



*a running*  
**START**  
PHILADELPHIA  
*for every child, birth to 5*

2015

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*A Running Start Philadelphia*, Philadelphia's new citywide early learning plan, lays the foundation for a coherent system to provide high-quality early learning for all children from birth to age five.

The five years from infancy to kindergarten are the most important in life. Poverty and the trauma that often accompanies it can slow the development of infants, toddlers, and preschool children. It can affect how physically and emotionally healthy they grow up, how well they get along with others, and how well they learn. High-quality early learning is one of the most effective means to help children overcome the effects of intergenerational poverty and develop the tools they need to succeed in school, get good jobs, and raise healthy families themselves.

*A Running Start* is a crucial component of Shared Prosperity Philadelphia, the city's comprehensive anti-poverty strategy launched formally in the summer of 2013.

The plan is designed to meet a two-pronged challenge:

(1) ensure the early learning services that currently exist in child care centers and in homes are of the highest quality, and

(2) expand opportunities so the majority of Philadelphia's families with young children can benefit.

Like Shared Prosperity Philadelphia, *A Running Start* follows the philosophy of collective impact. It dismantles barriers to effective collaboration among the public, private, and nonprofit organizations addressing early learning issues. Specifically, it will create a public-private organization to coordinate the plan with all stakeholders, including parents and caregivers; more than 3,000 licensed child care providers; early childhood funders; local, state, and federal agencies; advocacy groups; philanthropic organizations; businesses leaders; and providers of technical assistance and professional development. It will develop a shared early learning policy and agenda for advocacy, while continuously measuring its impact and revising it for maximum effectiveness.

The plan includes these goals and related strategies:

- 1 All infants, toddlers, and preschoolers have the opportunity to experience high-quality, full-day/full-year early learning in formal and informal settings**
  - ▶ Advocate that all programs receiving public funds be required to participate in Keystone STARS, Pennsylvania's formal quality rating and improvement system.
  - ▶ Create a one-stop system where parents and caregivers can determine whether their children are eligible for publicly-funded early learning services and use a streamlined application process to apply for all programs for which they qualify.
  - ▶ Support early learning programs to meet the diverse needs of Philadelphia's families, with particular attention to populations that are currently underserved, including immigrant, refugee, dual language learner and homeless children and families.
  - ▶ Establish a learning collaborative among child-serving agencies to improve understanding of child development, early childhood systems and parent engagement.
- 2 Philadelphia has an ample supply of high-quality public, private, and nonprofit providers with supports for entering, sustaining, and growing the number of high-quality opportunities**
  - ▶ Help providers enter and stay in the field by aligning city agency functions that pertain to early learning programs and services.
  - ▶ Increase public and private financing for capital improvements for early learning programs in low-income neighborhoods.
  - ▶ Create a local "Close the Gap" investment initiative to address other essential components of early learning programs, including the need for a well-compensated professional workforce.

### 3 Philadelphia has a sufficient, stable, and diverse high-quality early learning workforce with access to professional development supports and adequate compensation

- ▶ Advocate to increase average salaries and expand tuition support to pursue early childhood degrees.
- ▶ Strengthen pathways to early childhood degrees and credentials and increase the linguistic and cultural diversity of the early childhood workforce.
- ▶ Enlist the aid of colleges, universities, and professional development organizations to expand the number of highly qualified trained teachers and staff.

### 4 Children and families are continuously supported by the early learning and K-3 systems

- ▶ Bring together teachers from both of these systems for combined professional development to use aligned curriculum and instructional standards.
- ▶ Create Kindergarten transition networks, especially in neighborhoods with diverse language and cultural needs. In these networks early learning and elementary school teachers, social service agencies and community groups will work together to help parents prepare their children to start school.

### 5 Philadelphia has the required infrastructure and funding to support a high-quality, robust early learning system

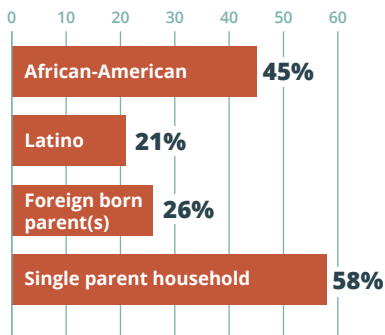
- ▶ Establish a public-private entity, with backbone support from the Mayor's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity (CEO), to coordinate the wide-ranging strategies in this plan. The organization will evolve from the Mayor's Early Learning Advisory Council (MELAC), which includes members from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.
- ▶ Work with state and federal agencies to collect relevant data to support planning, decision-making, and periodic reporting of results, while also leveraging funding to implement *A Running Start*.
- ▶ Establish a local philanthropic collaborative to foster new approaches to funding and maximize the impact of investments.
- ▶ Join other major cities in devising a plan for funding and implementing universal pre-kindergarten programs for all of Philadelphia's three- and four-year-olds.

## Why We Need a Citywide Early Learning Plan

Parents are children's most important and constant teachers, but high-quality early learning programs provide benefits for all children. These programs are particularly effective in bridging the gap between the opportunities available to children in low-income families and those with higher incomes. In addition, early childhood education helps identify children with developmental delays and disabilities, and supports children whose families speak a language other than English at home.

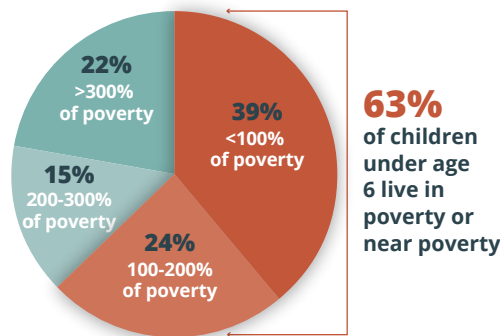
Quality programs reduce the need for special education, remediation and grade repetition. They increase the likelihood of high school graduation and college attendance, and reduce involvement with the juvenile justice and welfare systems as children grow up. Every one of Philadelphia's 110,000 children under age five should have the opportunity to experience them, starting with those who are at greatest risk of poor outcomes in school and later in life. Without such programs, poverty is more likely to persist from generation to generation.

Fig. 1 PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 5



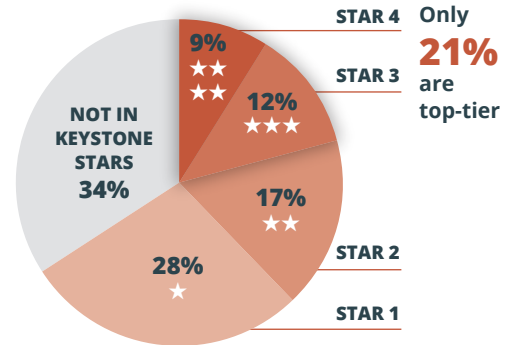
SOURCE: American Community Survey, 2013

Fig. 2 PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 6 BY FAMILY INCOME, 2013



SOURCE: American Community Survey, 2013

Fig. 3 PERCENTAGE OF SLOTS IN LICENSED PROVIDERS, 2014



SOURCE: childcaremap.org 2015

## The Current Situation in Philadelphia

Thirty-nine percent of Philadelphia’s children under age six are in families below the federal poverty line (\$24,250 for a family of four), while another 24 percent are in families just above poverty level (100 to 200 percent of the poverty line).

Supports currently in place to reach children in their earliest years fall short. Philadelphia has only half the spaces needed for the federal Head Start program for three- and four-year-olds in poverty, and less than 2 percent of the slots needed for infants and toddlers in Early Head Start. Of the thousands of families that were potentially eligible, all other evidence-based home visiting programs combined reached a small fraction of those who were eligible in 2013-14.

Quality also is an issue: Philadelphia has some stellar early learning programs, but others are of fair, poor, or unknown quality. Only about 14,500 of the nearly 68,000 licensed slots are rated top tier, and quality is unknown for about 23,000 slots.

## The Process

To create this plan, CEO engaged a team of professionals in the field of school readiness to gather data about current and past early learning efforts and research strategies that have proven successful in other cities. Based on information from interviews and focus groups with a broad group of stakeholders, the team drew up a draft plan, and then held community meetings and surveyed parents, community members, child care providers, and leaders in education and business, soliciting feedback from approximately 400 community members in the process.

## Conclusion

The effects of poverty continue to limit the ability of Philadelphia’s young children to develop to their full potential. In the time it has taken to create *A Running Start*, thousands of children have entered kindergarten not as ready to learn as they might have been. It’s critically important not only to help these children where they are right now, but also to create a system in which future children will have the best possible chances to thrive. They—and Philadelphia—can’t afford to wait.

The full report and supporting information are available at [sharedprosperityphila.org](http://sharedprosperityphila.org)

**Mayor’s Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity**  
 1234 Market Street, 16th Floor  
 Philadelphia, PA 19107  
 215-685-3600  
[www.sharedprosperityphila.org](http://www.sharedprosperityphila.org)

CEO is Philadelphia’s Community Action Agency, funded in part by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development. This report is also made possible with generous support from the William Penn Foundation.