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# BRIGHT START



Early Childhood Action Plan  
2023-2026





# BRIGHT STARTS FINISH STRONG.

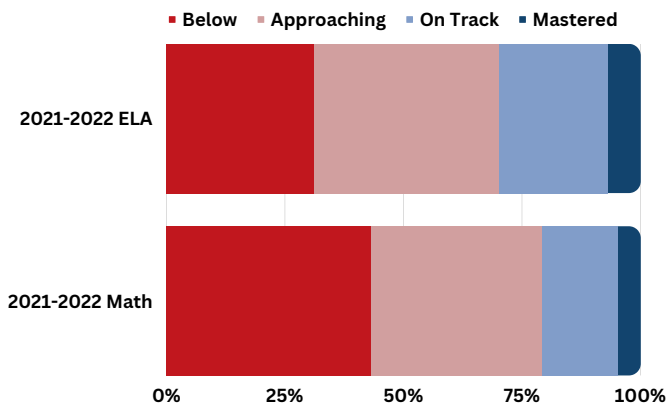
**Third grade is widely acknowledged as a critical benchmark year for future academic success .**

**4X**

A student not reading at grade level in third grade is four times more likely to drop out of high school.



**Unfortunately, less than one-third of West Tennessee's students are on track in reading or math by the third grade.** Economically disadvantaged students are often further behind, a gap we cannot ignore with over half of West Tennessee children living in or near poverty.



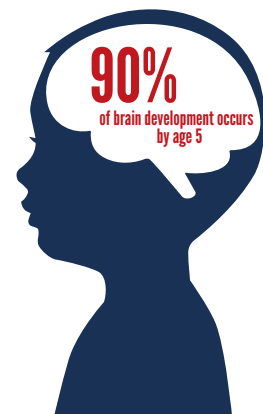
56% of children in the 9-county region live in low-income households



Only 20% of economically disadvantaged students test on track in ELA in the third grade.

**The crisis of declining academic preparedness is a complex problem, but not a hopeless one.** The most effective interventions are the ones that begin long before a child enters a third-grade classroom.

The first few years of a child's life have a profound and lasting impact. Positive experiences in these crucial years are essential for child health, learning, and overall well-being. In fact, 90% of brain development occurs before age five.



**To say it simply, the early years matter.**

Unfortunately, not all children and families have equal access to positive early childhood experiences.

**What if we could change that?** By leveraging the power of collective action and partnership we can build a system of early care and education that can ensure West TN's littlest learners, especially those most vulnerable, get the strong early foundation they need to succe

**....That's where the Bright Start Tennessee Network comes in.**



# TOGETHER WE CAN ACHIEVE A BOLD VISION.

**A comprehensive, equitable, and high-quality continuum of care for all West Tennessee children from birth to third grade. That's what we are building with Bright Start West Tennessee.**

Led locally by United Way of West Tennessee and dedicated partners, the Bright Start West Tennessee action plan aims to increase the number of third-grade children proficient in reading and math by five percentage points each year, resulting in 45% of students testing proficient or above by 2026. We will accomplish this by:



In order to achieve this lofty goal, we must consider the needs of the whole child. Our focus is on strategies that align with the three domains that we believe are essential to a child's academic outcomes. We call this framework the "Cycle of Success".

## Creating a Cycle of Success

What children need to achieve 3rd grade level reading and math proficiency



- Health and development on track beginning at birth
- Supported, and supportive, families and communities
- High-quality birth-through-age-eight learning environments



# TRACKING OUTCOMES

To track progress towards the ultimate goal of raising third-grade reading proficiency, it is important to identify indicators that are both measurable and drive growth. The Bright Start TN Network will utilize 15 Measures of Success to set realistic targets and measure progress.



The Measures of Success will be tracked annually at both the local and state level by the Bright Start TN Network.

# STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Not all strategies are in the same stage of implementation, with some being farther along than others. Strategies are labeled by stages. Target dates for full implementation and quarterly milestones are included in the full plan.





# EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

## Early Care and Education Workforce Pipeline

STAGE 1

Bright Start West Tennessee (BSWT) will convene community partners to address the complex challenge of ECE staffing by designing a collaborative workforce development plan that addresses compensation, quality credentials, and professional development.

## Shared Services Alliance

STAGE 2

A Shared Services Alliance is a partnership of child care providers that resources members with business, professional development, and staffing support services to strengthen program quality and sustainability.

## Micro-Center Network

STAGE 2

A micro-center network is a system of multiple, one-classroom child care “centers” located in an existing school, hospital, office building, etc. The classroom operates under a “hub” organization that provides administrative support, allowing the micro-center staff to focus solely on high-quality care.

## Family Care Provider Network

STAGE 1

Home-based care is crucial for families in rural areas and families needing care during nontraditional hours, like evenings, nights, and weekends. Family Child Care Provider Networks recruit, train, and support family care providers.

## Employer-Led Initiatives

STAGE 2

BSWTN will partner with local Chambers of Commerce, business and industry leaders, and community organizations to design and implement employer policies and practices that support working parents.

## LENA Early Talk Technology

STAGE 3

LENA technology is a professional development tool that tracks conversational turns between caregivers and children in order to improve interactions and encourage early language development.

## Community Schools

STAGE 1

Community Schools are public schools that act as hubs of their neighborhoods by leverage the resources of the whole community- students, families, educators, and community partners- to meet the needs of students and families.



## Evidence Based Home Visiting STAGE 3

Evidence Based Home Visiting (EBHV) programs foster healthy parental relationships by providing attachment-based, culturally respectful, and family-centered support. BSWT will prioritize two EBHV programs: Healthy Families America (HFA) and Parents as Teachers (PAT).

## Handle with Care STAGE 3

In Handle with Care (HWC) programs, law enforcement officers send notifications to schools when children have been involved in traumatic out of school events, ensuring children who are exposed to trauma receive appropriate interventions.

## Benefit Kitchen STAGE 2

Benefit Kitchen is a screener that uses state-of-the-art algorithms to determine the eligibility and estimated dollar amounts for more than a dozen federal, state, and local benefits, allowing families to quickly connect with needed benefits.

## Community-Based Literacy Initiatives STAGE 2

BSWTN will develop a region-wide literacy campaign focused on teaching early literacy strategies, sharing resources, and encouraging reading for fun at all levels. BSWTN will also support and scale existing community literacy work, such as Imagination Library, the Reading Railroad, the Read Team, and others.

## Tennessee Resiliency Project: Pathways FAMILY+ STAGE 3

The FAMILY+ program is a sustainable model for embedding licensed mental health providers in places that families already frequent, such as primary care physicians, Head Start preschools, perinatal clinics, schools, and juvenile courts.

## School-Based Clinics and Health Services STAGE 1

School-Based Health Clinics (SBHC) provide medical and behavioral health professionals at the school site (and where appropriate, via telehealth), creating unique access to healthcare for PreK-12 students and school staff.

## Mobile Health and Dental Services STAGE 3

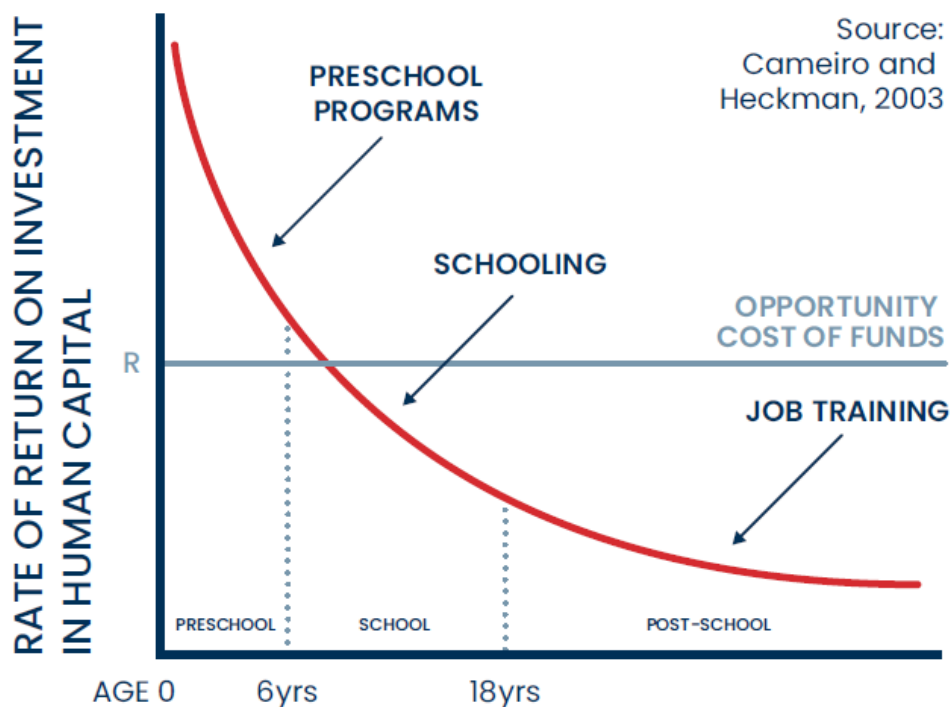
Mobile health services are crucial to giving rural communities access to high quality healthcare. Existing services include LeBonheur on the Move mobile healthcare, Helping Hands mobile dental clinics, and Pathways mobile telehealth.



## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The cost of each individual strategy is detailed in the full plan. Some strategies included in this plan already have funding secured. For others, United Way of West Tennessee and implementation partners will be seeking grants, public and private investors, and philanthropies who are eager to improve the early childhood system.

Investment in quality early education is more life- and cost-effective than later remediation. The figure below, known as the "The Heckman Curve", by Nobel Laureate Prize-winning economist James Heckman, demonstrates how investments in the early years have by far the greatest return. Particularly for disadvantaged children, early education can have returns as high as \$7-13 for every \$1 invested.



## A COMMUNITY EFFORT

**This plan is a bold undertaking for our region, but we can achieve it together.** Thank you to Tennesseans for Quality Early Education for providing the seed money to kick-start this initiative. While United Way of West TN serves as the backbone agency, each individual and organization has a unique part to play. How will **you** support West Tennessee's youngest learners?

Email [oabernathy@unitedway.tn.org](mailto:oabernathy@unitedway.tn.org) for more information on how you can get involved.