

# THE EARLY YEARS COUNT EDUCATION INITIATIVE OF THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF ST. JOSEPH COUNTY, INC.

*Impacting over 6,200 children in our community this past year*

As we review the past year, we look back across a chasm at a world that has disappeared. While we are fortunate to be healthy, our lives have been altered, our work is upended and, like everyone else, we live with deep uncertainty.

What has loomed largest for us is concern for young children, their families, their development, their care taking, and their education. How will the tenderest infants, toddlers and preschoolers be cared for? How can we support their teachers and caregivers? What will happen to school age children if they miss vast amounts of their education? Where can we find the expert help for circumstances no one now living has experienced?

What has sustained us since early March is who we are and what we know.

The Family Connection's mission is to foster excellence in community systems that serve children and families. Our team is passionate, knowledgeable, persistent, and inventive. We are honored to be an integral part of the wider St. Joseph County early childhood community, which has deep and long-lasting relationships and knows how to work collaboratively on behalf of children.

We know that our quality improvement model works: teach, assess, coach and repeat. We know that the educational approaches we have brought to programs in St. Joseph County—HighScope and Responsive Classroom—are evidence based, have positive outcomes for children, and can be taught to teachers. We know that the assessments we use—HighScope's Program Quality Assessment and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System—are valid and reliable. We know that the professional development and coaching we provide reflect best practices and have been effective in raising quality.

We know that it has been the foresight, hard questions, shared problem solving, creativity and doggedness of the Community Foundation that underlies all that we have managed to accomplish. And we know that our funders' generosity and belief in our capacity to accomplish what we say we will is the bedrock. Without each of you, the ability of teachers, early childhood programs and schools to navigate this pandemic would be greatly diminished.

As we say in the office, "We can do hard things. Onward."

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSESSMENT PROJECT (ECAP) is working currently with 29 community programs serving children birth to age five, including seven centers, six preschools, nine ministries, and seven family child care homes. ECAP's goal is straightforward: to raise quality in early childhood programs in St. Joseph County through an ongoing cycle of training, support and assessment. ECAP impacted over 1,090 children this past year.

We have long known the important role of early childhood caregivers as they nurture, educate and inspire young children. This year, however, we learned just how essential these workers are to our community. While schools shut down countywide, most of our childcare programs offering full-day, year-round care remained open. They bravely navigated this pandemic, the changing regulations, and many unknowns to provide safe, ongoing care for their families and employment for their teachers. But they didn't do it alone. Thanks to the community built over the years through the Early Years Count Quality Leadership Initiative (QLI) and through ECAP gatherings, directors have been able to lean upon one another based on these strong relationships.

✱ *Covid-19 impact: Fourteen preschool programs operating during the school year closed early in the spring and plan to reopen this fall. Two of our ECAP early childhood programs remain closed at this time with no immediate plans to reopen—YWCA and Center for the Homeless. Directors, whether remaining open or having closed temporarily, were filled with concerns. At their request, we have been hosting Zoom meetings for them to gather, support one another, ask questions, and share information.*

HEAD START in St. Joseph County is also supported by the Early Years Count. Head Start has 21 full day and two half-day preschool classrooms; Early Head Start has eight classrooms serving infants and toddlers. Our goal for Head Start is the same as for ECAP—to raise quality through an ongoing cycle of training, support and assessment. We also want to see Head Start reach a quality level on par with the top 10 percent of Head Start programs nationwide. This past year, Head Start impacted over 552 children.

Throughout the roller coaster ride of this school year, we relied on relationships. The quality of the relationships we have built with administrators and teachers at Head Start meant that they could easily turn to us for information, guidance and support, that we were welcomed in for assessments, feedback, coaching and training, and that we could jointly problem-solve issues of quality and the challenges of early closure. The end goal of this relationship building of course is to create classrooms where children actively learn and teachers joyfully teach; our data support progress toward this goal.

✱ *Covid-19 impact: Head Start and Early Head Start switched from in-person to virtual visits in mid-March until the end of the school year. EHS continued with virtual "get-togethers" this summer. Plans for reopening are still unclear, though teachers have returned for training and preparation.*

**HIGHSCOPE** is central to the growth of quality in early childhood settings for children birth to five. Its approach promotes strong social-emotional and academic skills through active learning and scaffolded support. The richness and depth of this curriculum provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to continue their growth and understanding far beyond their initial training. Therefore, we've established an array of training and support options in multiple formats that all focus on high quality implementation through a HighScope lens.

*HighScope curriculum course.* Ivy Tech has steadily offered this 120 hour course twice yearly. We funded three teachers this year, fewer than we budgeted for because other participants were able to capture other funding. We are pleased that Head Start, at their expense, has been offering the full HighScope course for their teachers and assistants each summer. Three sections were held in Summer 2019 and two sections in Spring 2020. This course is an important base from which teachers can grow in quality.

*HighScope Lite.* We developed this week-long introductory class for teachers and directors who are unable to commit to the full semester course. This year, we held one section for preschool teachers and another for teachers of infants and toddlers.

*New Teacher Academy.* Because teachers are hired throughout the year and often start in the classroom with no training, we planned this one-day introduction to HighScope to give newly hired teachers a jumpstart on how to use effective strategies in their classrooms. Each orientation is followed by individualized, on-site coaching. We offer this monthly for most of the year, allowing directors to plug in new hires quickly. There were a total of 38 attendees this past year in seven trainings. In addition, we held three New Teacher Academy days specific to Head Start teachers, followed by focused coaching for each attendee.

*HighScope training and refreshers.* We continue to hold highly successful HighScope "refreshers" to dig deeper into curriculum content, social emotional concerns, and teacher well-being. This past year, 15 refreshers were offered to teachers and directors. We also conduct site-based workshops. More and more directors are requesting these targeted trainings for their teachers. This year, we provided eight workshops at six programs. Head Start uses the first Friday of each month for staff development; we presented 13 trainings this year on topics tied to the HighScope curriculum, including Focus on Math and Science, Self-regulation and Friendship Skills, Joyful Storytimes, Group Times through a CLASS Lens, and Early Literacy.

*Individual and small group coaching.* With higher quality evident in many of our programs, coaching has been more focused on new teachers as well as supporting teachers in their HighScope certification process. A total of 27 teachers and directors were coached this year. We believe it is important for HighScope certified teachers to mentor other teachers, so whenever possible, we bring them in as part of our coaching team. This year, three worked for us in this capacity. We also have been conducting more site-based workshops for small groups of teachers. Eight were held this year at early childhood programs on topics ranging from active learning to encouragement vs. praise.

*The Early Literacy Lab (TELL).* This past fall we initiated TELL, a targeted focus on early literacy because overall ELLCO scores were not meeting our goals. A group of 21 teachers

and coaches met every other month for a workshop taking an in-depth look at emergent writing, phonological awareness, and vocabulary building. Each of the three workshops was followed up with individualized coaching on implementation for the practice taught.

*EYC Literacy Connection.* Another way we are focusing on early literacy is through the “Early Years Count Literacy Connection.” Our website currently holds over 100 information sheets to guide teachers’ use of *Imagination Library* books in the classroom. Each sheet we develop ties a book to the HighScope curriculum by highlighting vocabulary words, connecting to COR (HighScope’s child observation record used for planning and assessment), offering reading tips and ways to incorporate the book throughout the day and around the classroom, giving suggestions for open-ended questions, and providing a sample paragraph about the book that can be sent in a newsletter to parents. A sample sheet is included at the end of this report. Many programs are using their mini-grants to purchase *Imagination Library* books for the classroom.

*Environment walk-throughs.* In the Fall of 2019, we put together a learning environment checklist based on components in the Program Quality Assessment and conducted walk-throughs of each Head Start and Early Head Start classroom to ensure that room set-up, interest areas and materials reflected best practice in active learning.

✱ *Covid-19 impact: Ivy Tech completed the spring semester of HighScope online and Head Start offered a full course online this spring. Other classes and workshops that we presented also pivoted to online training and webinars this spring. These were well attended by Head Start and Early Head Start teachers and managers along with the ECAP community. Their evaluation comments expressed appreciation of the opportunities we offered for continued professional development, reflection and learning during pandemic closures.*

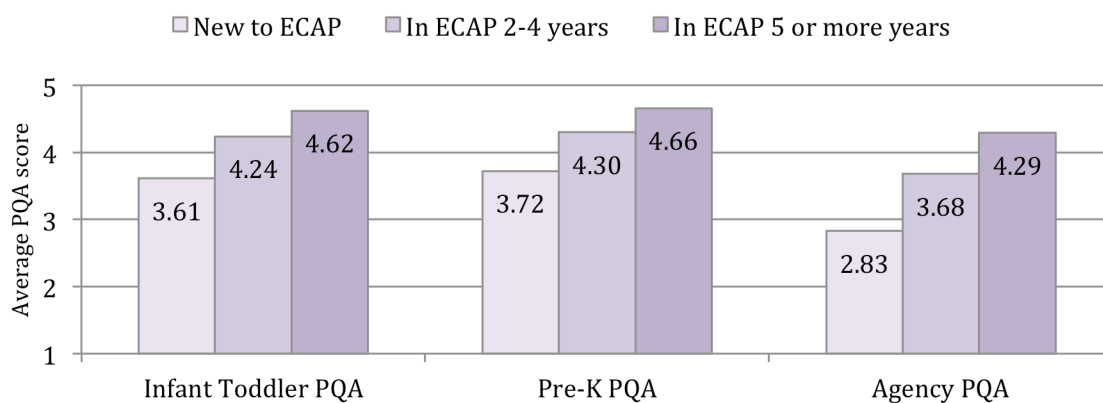
**ASSESSMENTS**, for both teachers and directors, hold the key to reaching and maintaining high quality early childhood care and education throughout the community. We continue to use multiple versions of the Program Quality Assessment (PQA)—Infant Toddler, PreK, Homes and Agency—to assess and coach teachers and program directors on implementing HighScope with fidelity. For Head Start, Early Head Start and HighScope certified teachers, we also use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool to further validate strong teaching practices. To measure specific aspects of early literacy, we use the Early Literacy and Language Classroom Observation (ELLCO) for preschool teachers.

We use assessments for one-on-one teacher feedback to emphasize strengths and suggest areas for growth. A strong assessment is also a gateway to HighScope certification. We provide directors with specific assessment data pertaining to their program as well as collective data for the community. They in turn are able to use this information for planning, for individual teacher support, for Board reports, and to apply for needed funds. Assessments guide our focus for coaching and our choices for workshop topics. Rising scores affirm our training and support approaches while problem areas grab our attention and spur our innovation. We dig deeply into the data to understand where we’ve been, where we are, what’s changing, and what needs to change.

*Program Quality Assessment (PQA).* Research has documented that implementing a high-quality curriculum with fidelity is tied to stronger child outcomes. The Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is used in preschool and infant-toddler classrooms to measure the quality of classroom interactions, environment, daily routine and use of observation tools; for directors, it measures parent involvement and family services, staff qualifications and staff development, and program management.

We consistently see teacher and director growth for the 29 programs that are a part of our ECAP community. By five years, high quality is well established.

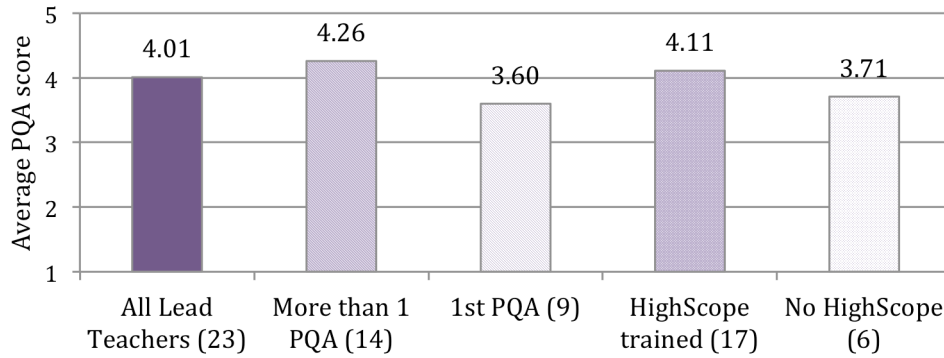
### PQA scores by years in ECAP



We are heartened to see a quicker path to high quality over the years. The chart above shows that ECAP teachers are reaching an average well above 4.0 within two to four years. That score used to be our target for five years. Now, at five years or more we are seeing teachers average HighScope certifiable scores—above 4.5. In fact, nine teachers were added to our growing list of HighScope certified teachers this year.

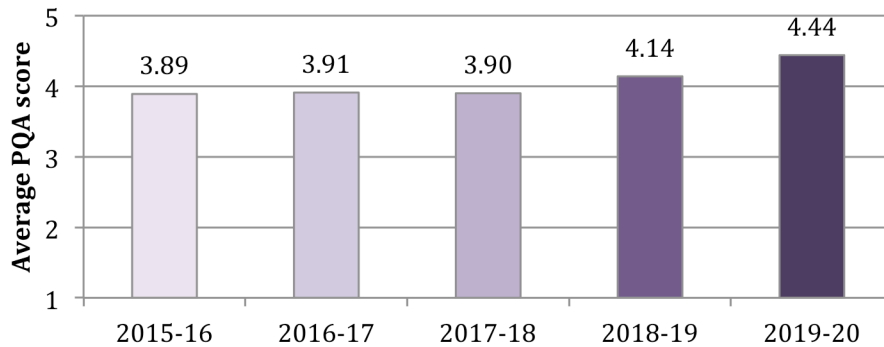
At Head Start, preschool PQA scores held steady this year, just above our goal of an average overall score of 4.0. This, despite a walloping teacher turnover of 39 percent. Substantive differences can be seen between the scores of new teachers receiving their first PQA (3.60) compared to returning teachers (4.26) and between those with HighScope training (4.11) and those without (3.71). Our continued commitment to quality curriculum implementation, through the teach-assess-coach-repeat cycle, is demonstrated in the higher scores of teachers and teaching teams who have taken the journey with us.

Head Start Lead Teachers ~ Fall 2019



Average Infant-Toddler PQA scores for St. Joseph County Early Head Start teachers have steadily grown for the past five years. Overall program average scores from 2018-19 to 2019-20 grew an impressive .3 percentage points. Ninety percent of Early Head Start teachers who scored below a 4.5 showed improvement and 100 percent of teachers scoring at 4.5 or above maintained that high level of quality. This year one Early Head Start teacher achieved HighScope certification, the highest level of practice; applications for two other teachers are awaiting approval from HighScope.

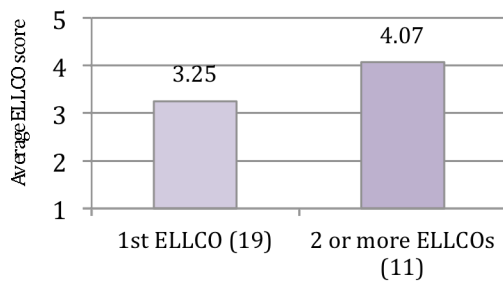
Early Head Start SJC Inf-Toddler Teacher ~ Fall 2019



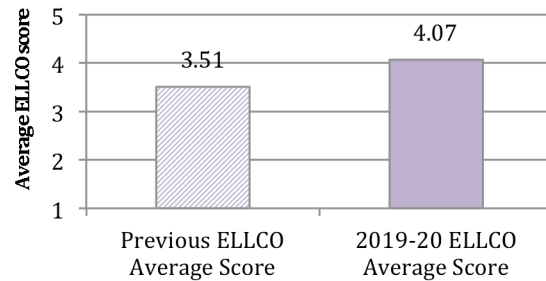
✳ *Covid-19 impact: In ECAP, PQA assessments were not able to be completed for 8 pre-k teachers, 4 teachers of infants & toddlers, and 5 programs. One of these programs was new to ECAP and we will assess them in early fall. Others were more established, so we'll assess during our normal cycle this coming year. Feedback sessions were conducted via Zoom after social distancing was enacted. There was no impact on Head Start PQAs because they were conducted in early fall.*

*Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO)*. We use the ELLCO to assess the quality of opportunities for children’s language and literacy development. Higher scores on the ELLCO represent preschool teachers’ intentional focus on interactions and materials that support children’s ability to communicate, to use language effectively, and to read and write as developmentally appropriate. With an increased focus on early literacy, we also increased the number of teachers who received an ELLCO this year. Our goal for quality is an overall average of 4.0 for the community. While we still have a ways to go (the current average is 3.55, impacted by scores of 63 percent of teachers receiving their first ELLCO), we are pleased that ECAP teachers who have had more than one ELLCO are reaching that goal and showed considerable growth from their previous score.

ECAP - ELLCO average scores by number of years assessed

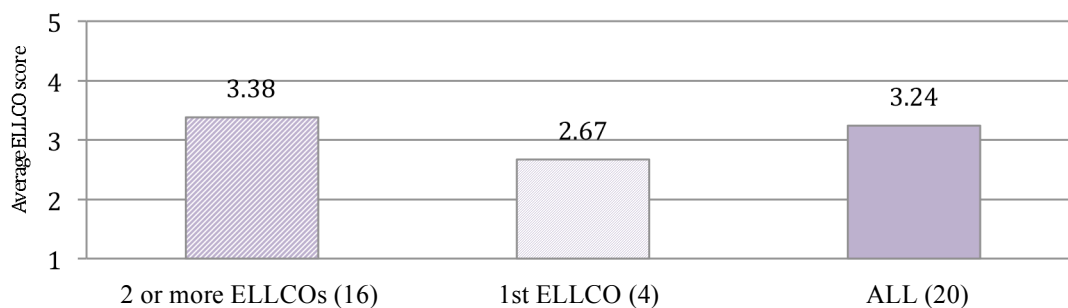


ELLCO Growth (11 ECAP teachers)



ELLCO scores in Head Start classrooms remain below where we need them to be to positively impact young children’s language and literacy development. In fact, they’ve been on a steady decline for the past several years, with this year’s average at 3.24. The one positive finding is that teachers who have had a previous ELLCO assessment demonstrated a .7 higher average score relative to those teachers who had never been assessed.

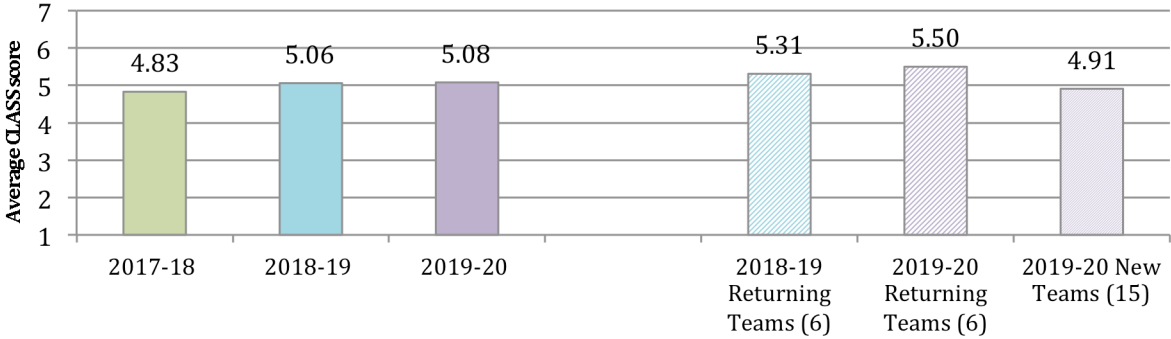
Average ELLCO scores for Head Start teachers ~ Fall 2019



✳ *Covid-19 impact: 3 ELLCOs for ECAP were not able to be conducted in the spring. We will pick these up during the normal cycle in the coming year. We were not able to do the post-ELLCOs as planned for the TELL project evaluation; these will take place in the fall after a presentation to review last year’s workshops.*

*Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*. The Pre-K CLASS assessment measures domains essential to effective teaching: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. We conduct CLASS yearly on Head Start teaching teams. Scores stayed steady, despite the high turnover in the past year and growth was observed in teams that remained together.

Average CLASS Scores for HS Teams

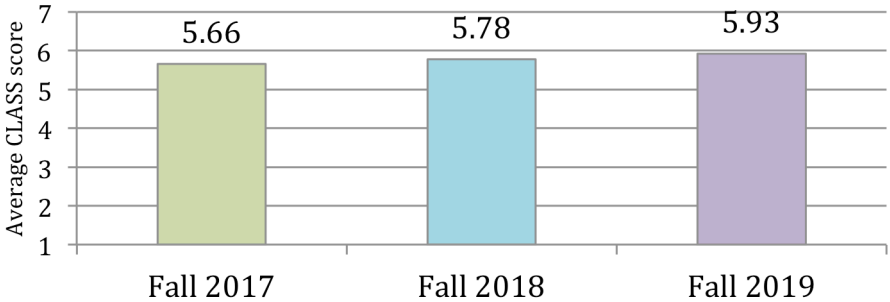


In conversation with research specialists at Teachstone, we learned about their review of research focused on specific threshold CLASS scores and child outcomes. For the K-3 CLASS, they suggest using thresholds of 5.0 for Emotional Support and Classroom Organization and 3.25 for Instructional Support as a baseline for quality sufficient to impact children’s learning and development.

Looking at Head Start teaching teams, 100 percent meet or exceed the 5.0 threshold in the area of Emotional Support, 86 percent in Classroom Organization, and 52 percent meet the Instructional Support threshold.

The Toddler CLASS measures domains demonstrated to be essential to effective teaching of young learners: Emotional and Behavioral Support and Engaged Support for Learning. Average scores have been steadily rising for Early Head Start. There are no national threshold or benchmark scores established, but our teaching teams’ average score of 6.5 (out of 7) on Emotional and Behavioral Support and 4.97 (out of 7) on Engaged Support for Learning represents Early Head Start teachers’ ability to implement effective intentional and responsive teaching.

EHS Toddler CLASS Growth by Year





SOUTH BEND COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION and SOUTH BEND EMPOWERMENT ZONE are partnering with the Early Years Count Early Childhood Education Initiative (EYC) to make Kindergarten through 5th grade classrooms places of engaged learning and belonging for all children. Eight schools are participating, four South Bend schools (Kennedy, Lincoln, Madison, and Nuner) and four in the Empowerment Zone (Coquillard, Harrison, Warren, and Wilson), with the aim of helping teachers become better.

Elementary school teachers have long borne the brunt of frustration over enduring social problems. Rarely is the extraordinary difficulty of their jobs recognized and their commitment acknowledged and appreciated. When the schools closed their doors, their roles, not only in the lives of children and families but also in the community, became starkly visible. Schools, for example, pivoted to become food distributors. They sought a way to make mental health workers available for families. Parents struggled to teach their children. There was no school-age child care if businesses needed parents to come to work. Teachers were yanked from their classrooms. It is clear that reopening the economy depends on reopening schools.

For years The Family Connection has cultivated and maintained critical relationships with superintendents, principals, and teachers and we are now included in some of the thinking about the next phase. Uncertainty over what comes next continues, but we know one thing for sure: the education that is provided, in no matter what format, must be high quality.

✳ *Covid-19 impact: All schools were closed in March and teachers taught through e-learning. We continued to meet virtually with both SBCSC and Empowerment Zone administrators and principals.*

RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM is an approach to teaching that focuses on engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness. The strategies and resources help educators create safe and joyful learning communities where students develop strong social and academic skills and every student can thrive. Independent research has found that the Responsive Classroom approach is associated with higher academic achievement in math and reading, improved school climate, and higher-quality instruction. In order to fully integrate this approach into our partner schools, we continue to utilize our model of teach, coach, assess, repeat.

*Responsive Classroom training.* We met our goal of providing four one-week Responsive Classroom trainings this year. In July 2019, two Elementary Core Courses and two Advanced Courses were offered with 107 teachers participating. The courses were delivered by educators from the Center for Responsive Schools. As of June 30, 2020, 72 percent of the teachers in the Empowerment Zone and 53 percent of the teachers in SBCSC schools had taken at least the first course of Responsive Classroom.

*Responsive Classroom workshops.* In January 2020, the South Bend Community School Corporation (SBCSC) and the Family Connection collaborated to offer four one-day workshops taught by the Center for Responsive Schools staff. These included three days of Introduction to Responsive Classroom and one day of Responding to Misbehavior. In June, SBCSC offered one day of Responding to Misbehavior. South Bend Schools paid for three of these sessions.

*Coaching and group meetings.* This was a learning year with regard to teacher professional development at the schools. Few teachers were taking advantage of our coaching offers, so we did some asking around. After talking with principals and teachers, we realized that, in the education world, if you need a coach the implication is that you are not doing a good job. We consequently changed the title to “Implementation Partner.”

We also began to explore other methods of delivering professional development. We found that whole school meetings and grade level meetings were welcomed, perhaps because teachers did not feel singled out. We were developing good momentum, holding grade level meetings at five schools and whole school meetings at three, when the schools shut down.

*Resources for assessors and coaches.* Over this past year, we have developed an extensive collection of relevant articles and video clips that can be given to teachers as part of professional development.

✱ *Covid impact: The last one-day workshop supported by South Bend Schools was held in a virtual format. When schools closed and teachers went home, coaching and grade level meetings were curtailed. We developed and emailed ideas for teachers on how to incorporate Responsive Classroom into e-learning.*

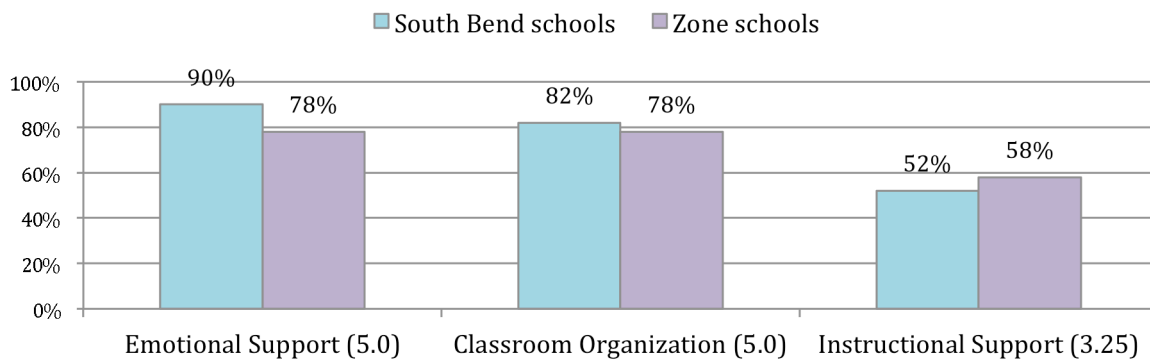
ASSESSMENTS take a measure of quality and we’ve set high goals for teachers. That’s because children in classrooms where teachers reach these goals would feel that they belong. They would feel cared for and respected. They would understand expectations and know how to meet them. They wouldn’t be frustrated by waiting with nothing to do, or bored by activities that hold no meaning or interest for them. Their minds would be engaged in thinking and creating and working on projects that they chose. This is what we want for the children in South Bend schools. And when teachers meet these goals, the children who will benefit the most are those most at risk for low achievement and all that means for their futures.

*Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).* We continue to use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System to measure quality practices in the areas of emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. By the end of this three-year funding cycle, our aim is for CLASS scores, which are on a 7-point scale, to average 6.0 in Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Student Engagement and 4.0 in Instructional Support. Not all teachers are there yet, but in some cases they are close.

CLASS DOMAINS	K - 3rd	4th - 5th
Emotional Support	5.68	4.81
Classroom Organization	5.51	6.17
Instructional Support	3.40	3.42
Student Engagement	NA	5.57

As described earlier (see Head Start CLASS), Teachstone has adopted threshold scores of 5.0 for Emotional Support and Classroom Organization and 3.25 for Instructional Support. It is heartening to know that many teachers are meeting these thresholds. While our goal is for teachers to score beyond the threshold, we know that improvements made after reaching a threshold score indicate better outcomes for children.

Percent of teachers at or above CLASS thresholds



✱ *Covid-19 impact: School closure cut short the observations, so 8 (of 110) teachers did not have CLASS assessments.*

*Classroom Practices Observation Measure (CPOM).* This year we also conducted the CPOM, which rates the degree of implementation of Responsive Classroom (RC). Eighty-three teachers with at least one level of RC training were assessed. The overall average was 1.93 on a 3-point scale. This tells us that while some Responsive Classroom strategies are being implemented, others are not. Most classrooms have a space for morning meeting, and children participate in community building exercises such as greeting each other and the teacher by name and sharing brief personal news. Positive rules are posted in most classrooms. However, teachers need more work on giving children individualized choices related to an academic lesson. Specific observations like these allow us to focus our coaching, grade level meetings, and talks with principals.

**MOVING FORWARD**, we will be guided and sustained by the vibrant national partnerships that have grown even stronger this past year, by the committed directors and administrators who share our vision, and by our flexible, passionate team.

*Vibrant national partners.* Our coronavirus challenges are not unique to us. Local communities all over the country are turning to HighScope, Responsive Classroom, and Teachstone for guidance and inspiration, for concrete ideas and emotional support. Our relationships with these national educational leaders have been long-standing, giving us a front row seat to their most current thinking, recommended approaches, and innovative ideas for this shifting world of early education. All have fully focused their attention and resources to support the work of teachers facing unprecedented challenges.

But our connections with these national organizations go deeper. Beth O'Connor was just recognized nationally as a "HighScope Hero," an honor initiated by one of our HighScope certified teachers in one of our HighScope certified programs. We were invited to present at Teachstone's InterAct Teacher webinar conference this month. Responsive Classroom has generously offered, at no charge, two one-hour workshops for South Bend teachers on embedding Responsive Classroom practices into Zoom teaching. We know, beyond a doubt, that moving forward we can connect with these national partners to ask questions, share our concerns, seek guidance, and celebrate our successes.

*Committed Directors and School Leaders.* An attendee new to ECAP exclaimed enthusiastically, after a recent Zoom webinar, that she wanted to keep in contact because she had never experienced a community of such passionate, knowledgeable educators who were so focused on helping each other. That's not a surprise to us. Our early childhood directors and teachers routinely help each other and look to us for support. We continue to learn together as we find our way. Our early childhood directors are eager to meet again in a few weeks to talk about and make plans for our ongoing support.

Our strong relationships with the Head Start director and managers have led to their demonstrated commitment to HighScope. As they move into the coming school year, they're counting on our input on how to best guide and support their teachers.

Regular meetings with South Bend school leaders ensure that Responsive Classroom is always part of the decision-making process. We not only hear strong words of support for Responsive Classroom, we're seeing commitment and results. Several administrators attended the recent Responsive Classroom training. We've been invited to have Responsive Classroom materials included on a school corporation platform for teacher access. Knowing the important role school leaders play in Responsive Classroom implementation, we're seeing very positive results at Madison Steam Academy, with not only CLASS scores steadily rising, but a new culture of warmth visible with the very first step into their door.

Moving forward, we're confident that the commitment to quality of directors, principals and administrators will not waver, but will be an ever-present factor in the choices ahead.

*A flexible, passionate team.* Our cohesive staff has successfully made many leaps into unknown territory. We learned how to use Zoom for presentations and meetings by practicing together and making mistakes together. We figured out Zoom features, researched new platforms, practiced techniques, and incorporated best practices. We took evaluations to heart, working to improve our style and message. We planned for strategies for a variety of school reopening scenarios, read articles from around the country, and explored a wide range of possibilities.

Because both children and teachers may have experienced trauma, or increased trauma, as a result of the pandemic, we've worked together to learn more about trauma-informed care and education and how to be sensitive to teachers, who cannot regulate their classrooms if they are unable to regulate themselves.

As a team we are educating ourselves and having rich conversations about how inequities and biases can undermine best practice in classrooms and about how we probably harbor some of those biases ourselves.

With our spirit, support, problem-solving mindset, and approach to learning our team hasn't missed a beat in the past six months. Moving forward, we feel well equipped to help our early childhood and school community continue on a path to high quality.

Yes indeed, we can do hard things.