



CITY OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

**Office of the Mayor**  
**Thomas M. Menino**

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## **Mayor Menino and United Way Announce \$1 Million School Readiness Initiative**

Under the leadership of Mayor Thomas M. Menino, today the City of Boston and United Way of MA Bay will announce a \$1 million city-wide, school readiness initiative. This effort is backed by new scientific research on the impact of children's early years on school readiness, as well as long-term studies that show the investment return from improving early learning. The public-private partnership seeks to prevent the achievement gap before it surfaces among the next generation of children.

"This public-private partnership is crucial to making sure our children succeed in school and that their families are engaged from the start," Mayor Menino said. "We are already making significant investments in closing the existing achievement gap among school-aged students. This new initiative brings together parents, child care providers, pediatricians, educators and other experts to develop a comprehensive plan for early learning."

At the 11 AM City Hall event, Mayor Menino will also announce some of the newest programs to promote early learning in Boston.

Boston has made significant strides toward addressing the achievement gap and caring for its youngest citizens, as noted by numerous health and education indicators, yet major challenges remain. Social and economic predictors of the achievement gap are apparent among our young children. Of the 31,500 households in Boston with children ages 0-5:

- More than half of the parents (16,000) have no more than a high school diploma -- 7,500 have not even completed high school;
- 8,000 families are living at or below the poverty line (living on less than \$17,000 per year for a family of four at the last census); and
- 8,400 homes with children ages 0-5 are headed by parents with limited or no English proficiency.
- The \$1 million effort is funded by a grant from an anonymous donor of \$633,000, which is matched by more than \$360,000 in additional support and in-kind contributions from 12 partners. The grant, which will be managed by United Way and the Mayor's Office, will fund

the launch of a 30-person Mayor's School Readiness Action Planning Team (APT) that will develop a five-year sustainable plan for preventing the achievement gap. Funds will also be used to develop and pilot a new comprehensive Boston Public Schools Kindergarten Assessment to determine what percentage of children in Boston are ready to enter school and then track the City's progress over time.

“This initiative represents the kind of public/private partnership that is essential to helping us realize our ambitious vision for children and families,” said Milton J. Little, Jr., president and chief executive officer at United Way of Massachusetts Bay. “Under the Mayor's leadership, many diverse groups in the City will come together to develop shared goals for young children and determine which programs are the most effective and should be expanded, and what new opportunities are needed for children and their parents. We're proud to stand with the Mayor to level the playing field among young children, narrow or even eradicate the achievement gap for the next generation, and ensure all children have access to opportunities that promote educational success.”

Some of the other components of the initiative include:

- A new 0-5 Data and Research Team (DART) to review data about young kids and their families across all fields (health, homelessness, BPS, ECE, etc.) to inform the work of the School Readiness Action Planning Team and build a permanent base for data sharing.
- Consensus building across the early care and education (ECE) community about the definition of school-readiness (including cognitive, social-emotional and physical assets that facilitate school success) and identification of appropriate assessment tools to determine readiness of children in ECE before they enter school.
- The development and dissemination of culturally appropriate tools to communicate child development information to parents, ECE providers and health providers, including information on developmental milestones every six months from birth through age 5.
- A Talk Campaign conducted by ReadBoston to bridge the severe vocabulary gap faced by low-income children entering school.
- A “Parents Are A Child's First Teacher” campaign conducted by Countdown to Kindergarten to promote the important role caregivers have in nurturing young children's learning and development.
- Public engagement about the importance of children's early years.

This school readiness initiative has emerged from Mayor Menino's new Achievement Gap Taskforce, launched one year ago. Thirty-three (33) organizations, institutions and City departments have collaborated on the development of this school-readiness initiative, 10 of whom collaborated for the first time with the Mayor's Office and United Way to develop the components of the successful \$1M grant proposal, including: Associated Early Care and Education, Boston Child Care Alliance, Early Childhood Quality Improvement Project, The Children's Museum, The Family Nurturing Center, Countdown to Kindergarten, ReadBoston, Children's Hospital Boston, Community Partnerships for Children and the Boston Public Schools.

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