In our community, there are classrooms alive with the babbling of happy babies. Small children learn fractions, shapes, and motor skills by tearing, shaping and molding a stretchy substance called flubber. Ladybugs flutter in front of wide open eyes at the science table. And, a group of tots snuggles up to a teacher who reads stories that spark their imagination.

These are United Way Bright Beginnings classrooms, and they are where United Way has been preparing the future of our community for more than 15 years.
We know that when children have a strong foundation built on quality education, they have a much better chance of succeeding as adults. We also know that the future of our families, our businesses and our community depends on preparing a new generation for success.

Compelled by overwhelming research indicating that investments in early childhood education yield tremendous returns through greater success in school and in life, United Way of Greater Houston and ExxonMobil created United Way Bright Beginnings in 2002.

As we mark the 15-year anniversary of United Way Bright Beginnings, we celebrate the achievements of more than 11,700 Houston-area children who are on track to reach their full potential because Bright Beginnings gave them the strong foundation they needed.

UNITED WAY BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

Research shows that quality child care in the early years can be the single greatest difference between success and failure in our society. Without a strong foundation on which to build, many children fall behind long before they start kindergarten—with little chance of catching up.

Early experiences shape whether a child’s brain develops strong skills for future learning. United Way Bright Beginnings reaches children during this critical time in their development, laying the groundwork for them to succeed.

UNITED WAY BRIGHT BEGINNINGS 2.0

With growing numbers of children in home-based child care, United Way Bright Beginnings identified an opportunity to improve the quality of care in these licensed in-home settings.

Early experiences shape whether a child’s brain develops strong skills for future learning. United Way Bright Beginnings reaches children during this critical time in their development, laying the groundwork for them to succeed.

In the fall of 2014, United Way Bright Beginnings began working with Family Home Providers who operate licensed child care facilities out of their homes. United Way Bright Beginnings provided professional development training, leadership development, and one-on-one coaching to help bring these home-based centers and teachers up to United Way Bright Beginnings standards.

In 2017, United Way Bright Beginnings expanded into Montgomery County with two new centers thanks to additional support from CB&I.

UNITED WAY BRIGHT BEGINNINGS 2.0

With growing numbers of children in home-based child care, United Way Bright Beginnings identified an opportunity to improve the quality of care in these licensed in-home settings.

In the fall of 2014, United Way Bright Beginnings began working with Family Home Providers who operate licensed child care facilities out of their homes. United Way Bright Beginnings provided professional development training, leadership development, and one-on-one coaching to help bring these home-based centers and teachers up to United Way Bright Beginnings standards.

Over the past five years, United Way Bright Beginnings alumni exceeded HISD averages on STAAR math and reading exams 80 percent of the time.
**HIGH QUALITY CLASSROOMS ELEVATE LEARNING**

High-quality child care classrooms lead to better outcomes for children, starting with increased readiness for school.

High-quality classrooms are led by trained and consistent staff who employ a developmentally appropriate curriculum, maintain a safe environment, and provide warm interactions with children. These classrooms maintain a high teacher-to-child ratio and a high rate of parental involvement.

United Way Bright Beginnings provides developmentally appropriate classroom equipment, furniture and supplies that help Bright Beginnings teachers reinforce the curriculum and engage children in hands-on learning. And, specially constructed playgrounds allow teachers to bring the classroom outdoors, helping children connect what they’re learning to the world outside.

**THE BRIGHT BEGINNINGS PHILOSOPHY**

United Way Bright Beginnings’ philosophy is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.

The Reggio Emilia philosophy, based on the school system in Reggio Emilia, Italy, believes that children are capable of constructing their own learning and the role of the teacher is to act as a researcher, documenting and supporting the self-directed experiential individual learning of each student. In this schema, parents, teachers, children and physical environment all play critical roles in the learning process.

To effectively stretch and develop each child, United Way Bright Beginnings teachers continually adapt and adjust learning based on the individual student’s needs and interests.

By listening, observing, and asking questions, teachers work together with each child to decide what materials and ideas they will pursue to expand the children’s understanding. Teachers create learning environments that support their own reflection and examination of the children’s activities to determine how best to support them. The curriculum develops out of the curiosity of the child.

**BY THE NUMBERS:**

- 11,700 children have built a strong foundation in United Way Bright Beginnings
- 233 Bright Beginnings teachers have earned Child Development Associate certificates, the basic early childhood education credential
- 57 United Way Bright Beginnings teachers and directors have earned college degrees in early childhood education
- 40% of United Way Bright Beginnings centers have achieved national accreditation, compared to less than 5% of all licensed child care centers in Houston
- United Way Bright Beginnings has grown from 13 to 34 centers
- Over 10 years, United Way Bright Beginnings has retained staff at nearly double the national average for teacher retention

“United Way Bright Beginnings provides solid proof over 15 years that with respectful, mindful, and high quality interactions, early childhood professionals facilitate positive change for children and families. United Way of Greater Houston created a successful model that stands out as a beacon of light for the rest of the nation as to all that is possible in quality early childhood environments.”

Joshua D. Sparrow MD, Director, Brazelton Touchpoints Center, Boston Children’s Hospital

“It’s all about how we help children reach their full potential, so that when they go to school, they’re right where they need to be.”

United Way Bright Beginnings center director
QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MEANS A STRONGER COMMUNITY

Children with high-quality early care experiences, like those in United Way Bright Beginnings, demonstrate greater language abilities and higher math and reading scores.

Equipping our children with the tools to succeed benefits not only them, but our entire community. The Greater Houston area’s ability to thrive and grow depends on a new generation equipped to compete on a national and global level.

Children with the quality early education experiences that drive them to succeed in school also develop strong job skills, like problem solving, critical thinking and collaboration. They can expect higher employment and earning rates, and are more likely to own homes and positively contribute to their communities.

Over the past five years, United Way Bright Beginnings alumni (now in third through eighth grades):

- Exceeded the HISD average 15 out of 22 times in achieving advanced reading performance
- Exceeded the HISD average 23 out of 26 times in meeting reading standards
- Exceeded the HISD average 15 out of 22 times in achieving advanced math performance
- Exceeded the HISD average 24 out of 26 times in meeting math standards

TEACHER TRAINING AND AGE-APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM

Bright Beginnings teachers work hand-in-hand with a network of experts and receive support, training, and information to help them provide the very best education and care to the children they serve.

Teachers use a comprehensive, but varying, age-appropriate curriculum paired with targeted hands-on activities to address all aspects of children’s development, stretching their imaginations and developing skills for life. This collaboration allows them to develop and refine lessons and activities that stimulate learning.

Every $1 invested in high-quality pre-K in Texas returns $3.50 per participant to the community.

Among our United Way Bright Beginnings teachers:

- 233 have earned a Child Development Associate Certificate
- 30 have earned an associate degree in early childhood
- 15 have earned a bachelor’s degree in early childhood
- 12 have earned a master’s degree in early childhood

Quality Early Childhood Education

“Every $1 invested in high-quality pre-K in Texas returns $3.50 per participant to the community.”

QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MEANS A STRONGER COMMUNITY

We begin the new school year confident that our children are academically and socially prepared to enter kindergarten and first grade. We are proud of the compassion, creative thinking and self-confidence our children share with the world. As the old adage goes, ‘it takes a village,’ and we were fortunate to have the right village working alongside us as parents through these critical years.”

Parent of United Way Bright Beginnings alumni

“I was so relieved as a parent who had so many obstacles in front of me to not have to worry about my daughter because I knew that she was being taken care of. They took such a great burden off of me.”

Parent of a United Way Bright Beginnings student