



MARCH 2022

# Laredo Learns 2030

Healthy Beginnings, Supported Families, High-Quality  
Early Care and Learning | Systems Map



# Introduction

The Texas Prenatal to Three (PN-3) Collaborative envisions a Texas that is the 'best place to be born'. This endeavor will build upon support from more than 115 partners across the state, funding from the Pritzker Foundation, and a newly developed policy agenda and action plan for Texas. The work of the collaborative is grounded in three key pillars — Healthy Beginnings, Supported Families, and Quality Early Childhood Care and Learning.



“There’s a lot of richness here. There’s a lot of culture. There’s always something to do. People don’t always look for those things... [so I] want to change people’s perspectives on Laredo.”

— **STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW**

## At the state level, this includes three specific targets:

- » **Healthy Beginnings:** Increased quality of and access to prenatal and postpartum health services for low-income mothers and health services for low-income infants and toddlers.
- » **Supported Families:** Increase the number of low-income infants, toddlers, and their families who are screened and successfully connected to necessary services.
- » **Quality Early Childhood Care and Learning:** Increased access to high-quality childcare programs serving low-income infants and toddlers.<sup>1</sup>

## Laredo Answers the Call

**Laredo has answered the call to become a new frontera of innovation in the prenatal to three space, by launching the Learning City@ Laredo Pre-Natal-3 (LoC@L PN-3) Project. By 2030, Laredo can optimize the PN-3 system to ensure all families can access the programs they need to provide a strong foundation for healthy development and learning.** This System Map details the key resources, people, and programs that are already working towards this goal. While this information is divided into the three categories listed above, the Laredo PN-3 ecosystem includes robust coordination and alignment across providers. Further this document highlights promising practices that can be built upon, as well as identifying opportunities for development.

## Healthy Beginnings

By 2030, Laredo commits to ensuring infants and toddlers experience *healthy beginnings* from birth. To accomplish this, the community needs to optimize *systems of physical and mental health care* to create a *high-quality* foundation for lifelong wellness, and provide families with access to prenatal care and preventive and comprehensive healthcare.

For **Children's Health**, Laredo is committed to ensuring an adequate supply of providers, practitioners, and medical facilities. This allows children and families to get care in a timely manner in accessible locations. The information below is an overview of the key assets.

IN WEBB COUNTY, THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED:

**20**

Pediatricians<sup>2</sup>

**40**

Family  
Medicine  
Doctors

**115**

Nurse  
Practitioners

**20**

Community  
Health Workers

**6**

Hospitals, of which 3 serve children and/or pregnant mothers.<sup>3</sup>

**2**

Federally Qualified Health Clinics, both run by **Gateway Community Health Center (GCHC)**

**4**

Free Or Low-Cost Clinics:  
» 3 clinics are managed by GCHC  
» **Laredo Health Department**  
» **Mercy Ministries of Laredo**

### Mental Health centers with free or low-cost care:

- » **Border Region Behavioral Health**
- » **PILLAR**
- » **Serving Children and Adults in Need (SCAN, Inc.)**

**Prenatal and Perinatal Programs** are critical to ensuring healthy outcomes for mother and child by 2030.

### 2 birthing hospitals support the population of Laredo:

» **Doctor's Hospital of Laredo**

» **Laredo Medical Center**

Additionally, at **Driscoll Health System** doctors rotate in from Corpus Christi to treat pregnancy complications, maternal and pediatric medical conditions.

**20** Ob/gyns<sup>4</sup> are estimated to serve the Webb County area.<sup>5</sup>

**1** Midwife (focused on women traveling from Mexico to US to give birth).<sup>6</sup>

**2** Doulas serve the Laredo area.

*"When I got pregnant, I noticed that there were not a lot of resources for moms in Laredo. I got really interested in doing doula work; ultimately, I want to become a midwife to ensure that the mother's experience is at the center of care. I want a solidified community for mothers." – Linda Martinez, Laredo's Diligent Doula*

**SPOTLIGHT ON: Gateway Community Health Center** is a federally-funded community health center that provides a broad range of services from primary care to women's health to oral health to pharmacy and beyond.

*"No one is turned away at Gateway. We take people regardless of ability to pay. During the pandemic, we were able to serve the community without interruption. We were able to continue to provide services, including vaccinating 35,000 people against COVID-19." – Elmo Lopez, Jr., CEO, Gateway Community Health Center*



## Supported Families

To ensure nurturing *child-parent relationships and positive development*, Laredo is committed to increasing the number of low-income infants, toddlers, and families who are *screened* and successfully *connected* to necessary services such as home visiting, early intervention and social service programs by 2030.

**Home Visiting** programs offer parents of young children vital support, information and coaching, and connections to a range of resources and programs, including screening and referrals.<sup>7</sup>

- » Nurse-Family Partnership
- » United Independent School District: Pregnancy, Education, and Parenting Program
- » HOPES I & II provided by Serving Children and Adults in Need (SCAN, Inc.)
- » Webb County Head Start – Early Head Start Home-Based Programs

**Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)** provides early identification and specialized services for children with developmental delays and disabilities, and their families.

- » Community Action Corporation of South Texas – ECI Project Niños.

Support for children with disabilities is also provided by the Children with Special Health Care Needs program.

*“One of our priorities is making ECI a household name so that parents don’t have to think twice about where to go. We coordinate with community partners like home visiting and breastfeeding programs, as well as community centers. We’re always looking for other ways to spread the message.”*  
– Eric Castillo, Child Find Coordinator, Early Childhood Intervention Project Niños



**Social Service Programs** support families when they experience challenges. In Webb County, these include:

- » The **Children’s Advocacy Center of Laredo-Webb County** is focused on community education and training and prevention to reduce child abuse.
- » **City of Laredo WIC Program** provides nutritional benefits to women, infants, and children. There are 8 WIC clinics in Laredo.
- » **Webb County Community Action Agency** offers services such as utility payment assistance, rural transportation, food assistance, and more.
- » **Casa de Misericordia** is an organization dedicated to ending domestic violence. They provide shelter, education, mental health resources, and beyond.
- » **Texas Health and Human Services’s 211 Hotline and Website** provides on-demand support to families, connecting them with a wide variety of resources ranging from financial assistance to housing and beyond.

*“We are the only domestic violence shelter in an eighty-mile radius and we never turn anyone away. Even if they stop by the educational center, even if they need help with a utility bill - sometimes that’s how you find out they need help with a domestic violence situation. Domestic violence is a public health issue.”*  
– Sr. Rosemary Welsh, Executive Director, Casa de Misericordia

**SPOTLIGHT ON: SCAN, Inc. (Serving Children and Adults in Need) Inc.** an organization which provides Laredians, and others in the border region, with access to prevention, intervention, and treatment services that are culturally-responsive, trauma-informed, and comprehensive.

*“SCAN, Inc. does so much for the community with more than 40 programs, each serving Laredo and its surroundings in specific ways. Our focus is supporting children, adolescents, adults, and families by providing a wide range of evidence-based prevention, intervention, and treatment services in behavioral care.”*  
— San Juanita Guerra, SCAN, Inc.

## High-Quality Early Care and Learning

To foster optimal early brain development, infants and toddlers need nurturing, responsive care and joyful learning experiences. To accomplish this, Laredo is committed to increasing the number of *affordable, accessible, and high-quality* options for care and learning, including resources for providers, working families, and families caring for children at home by 2030.

**Quality Child Care** is a critical part of the community. There are a number of providers serving infants and toddlers who accept child care subsidies, a critical avenue to affordable care for Laredo's families.

### **115** regulated providers of childcare:

- » 6 registered childcare homes
- » 23 licensed childcare homes
- » 86 licensed childcare centers
- » Very few families use the child care subsidy with Family, Friend, or Neighbor caregivers.

### **91%** of all licensed providers

accept subsidies and 25% of them participate in **Texas Rising Star**, Texas' Quality Rating and Improvement System

**Workforce Solutions for South Texas** administers the child care subsidy program and provides quality assessments, technical assistance, and professional development to childcare providers, as part of **Texas Rising Star**.

**SPOTLIGHT ON: Bright by Text** is a free text messaging service available to parents. Texts include information about early development, learning activities, and community-specific updates. TAMIU and the Laredo Health Department are partnering to help Bright by Text reach 1000 of Laredo's 'first educators.' **Families can sign up by texting TEXASKIDS to 274448.**

The center-based **Early Head Start** program provides high-quality childcare, screenings, referrals, and parent leadership opportunities for qualifying families with children under the age of 3.

### **2** Early Head Start centers

» Sierra Vista » Little Palominos

### **1** Early Head Start child care partnership site<sup>8</sup>

» Education Center

*"Early Head Start is a wonderful program that helps children develop social and emotional skills to help them succeed as they are reaching the preschool age. Our goal is to prepare and get children ready for school with the parents acting as their child's advocate!"*

– Lucy Trejo, Managing Director, Webb County Head Start

## Opportunities for Learning, Exploration, and Play

are a key part of a vibrant early learning ecosystem that help families guide their children in experiential learning and play.

### **5** Libraries

#### **2** Family Place Libraries

with 1,2,3 Play with Me program

- » Joe A. Guerra Laredo Public Library
- » McKendrick Ochoa Salinas Branch Library

Also, 1 mobile library

### **13** Community centers (precinct 1, 2, 3, 4)

provide programming including food banks, mobile clinics, summer camps for children, and other social events.

### **57** Parks administered by Laredo Parks and Rec

### **1** Children's Museum

» Imaginarium of South Texas

## Laredo's Promising Practices and Key Opportunities

Laredo has a wealth of resources and systems to support the goals of *Healthy Beginnings*, *Supported Families*, and *High-Quality Early Care and Learning*. The promising practices below, though not exhaustive, provide a snapshot of strengths that Laredo can build on while increasing access, building connections, and supporting quality systems. The opportunities included below can help Laredo chart a transformative path for the future. Both are integrated with the data and recommendations described in the companion "**LAREDO Learns 2030 Report and Recommendations.**"



### Healthy Beginnings

#### Promising Practices:

- » Border Region Behavioral Health Center instituted telehealth, expanding access, and increased salaries for providers in hard-to-staff roles.<sup>9</sup>
- » Gateway Community Health Center has community health workers/*promotoras* who conduct outreach and teach health education classes that cover topics from prenatal care to chronic conditions like pre-diabetes.

#### Key Opportunities:

- » Expand the number of local high-risk pregnancy specialists and ob/gyns.
- » Increase the number of pediatric providers and specialists serving Laredo.

### Supported Families

#### Promising Practices:

- » Nurse-Family Partnership is a research-based home visiting program for first-time parents in the prenatal and postpartum period. This program helps families build support systems and connect to resources.
- » ECI Project Niños' Pathways program supports parents of 0-3 year olds who demonstrate signs of autism but are not yet eligible for IDEA services.

#### Key Opportunities:

- » Increase accessibility of home visiting programs by securing additional resources and expanding eligibility criteria.
- » Launch support groups for families in the PN-3 stage to increase social connections and mental health.

### High-Quality Early Care and Learning

#### Promising Practices:

- » The 1, 2, 3 Play with Me program offers workshops with parenting resources, crafts, and books to help families connect and learn more about early development.
- » Bright by Text sends regular community-driven texts to participants, to connect families with resources, share developmental practices, and build community.

#### Key Opportunities:

- » Increase the number of providers in Texas Rising Star and providing high-quality care and education
- » Support extended family members providing child care in becoming eligible for subsidies
- » Build resources to help guide families and other caregivers in creating play and learning experiences

*"Quality care matters – families do not want to leave their children with just anyone. Quality care is not easy to come by; while working in childcare, the salary for childcare providers is low and that can impact quality care because well qualified providers that are in the field end up leaving the childcare profession. I've had so many graduates that just were not able make it on the salary they received.... This is a challenge that all childcare providers face."*

— Gloria Juarez, Child Development Department Chair, Laredo Community College

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“Laredo’s parents are the First Educators for their children. They play a critical role in their development and learning. As a city, we need to empower our First Educators by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to be effective, connecting them to key developmental screening services and ensuring they access all the resources Laredo provides to set their children on a path to success.”

— **DR. JAMES O'MEARA, DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, TEXAS A&M INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

## Endnotes

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**Start Early (formerly known as the Ounce of Prevention)** is a nonprofit public-private partnership advancing quality early learning and care for families with children, before birth through their earliest years, to help close the opportunity gap. For nearly 40 years, Start Early has delivered best-in-class doula, home visiting and Early Head Start and Head Start programs. Bringing expertise in program delivery, research and evaluation, professional development and policy and advocacy, Start Early works in partnership with communities and other experts to drive systemic change so that millions more children, families and educators can thrive. Learn more at [StartEarly.org](https://www.StartEarly.org).



A Member of The Texas A&M University System, **Texas A&M International University (TAMIU)** is a primarily Hispanic-serving, State-assisted university founded in 1970. Its 300-acre campus is located in northeast Laredo on former ranchland. The campus is home to a diverse enrollment of over 8,450 students from some 31 countries and 28 US states. TAMIU offers transformative undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees in the arts and sciences, business, education, and nursing. As its name affirms, the University maintains a special focus on developing an international academic agenda for the State of Texas. Its 30,000+ graduates lead lives of change and impact around the world, and just around the corner.

The University aggressively serves as 1. A transformative education destination, 2. A diverse forum for learning, research and service, 3. A collaborative hub that seeks out and values partnerships, and 4. A vital agent of excellence delivering its mission through giving and leading. The University celebrated its milestone 50th Anniversary in 2020. Additional information is found at [tamiau.edu](https://www.tamiau.edu).