

The Early Years Count!

an Education Initiative of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, Inc.

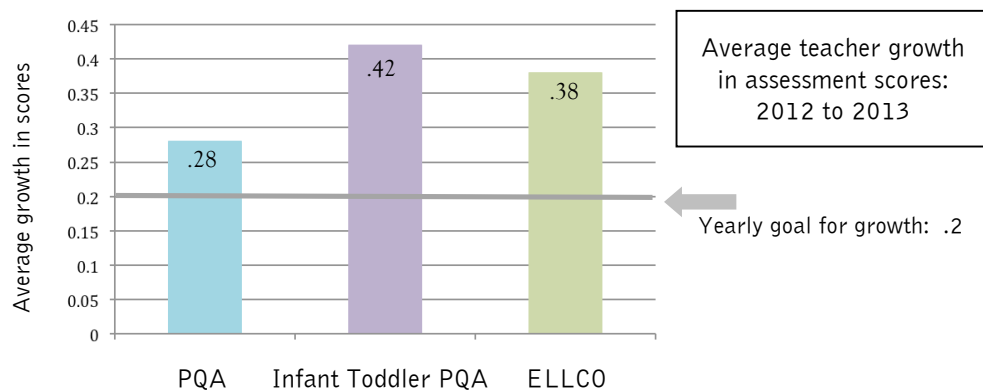
*High quality early childhood programs
are a high quality investment in 2,695 children this year*

It has been a landmark year for growth in quality. Early childhood programs appear to have a more focused vision on excellence and are making strong strides towards their goals. This summary hits some of the highlights that give the Early Years Count Education Initiative reason to celebrate.

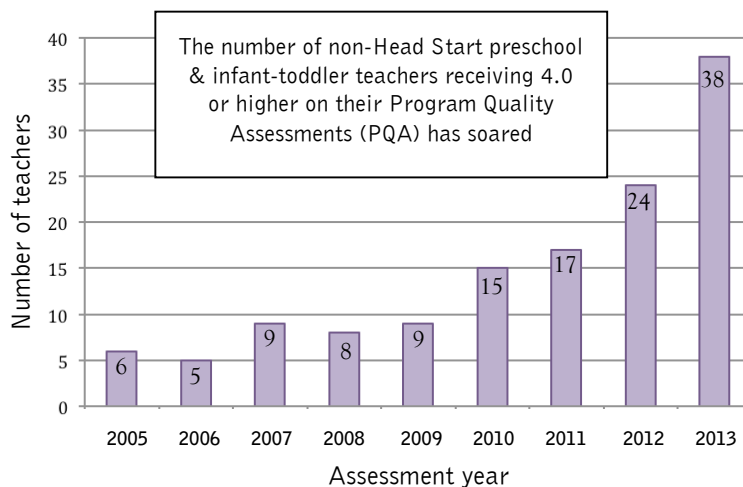
The Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP): *The combination of training, assessment, and support is a clear pathway to higher quality.*

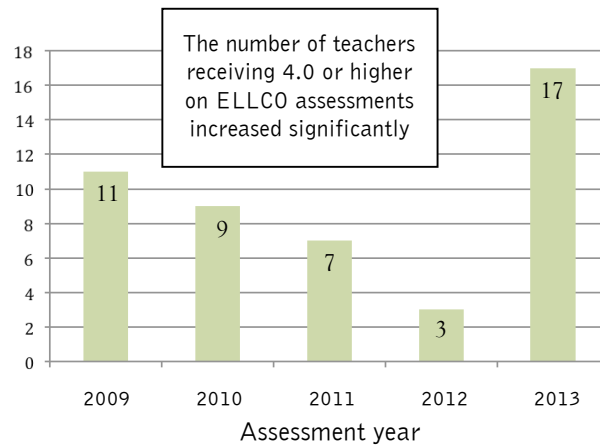
The use of assessments to guide teacher and program quality has proven to be a successful strategy for growth. This fall, over 180 assessments were conducted on teachers in centers, ministries, homes, preschools, Head Start, and kindergarten and first grade classrooms, and on their programs as well.

One of our goals for growth is to have teachers' scores increase by .2 from one year to the next. This year, strong evidence of growth was shown through Program Quality Assessment (PQA) and Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) scores that well surpassed our goals.



Another way to look at the growth in quality is to compare the actual numbers of teachers achieving a 4.0 or higher on their assessments. This year, the numbers soared for both PQA and ELLCO. The chart at the right shows the number of teachers in community programs scoring a 4.0 or higher on their PQA by year. ELLCO growth is shown on the following page.





Head Start: *Children at-risk are the biggest beneficiaries of high quality early childhood programs.*

Maintaining a high quality Head Start program continues to be the single-most significant way to impact the lives of young children from low income families in our community. Each year, Head Start serves 557 children from birth to age five in St. Joseph County, and every year that a child spends in Head Start helps to close the learning gap.

While Head Start remains a key component of the Early Years Count Education Initiative, they now contribute significantly to the funding for assessments, training and other professional development services. This investment helps to extend the work of Early Years Count.

❖ CLASS (Classroom Assessment and Scoring System) is the instrument required for all Head Starts to measure teacher effectiveness. The assessment looks at three domains (emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support) using very specific indicators. Prior to this year, CLASS had been handled internally at Head Start. The Early Years Count team is now conducting this assessment and giving teacher feedback two times per year (fall and winter). This move was highly embraced by both staff and administration.

❖ ELLCO (Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation) assessments were conducted in the fall on all Head Start lead teachers. For the first time, average ELLCO scores for Head Start teachers exceeded 4.0 on a 5 point scale—a strong indicator that focused early literacy training and individualized coaching are working.

Year	Average ELLCO Score
2011	3.61
2012	3.68
2013	4.06

❖ PQAs (Program Quality Assessments) were conducted this fall for the first time on all Head Start assistant teachers. Assistant teachers play a critical role in the Head Start classroom—each day they lead small groups, partner in play with children, take anecdotal notes, and help with planning. One-on-one feedback helped teachers see their strengths and zero in on areas of focus for professional development. Assistant teacher PQA scores averaged 4.11 out of 5—a strong showing for a first-time assessment.

❖ Using their assessment scores, each Head Start teacher and assistant sets goals for an individualized professional development plan. They are provided training and coaching based on these plans.

HighScope: *A strong curriculum sets a high bar for quality throughout our community.*

HighScope was chosen because of its national recognition as a high quality curriculum, its in-depth teacher training, its strong evaluation component, and its solid research.

- ❖ In 2001, Head Start, working in collaboration with the Early Years Count, was the first program in St. Joseph County to embrace HighScope. Today, 21 programs identify HighScope as their curriculum.
- ❖ HighScope-trained teachers and directors in our community now number over 570. Training through Ivy Tech is ongoing; the current HighScope class includes six Early Years Count scholarship recipients from five programs.
- ❖ A HighScope Infant-Toddler Training series (71.5 hours) was conducted this past summer for 15 teachers. For the first time, this training was done by the Early Years Count team rather than through the HighScope Educational Foundation.
- ❖ One way to recognize teacher excellence is through HighScope certification. Six teachers were certified in the past year, bringing the total number of teachers who have been certified in St. Joseph County to 20 in eight different programs. Up to 19 more teachers scored high enough on their Program Quality Assessments to begin working on certification this year, including all eight Early Head Start teachers. Re-certification PQAs will be done this spring for seven Head Start preschool teachers.

New Programs: *Starting out with the destination in clear focus gives a jumpstart to high quality.*

When new programs begin with a vision of becoming a high quality HighScope program, progress towards that goal goes more quickly. Hope4Kids did just that and in 2012 became the first HighScope certified program in St. Joseph County.

- ❖ Within the past two years, three more HighScope-committed programs have opened (The Early Learning Center at Granger Community Church, Discoveries Infant Toddler Center, and St. Joseph Preschool). Even though they are new, their teachers' Program Quality Assessment scores already are higher than the community norm (4.33 for these new programs vs. 4.13 for all others).
- ❖ Two additional HighScope early childhood programs are planning to open on the west side of South Bend this year. One director has already completed HighScope training; the other has just begun.

South Bend Community Schools: *Carrying high quality concepts into primary schools strengthens the long-term outcomes for children.*

An Early Years Count pilot program in five primary schools (Harrison, Hay, McKinley, Monroe, and Warren) began this past year. This project brings the successful formula of assessment, training, and support to the elementary level.

❖ Kindergarten and first grade teachers received CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) assessments and feedback (both written and verbal) in the spring and again in the fall of 2013 (37 teachers in spring, 42 teachers in the fall). These assessments will be ongoing, with another round scheduled for April 2014. As training expands to additional grade levels, CLASS assessments will be added for these teachers as well.

❖ Training in the Northeast Education Foundation's *Responsive Classroom*, an approach that is complimentary to HighScope, was started in August with additional training days in September, October and February of this school year. Kindergarten and first grade teachers, coaches, and principals from the 5 pilot schools attended the 5 days of phase one training. Next summer, this group will begin the second phase of Responsive Classroom training, while upper primary grade teachers (2nd – 4th) will begin their phase one training.

❖ Principals at two additional schools, Perley and Madison, are eager to join this pilot group.

Other support: *Teachers are eager to learn through ongoing training, individual coaching, and the sharing of information.*

❖ Over 60 teachers and directors attended an Early Years Count workshop in October on *Intentional Teaching* that was presented by Tracy Mercier, trainer for Responsive Classroom.

❖ A third round of *Community Literacy* began in late fall. This series of three focused workshops on vocabulary, phonological awareness and talking includes onsite teacher observations and feedback following each workshop session.

❖ A *Harrison/Head Start transition team*, facilitated by the Early Years Count, is developing a model for smooth transitions from preschool to kindergarten, including the transfer of information from Head Start to primary schools in a useful, timely manner. A reception was held in late fall at Harrison that brought kindergarten and Head Start teachers together for the first time. Head Start teachers gave a short presentation about their approach to learning in preschool followed by table discussions.

❖ Planning for a *Teacher Share Fair* is underway. HighScope certified teachers have been invited to share their classroom strategies with others through displays and/or demonstrations in early spring.

❖ Head Start teachers requested training on the developmental characteristics of three-year-olds. This training was held in January and will be repeated for teachers in other early childhood programs this spring.

❖ *Taking Charge of Change* will begin soon for a new cohort of early childhood directors. This 120-hour training series uses a curriculum from the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. The first group of directors shared their exit projects last spring and gave the workshops high praise.

❖ Mini-grants for coaching and materials are currently being processed; up to 72 will be awarded to teachers and directors in the coming months.