

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 the Early Years Count Education Initiative of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County 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 following graphic provides a glimpse of the inter-relationship between entities within the Early Years Count system.

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