



STATUS OF EARLY LEARNING IN GREATER KANSAS CITY 2007-2008

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL ON EARLY LEARNING





The Metropolitan Council on Early Learning at Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) produces this status report on early learning in Greater Kansas City biannually. The report is designed to provide an overview of family support and early learning programs in the nine-county metropolitan area, including Cass, Clay, Jackson, Platte and Ray counties in Missouri, and Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami and Wyandotte counties in Kansas. The status report is based on data collected in 2006 from the following sources:

- A survey of a representative sample of early learning programs in centers and child care homes
- Resource and referral agencies
- State social service and child care licensing agencies
- Literature review of national research
- Regional and national census and economic data

For additional copies of the status report, please contact MARC at 816/474-4240, or visit www.marc.org/mcel.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Access to Quality	6
Workforce Development.....	18
Public Engagement	28
Support for Families	36
Conclusion	38
Methodology	40
About MCEL	41

**STATUS OF EARLY LEARNING
IN GREATER KANSAS CITY
2007-2008**



INTRODUCTION

Why Quality Early Learning Matters

Quality care and early education experiences establish life-long patterns of learning and are key tools in building a child's foundation for success in school and in life.

Quality early learning has a positive impact — both immediate and long-term — on our children, our families, the region, the states of Missouri and Kansas, and the nation at large.

Currently, one in four children in Greater Kansas City arrives for his or her first day of kindergarten socially, physically and intellectually unprepared to succeed — even though the benefits of quality early learning experiences could not be more clear. By 2010, with the help of ambitious programs and vigorous work underway in the region's early learning community, area kindergarten teachers will see significantly greater numbers of children arriving at school ready to learn.

Why Are Some Children Unprepared for School?

In many cases, whether or not a child receives high-quality early learning depends greatly on the child's family situation. Families with higher incomes and greater social and emotional resources tend to use higher quality care. Low-income families are the ones who most often rely on poorer quality care — most likely because they cannot afford the higher fees for better care or because high-quality care is not available nearby.

However, research shows that children who come from low-income families benefit even more from high-quality early learning, and that high-quality programs can help to protect children from the adverse effects of living in at-risk or poverty situations. Fortunately, there are programs such as Head Start that are helping thousands of children from low-income families. But such programs are often woefully underfunded and are not able to serve every family in need.

Because children in disadvantaged families are at the greatest risk of school failure, the early learning community in Greater Kansas City focuses investment dollars on efforts and programs to serve this population while developing a seamless, quality early learning system that will effectively serve the needs of all families in the region.



**Quality early learning
experiences build a child's
foundation for success**

What Does Quality Early Learning Look Like?

The characteristics of quality early learning have been studied by numerous researchers over the years. Among the most significant components of high-quality programs are:

- Low child-staff ratios
- Educated providers
- Ongoing training for providers
- Adequate compensation and benefits for providers
- Low staff turnover
- Family involvement
- Accreditation

In the Kansas City metropolitan area, the Quality Rating System is providing hundreds of early learning programs with the information and support they need to improve and maintain high-quality services for children and families, while the Accreditation Project helps programs meet national standards and earn accreditation.

From Dream To Reality

Greater Kansas City's decade-long effort to develop an innovative system of high-quality early learning tells a compelling story.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the quality of child care in Kansas City, like that of the rest of the country, was largely substandard. In the past decade, tens of millions of dollars from public and private sources have been invested in an early learning system in the metropolitan area. Teacher education has improved, turnover has decreased, and facilities have been upgraded. Because the quality of early learning programs is increasing, more children in Greater Kansas City are entering school ready to succeed.



In 2007, the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning published a comprehensive history of Kansas City's campaign to improve the quality of learning for its youngest children. The report, *From Dream to Reality: The Growth of Early Learning in Greater Kansas City*, traces the genesis of initiatives such as Partners in Quality, the Accreditation Project, the Quality Rating System and scholarship and compensation initiatives. The report also outlines the critical next steps needed to continue the momentum toward building a system of quality early learning in metropolitan Kansas City.

From Dream to Reality: The Growth of Early Learning in Kansas City is available on the MARC Web site at www.marc.org/mcel/publications.htm.

ACCESS TO QUALITY

From the moment they are born, children are learning the critical cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills they will need for later success both in academics and in life.

During the first three years of life, 85 percent of the brain's physiological development takes place. Approximately 60 percent of a child's cognitive skill — the ability to learn — is developed by age four. While we know that the development of a young child's brain takes years to complete, we also know that parents and early learning providers can do many things to help children get off to a good start and establish healthy patterns for life-long learning.

A significant correlation exists between early learning program quality and outcomes for children. Research tells us that children who attend quality early learning programs have better language and math skills well into elementary school. Children with close, consistent relationships with early educators have better classroom social and thinking skills and fewer behavior problems.

Children who attend quality early learning programs become more productive adults. They are less likely to end up in prison or be dependent on social services. They often end up with higher paying jobs and are more likely to have their own homes and cars.

Poor quality care can hamper what and how children learn, their readiness for formal schooling, and their future success in school, at work, and as citizens. Many of our children are spending their formative years in settings that are not conducive to learning.

Defining a High-Quality Program

A high-quality early learning program has:

- *Consistent, well-trained, educated teachers who continually improve their skills through additional training and education.*
- *Intentional implementation of a well-established curriculum.*
- *A low adult/child ratio that allows for more direct one-on-one time.*
- *Strong health and safety practices.*
- *Great books, toys and enriching indoor and outdoor play spaces.*
- *A program that includes families' participation in their children's early learning and informs families of support services.*

Measuring Quality in Greater Kansas City

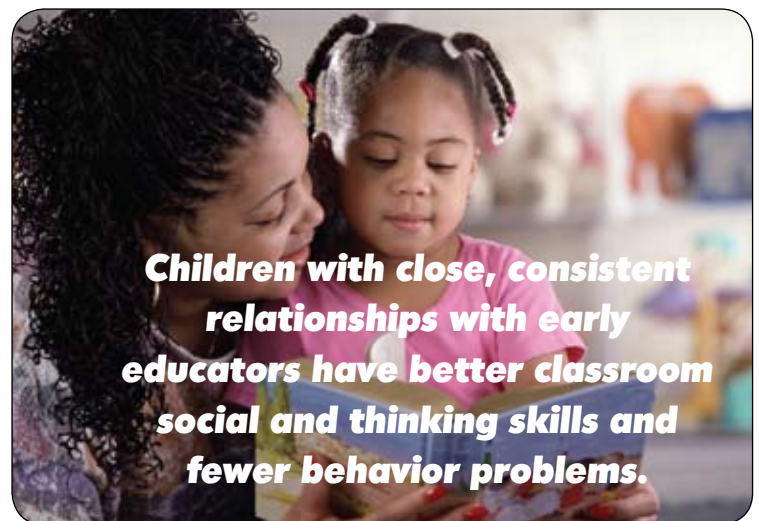
In the Kansas City region, the quality of early learning programs is measured in several ways:

- *State licensing is the first step in making sure that basic health and safety standards are met.*
- *Accreditation by either the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the state of Missouri is granted to programs that provide higher quality as measured by a comprehensive self-assessment and validation visits from outside experts. All programs that are accredited must be licensed or license-exempt.*
- *The Quality Rating System (QRS) pilot program is a comprehensive measurement tool that rates program quality on a five-level scale. Since it began in 2004, nearly 150 early learning programs have participated in the QRS. Currently, 127 programs are participating.*

Unfortunately, quality early learning is often beyond the reach of many working families. Child care costs are particularly hard on poor and low-income families, who pay a significantly higher share of income for care than do upper-income families.

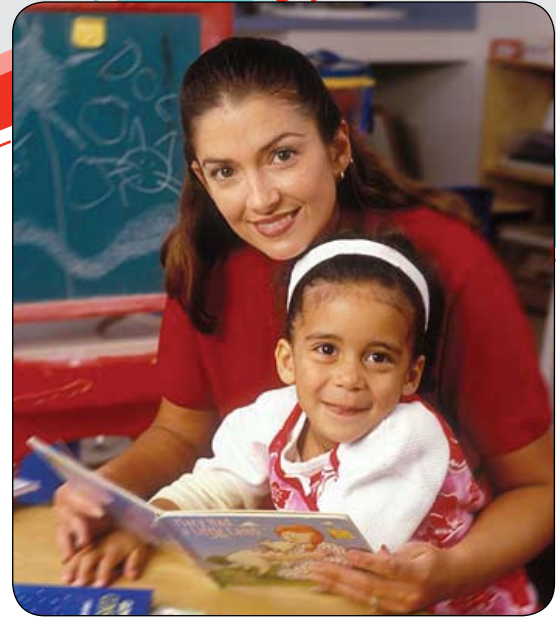
Federal programs such as Head Start do an excellent job of providing quality early learning and other services for children from low-income families. Mid-America Head Start serves more than 2,700 low-income children in Clay, Platte and Jackson counties in Missouri. However, current funding levels allow Mid-America Head Start to serve less than 50 percent of 3- and 4-year-old children in those counties who live in poverty.

Fortunately, the Kansas City region has embraced the idea of creating a high-quality early learning system. In the past 10 years, tens of millions of dollars from the public and private sectors have been invested in improving the quality and availability of early learning programs. This commitment has led to a significant improvement in the quality of early learning in the metropolitan area.



Children with close, consistent relationships with early educators have better classroom social and thinking skills and fewer behavior problems.

MEASURING QUALITY



State Licensing

Kansas and Missouri state health departments require that specific health and safety standards be met by most early learning programs, including centers, preschools, Head Start/Early Head Start programs and some family child care providers. Licensing requires minimal health and safety standards, such as:

- Fire, sanitation and health inspections.
- Staff training and staff-to-child ratio requirements.
- Staff and volunteer screening for criminal history and child abuse background checks.

License-Exempt Programs

All church-affiliated programs are exempt from full licensure in the state of Missouri. License-exempt centers are required to meet the same basic health and safety standards as other child care facilities, but staff education and staff-to-child ratios are not required. Full licensure is waived in Kansas for family-care providers who serve fewer than three non-related children, and in Missouri for those who serve fewer than five non-related children.

State-Licensed Programs in Greater Kansas City	
Missouri	
Licensed Centers	226
Licensed Homes	310
License-exempt Centers	114
Kansas	
Licensed Centers	239
Licensed Homes	876

Program Accreditation

Early learning program quality is generally evaluated by reviewing process and structure. Process includes interactions, activities, materials and learning opportunities, and the health and safety routines observed. Structure includes the size of each group of children, the adult-child ratio, and the education and training of the teachers and staff.

■ National Accreditation

National accreditation measures the quality of early learning programs and identifies those of highest quality. Accreditation requires early childhood programs to operate by guidelines prescribed by child-development specialists in the areas of curriculum assessment, staff training and facility management. These standards were developed to identify environments that enhance and nurture children's development in the early years, while preparing them for continued success in school.

National accreditation is awarded to centers by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Currently, there are 141 NAEYC accredited programs in the Greater Kansas City area.

■ Family Child Care Accreditation

Comparable to NAEYC accreditation for center-based early learning programs, the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) measures the quality of home-based programs. NAFCC accreditation requires family child care providers to operate according to guidelines prescribed by child development specialists. In the Kansas City area, family child care providers engaged in self-study — the first step toward accreditation — receive guidance from members of a mentor cadre consisting of currently NAFCC-accredited family child care providers. The Family Child Care Accreditation Project in Kansas City is the largest such project in the Midwest. Currently, 54 family child care programs are nationally accredited in the Greater Kansas City area.



■ Missouri Accreditation

Missouri accreditation recognizes quality standards met by early learning programs serving children from birth to 12 years of age within the state of Missouri. Missouri accreditation goes beyond the scope of state licensing requirements for child care facilities to evaluate qualitative aspects of the physical, social, emotional and intellectual growth opportunities afforded to children enrolled in the state's center-based and home-based early learning programs. There are 16 Missouri-accredited programs in the Greater Kansas City area, many in schools and churches. All Missouri-accredited programs in the Kansas City area are centers rather than family child care homes.

MEASURING QUALITY



Two major initiatives are working to improve the quality of early learning programs in the region — the Accreditation Project and the Quality Rating System.

The Accreditation Project

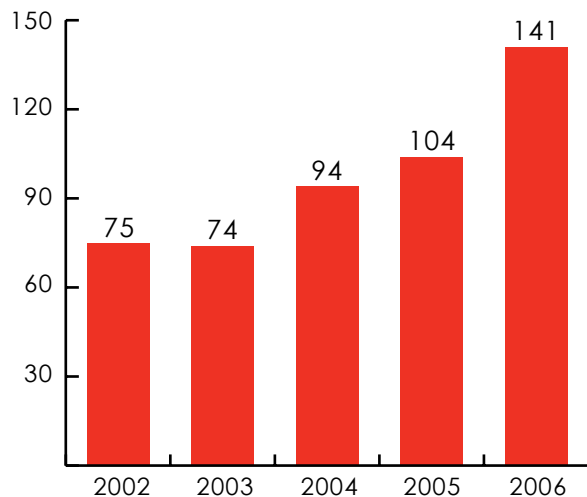
The Accreditation Project, started by The Family Conservancy in 1997, is designed to improve the quality of early learning programs in Greater Kansas City by increasing the number of nationally accredited early learning centers and family child care homes.

Heart of America United Way partnered with The Family Conservancy to improve the quality of early learning programs by establishing the Accreditation Fund in 1996. This fund works with the Accreditation Project to provide grants to early childhood centers and family-care homes to help them meet the national accreditation standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC). Currently the focus of the Accreditation Project is on working with family child care providers.

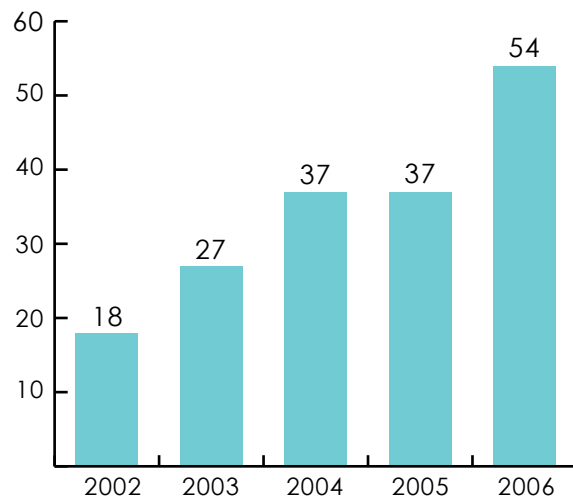
For more information about the Accreditation Project, call The Family Conservancy at 913/342-1110.

Number of Accredited Programs in Greater Kansas City

Nationally Accredited Centers



Nationally Accredited Family Providers



The Quality Rating System



The Quality Rating System (QRS) pilot project, begun in 2004, provides early learning programs with the information and support they need to improve and maintain higher quality services for children and families.

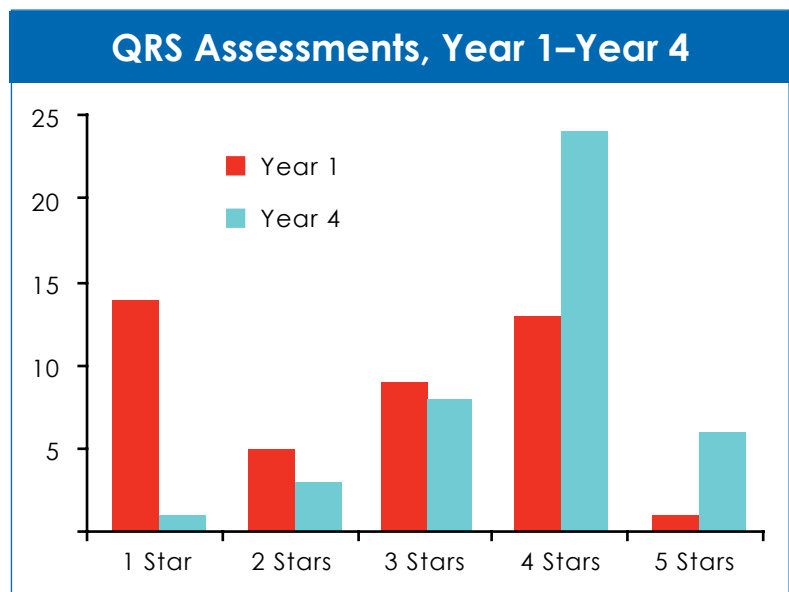
The QRS supplements national accreditation efforts by providing opportunities for programs to participate in a system that encourages incremental quality improvement standards and provides targeted supports.

At the core of the QRS is an easy-to-understand tool to measure early learning program quality that is designed for both providers and parents. Five areas are measured — learning environment, family partnerships, staff training and education, adult-to-child ratios, and program accreditation. Points are awarded for each indicator, resulting in an overall quality rating. Participating programs receive targeted quality improvement support and resources, such as quality coaching, quality improvement mini-grants, technical assistance and access to training and scholarships for staff. Quality rating scores will not be made public until the programs have had an opportunity to adjust to the assessment model and the pilot phase of the project is completed.

Currently, 127 area early learning programs — including 80 early learning centers and 47 home providers — are participating in the pilot project. Of these programs, 45 percent are located in the urban core.

The results have been impressive. At the end of 2007, 42 programs had completed four QRS assessments. Data from these assessments shows that over the four-year period:

- 64 percent increased their ratings by at least one level, and 38 percent increased their ratings by more than one level.
- The number of four- and five-star programs increased from 33 percent to over 71 percent.
- 83 percent of participating programs increased their overall point level.
- The number of accredited programs increased from 31 percent to 57 percent.



Providing parents with program quality information clearly has the potential to help inform consumer choice and put parents in the position of demanding — and policy makers in the position of funding — high-quality early learning programs.

MEASURING AFFORDABILITY

Access to Affordable Early Learning Programs

In parent focus groups, a majority of families said that “access to quality child care is extremely important.”

Unfortunately, families often find that locating early learning programs that meet their needs is a difficult, if not impossible, task.

Demand for many types of early learning programs exceeds supply throughout the metropolitan area. These challenges are particularly pronounced for families with infants or toddlers, children with special needs, children who are mildly ill, or families who need early learning programs before 7:00 a.m. or after 6:00 p.m.

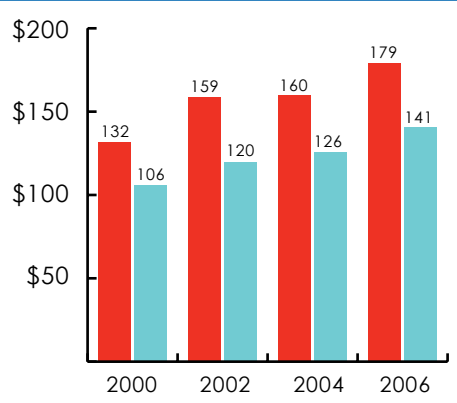
High-quality early learning can be expensive. In 2006, the average cost of center-based child care was \$6,281 per year for a preschooler and \$9,323 per year for an infant.

A family of four with one infant and one preschooler in care and a total family income at the Kansas City household median of \$51,035 could spend 31 percent of its annual income on child care.

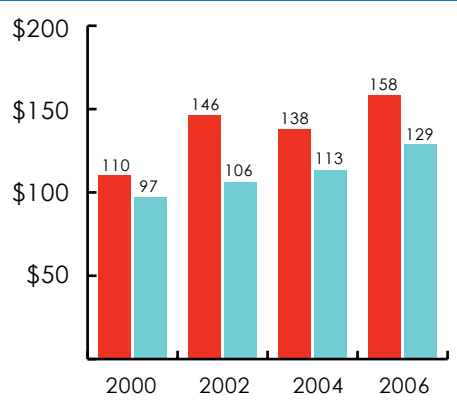
Average Weekly Costs for Early Learning Programs

Center-Based Providers
Family Home Providers

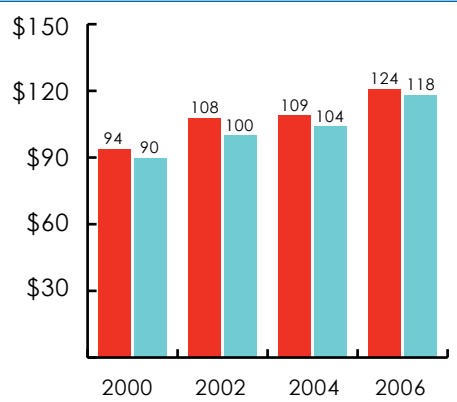
Infants



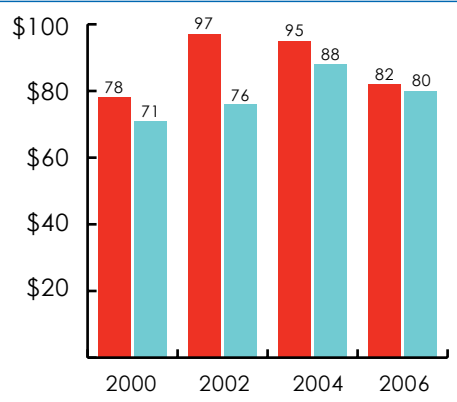
Toddlers



Preschool



School Age



Access for Low-Income Families

Finding affordable early learning programs that meet their needs is particularly challenging for low-income families. Subsidies can help these families access affordable early learning programs, increasing the likelihood that low-income parents will become and continue to be productive members of the community's workforce.

Subsidies that pay for or help offset the costs of high-quality early learning programs for children from low-income families come primarily from three federally funded programs: Child Care and Development Block Grants (CCDBG); Head Start and Early Head Start; and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)



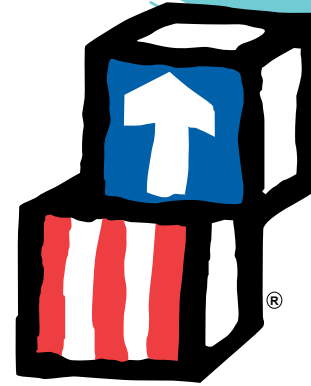
Children Receiving State Child Care Subsidies	
	Monthly Average for FY 2006
Cass County	717
Clay County	392
Jackson County	6,486
Platte County	145
Ray County	89
Leavenworth County	402
Miami County	1,628
Johnson County	1,935
Wyandotte County	223

CCDBG is the primary federal funding stream for child care in the United States. The CCDBG program was created in 1990 and reauthorized and expanded in 1996 as part of welfare reform. CCDBG came up for reauthorization in 2002, but because the legislation has not yet been approved by Congress, funding has essentially remained frozen for five years. As a result, many states have lowered income eligibility cut-offs, increased parent co-payments, reimbursed providers at lower-than-market rates, and placed children on waiting lists.

With support from federal CCDBG allotments and some state funding, both Kansas and Missouri provide subsidies to low-income working families to help offset the cost of early learning programs. In fiscal year 2006 more than 12,000 children in the Greater Kansas City area and their families received subsidy support through CCDBG Funding.

- The Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) provides subsidies in Kansas. The current eligibility level for low-income families is 185 percent of the federal poverty level. This translates into earnings of \$ 31,765 annually, or approximately \$15.27 per hour, for a family of three. Kansas currently ranks 24th in the nation for child care subsidy eligibility.
- The Department of Social Services (DSS) provides subsidies in Missouri. The current eligibility level for low-income families has improved over the last year to 127 percent of the federal poverty level. This translates into annual earnings of \$21,806, or approximately \$10.48 per hour, for a family of three. Missouri now ranks 46th in the nation for child care subsidy eligibility, up from 50th in 2006. Nationwide, the median eligibility level for child care subsidy is 179 percent of the federal poverty level.

SPECIALIZED SERVICES



Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start is a federal program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children. The program provides educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to low-income children and families. Head Start has served more than 24 million children since its inception in 1965, and has a proven track record in improving the skills of infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Eligibility for Head Start services is largely income-based (100 percent of the federal poverty level), though each locally operated program includes other eligibility criteria such as disabilities and services to other family members. Head Start reserves 10 percent of its enrollment for children with disabilities.

In Greater Kansas City, over 4,000 children and their families are served by seven Head Start and Early Head Start grantees. These programs serve approximately 30 percent of the children in the metropolitan area who are eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start services.

- In October 2005, Mid-America Regional Council was named the grantee for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Clay, Jackson and Platte counties in Missouri. **Mid-America Head Start** began operation in January 2006. Four delegate agencies — The Family Conservancy, the Independence School District, the Kansas City, Mo., School District and the YMCA of Greater Kansas City — were chosen to provide direct services to children and families under the Mid-America Head Start banner. In 2006-07, Mid-America Head Start provided services to more than 2,700 children and their families in the three counties.
- In Wyandotte County, Kan., the **Economic Opportunity Foundation, Inc.**, provides Head Start services to more than 800 children and their families. **Project EAGLE Community Services** provides Early Head Start programs for nearly 150 children and their families each year.
- In Johnson County, Kan., **Head Start of Shawnee Mission, Inc.**, provides Head Start and Early Head Start services to more than 200 children and their families, and the **Olathe School District** provides Head Start services to an additional 150 children and their families.
- The **Northeast Kansas Community Action Program** provides both Head Start and Early Head Start services to about 150 children and their families in Leavenworth County, Kan.
- The **East Central Kansas Community Action Program** provides Head Start Service to more than 50 children and their families in Miami County, Kan.

Programs Accepting Children Who Receive Subsidies		
	Centers	Homes
Percentage of programs accepting children who receive state subsidies	78%	63%
Average served	15	3
Percentage of programs participating in CACFP	34%	74%
Average Served	56	7
Percentage of programs enrolling Head Start children	29%	27%
Average Served	11	3
Percentage of programs enrolling Early Head Start children	15%	21%
Average Served	6	1.5

Access to Specialized Programs

■ Infants and Toddlers

Early learning programs for infants and toddlers in Greater Kansas City are in both high demand and short supply. Child Care Source, the region’s resource and referral network, reports that over 60 percent of all requests from families are for infant and toddler programs. A large percentage of early learning programs that serve infants and toddlers say that demand surpasses available supply by high proportions.

■ Special Needs

Children who are medically fragile or who have other special needs must be served by staff specially trained to identify and address their individual needs. Because of the low level of staff training and high staff turnover in early learning programs overall, it is hard for families to locate programs and services that meet their specific needs. Developmental delays are the most common type of special need identified by programs that serve children in this area.

■ Extended Care

In Greater Kansas City, only 10 percent of centers provide care before 6:00 a.m. or after 6:30 p.m., while 28 percent of family home providers offer extended hours. Only 20 percent of centers offer care for mildly ill children, compared with 45 percent of home providers.



SPECIALIZED SERVICES



■ Language Needs

Many early learning programs in Greater Kansas City serve Non-English Speaking (NES) or English as a Second Language (ESL) children. The majority of these children are from Hispanic/Latino families where Spanish is the primary language spoken at home.

To better serve the needs of programs that serve the Hispanic community, the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning, with the assistance of the Hispanic Development Fund of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, recently began the Latino Early Learning Initiative.

The first project for this initiative is to gather input from the Latino community on what services are lacking and develop an action plan with key benchmarks to better target existing and future resources to address the needs of programs that serve the Latino community.

Programs Offering Specialized Services		
	Centers	Home Providers
Percent of all area programs with the ability to care for special-needs children	58%	43%
Percent of those programs with special-needs children enrolled	52%	N/A*
Average number enrolled	5	1
Percent of programs that can serve mildly ill children	27%	48%
Percent of programs offering extended hours of care	10%	28%
Percent of programs offering weekend care	2%	12%
Percent of programs with NES or ESL children enrolled	78%	27%
Average number of NES or ESL children enrolled	3	1
Average number of Spanish-speaking children enrolled	2	1

*Home providers were not asked about current enrollments of special-needs children in the survey.

Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers				
	Centers		Home Providers	
	Infants	Toddlers	Infants	Toddlers
Percent of all area programs that accept infants and toddlers	47%	61%	83%	94%
Average number enrolled in those programs	9	14	1	2
Percent of those programs with waiting lists	75%	56%	31%	15%
Average number on waiting lists	10	11	3	3

The Child and Adult Care Food Program

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides funding to early learning programs for meals and snacks to help meet children’s daily nutritional requirements.

The program serves children age 12 and under; children of migrant workers age 15 and under; and mentally or physically disabled persons enrolled in a facility serving a majority of people age 18 and under.

CACFP provides reimbursement to child care centers and family child care homes for meals served to participating children. The Child and Adult Care Food Program is administered by the Division of Nutritional Health and Services — Bureau of Community Food and Nutrition Assistance (BCFNA). The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

CACFP reimbursement for centers is based on three categories: free, reduced price and paid. These categories are determined from information about family size and income reported by households on the Income Eligibility Form. Centers earn reimbursement for eligible meals and snacks served in each category.

All eligible child care homes are eligible for regular (Tier II) reimbursement rates. A higher rate (Tier I) is paid to home providers who live in low-income areas, are low-income themselves, or serve low-income children.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

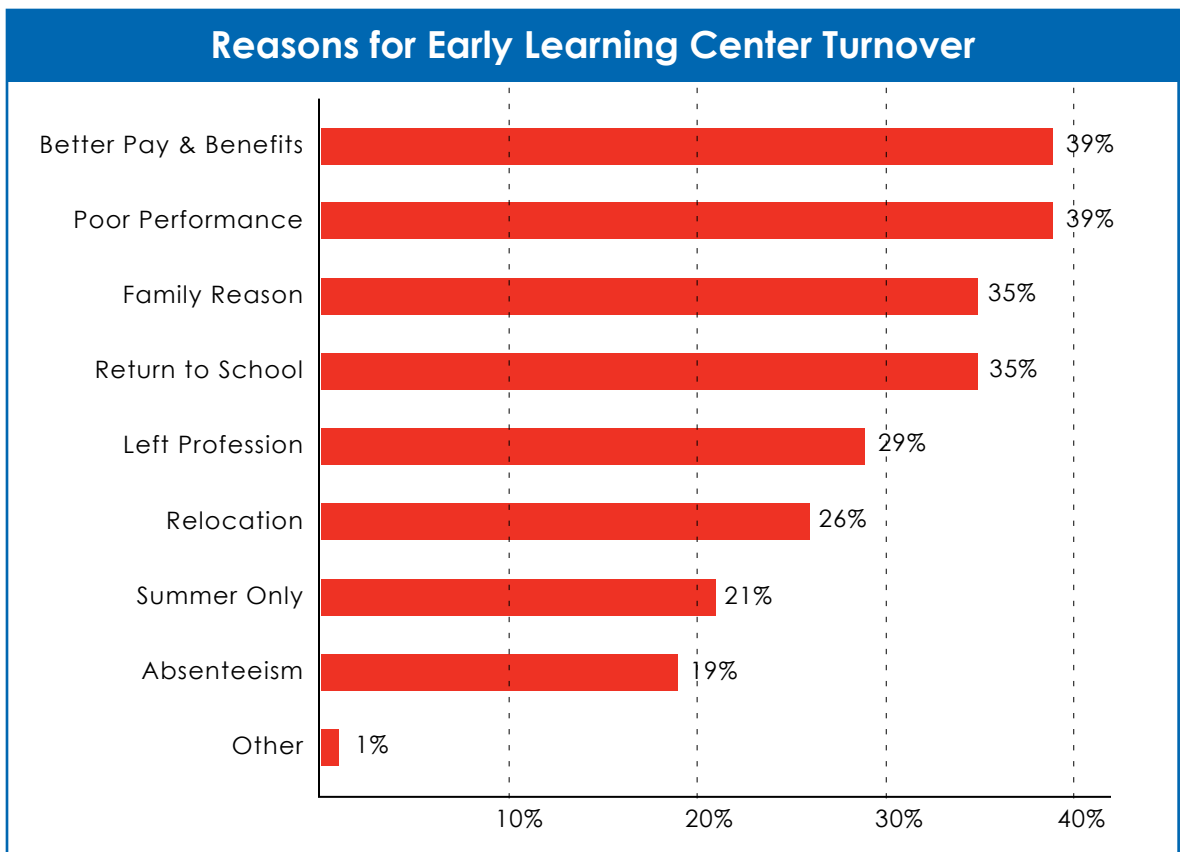


Helping children grow, learn and gain new skills can be a very rewarding occupation. But being an early learning teacher is often a physically and emotionally demanding job. In addition to nurturing and caring for children, early learning teachers and child care providers must be constantly alert, anticipate and prevent trouble, deal effectively with disruptive children, provide firm discipline, and, above all, prepare children for success in school.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, child care workers earn an average wage of \$8.61 per hour (\$17,900 annually) and preschool teachers earn an average wage of \$11.51 per hour (\$23,930). They often work with children for 50 or more hours per week, and sometimes put in additional unpaid hours for shopping, cleaning and preparing activities. Qualified early learning professionals are drastically undervalued, especially when comparing their wages to other professions. A lack of resources and an effort to maintain affordability for parents often make it difficult for early learning programs to offer adequate wages to retain educated staff and to reward or encourage teacher education.

Most early learning teachers and providers continue to earn near-poverty level wages. The public and many policy makers have gradually realized that overall improvement of early learning programs will require better compensation for teachers.

Average Hourly Wage Comparison	
Profession	Average Annual Earnings
Kindergarten Teachers	\$41,230
Animal Control Workers	\$28,510
School Bus Drivers	\$24,170
Preschool Teachers	\$23,930
Bank Tellers	\$21,810
Pet Caretakers	\$19,710
Child Care Workers	\$17,900



Because of low wages and long hours, most early learning programs have a difficult time maintaining a consistent staff. For many teachers, child care can be an unattractive occupation.

Employee benefits often are minimal. Benefits vary, but are scarce for most early learning teachers. Many centers offer free or discounted child care to teachers. A few offer a full benefits package, including health insurance and paid vacations, but others offer no benefits at all.



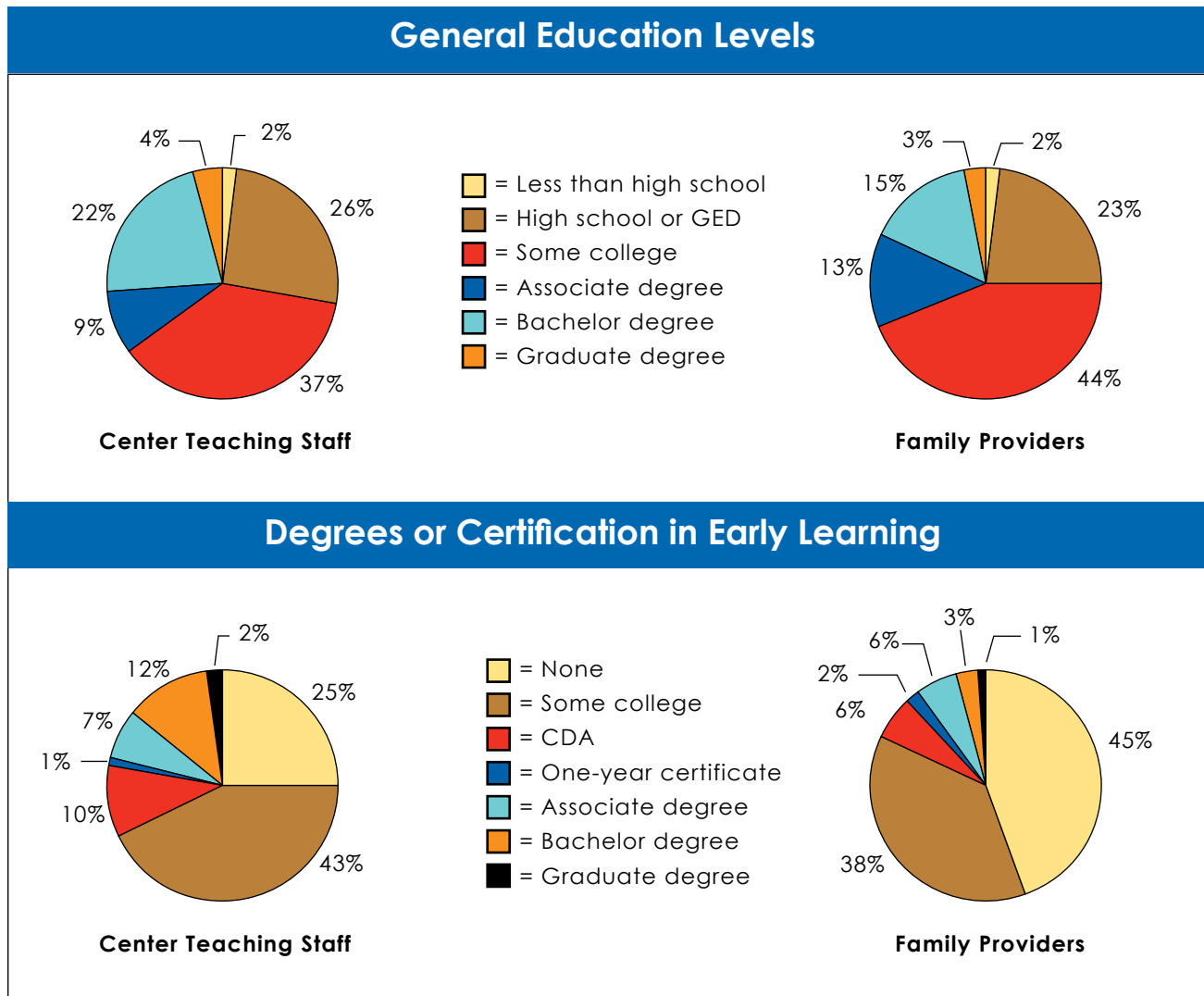
Early learning centers reported that 20 percent of employees left their jobs in 2006. This average rate has declined in recent years and is comparable to turnover rates in educational services. Some early learning programs, however, had turnover rates in excess of 150 percent.

Turnover was highest for aides, assistant teachers and teachers. In 2006, 28 percent of assistant teachers and 19 percent of teachers left their positions. This rate of departure means that children still struggle with inconsistent relationships with educators in the years when establishing trust and learning in a stable environment are most important.

STAFF EDUCATION

One of the most effective ways to enhance the quality of early learning programs is to improve the education and skills of the early childhood workforce.

The training and qualifications required of child care workers vary widely. Every state has its own licensing requirements that regulate caregiver training. These can range from high school diplomas to community college courses to college degrees in child development or early childhood education.



Greater Kansas City colleges and universities have created an impressive professional track for individuals wishing to pursue more specialized training or preparation. Nine area two-year and four-year colleges offer credential and degree programs in early childhood education. Many efforts have been made to meet the needs of early childhood professionals, including offering courses in the evening or on-site to help students and professionals pursue degrees in the field. These concerted efforts have helped to increase the number of early learning and child development degree-seeking professionals. In 2006, 10 percent of center staff and 14 percent of family child care providers were pursuing degrees in early learning.

The Community Response to Professional Development for Early Learning

Many early learning professionals would like to pursue more education to enhance their skills and knowledge of child development, but the low pay rates in their profession make it difficult to afford continuing education.

Recognizing this need, the MCEL Professional Development Fund developed a scholarship program that has paid for tuition, books and fees for early learning professionals in the region since 1996. Assistant teachers, teachers, directors and family child care providers have taken classes at area colleges and universities toward Child Development Associate (CDA) or Associate of Arts (AA) degrees in child development. Eligible scholars must work at least 25 hours per week with children from birth to age five in the nine-county region, maintain a 2.5 grade point average and commit to remaining in an early education program for a period of time following graduation.

Funds for the MCEL scholarship are provided through a state grant authorized by Missouri House Bill 1519 to Kansas City's Local Investment Commission (LINC), a variety of private community foundations and the United Way of Greater Kansas City.

In 2006, 198 scholarship recipients attended classes and earned a total of 1,757 credit hours towards degrees or certification in early childhood education. With support from MCEL's scholarship program, 61 early childhood professionals earned degrees in 2006.

MCEL Fund Accomplishments

- *More than 1,000 scholarship recipients have completed 23,485 credit hours of college course work.*
- *340 students have earned degrees or credentials through the fund.*
- *155 scholarship recipients are actively pursuing degrees or credentials.*
- *More than \$2 million has been paid in scholarships for early learning educators.*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Kansas/Missouri Director's Credential System

While most local colleges and universities offer coursework in early childhood administration, only a few offer degrees in early childhood administration. To date a coordinated system has not emerged in Kansas City to enhance the management and leadership skills of directors and managers of early learning programs.

For the past three years, MCEL has worked with key stakeholders throughout the region to develop a credential system for early learning center directors. This work included developing a structure and identifying draft criteria for a directors credential that will provide a pathway for directors to develop the knowledge, skills and abilities they need to be successful in the early learning industry.

The Mid-America Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC) is working with key stakeholders in both states to move the work forward, with the goal of developing a coordinated system of leadership development and management training for early learning administrators in the region.

A consultant hired by Mid-America AEYC is working with stakeholders in Missouri and Kansas to facilitate and support the development of a directors credential system. This process should be completed by Spring 2008.



Early Education Programs at Area Colleges and Universities				
	One-Year Certificate	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree
Donnelly College	●	●	●	
Kansas City Kansas Community College	●	●		
Johnson County Community College	●	●		
Penn Valley Community College	●	●		
Park College			●	●
University of Missouri–Kansas City			●	●
University of Kansas			●	●
University of St. Mary			●	
William Jewell College			●	

The Family Conservancy's Director Training Program

The Family Conservancy responded to early learning program directors' training needs by developing a four-part training series based on a curriculum from the Development Corporation for Children's Business Development Center in Minneapolis. The 20-hour training sessions cover four topics: Administration and Finances; Building Positive Staff Relationships; Creating a Developmentally Appropriate Children's Program; and Leadership and Change Management. All four sessions in the series can earn participants continuing education credit hours or college credit hours through the Kansas City, Kansas, Community College. In addition, the content of all trainings is connected to Kansas/Missouri core competencies and child development associate (CDA) subject areas.

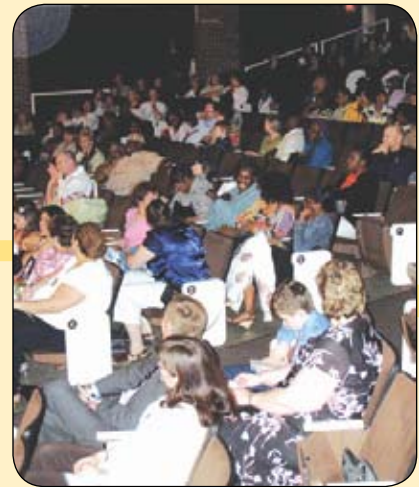
Response from participants indicates that the series met their professional development needs and they would recommend it to other directors.

The 10th Annual Quality Celebration

More than 200 people gathered at Pembroke Hill School on March 29, 2007, for the 10th Annual Quality Celebration. The event recognizes the contributions the Greater Kansas City region is making in improving the quality of early learning programs.

At the celebration, 61 individuals were honored for earning a CDA (child development associate) or an associate, bachelor's or master's degree in child development. All of the honorees earned their degrees with assistance from the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning (MCEL) Professional Development Fund.

The Quality Celebration also recognized the 16 early learning centers and 12 family providers who gained national accreditation in 2006. Today, 141 centers and 54 family providers in the metropolitan area have earned national accreditation.



COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

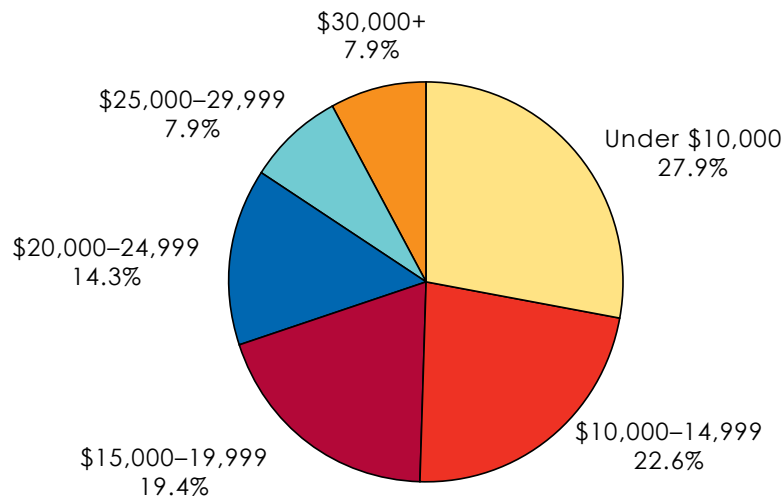
Having a stable relationship between teacher and child is critical to the success of the early learning experience. Familiarity and consistency are the keys to building strong social skills and providing an environment conducive to learning.

High turnover rates directly affect the overall quality of an early learning center. It takes time and money to find and train new teachers. More than that, teachers and children require an adjustment period to build effective relationships. It is only through knowing and understanding each child's individual needs, strengths and personality that teachers can give each child the care and nurturing he or she needs.



While low wages are one major reason early learning teachers give for leaving the field, a lack of benefits, little room for career advancement, and an absence of respect and recognition for the enormity of their job are also cited as factors in turnover. The Greater Kansas City early learning community recognizes that turnover is closely tied to low compensation and benefits and that wages for early learning providers must increase if turnover is to be significantly decreased.

Family Child Care Provider Earnings in 2005 After Taxes and Expenses



Tri-County Smart Start and the Compensation Advancement Program

The Compensation Advancement Program (CAP) and Tri-County Smart Start Kansas provide funds for supplemental wages and flexible benefits, based on position and education level, to early learning teachers in 33 centers across the metropolitan area. The purpose of the program is to demonstrate how increased compensation for early education teachers results in improved program quality and positive outcomes for children. Participating programs have lower turnover rates and higher levels of staff education than other early learning centers in the region.

On the Kansas side of the metro area — in Johnson, Leavenworth and Wyandotte counties — the Tri-County Smart Start compensation program is funded through the Kansas Children’s Cabinet. In Missouri, funding initially came from a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Early Learning Opportunities Act grant. MCEL has secured additional support for the CAP centers from philanthropic organizations, such as the George K. Baum Foundation and the Stanley H. Durwood Foundation.

Mini-Grants for Quality Improvement

In 2004, Tri-County Smart Start developed a quality improvement mini-grant system. This system allows participating Smart Start centers to apply for funds that will help them implement pieces of their quality improvement plans, such as facilities upgrades. With these grants, programs will be more likely to achieve higher quality and be able to provide better options for the children and families in the tri-county area. The mini-grant process is already serving as a model for replication by MCEL for other centers and family child care homes that are participating in the Quality Rating System, with funding from the Hall Family, Francis Family, Jacob L. and Ella C. Loose, George K. Baum and Stanley H. Durwood foundations.

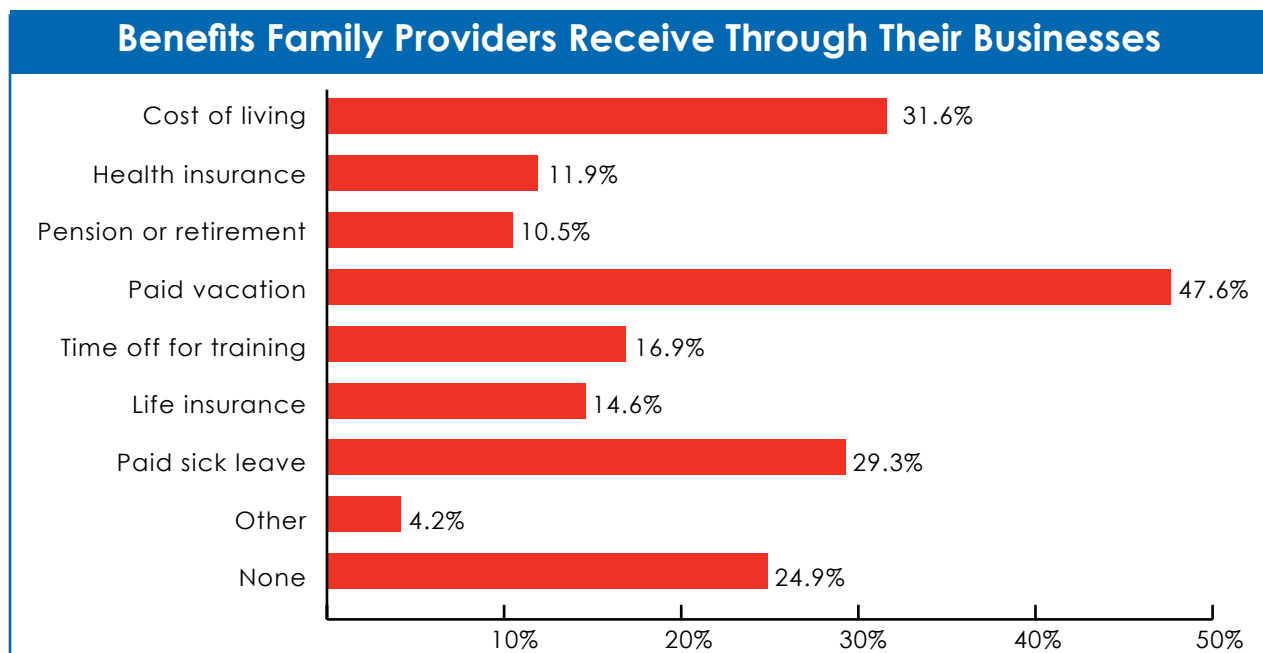
Benefits

Jobs in the early learning field typically offer few benefits. Only 39 percent of center teachers and 12 percent of family child care providers receive health insurance benefits. Only 53 percent of center teachers and 29 percent of family home providers have paid sick leave through their jobs. For centers that offer benefits to full-time staff, only 31 percent offer similar benefits to part-time staff. Not surprisingly, the lack of benefits and low compensation were the number one reason for staff turnover in early learning programs in 2006.

Median Hourly Wages Earned by Center Staff		
	Median Low	Median High
Aides	\$7.00	\$7.50
Assistant Teachers	\$7.25	\$9.00
Teachers	\$8.00	\$10.75
Teacher Directors	\$10.25	\$12.00
Directors	\$13.81	\$15.00

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

Benefits Offered to Early Learning Center Staff					
Benefits	Aides	Assistant Teachers	Teachers	Teacher/Directors	Directors
Health insurance coverage	8.4%	27.5%	39.0%	28.9%	48.1%
Paid time for on-site training	20.6%	45.6%	70.7%	42.2%	68.6%
Paid time for off-site training	18.8%	42.5%	67.2%	39.7%	67.2%
Paid vacations	13.6%	39.0%	65.5%	39.7%	71.4%
Paid holidays	15.3%	40.4%	69.0%	42.2%	71.4%
Paid sick leave	13.2%	33.8%	53.3%	35.5%	58.9%
Retirement	5.6%	19.9%	29.3%	19.5%	35.5%
Other benefits	1.4%	4.2%	4.5%	3.1%	4.2%



Concerns of center directors and family providers have decreased slightly over the past two years, but their concerns are still significant.

Concerns of Center Directors		
Level of concern rated from 1 to 4 (1 = major concern, 4 = not a concern)		
Finding and keeping qualified staff	2.26	<p style="text-align: center;">Most Concerned</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Least Concerned</p>
Finding money for program/facility improvements	2.27	
Offering competitive wages	2.46	
Finding temporary staff/substitutes	2.53	
Finding quality training for staff	2.66	
Finding money for staff training	2.86	
Offering health benefits	2.9	
Meeting state licensing requirements	3.06	
Meeting basic expenses	3.18	
Staff needing basic education	3.28	
Budgeting and accounting assistance	3.33	
Meeting fire/health/safety codes	3.39	

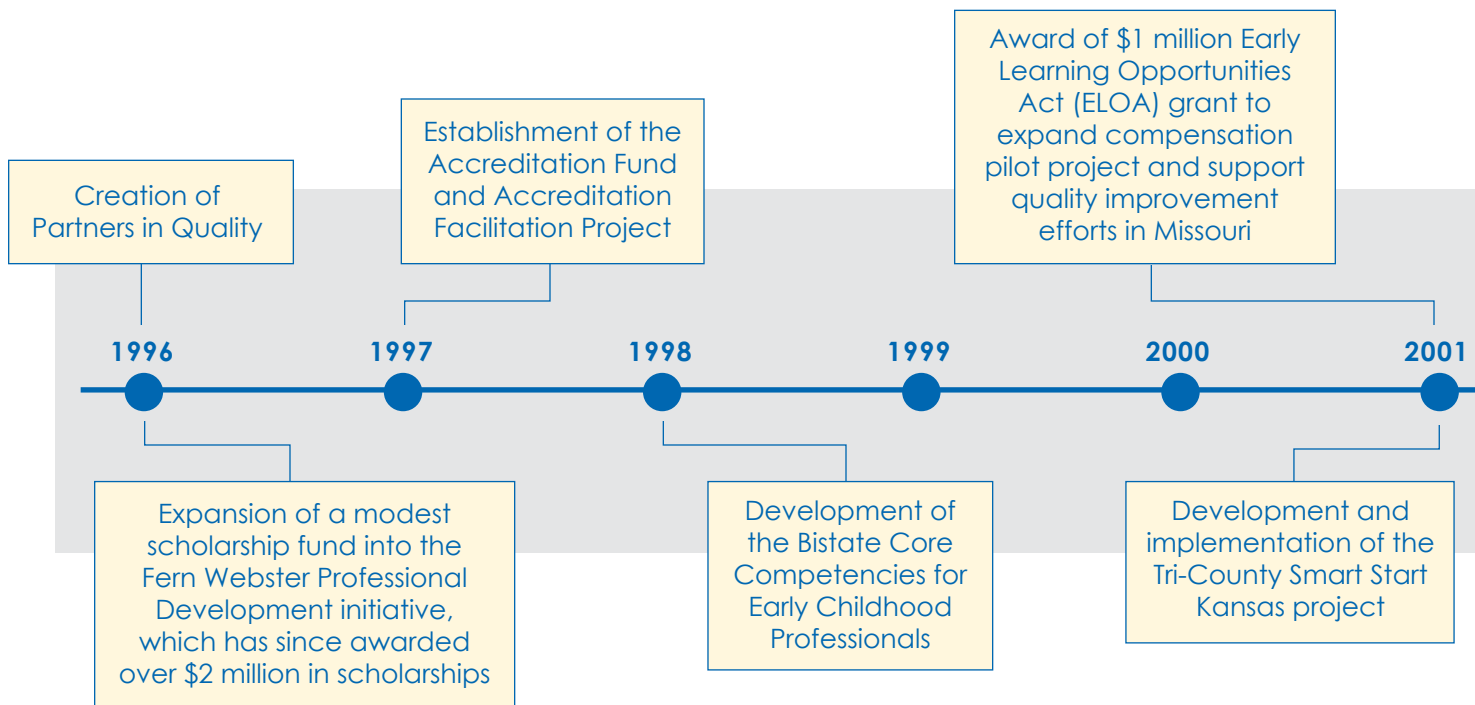
Concerns of Family Providers		
Level of concern rated from 1 to 4 (1 = major concern, 4 = not a concern)		
Being adequately compensated for work	2.7	<p style="text-align: center;">Most Concerned</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Least Concerned</p>
Finding money for program/facility improvements	2.75	
Having health benefits	2.78	
Meeting basic expenses	3.15	
Finding quality training	3.15	
Finding temporary staff	3.2	
Finding money for training	3.29	
Meeting state licensing requirements	3.43	
Business management	3.43	
Meeting fire/health/safety codes	3.56	

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 outstanding successes in early learning in Greater Kansas City.

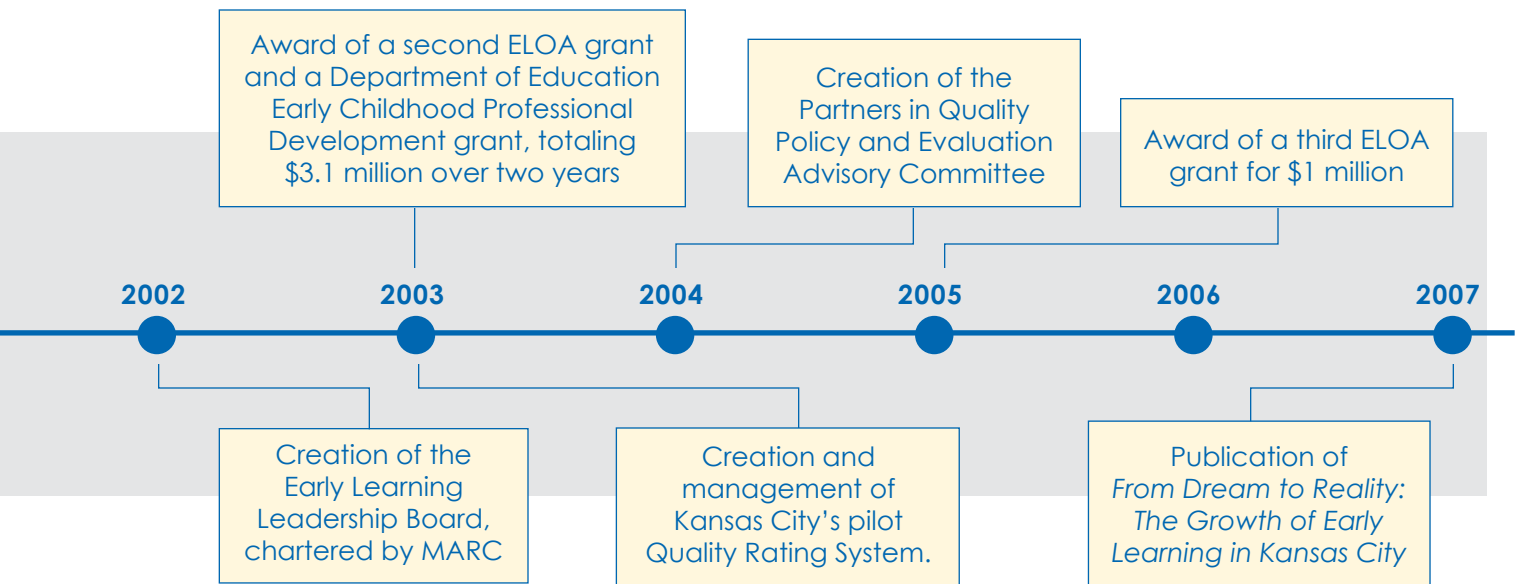
MCEL has raised more than \$15 million for early childhood programs and initiatives since its inception. But a great need still exists for a continuous and reliable source of public funding for early learning improvements. Many of the region's achievements in early learning are funded by finite grants.



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.



PLANNING AND POLICY



Partners in Quality Strategic Plan: 2006–2010

Partners in Quality (PIQ) was formed in 1996 by public and private organizations committed to building a nationally unsurpassed early learning system in the Kansas City region. PIQ's mission is to engage a broad, influential group of organizations and individuals to design and implement a high-quality early learning system through individual commitment and collective action. The work of PIQ is guided by a strategic plan that sets out priorities in workforce development and retention; access to quality; family support; public policy; and evaluation.

PIQ hopes to achieve the following goals by the year 2010:

Workforce Development and Retention

- Develop a structure and a plan for issuing a Director's Credential.
- Continue to provide and oversee compensation and flexible benefits grants.
- Develop and deliver training for early childhood teaching staff regarding the intentional implementation of a learning curriculum.
- Develop a plan to expand resources for early learning career opportunities for Latinos.

Access to Quality

- Coordinate the implementation of the Quality Rating System and quality improvement supports in Greater Kansas City and work toward successful state implementation.
- Develop training, curriculum and a foundation for a Coaching Certification program for Greater Kansas City.
- Develop and implement model pre-kindergarten programs.

Family Support

- Investigate the use of HOMEFRONT's Measure of Family Engagement in additional early learning programs.
- Develop plan to expand and promote involvement of fathers.
- Continue to support programs that engage and provide information, training and resources to parents.

Public Policy

- Develop a public policy agenda with one voice for PIQ.
- Continue to bring together key stakeholders from across Kansas and Missouri to develop education and advocacy plan around early learning.
- Develop stronger partnerships with local school districts to ensure a smooth transition from early learning programs to the K-12 education system by convening representatives from area school districts to begin the dialogue on how the two systems can be more closely aligned.

Evaluation

- Provide ongoing evaluation of Greater Kansas City's early learning system to determine the overall impact of system inputs on program improvement.
- Include analysis of child outcomes in the evaluation of the early learning system, specifically related to on-site coaching of classroom teachers and curriculum implementation.

In spring 2007, PIQ began working with Mid-America Head Start to explore blending each organization's strategic plan into one community-wide Early Learning Strategic Plan. This combined plan is a dynamic document still in draft form. PIQ and the MAHS Policy Council are working to refine the strategies and priorities outlined in the plan.

Partners in Quality Members

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

PLANNING AND POLICY

Early Learning Leadership Board

The work of the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning and Partners in Quality is guided by an Early Learning Leadership Board. The board leads and coordinates community efforts to increase public investment in early learning. 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 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 contributed to the early learning system.
- Coordinating key community initiatives to maximize investment of public and private funds.
- Overseeing the evaluation of progress in the early learning system, including the dissemination of outcomes of community investments, to inform public and private sector decision making.

Early Learning Leadership Board

Bill Nelson, Chair

George K. Baum Asset Management

Karen Bartz

Chair, Missouri Coordinating Board for Early Childhood

Bill Berkley

President and CEO, Tension Envelopes

Jim Caccamo

MARC Early Learning Director

Mike Chesser

Chairman and CEO, Great Plains Energy

James Corwin

Chief of Police, Kansas City, Mo.

Laura Cray

Community Volunteer

Frank Ellis

Chairman, Swope Parkway Health Center

Brian Gardner

Executive Vice President, Hallmark Cards

Audrey Langworthy

Community Volunteer

David Oliver

Berkowitz Stanton Brandt Williams & Shaw LLP

David Warm

MARC Executive Director

James White

Assistant Superintendent, Kansas City, Kan., School District

Yvonne Wilson

Missouri State Senator

Greater Kansas City Early Learning Policy Report for 2007

As advocates for children, the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning and its partners in Greater Kansas City's early learning community worked on a number of early learning issues that came before the state legislatures in 2007.

■ Kansas

The Legislature appropriated \$10.5 million in new funding for the Child Care Assistance Program. The regular session budget contained \$2.9 million for fiscal year 2007 and \$4 million for fiscal year 2008. The omnibus budget added \$3.6 million to address the ongoing shortfall in the program caused by increasing demand.

The omnibus budget included \$500,000 in new funding to increase access and improve quality of care for children ages three and under. Governor Kathleen Sebelius had requested \$1 million for the Child Care Quality Initiative.

The legislature allocated \$1.6 million in new funding for the Kansas Early Head Start program to expand its reach to the 70 counties that now have no services. The governor's original request was \$2.2 million.

The omnibus budget contained \$3 million in new funding for the pre-kindergarten pilot programs, allowing expansion to new counties and service to more children. The governor had requested \$3.5 million. The Legislative Division of Post Audit reports that 563 children were served in pilot pre-kindergarten programs last year.



■ Missouri

The House and Senate Conference Committee approved a fiscal year 2008 budget that failed to make early childhood education a priority for the state of Missouri. The Senate originally appropriated \$4 million in additional general revenue funds to raise income eligibility for the child care subsidy program, but during conference committee meetings that was slashed to \$1 million. The final budget allocated enough funds to raise the eligibility threshold from 108 percent to 127 percent of the federal poverty level for next year. Missouri will now be ranked 46th in the nation for funding child care assistance, up from 50th in prior years.

Senate Bill 161 would have required the Department of Social Services, in collaboration with the Departments of Health and Senior Services, to establish a five-star quality rating system (QRS) for licensed early childhood and before-and-after-school programs. This system would allow parents to evaluate and select high-quality programs for their children. During the session, the House added language from 11 other bills relating to education and drastically changed the provisions for the QRS, which stalled the legislative process and eventually led to failure to pass the underlying QRS bill.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

2008 Legislative Priorities

The Metropolitan Council on Early Learning works with its community and state partners each year to develop a public policy platform. Issues for 2008 include:

■ Federal

- **Congress should reauthorize and increase appropriations for Head Start and Early Head Start to allow programs to add slots to serve more eligible families.**

Head Start is a comprehensive program that focuses on children's educational, social, emotional and physical needs, as well as parental involvement and family support. Early Head Start provides services for pregnant women and low-income families with children from birth to age three. Current funding levels do not allow area Head Start programs to serve all eligible children.

- **Congress should reauthorize the Child Care and Development Block Grant Program.**

This program provides funding support through the states to assist low-income working families with child care needs. Congress has not increased funding for this program since 2002. Due to inflation and increased demand, funding is no longer adequate to provide services to all eligible families.

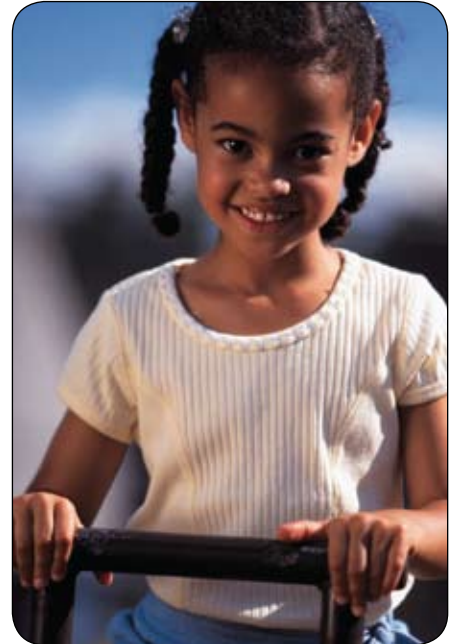
■ Missouri

- **Implement a quality rating system for Missouri child care facilities.**

Support a quality rating system that provides incentives for quality improvement by offering technical assistance, professional development scholarships, and/or increased rates for subsidized provider reimbursement.

- **Increase the child care subsidy for low-income families and include a sliding fee scale and exit eligibility to aid in the "cliff effect" facing families at the margins who lose eligibility when their income increases.**

Missouri ranks 46th in the nation for child care subsidy eligibility. Currently, a family must earn less than 127 percent of the federal poverty level to receive child care assistance. Under these guidelines, a family of three with an annual income greater than \$21,082 is not eligible to receive a child care subsidy.



The income eligibility cutoff is not keeping up with inflation. Many low-income families find it difficult to remain in the workforce and find it nearly impossible to access quality child care programs for their children. Once a family reaches the income limit, the entire subsidy is lost. This impacts the ability of businesses to recruit and retain qualified employees.

- **Advance and expand access to voluntary pre-kindergarten for all Missouri children.**

High-quality pre-kindergarten programs give children the early social, emotional, reading, and math skills that are the foundation of success in school. The Early Childhood Development Education and Care Fund provides funding for state-sponsored pre-kindergarten programs in Missouri. The Missouri Preschool Project provides grants to public and private pre-kindergarten programs, with priority given to those that serve children from low-income families. In 2006, 18,000 Missouri children attended pre-kindergarten, including approximately 6,000 children from the Kansas City area. In 2007, the Kansas City, Mo., School District launched a universal pre-kindergarten program which offers free, full-day pre-kindergarten programming to all district families. This program, which is funded by the school district and Head Start, is expected to serve 3,000 children.

■ Kansas

- **Implement a quality rating system for Kansas child care facilities.**

Support a quality rating system that provides incentives for quality improvement by offering technical assistance, professional development scholarships, and/or increased rates for subsidized provider reimbursement.

- **Maintain the income eligibility for families to receive child care subsidies at 185 percent of the poverty level.**

Child care subsidies are essential to allow low-income families to enter and remain in the workforce. Kansas is ranked 24th in the nation for child care subsidy income eligibility.

- **Advance and expand access to the voluntary pre-kindergarten program and Smart Start programs.**

Support funding to allow expansion of pre-kindergarten programs to include more counties and serve more children. High-quality early learning programs are an effective, proven way to improve young children's school readiness.

MCEL works with its community and state partners each year to develop a public policy platform. For more information about the platform and to get involved in advocacy efforts, please contact MCEL at 816/474-4240 or visit www.marc.org/mcel.

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

A 2006 study funded by the National Institutes of Health found that a child's family life has more influence on his or her development through age four and a half than does a child's experience in an early learning setting.

The impact of parents and families was two to three times more strongly linked to the growth and development of a child than was child care during the preschool years.

Families play the primary role in preparing children socially, physically and intellectually to enter school ready to learn — a role that begins at birth.

Children are born to learn and learn best through everyday experiences with the people they love and trust the most — their families. Families are children's first and most powerful caregivers, teachers and advocates.

What does it mean for parents to prepare a child to be socially, physically, and intellectually prepared for school? Some examples include:

- Socially, by age five, a child should be able to cooperate with other children and adults, accept responsibility, and build relationships of mutual trust, understanding and respect for others. The child will need to work well in large groups and get along with new adults and other children. He or she will have to share the teacher's attention with other youngsters.
- Physically, a child needs to be healthy. This includes up-to-date immunizations, and regular dental and medical care. A physically healthy child can focus better on school and is less distracted by ailments. Preschoolers need opportunities to exercise and develop physical coordination.
- Intellectually, a child should be able to apply early reading skills, use writing as a means of expression and communication, and seek answers to questions through active investigation. Children who can't or don't communicate easily may have problems in school.



In addition, families themselves must be prepared by having the essential elements present in their own lives to care for their children. These elements include economic stability, parenting support and instruction, and support from their employers.

Most parents want to be their children's best teachers and want to feel confident that their children will enter school prepared to succeed. Fortunately, families in Greater Kansas City have many support services and resources available to help them prepare their children for success in school and in life.

Family Support Services in Greater Kansas City

United Way 2-1-1

2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember telephone number that connects people with important community services and volunteer opportunities. United Way 2-1-1 spans a 23-county area, including seven counties in Kansas and 16 in Missouri, and has access to literally thousands of resources. Since it began operating in late 2006, United Way 2-1-1 has taken thousands of calls from families who want information on how to find an early learning program, how to apply for child care subsidies, or where to go if they have a concern about a child care provider.

Child Care Source | 913/573-CARE (2273)

Child Care Source, operated by The Family Conservancy, helps connect parents with resources and early learning programs that will meet their individual needs. Child Care Source assists parents by:

- Providing consumer education on choosing quality child care.
- Providing individualized child care referrals to families based on cost, location and other program factors.
- Offering training and resources to early learning professionals so that families have access to higher-quality early learning programs.
- Helping employers with referral services that make employee searches for early learning programs faster and easier.

CONCLUSION

Are Greater Kansas City's children ready for school? Not all of them are — yet. But a large network of early learning professionals, advocates and support agencies are working together to make sure they will be.

The Region Is Seeing Great Progress

The region's early learning system has continued to make great gains in the past few years. More programs have achieved national accreditation standards and more teachers have earned degrees or certificates in early childhood education. The number of programs participating in the Quality Rating System pilot project has increased — and so have the overall ratings earned by participating programs. Families who need help can access support services more easily than ever before through the new United Way 2-1-1 system. And, with the help of advocates in both the Missouri and Kansas legislatures, MCEL and its partner agencies have achieved some policy goals and made progress toward others.

Many Hurdles Still Lie Ahead

High costs are still a barrier for many families who seek high-quality early learning experiences for their children. Low-income families in Missouri have an especially hard time accessing quality care, as the state ranks among the lowest in the nation in providing child care subsidies that help poor working parents stay employed. Child care subsidies in both Missouri and Kansas remain well below market rates, which deters some providers from offering services to children whose families receive subsidies.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs offer comprehensive supports to low-income children and their families, but due to funding constraints they can only serve a portion of the children who are eligible for these services.

A growing need exists for support services for non-English speaking children and families, as a majority of center-based programs in the region now enroll children who either don't speak English or speak it as a second language.

Early learning teachers and child care workers remain undervalued in the workforce. They typically earn much less than their counterparts in elementary education and receive few benefits. While turnover among early learning program staff has leveled off in recent years, it still remains quite high at about 20 percent.



Dedicated Professionals Are Working Towards Regional Goals

MCEL and its partners are striving to build a strong early learning system that prepares the region's children for success in school. Through its strategic plan, Partners in Quality has outlined a road map that will guide these efforts over the next several years. Important efforts currently underway include:

- Accessing sustainable public funds to support full implementation of quality rating system programs in both Missouri and Kansas.
- Thoughtful implementation of universal, voluntary pre-kindergarten programs throughout the region, working hand in hand with local communities and school districts.
- Development of and support for community leadership regarding early learning issues.
- Increasing program support services, including curriculum training, professional development opportunities for center directors and technical assistance to programs as they transition to state quality rating systems and pre-kindergarten.
- Addressing the unique language and cultural needs faced by programs now serving high populations of non-English speaking or ESL children.

How Can You Help?

■ Be an Educated Advocate

Become an educated advocate for early learning by keeping up to date on state and federal policies. Know who your elected officials are and let them know how important early learning is for children. Sign up for the Partnership for Children's legislative updates and learn more about your elected officials at <http://capwiz.com/pfc/mlm/>.

■ Be Engaged in the Work

Encourage your organization to become a member of Greater Kansas City's early learning network, Partners in Quality. To learn more about PIQ and how to become a member contact the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning, 816/474-4240, or visit www.marc.org/mcel.

■ Be Involved in Learning

Whether you are a parent, grandparent, friend or interested volunteer, there are many ways you can be involved in a young child's learning first hand. For example, read, hug, play and talk with your child at home; volunteer at your child's early learning center; and volunteer to assist other parents.

For more about ways you can get involved in efforts to improve early learning in Greater Kansas City, please contact MCEL at 816/474-4240 or e-mail earlyeducation@marc.org.

METHODOLOGY

To gather data for the *Status of Early Learning in Greater Kansas City 2007–2008*, the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning distributed surveys to a random sample drawn from more than 2,000 child care programs that serve children under the age of five in metropolitan Kansas City.

Through the survey, MCEL requested a variety of information, including the number and age of children enrolled, fees charged, and the levels of provider training, education, salaries, benefits and turnover. Different survey forms were distributed to family child care homes and to child care centers, though some identical questions asked on both forms allowed comparison between the two types of programs.

The distribution list for the survey was compiled by the area resource and referral network, Child Care Source. The providers on these lists are licensed, registered or license-exempt. Child care provided by family members and in-home nannies was not included in the survey. Some unregulated family providers in Missouri were included in this year's survey.

Child Care Centers: 780 surveys were sent to area child care centers including licensed child care centers, license-exempt centers, for-profit and not-for-profit programs, preschool programs, church-based and school-based programs, and part-day and full-day programs. Completed surveys were returned by 272 centers, for an overall return rate of 35 percent.

Family Child Care Homes: 1500 surveys were distributed to family home child care providers including all registered and licensed family home child care providers in Kansas and all licensed family home care providers in Missouri. Completed surveys were returned by 791 family providers, for a 53 percent return rate.

About the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning

The Metropolitan Council on Early Learning (MCEL) believes that every child in Greater Kansas City should enter school ready to succeed. MCEL, which has been part of the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) since 1989, serves as a think tank and catalyst for the development and implementation of a quality early learning system in Greater Kansas City that works to make this vision a reality.

MCEL works with an extensive network of community partners from the public and private sectors to develop, implement and promote a quality early learning system that supports families and prepares children to thrive and prosper in school. Major components of that system include Mid-America Head Start, the Quality Rating System and other MARC programs that create professional development opportunities for early learning teachers.

We are committed to building and supporting the infrastructure Greater Kansas City needs so that all children have access to quality early learning opportunities and the greatest chance at success in school and life.



Metropolitan Council
on
EARLY LEARNING

For more information on MCEL and its work, please visit our Web site at www.marc.org/mcel or call 816/474-4240.



MARC

Mid-America Regional Council

The publication of *The Status of Early Learning in Greater Kansas City 2007–2008* and the associated research were made possible by grants from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

The Mid-America Regional Council would like to acknowledge the support and contributions of its collaborative partners and volunteer participants, and thank area early care and education professionals for their response to the surveys and other requests for information on which this publication is based.



MARC

Mid-America Regional Council

600 Broadway, Suite 200 • Kansas City, Missouri 64105-1659
Phone 816/474-4240 • Fax 816/421-7758 • www.marc.org