



Early Childhood  
**Education**  
Task Force

May 2016



## Introduction

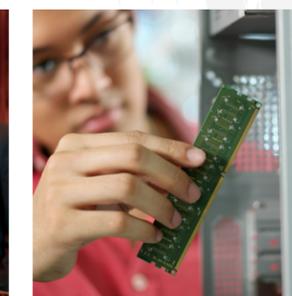
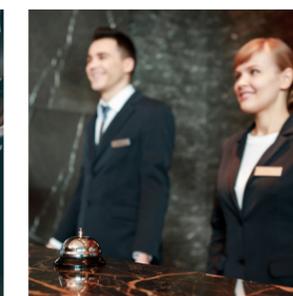
The Early Childhood Education Task Force is comprised of qualified experts and community leaders representing education, business, non-profits, and government. Its charge has been clear:

**Examine the state of early learning in Mesa and develop concrete, progressive actions that propel our community forward to serve our children's needs and to ensure that these children have every opportunity to be ready to enter kindergarten, succeed in school and become college and career ready.**

For Mesa to continue to be a sustainable and successful city, the community must make it our duty to ensure that every child in Mesa has every opportunity to succeed academically and to become part of our talented workforce.

### The evidence is clear:

- Ninety percent of critical brain development occurs before age 5. (1)
- **Quality early learning experiences for children ages birth to 5 increases school readiness, which leads to career readiness. (1)**
- Every \$1 invested in early learning yields a \$16 return to the community with strong positive effects on kindergarten readiness, language, math and social skills, K-12 test scores, high school graduation and college enrollment. (1)
- The competitiveness of small, medium and large companies depends on having a pipeline of talented, educated employees with the skills needed in today's economy. (1)
- Today, only 36% of Mesa's 3 and 4 year olds are enrolled in early care and education compared to 48% nationally. (2)





## Quality early learning leads to a successful community and strong economy

Children who have access to early learning...



For every \$1 invested in early childhood development communities see \$16 return from their later success.



**Now is the time for the entire community to join forces and address this challenge.**

These research findings are based on state-funded pre-kindergarten programs and high quality early childhood programs such as High Scope Perry Preschool, Chicago Child-Parent, and Abecedarian Project.

Allocating resources to support the health and learning of our young children is a critical economic development strategy, and that benefits the entire city. The total cost (capital, personnel, training, special education services, supplies, admin., etc.) to provide early learning services by institutions in Mesa today is approximately \$4,000 per child for a half-day program and approximately \$7,000 per child for a full-day program. (3)

Because the State of Arizona provides no additional resources for early learning, new funding sources must be identified and obtained. Example resources include but are not limited to: reprioritizing existing resources, increasing sales tax/property tax, seeking new



federal and state grants, advocating for new funding for pre-k and full-day kindergarten at the state and federal levels, and receiving corporate and education philanthropic gifts. (See other financial information for existing, quality early learning programs in the Research and Data Index.)

In order to have the greatest long-term impact on developing and keeping an educated workforce that leads to greater economic development, Mesa needs to place a high priority on the entire education continuum by offering quality early learning opportunities, building upon the high quality K-12 system, and continuing to promote higher education opportunities.

Mesa is fortunate to have outstanding K-12 schools and the City of Mesa has worked hard to advance higher education options. There is an immediate need to add a complimentary piece to existing strategies to help Mesa's families with children under 5 years old access existing and new affordable, quality early learning opportunities.



This report is a call to action for the City and the community.

**There is an opportunity for the City of Mesa to be a champion in pursuing innovative, community-owned solutions.**

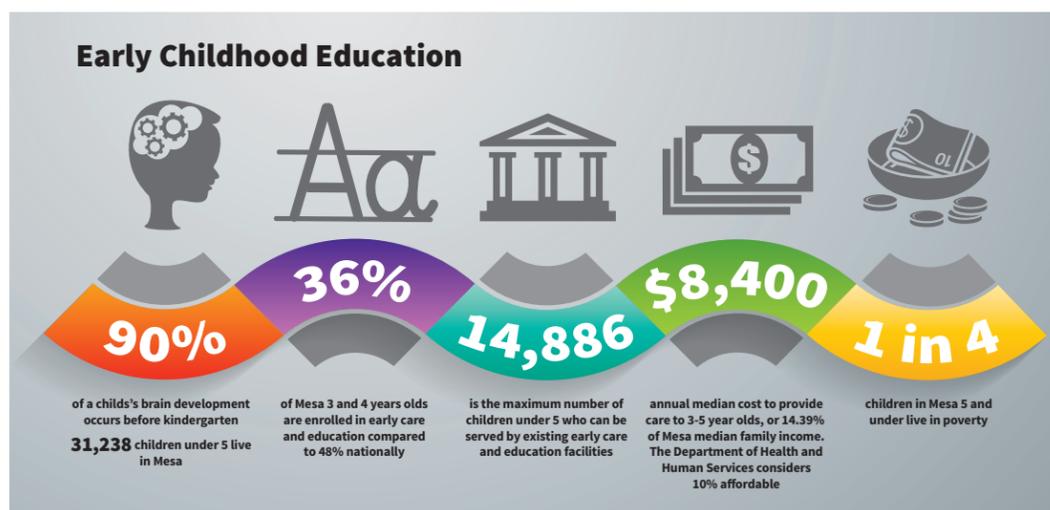
The need for ample early childhood education options for the children of Mesa (ages 0-5) demonstrates the needs of families living in poverty who have the least/fewest resources.



It is imperative that the City is aware and prepared to mobilize resources and leverage partnerships to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents.

The Task Force appreciates the City's recent leadership in providing "political lift" to this urgent community and workforce development challenge. Respectfully, there's much more to do and it will require political commitment and foresight to make it happen. This is not a short-term fix. As outlined in this report, there are actions that the community can and should pursue in order to create immediate impact. However, to make a long-term, sustainable difference, the Task Force believes that the City should dedicate staff whose job is focused on this initiative as well as identify clear, ongoing, significant resources to fill gaps and respond to this need.

There are **31,238** children under 5 today in Mesa (4) who are counting on your bold and decisive actions.



The remainder of this report is divided into three main sections:

- 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** The Task Force frequently discussed many of the complex realities and challenges that Mesa faces in formulating sustainable and effective solutions. The Task Force believes it important to convey these insights as a way to provide important context for the shared recommendations proposed.
- 2. MESA'S CALL TO ACTION:** These are concrete actions the Task Force believes are necessary for Mesa and that will allow the community to make immediate impact toward long-term approach(es) utilizing various methods. These recommendations are based on information and data that highlights both existing assets in Mesa today as well as gaps and challenges in Mesa that warrant and deserve further attention.
- 3. RESEARCH AND DATA INDEX:** The Task Force invested most of its time in reviewing and understanding local, state and national data and trends, best practices and demographic data for Mesa. All of this data, including financial information and the Task Force's Phase 1 memorandum, is provided in the Research and Data Index section.



## Acknowledgments

The Task Force acknowledges that a comprehensive path forward will need to be pursued within the context of strong leadership as well as considering the cross-jurisdictional complexities that are part of strong and diverse, full-service communities like Mesa. These acknowledgements include:

- **Workforce development:** The Task Force fervently believes that the City of Mesa needs to be part of a long-term approach. There is an abundance of data that demonstrates a direct connection between a child's exposure to quality early learning and later success in school and career. Approximately 74% of business leaders say a skilled workforce is the most important factor to business. (5) Mesa's economic success and community health depend on expanding early learning access and quality.
- **Funding and resources:** Arizona does not provide a dedicated funding source for full-day kindergarten nor pre-k services. A long-term approach will require ongoing, sustainable sources of revenue. The City of Mesa has an opportunity to be a champion in helping the community shine a spotlight on this urgent need and to gain new resources to serve Mesa's families and children.

- **Community response and ownership:**

**No single organization has the resources to independently address the issue of early learning opportunities alone.**

The need to leverage and expand upon existing resources is important to enable more of Mesa's children to flourish academically, physically, emotionally, and socially.

- **Partnerships:** A sustainable response to early childhood learning in Mesa will call for multiple agencies to put Mesa's children first by joining their political strength, sharing information with each other and working toward the common good for Mesa's children and their ultimate success.
- **Quality and Parental Choice matter:**

**The quality of early learning providers and early learning environments matter, regardless of the setting.**

Settings can range from licensed early learning centers to in-home care with parents or caregivers. In full support of parental choice, the Task Force supports providing more information, awareness about tools and resources to enhance all early learning environments.



## Mesa's Call to Action

With these 'acknowledgements' considered, the Task Force offers the Mayor and City Council this call to action as urgent next steps to immediately leverage and expand upon quality, affordable early education tools and options for every child. The City has the opportunity to be a champion in Arizona and lead the charge for quality early learning opportunities.

**This important work not only assures that Mesa's children arrive to kindergarten ready and able to learn but also ensures Mesa's future workforce will be able to provide the talent needed for a thriving local economy.**

### **1. PLAN FORWARD IMMEDIATELY:** By September 2016, build a strategy to ensure forward progress and that there are methods for accountability and measurement.

- a. Identify staff expert(s) whose job it is to liaison with existing early education, businesses and community-based organizations to develop partnerships and identify methods to measure results.
- b. Establish an early childhood advisory committee (and the funding to support it) of educators, businesses, non-profits and agencies that convenes around shared goals and a common agenda to align and leverage existing resources as well as define best approaches for expanding those services to meet demands.
- c. Demand state funding for early learning services by adding this priority as part of the City's next legislative agenda.
- d. Immediately share and use existing assessment tools and try new ones, such as Kindergarten Developmental Inventory, to measure outcomes.
- e. Incorporate the City's early learning priority within all citywide plans, i.e. General Plan, City Council Strategic Priorities, Economic Development targets for Healthcare, Education, Aerospace and Tourism/Technology, aka H.E.A.T. initiative.

### **2. LEVERAGE AND EXPAND EXISTING ASSETS:** Expand services, capacity and programming within Mesa's outstanding, existing assets.

- a. Expand upon existing and identify new higher learning initiatives that specifically support quality, early learning professional development and add new early learning resources in Mesa.
- b. Identify and apply for available grants and other funding sources, in order to increase capacity at high-quality existing assets, i.e. half-day to full-day pre-k opportunities.
- c. Provide grants to existing programs to produce and distribute new marketing materials.



- d. Add additional offerings "slots" in Mesa for low-cost/free openings for Pre-K services and programs.
- e. Immediately expand new early learning services and information sharing at existing resources, i.e. existing public school-based early learning centers, Mesa Community College Early Learning Center, Mesa Public Libraries, Mesa's i.d.e.a. youth museum, Mesa Counts on College, non-profits, faith-based organizations, etc.

### **3. SUPPORT FAMILY CHOICE:** Provide quality, plentiful, evidence-based tools for those families and/or caregivers who choose in-home early learning environments.

- a. Invest in new tools and equipment to share information with parents about quality resources for early childhood learning at public facilities, at-home or within in-home care environments.
- b. Harness technology and social media to offer caregivers/parents "bite-sized" tips to support learning and development tailored to 0-2 and 3-5 year olds.
- c. Expand and/or partner with existing resource centers or repurpose spaces where families can access early learning information and materials to enhance in-home care and/or access Pre-k programs for 3 and 4 year olds.

### **4. CREATE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND ACCESS:** Prioritize available early learning resources to those families who need the most help. Pay attention to geographic locations of services, transportation, language and financial needs.

- a. Locate centers for learning that are accessible for under-resourced families who may be without transportation.
- b. Call on businesses to develop and provide tuition-free, quality pre-k programs using a sliding tuition scale that applies to families within 300% of federal poverty level; offer scholarships for families who do not qualify for tuition-free services but still cannot afford top-rated, quality services without financial relief.
- c. Reprioritize City resources to establish a centralized hub in under-resourced areas to provide resources, information, and referrals for families with children ages 0-5.

**d. Include healthcare and child development information as part of early learning services.**

### **5. IMPLEMENT AGGRESSIVE COMMUNITY AWARENESS CAMPAIGN:** Create a campaign to increase community awareness about and support for early learning investments.

- a. Partner with 150+ local hospitals, faith-based organizations, pediatricians, government, businesses and schools to increase awareness about the importance of early childhood education and the availability of free/affordable programs and resources.



- b. Host an annual “Early Education in Mesa” conference that allows providers and families to learn about opportunities, best practices, and share information.
- c. Pursue existing funding through Helios Foundation and/or First Things First to create an aggressive (bilingual) public relations plan to consistently “tell the story” about the community’s plan to improve kindergarten readiness.
- d. Maximize existing outreach tools (utility bill, websites, social media, Mesa 11, etc.) to get the word out about early learning needs and services in Mesa.

**6. INSIST ON QUALITY: Strengthen quality programming, where needed.**

- a. Identify goals and timeline to expand the number of quality early education centers and quality in-home environments in low-income and under-resourced neighborhoods.
- b. Subsidize funding for teacher certification in early childhood education in exchange for recipients agreeing to teach in Mesa early learning for a minimum of 5 years.
- c. Partner with high-quality sites to develop educator training, teacher swaps, coaching/support groups.



**Credits**

- (1) Arizona First Things First Business Information Report (2016)
- (2) U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- (3) Mesa Community College Early Learning Center and Mesa Public Schools Jordan Early Childhood Education Center.
- (4) U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- (5) Zogby International (2005); Arizona First Things First Business Information Report (2016)

**Glossary of Terms**

*For the purpose of this report the following terms are being defined using the definitions listed below.*

- **Early Learning:** Learning environments provided to children who are between the ages of 0-5 years old.
- **Pre-K:** Learning environments provided to children who are 3 to 5 years old but not within kindergarten.
- **Quality:** Overall, the Task Force believes that investment in existing or new quality programs is important. One way to define quality is through First Things First, which is a standard scale by which facilities are evaluated in Arizona.

1 Star ★ (Rising Star)	2 Star ★★ (Progressing Star)	3 Star ★★★ (Quality)	4 Star ★★★★ (Quality Plus)	5 Star ★★★★★ (Highest Quality)
Demonstrates a commitment to examine practices and improve the quality of care beyond regulatory requirements.	Demonstrates a commitment to provide environments that are progressing in the ability to foster the health, safety and development of young children.	Demonstrates a level of quality that provides an environment that is healthy and safe with access to developmentally appropriate materials. Curriculum is aligned with state standards. Interactions between adults and children are enhanced. Staff qualifications exceed state regulatory requirements.	Demonstrates a level of quality that provides an environment of developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive learning experiences. Curriculum is aligned with state standards. Relationships between adults and children are nurturing and promote language development and reasoning skills.	Demonstrates a level of quality that provides an environment of lower ratios/group size and higher staff qualifications that supports significant positive outcomes for young children in preparation for school. Curriculum is aligned with state standards and child assessment. Relationships between adults and children are nurturing and promote emotional, social, and academic development.



## Research and Data Index

### Mesa's Challenge

1. [Mesa Maps and Demographic Statistics](#)
2. [Phase I Define the Issue Data Summary Information](#)
  - a. Grouped in categories: target population, ready to learn, early education capacity, quality, existing programs, locating and funding resources, and parent knowledge of kinder readiness.
3. [Task Force Phase I Report](#)
  - a. Defining the early learning challenges for Mesa

### Existing Assets, Programs

1. [Early Child Care Information Packet](#)
  - a. Executive Summary and Summary and Conclusions of the First Things First Southeast
  - b. Maricopa Regional Partnership Council 2014 Needs and Assets Report
  - c. First Things First Quality First Rating Scale
  - d. Arizona Infant and Toddler Guidelines
  - e. Arizona Early Learning Standards and Kindergarten Standards
  - f. Early Child Care Professional Qualifications
  - g. Early Child Care Facilities Requirements
  - h. Head Start and Early Head Start
  - i. Mesa Public Schools KinderU
  - j. Mesa Public Schools Parent University
  - k. Gilbert Public Schools Kindergarten Prep
  - l. 2012 Family and Community Survey Results
  - m. Adverse Childhood Experiences Study
2. [Arizona State Funding Overview in The 2014 State of Preschool Report](#)
  - a. Percent of state 3 & 4 year olds population enrolled
  - b. State spending per child enrolled
  - c. Access information and background information on state funding in Arizona
3. [Quality First-First Things First Program Overview](#)
  - a. Quality in Early Care and Education
4. [Head Start Program Overview](#)
  - a. Publically funded initiatives, indicators of future school success, frequency of learning experiences
5. [Head Start Mesa Community Handout](#)
  - a. Mesa specific stats on school readiness reported by Maricopa County Human Services Department Early Education Division
6. [Head Start Arizona Fact Sheet](#)
  - a. 2015 Arizona Head Start Fact Sheet providing information on children in poverty, enrollment, delivery options, and explanation of comprehensive approach in services
7. [Responding to the Challenges](#)
  - a. Responding to the challenges, impact of poverty, Brain Time, Brain Boxes, Kinder Prep and Kinder Ready



### 8. [Financial Overview](#)

- a. Mesa Public Schools Kinder U
- b. Mesa Community College Early Learning Center
- c. First Things First Quality First Investment

### Benchmarking, Model Solutions

1. [Community Early Childhood Learning Programs PowerPoint and other communities approach:](#)
  - a. Boston Thrive in 5
  - b. Denver Preschool Program
  - c. Hartford Blueprint for Young Children
  - d. Pre-K 4 San Antonio
  - e. First 5 San Francisco
  - f. Smart Start San Jose
  - g. Seattle Preschool Program
  - h. Educare Tulsa
2. [Pre-K 4 SA Program Overview](#)
  - a. Review of San Antonio site visit





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