



Thomas M. Menino
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Mayor Menino, United Way, Community Partners Launch 'Thrive in Five' Funders Commit \$3.25 Million for Initiative to Promote School Readiness in Boston

BOSTON (MARCH 12, 2008) – Mayor Thomas M. Menino, joined by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley and other community partners, today announced a new public-private partnership aimed at preventing the achievement gap in the next generation by promoting school readiness and ensuring the healthy development of Boston's youngest citizens. The initiative, *Thrive in Five*, is a 10-year effort that for the first time aligns families, educators, health care and human service providers, the private sector, and city departments – working in collaboration with state agencies – to ensure that all children will be ready for sustained school success.

"We have an ethical obligation – informed by science and economics – to focus on our children's earliest years and provide them and their parents with the tools they need to achieve," Mayor Menino said. "My administration is already aligning the work of city departments to implement this plan, and I am pleased to announce \$3.25 million in commitments from public and private funders to support *Thrive in Five*."

The City of Boston is committing \$750,000 to the *Thrive in Five* initiative, and United Way has pledged an additional \$1.3 million. Three lead partners in the effort -- Children's Hospital Boston; Partners HealthCare and its founding hospitals, Brigham and Women's and Mass. General Hospital; and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation -- have committed another \$1.2 million over the next three years.

Thrive in Five draws on Boston's considerable strengths to advance clear strategies to: surround children and families with school readiness supports, raise the quality of early education and care, screen earlier for threats to healthy development, conduct public engagement campaigns about the importance of the early years, and more. The initiative draws on economic and scientific data provided by international expert Dr. Jack Shonkoff, director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.

Scientific research shows that brain and cognitive development at the earliest stages of life have long-term individual and societal impacts. Trauma or neglect can negatively impact early childhood brain development, leading to problems with learning, health and behavior. Investing in children early is far more effective and efficient than treating problems at a later age. For example, a child growing up in poverty who has experienced high-quality early education is 40 percent less likely to require special education or to be held back a grade and twice as likely to go to college. When children thrive through their first five years, they are poised to be strong lifelong learners, earners and engaged citizens.

"This is a community effort. Families, government, health care, nonprofits, the business sector – we all win when a child is ready to succeed in school and life," said Michael K. Durkin, President and CEO of United Way. "To sustain the kind of long-lasting change that *Thrive in Five* lays out requires that we work

together. Because together, we can accomplish more than any single organization – public or private – can alone.”

Thrive in Five is the result of a year-long public and private collaboration led by the City of Boston and United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley. To develop *Thrive in Five*'s powerful goals and strategies, a 65-person, cross-sector School Readiness Action Planning Team was appointed by Mayor Menino and co-chaired by Children's Hospital Chief Operating Officer Sandra Fenwick and Wheelock College President Jackie Jenkins-Scott. That group, known as “the APT,” was in turn informed by a diverse group of 35 parents, grandparents and guardians from all Boston neighborhoods called “the Parents APT.” Together they engaged an additional 300 Boston leaders and residents through focus groups and community meetings.

“As parents, we all want the best for our kids. It can be hard to balance taking responsibility for our children and asking for help when we need it. We need support to help make our dreams for our children reality,” said Gloria Weekes, a parent from Hyde Park and member of the Parents APT.

Research shows that children's earliest experiences actually shape the architecture of the brain – the foundation of neural circuits upon which future learning, behavior and health depend, creating either a resilient or fragile foundation for learning and health. The economic benefits of quality early childhood interventions are significant, producing a \$14-\$17 return for every dollar invested. The return includes savings from reduced special education and remedial education, welfare, and prison costs, as well as increased tax revenue produced in the workforce.

Progress toward universal school readiness will be reported regularly, including evaluation of performance measures for each part of the plan, as well as broader indicators showing progress across components. Among the broader indicators to be tracked, *Thrive in Five* seeks to increase the percentage of:

- Nationally accredited early education and care programs in Boston;
- New parents who are offered a newborn visit to connect to vital services;
- Parents who report accessing information and resources they need to support their child's development;
- Children ages birth to five screened for developmental delays, behavior issues and environmental risk factors – and connected with effective follow up services;
- Parents who are engaged in their communities and registered to vote;
- Circulation rate of picture books in the Boston Public Library system across neighborhoods.

“This roadmap will strengthen our child- and family-serving systems, creating new supports, and coordinating our work across the city for greater impact,” said Jackie Jenkins-Scott, President of Wheelock College. “This will reap profound benefits not only for Boston's children, but for the entire city.”

For more information about *Thrive in Five*, or to download a copy of the executive summary, visit www.thrivein5boston.org.