



The Early Years Count!

Education Initiative
of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County

The year has whizzed by, filled with the implementation of new initiatives and the expansion of established projects, with assessing and coaching, with a few challenges and many successes. Quality continues to improve and stabilize, ensuring that early childhood programs will provide the quality care and education that show the best child outcomes. Through the Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP) and workshops, we have been fortunate this year to have impacted the lives of over 2,250 children in St. Joseph County, some in programs that had not had the benefit of focused staff development. We continue to find teachers open and eager to learn more and to do better for children. They repeatedly thank us, and the Community Foundation, for the resources they have received.

Children who attend Head Start are the lucky ones.

Results of the Dibels, an assessment given at kindergarten entry to measure a child's readiness to begin formal reading instruction, indicated that Head Start children who started kindergarten in the fall of 2011 began school more prepared than children who are not in Head Start but live in low-income families. Further, it appears that the gap between Head Start children and children from middle-income (or higher) families may be closing. Charts showing these compared scores are included in the separate data section of this report.

Head Start teachers were thrilled to hear of these results. One teacher stated that, if they could get children this close, they were within reach of closing the gap, a possibility that she found tremendously motivating. Many teachers told us that it was our work with them that has enabled them to help the children to this degree.

However, there's still work to be done. The Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) scores from the fall of 2011 showed that in a few categories the early literacy teaching strategies of even the Head Start teachers are not where they need to be. As a result, we implemented a new training model at Head Start and we are hopeful that Head Start children who enter kindergarten in 2012 will do even better.

Literacy instruction isn't the whole of it by any means; Head Start teachers continue to demonstrate some of the highest quality in early childhood classrooms in this county. But not all eligible children attend Head Start. While that program serves approximately 375 South Bend children, the average number on the waiting list this school year was 300. Where are those children? And what about the children in families who do not apply to Head Start? What kind of early childhood experiences are they having?

Some of these children attend programs that have partnered with us in the Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP). Beginning in the fall of 2011, we began a Community Literacy project with teachers of four and five year olds from seven programs. This project used the training model developed for Head Start, with three group workshops combined with one-on-one coaching. We also focused all our sessions with the registered ministries of the Village on early literacy "how to's," from reading books to bolstering vocabulary development. More details on these projects are included in the short summary below.

Every year we look for ways to expand our reach to programs serving low-income children. This year, for example we started working with homes and we recruited more registered ministries to join the Village.

And the public schools beckon. In a very recent conversation, Dr. Carole Schmidt, the new superintendent of South Bend Schools, expressed her excitement about the possibility of developing a transition project between the public schools and area child care programs. A project with several false starts in the past, our hope for its development was renewed by Dr. Schmidt's interest and energy.

At the same time, we continue serving programs through ECAP. Teacher turnover in the early childhood workforce ensures that there will always be new teachers to train and coach. New research informs our work so that we often have new strategies to pass along to teachers and new information to translate from research to practice. Further, the education landscape continues to shift. Indiana has adopted the federal Common Core State Standards for K-12, raising the bar for what children must know before they walk into school. This, of course, also raises the bar for what early childhood teachers must know and do. Teachers who are not continually learning and striving to improve quality will not be equipped to build the social, emotional, physical and cognitive foundations children need for success in school and beyond.

Every day we are awed by the dedication of teachers to improve, the openness of directors to talk about and tackle their very real challenges, and the wealth of new information and research that becomes available. Despite these, a wide gulf remains between early childhood educators who are making a difference and those who've just begun their learning journey. Closing that divide is the ongoing mission of Early Years Count. What follows is a short summary of the work we have been doing this past year to make that happen.

◆ **HighScope:** Teachers and directors continue to take 120 hours of training on the HighScope Preschool Curriculum. Twenty-five completed the Ivy Tech course during the 2011-12 school year. At least 22 more early childhood educators will receive training this summer, bringing the total trained to 550.

➤ *Hope4Kids, the early childhood program for homeless families at Hope Ministries, is set to become St. Joseph County's first fully certified HighScope program—one of the highest standards of early childhood excellence.*

◆ **ECAP:** The Early Childhood Assessment Project—the mainstay of our quest for quality—has grown in numbers of programs involved (24) and teachers participating (89). By summer's end, we will have conducted over 136 assessments, awarded over 89 mini-grants and conducted over 400 coaching sessions since last year.

We again saw growth in the overall Program Quality Assessment (PQA) scores of directors and teachers. There continues to be a big difference between scores for teachers and directors new to ECAP when compared with scores for returning teachers and directors. Most of our goals were met; ELLCO (Early Language and Literacy Classroom Assessment) still picks up the challenges that teachers face, especially with efforts to build vocabulary and phonological awareness. We addressed this lack of growth through the literacy training described under Head Start and Community Literacy below. Assessment data is included in a separate section of this report.

➤ *"I would like some mentoring on literacy and ways to help encourage the children in reading and writing. I would also like some help with team teaching and logically located interest areas." —mini-grant from teacher*

"I would like to work on my teacher observation and feedback." —mini-grant from director

◆ **Head Start:** Our staff development for Head Start teachers this year ran along two tracks—one for early literacy and one for math. We held four group workshops over the course of the year, two for literacy and two for training in the HighScope Numbers Plus curriculum. The early literacy curriculum focused on book reading, vocabulary development and phonemic awareness. Training in Numbers Plus highlighted teaching numbers and geometry. Teachers did two math and two literacy activities that were videotaped and reviewed by coaches, who then met individually with each teacher to talk about the activity and how it went. Teachers reflected on their teaching techniques and made plans for further growth.

➤ *Initially teachers did not want to be videotaped, an understandable reaction. When the teachers watched their tapes, however, they were engrossed, amazed at what they noticed about children when they themselves were not immersed in the action. Each teacher wanted to keep her tape so she could watch it again; some planned to videotape their classrooms for their own use. Watching the tapes with the teachers made it easy to point out how differently children used the materials and how they could individualize learning for each child.*

◆ **Community literacy:** We met three times with a group of ten preschool teachers from eight programs to provide training on early literacy. We focused on the use of book reading to develop language, expand vocabulary, and strengthen children's phonemic awareness. Each teacher received a copy of the book that was central to each workshop. In between each training, we met individually with teachers, observing them as they carried out assignments that were designed to demonstrate their understanding and application of what had been covered in the workshop. We then followed up with each teacher to talk about our observations and to make suggestions. In some instances we planned a second observation on a topic if the original observation uncovered a lack of understanding.

➤ *One advantage of bringing teachers together is that they make connections among themselves and learn from each other. During a recent coaching session, one teacher said that she enjoyed hearing another teacher in the community literacy group talk about what she did in her classroom and would like to observe her. Watching another teacher is a powerful learning experience. As we build capacity among teachers in our community, we are able to facilitate more of these exchanges.*

◆ **Registered ministries:** The "Village," which includes participants from registered ministries that serve primarily African American children from low income families, has expanded its reach and continues to meet monthly, September through May. Nefertiti Bruce, a trainer from the Devereux Foundation, presented two sessions on resiliency for teachers and children. The other sessions have focused like a laser on teaching early literacy through book reading. Participants have an opportunity to practice what they've been taught, learn how to tie each story to music and movement, and leave each session with a book and a full implementation plan on how to use it in the classroom. After many of the sessions, they could also choose to have a site visit with Chris Rodda, a dance instructor who demonstrates with the children the music and movement activities.

Registered ministries in the Village are also now a part of ECAP, the Early Childhood Assessment Project. Through ECAP, each teacher receives a Program Quality Assessment with feedback and coaching, along with materials for the classroom. Most classrooms in the ministries new to the Village are severely lacking even basics such as blocks and quality books for children. Some have broken cribs and almost all have cribs that will be out of safety compliance regulations by the end of the year.

➤ *Because the Village is made up of ministries, we always circle up for an opening prayer led by one of the directors. We routinely hear "...and thank you God for the funders who help bring this good information to us every month."*

◆ **Home providers:** This year we extended the Early Years Count reach to home providers. Recruiting was done throughout the fall. To establish relationships and build trust, at least two visits were made to each home before the “Better Together” workshop series began. Starting in January, 25 caregivers from 11 homes participate in monthly trainings on the HighScope Curriculum for Home Providers at the Robinson Community Learning Center. In between the sessions, on-site visits are made to each home where an activity is demonstrated and materials and instructions are left. An assessment designed for home providers is being conducted in each of the homes to track growth in quality. Once assessments and feedback are completed, home providers will receive extended coaching and materials to further quality.

► *Monday morning staff meeting—coming together looking forward to solving the problems of the world... We think, rethink, and then think again. What can be done to help? Are things changing for the better? Do they get it? These are just a few of the mind-boggling questions we ask ourselves. As I set out for the day, I'm able to answer a few of these questions. I'm at one of our home daycare providers that has allowed the Early Years Count to become an intricate part of their program. They invite us into their home; they introduce us to their children and any parents that may be around. This is the chance I have been waiting for, now it all makes sense—we can change the world, one child at a time, one program at a time. An activity has been thoughtfully planned out to do with the children. We want to Engage, Encourage, and Inspire the children, the home provider, and parents that come and go. Did we save the world? Time will tell. I'm not sure if the little boy next to me that was allowed to show initiative by creating his own ideas with the materials that we gave to him will be a CEO of some company or a statistic by grade 3 because he lacked materials and opportunities in his earlier care. Therefore we have to keep thinking, rethinking and thinking again because it does matter; things are changing for the better, and yes eventually they do get it! There is no stopping, even if we hit a brick wall, even if they don't return our call. Everyone gets a chance.*

—Virgie Smith, former teacher in the Village, now on the Early Years Count staff

◆ **Other workshops:** In addition to a previously reported full-day presentation on “Bullying—Can it Exist in Preschool?” and “Conflict Resolution” in the fall of 2011, we have worked on several other workshops open to the community this year. In early March, we invited a representative from the IN Department of Education to speak to 39 directors and others about Indiana’s adoption of Common Core State Standards in K – 12 and the implications that might have on early childhood programs. In late March, we joined forces with the Early Childhood Professionals of Northern Indiana to sponsor nationally-known speaker Michael Brandwein, who presented a day-long workshop on communication with children, colleagues and parents for over 300 participants. In April, we presented “When Push Comes to Shove” for 73 teachers of infants and toddlers. This June, we will run a HighScope refresher on outside play. These workshops help us extend our reach—83 teachers from over 18 programs not yet a part of ECAP, Better Together, or the Village attended at least once.

► *“I enjoyed this class so very much. I almost felt like I was in church a few times...That was so refreshing.”* —Participant, When Push Comes to Shove

◆ **Taking Charge of Change:** The 7th of nine sessions based on a curriculum from the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership was held in mid-April with a focus on staff development. After the full day trainings, a 2-hour follow-up discussion is held the next month. In addition, each director in TCC is has developed an action plan and receives ongoing coaching.

► *Leslie Kleppe, director of East Bank Learning Center, was recognized as Hoosier Educator of the Year for Preschool & Early Elementary at the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children state conference in April. Leslie has been a participant in Taking Charge of Change. She attributes her involvement with this, along with ECAP and other Early Years Count trainings and support for much of her success.*

Head Start is making a difference.

This year, the Dibels and mCLASS Math assessments were given at the beginning of the year to all incoming kindergarteners in the South Bend schools. Dibels assesses a child's readiness to begin formal reading instruction. Access to this data made it possible for us to compare Head Start children with other children in the Corporation.

Here's what we found:

➤ Head Start children came in more prepared to start school than children from low-income families who are not in Head Start.

The following chart compares scores for English-speaking children from low-income families who attended Head Start and who did not attend Head Start. (Low-income determined by free-lunch status.)

Assessment	Component	In Head Start	Not in Head Start
Dibels*	Dibels Comprehensive Score	32.23	23.65
Dibels*	First Sound Fluency	11.77	9.71
Dibels*	Letter Naming Fluency	20.46	13.94
mCLASS Math**	Number Identification	13.63	10.38
mCLASS Math**	Quantity Discrimination	13.69	11.01
mCLASS Math**	Counting Score	46.11	36.88
mCLASS Math**	Missing Number	4.59	3.17

➤ The gap is closing between Head Start children and children from middle-income (or higher) families

The following chart compares scores between English-speaking children who attended Head Start and children from middle-income (or higher) families. (Middle-income or higher determined by paid-lunch status.)

Assessment	Component	Head Start students	Middle income students
Dibels*	Dibels Comprehensive Score	32.23	34.75
Dibels*	First Sound Fluency	11.77	14.58
Dibels*	Letter Naming Fluency	20.46	20.17
mCLASS Math**	Number Identification	13.63	14.25
mCLASS Math**	Quantity Discrimination	13.69	13.96
mCLASS Math**	Counting Score	46.11	44.77
mCLASS Math**	Missing Number	4.59	5.23

*Benchmarks for Dibels at the beginning of kindergarten:

- for the **Comprehensive Score**, children who score a 26 or higher have "the odds in their favor" to achieve later reading outcomes, with good elementary instruction. The cut point for risk is below 13, so children who score 0 - 12 are unlikely to achieve subsequent goals without receiving additional, targeted *intensive* instructional support. Future performance is harder to predict for children who score below the benchmark but above the cut point for risk (13 - 25). These students are likely to need *strategic* support.
- **1st Sound Fluency** scores are defined similar to above, but the range of scores is different, with 10 or higher designated as the benchmark, cut point for risk below 5, and below benchmark 5 - 9.
- there is no benchmark set for the **Letter Naming Fluency**, since this, in itself, is not a separate learning target. However, the scores for both this assessment and 1st Sound Fluency are used for the Composite Score.

**mCLASS Math assigns 3 levels to the scores:

Deficit - far below benchmark expectations; thorough instructional support is recommended

Emerging - Advancing toward benchmark expectations; heightened instructional support is recommended

Established - Meets or exceeds benchmark expectations; current instructional support is sufficient

- For the **Counting Score**, established is 60 or more; emerging 20 - 59; deficit 0 - 19. [The new Common Core Standards that IN has just adopted aim for children to count to 30 by the end of the first 45 days of K.]
- For **Number identification**, established is 20 or more; emerging 3 - 19; deficit 0 - 2. [Common Core first 45 day goal for K is 10.]
- For **Quantity Discrimination**, established is 20 or more; emerging 5 - 19; deficit 0 - 4
- For **Missing Number**, Established is 7 or more; emerging 1 - 6