

# The Boston Globe

## Bromley-Heath housing complex to get \$16 million learning center that focuses on entire families

By **Matt Rocheleau** GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 02, 2012

Boston officials and education leaders will break ground Friday on a \$16 million learning center at the Bromley-Heath housing development that aims to teach children, their parents, and other members of their community in the same space.

“The more we looked at what really moves the dial for low-income, at-risk kids, we realized we had to focus on the economic stability of the entire family,” said Wayne Ysaguirre, head of Associated Early Care and Education, a Boston nonprofit that is spearheading the project.

The organization has specialized in teaching young children for more than a century and opened an early education center at Bromley-Heath 60 years ago. The complex is located where Jamaica Plain, Mission Hill, and Roxbury converge.

Latoya Taronino’s 3-year-old son, Anthony, is one of about 80 children enrolled at the old center. Working full time as a receptionist and raising three children by herself, the 31-year-old Bromley-Heath resident said she had struggled at times to teach her youngest son. He could not count to 10, for instance, and he fell behind his peers.

But since Anthony joined the early-learning program two summers ago, she said, he has made dramatic improvement. He can count to 30; he knows his ABCs and shapes; he speaks in clear, full sentences, she said. “He’s actually a little ahead.”

Already appreciative, she said, she could not have been more excited to learn about the new, cutting-edge center, expected to open in 2014 .

The existing site at Bromley-Heath is located in an old basement. After trying for two decades, operators secured new property nearby four years ago, and planning began.

The core component will be early education. The new facility will have room for about 175 children up to age 8.

More than a dozen other organizations will share resources, including the Thrive in 5 initiative, which is run by the city and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley. The initiative prepares Boston children for kindergarten.

The center’s 150 educators will be required to have at least a bachelor’s degree, a high requirement for early education, Ysaguirre said.

The 20,000-square-foot facility will be run as a lab school, incorporating the latest research on creative curriculum and teaching methods.

The energy-efficient building will be paid for by a \$5 million federal grant, a \$1.5 million state grant, and private donations.

“We can’t engage a kid without engaging their parents,” said Kate Bennett, chief of development for the Boston Housing Authority, which oversees the city’s public housing.

Career-focused courses will be offered to about 150 adults. Another 700 can enroll in programs on parenting, financial stability, and nutrition.

Officials also envision that the center will improve the well-being of Bromley-Heath's 1,800 residents. More than 40 percent of adults do not have a high school diploma.

"There's so much going on in that community; they need a catalyst for change," said state Representative Jeffrey Sanchez.

Sanchez said that when he was 4, he enrolled in the Associated Early Care and Education center in the Mission Main housing development after his Spanish-speaking family moved from New York City.

"It's where I learned English," he said. "I hope more children who are in the same situation that I was in can access programs like this."

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