

EARLY CHILDHOOD ISSUE BRIEFS

Children are born learning, and their experiences in the first years of life form the building blocks for their future success in the classroom, in the workplace, and in the community.

According to the Harvard University's [Center on the Developing Child](#). "Healthy development in the early years (particularly birth to three) provides the building blocks for educational achievement, economic productivity, responsible citizenship, lifelong health, strong communities, and successful parenting of the next generation." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) promotes the significance of the [First Thousand Days](#), referring to the period from pregnancy through a child's second birthday, as a critical time for brain development, healthy growth, and setting the foundation for lifelong health. CFEC is especially interested in supporting the prevention of negative outcomes and ensuring safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children, beginning in their homes from the very beginning.

Early Childhood

The Community Foundation of Elkhart County defines Early Childhood development and education as spanning a wide range of ages, issues, and settings. We include the prenatal months through 8 years of age/3rd grade. Topics include social, emotional, & academic learning and factors that ensure that children and their primary caregivers are well-nourished, supported and free from trauma and toxic stress. Finally, early learning settings include formal & informal environments, and caregivers include families, teachers, friends, health care providers, home visitors, relatives and neighbors, and many others who care for our community's children.

Address Racial, Ethnic, and Economic Disparities in Early Childhood

We know that people of color strive to overcome more obstacles to achieving developmental and educational milestones. They face historical inequities, unfair policies & practices, higher levels of stress, and more. Yet, we aspire to do more than close gaps. We truly desire for all children to flourish. We will use disaggregated data to identify systemic barriers to success.

Desired Result: Our Children are Prepared for Success

All Elkhart County children are prepared for success as they begin school and thrive in the early grades.

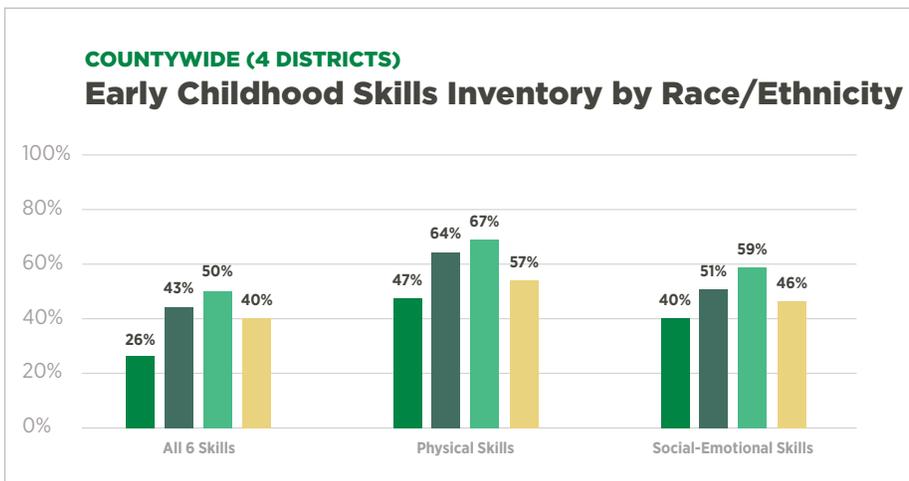
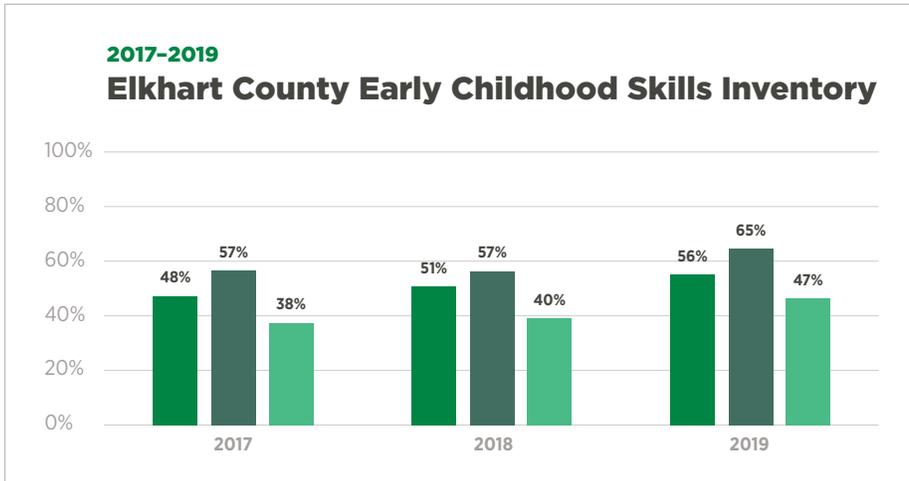
Foundational Framework: Results Based Accountability ([RBA](#)) is a disciplined way of thinking and taking action collectively. Begin with the end result in mind and works backward, step by step, towards the means.

RBA makes an important distinction between population and performance accountability. In population accountability, the entire community, including the public and private sectors, shares responsibility for achieving the desired community conditions. Performance accountability, by comparison, is held at a program, agency, or service level and determines whether the clients or customers of the program or service are better off. This distinction ensures that appropriate responsibility is attached to programs and services and avoids the expectation that one single program can produce significant population-level results.

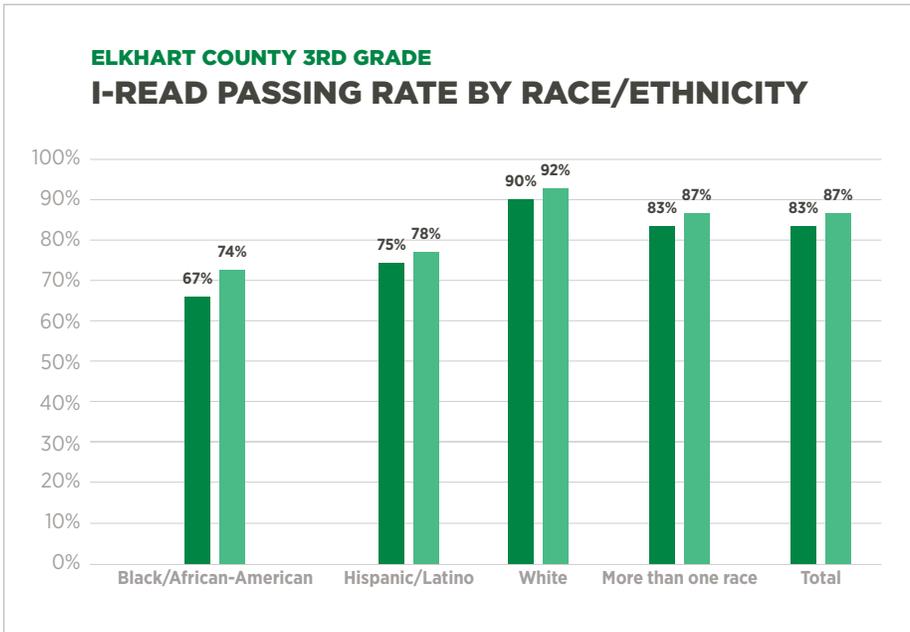
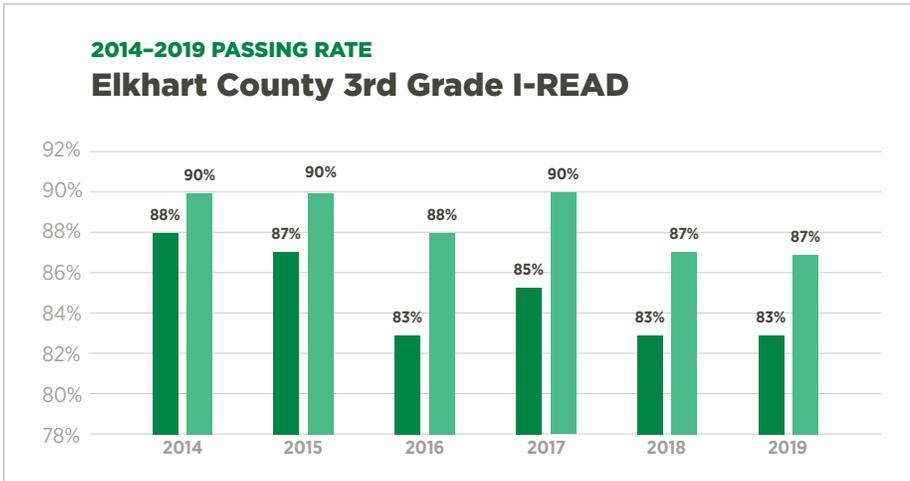
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Early Childhood Population-level Measures:

- **Kindergarten readiness:** the Elkhart County Early Skills Inventory, measuring social-emotional and physical developmental readiness.
- **Third-grade reading scores:** Measured through the state IREAD-3 assessment.



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Area of emphasis

While the best available population-level indicators are measured when children enter school, research shows that the most significant returns are realized from investments made at the very beginning of the child’s learning-with their family in their home. The Community Foundation will demonstrate the importance of this issue by prioritizing programs and projects that impact peri-natal and the very early years of childhood.

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Many factors influence the early development of children. These factors include healthy & well-timed births, healthy & safe environments, supported & supportive families, and high-quality childcare options. No single program alone can drive significant change in either of the headline measures. A collection of targeted interventions, however, CAN lead to meaningful change in a community. *(See the Project Examples later in this document)*

Funded programs will identify how success is defined and measured. The Community Foundation will prioritize funding for projects aligned with the principles outlined by Harvard's Center for the Developing Child (see link below):

1. Support Responsive Relationships
2. Strengthen Core skills (Executive Function and Self-regulation skills)
3. Reduce Sources of Stress

Disaggregated data

The purpose of disaggregated data is to understand gaps in opportunities, experiences, and outcomes within communities to identify systemic issues. Disaggregated data is a tool for working with communities to understand how the system is currently working and build on community strengths and assets to close gaps. There can be many causes for equity gaps in data, including bias within research tools and data collection methods. Disaggregated data should only be used as a starting point to explore disparities from a systemic and assets-based perspective to avoid perpetuating false stereotypes or narratives about individuals and communities.

Resources

- [Success Indicators in Early Learning and Education](#)
- [Indiana's Management Performance Hub](#)
- Harvard University, Center for the Developing Child [Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families](#)
 - [Support responsive relationships for children and adults.](#)
 - [Strengthen core life skills.](#)
 - [Reduce sources of stress in the lives of children and families.](#)
- Harvard University, [From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts](#)
- CDC's [Essentials for Childhood: Creating Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments](#)
 - [Essentials for Childhood One Pager](#)
- [Adverse Childhood Experiences.](#)
- [Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences.](#)
- Tufts University, [HOPE-Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences program](#)

Graphs provided by Horizon Educational Alliance.

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EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT EXAMPLES

The Community Foundation is interested in funding projects/programs that improve early childhood experiences, especially those that will improve equity across the community.

Children are born learning, and their experiences in the first years of life form the building blocks for their future success in the classroom, workplace, and community.

While the best available population-level indicators are measured when children enter school, we believe the best investment is made at the very beginning of the child's learning—with their family in their home. The Community Foundation will demonstrate the importance of this issue by significantly investing in early childhood efforts aligned with principles outlined by [Harvard University's Center for the Developing Child](#):

- Support Responsive Relationships
- Strengthen Core skills (Executive Function and Self-regulation skills)
- Reduce Sources of Stress

See *CFEC Issue Brief* for definitions, desired results, and resources. In addition, the following examples of projects/activities and indicators are offered to guide program design and evaluation. This is not an exclusive list of projects eligible for funding but is provided as a guide to inspire.

Please contact Program Officer Vonnie Trumble to discuss your project ideas to assist you in developing a robust proposal.

1. Support responsive relationships

Activities in this category will support the family, caregiver, and child wellbeing and mental health.

- Project example: coaching parents/ caregivers on [serve-and-return interaction](#) with children in a wide range of settings
- Project example: parent/ caregiver support programs for at-risk families; parent trainings
- Project example: parent mental health screening and referral pathways
- Project example: trainings for pastors, school personnel, and community leaders in recognizing and referring for mental health needs, child abuse and neglect.
- Project example: Improve hiring and training practices to increase the ability to build strong relationships with families with varying cultural backgrounds and diverse needs.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT EXAMPLES

Example indicators for community partners to show the program is having an impact (may be through a pre and post-survey, focus groups, etc.)

- % of clients screened for [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) and appropriately referred to services & supports
- % of parents who understand ACES and strategies for prevention of ACES
- # of parents trained in protective factors
- # of parents trained- i.e., evidence-based child abuse prevention, community screening for mental health needs, community resources, parenting resources, etc.
- % of parents reporting increased knowledge/ skill/ confidence
- % of direct service staff reporting adequate support and resources to perform the work effectively

2. Strengthen core skills of self-regulation and executive function

Activities in this category will support high-quality learning supports for children and their parents/ caregivers in Elkhart County, where these core skills are modeled, practiced, and coached.

- Project example: coaching models with parents/ caregivers that allow them to identify, plan for, and meet their goals
- Project example: create regular opportunities to learn and practice new skills in age-appropriate, meaningful contexts (for children and their parent/ caregivers)
- Project example: Pre-K curriculum purchase and training support and accreditation support for non-accredited early childhood sites

Example indicators for community partners to show that their theory of change is having an impact

- % of participating children meeting developmental milestones.
- Accreditation and training status of program and staff
- Increase in hours of children being read to (birth to preschool), and of children reading (K- 3)
- Annual staff retention rate (childcare and family support positions)
- Reduction in milestone achievement disparities for participating children
- Reduction in harsh and exclusionary disciplinary actions
- Reduction in disciplinary disparities

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT EXAMPLES

3. Reduce Sources of Stress

Activities in this category will support families in meeting their basic needs in the areas of housing, food, safety, and a predictable environment

- Project example: The assessment process includes questions about significant stressors, and plans are developed to support an effective response by the family
- Project example: Home Visitors help parents strengthen their skills to create a stable and supportive home environment with consistent and predictable routines
- Project example: The assessment process includes maternal depression screening and results in action plans to respond.
- Project example: An organization like the Boys & Girls Club provides staff/staff time to link families who are homeless to stable housing resources
- Project example: Safety assessments of homes where young children live result in action plans to remove hazards, such as lead, mold, unsafe wiring.
- Project example: Implement staff support protocols for direct service providers to manage their own stress to help their clients effectively.
- Project example: Workforce development and retention strategies for early childhood centers and staff (Staff support, management support, incentives, trainings, etc.)

Example indicators for community partners to show that their theory of change results in measurable change (may be through a pre and post-survey, focus groups, etc.)

- The average change in the child (project participant) reported home safety (pre and post instrument)
- Change in the parent (project participants) reported ability to meet their child's needs (survey or focus groups)
- # of kids who have found stable housing through the project/intervention
- #/% of kids/families reporting food security (in the program via a survey)