NTC CASE STUDY

Pre-K 4 San Antonio (Pre-K 4 SA) was established to change the trajectory of education in San Antonio. Through high-quality early childhood education, Pre-K 4 San Antonio seeks to create a world-class workforce in one generation. They believe that if nurtured correctly, early childhood education is the key to creating culturally concerned and productive citizens. Pre-K 4 San Antonio’s four education centers are spread widely across the city, serving 2,000 children. In addition to their four centers, Pre-K 4 SA supports preschools and school districts through its Professional Learning Program and Grant program. By 2021, Pre-K 4 SA’s Grants program will have awarded over $21 million since the inception of the program. Through these efforts there will be an impact on over 200,000 students throughout San Antonio by the year 2021.

The San Antonio metropolitan area has the highest poverty rate in the country according to 2018 survey estimates released from the U.S. Census Bureau. New Teacher Center (NTC) initially partnered with Pre-K 4 San Antonio in 2018 to create specialized training for elementary school principals and district leaders in partnership with San Antonio area districts. With the national rise in efforts to expand public pre-K programming, there is a critical need to rethink principal roles and help them become better-equipped in handling the specific aspects of early learning education while effectively supporting the quality of teaching and learning.

DRIVING QUALITY EARLY LEARNING THROUGH COACHING AND LEADERSHIP

Partner: Pre-K 4 San Antonio (Pre-K 4 SA)
Location: San Antonio, TX
Focus Area: Early Learning Coaching and Leadership
Partnership Dates: 2018–2020
Addressing the Challenges of Early Childhood Education

The fate of all children is largely determined by their first years of life—where they’re born, their parents’ own education level and current involvement, where they grow up, and their family’s socio-economic status. While all of these variables have a profound impact on a child’s future success, what remains similar across most families is their desire for their young children to succeed in school and life.

High-quality preschool programs provide every child a strong start which is essential for expanding educational equity and opportunity. Lifelong benefits associated with high-quality early childhood education (ECE) include higher employment, better health, and better cognitive and social-emotional skills, among many others. Young children who have access to high-quality early childhood programs have been shown to have greater self-control, increased ability to use memory to make connections between ideas, a better understanding of their emotions, and a greater ability to think creatively and prioritize tasks.

“A high-quality early education can unlock the potential in every child and ensure that all children start kindergarten prepared for success. Because of historic investments from states, cities, and the federal level, more children—particularly those who have been historically underserved—now have access to high-quality early learning.”

– Former U.S. Education Secretary, John B. King Jr.

While states and local communities are increasing access to preschool, we are unfortunately still seeing a significant divide when it comes to the quality of early learning programs being offered to young children. Education and training requirements for preschool teachers vary based on setting and state regulations. While professional learning opportunities may be offered, effective job-embedded coaching support to ensure that learning is implemented is rare. Teaching our youngest learners is its own unique pedagogy. Developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant teaching and learning practices set the stage for ensuring that experiences are suited to each child’s developmental level. Children are arriving at preschool with a wide range of developmental abilities and a small but critical window in which to become kindergarten ready.
Fortifying Teachers and Programs by Focusing on School Leaders and Coaches

Principals who understand how young children learn best can take meaningful steps to support appropriate instruction in their schools and strengthen alignment in pre-K and the early grades.

Source: Building Early Education Leaders: Conclusion and Takeaways BLOG POST, By Abbie Lieberman and Laura Bornfreund May 28, 2019

In addition to their four centers, Pre-K 4 SA’s charge prioritizes advancing the quality of pre-K programs in area schools and programs. They also provide 10,000 hours of professional learning to teachers in these districts and centers, each year. Just as critically, they have recognized the power of appropriate leadership support(s) and infrastructures to ensure this training positively impacts teaching and learning opportunities.

Because of this important foundational work, NTC and Pre-K 4 SA are currently partnering through the Early Learning Leadership Program (ELLP). This is a year-long program in which principals learn developmentally appropriate early learning pedagogy, such as: child and brain development, playing to learn, social-emotional learning, emergent literacy, and much more. Moreover, school leaders are also learning to effectively support teacher practice through coaching language and collaboration. In the inaugural year of ELLP, twenty-seven (27) elementary school principals participated and to date, NTC has trained thirty-two (32) additional principals, as well as assistant principals, instructional coaches, and other school district leaders.

As the partnership continues to evolve, NTC and Pre-K 4 SA have begun to train internal coaches through a professional learning series. This series is designed to transform teaching and learning using research-based coaching tools and methods for assessing, responding to, and advancing teaching toward reflective practice. NTC and Pre-K 4 SA know that ongoing, job-embedded professional learning through coaching is one of the most effective ways to equip teachers to better meet the needs of young learners.

The NTC coaching model is the only model nationally that provides a specific framework geared towards instructional coaching for Pre-K and K educators. We have experienced tremendous benefits from the reflective, inquiry-based coaching language and stances outlined in the framework. Our teachers have become better critical thinkers around their classroom practices. The framework also guides coaches and teachers to focus on achieving high outcomes for children.

– Larissa Wilkinson, Director of Professional Learning and Program Innovation, Pre-K 4 San Antonio
Outcomes of Collaboration

The following impact data has been taken from the most recent ELLP cohort end-of-year survey, indicating positive experiences, learnings, and outcomes.

86% of ELLP participants state they can now identify instructional practices, pedagogy, and curriculum that are developmentally appropriate and impactful for young learners.

100% of ELLP participants state they have deepened knowledge and capacity to support early learning teachers in their schools.

100% of ELLP participants state they have acquired essential skills in observing teaching and providing feedback to support early learning instructional leadership.

Source: 2020 ELLP impact data

“I feel more confident observing and providing feedback to our early literacy teachers. I am able to advocate for more resources so that students can learn through play, and I am more aware of the conversations and level of discussion that takes place in the classroom.”

Key Takeaways and Looking Ahead for Pre-K 4 San Antonio

In conclusion, Pre-K 4 San Antonio’s critical groundwork in visioning and commitment to the highest possible early childhood education after quality coupled with NTC supports yielded an ideal partnership focused on continuous improvement. Building on these existing successes, NTC will continue working in tandem with Pre-K 4 San Antonio to support impactful leadership and intentional coaching in support of program quality. Looking ahead, this collaborative partnership will remain focused on scalable and sustainable impact for San Antonio’s youngest learners across all schools and districts. In the coming year, we expect to:

1. Train coaches and teacher leaders to facilitate early learning-specific Professional Learning Communities supporting data-driven learning opportunities for young children.

2. Offer the Early Learning Leadership Program to additional participants from existing and new districts.

3. Train an additional cohort of coaches, including those from Pre-K 4 San Antonio partner districts, to effectively support teaching and learning in early learning classrooms.