

public engagement

Since the creation of the Metropolitan Council on Child Care (now known as the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning or MCEL) in 1989, the community infrastructure that supports quality improvements in early learning has grown dramatically. MCEL and its partners have contributed greatly to the following accomplishments:

- 1996: Creation of Partners in Quality.
- 1996: Expansion of a modest scholarship fund into the Fern Webster Professional Development initiative, which has since awarded over \$2 million in scholarships.
- 1997: Establishment of the Accreditation Fund and Accreditation Facilitation Project.
- 1998: Development of the Bistate Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals.
- 2001: Development and implementation of the Tri-County Smart Start Kansas project. Secured a \$1 million Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) Grant to expand compensation pilot and support quality improvement efforts in Missouri.
- 2002: Creation of the Early Learning Leadership Board, chartered by MARC.
- 2003: Award of two large federal grants, a second ELOA grant and a Department of Education Early Childhood Professional Development grant, totaling \$3.1 million over two years.
- 2003: Creation and management of Kansas City's pilot Quality Rating System.
- 2004: Creation of the Partners in Quality Policy and Evaluation Advisory Committee.



**To sustain progress . . .
there is a great need for
continuous and reliable
public funding.**

The successes in early learning in Greater Kansas City to date have been outstanding. MCEL has raised more than \$15 million for early childhood programs and initiatives since its inception. But there is still a great need for a continuous and reliable source of public funding for early learning improvements.

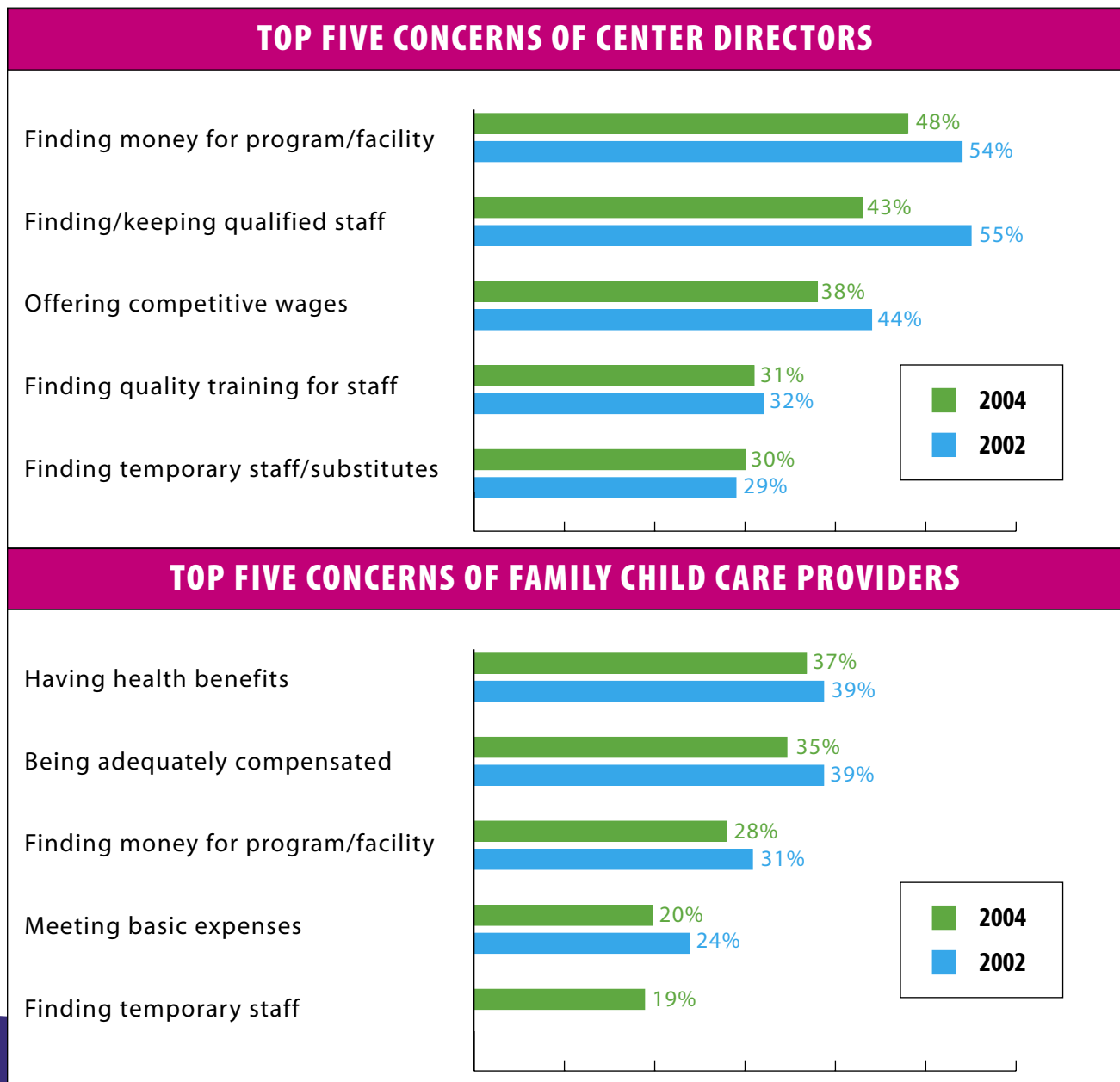
Many of the region's achievements in early learning are funded by finite grants. Existing public funds, the amounts families pay for services, and private contributions are not sufficient to sustain progress and achieve the goals set out by providers, families and the early learning community.

Unlike other sectors of education, families pay 60 percent of the total actual costs of early learning. This is dramatically different from the higher-education system

where parents contribute 23 percent, and K-12 education where parents contribute just 5 percent. Increased public funding for high-quality early learning programs that help children enter school prepared to succeed will decrease the financial burden on K-12 schools that must provide remedial services to children who are not prepared.

Early learning is an essential investment for a society that values an educated, quality workforce, but too few children currently have access to quality programs, and the number of quality programs is too low. Public financing, together with private funding, will increase the number of children who start their first day of kindergarten ready for success.

Concerns of center directors and family providers have decreased slightly over the past two years, but their concerns are still significant. The efforts of the early learning community must continue until these concerns are minimized and until EVERY child in the metropolitan area arrives at kindergarten prepared for school.



Planning and Policy

Partners in Quality Strategic Plan: 2004-2010

Public financing will help pay for early learning school-readiness goals set by Partners in Quality — an organization of community stakeholders from the public and private sectors that have made a commitment to support early learning in Greater Kansas City. The vision of Partners in Quality (PIQ) is to build a nationally unsurpassed early learning system, ensuring the success of all children in the community. PIQ’s mission is to engage a broad, influential group of Greater Kansas City organizations and individuals to design and implement a high-quality early learning system through individual commitment and collective action.

Partners in Quality Members

- 
- Administration for Children and Families,
U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
 - Bright Horizons-Citicorp Family Center
 - Children’s Place
 - Citi Cards
 - Civic Council of Greater Kansas City
 - Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph
 - Early Childhood Special Education
Directors’ Forum
 - Economic Opportunity Foundation Head Start
 - Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
 - Family Literacy Center Inc.
 - Francis Child Development Institute
 - Francis Families Foundation
 - Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce
 - Greater Kansas City Community Foundation
 - Hallmark Cards, Inc.
 - Head Start of Shawnee Mission Inc.
 - Healthy Steps
 - Heart of America United Way
 - HOMEFRONT
 - Independence School District
 - Kansas City Public Television Channel 19
 - Lee’s Summit Economic Development
 - Local Investment Commission
 - Maternal Child and Health Coalition
 - Metropolitan Community Colleges
 - Metropolitan Council on Early Learning
 - Mid-America Association of the Education of
Young Children
 - Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership
 - Midwest WholeChild Development Group
 - Parents as Teachers Consortium
 - Park University
 - Partnership for Children
 - Pembroke Hill School
 - Project EAGLE
 - Seton Center Family and Health Services
 - The Family Conservancy
 - Tri-County Smart Start Kansas Coalition
 - United Community Service of Johnson County
 - United Way of Wyandotte County
 - University of Missouri-Kansas City Family Studies
 - University of Missouri- Kansas City Institute for
Human Development
 - Wyandotte County Early Childhood Inter-Agency
Coordinating Council
 - YMCA of Greater Kansas City

By 2010, PIQ hopes to achieve the following goals:

Access to Quality

- Early learning programs — home- and center-based, for-profit and nonprofit — will have implemented research-proven curriculum, and will work in partnership with families and local school districts to ensure children arrive at school prepared to succeed.
- A well-established, metro-wide Quality Rating System will help families choose high-quality programs for their children. Quality ratings will determine family financial aid reimbursements to programs and operational reimbursements; higher-quality programs will receive higher reimbursements. Technical assistance will be available to programs to assist them in improving their quality ratings.
- The impact of increased investment on programs will be evaluated to ensure parent satisfaction. Program quality and children's readiness for school will be positively impacted, and continual improvement will occur as a result of the evaluations.
- Back-office administrative support will be available to support the business operations of programs and create a more efficient industry. This support could include billing, fee collection, accounting, auditing, overall fiscal management and purchasing pools for materials, services (janitorial, catering) and benefits and/or liability insurance.

Workforce Development

- Well-educated teachers and staff will work in all early learning programs. Directors and teachers will hold degrees and certificates in the field of early education. These professionals will receive competitive compensation and benefits packages so a competitive workforce can be recruited and retained.

Public Engagement

- A highly engaged and supportive public will encourage continued investments in early learning. Elected officials will include early learning as part of their platforms, and will work closely with Partners in Quality.
- New funding from the public and private sectors will be developed and dedicated to various components of the community's early learning system, including quality improvement, family support, resource and referral services, oversight, accountability and administration.

Support for Families

- Sufficient funding — through family fees, public funds and private investments — will be secured for parent education and quality programs for all families who choose to access them; resource and referral services; quality improvement initiatives.



Planning and Policy

Policy Platforms

In addition to the long-term priorities established each year, Partners in Quality works to sustain and create new public financing for early learning through Kansas, Missouri and federal public policy platforms.

2005 Kansas Policy Priorities

Sustain state funding for quality early learning initiatives:

- Smart Start Kansas.
- Early Head Start.
- Kansas Endowment for Youth and Children's Initiative Fund. Maintain the endowment established through the Kansas Endowment for Youth (KEY) Fund.

2005 Missouri Policy Priorities

- Raise the income eligibility requirement for families who receive child care subsidies to 120 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Increase reimbursement rates to child care providers.
- Protect funding for quality early learning initiatives including:
 - The Early Childhood Development, Education and Care Fund.
 - Early Head Start.

2005 Federal Priorities

- Enhance funding for Head Start programs. Reauthorize Head Start with continued federal-to-local funding and require existing quality program performance standards and a strong parental involvement component.
- Reauthorize CCDBG and TANF with significant increases to child care mandatory funding; reject increases in the hours of weekly work required of parents beyond the current 30; and support provisions permitting flexibility in work requirements and what counts for work.

Policy and Evaluation Advisory Committee

In 2004, Partners in Quality formed the Policy and Evaluation Advisory Committee (PEAC), to strengthen partnerships with state stakeholders in Missouri and Kansas. The PEAC will act as an advisor on public policy matters, and help PIQ evaluate its policy priorities on early learning issues.

Public and Private Governance/MCEL Early Learning Board

The work of the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning and Partners in Quality is guided by the Early Learning Leadership Board. The board leads and coordinates community efforts to increase public investment in early learning. Additional functions of the board include:

- Advancing a community vision for building an early learning system.
- Developing and promoting strategies to ensure the financial sustainability of the community system.
- Providing a mechanism for coordinated research and formulation of early learning public policy; supporting legislative initiatives to increase public funding.
- Identifying priorities for resources from the public and private sectors that are contributed for the early learning system.
- Coordinating key community initiatives to maximize investment of public and private funds.
- Overseeing the evaluation of progress of the early learning system, including the dissemination of outcomes of community investments, to inform public and private sector decision making.
- Guiding research into other local and state models to inform development and implementation of aspects of the early learning system.

Early Learning Leadership Board Members

Bill Nelson, Chairman, George K. Baum Asset Management

Karen Bartz, Chair, Partners in Quality; Community Development Manager, Hallmark Cards

Bill Berkley, President and CEO, Tension Envelopes

Mike Chesser, Chairman and CEO, Great Plains Energy

James Corwin, Chief of Police, Kansas City, Missouri

Laura Cray, Community Volunteer

Frank Ellis, Chairman, Swope Parkway Health Center

Brian Gardner, Executive Vice President and General Counsel, Hallmark Cards

Lori Hirons, Vice President and Director of Public Affairs, Citi Cards; Mayor, Roeland Park, KS

Audrey Langworthy, Community Volunteer

Carol Marinovich, Mayor/CEO, Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas

Mary Anne Murray-Simons, Manager of Business Development, HNTB

David Oliver, Berkowitz Stanton Brandt Williams & Shaw LLP

Juan Rangel, Executive Director, Center for Community and Justice

Shirley Stubbs-Gillette, Gillette Consulting Group

Abby Thorman, Senior Strategic Advisor on Children, Youth and Families, Greater Kansas City Community Foundation

James White, Assistant Superintendent, Kansas City, Kansas, School District

Yvonne Wilson, Missouri State Representative



Greater Kansas City Early Learning Policy Successes in 2004

As advocates for children, the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning and its partners in Greater Kansas City's early learning community celebrated the following policy successes in 2004:

Smart Start Kansas

Partners in Quality and the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning worked actively in 2003 and 2004 to increase funding for Smart Start Kansas. In April 2004, Governor Kathleen Sebelius signed a budget bill that provided approximately \$8.45 million for Smart Start in fiscal year 2005, an increase of nearly 164 percent from the previous year.

Smart Start Kansas is administered by the Kansas Children's Cabinet and is funded entirely by dollars from the Master Tobacco Settlement. It provides grants that allow communities to respond to the needs of local children ages birth through five and their families. The Kansas Children's Campaign, in conjunction with the Kansas Children's Cabinet, announced its goal for an enhanced Smart Start Kansas in the fall of 2003.

The additional funds invested in Smart Start will allow current grantees to enhance their present services and will allow for an expansion of Smart Start to other areas of the state. This will greatly increase the number of children who can benefit from these proven programs. In Greater Kansas City, the additional funds will provide continued financing for the Tri-County Smart Start program, as well as new funds for mini-grants to selected early learning centers.

Missouri's #1 Question Campaign

In September 2004, Missouri's #1 Question Campaign was launched by Citizens for Missouri's Children (CMC) and Partnership for Children. The goal of the campaign is to mobilize a large group of citizens who are committed to promoting the needs of children and youth across the state, with a special emphasis on supporting quality early education, after school and health programs, and securing sustainable funding for those programs.

Missouri's #1 Question Campaign is an expansion of the Partnership for Children's highly successful #1 Question Campaign. Launched in 1997, that campaign asked everyone in Greater Kansas City to consider the question "Is it good for the children?" in all decision making.

With the launch of the statewide campaign, CMC and the Partnership for Children intend to create a grassroots activist network dedicated to impacting the legislative discourse on children and youth concerns. The campaign will help build a public constituency that will get more involved in public dialogue, ensuring that programs supporting children and families become front and center in lawmakers' minds.

A major component of the Missouri #1 Question Campaign will be the formation of a Children's Corps made up of concerned citizens from communities across the state. Members of the Children's Corps will keep the spotlight on children and youth issues through participation in public events and forums in their localities. Direct mail and other communications activities will be used to inform and educate the public.