



The Early Years Count!

Education Initiative of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph Co.

*Impacting the quality of early childhood education
for over 5,600 children this coming school year!*

August 2015

The focus of The Early Years Count Education Initiative has never wavered—*high quality early childhood education*. The research has been very clear: high quality equals better chances for success not only in school, but throughout life. Over the past decade of local funding, the impact of The Early Years Count (EYC) in St. Joseph County has been immense.

- ❖ **More children than ever are benefitting from the work of EYC**—the numbers of children touched each year by this focus on quality have soared from just over 1,300 in 2005 to over 5,600 this coming school year. EYC has been able to extend the quality focus to elementary schools, Early Head Start has received funding for a huge expansion in the numbers of infants and toddlers they are able to serve, more programs are choosing to work with the Early Childhood Assessment Project, and this fall, for the first time, 10 Title I Preschools will be opening in five South Bend Primary Centers.
- ❖ **Quality is the new community norm.** Due to over a decade of EYC assessments, intensive training, coaching, and re-assessing to achieve continuous quality improvement, teachers are reaching higher scores on Program Quality Assessments sooner than ever and programs are more focused on promoting, maintaining, and growing quality.
- ❖ **High Scope has become the community standard.** HighScope was chosen for infants, toddlers, and preK classrooms because of its solid research, strong curricular content, and exceptional teacher training. HighScope classes through Ivy Tech continue to fill each semester; new programs are selecting HighScope from the start; and when the South Bend Community Schools Title I Preschool classes start this fall, they, too, will be using the HighScope curriculum.
- ❖ **The transition from preschool into elementary schools is strengthening.** The long awaited EYC expansion into elementary schools through training and support in Responsive Classroom (an evidence-based approach to increase teacher effectiveness) assures that the gains achieved in preschool are not lost in transition. The fact that all the Title I preschools will be High Scope classrooms in Responsive Classroom schools reinforces this transitioning period for young children.
- ❖ **Great progress has been made in strengthening early childhood leadership.** At the start of EYC, the numbers of Masters-level early childhood educators in St. Joseph County could be counted on one hand. Today, those numbers are well above 20. A second cohort of directors will soon be completing an intensive year-long leadership training; 10 additional HighScope trainers will be certified this year; and the numbers of qualified assessors and early childhood coaches continues to grow.

Reaching—and maintaining—quality will always be an ongoing process. But raising the bar on community quality builds a solid foundation for continued and sustained growth, providing our youngest children the strongest start possible on their life journey.

The Early Years Count! An integrated system focused on quality

When Dr. Kathy Guajardo, Executive Director of the Elkhart and St. Joseph County Head Start Consortium, met with her Early Head Start Partnership consultant recently, she explained how the Early Years Count fit into the various aspects of their multiple programs. The consultant marveled at the complexity of the system that EYC has built, saying she has never seen any other model so well integrated into the community.

We've been thinking a lot about this comment—and about what makes the Early Years Count Education Initiative so unique. While none of what we do is that much out-of-the-ordinary, it's that each of the factors below needs to be in place in order to make a system effective. Perhaps this is what makes EYC so compelling:

A clear vision—consistently focused on one goal: high quality

A dedicated team—tireless, passionate, committed, and knowledgeable

Trusting relationships—built carefully, purposefully over time

Healthy partnerships—strong connections between and among all the early childhood players, such as Head Start, higher ed, school systems, and state-level agencies

Well-researched approaches—including HighScope and Responsive Classroom

Cutting edge practices—connecting training to ongoing support, using assessments to move quality, individualized professional development

A holistic approach—coming at quality through individual teachers, directors, programs as a whole, community supports, and state-level protocols

Birth to Grade 3 continuum—staying attentive to smooth transitions and continuous, connected learning

Community capacity-building—educating and empowering at every level by building in career ladders for teachers, directors and others connected to the early childhood field

Strong, consistent funder support—enabling ongoing programs, opportunities to reflect and refine, and the ability to focus completely on EYC's vision.

The graphic at the end of this report provides a glimpse of the inter-relationship between entities under the Early Years Count umbrella.

Strengthening and extending the system

So many exciting things have come together over the past year that broaden the reach of high quality, enhance the professionalism of early childhood teachers, and integrate the spectrum of learning across the ages and among community partners.

Here's what's currently making us smile:

☺ The Early Head Start Expansion and Partnership Grant was approved.

This means 44 additional high quality child care spaces for infants and toddlers of families living in poverty in St. Joseph County (as well as 72 in Elkhart County).

For the first time, Head Start is partnering with a community agency—El Campito—with a goal of expanding Head Start capacity *and* increasing quality in community programs. We've already seen this happen, even before children have started: Head Start has paid to renovate El Campito's playground, purchased laptops for teachers to use for assessments and intentional planning, and invested in two new freezers so El Campito can continue to offer family style meals. A win-win for everyone. There is also a potential for other Early Head Start community partnerships, including the two early childhood programs in our homeless shelters, because of the quality that is already in place through the Early Years Count.

Beth Morlock, the manager hired by Head Start to oversee much of this expansion, has long been associated with the Early Years Count Education Initiative. She received her HighScope training (both preschool and infant/toddler) through EYC as well as her HighScope Trainer certification. She and Beth O'Connor, our infant-toddler specialist, will be working closely together to insure a high quality Early Head Start Child Care program. This fall, Beth O will provide 120 hours of training for all the new teachers. She has worked in collaboration with Ivy Tech to incorporate many of the portfolio requirements that will be needed by teachers who must still obtain their CDA certificate. The two Beths will also team up to complete the fieldwork required for the newly available HighScope Trainer Certificate for Infants and Toddlers.

☺ Responsive Classroom is growing.

Responsive Classroom is a research-based education approach associated with greater teacher effectiveness, higher student achievement, and improved school climate. We were heartened to find out that McKinley Primary Center wanted to return to the Responsive Classroom (RC) pilot. They were part of year one, but the principal, who was new to the school, opted out in year two. At the urging of her teachers, they have returned to the project. Muessel Primary Center will also be joining the RC community, which has grown from five to nine schools and 37 to 144 teachers. Muessel and McKinley teachers will be included in the training this August.

A challenge for the schools—and us—is the number of initiatives coming through their doors and understanding how they intersect with Responsive Classroom. The good news is that they complement one another well. We view Responsive Classroom as the foundation to a high-quality classroom. Without the key elements of RC in place, teachers will have a difficult time implementing the strategies for Differentiated Instruction or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), two other initiatives that schools are beginning to implement.

Principals have been open to our joining in on the teacher training in these other programs, which has helped us see the connections and begin work on a crosswalk to help teachers also see how what they are learning in Responsive Classroom provides the groundwork for these other, more focused programs.

New from Responsive Classroom this year is a tablet-based evaluation tool that will measure the implementation of various aspects of a responsive classroom. Principals and The Family Connection staff will receive training on its use this fall.

Another new development at Responsive Classroom is the designation of Certified Responsive Classroom Teacher. We will be working closely with our RC consultant, Tracy Mercier, in identifying teachers who might be good candidates to work towards this designation. This would be the first step in building a local training capacity. We also have increased the consulting days that Tracy will be working with schools this year. This follow-up support has been greatly appreciated by both principals and teachers.

☺ **SBCSC Title I Preschool is coming to five Primary Centers in South Bend.**

Coquillard, Harrison, Madison, Muessel, and Warren each will have two Pre-K classrooms, each with a morning and afternoon session. This means 340 additional children, many who are currently on the Head Start wait list, will be able to attend preschool this coming year. Head Start has been contracted hire and oversee teachers and curriculum implementation, so there will be consistency with current Head Start classrooms and with their high bar for quality. We will be conducting 16 days of HighScope training for all teachers and assistants starting in mid-August, as well as assessments (both PQA and CLASS) and coaching throughout the school year. All of these schools are Responsive Classroom schools, which will greatly ease the transition from pre-k to kindergarten.

☺ **The Harrison Primary School Improvement Grant (SIG) brings it all together.**

Key elements of this grant, submitted in early July 2015, focus on full implementation of Responsive Classroom, establishing a strong transition protocol, moving to full day preschool classrooms, promoting a pre-k to 3rd grade continuum of learning, and incorporating technology into the classroom.

Some of the specific things that will help realize these goals include a coaching position dedicated to Responsive Classroom, grade level trainings on child development, the strategic use of teacher assessment data to drive quality, mentoring the principal in early childhood education (including the appropriate use of technology), and bringing together a Ready School Assessment Team to develop a transition implementation plan. While we are hopeful that Harrison will be awarded this early learning grant, Patty Karban, the principal, is intent on initiating many of these strategies even if funding is not available. We'll find out August 12.

☺ **HighScope has become the community standard.**

That the 10 new preschools in the South Bend Community School Corporation will be using HighScope is a strong indication that this curriculum is becoming well established, highly regarded, and here to stay.

While we still just have one HighScope-certified program in the community (Hope4Kids), four other programs are actively working on reaching this marker of outstanding quality. The HighScope class at Ivy Tech continues to fill each semester and to date, over 600 teachers have completed this training. (In addition, well over 100 teachers have received training in the HighScope Infant Toddler curriculum.)

Another marker of our community's HighScope embracement is reflected in the numbers of directors and teachers who attended this year's International Conference in Ypsilanti, MI—22! In addition to The Family Connection staff, there were 4 managers from Head Start, and 12 teachers and directors from six community programs. At least three other programs were unable to attend because the conference was filled to capacity before they had a chance to register.

☺ **The community capacity for high quality leadership is increasing.**

We were pleased to add Amy Heller to our Family Connection staff early in 2015. Amy has a Masters in Early Childhood Special Education from Syracuse University, 12 years experience in a preschool classroom, and over three years experience as education specialist for a Head Start in New York, where she helped implement the HighScope curriculum. She also has been a Certified CLASS Observer since 2010.

Our cohort of 10 in the HighScope Training of Trainers course has made great progress towards their HighScope Trainer status. Stephanie Hooks and Kathy Schaefer, both on The Family Connection staff, have completed all requirements and are just awaiting the formality of their official HighScope designation. The others will be finishing their fieldwork in the coming months. This training—and all the work surrounding it—was a huge undertaking that has resulted in a wealth of HighScope knowledge and understanding.

Once again, we are looking to enlarge our assessor / mentor pool and hope to be interviewing candidates soon and conducting assessment training in late summer.

☺ **A rich array of professional development opportunities awaits our providers.** We'll be bringing in presenters for a full day workshop on STEM (focusing on balls and ramps) in the fall and helping boys thrive in preschool in the spring. We'll also be offering workshops and refreshers on planning, stress, trauma, and literacy, as well as a series of STEM follow-up sessions. We have moved to a very individualized approach of professional development with Head Start teachers and assistants and also more agency-specific trainings for our community programs. After a successful summer book club discussing *Make Room for Boys!* by Gerin Martin and Sandy Slack, we plan to offer more opportunities for teachers and directors to explore books and articles relevant to early childhood.

Yearly Overview: July 2014 ~ June 2015

HighScope Teacher Training

- Two full (120 hour) trainings in the HighScope Infant Toddler Curriculum were conducted by The Family Connection: 15 Early Head Start teachers attended a three-week training in Summer 2014; an additional 19 teachers from community programs attended Infant Toddler training on Fridays throughout the school year.
- 25 teachers completed the HighScope Preschool Curriculum course at Ivy Tech during this past school year. Of those, 11 received funding support through the Early Years Count.
- 10 participants attended the second week of HighScope Training of Trainers in July 2014 and 9 completed the final week of training in June 2015 (one participant was out of the country and will do her third week of training in Ypsilanti MI in summer of 2016).
- 1 teacher received HighScope certification, several others are in the process.

Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP)

- A new staggered approach to the timing of assessments was successfully implemented. This has allowed for more prompt feedback and better utilization of our outside assessors and coaches.
- 145 assessments were conducted in 23 programs (including Head Start): 36 Infant Toddler Program Quality Assessments (PQAs), 52 Preschool PQAs, 20 Agency PQAs, and 37 Early Language and Literacy Assessments (ELLCO)
- Over 260 hours of coaching were provided to over 140 teachers and directors.
- Over \$5,000 worth of materials were ordered for classrooms.
- Two new programs—Our Lady of Hungary and Friends School and Daycare—were added to ECAP.

Intensives, Workshops and Refreshers

- 12 directors have almost completed the Quality Leadership Institute (previously called “Taking Charge of Change”). Nine half-day (4-hour) workshops were presented this past year; two more workshops this fall will complete this training. A new cohort of directors will be recruited in the coming year.
- 13 teachers participated in Community Science, a series of three lunchtime workshops followed by onsite observation and feedback with a focus on nature, air, and water.
- 6 workshops for Head Start teachers and assistants were provided on executive function, small group times, phonological awareness, concept development, planning and recall, and vocabulary. In addition, we arranged for a specialist on inclusion (and certified HighScope Trainer) to present a full day workshop at Head Start.
- 7 workshops for early childhood programs were presented on transitions, large group, implementing home visits, learning environment, planning and recall, preschooler development, and technology.

- 3 workshops were presented at the HighScope International Conference on reducing stress for early childhood leaders, executive function for infants and toddlers, and the effects of trauma on young children.
- 10 teachers and directors participated in a 3-part book discussion on *Make Room for Boys* facilitated by the Early Years Count.

South Bend Community School Corp

- 75 teachers and their principals attended their first 4-day Responsive Classroom training and 30 kindergarten and first grade teachers, along with 2 principals, finished the Responsive Classroom Advanced Training (formerly Responsive Classroom II).
- CLASS assessments were conducted on 102 teachers in seven schools (Coquillard, Harrison, Hay, Madison, McKinley, Perley, and Warren). Written reports were provided to each teacher, along with one-on-one feedback meetings.
- Data reports were prepared for each of the participating principals.
- A team of nine (6 principals and 3 from The Family Connection) attended the three-day Responsive Classroom Leadership Conference in Chicago in October.
- The Community Foundation hosted a lunch for principals at Responsive Classroom schools to better understand their challenges and hopes.
- Ann and Sue attended a staff meeting at Warren and a full day training with Harrison teachers on Differentiated Instruction to help understand how this approach intersects with Responsive Classroom.
- Ann, Sue, and Beth were members of the planning team for Harrison's School Improvement Grant.
- Muessel Primary Center has been added to the Responsive Classroom schools and Monroe Primary, who had withdrawn from the pilot during year two, is returning at the request of the teachers and principal there.
- Five 4-day Responsive Classroom trainings have been set for the first two weeks of August.

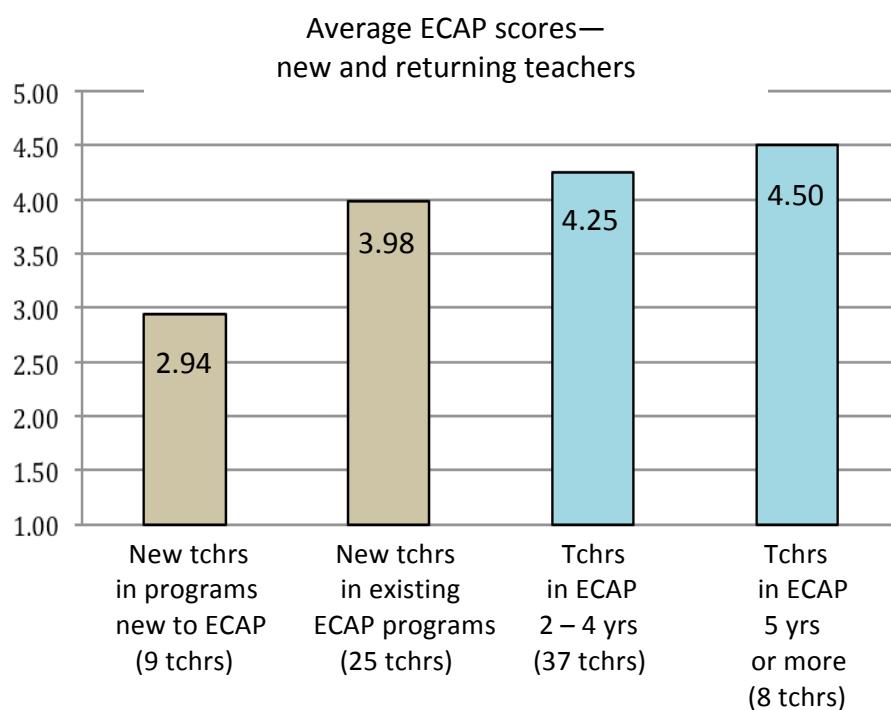
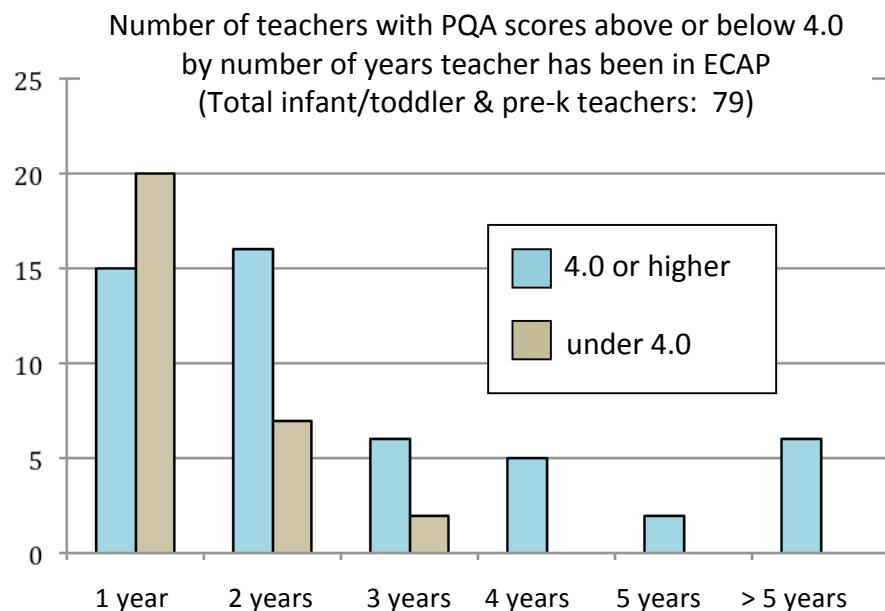
Head Start

- 32 Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) assessments were conducted for Head Start teachers.
- 62 teachers and assistants were supported in establishing a professional development plan, then provided individualized professional development through small group workshops, articles and videos for independent study, classroom observation and feedback, modeling, videotaping, and one-on-one mentoring.

Making a difference

The numbers continue to demonstrate ongoing growth in quality.

Consistently, scores start out low for new programs, are better for new teachers in programs already involved with ECAP, increase significantly in years 2 – 4, and reach excellence by year five and beyond. Of the 79 teachers this year who received a Program Quality Assessment (PQA), *everyone* who had been a part of ECAP for more than three years scored a 4.0 or higher.



Numbers are not the only way to tell the story, however.

What changes have you made?

In the mini-grant application that teachers and directors fill out, we ask them, “based on the information you received from your Classroom (or Agency) PQA or other assessment feedback this year, what changes, if any, have you already put into place?”

Here’s a small sampling of what they had to say:

- *In reference to language modeling, it was observed that I consistently responded to children’s comments with repetition, but rarely with extension. I now work to extend conversations with children with open-ended questions.*
- *We have changed our daily schedule to allow appropriate amounts of time for each.*
- *We have re-arranged some parts of the room to make the house area more accessible.*
- *We added more real items to house area (oven mitts, clean & empty food containers, baking pans, wooden spoons, real plates).*
- *I’m using more baby signs to support the children that are not yet verbal.*
- *We created a large motor room for running, jumping activities when we can’t get outside.*

How are we doing?

We recently asked directors to give us feedback on the various facets of Early Years Count. This is a sampling of their responses:

Teacher assessments—*Our staff has benefitted greatly from the PQAs and look forward to the feedback each year. It is invaluable to receive feedback on specifics with our teaching from outside evaluators. The information is always detailed and thoughtful.*

- *When I was a teacher, this was a great motivational tool to strive toward excellence in everything I did. As a director now, I appreciate this tool as a built-in platform for training new staff and an ongoing tool for staff development in the HighScope approach.*
- *Always, the most important part of your work.*

Mentoring—*Our staff are very supportive of the mentoring and, most importantly, this has developed a safe place for them to engage with their mentors and develop strategies that enable them to deliver quality services.*

- *The mentors have been specific, practical and beneficial to our teams.*

Mini-grants—*Mini grants are helpful in implementing HighScope, improving our programs, and motivating teachers. Our teachers are very excited to select materials to improve their classrooms. With our budget deficit, this is one of the few times the teachers are able to order some exciting new things.*

Workshops/trainings—*Trainings provided by Family Connection staff are always high quality trainings that are interactive and motivating. My staff and I leave feeling refreshed and excited to try new things.*

- *Can't get enough, please have more!*

HighScope course at Ivy Tech—*Excellent and extremely impactful to our program. We try to send two teachers each semester. Teachers often comment it makes so much sense when they experience the classroom and then receive theory about HighScope and have time away from their own classroom to reflect and see other programs.*

- *Providing this course is absolutely a necessity to all teachers and programs! Truly key to providing quality programs to children, families, and the community!*

Overall—*It's hard to know where we would be without the Early Years Count. Your team has encouraged, inspired and taught me so many new things that have improved the quality of our program.*

- *I have nothing but respect and admiration for the ladies that work with all of us and encourage, support, coach and train us all. They are the reason that so many childcare centers are thriving and making a difference in these young lives.*

- *Quality has certainly improved. We have a new standard for how we operate. Your program initiated enhancements that have led us to NAEYC Accreditation (almost there). New teachers don't even know our old standards. Our environment and veteran teachers model a superior way of teaching. New teachers' scores are higher than the old scores of great teachers from "yesterday"!*

The directors provided many suggestions that we will consider as we plan for the future, such as: inviting directors who've completed the Quality Leadership Institute to return and speak to the next cohort, assigning QLI "homework" or required reading, bringing directors together more often, shortening the time between assessments and feedback, being more "brutally honest" in our feedbacks, supporting assistant teachers with coaching, some kind of ongoing training in a context similar to QLI for more seasoned teachers, more trainings and workshops, providing a menu of in-service sessions for programs, and offering summer HighScope training.

Is the Early Years Count making a difference? We are sure of it.

The Early Years Count: An integrated system focused on quality

