



# The Early Years Count

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

## Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP)

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **What is the Early Childhood Assessment Project?**

The Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP) is a part of the Early Years Count! Education Initiative of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County. The goal of ECAP is to raise quality in early childhood centers, ministries, preschools and homes.

#### **What does my program gain from ECAP?**

Lots! Classroom assessments provide helpful feedback about the strengths and challenges of your program. Through “mini-grants,” teachers can get support through coaching and materials. There is no cost to you or your program.

#### **What kind of commitment is required?**

The desire and will to improve quality. Our Early Years Count goals are to raise quality for each teacher by at least .2 each year, to bring the community as a whole to an average score of 4.0, and to help individual teachers reach a 4.5 on the PQA.

#### **How do the classroom assessments work?**

Each year, an assessment is done on one lead teacher in each classroom. The assessor is there for about four hours and will stay in the background as much as possible. The assessor will need about 15-20 minutes to interview the teacher at some time during the assessment when children are not present.

#### **What assessment tools are used?**

The **Program Quality Assessment (PQA)** is our primary assessment tool. There are versions for preschool, infants and toddlers, homes, and program directors. The PQA is used throughout the United States to assess quality. It measures adult-child interactions, the learning environment, daily routine, and curriculum in the classroom, and family involvement, staff qualifications and development, and program management for directors.

Teachers who have been in ECAP for at least one year may also receive an Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO).

#### **Who are the assessors?**

The assessors who work with the Early Years Count are trained in conducting the assessments we use, maintain reliability, and are involved locally in efforts to strengthen and enhance early childhood program quality.

#### **How—and with whom—are results shared?**

Assessment scores, along with the booklets, are shared with the individual teacher whose classroom was assessed. Directors will receive copies of all teacher score sheets. *Individual scores will not be identified by program beyond your center, ministry, preschool, or home.* However, results from participating programs may be combined for a yearly report to the funders and/or the community.

#### **What does the classroom teacher need to do?**

The classroom teacher simply needs to welcome the assessor into the classroom and follow the regular daily routine. The assessor will ask to see lesson plans, the weekly menu, and anecdotal notes, if available. Other than that, no special preparations are necessary. The day should be a typical day. If the teacher is sick on the day of the assessment, she (or the director) should contact the assessor asap so that an unnecessary trip is not made.

#### **What if the scores are low?**

It's pretty common for teachers or programs to score low in the beginning. Occasionally, a teacher's scores may drop from one year to the next. However, if teachers are committed to quality improvement, their scores should steadily improve.

#### **How do the mini-grants work?**

Mini-grants for materials and coaching are available to address areas shown by each assessment as needing improvement. Mini-grants are available to classroom teachers as well as program directors. The application is simple and straightforward. It includes setting goals for assessment scores and tying requests for coaching and/or materials directly to these goals. Rarely, a mini-grant will be withheld if a teacher or program has participated in ECAP more than two years and has shown little or no growth.

#### **What do I have to do to participate?**

Just fill in the enclosed application and return to the Early Years Count, 132 N. Lafayette Blvd. South Bend IN 46601 or fax to 237-1071.

The ECAP assessment schedules are staggered by program, beginning in September and running through April. Our intent is to provide feedback and the mini-grant opportunity within two to three weeks of the assessment observation.