FALL 2021

BRINGING EARLY LEARNING SYSTEMS CHANGE TO SCALE

LESSONS FROM STARTING SMART AND STRONG

engage R+D

the David & Lucile Packard FOUNDATION

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Executive Summary

Expanding kindergarten readiness through equitable practices in three California communities

Starting Smart and Strong is the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's kindergarten readiness strategy to build, test, and scale up community-driven solutions in early learning. The Foundation is supporting three California communities—East San Jose, Fresno, and Oakland—in a ten-year effort to bring together public and private partners to determine and test approaches that address inequities in quality early childhood experiences, professional development for early educators, and kindergarten readiness. Having completed its sixth year in 2020, Starting Smart and Strong aims to develop best practices that can be useful in any community.

Engage R+D is working with the Foundation on an evaluation to understand how Starting Smart and Strong communities are developing early learning support systems and to identify best practices for implementation and taking solutions to scale. Our 2021 full evaluation report, *Bringing Early Learning Systems Change to Scale: Lessons from Starting Smart and Strong,* focuses on a period of expansion and learning as the three communities worked to **scale and spread innovative and effective professional development practices.** This executive summary outlines those findings and highlights actionable insights for funders and stakeholders in these and other communities.

> With Starting Smart and Strong, the Packard Foundation has embraced a community-driven approach with the belief that, while multiple pathways can lead to kindergarten readiness, successful adoption relies on each community taking a path that is relevant to its context and driven by its assets and ambitions.

Read more about Starting Smart and Strong here.

Starting Smart and Strong Lead Grantees

Franklin-McKinley School District	Fresno Unified School District	Oakland Unified School District
Small urban district (East San Jose)	Large district in rural area	Large urban district
Students eligible for Free & Reduced-Price Meals*: 71%	Students eligible for Free & Reduced-Price Meals: 86%	Students eligible for Free & Reduced-Price Meals: 73%
Professional development focus: Social and emotional development	*Professional development focus:* Dual language learners	*Professional development focus:* Trauma-informed care/resilience

*Source: Ed-Data.org. Free and Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data, 2020-21.

Lessons and Actionable Insights Within Five Phases of Scale

While each community forged its own path in scaling early learning solutions, the Starting Smart and Strong evaluation documented five phases of scale common across the communities. The phases provide a framework to reflect on lessons and implications broadly relevant to early learning systems change.

A discovery process must become a normal, planned-for phase of community-driven initiatives. Systems change approaches are necessarily shaped by the people and organizations involved, as well as contextual factors. In a community-driven approach for systems change, each community needs time and support to explore how scaling fits within the local context.

What's behind this finding? In the first phase, communities began to conceptualize the ambitious goal of spreading effective early learning innovations. The Foundation supported communities in determining what scale meant without imposing top-down definitions. Grantees and partners experienced this early stage of work as both an opportunity to define their own path and a challenge to align their community priorities to definitions of scale. Communities found that scaling up could take many different forms. They needed in-depth discussion and sensemaking sessions to explore priorities, feasibility, and implementation—and ultimately to find a shared understanding of scale. Through this process, each community arrived at a distinct, locally-informed approach to scaling.

How each community scaled its early learning practices:

- **Franklin-McKinley aligned practices** across grades and settings.

- **Fresno spread knowledge of strategies** among educators across settings and families.

- **Oakland replicated specific program elements districtwide**, such as screenings, or coaching and engagement strategies.

Actions for Communities

✓ **Take time to explore** a variety of ideas about what scaling up could look like in practice.

✓ **Begin collaboratively** by bringing together potential partners and key players early in the process to build common ground and identify differences in perspective from the start.

Actions for Funders

✓ **Support a discovery process** in the early stages of a community-driven approach to systems change to cultivate local ownership and enable grantee sensemaking of the overarching concepts of the initiative within the community context.

✓ **Allow enough time** for systems to develop and conditions to be created. Systems work takes multiple years, so funders need to be ready to commit long-term.

Supporting community-led approaches to scale requires funding opportunities to pilot and test new practices that have the potential to take hold across a community. Centering community priorities means supporting the exploration of local needs and giving communities the resources and time to test out solutions and strategies. Funders learning to walk alongside communities as the systems work takes shape holds value and requires an expectation of learning from missteps and recovery.

What's behind this finding? In the second phase, grantees and partners examined community needs and practices to identify issues to address through Starting Smart and Strong. The Foundation urged testing of ideas on a small scale to start. Supported by technical assistance, the testing and learning process in this phase helped communities identify approaches that aim to achieve equity at scale and collect data to test their strategies.

Community-led decisions of what to scale:

- **Franklin-McKinley: Children's Social and Emotional Development.** Strategies to help educators manage classroom behavior and approaches to learning included teacher training, learning communities, reflective practice, and ongoing coaching, with scaling plans to engage all adults that interact with children from infants through K-12.

- **Fresno: Early learning among dual-language learners.** The district and its partners launched the Language Learning Project to improve professional development and training for early learning educators to better support dual language learners and their families. The approach honors the learner's home language and engages parents.

- **Oakland: Family- and teacher-centered trauma-informed practices.** Building on the success of site-based instructional coaching that scaled districtwide, Oakland began trauma-informed practice professional development known as ROCK (Resilient Oakland Communities and Kids).

Actions for Communities

- ✓ **Take stock** of community needs and priorities with consideration of underrepresented groups.
- ✓ **Test ideas** to find data-supported strategies to address the needs. A period of testing and learning strengthens the approach by allowing for missteps and reworking on a small scale.

Actions for Funders

- ✓ **Establish engaged, collaborative relationships** with grantees to build trust and develop an understanding of nuances in community interests and assets.
- ✓ **Be mindful** of boundaries and power dynamics. Embrace listening, learning, and open dialogue.
- ✓ **Encourage community experimentation** about how to meet the initiative's goal, including learning from missteps and recovery as grantees test strategy ideas.

Community input is key in developing evaluation approaches to measuring progress of community efforts. Dedicating space and resources for authentic community engagement can ensure that assessment is useful and meaningful to the community and supports evaluation participation centered on learning rather than reporting.

What's behind this finding? As communities implemented and collected data on new early learning practices in the third phase, questions about scale became more specific. The Foundation worked to balance its desire for common data measures with a recognition that each community could benefit from pursuing its own inquiries.

Through a series of in-depth discussions with Starting Smart and Strong partners and communities, including listening to communities' concerns and revisiting ideas about common benchmarks, the Foundation and Engage R+D supported each community in articulating its scaling goals and measures of progress. Engage R+D also introduced a social network analysis and the Early Learning Systems Self-Assessment (ELSSA) tool, developed in collaboration with the communities. The data collection engaged grantees and their stakeholders in a process that was both reflective and strategic. Further, data from these measures drew attention to the importance of leadership and networks, which the Foundation and communities now see as essential to the scaling process.

Actions for Communities	✓ **Routinely assess progress** on community-based systems change goals and questions of interest. Reflect on successes, challenges, and lessons to apply going forward.
Actions for Funders	✓ **Gather community input in developing evaluation approaches** to measuring progress of community efforts. ✓ **Design evaluation to serve community** information needs and learning. ✓ **Be open** to supporting community growth in unexpected directions.

Key progress in leadership and networks:

Built-In Leadership:

- **Franklin-McKinley** struggled with scaling during a leadership transition and shifting community partnerships, but, in 2020, more cohesive leadership and partners were better positioned to support scaling of effective practices. ELSSA data showed marked growth in leadership from 2014 to 2020.

- In **Oakland**, a formal and broadly inclusive cross-sector leadership table was a goal from the initiative's start and gained recognition for catalyzing new collaborations, improving cross-sector communication, and strengthening shared goals and strategies. ELSSA data showed strong progress from 2014 to 2020 in the systems areas of Leadership and Community Alignment.

Collaborative Partnerships and Networks

- **All three Starting Smart and Strong communities** developed tightly knit partner networks. According to network analysis, after five years of participating in Starting Smart and Strong, an average of 99% of all possible interactions were occurring between partners in each community, and the quality of those relationships had improved.

- In **Fresno**, network analysis data shows that the number of partners working together at a formal partnership level increased by 30 percentage points from before Starting Smart and Strong to 2019.

What's behind this finding? Communities strengthened the skills and infrastructure needed to scale effective practices across a system in the fourth phase. They developed capacity to collect and track data, built leadership and partnerships, and embraced flexibility to take advantage of a variety of opportunities to expand. Overall, in the first six years of Starting Smart and Strong, the three communities made substantial progress on developing strong data capacity and supportive early learning infrastructure. The positive evidence they have shown not only demonstrates a readiness to scale, but also the communities' growing capacity to use data and tell the story of Starting Smart and Strong.

Actions for Communities

✓ **Continue to build trust and common goals** —both short-term and long-term—with partners to integrate the collaboration needed for systems change.

✓ **Tackle the challenge of developing shared data capacity** across the system to gain the substantial benefits of robust, shared information.

Actions for Funders

✓ **Work alongside communities** to support essential components of systems change that are informed by considerations of equity. Regularly re-examine the funder's role, reflecting on when to lead and when to follow.

Among other achievements:

- **Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) data** shows that, by 2020, an average of 73% of children in Starting Smart and Strong classrooms were observed to be ready for kindergarten, up from just 58% at the initiative's start. The largest improvements, overall, were observed in the social and emotional development domain.

- In **Franklin-McKinley**, the more professional development early educators received in social and emotional development, the higher the DRDP scores were by the end of the school year.

- In **Fresno**, dual language learning (DLL) children in the Language Learning Project performed as well or better on all DRDP domains than their non-DLL peers across all partner organizations.

- In **Oakland**, children in classrooms whose teachers had participated in three years of coaching demonstrated significant progress from fall to spring each year and over time.

What's behind this finding? In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, and race equity movement (such as Black Lives Matter and fighting against anti-Asian hate) tested the resilience of the Starting Smart and Strong communities and revealed whether new systems and practices could help them weather challenges. The disrupted normalcy in 2020 took a disproportionate toll on some groups, including families. In this radically changed context, though, the resources, connections, and tools that communities built through Starting Smart and Strong positioned them to rapidly adapt and respond.

For example:

- **Oakland** was able to leverage and spread its trauma-informed care work as demand increased during the pandemic.

- **Fresno** was prepared to support and reach out to dual language learner families, many of whom were severely affected by the pandemic.

- In **Franklin-McKinley**, educators were keenly aware of the critical importance of addressing social-emotional learning in the shift to remote instruction.

Actions for Communities

✓ **Consider how resilience can be strengthened** by building collaborative partnerships, data capacity, and infrastructure that support scaling efforts. Crisis preparedness can be a valuable reason to pursue systems change.

Actions for Funders

✓ **Include resilience as an indicator of success** in systems change work. The resilience that communities gain from developing and driving the relationships and infrastructure needed for systems change helps them weather crises and is another compelling reason to support community-led approaches.

Looking Ahead as Starting Smart and Strong Continues

Through the remaining years of Starting Smart and Strong, the three communities will continue to scale up best practices in early learning. They will undoubtedly gain new insights and lessons about community-driven systems change to share with funders, stakeholders in early learning, and others interested in strengthening community systems.

Introduction

Starting Smart and Strong is designed to help children learn, grow, and thrive. A ten-year, place-based strategy of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Starting Smart and Strong brings together public and private supporters of community-driven solutions to help parents, caregivers, and educators prepare young children to be healthy and ready for school. The Foundation partners with three California communities—East San Jose, Fresno, and Oakland—to build, test, and scale up early childhood systems with the intention of developing best practices that can be useful in any community. The North Star of these efforts is kindergarten readiness of all children. The visual below provides an overview of the initiative's four pillars.

The Four Pillars of Starting Smart and Strong

1
Testing professional development and training models for early childhood educators in formal settings

2
Testing new approaches to support and provide resources for informal caregivers and to ensure authentic parent engagement

3
Working to ensure the healthy development of young children through access to universal developmental screening and appropriate responses

4
Scaling what works by creating strong systems, committing resources, and engaging committed leaders who are willing to take action

Read more about Starting Smart and Strong at: https://www.packard.org/what-we-fund/children-families-and-communities/starting-smart-and-strong/

East San Jose, Fresno, and Oakland are diverse communities with unique demographics, geography, and infrastructure, and all with many young children living in poverty (see visual below). Families in these communities seek the best care for their children so they can grow up healthy and ready for school, but they face barriers due to a long and devastating history of systemic racism in our country that limits opportunities for some groups while protecting the advantages of others. In the early care and education field specifically, school districts in these communities have embraced new approaches to address the inequities that remain in quality early childhood experiences, professional development (PD) for early educators, and kindergarten readiness.

The Packard Foundation has embraced a community-driven approach that gives space for grantees and their partners to determine and test the early learning changes needed within their local context, while holding tight to achieving kindergarten readiness through these multiple pathways. School districts are the grantees leading the work; their broad scope, including providing transitional kindergarten, positions them to bring together public and private early learning partners to improve systems in response to local needs.

Starting Smart and Strong Lead Grantees

Franklin-McKinley School District (East San Jose)	Fresno Unified School District	Oakland Unified School District
• Small urban district • High eligibility for Free & Reduced-Priced Meals*: 71% • Key PD focus: Social and emotional development	• Large district in rural area • High eligibility for Free & Reduced-Priced Meals: 86% • Key PD focus: Dual language learners	• Large urban district • High eligibility for Free & Reduced-Priced Meals: 73% • Key PD focus: Trauma-informed care/Resilience

*Source: Ed-Data.org. Free and Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data, 2020-21.

This brief report from the Starting Smart and Strong evaluation provides a window into the ongoing story of the initiative through its sixth year, completed in 2020. It focuses on a period of expansion and learning in the three communities as the work notably progressed on a key pillar of Starting Smart and Strong: scaling to spread innovative and effective professional development practices (see visual below). The report first describes the evolution of scale in Starting Smart and Strong. It then highlights lessons that have emerged from the three communities that can inform funders and other stakeholders in early learning. The report closes with suggested actions that funders and community stakeholders can take in their work to expand community-based solutions across a system.

Starting Smart and Strong
Timeline of Community-Driven Early Learning Systems Change

| Laying the Foundation | → | Building Practice & Platforms | → | Scaling What Works | → | Sustaining the Changes |

2014   2017   2020   2023

Starting Smart and Strong Launch
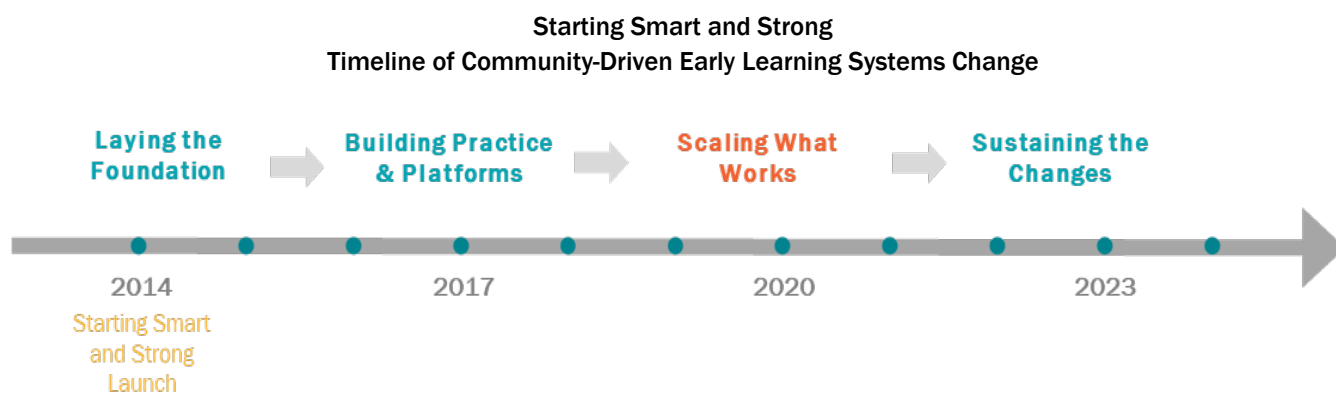
About the Starting Smart and Strong Evaluation

Over the course of Starting Smart and Strong, the Packard Foundation is working with Engage R+D on a developmental evaluation. The evaluation aims to understand how grantee communities are developing early learning support systems and to identify best practices for implementation and taking solutions to scale. The Engage R+D team is intentional about doing our work in service of equity. We, along with the Foundation, strive to keep in mind the principles from the Equitable Evaluation Framework (EEF):[*] evaluative work should (1) be in service of equity; (2) answer critical questions about different populations and the underlying systemic drivers of inequity; and (3) be multi-culturally valid and oriented toward participant ownership. Our approach focuses on learning from implementation, ongoing reflection, and refining strategies as they unfold, opening a variety of opportunities to incorporate EEF principles. We are engaging grantee communities, funders, and technical assistance partners as active participants in the evaluation, gathering diverse perspectives, testing assumptions, and creating space to pause and take stock of the work. These practices help to ensure we are responsive to communities as partners in learning and quality improvement.

*Center for Evaluation Innovation, Institute for Foundation Donor Learning, Dorothy Johnson Center for Philanthropy, Luminare Group. "Equitable Evaluation Framing Paper." Equitable Evaluation Initiative. July 2017. https://www.equitableeval.org/

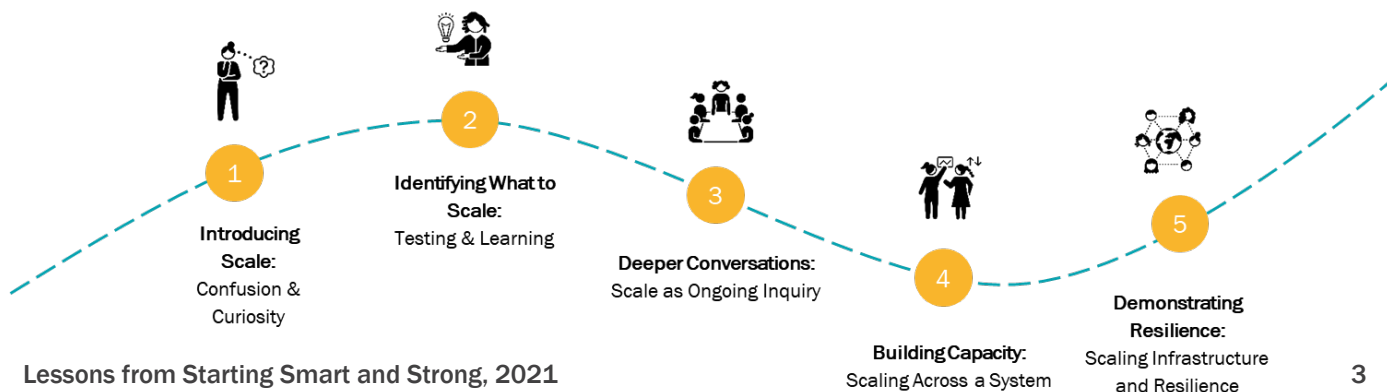# The Evolution of Scale in Starting Smart and Strong

Starting Smart and Strong communities share a commitment to testing and expanding solutions as well as scaling what works to create lasting change in children's lives. Scaling up a solution can look quite different depending on factors such as logistics of implementation and who needs to be involved; stakeholders' priorities regarding where and to whom expansion will take place; and differences in contextual opportunities and barriers in each community. Through the early years of the initiative, grantees and partners in East San Jose, Fresno, and Oakland engaged in a process to determine what scale meant in their work and how to embark on it.

While each community forged a unique path in scaling early learning solutions, the Starting Smart and Strong evaluation documented five phases of scale common across the communities. In some cases, the phases overlap and communities' journeys along them have not been entirely linear, but they are useful in providing a framework to reflect on experiences and lessons relevant to early learning systems change more broadly.

This report is organized by the phases of scale shown below, highlighting Starting Smart and Strong experiences and lessons in each.

The Five Phases of Scale in Starting Smart and Strong

1. **Introducing scale:** Communities began to conceptualize what it would look like to take on the ambitious goal of spreading effective early learning innovations. Communities balanced feelings of confusion and curiosity as they entered this work and sought guidance and clarity. The Foundation aimed to encourage communities to determine what scale meant and support their discussions without imposing top-down definitions.

2. **Identifying what to scale:** Grantees and partners examined existing needs and practices based on various forms of community data to identify what issues they could address through Starting Smart and Strong. The Foundation urged testing of ideas on a small scale to start.

3. **Deeper conversations:** As communities implemented and collected data on their new early learning practices, questions about scale became more specific. The Foundation worked to balance its desire for common data measures and benchmarks with a recognition that each community could benefit from pursuing its own inquiries within their community context.

4. **Building capacity:** While conversations about scale continued, communities were strengthening the skills and infrastructure needed to scale effective practices across a system. They developed their capacity to collect and track data, strengthened leadership and partnership, and embraced flexibility to take advantage of a variety of opportunities to expand.

5. **Demonstrating resilience:** The upheavals of 2020—including the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, and race equity movement—tested the resilience of the Starting Smart and Strong communities and revealed whether systems and practices developed through the initiative could help them weather challenges.

1. **Introducing Scale:** Confusion & Curiosity
2. **Identifying What to Scale:** Testing & Learning
3. **Deeper Conversations:** Scale as Ongoing Inquiry
4. **Building Capacity:** Scaling Across a System
5. **Demonstrating Resilience:** Scaling Infrastructure and Resilience

Lessons from Starting Smart and Strong

Phase 1. Introducing Scale

In the **introducing scale** phase, communities began to conceptualize what it would look like to take on the ambitious goal of spreading effective early learning innovations. The Packard Foundation aimed to encourage communities to determine what scale meant and support their discussions without imposing top-down definitions.

Starting Smart and Strong Experience

When they formed Starting Smart and Strong, communities committed to spreading innovative and effective early learning changes to teaching practices. However, what scaling up would mean in practice remained abstract. Communities raised formative questions about scaling, such as:

- *Does scaling mean expanding a program or spreading a set of practices?*
- *Who are we trying to reach with scaling--additional age groups, more sites within the school district, informal settings outside the district, or others?*
- *What resources do we need for scaling?*

The communities looked to the Foundation and The Early Learning Lab (a technical assistance partner for guidance), but the initiative's community-driven approach meant the Foundation wanted communities to determine their own definitions of scaling. Grantees and partners experienced feelings of uncertainty and curiosity, recognizing this early stage of work as both an opportunity to define their own path and a challenge to align their community priorities to definitions of scale. With the Foundation's encouragement, the communities embarked on a period of messy conversations that were needed for collective sensemaking, as well as exploration of different ideas and scenarios. The chart below summarizes how communities are exploring and conceptualizing scale.

Diverse Concepts of Scale in the Starting Smart and Strong Communities
Interviews with practitioners in each community shed light on different ways of conceptualizing scale.

	Franklin-McKinley	Fresno	Oakland
Scaling concept:	**Align practices** across grades and settings.	**Spread knowledge of strategies** among educators across settings and families.	**Replicate specific program elements**, such as assessments or coaching strategies.
In action:	Franklin-McKinley implemented the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children in transitional kindergarten and preschool classrooms. Through Starting Smart and Strong, they expanded use of the model with infants and toddlers as well as early elementary grades.	Fresno prioritized cross-agency collaboration. Educators across multiple settings in Fresno worked together to spread knowledge about strategies to support dual language learners and their families, generating interest and demand across a range of stakeholder groups – both within Fresno and statewide.	Oakland started small, tested strategies, and then spread them systemwide. They took this approach with the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), developmental screening, and differential coaching, all of which are now being used districtwide. They then built on this foundation to spread trauma-informed practices.

Cross-Cutting Lesson: A discovery process must become a normal, planned-for phase of community-driven initiatives.

Systems change approaches are necessarily shaped by the people and organizations involved, as well as contextual factors. In a community-driven approach for systems change, each community needs time and support to explore how scaling fits within the local context.

Community takeaways
▶ Scaling up can mean different things in practice, and it can take time for communities to arrive at a clear, common, and shared understanding of scale.
▶ Planning to spread solutions involves a process of finding consensus on priorities, feasibility, and implementation.

Foundation takeaways
▶ A discovery process, which requires time and support, is a valuable and necessary part of a community-driven approach to systems change.
▶ Communities' differences come to light during in-depth discussions and sensemaking sessions. These differences may inform distinct approaches they take to scaling.

Phase 2. Identifying What to Scale

In the **identifying what to scale** phase, grantees and partners examined existing needs and practices through various forms of community data to identify what issues they could address through Starting Smart and Strong. The Foundation urged testing of ideas on a small scale in order to make it easier for communities to tweak their strategy or pivot in another direction if necessary. For communities, this also made it easier to get buy-in from community partners, teachers, and/or district administrators.

Starting Smart and Strong Experience

To identify early learning practices to codify and scale, the Foundation encouraged communities to start small, test new approaches, and "fail forward" by making course corrections. Communities had flexibility to focus on local priorities and determine programmatic strategies for addressing them. The Early Learning Lab supported grantees in looking at data, conducting needs assessments, and developing driver diagrams. It also developed a framework (known at the time as the 5 Priority Practices) that identified the most important practices to build in teachers, parents, and caregivers.

The testing and learning process in this phase helped communities identify scaling efforts that addressed inequities. Each community's local and political context influenced how stakeholders spoke about equity in their work, but, by collaboratively developing interventions in response to community-grounded needs and demands, they all identified approaches that aim to **achieve equity at scale**.

The three communities selected different focuses for their Starting Smart and Strong work and collected data to test their strategies.

▶ **Franklin-McKinley** focused on children's **social and emotional development,** pursuing strategies to help educators understand and manage classroom behavior and approaches to learning that are more reflective, equitable, and asset-based. They provided professional development to teachers using the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children and reinforced the application of core skills and principles from this training with professional learning communities, a reflective practice tool and ongoing coaching. The district was interested in engaging all adults that interact with children (including teachers, paraprofessionals, families, principals) to support social and emotional development and scaling this approach to infant/toddler classrooms, inclusion/special education, family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) caregivers, and early elementary grades (kindergarten and first grades).

> "We started [coaching] small. I really appreciate that. I feel like it takes a long time to start but once you start rolling, the ball gets rolling like a snowball-effect."
>
> – Franklin-McKinley

▶ **Fresno** chose to address early learning among **dual language learners** (DLL) through an approach that honors their home language and engages parents. The district serves children that speak over 50 different languages, including Spanish and Hmong. District student data revealed a notable disparity in language and literacy scores of DLL students compared to other students from kindergarten to the third grade. In order to address this disparity and support equitable outcomes for the diversity of its children, Fresno partnered with multiple early learning organizations and renowned early childhood experts to launch the Language Learning Project, which aims to improve professional development and training for early learning educators—regardless of setting—to better support the needs of young DLL children and their families. Participants, who include district, county, Head Start, and home care educators, attend five PD sessions and receive site-based coaching focused on Personalized Oral Language(s) Learning strategies that support language development in multiple environments.

▶ **Oakland** decided to strengthen early learning through site-based instructional **coaching** and family- and teacher-centered **trauma-informed practices.** Specifically, Oakland Unified School District partnered with New Teacher Center to provide educators with site-based differential coaching on best practices to support early childhood development. The strategy is meant to provide each teacher with the opportunity to work with a coach in a non-

evaluative, strengths-based, and confidential relationship aimed at increasing student learning in equitable classrooms. Building on the success of coaching that scaled districtwide, Oakland began trauma-informed practice professional development known as ROCK (Resilient Oakland Communities and Kids). This was based on data that showed that teachers, families, and children were all exposed to various forms of trauma and the district needed a tailored and caring approach to address it. (For more information on how Oakland is centering equity in their work, see the inset below.)

Oakland's Focus on Equity

At their core, quality early childhood experiences, professional development for early educators, and school readiness are equity issues. All three Starting Smart and Strong communities are working to integrate equity across their systems work. Oakland, in particular, has lifted up equity by making it the through line across the four pillars of Oakland Starting Smart and Strong. Oakland's long commitment to deep engagement and collaboration with partners, teachers, and families has helped the district earn high ratings on the Early Learning System Self-Assessment (ELSSA) equity sub-domain that looks at communities' progress on reaching families in neighborhoods with higher needs, engaging parents, using participatory decision making, and centering equity in other ways.[*]

Oakland's high equity score shows that their early and intentional commitment to equity paid off. As a collaborative, they developed results-based accountability indicators with equity at its core. In addition, it was due to families' input that Oakland decided to focus on trauma-informed care and practices for Starting Smart and Strong. The community's deep roots in advocating for racial equity is reflected in their Oakland Starting Smart and Strong Lead Planning Team. These examples of centering equity in the early learning community can serve as a model for others in the field.
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*Engage R+D. "Strengthening Systems for Quality and Scale: Findings from the Early Learning Systems Self-Assessment (ELSSA)." Report for the David & Lucile Packard Foundation's Starting Smart and Strong. March 2021.

Cross-Cutting Lesson: Supporting community-led approaches to scale requires funded opportunities to pilot and test new practices that have the potential to take hold across a community.

Centering community priorities means supporting the exploration of local needs and giving communities the resources and time to test out solutions and strategies. Funders learning to walk alongside communities as the systems work takes shape holds value and requires an expectation of learning from missteps and recovery.

Community takeaway
▶ Choosing which practices to spread involves understanding community needs and priorities as well as identifying data-supported strategies to address the need.

Foundation takeaways
▶ A community-led, place-based approach like Starting Smart and Strong challenges funders to establish highly engaged, collaborative relationships with grantees and bring a mindfulness of boundaries and power dynamics.
▶ A foundation can be firm about an initiative's ultimate goal or North Star (in this case kindergarten readiness), while encouraging communities to decide how to pursue that goal. The process demands ongoing, open dialogue and listening and observing with sensitivity about when to provide guidance and when to support communities in taking the lead.

🏛️ Phase 3. Deeper Conversations ──────

In the **deeper conversations** phase, as communities implemented and collected data on their new early learning practices, questions about scale became more specific. The Packard Foundation worked to balance its desire for common data measures and benchmarks with a recognition that each community could benefit from pursuing its own inquiries.

Starting Smart and Strong Experience

As communities' Starting Smart and Strong strategies matured, they gained a newfound readiness to examine what it would take to spread their practices. In response to communities' requests for guidance, the Foundation sought to explore what scale might look like by developing a unifying theory of scale framework. The Foundation asked Engage R+D to facilitate a meeting to outline a theory of scale beginning with Starting Smart and Strong partners, then with communities. While these initial meetings generated exciting conversations about scale, including defining terms and discussing different ways of scaling, communities were unsure of how to apply the theory of scale to their scaling work.

The Foundation sought to help communities apply the theory of scale to practice by establishing common benchmarks to better measure shifts in practice or outcomes, initially suggesting that communities set benchmarking goals for scale. The three communities, however, raised concerns that set benchmarks may prove too static in their dynamic contexts and that such datapoints might inhibit innovation and inadequately represent their systems change efforts. While they understood the importance of common data measures, grantees and partners felt their work required more nuanced assessment of scaling progress than benchmarks could provide.

Listening to these concerns, the Foundation circled back to its approach of supporting community ideas to drive the initiative and backed away from the idea of a unified theory of scale and common benchmarks across communities. In 2019, the Foundation funded communities' participation in The Billions Institute, which offered communities ideas and resources that enabled them to expand their understanding of scale. In this phase of scaling, communities asked deeper questions, for example:

- *Is what we're doing working?*
- *Who else can benefit?*
- *How can we spread practices to others in our community?*
- *How can we better measure what is being done?*

Engage R+D facilitated learning sessions with each community to help them further articulate their scaling goals and identify resources and supports needed. They also introduced additional evaluation measures, such as the Early Learning Systems Self-Assessment (ELSSA) and social network analysis, to ensure the evaluation includes perspectives of those deeply involved in this work across each community and that there is data that captures how communities create the conditions that support scale and Kindergarten readiness (for more information, please see the Appendix: Glossary of Terms). Data from these measures lifted up the importance of leadership, relationships, and networks, measures that were not initially being explored as progress towards scale but are now understood to be essential to process by the Foundation and communities alike:

▶ **Built-in Leadership.** Communities' scaling efforts required the support of leaders at different levels within the district and across partner organizations. Communities needed committed leadership to create a common vision for scale and for sustainability. Leadership played a notable role in Franklin-McKinley, a community that struggled to find a vehicle for scale as they went through a leadership transition and different configurations of community

partnerships. In 2020, as their leadership became more cohesive and their alignment with partners strengthened, they become better positioned to support scaling of effective practices. Data from the ELSSA tool show notable progress and growth in leadership over three years. They started off in 2014 with a score of 1, which indicated that they were in a "start-up" phase, to 3.4 in 2020 which indicated that they had made "strong progress" and were approaching a stage of having "embedded strong early learning leadership" (see Exhibit at right).

Franklin-McKinley Leadership Domain
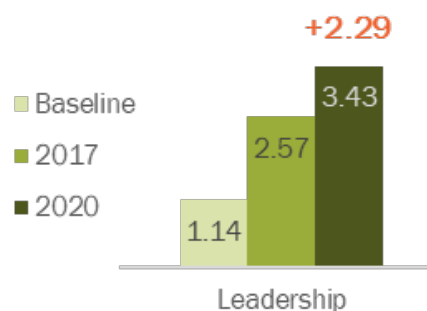
In Oakland, creating a formal and broadly inclusive cross-sector leadership table was a focus from the initiative's start. This table became widely recognized by Oakland's practitioners for catalyzing new collaborations, improving communication across the formal and informal sector, and creating space for articulating shared goals and strategies. Practitioners noted that the value of shared leadership was demonstrated when it was able to sustain and advance cross-sector dialogue and partnerships while the district was contending with severe budget issues.

Supporting these actions, the ELSSA data showed progress over three years in the systems areas of Leadership and Community Alignment. For Leadership they started with a score of 1.7 and, by 2020, they had nearly demonstrated embedded early learning leadership with a score of 3.6. Similarly for Community Alignment, they began in a start-up stage of 1.5 and demonstrated strong progress in 2020 with a score of 3.2 at a time

Oakland Leadership and Community Alignment Domains

when their cross-sector was meeting regularly, collaborating on projects, and making decisions collectively (see Exhibit at right).
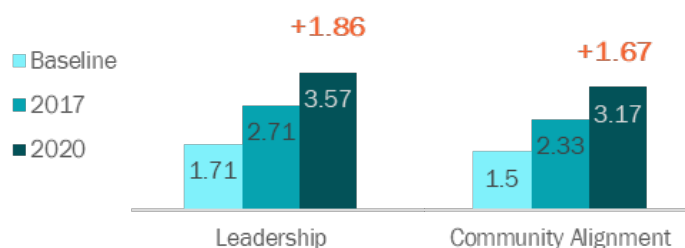
▶ **Collaborative Partnerships and Networks.** Starting Smart and Strong communities have developed tightly-knit partner networks. A partner mapping survey conducted by Engage R+D in 2019 found that, in each community, partners increased and deepened their connections to one another over the course of the initiative. After five years of participating in Starting Smart and Strong, on average, 99% of all possible interactions were occurring between partners in each community. Furthermore, the quality of those relationships increased: before Starting Smart and Strong began, about one third of partners in each community were working together on joint activities or involved in a formal partnership; after five years, this average increased to nearly three quarters. Serving to facilitate collaboration and information exchange, these networks are critical components in scaling early learning practices.

According to practitioners interviewed in Year 5 (2018-19) in each community, Starting Smart and Strong has fostered new and deeper partnerships that facilitate systems change and improve services for children and families.

> "Cross-sector collaboration has enhanced the service delivery for our children and families."
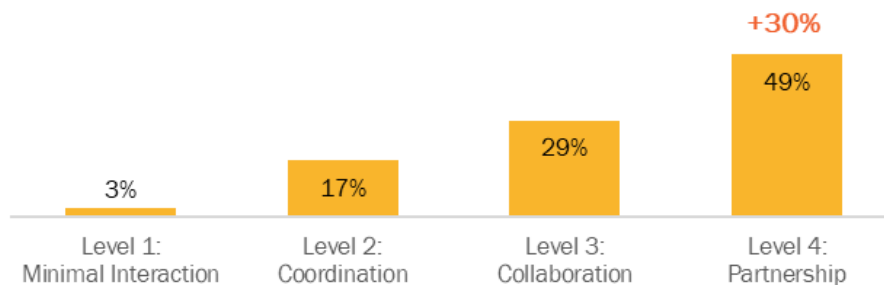>
> – Fresno

- **Oakland** practitioners credited Oakland Starting Smart and Strong with bringing stakeholders together and creating connections across programs. One noted, "We're all sitting at the same table monthly, constantly sharing data, collaborating for the benefit of families, provider-agnostic. I have relationships now with people and agencies that I never had before. [Oakland] used to be very siloed, and it makes a big difference to make sure the right organizations are represented. It's truly key to the success of this initiative."

> **"Oakland is suddenly more collaborative. Teachers feel valued. They are happier. Their interactions with kids and families as a result are better."**
>
> **– Oakland**

- **Franklin-McKinley** practitioners described stronger partnerships as central to quality improvement of programs. "It's not just work being done by the district," one commented. "It's our valuable partnerships with the Franklin-McKinley Children's Initiative, and Educare, and Head Start, and First 5. Everybody plays a role in this."

- Practitioners in **Fresno** highlighted a core group of partners that actively participate in the Language Learning Project, Helm Home Play and Learn Center, and Help Me Grow. They affirmed the importance of relationship-building. As the network analysis data for Fresno shows, the number of partners working together at a formal partnership level increased by 30 percentage points from before S3I to 2019. As one participant explained, "We all want our children to be able to succeed and be ready for kindergarten. Everybody understands that. It's one of the main things that needs to be in place in order to move forward. There has to be that trust and that collaboration with each other."

Types of Relationships in Fresno

			+30%
			49%
		29%	
	17%		
3%			
Level 1: Minimal Interaction	Level 2: Coordination	Level 3: Collaboration	Level 4: Partnership

Overall, exploration, resources, and learning sessions ultimately allowed communities and partners to lean into scale as a concept that required ongoing inquiry, assessment, and a strong connection between funder and community. This led to a broad range of measures and indicators for scale than were initially anticipated by the Foundation and evaluation team.

Cross-Cutting Lesson: Community input is key in developing evaluation approaches to measuring progress of community efforts.

Dedicating space and resources for authentic community engagement can ensure that assessment is useful and meaningful to the community and supports evaluation participation centered on learning rather than reporting. The ELSSA tool, for example, was developed in collaboration with the S3I communities through interviews, collaboratively defining desired outcomes, and testing and vetting the tool. Additionally, the data collection engages grantees and their stakeholders in a process that is both reflective and strategic.

Community takeaway
▶ Measuring progress of community-based initiatives can be productive, valuable, and nuanced, particularly when assessments reflect community goals and questions of interest.

Foundation takeaways
▶ Ongoing inquiry is valuable and demands openness to exploring new directions. Investing in systems change in early learning means investing in people and their dynamic relationships and roles in the system. Productive learning may not mean linear progress but more open discovery and growth in unanticipated directions.

👫 Phase 4. Building Capacity and Evidence

In the **building capacity** phase, while conversations about scale continued, communities were strengthening the skills and infrastructure needed to scale across a system. They developed their capacity to collect and track data, embraced flexibility to take advantage of a variety of opportunities to expand, and are already producing evidence that documents early impacts of their efforts.

Starting Smart and Strong Experience

Through the first six years of the initiative, the three Starting Smart and Strong communities made substantial progress on developing a range of capacities and infrastructure required for scaling. Developing robust data capacity and strong early learning infrastructure are two capacities that are the heart of communities' work:

▶ **Robust Data Capacity.** High-quality data collection and tracking is critical to scaling because 1) communities do not want to spread something that is ineffective, and 2) once communities find something that works, they need data infrastructure to track progress and collect evidence. The Starting Smart and Strong communities entered this work with vastly different levels of data capacity that impacted how quickly they could begin the testing, learning, and scaling process. For example, even though Oakland was the last community to identify which early learning practices to test, they already had a strong data infrastructure, which supported a faster pace of assessment and scaling.

Practitioners interviewed in 2019 reported increased awareness of the importance of **sharing and using data**. For example:

- **Oakland's** use of the Early Development Instrument data in the dashboard system proved to be an important tool to build results-based accountability and drive decision-making, particularly around targeting specific communities. The district has created centralized access to a data dashboard and supported a culture of learning. As one local stakeholder commented, "Reflecting on data and practices has become embedded within Oakland Unified School District... [with] ECE educators and administrators participating in reflective equity/anti-racist inquiry."

- In **Franklin-McKinley**, several interviewees pointed to the value of data and increased use of data dashboards to help the district cement social emotional learning as an important area of focus. Franklin-McKinley respondents were also hopeful about the district's participation in DataZone, a portal connecting all available student data to increase information flow between the school district and supporting agencies.

- In **Fresno**, interviewees acknowledged that interagency data infrastructure was a major gap in their work, limiting their ability to use shared data to inform their practice and measure child and family outcomes across settings. Despite such challenges, some were optimistic that the conditions were ripe for the region to improve their shared data infrastructure. As one practitioner remarked, "We all see that it's better to have a system-wide data system that we can share. We're having those conversations. People are willing to test things out, so there's a lot of willingness."

▶ **Strong Early Learning Infrastructure.** To scale effective early learning practices, communities must have resources and infrastructure, including funding, staffing, facilities, and policies. Across a community, systemic change requires alignment and coordination of resources and infrastructure across institutions. Moreover, scaling a set of practices across a system requires being nimble and opportunistic, which means where and how practices spread will not look the same across communities. In Starting Smart and Strong, practitioner interviews in 2019 indicated that communities were developing professional development structures that bridged early care and education settings in distinct ways.

- **Fresno** interviewees affirmed that one of the biggest infrastructure successes in their region has been building shared professional development pertinent to dual language learners across childcare settings. They universally expressed that the Language Learning Project is, as one put it, "a great example of bringing key partners together, sharing professional development, and creating a professional learning community" to improve outcomes for young children.

- Practitioners in **Franklin-McKinley** highlighted how coaching and trainings have expanded to reach educators not only across district grade-level and role (e.g., principals), but across settings (e.g., Head Start, state preschool, Family Resource Centers). In their view, this has contributed to consistent messaging and a shared understanding of the value of early education and social emotional learning across formal and informal spaces.

- In **Oakland**, practitioners reported that the school district partnered with Head Start for their professional development work on trauma-informed care and practices through the ROCK program. The joint effort set the stage to align with and leverage a federal grant to the city on trauma.

Community self-assessments with the ELSSA tool in 2020 confirmed strong growth in the infrastructure domain from baseline to 2020. Notably, for the survey items "district has dedicated resources to support the professional development of teachers and instructional assistants" and "a systemic approach to ongoing support of early learning professional development is in place," all three communities achieved the highest rating indicating that this progress has been embedded in their systems. At the same time, financial resources over the long term were an infrastructure concern across the board, with interviewed practitioners voicing uncertainty about funding availability for testing, scaling, and sustaining practices after Starting Smart and Strong.

Growth in the Infrastructure Domain from Baseline to 2020
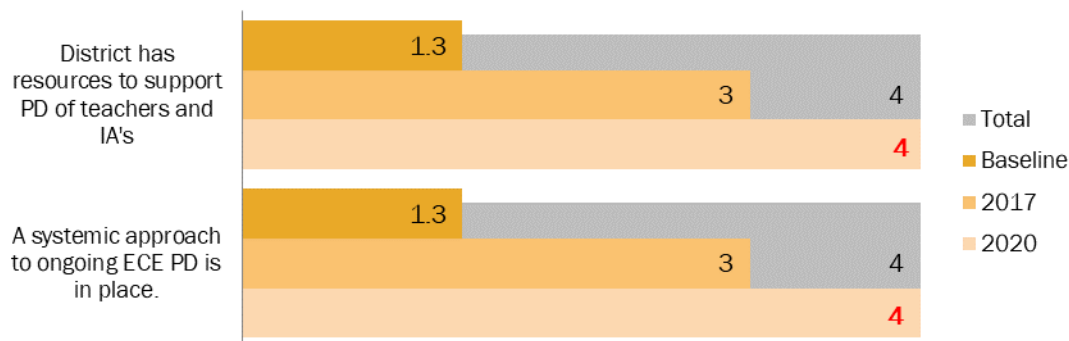
Scaling Fresno's Language Learning Project

In California, high-quality early learning programs must address the needs of multilingual learners in order to advance equity, as nearly 60% of children ages 0-5 live in homes where a language other than English is spoken.[*] In 2018, the California Department of Education recognized the value of Fresno's Language Learning Project (LLP) and awarded Fresno a $1 million grant to expand its reach across the state. Since then, Fresno has scaled its trainings to educators throughout the Central Valley and has created a "train-the-trainer" series to support other communities who wish to replicate or adapt Fresno's approach. In addition, Fresno has hosted site visits and connected with other communities, such as Franklin McKinley and its partner Educare. Learning from Fresno's work and its own pilot, Educare is now scaling DLL focused PD in Franklin-McKinley. To date, a diverse mix of over 500 educators, home visitors, coaches, and administrators from nearly 40 counties in California have participated in the LLP's PD and/or Train the Trainer series. In 2022, Fresno will turn towards adapting the LLP for family childcare and FFN providers, signaling an opportunity for further spread in support of equitable outcomes for California's multilingual children.

*Early Edge. "Dual Language Learners." https://earlyedgecalifornia.org/ece-priorities/dual-language-learners/

Initial Evidence of Child & Teacher Outcomes

Six years into the initiative, all three communities had shown evidence that their early learning practices were positively impacting children and educators. Based on the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) data that all communities collect, in 2020, among the S3I classrooms, an average of 73% of children were ready for kindergarten (up from 58% at the start of S3I). The largest improvements, overall, were observed in the social and emotional development domain. These numbers not only demonstrated a readiness to scale, but also the communities' growing capacity to use data and tell the story of Starting Smart and Strong.

Franklin-McKinley

The more professional development early educators received in social and emotional development, the higher the scores on the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) by the end of the school year.

Findings also showed improvements in teaching practices over time.

The number of educators who participated in the professional development grew as it expanded districtwide.

For further details, see Engage R+D. "FMSD Retrospective Study: Social and Emotional Learning Professional Development." February 2021.

Fresno

Dual language learning (DLL) children in the Language Learning Project performed as well or better on all DRDP domains than their non-DLL peers across all partner organizations.

Fresno DLL children had a higher average English Language Development score on the DRDP than communities that did not have a DLL focus.

Language Learning Project classrooms generated mean scores above the national average on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), designed to look at interactions between teachers and students.

For further details, see Engage R+D. "2018-19 S3I Testing and Learning Databook: Fresno." July 2020.

Oakland

DRDP data showed consistent progress over time in child development districtwide across all four DRDP domains.

Children in classrooms whose teachers had participated in three years of coaching demonstrated significant progress from fall to spring each year and over time.

The above progress in child outcomes corresponded with increased participation in professional development, coaching, and ROCK trauma-informed care work districtwide.

For further details, see Engage R+D. "Key Findings: Oakland Retrospective Study." January 2019. *and* Engage R+D. "2018-19 S3I Testing and Learning Databook: Oakland." July 2020.

Cross-Cutting Lesson: Building capacity for scaling involves developing key components of systems change.

Scaling across an early learning system requires embedded leadership, collaborative partnerships and networks, robust data capacity, and a strong early learning infrastructure.

Community takeaways

▶ Building trust and common goals with partners opens avenues for the collaboration needed to achieve systems change.

▶ Capacity to track and access data across a system is challenging to develop, but the benefits of robust, shared information are large.

Foundation takeaway

▶ Rigorous community self-assessments provide a dual value of ensuring that community insider knowledge informs evaluation and promoting community reflection about successes and challenges.

✳ Phase 5. Demonstrating Resilience

The **resilience** of Starting Smart and Strong communities was tested as nationwide and global realities took a drastic turn. The upheavals of 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, and race equity movement (such as Black Lives Matter and fighting against anti-Asian hate), placed communities in crisis response mode and revealed whether systems and practices developed through the initiative could help them weather challenges. In today's world, communities must plan for adversity and uncertainty. Resilience is the capacity to face such complications as they arise by tapping into strengths and connections and finding creative solutions.

Starting Smart and Strong Experience

Communities reached Year 6 of Starting Smart and Strong in 2019 and were hitting their stride with scale. Then, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, and growing race equity movement propelled them into a whole new reality. These large-scale forces disrupted normalcy across the board, with disproportionate effects on some groups, including families in the Starting Smart and Strong communities. However, in this radically changed context, communities' scaling infrastructure proved to be a source of resilience.

While communities' scaling practices were not conceived as strategies to address crises, the resources, connections, and tools they built over the years of the initiative positioned them to rapidly adapt and respond. For example, Oakland was able to leverage and spread its trauma-informed care work as demand increased during the pandemic; Fresno was prepared to support and reach out to their dual language learner families, many of whom were among those most affected by the pandemic; and in Franklin-McKinley, educators were keenly aware of the way in which addressing social-emotional learning would be critically important in the shift to remote instruction. Thus, despite the steep challenges that characterized 2020, Starting Smart and Strong communities demonstrated the value of the practices they were scaling, as well as the importance of relationships and infrastructure that undergirded these practices.

For the 2020 administration of the ELSSA self-assessment tool, Engage R+D developed a new resilience sub-domain that looks at communities' progress on participatory decision making, shared vision, staff engagement, access to data and resources, among other resilience factors. Because scores for this domain have been collected only once so far, they do not reflect change over time; but, communities' ratings in 2020 all showed relatively high ratings of resilience (over 3.2 on a 4.0 scale). Communities' leadership and infrastructure, in particular, proved to be elements that positioned them to pivot quickly to serve needs of families, caregivers, and educators that arose in the crisis. **Leaders** helped ensure that *staff at all levels were working in unison toward a common vision* and supported *a culture of participatory decision making across all levels of district staff*, both of which were especially important in a time of crisis when staff were disconnected from each other. In terms of **infrastructure** supports, districts had already *dedicated resources* and *a systemic approach* to support the professional development of their teachers, establishing key resources of funding and staffing supports that can help people and practices weather crises.

Cross-Cutting Lesson: Investing in community-driven approaches builds resilience in handling crises.

With strong partner networks, local leadership, and infrastructure, communities are better able to adapt and rapidly respond to widespread challenges.

Community takeaway

▶ Building collaborative partnerships, data capacity, and infrastructure supported scaling of early learning practices but also paid off more broadly in terms of resilience in the face of crisis.

Foundation takeaways

▶ Early findings of resilience in the Starting Smart and Strong communities suggest that systems change work can help communities weather crises.

▶ The COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, and racial inequities had and will continue to have disproportionate effects on families in these communities, but that is not the full story; resilience and community-based assets are also compelling reasons to support community-driven approaches to systems change.

From Lessons to Action

Lessons from Starting Smart and Strong's experience with scaling can inform other efforts to achieve systems change in early learning and beyond. The cross-cutting lessons presented throughout this report suggest actions that funders and community stakeholders can take in their work to expand community-based solutions across a system.

Scaling Solutions for Community-Driven Systems Change

	Cross-Cutting Lessons	▶ Actions for Communities	▶ Actions for Funders
Introducing scale	A discovery process must become a normal, planned-for phase of community-driven initiatives. Systems change approaches are necessarily shaped by the people and organizations involved, as well as contextual factors. In a community-driven approach, each community needs time and support to explore how scaling fits within the local context.	**Take time to explore** a variety of ideas about what scaling up could look like in practice. **Begin collaboratively** by bringing together potential partners and key players early in the process to build common ground and identify differences in perspective from the start.	**Allow enough time** for systems to develop and conditions to be created. Systems work takes multiple years, so funders need to be ready to commit long-term. **Support a discovery process** in the early stages of a community-driven approach to systems change to cultivate local ownership and enable grantee sensemaking of the overarching concepts of the initiative within the community context.
Identifying what to scale	Supporting community-led approaches requires funded opportunities to pilot and test new practices that have the potential to take hold across a community. Centering community priorities means, for many foundations, shifting the relationship between funder and community. Funders learning to walk alongside communities as the systems work takes shape holds value and requires an expectation of missteps and recovery.	**Take stock** of community needs and priorities with consideration of underrepresented groups. **Test ideas** to find data-supported strategies to address the needs. A period of testing and learning strengthens the approach by allowing for missteps and reworking on a small scale.	**Establish engaged, collaborative relationships** with grantees to build trust and develop an understanding of nuances in community interests and assets. **Be mindful** of boundaries and power dynamics. Embrace listening, learning, and open dialogue. **Encourage community experimentation** about how to meet the initiative's goal, including learning from missteps and recovery as they test strategy ideas.

	Cross-Cutting Lessons	▶ Actions for Communities	▶ Actions for Funders
Deeper conversations	**Community input is key in developing evaluation approaches to measuring progress of community efforts.** Dedicated space and resources for community engagement can ensure that assessment is useful and meaningful to the community and supports evaluation participation centered on learning rather than reporting.	**Routinely assess progress** on your community-based systems change goals and questions of interest. Reflect on successes, challenges, and lessons to apply going forward.	**Gather community input in developing evaluation approaches** to measuring progress of community efforts. **Design evaluation to serve community** information needs and learning. **Be open** to supporting community growth in unexpected directions.
Building capacity	**Building capacity for scaling involves developing key components of systems change.** Scaling across an early learning system requires built-in leadership, collaborative partnerships and networks, robust data capacity, early learning infrastructure, and readiness to evolve and shift boundaries.	**Continue to build trust and common goals**—both short-term and long-term—with partners to integrate the collaboration needed for systems change. **Tackle the challenge of developing shared data capacity** across the system to gain the substantial benefits of robust, shared information.	**Work alongside communities** to support essential components of systems change that are informed by considerations of equity. Regularly re-examine the funder's role, reflecting on when to lead and when to follow.
Demonstrating resilience	**Investing in community-driven approaches builds resilience in handling crises.** With strong partner networks, local leadership, and infrastructure, communities are better able to adapt and rapidly respond to widespread challenges.	**Consider how resilience can be strengthened** by building the collaborative partnerships, data capacity, and infrastructure that support your scaling efforts. Crisis preparedness can be a valuable reason to pursue systems change.	**Include resilience as an indicator of success** in systems change work. The resilience that communities gain from developing and driving the relationships and infrastructure needed for systems change helps them weather crises—whether local or global—and is another compelling reason to support community-led approaches.

Looking ahead as Starting Smart and Strong continues

Through the remaining years of Starting Smart and Strong, the three communities will continue to scale up best practices in early learning. They are already starting to consider sustainability as they explore what more is needed to improve data infrastructure, build leadership, and reach more children with early learning solutions. The next few years of work will undoubtedly yield new insights and lessons about community-driven systems change to share with funders, stakeholders in early learning, and others interested in strengthening community systems.

Appendix: Glossary of Terms

Term	Description
Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)	The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an observation instrument that assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions in center-based preschool classrooms. CLASS includes three domains or categories of teacher-child interactions that support children's learning and development: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Within each domain are dimensions that capture more specific details about teachers' interactions with children. The CLASS assessment is usually completed by an external, certified observer, then followed by coaching for progress along the domains.
Community	Partnerships and collaborations in a defined geographic area (e.g., city and/or county, school district catchment area) that are needed to work together to lift up the early learning system and pivot it toward quality.
Developmental Evaluation (DE)	Developmental evaluation is an approach that is embedded in a project that supports innovation development to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments, such as changes in policy, practices, capacity, access and quality improvement. Evaluators act as "critical friends" who inform decision-making about innovations as they occur by promoting and facilitating learning in real-time. This is an approach that seeks to engage key stakeholders as active participants in the evaluation by gathering diverse perspectives, testing assumptions, reflecting on lessons learned, and creating space to pause and take stock of the work. These practices help to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and engage constituents as partners in learning and program improvement.
Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)	The Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) assessment instrument is designed for teachers to observe, document, and reflect on the learning, development, and progress of children, birth through 12 years of age, who are enrolled in early care and education programs and before-and after-school programs. The core domains for the preschool, Pre-K, Transitional Kindergarten (TK), and kindergarten levels includes Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, Language and Literacy, Cognition and English Language Development.
Early Development Instrument (EDI)	The EDI is a 103-item questionnaire completed by kindergarten teachers that measures children's ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations in five general domains: Physical Health and Wellbeing, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development, and Communication Skills and General Knowledge. It is a reliable and valid measurement tool of developmental status completed on individual children between 3.5 and 6.5 years of age. After teachers complete the EDI on each individual child in their class, the results are grouped together to give a snapshot of how children are doing across schools, neighborhoods, cities, or even provinces and countries.
Early Learning System Self-Assessment (ELSSA)	The Early Learning System Self-Assessment (ELSSA) is a tool designed to identify meaningful indicators of interim progress toward longer-term change. With multi-year initiatives or strategies, in particular, it was important for stakeholders and community members to have meaningful datapoints along the way about systems

	change. The ELSSA seeks to do that by engaging stakeholders in a process to complete this tool that is both reflective and strategic. The ELSSA Tool is organized into a framework of four domains, with a total of 27 indicator items on which community/stakeholder groups rate themselves. Each indicator has a four-point rating scale: 1) starting up, 2) emerging, 3) strong progress, and 4) embedded progress.
Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) care	Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) care, also referred to as informal care, kith-and-kin care, or license-exempt care, is both an affordable and flexible form of care and a way to provide children with a warm, nurturing environment with a trusted caregiver. Many children in the first five years of their life spend a substantial amount of time being cared for by extended family, friends, or neighbors, who play a critical role in supporting their health and early development. In California, 80 percent of young children ages birth to two and approximately 40 percent of children ages birth to five are cared for by unlicensed or license-exempt caregivers.
Formal Care	Formal care is any large or small licensed care setting, including center-based care, home-based care, and providers that are subsidized for care. It includes transitional kindergarten, preschool/PreK, Head Start and Early Head Start, other center-based centers, and home care.
Professional Development (PD)	Professional Development is the continuum of learning and support activities identified by partners that will lead to improvements in the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions of early education professionals. Professional development encompasses ongoing training, follow-up coaching, and targeted technical assistance.
Social Network Analysis (SNA)	Networking mapping, or social network analysis (SNA), is a methodological approach to measuring and mapping the relationships between entities. The analysis is often visualized as a network map that shows the entities in the network and the connections between them. By measuring the position and grouping of these entities, we can gain insight into the role participants play and how information flows between them. While traditional evaluation focuses on the actions of individuals, network mapping can illustrate how actors influence one another, pass along information and resources, and mobilize for action.
System	Systems supporting early care and education include strong leadership in early learning as well as the infrastructure and capacity to adequately provide and support quality early education to all young children.