



CITY OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS  
Office of the Mayor  
Thomas M. Menino

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## **Mayor, Community Partners Launch ‘Smart from the Start’** *Community based approach to ensuring school readiness*

Mayor Thomas M. Menino, joined by community partners, today announced the initial programming already begun through Smart from the Start (S<sup>2</sup>), with a focus on engaging parents before their children are even born. S<sup>2</sup> is a new community engagement and family support program that empowers families with the information and tools necessary to promote lasting school and life success among low-income children, ages birth to five.

“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. “Smart from the Start makes sure that parents and children know about and can use those tools.”

S<sup>2</sup> is a component of *Thrive in Five*, Boston’s new citywide approach to prevent the achievement gap in the next generation by promoting school readiness and ensuring the healthy development of Boston’s youngest citizens. As Mayor Menino and the United Way announced last month, *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. S<sup>2</sup> is a community-organizing component that pilots in three communities many of the goals of *Thrive in Five*.

S<sup>2</sup> utilizes new “play to learn” space in three Boston Community Centers (Archdale in Roslindale, Gallivan in Mattapan, and Charlestown) which sit adjacent to Boston Housing Authority public housing developments. The program is geared towards families living in or near these housing developments and community centers. Building on all parents’ commitment to their children and the understanding that fun activities bring families together, parents are encouraged to focus on the importance of play in child development and to gain skills and resources necessary to help them step confidently into their role as their children’s first teacher. The program works to improve quality and access to existing programs and services as well as identify gaps in resources that families need to improve their self-sufficiency and provide a better life for their children. Over time, the program will be expanded to provide activities to families throughout the city.

Parents participating in S<sup>2</sup> work with staff to choose among nine activities they feel will best support them in helping their children achieve school readiness and success. As a result, infant, toddler and preschool playgroups have been launched in all three communities. “Welcome Baby,” a free outreach visit to families with newborns, has been provided to participants as well. In addition, adult education and English classes, parent support groups, and activities to support young children’s physical and cognitive development like parent-child swimming classes and a new “Urban Gymboree,” are all on the menu of programs for the three sites. The program also strives to teach families how to utilize existing services by taking them on tours of their neighborhoods and visiting their local public library, health center, adult education center, elementary school, Head Start program and recreational areas.

“We want our parents to be able to step confidently into their role as their child’s first teacher,” said Cherie Craft, Director of Smart from the Start. “This is a preventative, strengths-based approach to developing partnerships with families that we hope will result in the breaking of cycles that lead to chronic school-underachievement, poverty, youth and family violence, substance abuse and involvement with the criminal justice system.”

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. 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. 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. 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.

S<sup>2</sup> is funded by the City of Boston, Boston Foundation, Paul and Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation, the Mabel Louise Riley Foundation, Children’s Hospital Boston, United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley and John Hancock. The program is a collaboration between the City of Boston, Boston Center for Youth and Families, Boston Housing Authority and the Family Nurturing Center of Massachusetts.

S<sup>2</sup> partners include the Boston Public Health Commission, Boston Public Library, Department of Education, Read Boston, Countdown to Kindergarten, Crittenden Women’s Union, John F. Kennedy Center in Charlestown, ABCD Head Start, WIC, Mission SAFE, Charlestown Workforce Development Center, Mass Family Network, Parents Helping Parents, Criterion Early Intervention, Boston Medical Center, Mass General Hospital, Martha Eliot Health Center, Roslindale Health and Dental Center, Charlestown High School, Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services, Roslindale Adult Education Center, and Child Care Choices of Boston.

For more information about Smart from the Start, please call 617-635-4920 or email [cherie.craft@cityofboston.gov](mailto:cherie.craft@cityofboston.gov).