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## Chapter

# Community Approaches to Funding and Supports for High-quality Early Care Experiences: A United States Example

*Larrisa-lei Wilkinson, Emily Diaz, Lauren Decker-Woodrow and Sarah Baray*

## Abstract

While much research has validated the importance of high-quality early learning environments to achieve successful long-term outcomes, providing such environments for all children continues to be a challenge. Debates and varying opinions of how to best use and direct funds to early education and care, as well as determine levels of support to increase quality persist. To address these challenges, a large urban city in the United States has taken a multi-faceted, community-based approach to both funding and quality implementation supports. In the chapter, the authors will first detail examples of funding and provision challenges and provide examples of how cities have sought to address these challenges. Second, the chapter will detail the specific approach to funding and support in the example of focus. Third, the authors will present findings to date on the quality of environments and return on funding investment. Finally, the authors will conclude the chapter with recommendations for increasing access to high-quality early care experience in other contexts and environments across the globe.

**Keywords:** community-based programs, early care funding, high quality interactions, shared service models, early childhood education

## 1. Introduction

While decades of research demonstrate the importance of high-quality early childhood education, in the United States federal and state governments provide only limited public funding for early learning. As a result, municipal governments are increasingly using local funding sources to provide more equitable access to high quality early childhood education and care. This chapter will highlight the challenges to obtaining adequate funding and how cities have used creative methods to provide educational opportunities for young children. The featured example is an innovative, comprehensive community-based program in San Antonio, Texas: Pre-K 4 SA. The chapter also includes strategies to inspire and spark creativity for how early education

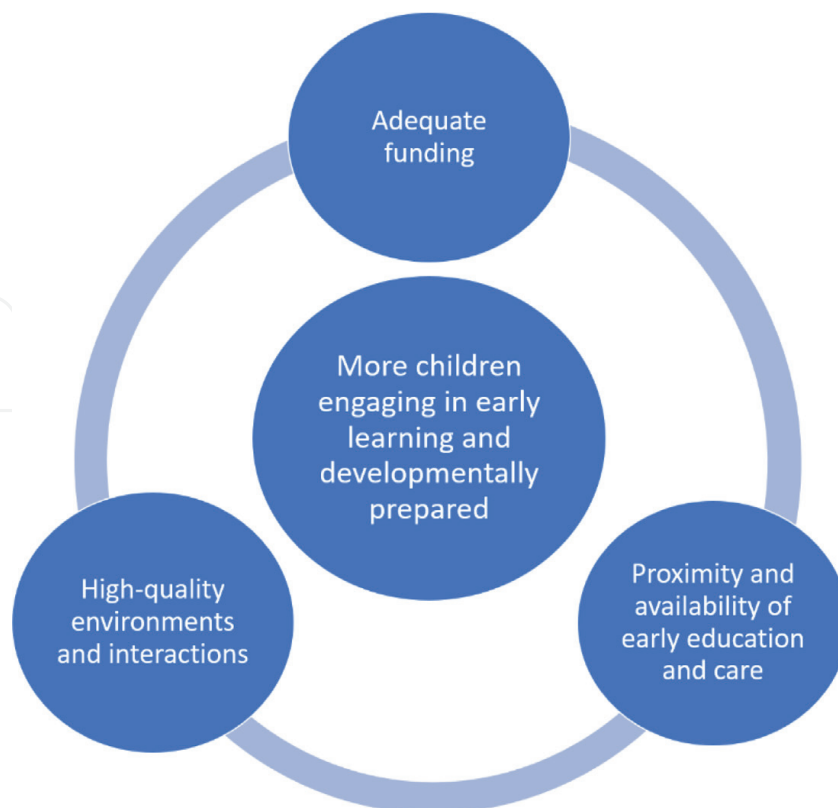
and care across the globe can be funded to implement quality supports in local contexts and communities.

### **1.1 The importance of funding high-quality early education and care**

Providing high-quality early education and care experiences for all children is a global priority. In fact, the fourth sustainable development goal of the United Nations is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. A target of this goal is by 2030, all children will have access to quality early childhood developmental care and education [1]. Within the United States, there is not a comprehensive system for education and care from birth through age five. Instead, it is provided through a combination of federal, state, and local policies and programs [2]. Formal schooling for children starts between the ages of five and seven years old depending on the state in which a child resides [3]. Research on the period of education prior to formal schooling has been ongoing for decades [4–15]. A comprehensive meta-analysis of 123 studies on early childhood programs in the United States provided evidence that preschool (defined as programs prior to formal schooling) by itself can close half the achievement gap between low- and high-income students [16]. When considering the research evidence of early childhood education in the United States, two pioneer programs often cited are the Perry Preschool program and the Abecedarian project [17, 18]. Both were rigorously designed using experimental methods and found long-lasting impacts of high-quality preschool education. These benefits include children entering formal schooling better prepared and less likely to repeat a grade, higher I.Q. scores, greater achievement test scores, increased likelihood of attending a 4-year college or university, having a skilled job resulting in higher lifetime earnings, owning a home and car, and improved health outcomes. At the same time, there was a reduction in the likelihood of being a teen parent, reporting depressive symptoms, and committing fewer crimes [17, 18]. Taken together, high-quality early childhood education provides short- and long-term benefits, as well as a pathway for children to mature to their full potential.

While much research has validated the importance of high-quality early learning environments to achieve successful long-term outcomes, providing such environments for all children continues to be a challenge due to a lack of adequate funding [4–15, 19, 20]. In 2015, only 0.33% of the United States Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was spent on early education while the average public spending among the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries was 0.74% [21]. In the United States, early education and care is funded through federal, state, and local systems in a piecemeal fashion, creating a disjointed governance structure controlling multiple funding streams with diverse priorities and targeting different populations of families. Although 44 of the 50 states have universal public preschool programs, these programs only serve approximately one-third of four-year-old children in the country [22]. Additionally, many of these programs lack key quality benchmarks for providing and implementing instructional supports that are necessary to obtain the lasting benefits of preschool [19, 22]. In order to operate, programs must blend multiple funding streams at multiple levels [23]. Therefore, greater investments are needed to expand access to serve more children in high-quality early learning environments.

In order to ensure young children have access to the critical resource of high-quality early education, cities have become creative in identifying potential funding sources and seeking strategic collaborations to support early learning initiatives



**Figure 1.**  
*Visual representation of necessary resources to provide high-quality early learning.*

to meet the needs of their communities. Early childhood education has proven so beneficial that The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified these programs as an important and effective tool to improving community health. Local funding for early learning programs is touted as one of the best non-clinical cost-effective approaches, since investments in high-quality early education generate positive health results within five years that persist over the lifetime of a city [24]. In summary, a visual representation of the necessary resources to provide high-quality early learning is displayed in **Figure 1**. In the next section, we will examine the various approaches cities have taken to fund high-quality early education and care in the United States.

## **2. Cities taking the lead to fund early education and care in the United States**

Cities, like states, use the same funding streams to set aside and allocate resources for early childhood, but also have creatively explored other avenues in recent years to increase funding for local initiatives. More than two dozen cities have dedicated, voter-approved funding for early childhood education. Cities generally use one of four types of tax to create sustainable and dedicated funding streams: 1) Income; 2) Property; 3) Sales; or 4) Sin. Income tax approaches vary from an overall income tax on the entire community to a tax only on high income wage earners. Although the use of income tax is viewed as a progressive funding approach, most cities have been reluctant to utilize income tax as a funding mechanism for early learning because income is already heavily taxed by the United States federal government and most

states. Additionally, because the amount of income tax withheld is reported to workers on each paystub, community members consistently see how much of their income goes to taxes, making it harder to garner voter support for increasing the tax. Property tax has been used successfully by cities located where statewide property tax rates are low. Some cities opt to apply the tax to all residential and commercial properties, but more commonly, only to certain types of properties (e.g., commercial or high value residential properties) in an attempt to take a more progressive taxing approach. In spite of its reputation as a regressive tax, local sales tax is one of the most commonly used approaches for funding early education [25, 26].

Sales tax has the advantage of being a less noticeable tax because it is assessed on individual purchases and represents only a small portion of the total price consumers pay. Campaigns to encourage voters to approve the use of sales tax for early learning often emphasize the tax is less than ½ cent. A sales tax that is perceived as more progressive is the sin tax, which increases the price on non-essential items, such as tobacco, alcohol, soda, gambling and gaming, marijuana, and lottery revenue. Sin taxes are popular with cities seeking funding for early education because the tax is viewed as optional. Only those who partake in behaviors like smoking, drinking, and gambling pay the tax. This argument is often persuasive to voters, although in many cities the majority of voters engage in one or more of these behaviors [19, 25, 26].

Considering a city's dedicated funding stream may not generate sufficient funds or may have restrictions on allowable expenditures, cities often supplement tax revenue with private philanthropy or public education funding through school-community partnerships. Community advocacy efforts have helped to shape public opinion on the importance and benefits of high-quality early learning leading to greater local investments for young children and families [19, 25–28]. Cities have worked to combine public and private funds as well as form collaborative partnerships with businesses, philanthropic agencies, and other community organizations to raise additional dollars and obtain resources [19, 29–31]. As a result of many states providing public funding for only some children to attend early education programs, most cities with dedicated early childhood funding have opted to focus on expanding access to more children. **Table 1** offers some examples of city early education programs in the United States.

As displayed in **Table 1**, four of the seven programs serve three-year-old children and all serve four-year-old children. As indicated previously, most programs blend funding across multiple sources with most utilizing local funds through either sales tax, property tax, or beverage tax. Programs demonstrate a variety of mixed delivery mechanisms to serve young children and most use public elementary schools. All programs are full-day and most are offered at no cost to families. Finally, most programs were given a gold quality level demonstrating they served over 30% of children enrolled in preschool programs and met at least 8 of the 10 quality benchmark standards indicated by the National Institute for Early Education and Research. This table highlights programs that were able to obtain creative innovative funding sources that work for their community with high-quality supports [32–38]. We will now showcase a specific comprehensive and innovative funding model in San Antonio, Texas: Pre-K 4 SA.

## **2.1 A community-based early learning ecosystems approach: Pre-K 4 SA**

### *2.1.1 A bold community-wide early learning vision*

Unlike many local early education initiatives across the United States that start by expanding access, San Antonio chose to lead with a strong vision of quality first.

City	Program Name	Ages served	Funding Source(s)	Delivery Mechanism	Program length	Cost to Families	NIEER Quality Level <sup>a</sup>
Boston	Boston Preschool	3–4 years old	State, Local (property tax), and Private Philanthropy Contributions	Public elementary schools and community-based organizations	6.5 hours	No cost	Gold
Charlotte	NC Pre-K	4 years old	State	Public elementary schools, private child care programs, and Head Start centers	6.5 hours	No cost	Gold
Nashville	Nashville Pre-K	3–4 years old	State and Local (tax)	Public elementary schools and community-based organizations	6 hours and extended day	No cost or reduced	Gold
New York City	Pre-K For All	4 years old	State	Public elementary schools and community-based organizations	6 hours	No cost	Gold
Philadelphia	Bright Futures Pre-K Counts	3–4 years old	Local (Philadelphia beverage tax)	Public elementary schools and community-based organizations	6 hours	No cost	Silver
San Antonio	Pre-K 4 SA	3–4 years old	Local (sales tax)	Child development centers	7.5 hours and extended day	No cost or reduced	Gold
Tulsa	CAP Tulsa	4 years old	Federal and State	Public elementary schools, charter schools, child development centers, and Educare	9 hours	No cost	N/A <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The National Institute for Early Education and Reserach (NIEER) awarded cities three medals: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. A Bronze medal is awarded to cities with over 30% of children enrolled in Pre-K programs; a silver medal is awarded to cities meeting 8 out of 10 quality benchmarks; a Gold medal is awarded to cities with over 30% of children enrolled in Pre-K programs and meeting 8 out of 10 quality benchmarks. The policy benchmarks include: Learning goals, curriculum supports, teacher education level, teacher specialized training, assistant teacher education, professional development, maximum class size, teacher-child ratio, health screening and referral, and continuous quality improvement systems. For more information see the full report [19].

<sup>b</sup>Tulsa was not included in the NIEER report and did not receive a quality reference.

**Table 1.**  
Major cities' coordination of funds to achieve high-quality early learning.

In 2011, former San Antonio Mayor Julián Castro convened a taskforce of corporate chief executive officers, superintendents, and education leaders throughout the city to identify the most effective approach to improving community educational outcomes and the resulting workforce trajectory. After a year of study, the Brainpower Taskforce recommended the development of a program focused on high-quality pre-kindergarten services for four-year-old children. The Taskforce based their deliberate decision on the research demonstrating the long-term benefits of improving overall community education outcomes by helping young children to learn and read on grade-level, making them less likely to fall behind their classmates and more likely to graduate and attend college. The Taskforce envisioned a comprehensive program design offering both direct services to children through state-of-the-art early educational centers and increasing access to high-quality opportunities to more families through strategic partnerships and investments in other early learning programs across the city [39].

Championed as a workforce development initiative, the mission of Pre-K 4 SA is to develop a world-class workforce in one generation through high-quality early childhood education. In August 2012, the city council authorized the creation of the San Antonio Early Childhood Education Municipal Development Corporation, in accordance with Chapter 379A of the Texas Local Government Code, known as the Better Jobs Act. The Better Jobs Act incentivizes municipalities to promote economic opportunity by improving the skills and qualifications of the labor force and supporting economic infrastructure. The code articulates the specific approaches a city may employ to improve the workforce, one of which is through the development of early childhood education programs. The Better Jobs Act permits a city to increase the local sales tax to support the Municipal Development Corporation, if such an increase is approved by the majority of voters in a public election. In November 2012, 53% of voters approved raising the local sales tax by 1/8th cent to support the Pre-K 4 SA initiative [40]. The initial authorization was for eight years. In November 2020, Pre-K 4 SA was reauthorized for another eight years with 73% voting in favor of funding the program through 2029 [41]. With a population of 1.5 million, San Antonio is the 7th largest city in the United States. Due to its favorable weather, cultural influences, and historical architecture, San Antonio is also a popular tourist destination. The combination of a large local population, with a strong tourism industry, results in a sizable sales tax revenue. In Fiscal Year 2023, the 1/8th cent sales tax dedicated to Pre-K 4 SA generated over \$48 million in revenue for the program [42, 43].

### *2.1.2 Leading with quality*

From the onset, Pre-K 4 SA was designed with quality as the focus. The architects of Pre-K 4 SA, the Brainpower Taskforce, understood that only high-quality early childhood programs generate the types of long-term benefits described in the research literature [11–13, 39]. For this reason, the comprehensive program design includes four state-of-the-art early educational centers that serve as model early learning sites demonstrating what is possible when young children have access to highly skilled and well-compensated teachers, an evidenced-based curriculum, instructional supports and content specific professional learning. The educational centers serve 2,000 three- and four-year olds. Pre-K 4 SA's four education centers are strategically located throughout the city and offer a full-day pre-kindergarten program. All lead teachers are required to have a baccalaureate degree (BA) or a master's degree (MA) in early childhood education. Assistant teachers are required to have a minimum of

a Child Development Associates (CDA) credential. Administrators are required to have a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education and a state-issued principal credential or a child development director credential. Pre-K 4 SA instructional staff engage in over 150 hours of professional learning each year through trainings and job-embedded instructional coaching. Pre-K 4 SA's family engagement team is comprised of parent liaisons from the community and is dedicated to collaborating with families and fostering advocacy opportunities. The family engagement team's goal is to create spaces for families to share ideas and be a part of the decision-making process in their children's educational experience [40, 41, 43–45].

Pre-K 4 SA also offers free best-in-class professional learning for birth through third grade educators and competitive grants for early learning programs across the city. Pre-K 4 SA's professional learning department provides over 10,000 hours of professional learning to over 2,000 birth through third grade educators annually free of charge. The grants department awards approximately \$4.2 million annually to partnering early learning programs. Pre-K 4 SA has invested \$30 million to enhance and expand early learning programs in partnering school districts, charter schools, private/parochial schools, child development centers, and family home providers. The program's comprehensive structure allows Pre-K 4 SA to create sustainable partnerships with school districts and child development centers to ensure a continuum of care from birth to third grade for children entering and exiting the program. During its first eight years, Pre-K 4 SA supported 13,000 additional young children across the city and impacted more than 138 schools [43].

In 2017 Pre-K 4 SA was awarded the HEB Excellence in Education award and was recognized as being the best early childhood program in Texas. By 2019, all four education centers received National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation and the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) awarded Pre-K 4 SA a Gold Medal for meeting all ten of the quality policy benchmarks [19, 43].

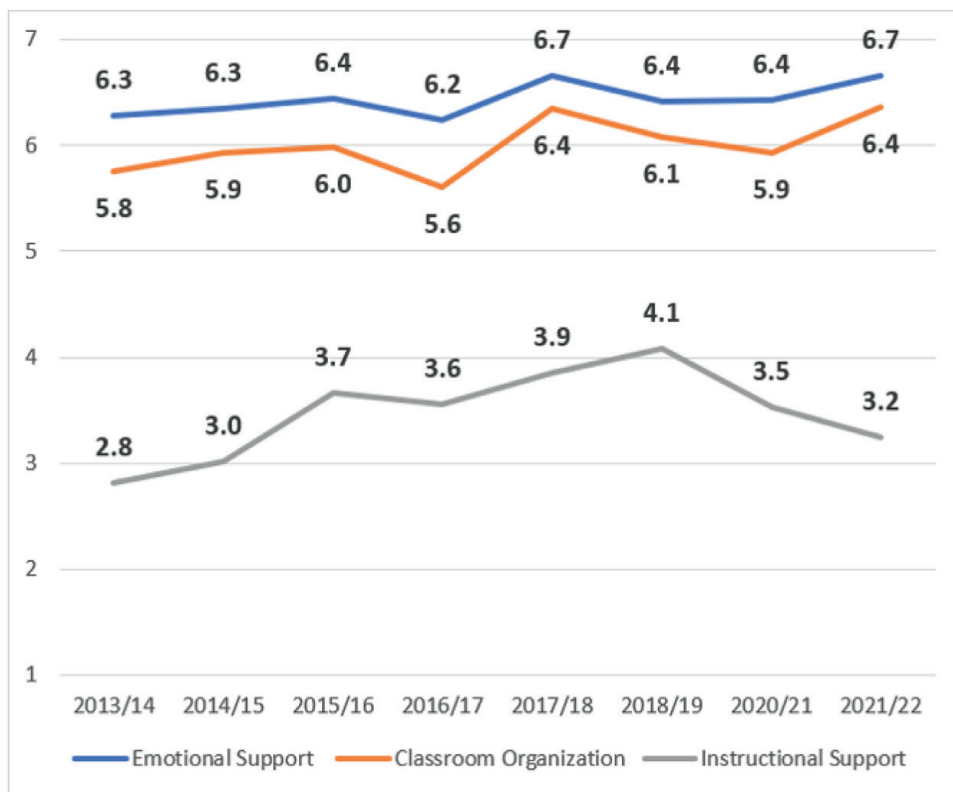
### *2.1.3 Results of Pre-K 4 SA*

A series of independent evaluations were included as part of the program design of Pre-K 4 SA. These independent annual evaluations have demonstrated positive results based on the Pre-K 4 SA learning model [40, 41, 44–52]. Together, these evaluations indicate positive results with respect to short- and long-term outcomes for children and families. For example, program findings demonstrate increased classroom quality, kindergarten readiness, attendance, 3rd-grade test scores, and employment and wage earnings for families. Moreover, there has been a decreased need for additional early reading supports, special education placement, and grade retention.

With respect to classroom quality, Pre-K 4 SA classrooms were observed in the spring of each school year using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) [53]. CLASS is an observational system used nationally and internationally and assesses classroom practices in preschool by measuring the interactions between children and adults [5–8, 54, 55]. Scores range from 1 to 7 with values from 1 to 2 indicating low levels of quality, values from 3 to 5 indicating mid-levels of quality, and values from 6 to 7 indicating high quality [53]. Presented in **Figure 2** are the overall CLASS domain averages across years. In 2019/20 observations were not conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As displayed in **Figure 2**, average scores for the Emotional Support domain ranged from 6.2 to 6.7 (on a 1–7 scale), with all scores in the high range of Emotional Support,





**Figure 2.** Average Pre-K 4 SA scores over time demonstrating high-quality learning environment for young children.

suggesting observed teacher-child interactions were consistently rated as high quality over time. Average scores for the Classroom Organization domain scores ranged from 5.6 to 6.4, with scores either near high or in the high range, which suggests classrooms showed effective interactions regarding Classroom Organization. Finally, Instructional Support domain scores ranged from 2.8 to 4.1, with all but the first year in the mid-range, which suggests in some observed interactions teachers provided support that extended children’s thinking or asked questions that encouraged children to analyze and reason.

When considering classroom quality, Pre-K 4 SA has consistently achieved high levels of Emotional Support, near high or high levels of Classroom Organization, and mid-levels of Instructional Support. It is important to note that lower ranges of Instructional Support quality are common across the United States and internationally as these types of interactions are found to be especially challenging for teachers of young children [4–9, 54, 55]. As displayed in **Figure 2**, these findings demonstrate observed teacher-child interactions were well organized and managed and consistently supportive to children’s safety, security, and well-being. Additionally, teacher-child interactions fostered learning opportunities to support higher order thinking, cognitive development, and instances to hear and use language.

In addition to these findings, an evaluation was conducted to examine the cost and benefits of Pre-K 4 SA [46]. Total costs were calculated using the ingredients method, a conservative method of cost calculation, supported by the Institute of Education Sciences within the United States Department of Education as a rigorous method of cost and benefit calculation [56]. Unlike other methods limited to budgets and expenditures, the ingredients method considers the total costs of implementing a program (including the value of facilities, equipment, and in-kind services). Therefore, it is

expected the ingredients method will result in higher costs compared to other calculation methods.

The total cost of the Pre-K 4 SA program and the average cost per child are shown in **Table 2**. The total cost of providing the Pre-K 4 SA initiative for one year, in 2018 dollars, is \$33,454,290, including all four core components (Education Centers, Family Engagement, Professional Development, and Competitive Grants), serving an estimated 21,872 preschool-age children. Dividing this total by the total number of children served by all four components, produces an average cost per child of \$1,530.

To examine whether the identified benefits of Pre-K 4 SA exceeded the associated costs, a Benefit-Cost ratio was calculated to analyze how much benefit to the society is generated per dollar of investment in Pre-K 4 SA. Monetary values were calculated for the existing evaluation outcomes (see **Table 3**).

When all monetized evaluation outcome benefits were aggregated, an estimated total societal benefit of the Pre-K 4 SA initiative was estimated at \$10,590 per participating child. When considering the local San Antonio community, the benefits were estimated at \$3,790 per participating child. This monetary benefit comes primarily from increased parent participation and earnings in the workforce, where parents are afforded more time for their careers while their children are in care.

#### 2.1.4 Expanding birth through five access to high-quality early learning opportunities

As previously mentioned, the vision of Pre-K 4 SA is to support, strengthen, and amplify the work happening within San Antonio's existing early learning ecosystem,

Total cost	Value
Aggregate (all components, all resource type)	\$33,454,290
Per child (unweighted average)	\$1,530

*Note: Present value cost in 2018 dollars, rounded to the nearest \$10. The total number of all children reached by the four components during the 2018–2019 school year was 21,872.*

**Table 2.**  
 Total cost of Pre-K 4 SA, in aggregate and average cost per-child terms (N = 21,872 children).

Effects (outcomes)	Monetized Value (per child)
Improved mathematics test score at grade 3	\$1,830
Reduced grade repetition during grades K-3	\$200
Reduced special education placement during grades K-3	\$650
Increased student attendance during grades K-3	\$230
Increased weekly income among Extended Day parents	\$7,690 <sup>a</sup>
Total	\$10,590

*Note: Present value cost in 2018 dollars, rounded to the nearest \$10. The total sum may not exactly equal the dollar values across all rows in the table due to rounding.<sup>a</sup>The full estimated result for Extended Day participants is \$15,800 with salary and non-salary compensation taken into account. However, to appropriately attribute evaluation outcome effects across participants, that value is spread across the total of 1,943 children (rather than the 945 who attended Extended Day), thus arriving at the value included in the Benefit–Cost ratio of \$7,690.*

**Table 3.**  
 Estimated benefits per child demonstrating the monetary value of Pre-K 4 SA.

especially toward expanding access to high-quality birth through three-year old programs. In 2019, Pre-K 4 SA partnered with seventeen child development centers to develop a San Antonio Shared Services Alliance to improve the quality of child care and increase access to more families in vulnerable areas of the city experiencing child care deserts. The Alliance grew in 2022 to include fifty-seven child development centers and twenty-three family home providers. The Shared Services approach focuses on sharing skilled staff and resources to provide business and pedagogical leadership among a network of center and home-based providers [57].

The San Antonio Shared Services Alliance offers partner providers professional learning, business leadership development, marketing and communications, teacher credentialing, and program certification and accreditation support. Pre-K 4 SA serves as the Alliance hub agency, while providers work within the network in peer-to-peer support groups to share information and resources. The Alliance has fostered a sense of community among providers who often work in isolation, and also leverages economies of scale to negotiate contracts and services that benefit all Alliance members. This has resulted in providers acquiring research-based curriculums and curriculum supports, classroom materials and furniture, outdoor learning equipment, and shared operational services, such as landscaping and building maintenance. The Alliance has also provided support for recruiting, supporting, and retaining high-quality educators and staff. These supports include job-embedded coaching, job fairs, and a substitute teacher pool for when educators are not able to work. Other cities and communities across the United States have also implemented a variety of Shared Services models in order to better leverage funding opportunities and resource sharing through early learning program partnerships.

#### *2.1.5 Sustainability through community partnerships and awareness*

San Antonio has a long history of addressing issues of early childhood through public policy and philanthropy. This commitment, engagement, and support, along with the broader community and civic leader awareness, are keys to the launch and continued success of Pre-K 4 SA. The ability to capitalize upon the work the city was already doing in the early learning and care space, while also leveraging the political will of the mayor and other cross-sector community leaders (i.e., education, philanthropy and business) helped to strategically align critical stakeholders in moving forward with an ambitious early education agenda.

A targeted communications strategy, along with building and maintaining community support, is a focus of Pre-K 4 SA. During the first years of the program, efforts were focused on educating the community on the benefits of early childhood education, generating awareness of the newly launched program, and driving enrollment. Initially, Pre-K 4 SA had a marketing plan, but not a strategic communications plan. The central focus of the marketing plan aimed to ensure families enrolled in the program. However, a 2016 community survey revealed most community members had little to no awareness about Pre-K 4 SA. Most concerning, some community members assumed the program had failed because they had not heard about it since the authorization election. The research indicated significant and community-wide need to elevate the conversation from Pre-K 4 SA's programmatic components, to the program's benefits for children, families, and the community [40, 41, 43–52]. As a result of the research evidence and knowing the program would be seeking reauthorization, Pre-K 4 SA hired a communications professional to lead brand development and strategic communications. The communications manager hired a team that

reported directly to executive leadership with a dedicated budget capable of sustaining year-round, paid and non-paid, multi-stream messaging to multiple stakeholders. This decision was central to securing overwhelming voter support when the program went up for reauthorization.

Pre-K 4 SA has also adopted a consumer-focused and consumer-driven communications approach. The program has identified three priority audiences for public education and communication: 1) families; 2) educators; and 3) the broader community. Efforts include dedicated media messaging for each target audience. Further, marketing events and outreach connect media efforts to real-world engagement in the communities where families live and work. As Pre-K 4 SA continues to expand its reach beyond its early education centers, communication efforts are shifting to educate the public about the program's city-wide impact on the larger early learning ecosystem through its partnerships with other programs. This strategy aids efforts to build and sustain community and leadership support by focusing on the program's goals, benefits, and return on investment.

## 2.2 Strategies to fund and implement quality supports: A discussion

While Pre-K 4 SA is a powerful example of a community securing and leveraging public funding to increase access to high-quality early learning, the program exists in a unique context with situational factors that do not exist in every community. Nonetheless, we believe there are important lessons from Pre-K 4 SA's approach and the work of cities across the United States that can inform early childhood advocates in locations globally. This section offers some strategies for funding and developing high-quality early learning models in different contexts and environments:

- **Quality first:** The first and most important lesson is to focus on quality before access. Some might argue that getting more children into early learning should be the primary goal as early learning of any quality is better than no early learning. However, this approach can lead to low-quality programs with mediocre results and no lasting impacts for children and families [4–9, 54, 55]. The case of Pre-K 4 SA demonstrates that when families and the community have visible examples of what high-quality early learning looks like, they are better positioned to advocate for higher quality programs. In this way, demonstration sites serve as “models” to guide providers and the community toward higher quality standards and families toward higher quality programs. Pre-K 4 SA had the benefit of funding to build four model preschools. This worked for San Antonio, but it is not the only way. Communities can identify or develop high quality providers to serve as demonstration sites. They can conduct site visits to high-quality programs in other communities. The essential aspect is to have a shared vision of high-quality early learning and a community commitment to work toward it.
- **Multi-sector support and partnerships:** In the United States, early education has not had strong political champions. Political leaders tend to have little knowledge about early education and its deep research base [4–20]. As a result, early education does not tend to rise to the top of policymaker agendas. When it does, it is generally positioned as a necessary part of getting more people (mostly women) into the workforce. Similarly, business leaders often fail to understand how critical early learning is to the development of the current and future workforce. Even educational leaders lack understanding about early learning

and its relevance to long-term educational outcomes. San Antonio addressed this issue head on by ensuring the Brainpower Taskforce was comprised of prominent business, civic, and educational leaders. This strategic decision resulted in a strong multi-sector coalition united around a common goal: to develop a high-quality early childhood program to serve children and families across the San Antonio community [39]. Cross-sector collaborative partnerships are important because each stakeholder group can leverage their expertise independently and collectively. Political representatives can advocate for a need in their local community. Business and financial experts can use their connections and resources to secure funding. Education leaders can use their pedagogical and early childhood content expertise to train and develop staff needed to provide quality educational experiences to children and their families. The convergence of multi-sector partnerships can lead to stronger support for early learning initiatives, as well as additional community funding and resources.

- **Independent evaluations:** An external annual evaluation was included as part of the program design of Pre-K 4 SA. External evaluations are important because they allow for actionable feedback to determine what aspects of a program are working well, what aspects can benefit from further refinement, and if there are any outstanding needs. Moreover, the evaluation plan can be adapted over time to service the needs of the program and the community. For example, the Pre-K 4 SA evaluations included outcomes associated with kindergarten readiness, classroom quality, longitudinal program effects, benefit–cost analyses, and the economic benefits families receive from participating in the program [40, 41, 44–52]. Therefore, external evaluation findings can add more credibility and be used to demonstrate the potential value of a program and its effectiveness. Program evaluations also provide the community with access to information about the need for high-quality early learning experiences for children and families.
- **Community awareness:** Early learning programs directly serve a relatively small segment of the larger community. If families who are directly served by the program are the only community members who know the benefits of the program, securing ongoing funding will be a challenge. An effective strategic communications plan ensures widespread understanding that early learning benefits the entire community.

### **3. Conclusions**

Ensuring all children have access to high-quality early education leading to lifelong learning opportunities and long-term benefits is a noteworthy goal of global importance [1]. This chapter highlighted the significance of high-quality early childhood education and its associated benefits, while calling attention to the difficulties in obtaining adequate funding due to limited public investments at the federal and state level in the United States. Due to inadequate funding, many programs lack the necessary resources to provide quality benchmarks and instructional supports, which are crucial for young children to attain the lasting benefits of preschool [18]. Therefore, to provide opportunities for more children to engage in high-quality early learning environments, greater investments are needed.

Consequently, cities and local communities are taking the lead in thinking innovatively about how to secure financial resources for providing high-quality early educational experiences to young children prior to formal schooling [19, 25, 26, 58]. To further expound on how city led programs are funded and operated, the chapter showcased a comprehensive community-based program in San Antonio, Texas: Pre-K 4 SA. The case for Pre-K 4 SA demonstrates a cross-sector perspective to leveraging funds based on local community resources and creating long lasting impacts for its citizens [39–52]. The chapter also provides strategies to foster inspiration on pathways in which early education and care can be funded and implemented with high-quality in local contexts and communities across the globe. Cities know their community's needs and are best positioned to create multi-sector integrated partnerships that collectively work toward providing equitable access to sustainable, high-quality early care and education.

## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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