Pre-K 4 SA: Providing High Quality, Affordable Preschool to San Antonio Families

OVERVIEW

Program Basics
- Pre-K 4 SA provides high quality, full-day pre-kindergarten to 2,000 lower-income four-year-olds in San Antonio each year.
- All instructors have master’s degrees and teach the evidence-based HighScope curriculum; services are delivered at state-of-the-art facilities.
- The initiative is funded by a 1/8th-cent sales tax, first approved in 2012 and reauthorized in 2020.

How Does Pre-K 4 SA Improve Economic Mobility?
- Pre-K 4 SA helps children enter kindergarten ready to learn. Compared to children who enter kindergarten unprepared, children who are ready to learn are more likely to master basic academic and social skills by age 11 and less likely to repeat a grade or be placed in special education.
- In helping children enter kindergarten ready to learn, Pre-K 4 SA increases the likelihood that participants will graduate from high school, receive a post-secondary degree, attain high-quality employment, and experience good outcomes. Participants are also less likely to be arrested or incarcerated.

EVIDENCE LEVEL: PROVEN (HIGHEST TIER)
Preschool is ranked as having the highest level of evidence by the U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Program cost</th>
<th>Implementation locations</th>
<th>Dates active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool-aged children</td>
<td>Approximately $15,000 per student in San Antonio</td>
<td>Used nationwide</td>
<td>Pre-K 4 SA: 2012–present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2010, following an intensive community visioning process, then-Mayor Julian Castro convened a group of civic leaders to determine which investments would most improve San Antonio’s educational and economic trajectory. The group, known as the Brainpower Taskforce, spent a year comparing alternatives and ultimately decided on investing in high-quality early childhood education. To fund the initiative, the city placed a 1/8th cent sales tax on the ballot for November 2012. The measure passed with 53 percent of the vote.

With funding from the 1/8th cent sales tax, Pre-K 4 SA was positioned to provide high-quality, full-day prekindergarten to 2,000 lower-income families across the city.

Pre-K 4 SA has significantly expanded access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education in San Antonio. The initiative directly serves 2,000 four-year-olds per year and provides over $4 million annually to other providers to expand their early childhood education services. Pre-K 4 SA was recently ranked as one of only five “gold medal” providers of early childhood education by City Health and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). Since its inception, the initiative has raised $247 million for early childhood education and directly served 12,271 four-year-olds.

After initially being approved with 53 percent of the vote in 2012, the 1/8th-cent sales tax that funds Pre-K 4 SA received 73 percent of the vote in its reauthorizing referendum in November 2020.

### SAN ANTONIO'S IMPLEMENTATION OF PRE-K 4 SA

#### The Challenge
- San Antonio had long been recognized as one of the most income-segregated cities in the nation, with glaring and persistent racial divides in wealth and opportunity.
- Local leadership increasingly recognized that the city’s opportunity and wealth divides were due in large part to a history of discriminatory public policies, like redlining and school segregation.
- The city had experienced low high school graduation rates for years, leading to low levels of upward economic mobility for individuals and undermining the economic vitality of the city.
- Rates of enrollment in early childhood education were low, with few affordable options available to low- to middle-income San Antonio families.

#### The Solution
- In 2010, following an intensive community visioning process, then-Mayor Julian Castro convened a group of civic leaders to determine which investments would most improve San Antonio’s educational and economic trajectory.
- The group, known as the Brainpower Taskforce, spent a year comparing alternatives and ultimately decided on investing in high-quality early childhood education.
- To fund the initiative, the city placed a 1/8th cent sales tax on the ballot for November 2012. The measure passed with 53 percent of the vote.
- With funding from the 1/8th cent sales tax, Pre-K 4 SA was positioned to provide high-quality, full-day prekindergarten to 2,000 lower-income families across the city.
- Revenue from the sales tax would also be used to enhance and expand other early childhood education offerings across the city.

#### Major Accomplishments
- Pre-K 4 SA has significantly expanded access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education in San Antonio. The initiative directly serves 2,000 four-year-olds per year and provides over $4 million annually to other providers to expand their early childhood education services.
- Pre-K 4 SA was recently ranked as one of only five “gold medal” providers of early childhood education by City Health and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).
- Since its inception, the initiative has raised $247 million for early childhood education and directly served 12,271 four-year-olds.
- After initially being approved with 53 percent of the vote in 2012, the 1/8th-cent sales tax that funds Pre-K 4 SA received 73 percent of the vote in its reauthorizing referendum in November 2020.
MAYOR JULIAN CASTRO CONvenes BRAINPOWER TASK FORCE

May 2011

Informed by the results of SA 2020, a large-scale community visioning process, Mayor Castro brings together many of San Antonio’s most prominent civic and business leaders to decide on specific educational investments to improve the city’s educational and workforce trajectory.

BRAINPOWER TASK FORCE DECIDES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

June 2012

After over a year of comparing potential investments, the Brainpower Taskforce decides that investments in early childhood education will provide the largest social and economic return on public investment.

FUNDING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IS PUT ON THE BALLOT

August-November 2012

San Antonio leverages a state statute allowing municipal governments to levy a local sales tax to support certain types of workforce development strategies, including early childhood education. The initiative is supported by key leaders in business, public school districts, higher education, and community organizations. 53.5 percent of voters approve the 1/8th-cent sales tax measure in the November 2012 election.

PRE-K 4 SA PREPARES FOR LAUNCH

November 2012 – August 2013

City Manager Sheryl Sculley and Deputy City Manager Peter Zanoni lead a team of city officials and Pre-K 4 SA board members to secure and renovate the two initial education facilities, hire leadership and teachers, and launch an outreach and student recruitment campaign.

PRE-K 4 SA WELCOMES FIRST STUDENTS

August 2013

To ensure high-quality implementation, Pre-K 4 SA begins serving students at only two Education Centers in its first year. The initiative’s North and South Education centers launch first, serving a total of 700 students. The following year, the East and West Centers open, enabling Pre-K 4 SA to serve a total of 1,500 students.

PRE-K 4 SA LAUNCHES COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROGRAM

November 2015

Using funding from the 1/8th-cent sales tax, Pre-K 4 SA invites public, private, and parochial schools and licensed childcare facilities to apply for funding to enhance, expand, or create early childhood programs. These grants provide over $4 million per year.

Keys to Success

- Strong leadership from then-Mayor Julian Castro was essential in launching the initial community visioning process, bringing civic leaders together, deciding to invest in early childhood education, and building political will for the 1/8th-cent sale tax.
- Commitment to using evidence-based curricula, hiring high-quality teachers, and building top-notch facilities has produced strong outcomes and strengthened public enthusiasm for the initiative.
- Yearly independent evaluations of the initiative have enabled Pre-K 4 SA to monitor and track its progress, revise and continuously improve its offerings to meet child and parent needs, and communicate results to the general public.

SAN ANTONIO'S IMPLEMENTATION OF PRE-K 4 SA, CONTINUED

TIMELINE

PRE-K 4 SA | ECONOMIC MOBILITY CATALOG CASE STUDY | RESULTS FOR AMERICA | DECEMBER 2020
TIMELINE, CONTINUED

- EDUCATION CENTERS REACH FULL CAPACITY
  August 2016
  The initiative’s four centers serve approximately 500 four-year-olds each, for a total of 2,000 served yearly.

- PRE-K 4 SA RECEIVES ACCREDITATION
  May 2018
  After a rigorous evaluation process, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) awards Pre-K 4 SA its Early Learning Program Accreditation.

- RESULTS OF FIRST IMPACT STUDY ARE RELEASED
  January 2019
  The long-term impact study, conducted by the Urban Education Institute at the University of Texas at San Antonio, finds that Pre-K 4 SA produced positive academic outcomes in the first year of the program. Students had stronger STAAR exam scores on third grade reading and math, better attendance, and less need for special education services than children that attended public pre-kindergarten.

- RESULTS OF COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS ARE RELEASED
  March 2020
  The study, conducted by Westat, the University of Pennsylvania, and Teachers College at Columbia University, finds that Pre-K 4 SA generates $1.56 for every $1 spent. After subtracting the costs of the program, Pre-K 4 SA returned over $56 million in benefits to San Antonio in its first eight years.

- PRE-K 4 SA IS REAUTHORIZED
  November 2020
  An overwhelming 73 percent of voters support Pre-K 4 SA’s reauthorization.
Confronting the Problem

- San Antonio had become one of the most income-segregating cities in the nation, with glaring racial divides in wealth and opportunity.
- In 2010, then-Mayor Julian Castro launches SA 2020, a community-wide visioning process to help set priorities in rectifying decades-long disparities. San Antonio citizens overwhelmingly identify education as their top priority.
- Mayor Castro forms the Brainpower Taskforce, a group of business and education leaders tasked with deciding on which investments would most significantly improve San Antonio’s educational trajectory.
- After a year of studying best practices and evidence-based programs in other cities, the taskforce determines that investing in early childhood education would produce the strongest results.

Designing the Strategy

- Pre-K 4 SA’s top priority was to provide the highest-quality instruction for four-year-olds. All teachers have a Master’s degree and teach the evidence-based HighScope early childhood curriculum.
- Four specially designed Education Centers serve 500 students each. All feature outdoor learning spaces, cafes serving healthy food and snacks, and amenities for parents.
- The program includes a strong emphasis on family engagement and parent support, with the intention of helping parents become strong advocates for their child’s education throughout their schooling.
- To benefit the larger ecosystem of early childhood educators in San Antonio, the initiative provides professional development opportunities for all educators in the city working with children from pre-kindergarten through third grade.
- To improve the broader landscape of early childhood education in San Antonio, the initiative provides over $4.2 million in competitive grants to local school districts, private schools, and early childhood centers every year.

Allocating the Funding

- Texas state law allows municipalities to create publicly supported development corporations to advance workforce development goals.
- Enabled by this statute, the City of San Antonio levies a 1/8th-cent sales tax to fund Pre-K 4 SA. The measure is approved by 53.5 percent of voters in 2012.
- Initial projections estimated the 1/8th-cent sales tax would raise $29 million in revenue. In recent years, the tax has raised approximately $37 million annually.
- Through partnerships with local school districts, Pre-K 4 SA also receives approximately $4 million annually from state funding for pre-kindergarten.
Implementing the Plan

- After the 1/8th-cent sales tax referendum passed, the City of San Antonio establishes the San Antonio Early Childhood Education Municipal Development Corporation, the entity responsible for implementation.
- The Corporation’s Board of Directors are appointed by the Mayor and City Council in January 2013. Its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws are also finalized at this time.
- Then-City Manager Sheryl Sculley and then-Deputy City Manager Peter Zanoni lead a breakneck, nine-month effort to launch the initiative in less than a year. Major tasks include securing and renovating the two initial education facilities, hiring leadership for the initiative, hiring 36 teachers and 36 assistant teachers, and launching an outreach and enrollment campaign.
- The first two education centers, the North and South campuses, open in August 2013. The second two, the East and West centers, open in August 2014.

Measuring & Refining the Approach

- Pre-K 4 SA was designed to incorporate yearly, independent program assessments. Every year, Westat, Inc., the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and Rutgers University conduct evaluations that measure cognitive, mathematics, literacy, and oral language outcomes and track the physical and social–emotional development progress of participants.
- Classroom observations are conducted by Westat using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) to assess the quality of teacher–child interactions.
- Westat also surveys parents and guardians of Pre-K 4 SA children about their participation and perceptions of the program, changes in their confidence and behavior as parents/guardians, and plans for their children’s kindergarten year. These findings are used to guide program improvements and services for families.
- Results from these independent evaluations have demonstrated that both children and families are benefitting from services provided at Pre-K 4 SA centers.
RESOURCES

- Pre-K 4 SA website
- Villarreal, "Impact Study of Prekindergarten for San Antonio," Urban Education Institute at UTSA, 2019
- CityHealth and the National Institute for Early Education Research: "Pre-K in American Cities," 2019

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THE ECONOMIC MOBILITY CATALOG

This case study is part of Results for America's Economic Mobility Catalog, a tool designed to help local government leaders identify and implement evidence-based strategies to improve economic mobility outcomes for their residents. The Economic Mobility Catalog is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the foundation.

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