



# The Early Years

*Impacting the quality of early childhood education  
for over 4,500 children this school year!*

November 2014

It is an honor and a privilege to work with the early childhood educators in our community. Every day we witness caring, passion, and persistence as teachers and directors meet head on the challenges inherent in high quality.

Teachers give up their family time to attend trainings; they agonize about a child who has started aggressive behaviors; they intentionally plan how to build phonemic awareness into their transition activities; they look at scaffolding possibilities for the children in different stages of the learning continuum; they practice giving meaningful feedback in place of empty praise; they observe each child and document his or her learning through anecdotal notes tied to specific indicators of growth and development; they ask thoughtful, open-ended questions that encourage children to predict, experiment, evaluate, and compare; they model problem solving and encourage children to connect with their peers; they willingly invite observation and feedback; they continually challenge themselves to learn more.

Directors pour over work schedules to find time for team planning; they meet with parents to let them know about a child who may be behind in development; they scramble to find a last minute sub when a teacher becomes sick; they unplug toilets if there's no time for a plumber; they thoughtfully hire, train, encourage and evaluate teachers and support staff; they inspire those around them and set the tone for their program; they set policies and procedures that deal with things as diverse as late pick-ups and snow storms and child abuse; they wear a hundred different hats with grace and humor and humility.

There are many facets to quality. Solid research and evaluation are essential. Meaningful, in-depth training is a must. Ongoing assessment and feedback strengthens understanding and practices. Strong support through coaching and materials eases the challenges. Leadership from directors is critical in creating healthy learning environments. Foremost, though, is the quality work that the teachers themselves do. They take in new information; begin to apply pieces in the classroom; they practice, practice, *practice* until a new skill becomes second nature; then layer more learnings and strategies onto their growing knowledge base.

Teachers are the bottom line. We couldn't do the work of Early Years Count without them. And that makes it all the more exciting to see how far they have come on their journey to high quality.

## WHAT'S NEW

### ❖ **Expansion of Responsive Classroom in South Bend schools**

*“If it wasn’t for what I learned through Responsive Classroom, I would have drowned.”*

—South Bend teacher, talking about her overcrowded first grade class

Four of the five South Bend Community School Corporation primary centers are continuing in the EYC pilot program that brings Responsive Classroom training to South Bend schools. (One principal, who was transferred in to one of the original pilot schools, has opted out.) Teachers have been very positive about the training and a few have even expressed interest in becoming a Responsive Classroom trainer. Another teacher, who will be retiring after this coming school year, is looking forward to becoming an elementary school CLASS assessor for the Early Years Count.

Three additional schools—Coquillard, Madison and Perley—have been added to the pilot program this school year, joining Harrison, Hay, Monroe, and Warren. A new principal at Harrison School is enthusiastic about Responsive Classroom and we expect her to be highly engaged in this pilot to increase quality.

CLASS assessments, along with individual feedback, are being conducted on over 100 teachers in kindergarten through fourth grade at the seven pilot primary centers this school year.

### ❖ **A goal to increase young children served by Early Head Start**

Head Start has applied for a partnership and expansion grant that would increase the spaces they have for infants and toddlers by at least 56 in St. Joseph County. If granted, Early Head Start would greatly expand their capacity at Lafayette and also would partner with at least one early childhood program in the community that uses the HighScope curriculum. Lack of available quality care for infants and toddlers has been a longstanding need in the community.

### ❖ **Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP)**

The early childhood program at the YWCA has been added to ECAP this year. We have made a shift from fall assessments to a staggered assessment period going throughout the school year. This enables us to spread out the assessment work at a more even pace and better-utilize our excellent pool of outside assessors.

### ❖ **State-supported preschool vouchers**

St. Joseph County was one of 18 counties eligible to apply for the chance to become a pilot site for the state’s new preschool initiative. Although the proposal we developed for St. Joseph County was not chosen, a framework was developed and partnerships were formed that will be beneficial to future opportunities.

❖ **A strong team, growing even stronger**

As the Early Years Count increases its reach into early childhood programs and expands into elementary schools, we are cognizant of the need to build our own capacity in order to well-serve this growing community of educators.

**New staff:** We are excited to have two new part time employees helping us with the Early Years Count (EYC). *Kathy Schaefer* has a Masters in Early Childhood Education and is the former director of a NAEYC-accredited preschool that participated in the Early Childhood Assessment Project. Kathy has worked with us on a contract basis conducting assessments and coaching.

*Julie Hoelscher* most recently was an Early Childhood Specialist at the HighScope Educational Research Foundation. Julie conducted all of the HighScope training for the Early Years Count when this project started, so she is very invested in the people and programs in St. Joseph County. Julie also has extensive experience working with teachers in elementary schools.

Although no longer with us, both *Beth Morlock* and *Virgie Smith* have maintained their CLASS assessor reliability and continue to work with us doing assessments on a contractual basis.

**HighScope Trainers:** Beyond the staff changes, a HighScope Training of Trainers will give a powerful boost to the depth of quality support that will be available to teachers through the Early Years Count. Along with three full weeks of training, over 30 assignments, many involving field experience, guarantee a strong knowledge base of this curriculum.

We have ten participants in this training: three from The Family Connection, three certified HighScope teachers who coach other teachers for the Early Years Count, and four directors of early childhood programs involved with the Early Childhood Assessment Project who will help us with assessments, coaching and presentations in the future.

**Additional assessors:** In addition, we've added to our team of PQA, ELLCO, and CLASS assessors. Beyond Family Connection staff, we have 12 assessors who work with us throughout the school year; four were hired in late summer this year and have been fully trained.

**ACTION OVERVIEW:** *July 2013 (the start of the new funding cycle) to November 2014*

**HighScope Teacher Training**

- HighScope Infant Toddler training was held for 15 Early Head Start teachers in Summer 2013 (71.5 hours) and 12 teachers in Summer 2014 (120 hours). A third training is currently underway for 12 teachers from community programs, who will complete their 120 hours after the first of the year.
- 23 teachers completed the HighScope Preschool Curriculum course at Ivy Tech during this past school year. Of those, 12 received funding support through the Early Years Count. The current class has 18 students; 5 are supported through EYC. Registration is now underway for next semester, which begins in January.

- 10 participants attended the first two weeks of HighScope Training of Trainers (TOT) in June and July 2014. During this school year, they are working on the extensive requirements for their trainer certification by observing children, modeling parts of the day in classrooms, conducting workshops, doing assigned readings, and planning a major presentation for the TOT group next summer.
- 3 were added to our growing list of certified HighScope teachers.

### **Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP)**

During the 2013-14 school year:

- a total of 165 assessments were conducted in 21 programs, including 27 Infant Toddler Program Quality Assessments (PQAs), 52 Preschool PQAs, 18 Agency PQAs, and 36 Early Language and Literacy Assessments. In addition, CLASS assessments were conducted on 16 Head Start teachers in St. Joseph County in early fall and again in the winter.
- Over 370 hours of coaching was provided to over 100 teachers and directors.
- Over \$3,500 worth of materials were ordered for classrooms.
- 2 teachers received tuition assistance for early childhood classes.

So far, in the 2014-15 school year:

- At Head Start, CLASS assessments have been completed and feedback given for 16 teachers in St. Joseph County and PQAs have been completed and feedback given for 16 Assistant teachers and 10 Early Head Start teachers.
- PQA and ELLCO assessments are underway for an additional 48 teachers and 20 directors in community programs.

### **Intensives, Workshops and Refreshers**

- Over 60 teachers and directors attended a workshop in the fall of 2013 on Intentional Teaching that was presented by Tracy Mercier, a trainer for Responsive Classroom.
- A workshop on Concept Development was presented to kindergarten and first grade teachers at Hay Primary Center.
- A second cohort of 13 directors / assistant directors are participating in a training series called the Quality Leadership Institute that is based on McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership's "Taking Charge of Change." Since February 2014, eight half-day monthly workshops have been presented. Evaluations, given at the end of each workshop, are high. Participants use a scale of 5 (excellent) to 1 (poor) to rate the training on seven different measures. The collective average score of the workshops is 4.9. In connection with this training, organization climate surveys were conducted in the fall of 2014 with the staff in 10 programs. The directors will be matched with a coach and work on action plans to improve identified areas.
- During the 2013-14 school year, 13 teachers participated in Community Literacy, a series of three lunchtime workshops followed by onsite observation and feedback on phonological awareness, vocabulary building, and conversing with children. This year, a similar series on Community Science is being held for 14 teachers; two of the three workshops have been completed.

- Multiple trainings have been held for all Early Head Start teachers. Topics have included Intentional Choice, Responding to Challenging Behaviors, Schedules and Routines, Socio-emotional Development, School Readiness, and Executive Function.
- Workshops for all Head Start teachers and assistants were provided on science, social studies, concept development, Numbers Plus (the HighScope math curriculum) and literacy. In addition, a day-long workshop on inclusion of children with special needs by Amy Goerl, a HighScope trainer, was arranged for over 60 Head Start teachers and assistants in November 2014.

### **South Bend Community School Corp**

- The Early Years Count facilitated a transition committee made up of representatives from Harrison Primary Center, Head Start, and SBCSC Special Education Department to develop a plan to transfer Head Start records to South Bend kindergarten teachers. The plan was implemented in the fall of 2014 and available to all schools that enroll Head Start students.
- In August 2013, 4 principals, 52 teachers (including coaches) and 5 Family Connection staff members received training in Responsive Classroom I. In August, 2014, a Responsive Classroom II training was held for these participants and an additional 63 teachers got started with the first 4 days of Responsive Classroom I. There are now seven primary centers participating in this pilot.
- CLASS assessments were conducted on 42 teachers in Fall 2013 and again on 40 teachers in Spring 2014. Written reports were provided to teachers, along with one-on-one feedback. CLASS assessments for the 2014-15 school year have been completed on 49 kindergarten and first grade teachers and feedbacks are currently underway. Starting in January 2015, CLASS assessments will be done on second through fourth grade teachers at the participating schools.
- Through the Early Years Count, six principals and three Family Connection staff members attended a two-day Responsive Classroom Leadership Conference held in Chicago in October 2014. This provided an opportunity for principals to solidify their understanding of and commitment to this approach, to share ideas and implementation strategies, and to get to know our team better.

### **Staff development**

- Four Family Connection staff members attended the HighScope conference in May. While there, we presented sessions on Individualizing Professional Development, Coping with Biting, and Intentional Choice Time with Infants and Toddlers. We also were able to meet with personnel from HighScope Educational Research Foundation to talk about the Early Years Count project, ask questions, and get an update on the Foundation's current research and projects.
- A two-day training for CLASS assessors was held for 12 participants in September 2014. Included in the training were 6 assessors for the Early Years Count, 4 SBCSC coaches and SBCSC teachers. Teachstone, the developers of CLASS, provided the training.
- In early fall, 2014, the Family Connection held a full-day training for new PQA assessors and three half-day trainings on the ELLCO (Early Language and Literacy) assessment, the Pre-K PQA process for the Early Childhood Assessment Project, and the Infant Toddler Program Quality Assessment.

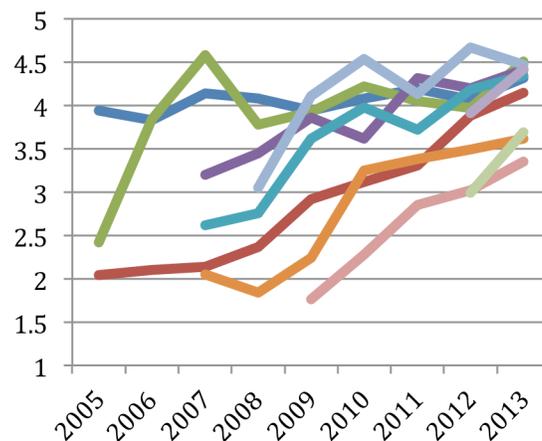
## OUTCOMES: A steady journey to high quality

Quality doesn't happen overnight; it's a journey that teachers and program directors commit to and work on continuously. While year-to-year gains are always exciting, it's helpful to pull back and take stock of the bigger picture of quality growth.

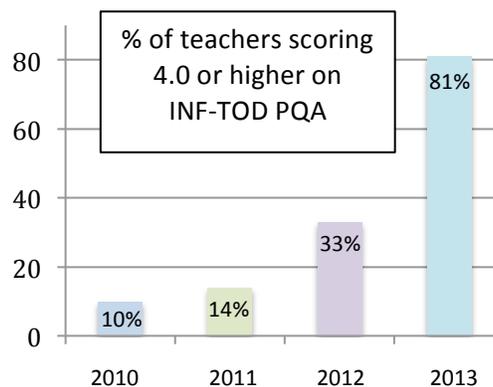
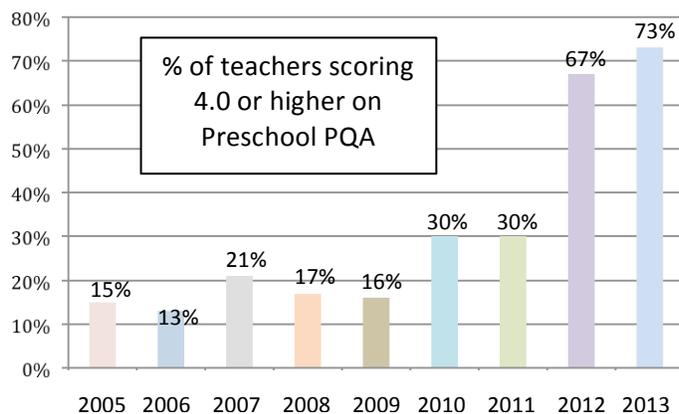
❖ **Overall growth in program quality.** Often the focus is on individual teacher growth (see some stats in the next sections). The table below shows the increase in average teaching staff scores—and thus quality—for several programs, comparing scores at their start in the Early Childhood Assessment Project to their scores in the fall of 2013. Each score is an average of all teachers in the program who had a Program Quality Assessment that year.

	Start year	Start year average score	Fall 2013 average score
Program A	2005	2.04	4.15
Program B	2005	2.42	4.51
Program C	2005	3.94	4.32
Program D	2007	2.62	4.34
Program E	2007	3.20	4.41
Program F	2007	2.05	3.62
Program G	2008	3.05	4.47
Program H	2009	1.76	3.35
Program I	2012	2.99	3.69
Program J	2012	3.91	4.42

Put in a picture, the growth looks like this:



❖ **Climbing percentages in teacher growth.** We know teachers are good if they score at least a 4.0 on the PQA. When the first preschool PQAs were conducted in 2005, 15% of the 41 teachers scored this high. In the fall of 2013, 73% of teachers were scoring a 4.0 or higher. An even more dramatic rise is seen in the infant toddler PQA, which started in 2010 with just 10% of teachers reaching 4.0. This past fall 81% of teachers reached a 4.0 or higher.



❖ **Teacher excellence—from 3 to 32.** The quality bar is set very high for teachers of excellence—at minimum, a 4.5 or higher on the Program Quality Assessment (based on a 5 point scale). At the start of the Early Childhood Assessment Project in 2005, just 3 teachers achieved this level of quality. In the fall of 2013, 23 teachers scored a 4.5 or higher. Adding in the 9 Head Start teachers who scored 4.5 or higher on their last PQA in 2011 brings the number to 32.