

# TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SAN ANTONIO

## EDUCARE SAN ANTONIO

Enhancing Early Childhood Education for Long-term Success  
Strengthening the Early Childhood Ecosystem Essential for Economic,  
Community and Familial Well-being

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
SAN ANTONIO



**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-SAN ANTONIO** is reflective of the diverse and heritage-rich community it serves. University and community partnerships provide a strong foundation for student and academic success and support interdisciplinary teaching and experiential learning. Faculty and staff collaborate to create comprehensive, industry-responsive academic and co-curricular programs that provide a transformative experience for all students. The University's inclusive environment inspires learning and fosters social development using relevant scholarship, research and public service. A&M-San Antonio graduates leave well equipped with knowledge and marketable skills that prepare them for rewarding careers, responsible global citizenship and lifelong learning.



# Strengthening the Bexar County Early Childcare Ecosystem with Educare

## Introduction

Texas A&M University – San Antonio provides students with a unique experience that educates, challenges, and prepares them to lead successful and impactful lives. It is a dynamic and innovative organization dedicated to educating our students and community by supporting families, students, and young children as they become tomorrow's entrepreneurs, researchers, and leaders.

Texas A&M in partnership with Pre-K 4 SA and others are championing a new initiative in the community to develop a state-of-the-art early childhood development school (Educare San Antonio) that will greatly enhance the future of our youngest learners ages six weeks through kindergarten. This effort will support and strengthen the development of the early childcare ecosystem in Bexar County and address the childcare desert in South Bexar County, offer high-quality childcare to families living or working in South Bexar County, support over 200 teachers at other childcare centers city and statewide as they enhance the quality of services they offer to an estimated 2000 children, and both directly and indirectly strengthen the workforce.

## Summary

Many children in San Antonio and across Bexar County are failing to reach their full potential. Low levels of kindergarten readiness and academic performance during the elementary years and high rates of Adverse Childhood Experiences indicate that our Early Childhood Ecosystem needs improvement. The early childhood ecosystem includes all the people, agencies and support that surround young children and their family.

South San Antonio is marked by shortages of specialists, poor kindergarten readiness scores, below average 3rd grade reading and math scores, and poor grade retention rates. One major contributor to the failing ecosystem is the lack of high-quality childcare in the community. Large areas of the city and county have been designated as child care deserts. In fact 94% of low income families in San Antonio do not have access to high quality childcare. All of these challenges were before the pandemic when Texas had over 17,000 registered child care providers. Eighteen-months later, in March, there were less than 13,000 statewide. It is critical that immediate supports are provided to address the childcare desert.

Texas A&M University San Antonio (A&M-SA) is committed to partnering with Pre-K 4 SA, Early Matters, and all our community partners to launch the first Educare School in Texas. As part of our commitment, the University seeks to build a 40,000 square foot Infant, Toddler, Preschool and Kindergarten facility at A&M-SA. The establishment of the A&M-SA Educare San Antonio School will provide the critical piece of infrastructure necessary to improve the ecosystem for South San Antonio.

The Educare program model is based on research from early childhood development, education, social work and other allied fields. There are currently 25 Educare Centers throughout the United States. In order to establish the first Educare Center in Texas at Texas A&M University-San Antonio, it is imperative to secure funding from multiple sources for the construction of the facility.



# STRENGTHENING THE EARLY CHILDCARE ECOSYSTEM

Our San Antonio Early Childhood Ecosystem includes early interventionists, medical and mental health providers, professional organizations who advocate for children and families, childcare or early childhood education providers, and higher education institutions who train the ecosystem's workforce. It also includes the public and private partners who support the childcare providers, provide direct services to children and families or advocate on their behalf. Low salaries for those working with our youngest children, low levels of education for early childhood staff, and high staff turnover all compromise the wellness of our ecosystem. Additionally, affordable quality care is a challenge for most families, as a large number of childcare centers lack high quality standards.

The City of San Antonio and Bexar County began the initial efforts to improve access to high quality care by establishing Pre-K 4 SA and convening the Early Matters Committee. However, there is still a need to increase child and family access to high-quality early childhood centers with certified teachers and professional specialists, family wrap-around services, and enhanced coordination of services.

Pre-K 4 SA provided a critical step in strengthening the ecosystem. Establishing Educare San Antonio in partnership with Pre-K 4 SA and other community groups, will scale that work from birth to kindergarten entry to ensure each child has the opportunity to fully develop their intellectual, social, emotional and physical abilities.

## HIGH-QUALITY CARE

Texas A&M University San Antonio, Pre-K 4 SA, the Early Matters Committee, community agencies and stakeholders are all committed to enhancing access to high quality childcare by establishing the A&M-SA Educare San Antonio School, which will be the first Educare Learning Network School in Texas. There are currently 25 other Educare Centers across the United States.

High-quality care in the early years is critical as a child's brain is growing faster during the first 3 years than at any later time in life. There are more than a million new connections made in the brain each second and these connections are the foundation all later learning will be built upon. When children receive high-quality early care, beginning at birth and continuing through public schooling, the impact on their learning, health, and long-term wellness is profound. By attending high-quality early care, children are more likely to graduate from High School and less likely to need remedial education services. This impact on health and long-term wellness is clearly documented and the economic value of those benefits established. Each dollar invested in improving the quality of care a child receives and the earlier that quality care is provided, significantly increases the return on investment.



### **Components of High-Quality Care:**

- Low Child-Teacher Ratios
  - Strong Teacher-Family Relationships and Family Support
  - Highly Qualified Teachers
  - Data Utilization
  - Low Staff Turnover
  - Accreditation or QRIS Ratings
-

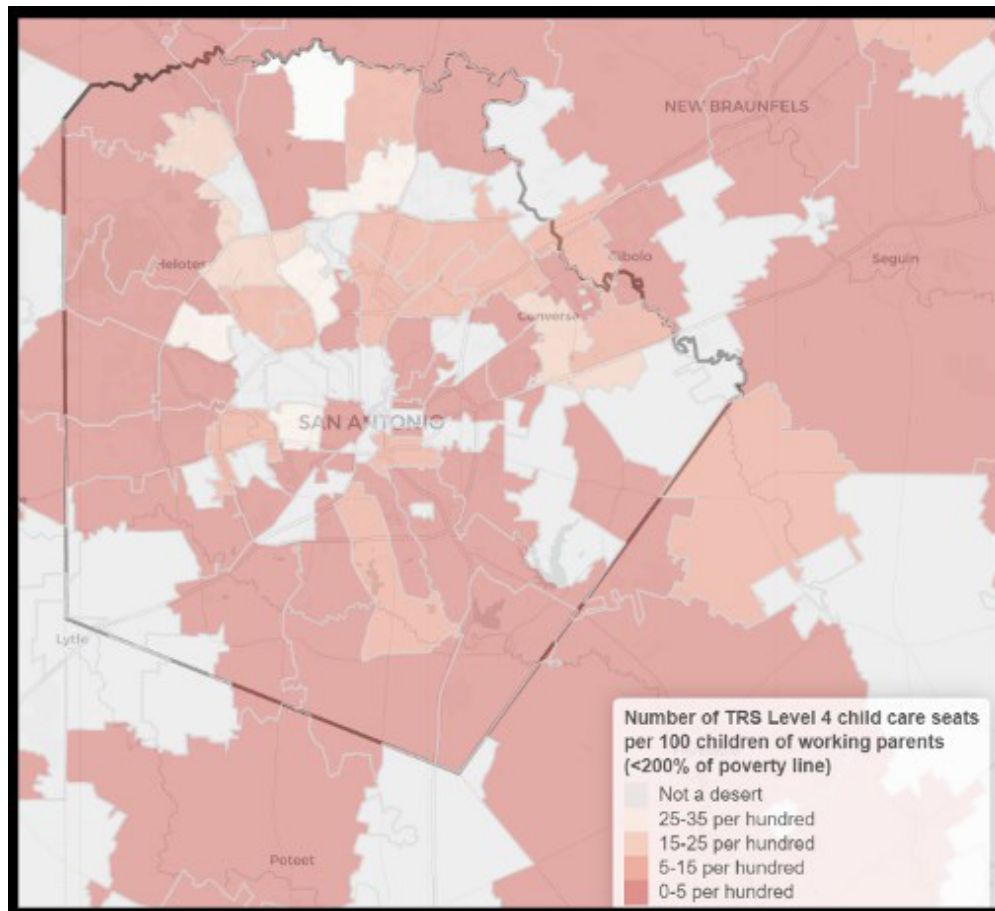
## A CHILDCARE DESERT

A childcare desert is any zip code with more than 30 children under the age of 5, with working parent(s) living in an area with either no child care or so few providers that there are more than three times as many children than licensed child care slots. For many families, finding childcare is a challenge. Finding high-quality early care is near to impossible.

Children at Risk, a nonprofit aiming to improve the quality of life for children stated that 94% of Bexar County families living in poverty also lack access to quality care measured under the Texas Rising Star System, which assigns a 1-to-4-star rating from lower quality to higher quality, respectively.

### **The State of childcare in Bexar County can be described as follows:**

- 79% of low-income children are living in areas where the supply of subsidized child care meets less than a third of the demand
- 94% of low-income children in Bexar County are living in areas where there are less than 5 seats in Texas Rising Star centers (per 100 children of working families)
- In Bexar County only 7% of childcare providers are Texas Rising Star level 2, 3 or 4
- The remaining either do not accept subsidy reimbursements for low-income families or are not participating



# RETURN ON INVESTMENT

According to Noble Prize winner, James Heckman, investments in early education offer communities an impressive return on investment and are one of the best investments we can make. Specifically, each dollar invested in high quality early education wrap-around programs can yield a 13% per annum return on investment that compounds over time when targeting our earliest learners. The cost benefit is over \$6.00 for each \$1.00 of cost

The City of San Antonio's Pre-K 4 San Antonio program has a proven return on investment enhancing the quality of early education and improving kindergarten readiness. An analysis of the city's investment proves that for every \$1.00 invested, the cost-benefit ratio is \$1.56. This investment in a child at the age of 4 saves the city from having to invest even more money in that same child, later in life. Investments in A&M-SA Educare San Antonio will increase the return rate even further.

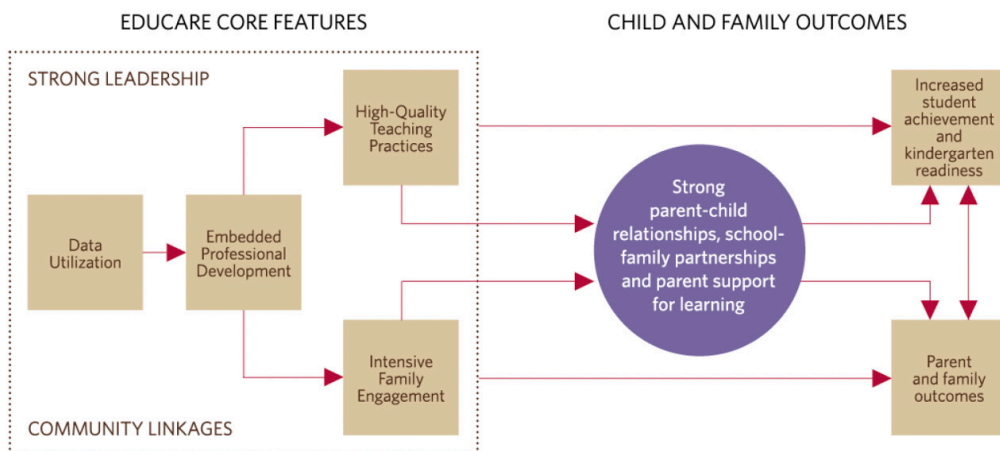
Investment in Educare San Antonio is estimated to **return over \$3.2M each year in cost benefits** and will provide a high rate of return on investment because children who participate are:

- Less likely to commit crimes
- Less likely to be neglected or abused
- Less likely to be unemployed
- Less likely to require public assistance
- Less likely to become teen parents
- Generally healthier and able to be more productive contributors to their local, state, and national economies

## A&M-SA EDUCARE

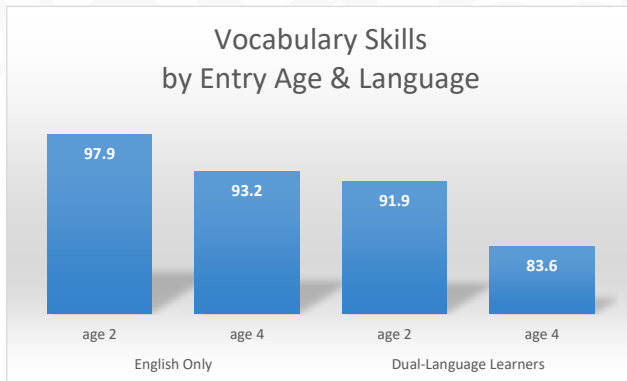
The Educare building will be constructed on the A&M San Antonio campus at the intersection of Jaguar Parkway and Monarch Manor. The 40,000 square foot building is designed to welcome observers and act as an education and training site for early childhood professionals the way a "teaching hospital" would for future doctors. Serving over 255 children and providing an array of community services including counseling and mental health, as well as, behavioral and special education services it will be a hub of infrastructure development. Educare San Antonio will offer professional education and research support to an estimated 200 teachers in Bexar County teachers serving 2000 children annually and is designed to be a space for family and community engagement.

### Educare Model Framework



## A MODEL FOR OUR YOUNGEST LEARNERS

For decades, Educare Schools across the nation have served as hubs for innovation and advocacy providing high-quality care that result in proven impact and support for children, educators, families, and communities. This support advances the early childhood ecosystem through high-quality care as evidenced by the QRIS accreditation, program research and data utilization, family engagement and wrap-around services, and professional development pathways for educators. The essential elements that have a proven impact on infants, toddlers and preschoolers.



### Proven Practices

- A professional early childhood workforce
- Research-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum that includes the whole child, across the four domains of development
- Data informed practices that lead to responsive curricular decisions and early interventions, when needed
- Wrap-around family services, including health and nutrition supports

Much like Pre-K 4 San Antonio, Educare programs have a proven impact on enhancing children's development and increasing school readiness and success. **A randomized control research trial has proven the positive impact of Educare. National Educare studies show:**

- Significantly higher English language skills
- Fewer parent reports of problem behaviors and more positive parent-child interactions
- Higher language skills and stronger early math skills
- Dual-language learners outperform low-income peers on vocabulary assessments
- Dual-language learners demonstrate stronger gains in English language ability
- Higher levels of receptive vocabulary skills at kindergarten
- Develop social-emotional skills before age 3 and continuing through age 5 works

## PARTNERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Texas A&M University - San Antonio is located on the South Side of San Antonio, established to provide higher education opportunities to the historically underserved South Side community. The economic demographic make-up of the South Side of San Antonio, including the areas directly around A&M-SA, are below the national median income average (48-75% living below the poverty line). A&M-SA was established as a 4-year university with a mission of changing the historical inequity in South Bexar County and improving the lives of Hispanic, low-income, and underserved students throughout Texas, and in particular the local San Antonio communities. The university is in a federally designated Opportunity Zone ID #480291520000.

Establishing the A&M-SA Educare School in partnership with Pre-K 4 San Antonio, AVANCE and over 20 other organizations, enables the early childhood ecosystem to strengthen itself through meaningful and mutually sustaining partnerships. These partnerships support workforce development within and outside of the early childhood workforce sector. Pre-K 4 SA and Workforce Solutions Alamo are essential partners in this work. The Educare Model was selected because the essential elements of Educare directly align with the proven practices in Pre-K 4 SA ensuring that the results that have emerged from 10 years of city-supported Pre-K can be increased as services begin earlier.

# TIMELINE

**Fall 2020** - Group of community stakeholders proposed the establishment of the first Educare in Texas at A&M-SA.

**Spring 2021** - Community partners came together to advance the idea into a working plan.

**Spring 2021** - Completed the required Community Readiness Self Assessment (CRSA). The Texas A&M University San Antonio proposal received the highest evaluation score ever awarded by the National Educare Network.

**Spring 2021** - Held Town Hall meetings with early childhood professionals, execute Articulation Agreements with local colleges, and aligning the operational plan to Pre-K 4 SA's mentoring program.

**Summer and Fall 2021** - Begin designs for the facility and to raise funds for construction.

**Fall 2023** - Proposed opening.

## Major Partners

Charles Butt Foundation  
Pre-K 4 San Antonio  
Southwest ISD  
United Way  
Workforce Solutions Alamo  
AVANCE  
CSA Head Start

# MISSION & PROGRAM GOALS

**Mission:** To transform families' lives and the early care ecosystem through innovative equity-centered practices, collaborative research, and advocacy.

**Goals:** Strengthen the Early Childhood Ecosystem in San Antonio, Bexar County, the State of Texas and beyond by:

- 1.) Increasing access to high-quality childcare
- 2.) Reducing the number of childcare deserts
- 3.) Establishing a seamless Early Childhood Profession Pathway
- 4.) Establishing Texas's 1st Educare Learning Network School serving children from 6-weeks through kindergarten
- 7.) Improving kindergarten readiness and academic success
- 8.) Providing wrap around services



# PROJECT COST AND NEED

The Educare School model provides direct services to children, families and the early childhood ecosystem in San Antonio and Bexar County. The operating costs associated with this model reflect a significant investment in a missing piece of essential community and workforce infrastructure. The capital cost of constructing the building is \$20M with an annual operating cost of \$6.2M to provide Educare in South Bexar County. The Educare model is made viable through blended and braided funding that includes philanthropic, local education, state and federal dollars.

