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## Early Action on Early Education

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MAYOR THOMAS MENINO is joining forces with Boston's 38,000 babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. Today he announces a promising \$1 million plan to immerse these children in rich settings, so that by kindergarten they'll be primed for success.

"Age 3 is late," says Dr. Jack Shonkoff, head of Harvard's new Center on the Developing Child. Early education should start at birth. So should efforts to protect against environmental stresses - such as abuse, neglect, deep poverty, and maternal depression - that can hinder children's brain development.

Investing in babies and toddlers, Shonkoff says, means spending less later on crime, healthcare, and academic remediation. And children with tough problems tend to gain the most from high-quality programs.

Menino has a big vision: not just a program or two, but a citywide culture of excellence, an early-education artery that runs through maternity wards, pediatricians' offices, grocery stores, and neighborhoods.

Narrowing the achievement gap that leaves many poor and minority students struggling to keep up is one goal. But Menino wants to go farther, to meet the needs of the whole family. So, for example, just as parents live in a given school district, very new parents might live in a certain early-education district, and that could mean access to any number of services, from home visits to parenting classes. Medical, dental, and mental-health care would be readily available. Prevention would be key, especially of well-known problems such as maternal isolation and depression.

Parents are a vital long-term asset. They also have to be school-ready, prepared to help their children succeed and to loudly expect a civic commitment that gives every Boston child a distinctive hometown advantage.

Menino can't go it alone. He'll need state, federal, and more private partners. But he is taking first steps.

The initial \$1 million - city and private money - will pay for expanding existing programs. And Menino is looking for new ways to use existing resources. One possibility is putting new programs in community centers so that children can visit and participate with their child-care providers. Teams are looking at both planning and analyzing data about young children and their families. ReadBoston will run a campaign to encourage parents to help build their children's vocabularies. And there will be a first-time assessment of kindergarten readiness among city youngsters.

Menino's will could power this effort. He's known for stopping children on the street and encouraging them to read. But he has to build a citywide culture that thrives and grows long after he leaves office.