

The Early Years Count!

The Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, Inc.

September 2005

A Commitment to Quality

The Early Years Count!
is an initiative of the

**COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
OF ST. JOSEPH
COUNTY**

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The Early Years Count!
is funded in part through a grant
from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

It's not rocket science...

It's harder. And it's more
important for our future.

For years, scientists have been
exploring the intricacies of brain
development in young children.
Recent research has generated
new understandings that have
clear, practical implications.

We've learned that brain
development is strongly influenced
by the interactions children have
with their surrounding environments—with people, materials, and ideas.
In the early years, when children are developing at lightening speed, these
interactions are critical to long-term outcomes.

That's why quality early childhood education and care matters. It's also why
the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, Inc. has committed over
\$6,000,000 to quality through its **Early Years Count!** initiative since 2001.

Research from longitudinal studies such as the Abecedarian Project, the
Chicago Parent Child Centers, and the Perry Preschool Project makes it clear
that high-quality early childhood programs have positive results for children
and communities, with children from low income families benefiting the most.

Yet findings from a new Needs Assessment of Early Childhood Care and
Education in St. Joseph County confirm that our community still has a long way
to travel on the road to quality. Highlights from the needs assessment, which
was conducted with major funding support from the Community Foundation of
St. Joseph County, Inc., are included in this report. The full needs assessment is
available on the Community Foundation's web site: <[http://www.cfsjc.org/
publications/research.cfm](http://www.cfsjc.org/publications/research.cfm)>

Fortunately, research shines a bright light on the road ahead, illuminating not
only the "why"—*why* we must move forward, but also the "how"—*how* we can
improve early childhood environments.

Inside these pages, you'll find strong evidence on the *why*. You'll also discover
how the Community Foundation is working to improve early childhood
environments in our community and to make **The Early Years Count!**

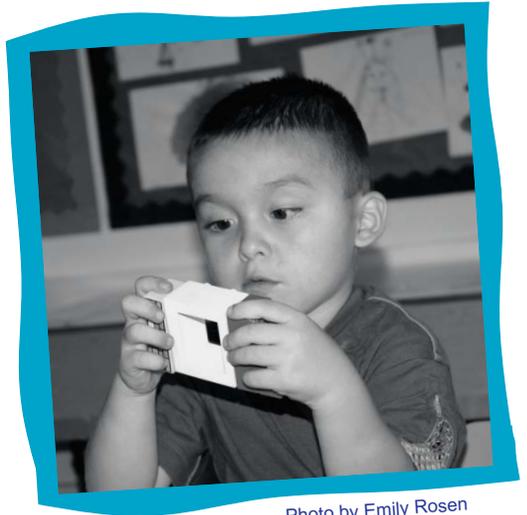


Photo by Emily Rosen



Why quality matters

Research from numerous longitudinal studies shows that high-quality early childhood programs have positive results for children and communities. For 40 years, the Perry Preschool study has followed two groups of African Americans from low-income families. One group attended a high-quality preschool; the other did not.

Among the findings:

■ **IMPROVED PERFORMANCE.** Those who received high quality early education on average outperformed the non-program group on intellectual and language tests during childhood, on school achievement tests between ages 9 and 14, and on literacy tests at ages 19 and 27.

■ **HIGHER GRADUATION RATES.** More of the group in high quality early education graduated from high school than the non-program group (65% vs. 45%), particularly females (84% vs. 32%).

■ **HIGHER EARNINGS.** The group who received high quality early education had median annual earnings more than \$5,000 higher than the non-program group.

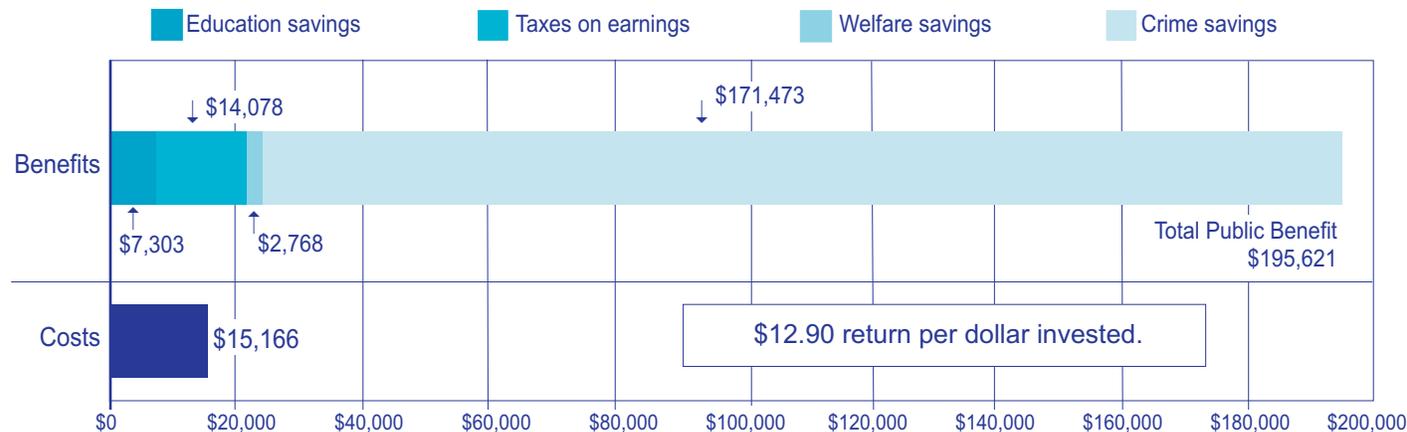
■ **GREATER EMPLOYMENT.** More of the group who received high quality early education than the non-program group were employed at age 40 (76% vs. 62%).

■ **LESS CRIME.** Significantly fewer members of the group who received high quality early care were ever arrested for violent crimes (32% vs. 48%).

Some economists maintain that quality early childhood education should top the list of economic development because outcomes translate into significant savings (see chart below). Lower crime rates, for example, bring down criminal justice costs. According to the economic analysis of the Perry Preschool 40 Year Study, the public benefit-cost ratio was documented at \$12.90 return per dollar.

While these figures are very compelling for communities, the benefits for individuals are beyond measure. Quality early childhood education is, indeed, a lifesaver—the silver bullet—with the greatest impact for the children needing it most.

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40 by Larry Schweinhart, PhD, is available online at: www.highscope.org





Quality Teachers

“Quality early education programs have teachers with formal education and specialized early childhood training...”

—National Association for the Education of Young Children

★ What research tell us:

ONE KEY TO PROGRAM QUALITY IS AN EDUCATED STAFF—those with Bachelor’s or advanced degrees in early childhood education, Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials, and other certificates, licenses and credentials. Many studies have confirmed this finding, including the Head Start FACES 2000 study (May 2003), which showed that Head Start teachers with higher levels of education tended to be in classrooms rated higher on quality indicators.

★ Findings from the needs assessment:

TOO MANY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS HAVE TOO FEW TEACHERS WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD CREDENTIALS. In the 30 licensed centers and registered ministries responding to the needs assessment survey,

- only two teachers hold a bachelor degree in early childhood education,
- 18 programs have no teachers with a bachelor degree in any field, and
- 38% of teachers in licensed centers and 56% of teachers in registered ministries have a high school diploma as their highest degree.

★ Community Foundation action:

Since the beginning of its **Early Years Count!** initiative in 2001, the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, Inc. (CFSJC) has been deeply committed to furthering teacher quality.

■ **TRAINING IN THE HIGH/SCOPE CURRICULUM.** Through CFSJC funding, more than 240 preschool teachers and assistants have received training in High/Scope, a research-based, high-quality approach to early childhood education. Funding for High/Scope training will be available at least through 2007. CFSJC also worked with Indiana University South Bend and Ivy Tech Community College to give academic credit for High/Scope training.

■ **MENTORING.** Knowledge does not automatically translate into behavior change, however. It takes time and ongoing support for teachers to put theory into practice in their classrooms. A CFSJC-funded mentoring program for sixty teachers through IUSB has just concluded. Starting this fall, teachers can receive mentoring through CFSJC-sponsored grants tied to program assessment.

■ **HIGH/SCOPE TEACHER CERTIFICATION.** One indicator of teacher quality is certification in High/Scope. CFSJC encourages teacher certification and actively supports teachers trained in High/Scope to meet the standards required to complete the certification process. Eight teachers received this status in 2005.

■ **SCHOLARSHIPS.** Another aspect of CFSJC’s strategy to improve early childhood education quality in St. Joseph County is to strengthen community capacity to educate preschool teachers. To this end, the CFSJC awarded “Champions for Early Childhood Education” scholarships to nine Master-level students in 2004 to enlarge the pool of instructors qualified to teach in local colleges and universities.



Quality Curriculum

“Curriculum is more than a collection of enjoyable activities.”

—National Association for the Education of Young Children

★ What research tells us:

AN ESSENTIAL TOOL IN A HIGH-QUALITY CLASSROOM IS A CURRICULUM MODEL—a set of education practices supported by child development research and educational evaluation. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), “Curriculum is more than a collection of enjoyable activities. *Curriculum* is a complex idea containing multiple components, such as goals, content, pedagogy, or instructional practices.”

A good curriculum model provides a guide to setting up the physical environment, structuring activities, interacting with children and their families, and supporting staff in their initial training and ongoing implementation of the program.

A quality early childhood curriculum model is developmentally-appropriate and comprehensive, not only taking into account cognitive challenges, but also supporting social and emotional competence and positive attitudes or approaches to learning. In addition, a quality curriculum provides cultural and linguistic continuity for young children and their families.

While there is no one “best” curriculum, indicators of effectiveness include:

- children who are active and engaged;
- goals that are clear and shared by all;
- a curriculum that is evidence-based;
- content that is learned through investigation, play, and focused, intentional teaching; and
- a curriculum that builds on prior learning and experiences.

★ Findings from the needs assessment:

MANY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS USE NO CURRICULUM AT ALL; FEW USE A CURRICULUM BASED ON RESEARCH ABOUT HOW CHILDREN LEARN. While a majority of programs responding to the needs assessment survey say that they use a curriculum, few indicate one that is research-based.

Those who identified a research-based curriculum model include:

- 6 of 19 licensed centers (32%);
- 1 of 11 registered ministries (9%);
- 2 of 44 home providers (5%); and
- 5 of 11 preschools—including Head Start—(45%).

★ Community Foundation action:

The impact of the CFSJC’s Early Years Count! initiative on curriculum is evident in the needs assessment survey responses. Of the 14 programs that report using a research-based curriculum model, 9 (64%), including Head Start, are using High/Scope, a high quality, research-based approach to working with young children. The implementation of High/Scope is a direct result of CFSJC’s work over the past five years, not only through extensive training and mentoring, but also through ongoing recruitment and relationships built over time with directors of early childhood education programs in the county.

- TRAINING OF TRAINERS. To insure that the High/Scope approach remains a viable curriculum option for early childhood providers in our community, the CFSJC is sponsoring a second High/Scope “Training of Trainers” in Fall 2005 to increase the number of instructors available locally to teach and mentor in the High/Scope method.

Quality Evaluations

“The primary purpose of evaluating early childhood programs is to improve the quality of education and other services provided to young children and their families.”

—National Association for the Education of Young Children

★ What research tells us:

AN OBJECTIVE, RESEARCH-BASED PROGRAM EVALUATION IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO MEASURE QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS. Studies clearly show that high-quality early childhood programs have a long-lasting positive impact on children. Research also tells us what quality looks like. Conducting a thorough, valid program evaluation helps programs measure their quality. Through an evaluation, programs learn what is going well and what they could be doing better. Evaluations can be used as an effective training tool, since detailed indicators reflect best practices in all aspects of program implementation. In addition, evaluations can provide a non-threatening platform for growth when used in combination with feedback, planning, and mentoring or other support systems.

★ Findings from the needs assessment:

FEW EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND HOME PROVIDERS USE A RESEARCH-BASED AND VALIDATED PROGRAM EVALUATION. Based on survey responses, only about a quarter of licensed centers, a tenth of registered ministries, one in twenty home providers, and half of preschools use a valid, research-based program evaluation. Those who do include:

- 5 of 19 licensed centers (26%)
- 1 of 11 registered ministries (9%)
- 2 of 44 home providers (5%); and
- 5 of 11 preschools—including Head Start (45%).

★ Community Foundation action:

Additional funding from the Lilly Endowment opens the door to CFSJC’s newest early childhood endeavor under **The Early Years Count!** initiative.

- **EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSESSMENT PROJECT (ECAP)** brings free Program Quality Assessments (PQAs) conducted by trained evaluators to at least 37 classrooms in centers and ministries in St. Joseph County, including Head Start.

Individual classroom and program results will be provided to centers and ministries for their own use; combined assessment scores will be reported to the community on a yearly basis to track progress.

Along with the program assessments, mini-grants will be offered to classroom teachers and program directors to help them focus on areas in need of improvement. Mini-grants can be used for education, mentoring, and/or materials, as long as they are tied to a goal to increase specific assessment scores.

ECAP is modeled after a similar project in Rochester, New York, where the Children’s Institute and the University of Rochester have implemented an evaluation and quality improvement system involving over 170 classrooms annually since 1996 and the quality of early childhood programs has soared.



Other quality issues

★ What research tell us:

MANY ISSUES ADD TO THE COMPLEXITY OF QUALITY CARE AND EDUCATION. For example, research is showing both short- and long-term costs to children with problem behaviors. Nationally, there is a strong focus on early literacy, fueled by burgeoning research into how children learn to read. And research is clear on the critical importance of the parent in the life of a young child.

★ Findings from the needs assessment:

CHILDREN WITH VERY CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS, EARLY LITERACY, AND PARENTING SURFACED AS LOCAL ISSUES.

According to survey responses:

- most early childhood programs are serving children with very challenging behaviors; 74 percent of directors want training for themselves and their staff in working with these children;
- low priority was given to early literacy training; and

- when asked about trends they were seeing, one in three mentioned a decrease in parenting skills or parent involvement.

★ Community Foundation action:

- TWO-DAY INTENSIVE SEMINARS. During the next three years, CFSJC will offer a variety of focused trainings to address issues raised in the needs assessment, such as working with children with challenging behaviors and sharing information on the importance of early literacy.
- PARENTS AS TEACHERS. Funding from CFSJC will add an additional full time Parent Educator to Madison Center's Parents as Teachers staff to provide parenting information and support to Head Start parents in St. Joseph County.

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