directory of resources** for families and providers ("Find It Cambridge") and continued a citywide campaign to promote oral language development and literacy (Let's Talk Cambridge).

Common Elements and Challenges

Comprehensive and coordinated efforts to improve quality on both sides of the early childhood–early elementary school divide, with attention to transitions and alignment, are relatively rare. The partnerships in Montgomery County and Cambridge demonstrate the benefits of improving First 10 quality and alignment of teaching, learning, and care through community-wide initiatives **in addition to** activities at the level of individual elementary schools.

The Montgomery County and Cambridge partnerships share a number of common elements:

- A clear equity agenda that focuses on low-income children and their families and children of color and their families
- Needs assessments and extensive consultation with stakeholders
- The development of ambitious strategic plans that include improving early education quality and alignment, partnering with families, and providing comprehensive services for children and families
- Development of understanding and commitment among a wide range of stakeholders
- Significant collaboration between school districts, city and/or county agencies, and community-based programs
- New organizing structures to manage and coordinate the collaborations
- The use of implementation benchmarks that are conscientiously implemented, monitored, and adjusted (Curtis & City, 2009)

In addition, both communities have demonstrated a strong commitment to these efforts by investing significant financial resources.

Given the breadth of their organizational ambitions, First 10 Community Partnerships—just like First 10 School Hubs—face **challenges** in implementing their work, for example:

- Staffing and facilitating a variety of committees and sub-committees

- Ensuring ongoing district commitment to First 10 priorities

- Addressing the needs of children of color from low-income families in settings accustomed to serving more affluent children[47]

- Building the capacity of schools and early childhood centers to engage in and lead quality improvement efforts

- Addressing staff turnover, especially in early childhood centers

- Sustaining initiatives, especially through leadership changes

Both First 10 Community Partnerships and First 10 School Hubs present a number of design options and strategies for communities developing First 10 initiatives to consider. Together, they also suggest the **goals, objectives, and roles** that underpin First 10 initiatives, as discussed in the Conclusion.

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[47] The participating early childhood centers in Cambridge are eager to serve children of color from low-income families who have scholarships, but some center staff lack experience and know-how in establishing fully inclusive policies and settings.

CONCLUSION

A Theory of Action for First 10 Schools and Communities

> Research shows why it is more difficult for children growing up in poor neighborhoods to break poverty's grasp, but [it] also provides a road map for reform.
>
> Single-parent families, elementary school quality, youth and adult employment, and civic and religious involvement all play a role in a student's future. The most successful efforts recognize this interconnectedness and increase, or decrease, their impact by focusing on particular communities and tackling multiple issues simultaneously. Public and private organizations and community and philanthropic leaders should learn from and support these holistic, place-based efforts.
>
> —Jim Shelton, "We Already Know How to Close the Achievement Gap," *Education Week* (Shelton, 2015, p. 19)

The schools, organizations, and communities discussed in this study represent the leading edge of an emerging model of First 10 improvement. The strategies being pioneered in these communities are a response to the very challenging economic and social circumstances faced by the 44% of American young children under age 9 from low-income families (Addy, Engelhardt, & Skinner, 2013; Putnam, 2015). This First 10 work is based on the following rationale:

- Children require "continuity of high-quality experiences" across the full early childhood continuum (NRC, 2015).
- Addressing children's adverse economic and social circumstances and improving child outcomes requires a comprehensive, multipronged approach involving families, elementary schools, early childhood centers, and community organizations.
- By developing good strategies, structures, and practices, effectively implementing such a comprehensive approach is feasible.

First 10 improvement requires that schools, early childhood centers, and communities develop capacities in multiple areas. As seen in Multnomah County, Normal, Cincinnati, Metro Omaha, Montgomery County, and Cambridge, this study has emphasized the importance of three capacities in particular:

- Providing high-quality teaching and learning aligned across the early childhood–elementary school continuum

- Developing strong partnerships between schools, families, and communities
- Providing comprehensive health and social service supports

In developing these capacities, communities draw on strategies associated with the P–3 and community schools movements, which in turn are informed and motivated by evidence of effectiveness: the decades-long longitudinal success of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers; the examples of Union City, Montgomery County, and Boston; and the positive results achieved by some community school models.

The initiatives described in the preceding chapters are all relatively new. Some of the larger initiatives (e.g., Metro Omaha and Cambridge) are being formally evaluated, and others track various forms of data to monitor their progress. Positive early evidence of change at this stage of development includes student learning progress and improvement in classroom quality in Metro Omaha, literacy gains in Cincinnati for children who began attending community learning centers in prekindergarten, and early childhood centers in Cambridge that have significantly improved their classroom quality measures. Based on early evidence of change, all the communities are engaged in deepening and expanding their First 10 initiatives.

Key Findings

1

First 10 Schools and Communities are aligning prekindergarten and elementary school education and reworking curricula, assessments, and instruction.

An integral component of improving the full early childhood–elementary school continuum is specifically addressing the quality and alignment of teaching and learning from prekindergarten through third grade. Improving preK–3 teaching and learning requires three broad tasks:

- Establishing the early years as school and district priorities and working to align prekindergarten and K–3 education—both within elementary schools and between elementary schools and community-based prekindergarten programs.
- Making substantive changes in instructional approaches in order to most effectively educate young children, including balancing teacher-centered and student-centered teaching and learning, increasing teacher-child interactions, and incorporating social-emotional learning.
- In elementary schools, incorporating this special focus on the early grades into a coherent overall schoolwide system, supported by school districts, that promotes quality teaching and learning throughout the elementary grades (Bryk et al., 2010).

The First 10 work underway in Normal, Omaha, and Boston suggest three different but not mutually exclusive organizational approaches to addressing the challenge of improving early-grades pedagogy to best serve student learning:

- Educators in Normal participated in cross-site visits and prekindergarten-kindergarten conversations that led to reciprocal adjustments: Prekindergarten teachers are now designing investigations and promoting concept development, and kindergarten teachers are piloting guided play. Other districts working on First 10 improvement have similarly brought together community-based prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers for joint professional development, cross-sector lesson development, and communities of practice (D. Jacobson, 2014b, 2014c; Schilder, 2018). These face-to-face collaborative approaches are perhaps best suited to First 10 School Hubs, smaller school districts, or small clusters of schools and early childhood providers within districts.

- In its Transforming Kindergarten initiative, the Omaha Public Schools pursued a collaborative process in which a team developed curricular materials while periodically receiving feedback from a number of kindergarten teachers throughout a relatively large district. The kindergarten teachers are now sharing best practices around these materials with one another through workshops and local kindergarten conferences.

- Boston's model demonstrates the potential of building expertise and capacity in a large early childhood department in a large district. Boston's preK–2 curriculum and coaching model are of great interest to the early education community, both in the particular curricular and pedagogical components that make up each grade's curriculum, and in the alignment of the curriculum across prekindergarten through grade 2.

2 First 10 School Hubs are providing influential supports to families and other caregivers of children ages 0–4 and then continuing those supports throughout elementary school.

In addition to working to improve preK–3 teaching and learning, First 10 School Hubs support children and their families—beginning with expectant mothers, infants, and toddlers, and continuing through elementary school. Several different models in different parts of the country have had significant success in building strong, highly supportive relationships with families of young children ages 0–4 through supports such as play-and-learn groups and home visits and by connecting families to health and social services.

First 10 School Hubs also develop partnerships with nearby family childcare providers and early childhood centers to work on quality improvement, teacher professional learning, and/or family engagement and partnership.

The First 10 School Hubs described in this study suggest a number of design considerations for communities considering developing hubs of their own:

- How will the role of First 10 coordinators be structured? Like the home visitors and family facilitators in Omaha? With a focus on play-and-learn groups, family childcare, multicultural outreach, and schoolwide family engagement, as in Multnomah County? Will the coordinators serve families, early childhood centers, and/or family childcare providers?

- What systems will be put in place to support these new roles? The contracts with community-based organizations to provide and support site managers in Multnomah County suggest one model, while the communities of practice in Metro Omaha suggest another.

- Around what activities will hubs collaborate with early childhood providers? For instance, will they do so in professional learning teams focused on common topics and approaches, as in the Blue Mountain region of Oregon? Or around common assessments and neighborhood approaches to family engagement, as in Lowell, Massachusetts?

- Should comprehensive supports for school-age children and their families include home visits, as in Normal? After-school programming, as in Multnomah County? On-site health care, as in Cincinnati?

- In what ways will hubs embed trauma-informed care into their work? How will they provide mental and behavioral health services?

3 First 10 Community Partnerships demonstrate that communities can develop **and implement** ambitious plans to improve the quality and coordination of education and care for young children and their families.

First 10 Community Partnerships develop and implement strategic plans to improve prenatal care, infant and toddler care, center-based and district prekindergarten, and the early grades of elementary schools. These broader partnerships bring together the child-serving organizations in a community for both **within-sector** and **cross-sector** collaboration.

Improving district curricula in the early grades, developing a system of care to support all home visiting programs within a community, and establishing quality improvement initiatives for cohorts of family childcare providers or early childhood centers are all examples of within-sector collaboration. Examples of cross-sector collaboration include curriculum alignment between early childhood centers and K–3 education; community-wide transition-to-kindergarten plans; providing early childhood mental health consultation support to home visiting programs, early childhood centers, and/or pediatrician offices; joint professional development initiatives; and community-wide campaigns (e.g., focusing on literacy, numeracy, or adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed care).

First 10 Community Partnerships have also developed new structures and strategies. For example, Cambridge's Birth to 3rd Grade Partnership includes new governance and leadership structures and a comprehensive set of First 10 initiatives and strategies. The work is overseen by a Steering Committee and three sub-committees and led by a director who reports jointly to city and school department leaders.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the First 10 Community Partnerships in Montgomery County and Cambridge share a number of **common elements**. These partnerships, as well as the preK–3 partnerships in Union City and Boston, also suggest some design considerations.

- What are the community's initial pressing needs, and what, among the broad range of possible areas of focus, are the community's initial strategic priorities? How do those priorities form a coherent strategic plan?
- What will the governance structure of the partnership be, and which organization(s) will serve as the partnership's backbone organization?
- How will the partnership be led and staffed, and how will it be funded?
- By what processes will data be gathered and used formatively to monitor progress relative to implementation benchmarks and to inform mid-course adjustments?
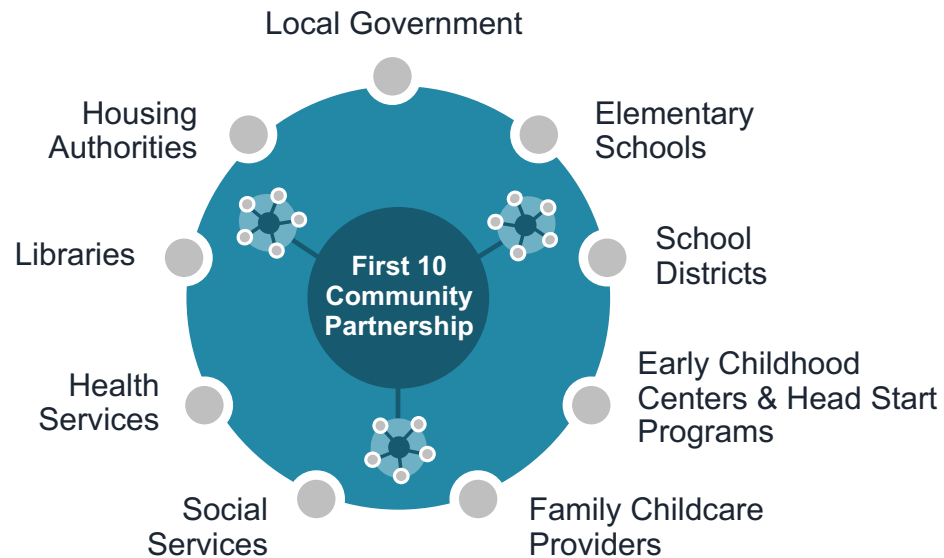
4 First 10 School Hubs and First 10 Community Partnerships operate on different levels and have complementary strengths and weaknesses; together they suggest a combined model that has great potential as a further innovation.

First 10 School Hubs' specific strengths stem from the direct relationships they build with families and early childhood providers in their neighborhoods or catchment areas. First 10 School Hubs build trust with families, which in turn allows them to better meet families' needs. They also develop relationships with nearby family childcare providers and early childhood centers, relationships that lead to sharing information about children and using common language, tools, and instructional approaches.

By design, First 10 School Hubs focus on the school's catchment area, and thus they are not positioned to build systems across multiple catchment areas. First 10 Community Partnerships operate across broader geographic areas—and often across school districts—to promote consistency and coordination and to build capacity around common approaches, systems, and processes. First 10 Community Partnerships can support the use of common curricula in both community-based and district prekindergarten programs. They can also support common approaches and establish a common language in areas such as social-emotional development and trauma-informed care.

FIGURE 10: **First 10 Community Partnership with School Hub**

To date, some communities have developed elementary school First 10 School Hubs, and others are building First 10 Community Partnerships. The potential, however, of **combining the two models** is significant. In a combined model (depicted in Figure 10 above), a community would develop a community-wide First 10 Community Partnership to work on improving quality across organizations and programs, improving systems, and coordinating transitions. Included in this work would be **systems of support** for elementary schools functioning as First 10 School Hubs serving young children, their families, and early childhood providers in the schools' catchment areas or neighborhoods. In this combined model, First 10 Community Partnerships and First 10 School Hubs each work to improve teaching and learning in preK–3 classrooms.

5 First 10 Schools and Communities present an alternative approach to improving children's experiences in the early years, one that contrasts with the way many communities are attempting to improve early childhood and elementary school education.

Cross-sector partnerships focused on education are proliferating across the United States, and most of these collaborations include goals for kindergarten readiness and third grade proficiency. These partnerships are often referred to as *cradle to career* and/or *collective impact* initiatives (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2016; Henig et al., 2016; Henig et al., 2015). Prominent examples include the StriveTogether network, the Harlem Children's Zone, and Promise Neighborhoods. First 10 initiatives share some similarities with these

initiatives, yet they differ from the way that most collective impact and cradle-to-career initiatives are currently structured in several important ways.

Coherent sets of mutually reinforcing activities are hallmarks of the First 10 School Hubs and First 10 Community Partnerships described in this study.

The most consequential difference revolves around the relationship between the public schools and early childhood organizations. Whereas most cradle-to-career initiatives create separate teams to work on kindergarten readiness and early-grades reading (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2016), First 10 initiatives form partnerships to work on quality, coordination, and alignment across the full early childhood continuum, beginning with prenatal care and extending through elementary school. Further, in practice, collective impact and cradle-to-career initiatives tend to focus mainly on developing consensus around shared measurements, and thus devote less attention to the mutually reinforcing activities condition of the collective impact model (White et al., 2019).[48] Coherent sets of **mutually reinforcing activities** are hallmarks of the First 10 School Hubs and First 10 Community Partnerships described in this study.

6 First 10 Schools and Communities encounter common challenges, including structural barriers, lack of capacity and/or commitment, and sustainability.

First 10 Schools and Communities are designed to bridge the gaps between early childhood and elementary education and care and between education, health, and social services. The communities described in this study are developing new structures, strategies, and processes to improve quality, coordination, and alignment, but, as one would expect, they have encountered significant challenges as they attempt to change entrenched systems, patterns, and behaviors.

Multnomah County and Metro Omaha, both multi-district initiatives, suggest the need to tailor work to the priorities of individual school districts at the early stages of implementing their pilot projects. Multnomah County provided an extensive orientation to the principals who participated in its P–3 pilot, only to see many of these principals move to other jobs. Staff turnover in early childhood centers has also been a challenge for Cambridge's quality improvement project.

Some P–3 initiatives have not yet addressed the full early childhood continuum. School personnel have a tendency to gravitate toward family engagement strategies and not to place an equal emphasis on changing teaching and learning in classrooms. The innovative initiatives in Montgomery County and Lowell described in this study have not continued

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48 Personal interviews with Jeff Edmonson of StriveTogether, May 23, 2017; Amy Neal of Metro United Way, Louisville, Kentucky, May 1, 2017; and Scott McLeod of United Way of Salt Lake City, Utah, September 26, 2017.

to be prioritized, due to leadership changes and changes in state funding priorities. While many states support P–3 efforts, only Oregon's initiative is funded through an appropriation in the state budget.

The challenges that First 10 Schools and Communities face are consistent with those identified in the research on early childhood system-building, the transition to kindergarten, and both preK–3 and P–3 initiatives (Coburn et al., 2018; File & Gullo, 2002; D. Jacobson, 2016; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012b; Kagan & Tarrant, 2010; Mashburn, Locasale-Crouch, & Pears, 2018; Pianta et al., 2007; Valentino & Stipek, 2016):

- Learning how to implement teaching practices that are developmentally appropriate and standards-aligned

- Addressing structural, programmatic, and philosophical differences between early childhood and K–12 education

- Setting early childhood and early elementary school education as school district priorities

- Building expertise, capacity, and/or will to engage in quality improvement efforts on the part of both early childhood programs and school districts

- Addressing disparities in opportunities for children of color, serving low-income children of color in settings accustomed to serving more affluent white children, and incorporating staff of color in schools with a predominantly white teaching staff

- Moving beyond the preK-K "seam" to include strategies intended to address the needs of children ages 0–3 and in grades 1–3

- Moving beyond introductory family engagement ideas to systemic family partnerships

- Developing reliable kindergarten readiness assessments and data in many contexts and reliable measures for social-emotional learning in grades 1–3

- Sustaining ambitious initiatives in contexts characterized by limited and/or inconsistent funding, leadership turnover, and staff turnover

7   States play a critical role in supporting First 10 Schools and Communities by creating a conducive policy environment and providing financial support, technical assistance, and networking opportunities.

Many states support P–3 improvement (D. Jacobson, 2016; Tarrant, 2015), and many support community schools (Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership, 2018). Developing First 10 systems at the state level requires changes in both state policy and state support for community-level First 10 initiatives. Expanding access to high-quality early childhood services, including prekindergarten and childcare for children ages 0–3, is an important component of the state role. First 10 state policy also encompasses aligning standards (including social-emotional standards) for infant and toddler, prekindergarten, and K–12 education; developing kindergarten

entry assessments; supporting data-sharing between prekindergarten and K–12 education systems; developing licensing structures, career lattices, and compensation schedules that support high-quality teachers; and promoting leadership development (Bornfreud et al., 2015; D. Jacobson, 2016).[49] Many states have also found it necessary to deepen collaboration among the agencies (or units within agencies) responsible for early childhood education, early elementary school education, and health (D. Jacobson, 2016).

A number of states have supported community P–3 initiatives by developing grant programs, such as the Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation fund in Oregon, and by providing technical assistance and networking opportunities to communities. New Jersey, Minnesota, Connecticut, and Massachusetts have all sponsored P–3 or preK–3 leadership academies in recent years. Pennsylvania and Massachusetts used U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant funds to support P–3 grant programs, and Alabama is currently supporting preK–3 alignment through a grant program as well.

States can support First 10 improvement at the community level by providing initial financial and technical support for a backbone organization to convene and coordinate First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships (Waters Boots, 2013).

Important questions that follow from this study and that states must address are how to support First 10 School Hubs, how to support First 10 Community Partnerships, and how to support the combined partnership-hub model depicted in Figure 9 above. A related question is whether regional entities will provide support to communities around First 10 improvement.

Also important is building the community's capacity to **develop, monitor, and adjust strategic plans as needed** (Bornfreud et al., 2015; D. Jacobson, 2016). The experiences of the communities described in this study suggest three additional areas in which states can provide targeted support for First 10 improvement:

- Developing and/or identifying curricula, assessments, and instructional guidance that integrate academic and social-emotional learning in developmentally appropriate ways aligned to how young children best learn

- Promoting collaboration between school districts and community-based early childhood centers

- Developing the capacity of school districts, elementary schools, and early childhood centers to deliver high-quality teaching and learning, engage families in meaningful partnerships, and provide comprehensive services for children and families

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[49] For more on state support of the K–3 grades in particular, see, *K–3 Policymakers' Guide to Action: Making the Early Years Count* (Atchison, Diffey, & Workman, 2016). For more on the state's role in supporting transitions and alignment, see *Transitions and Alignment: From Preschool to Kindergarten* (Atchison & Pompelia, 2018).

The Role of First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships: A Theory of Action

The cases described in this study suggest the **goals and objectives** that First 10 Schools and Communities should support, the **kinds of schools and community institutions** they are trying to build, and the **roles First 10 Hubs and Partnerships play** in supporting these goals. In doing so, the cases inform a **theory of action** for First 10 Schools and Communities.[50]

A *theory of action* tells a story about how a package of strategies is expected to lead to positive outcomes, creating what some have called a *causal story line* (City et al., 2009). In effect, a theory of action is a hypothesis: We believe that these activities will lead to these outcomes, which can be tested over time. In this way, the theory serves as a guide for how a group of strategies can be implemented in such a way that together they form a coherent, consistent approach (Argyris & Schön, 1978; City et al., 2009).

Theories of action are often summarized as "if-then" statements that convey the causal storyline underlying the expected link between action and outcomes. The First 10 Theory of Action, depicted graphically in Figure 11, outlines how First 10 initiatives can create a *virtuous circle* among families, schools, and communities—an ongoing cycle in which each strengthens the others.[51] The First 10 Theory of Action can be summarized as follows:

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[50] See also *Early Childhood Community School Linkages: Advancing a Theory of Change* (Geiser, Rollins, et al., 2013).

[51] A *virtuous circle* is the opposite of a *vicious circle.*

FIGURE 11: A Theory of Action for the First 10 Schools and Communities
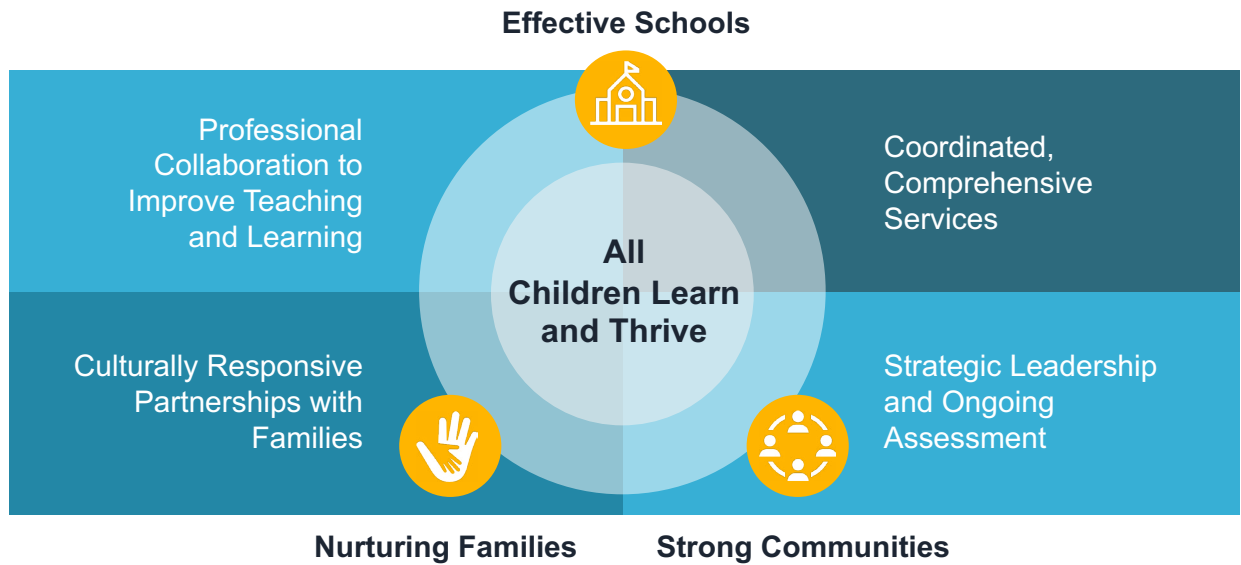
Effective Schools

Professional Collaboration to Improve Teaching and Learning

Coordinated, Comprehensive Services

All Children Learn and Thrive

Culturally Responsive Partnerships with Families

Strategic Leadership and Ongoing Assessment

Nurturing Families   **Strong Communities**

The First 10 Theory of Action

If First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships perform four roles:

- Support professional collaboration to improve teaching and learning
- Coordinate comprehensive services for children and families
- Promote culturally responsive partnerships with families
- Provide strategic leadership and ongoing assessment

with the explicit aim of promoting a virtuous circle of collaboration and improvement among:

- Effective schools
- Nurturing families
- Strong communities

then communities will promote educational equity and close opportunity gaps, and all children will learn and thrive.

All Children Learn and Thrive

The goal of First 10 Schools and Communities is for **all children to learn and thrive**. This is an **educational equity** goal, meaning that **all** children receive what they need in order to develop to their full academic and social potential. Realizing this goal requires that communities do the following:

- Ensure that all children have opportunities and supports that enable their educational success

- Eliminate the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with any social, economic, or cultural factor, including race

- Identify and end inequitable practices

- Create inclusive environments for adults and children[52]

A Virtuous Circle: Effective Schools, Nurturing Families, and Strong Communities

Improving schools, strengthening families, and strengthening communities are interdependent and mutually reinforcing endeavors. Fundamental to the First 10 Theory of Action is an underlying premise: **Effective schools, nurturing families, and strong communities form a virtuous circle of collaboration and improvement, each positively affecting the others in an ongoing process**. Effective schools and strong communities support nurturing families, nurturing families enable schools to be more effective and strengthen communities, and the work of schools and communities is likewise interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Hoagwood et al., 2018).

The First 10 Theory of Action draws on several seminal research statements to define these three domains as follows:

- **Effective schools** are characterized by strong leadership, collaborative professional learning, effective teaching, culturally responsive family partnerships, and community connections and support (Bryk et al., 2010).

- **Nurturing families** develop positive parent-child relationships, are knowledgeable about parenting and child development, promote the social-emotional competence of their children, and foster connections with their peers and the community. They are resilient and strive to promote family well-being (Browne, 2014; NRC, 2000; Office of Head Start, 2011).

- **Strong communities** are characterized by trust, a strong sense of community, the commitment of stakeholders to the community's collective well-being, the capacity for collective action and the ability to solve community problems, and access to economic, human, physical, and political resources (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001;

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[52] Adapted from The National Equity Project (http://nationalequityproject.org/about/equity).

Sampson, 2012). They are homes to effective community organizations, including home visiting programs, early childhood centers, Head Start programs, health providers, social services, libraries, hospitals, museums, and housing authorities.

The Role of First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships

According to this theory of action, First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships perform **four roles**:

- Support professional collaboration to improve teaching and learning
- Coordinate comprehensive services for children and families
- Promote culturally responsive partnerships with families
- Provide strategic leadership and ongoing assessment

Support Professional Collaboration to Improve Teaching and Learning. In both hubs and community-wide partnerships, First 10 initiatives bring professionals together to collaborate on improving teaching and learning. First 10 School Hubs and Community Partnerships can support professional development and professional learning within member organizations through, for example, supporting coaches and effectively using common planning time (D. Jacobson, 2010). Given their inter-organizational nature, however, the primary focus of their efforts is **within-sector** and **cross-sector collaboration**. Cambridge's work to create communities of practice to improve quality in early childhood centers and family childcare settings and its plan to develop a citywide home visiting system across its disparate home visiting programs are examples of within-sector collaboration on professional learning.

Effective schools, nurturing families, and strong communities form a virtuous circle of collaboration and improvement, each positively affecting the others in an ongoing process.

First 10 Community Partnerships support cross-sector professional collaboration by developing and implementing transition plans; aligning curriculum, assessments, and instructional practices; and sponsoring joint professional development opportunities, for instance, for community-based prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Cross-sector examples of professional collaboration in First 10 School Hubs include the Blue Mountain region's professional learning teams and Lowell's communities of practice on family engagement that included schools, early childhood centers, and family childcare educators.

Coordinate Comprehensive Services for Children and Families. First 10 School Hubs extend the community school model to include young children and their families. Head Start programs and some early childhood centers, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of

Dorchester, also provide comprehensive services for young children. Elementary schools serving as First 10 School Hubs in Normal, Multnomah County, and Greater Omaha employ family liaisons or coordinators who engage and support families through home visits, play-and-learn groups, family engagement events, out-of-school programming, and coordination of needed services, including health and mental health services.

First 10 Community Partnerships bring together First 10 stakeholders to develop systemic approaches to providing comprehensive services across a cluster of elementary schools and early childhood programs in a geographic area. The SUN Service System in Multnomah County and Cincinnati's networks of nonprofit community partners are examples of systems of support for comprehensive services.

Promote Culturally Responsive Family Support and Partnerships. Culturally responsive family engagement is a key element of First 10 initiatives. It involves "practices that respect and acknowledge the cultural uniqueness, life experiences, and viewpoints of classroom families and draw on those experiences to enrich and energize the classroom curriculum and teaching activities, leading to respectful partnerships with students' families" (Grant & Ray, 2018, p. 5). Examples of intensive family engagement work include Multnomah County's emphasis (mandated by SUN) on culturally responsive relationships, Beth Kelley's outreach to families at Sugar Creek Elementary School, the Families United leadership group at Earl Boyles, Cambridge's work around a citywide definition of *family engagement*, and Cambridge's needs assessment regarding family engagement and parenting education programs. First 10 Community Partnerships also organize community-wide early learning campaigns, for example, on literacy, math, social-emotional development, and trauma-sensitive practice.

Provide Strategic Leadership and Ongoing Assessment. Through their work on quality, alignment, and partnerships with families, leaders of First 10 School Hubs and First 10 Community Partnerships—principals, directors, resource coordinators, and managers of backbone organizations—support the development of effective schools, nurturing families, and strong communities. They build partnerships to promote both vertical alignment and horizontal coordination. They build their staff's capacity in effective teaching and learning, family engagement, and the provision of comprehensive services for children and families. They use needs assessments, strategic plans, and formative assessment to promote the quality and alignment of teaching, learning, and care across the early childhood–elementary school continuum.

Child, Family, School, and Community

As this study has shown, a number of communities across the United States are independently developing First 10 initiatives to improve quality, coordination, and alignment across elementary schools and early childhood organizations. These initiatives, which are primarily designed to address the needs of low-income and marginalized children and families, share a number of common features that together constitute **a powerful emerging model to improve outcomes for low-income children**. No community, however, has addressed all areas of need across the full early childhood continuum; rather, each has exemplary areas of strength and other areas that are in need of further work.

States and communities should join together to support these important initiatives, and in doing so deepen and accelerate the development of coherent strategies to improve child outcomes. To the extent that these strategies are successful, children will experience a succession of coherent, high-quality experiences; families will engage in meaningful partnerships in support of their children; and communities will be strengthened through better schools, more effective programs, improved coordination, deeper social connections, and expanding social trust.

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