



Early Learning Guidebook for Indiana Schools

Updated 2022



This Early Learning Guidebook for Indiana Schools is a statewide resource tool to develop, expand, and sustain high-quality early learning programs within public and nonpublic schools by providing information to support young children’s development and learning, as well as how to fund such programs. Once considered a strategy to support working parents with child care needs, most states now view access to high-quality preschool programs as both a critical long-term economic investment in the future workforce and a precursor to school success. Drawing on the best available research and using Indiana-specific data, the benefit-cost analysis indicates that a high-quality, state-funded early childhood education program would yield anticipated benefits of \$3.83 to \$4 per dollar invested, according to an Indiana University research team. Click [here](#) to read the full report. Rigorous, long-term evaluation studies have found that children who participate in high-quality preschool programs are 40 percent less likely to drop out of school and 50 percent less likely to be placed in special education (Atchison & Diffey, 2018). If you’re interested in learning more about the economic impact early childhood can make on a community, view a video clip [here](#). In the absence of a state-wide fully funded early childhood education program, this Early Learning Guidebook for Indiana Schools is designed to support schools in developing a preschool program, expanding existing programs, ensuring programs are high-quality, and understanding the Indiana early childhood system and how it connects.

Current guidelines for parent-paid and general fund supported general education preschools operated by a school or school district in Indiana fall outside of the parameters of what is required for a licensed child care facility, as well as outside of what the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) oversees. However, you would need to submit a corporation amendment to add preschool as a grade, contact the IDOE [Office of Accountability](#) to learn more. See the [joint FAQ](#) put out by the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) and IDOE for



additional information on these exempt programs. Policies and guidelines for preschool programs serving children age three and up within a nonpublic school or public school, or school district are currently based solely upon the type of funding the school uses to support the program (e.g. Title I, Part B, On My Way Pre-K). However, it is recommended that all programs follow best practices in the early learning field as will be described in the latter part of this guidebook. Additionally, regardless of funding streams used, please contact [IDOE's Office of Accountability](#) to submit a corporation amendment to add preschool as a grade. If you are unsure if your program is/will be considered an exempt preschool program operated by a school or school district, consult with an attorney.

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Road Map to High Quality Preschool

Stakeholder Discussion

What are the needs of our community? Looking at kindergarten data, where and how could Pre-K help? Have we considered all available funding options? What might be our per child cost? Consider completing the full discussion guide on IDOE's website.

Logistics

Determine location(s), staff, materials and equipment needed. Submit a corporation amendment to IDOE Office of Accountability.

Enroll and Open

Consider starting small, with a Title I funded, Developmental, or family tuition supported program.

Pursue LLEP or Licensure

Consider enrolling and working toward LLEP Status or Licensure through FSSA to be eligible to accept childcare vouchers and On My Way Pre-K vouchers. Visit OMWPK website.

Paths to QUALITY™

Consider enrolling and working towards PTQ Level 3 or 4 (National Accreditation).

Enroll in On My Way Pre-K

Once PTQ Level 3 or 4 is achieved, consider becoming an OMWPK provider.



Common Early Learning Terms, Programs, and Organizations to Know Before Reading



Authentic Assessment: The process of gathering evidence and documentation of a child's learning and growth in ways that resemble real life as closely as possible (e.g. observing and documenting a child's work in the environment and routines, e.g. as the child plays in the block area or is eating a meal). To measure growth and progress, a child's work is compared to his/her previous work rather than to the work of others. Authentic assessment is based on what the child does in a variety of contexts at points throughout the school year and represents the child's application, not mere acquisition, of knowledge and skills.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program plays a vital role in improving the quality of child care by making it more affordable for many low-income families. Each day, 3.2 million children receive nutritious meals and snacks through CACFP. The program also provides meals and snacks to 112,000 adults who receive care in nonresidential adult daycare centers. This program is administered by IDOE and is similar to the School Nutrition Program, but with slightly different requirements.

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF): The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) was authorized by Congress through the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, by amending the Child Care and Development Block Grant regulations at 45 CFR Part 98. In Indiana, CCDF is administered through the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL). CCDF serves infants/toddlers (0-3), preschoolers (3-4), kindergarteners/school-aged children (up to 13 years old). It is commonly known as the childcare voucher program or CCDF. Families can select any CCDF certified provider for early care and education, as well as out-of-school care for school-age children using this voucher. This can include a preschool program within a school, as long as the school has achieved LLEP or Licensed status with OECOSL.

Child Care Resource and Referral Network of Agencies (CCR&R): Indiana's childcare resource and referral agencies provide families with information about the different types of early childhood care and education available that would meet their specific needs, as well as information about the characteristics of a quality early childhood program. In addition, they conduct research in their communities to determine strategies for connecting families to needed supports. CCR&Rs support early childhood programs by facilitating the sharing of best practices, recruiting new

ECE programs, providing orientation to new programs, and supporting the family engagement framework. They can offer assistance with training on Indiana state licensing requirements, and recommendations for opening a quality early childhood program. They offer support and training to providers on how to utilize Indiana Learning Paths for professional development. Additionally, they work with community leaders on how ECE supports economic development, and work to ensure needed early childhood care and education spaces are available to potential, new, or expanding employers in the community. Finally, CCR&Rs collect and store data and information on families, programs, community organizations, and the agency itself to inform quality improvement. Community members and organizations can access information about the supply and demand for childcare, including information on the types of programs available, types of programs parents are asking for, and the gaps between the two. Here is a [map of CCR&R service providers](#) across the state.

Child Development Associate (CDA): The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential™ is based on a core set of competency standards, which guide early care professionals as they work toward becoming qualified teachers of young children. The Council for Professional Recognition works to ensure that the nationally-transferable CDA is a credible and valid credential, recognized by the profession as a vital part of professional development. Early Educators with a CDA know how to put the CDA Competency Standards into practice and understand why those standards help children move with success from one developmental stage to another. There are both formal and informal routes to consider when seeking a CDA. The formal route is through a higher education program, typically [Ivy Tech](#). The [Indiana Non-Formal CDA Project](#) contracts with experienced agencies throughout the state to offer quality CDA training. Both programs help early care and education professionals complete the training and assessment to earn the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential. Additionally, educators in both the formal and nonformal paths are eligible to apply for the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps, [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood@ INDIANA scholarship program](#). Schools must be an LLEP certified, Registered Ministry, or Licensed Center for staff to qualify for this scholarship. See the website linked above for additional information.

Developmental Stages: Natural or common divisions of the process of human growth characterized by types of behavior, biological properties or manifestations, and mental processes.

Developmentally Appropriate: Any behavior or experience that is matched to the maturity of the individual child with respect to age, needs, interests, developmental levels, and cultural backgrounds.

Early Childhood: Defined here as birth to eight years of age.

Early Childhood Development: The process by which children from birth to age eight gradually gain the skills and confidence needed to succeed in their present environment and the cognitive skills needed to form a foundation for school readiness and later school success.

Early Childhood Education (ECE): Activities and experiences that are intended to affect developmental changes in children from birth through the primary units of elementary school (grades K-3).

Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC): ELAC is a Governor appointed Council that is working to ensure that children ages birth to 8 years and their families have access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education programs that keep children healthy, safe, and learning. The Governor appoints ELAC committee members who in turn offer guidance and input to the Governor's Office and the Indiana General Assembly.

www.elacindiana.org

Early Learning Foundations: The Foundations are Indiana's early learning development framework and are aligned to the 2014 Indiana Academic Standards. This framework provides core elements that children should achieve from birth to age five to be ready for future success. They create common language and expectations for the early childhood field. The Foundations include English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Social and Emotional, Approaches to Play and Learning, Science, Social Studies, Creative Arts, and Physical Health and Growth. *(The Foundations are not a curriculum, lesson plan, or an assessment tool.)*

Experiential Learning: Acquisition of knowledge and skills through work, play, and other life experiences outside of the traditional classroom environment; learning by doing.

Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA): FSSA is a health care and social service funding agency. Established by the Indiana General Assembly in 1991 to consolidate and better integrate the delivery of human services by state government, FSSA is led by the Secretary who is appointed by the Governor and is a member of the Governor's cabinet. There are six care divisions in FSSA, but the relevant division to this guidebook is The Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL). OECOSL oversees early care and education and out-of-school time programs, including both before and after-school programs. OECOSL administers the childcare licensing and inspection program for child care centers, ministries, and child care homes. Additionally, OECOSL oversees preschool programs within schools that apply to become a Legally Licensed Exempt Provider (LLEP) in order to accept either CCDF vouchers and/or On My Way Pre-K (OMWPK) vouchers. Schools with preschool programs that do not apply to become an LLEP are not regulated by OECOSL and are not bound by OECOSL licensing regulations, per licensure exemption laws. See a joint [FAQ](#) between FSSA and IDOE to learn more about program licensure exemptions.

High-Quality Preschool Program: An early learning program that includes structural elements that are evidence-based and nationally recognized as important for ensuring program quality. In Indiana, OECOSL defines High-Quality Preschool as a program that enrolled in and rated a Level 3 or Level 4 in Paths to QUALITY™, or for nonpublic schools, is nationally accredited by a state-approved accrediting body.

I-LEAD: [I-LEAD, Indiana Licensing & Education Access Depot](#) is FSSA's platform for managing licensing and regulatory processes. I-LEAD offers Hoosier providers a streamlined solution to managing licensing paperwork, background checks, and updated program information. Managed by Indiana FSSA's Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning, this platform gives child care leaders a one-stop-shop for essential services, including access to Indiana Learning Paths, a free online learning system that connects providers with webinars, interactive learning sessions, and other learning opportunities that align with licensing and Paths to QUALITY requirements. [ILEADHelp.org](#) is a searchable knowledge base designed to help users navigate this tool. Contact [I-LEAD Solution Center](#) if you need additional support.

Indiana Learning Paths: Indiana Learning Paths is the section of [I-LEAD](#) that connects early childhood educators with webinars, interactive learning sessions, and other learning opportunities based on new research, evidence-based practices that

align with licensing and Paths to QUALITY™ (PTQ) and [Indiana's Core Knowledge and Competencies](#) (CKCs). Anyone who has a free account can register for face-to-face options, live webinars, or asynchronous online sessions on this platform. To access Indiana Learning Paths, you must first log into I-LEAD. If your program is not required to be registered with the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning as a Licensed Center, LLEP, or registered ministry, you may still set up an account to access the free online professional development on Indiana Learning Paths. Visit the I-LEAD home page at ilead.in.gov and click on login in the top right corner. There will be an option to click “sign up now”. Follow the prompts to set up your account. Once in I-LEAD, click the Start Your Indiana Learning Path button on the left side of the screen.

Kindergarten Readiness: A definition that was developed and approved by the Early Learning Advisory Committee (ELAC) for the state of Indiana in the summer of 2014: “In Indiana, we work together so that every child can develop to his or her fullest potential socially, emotionally, physically, cognitively, and academically. Through growth in all of these domains, the child will become a healthy, capable, competent, and powerful learner.”

Readiness encompasses multiple domains of growth and development and includes concepts like language and literacy, cognition, general knowledge (including early science and mathematics concepts), approaches to learning, physical well-being, motor development, and social-emotional development. Young learners develop skills and abilities across all of these developmental domains in a highly interrelated manner, building confidence and expertise as new competencies are mastered. However, children often progress unevenly within and across domains, meaning that ongoing observations may be needed to get a sense of a child’s developmental trajectory. Similarly, there is high variability in what is considered the “normal range” of child development. Young children are constantly developing and acquiring new skills, but the rate at which early learners acquire new concepts and skills varies significantly among children (Regenstein et al, 2018).

Legally Licensed Exempt Provider (LLEP): OECOSL manages the process of achieving this status. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program requires child care providers or preschools receiving CCDF funding to meet certain standards of health and safety. These standards are called Provider Eligibility Standards (PES). These laws affect registered ministries and legally licensed exempt providers (LLEP),

including home-based and center/school-based that choose to accept CCDF vouchers. Schools serving students ages three and up, by law, are exempt from FSSA/OECOSL licensing regulations. However, if a school would like to accept CCDF vouchers or OMWPK vouchers, they must go through either the LLEP process and meet the PES standards as described previously, or the full center licensing requirements. Schools that do not wish to accept CCDF or OMW vouchers do not have to complete the LLEP process but are also unable to participate in Paths to QUALITY and the incentives that accompany it.

Licensure exemptions under OECOSL: The following types of preschool programs are exempt from child care licensure under FSSA per IC 12-17-.2-2-8. (This is not to be confused with Legally Licensed Exempt Providers LLEP who must be certified through FSSA) **Edited to include only relevant portions to schools.*

1. A program for children enrolled in grades kindergarten through 12 that is operated by the Department of Education or a public or private school.
2. A program for children who become at least three years of age as of December 1 of a particular school year (as defined in IC 20-10.1-2-1) that is operated by the Department of Education or a public or private school.
3. A program operated to serve migrant children that: a) provides services for children from migrant worker families; and b) is operated during a single period of less than 120 consecutive days during a calendar year.
4. A child care program operated by a public or private secondary school that:
 - a. Provides daycare on the school premises for children of a student or an employee of the school;
 - b. complies with health, safety, and sanitation standards as determined by the division under IC 12-17.2-2-4 for child care centers or in accordance with a variance or waiver of a rule governing child care centers approved by the division, under IC 12-17.2-2-10; and
 - c. substantially complies with the fire and life safety rules as determined by the state fire marshal under rules adopted by the division under IC 12-17.2-2-4 for child care centers or in accordance with a variance or waiver of a rule governing child care centers approved by the division under IC 12-17.2-2-10.

Additionally, see the [joint FAQ with FSSA](#) around licensing questions for nonpublic schools.

On My Way Pre-K (OMW Pre-K/OMWPK): On My Way Pre-K is the state pilot preschool program that was opened up to all 92 counties in July 2019. It is administered through the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL) under the direction of the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA). This pilot program is one component of a larger vision to improve the lives of children and families in our state. On My Way Pre-K provides grants for four-year-olds from low-income families, to allow them access to high-quality Pre-K programs the year before they begin kindergarten. The program is flexible and is built around the needs of families, offering options for full-day or partial-day programs. Specific eligibility requirements are subject to legislation updates.

Paths to QUALITY™ (PTQ): A free, voluntary Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) designed to raise the standard of quality in early childhood education in Indiana. Paths to QUALITY™ includes four levels of standards, with each level having progressively higher levels of standards. SPARK Learning Lab offers support and technical assistance for programs interested in participating.

Registered Ministry: A Registered Ministry is a childcare or preschool provided as an extension of a church or religious ministry that is a religious organization exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code. These programs are unlicensed but registered with the state board of health and state fire marshal's office. Non-public schools can enter Paths to Quality from this status in addition to the LLEP or licensed center paths.

SPARK Learning Lab: The statewide technical assistance (TA) provider for Indiana early education and care programs. [SPARK Learning Lab](#) provides a self-guided assessment tool and tiered-level coaching resources based on the needs and services for each early education and care program. This technical assistance is available to all programs across the state. SPARK Learning Lab is the Indiana branch of the parent company Shine Early Learning/Acelero Learning. Reach their Help Desk at 1-800-299-1627.

Additionally, here are links to two additional glossaries you may find helpful when navigating early childhood education.

[OMW Pre-K Provider Site Glossary](#)

[ELAC Glossary](#)

Printable Early Childhood Acronym Sheet

Acronym	
ACSI	Association of Christian Schools International
ASQ	Ages and Stages Questionnaire (Developmental Screening)
CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
CCDBG	Child Care Development Block Grant
CCDF	Child Care and Development Fund
CCR&R	Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (also sometimes referred to as local R&R)
CDA	Child Development Associate Credential
COA	Council on Accreditation
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EHS	Early Head Start
ELAC	Early Learning Advisory Committee
ELI	Early Learning Indiana
FSSA	Family and Social Services Administration
HS	Head Start
IDEA Part B	Developmental Preschool 619
IDEA Part C	Early Intervention/First Steps
INAEYC/IAEYC	Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children (Indiana Chapter of NAEYC)
ISDH	Indiana State Department of Health
LLEP	Legally License Exempt Provider
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NECPA	National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
OECOSL	Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning
OMWPK	On My Way Pre-K
PDG	Preschool Development Grant
PK	Pre-K (4-year-olds entering kindergarten the following year)
PS	Preschool (3-4 or a 3-5 Classroom)
PTQ	Paths to QUALITY™
SPARK	Self-Assessment, Resources & Knowledge (TA provider)
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Benefits of Pre-K



Local education agencies (LEAs) looking to improve long-term student outcomes, accelerate educational progress, and close achievement gaps cannot afford to ignore the early years. Gaps particularly between low-income and middle-class children appear early and increase over time. Such gaps in social-emotional and academic readiness for kindergarten lead to gaps in literacy and math proficiency by third grade, which in turn lead to gaps in high school graduation rates and college and career readiness. High-quality early childhood services can effectively address these gaps (Jacobson, 2014). Overall, there are multiple benefits of quality Pre-K to a variety of stakeholders. High-quality preschool benefits children, families, schools, and Indiana as a whole.

How Pre-K benefits:

Children: Children show accelerated gains in kindergarten (KDG) readiness skills in ELA and math, demonstrating 15 months of gain in only nine months of participating in a high-quality program. Social skills show significant gains as well. Children identified as having high levels of at-risk behaviors at the start of the school year show a significant decline of these behaviors by the end of the year. A majority of children identified as delayed at the start of the program, exited the program at or above age level.

Families: When families have a quality program their child can attend, it allows them to continue working, start working, or continue their education. Fifty percent of parents of students in Indiana's Pre-K pilot program have reported they have been able to increase work hours. Thirty-five percent report they were able to find new employment, and thirty-three percent of families also indicated they were able to begin their own schooling.

Schools: Schools benefit from ensuring families have access to quality early learning experiences by having children enter kindergarten ready to learn. Students' preschool experiences set the tone for future success, therefore Pre-K plays a critical role in the development of young children. Additionally, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), "Children who attend high-quality preschool enter kindergarten with better pre-reading skills, richer vocabularies, and stronger basic math skills than those who do not," says NIEER director W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D. According to Early Learning Indiana, more than four out of every 10 children in Indiana live in a child care desert, meaning an area where there is no more than one child care seat available for every three children. The [State of Pre-K](#) in Indiana site quotes 27,095 children across the state are without access to quality pre-k programs. In states like

Michigan, Oklahoma, and North Carolina, where pre-k programs have been in existence for generations, test scores and overall academic achievement improved. Students were more likely to graduate high school on time and were less likely to miss school or repeat grades. Schools across Indiana are well-positioned to step in and fill this need for children, for families, and for themselves. One final note to consider is how offering onsite childcare or preschool for school employees can help meet the needs of your staff with families, leading to increased morale and employee retention.

Indiana: According to The State of Pre-K in Indiana site listed below, for every \$1 spent on high-quality Pre-K, Indiana saves an estimated \$4 in future special education costs, remediation, and grade retention, among other savings. Additionally, estimates of the economic impact of childcare issues show that these issues affect a large number of Indiana workers, resulting in major economic costs to employers, and negatively impacting the state, including losses in tax revenues. Billions of dollars in costs can be mitigated by increased investments in quality Early Childhood Education programs that allow parents to fully participate in the workforce at a time when Indiana employers are facing shortages of employees.

Additional reports and data around the benefits and impact of preschool:

[The State of Pre-K in Indiana
Creating a P-3 continuum](#)

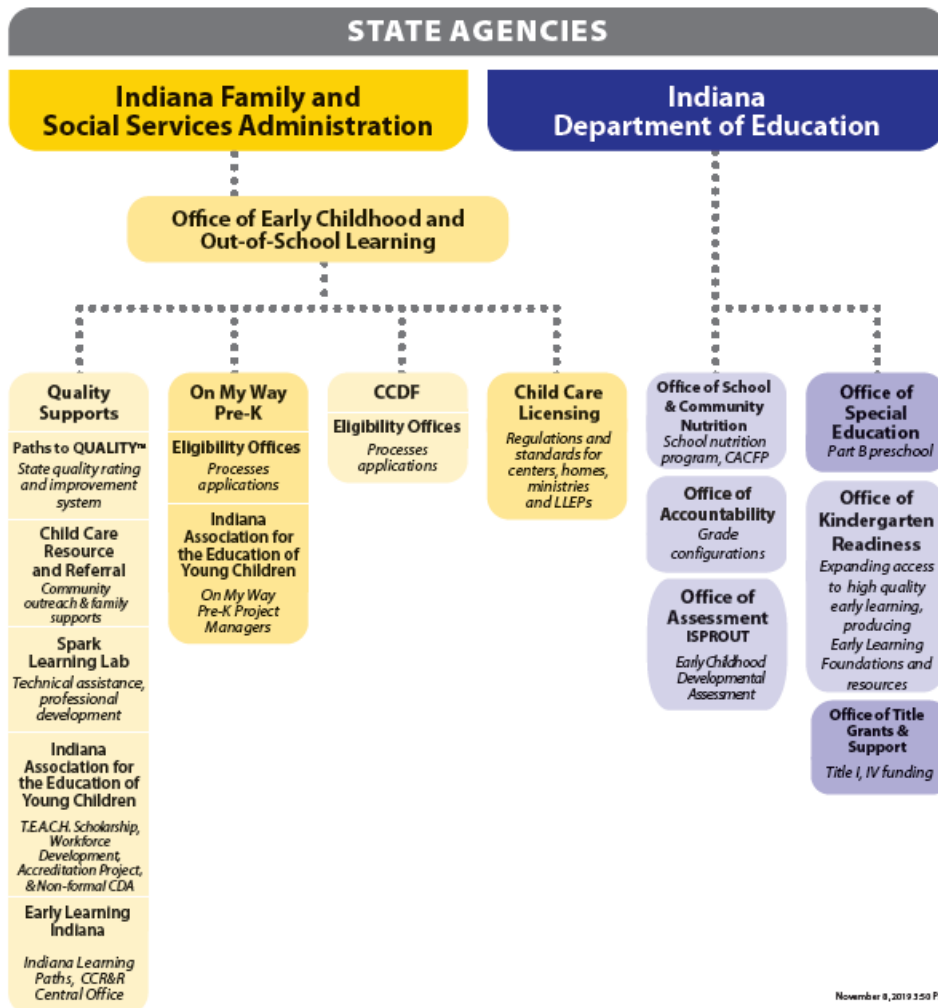
[Impact of Inadequate Childcare
Annual reports from ELAC](#)

Early Childhood Systems in Indiana



Indiana Early Childhood Systems¹

Indiana Early Childhood Systems



November 8, 2019 3:50 PM

¹ Click here for an interaction version.

Blending and Braiding Funding Streams to Support Pre-K



Blending and Braiding Funding Streams

One way for programs to effectively deliver high-quality, comprehensive, early education programming to young children and families is to maximize public and private sector investments by using funds from multiple funding streams. Combining these funding streams is referred to as “blending” and “braiding” funds. At the program level, when funds are blended, funds from two or more separate funding sources are wrapped together within one program budget to pay for a unified set of program services to a group of children. In blending, costs are not necessarily allocated and tracked by individual funding sources. When funds are braided, two or more funding sources are coordinated to support the total cost of services to individual children, but revenues are allocated and expenditures tracked by the categorical funding source. In braiding, cost allocation methods are required to assure that there is no duplicate funding of service costs and that each funding source is charged its fair share of program and administrative costs (Wallen et. alt., 2013). This section will describe many possible funding streams available to support pre-K from both IDOE and FSSA.

CCDF

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act authorizes the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which is the primary Federal funding source devoted to providing low-income families who are working or participating in education/training programs, to help subsidize child care. The CCDF program in Indiana is administered through the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) in the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL). Providers who are eligible to accept CCDF vouchers for qualifying families will receive reimbursement based on student attendance. Preschool providers must be able to demonstrate compliance with the Provider Eligibility Standards (PES) prior to participation and the receipt of any CCDF or state On My Way Pre-K funds. Schools may select either to become a fully licensed child care center, able to serve children as young as six weeks old, or a Legally Licensed Exempt Provider (LLEP), able to serve children three and up. The Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL), oversees both types of programs. For additional information visit their [website](#). While the OMW Pre-K Provider website was set up specifically for programs to navigate the On My Way Pre-K process, it is still useful for schools to navigate the process in becoming an LLEP and/or Paths to QUALITY™ provider. Visit the [OMWPK](#)



[Provider Website](#) resources tab for more specific information on standards, how to apply, consultant contact information, as well as videos describing the process. It is recommended that a principal consider assigning the completion of the LLEP packet to a staff member, as it is detailed and requires various specific steps to complete.²

After becoming an LLEP, programs will receive tuition reimbursement for children who enroll and attend their program with a CCDF voucher. CCDF reimbursement rates are tiered based on the Paths to QUALITY™ level of the program. CCDF reimbursement rates are established through a market rate survey that is conducted every few years by the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning (OECOSL). Child Care Resource and Referral agencies can assist new programs with rate setting and SPARK is available to assist with this for existing programs. It is important to note with regards to CCDF that this money is generally reimbursed to the schools a couple of weeks after attendance is submitted. Once a program becomes a CCDF provider, more information can be found in the CCDF Provider Manual, located under the resource tab on the [OMWPK Provider website](#). This manual gives CCDF eligible providers an overview of the CCDF program including helpful hints on getting started and details about CCDF program policies and procedures. For budgeting purposes, you may view the [CCDF Reimbursement Rates by county](#) here.

On My Way Pre-K (OMWPK)

Indiana's pre-K pilot, On My Way Pre-K, was created under IC12-17.2-7.2. On My Way Pre-K provides low-income four-year-olds with access to free, high-quality pre-K the year before they start kindergarten. OMWPK grants may only be accepted by qualifying institutions, but families can enroll with the OMWPK provider they choose. Families must qualify for the program demonstrating eligibility based on income.³ Since legislation around family eligibility can change, please check onmywayprek.org. One added benefit for nonpublic schools becoming an OMWPK provider is that students who have an OMWPK voucher to attend your school for preschool are eligible for the Choice scholarship for kindergarten. There is an [OMWPK](#)



² All schools may instead choose to become a licensed center, and nonpublic schools affiliated with a religious organization may instead choose to become a registered ministry. More information about those distinctions can be found [here](#). Any school planning to serve children under three must be licensed.

³ Please note these income requirements differ from the free and reduced school lunch income requirements. Families could qualify for reduced lunch, but not for these programs.

[provider website](#) designed to support programs through each step of becoming an OMWPK provider. A careful review of the entire OMWPK Provider page will share the steps to become an OMWPK provider, the eligibility guidelines, match requirements, reimbursement cycles, etc. The Resources and Tools tab on the OMW Pre-K Provider website has a wealth of information and tools including videos to help schools navigate the process. Additionally, educator qualifications can be found in the Paths to Quality standards section of the page.

Already an approved OMW Pre-K Provider: Once you are an approved OMW provider, you have additional support navigating the program with the assigned Pre-K Manager for your region. Additionally, other schools accepting OMWPK can offer tremendous insight to new participants. Ideas from participating schools may include suggestions like because of the unique attendance policy associated with reimbursement, schools may consider offering a separate “Back to School/Meet the Teacher” night for OMWPK families, where they can talk more in-depth about attendance expectations and procedures. Along those lines, the [Preschool Attendance Works Toolkit](#) could also offer more general attendance support. Keep in mind, schools will need to follow the CCDF attendance requirements for full reimbursement, especially in reference to holiday weeks as they make their preschool year calendars. The school or district can select only six days per year as designated holidays, where families will be credited eight hours of attendance for the day.

Capacity Building Grants

House Enrolled Act 1004 allows limited opportunities to award grants for expansion plans for existing Level 3 or Level 4 Paths to QUALITY™ providers or potentially eligible providers serving pre-K (4-year-old) children who have a plan in place to get to Level 3. Visit [OECOSL's website](#) to learn what grants are currently available.



Title I

[Title I, Part A](#) allows Local Education Agencies (LEA) to redirect existing Title funding to provide preschool programs to improve educational outcomes for eligible children from birth to the age at which the LEA provides a free public elementary education. Title I funded preschool programs are intended to assist children most at risk of failing to meet



the State’s challenging academic standards based on multiple, educationally related, objective criteria. Many of the processes and expectations are the same for this type of usage of Title funds. If districts choose to have a Title I school-wide program at the elementary site, all children in that school’s attendance boundary are eligible to attend. If seats are limited, schools will need to have a student selection process in place to determine the children most at risk. Head Start, homeless students, and foster children would still be automatic qualifiers. For larger school districts, Title I funds cannot be used to implement a preschool program throughout the district that benefits all preschool students unless all schools are Title I schools operating a schoolwide program. However, remember that blending and braiding of funds can occur in the same classroom. For example, a Title eligible school can have children receiving Title funds and children receiving On My Way Pre-K all in the same classroom. Title Preschools are still required to meet the state teacher requirements, and for this age group the requirements are as follows⁴:

Teachers: Minimum of an active CDA credential, Preferred Degree in Education, Early Childhood, or Child Development. Indiana does also grant licensure for preschool under the following codes:

Assignment Code	Bulletin 400	Rules 46-47	Rules 2002	REPA/REPA 3
Preschool	*Elementary with Special Subject; Nursery School *Kindergarten Certificate	Early Childhood Education	Generalist: Preschool	Early Childhood Education: P-3

Classroom Assistants/Instructional Aides/Paraprofessionals: Must have a High School Diploma or Indiana High School Equivalency along with an active Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential, a ParaPro Certification, or two years of college. Some districts have elected to offer separate contracts for these preschool teachers and aides as an additional option to consider.

In addition, Title Preschools are required to meet a subset of the Head Start Operations Performance Standards. The entire list of standards, found [here](#), are an excellent guide

⁴ If seeking Paths to QUALITY™ certification, Level Three requires that 50 % of all preschool staff, teachers and assistants/aides have a CDA at minimum.

to building strong preschool programs. Title I preschool programs should focus specifically on the following subset of standards:

[1302.31 Teaching and the learning environment](#)

[1302.32 Curricula](#)

[1302.33 Child screening and assessments](#)

Title programs should also consider and review the following resources:

[Federal non-regulatory guidance](#)

[Additional non-regulatory guidance](#)

[FAQ for Indiana Title I Preschools](#)

For additional support, contact the Title [staff person](#) designated for each LEA.

Child Nutrition Programs

There are a few options to consider when thinking of how to be reimbursed for meals and possibly snacks served to preschool-age children.



1. National School Breakfast (SBP) and Lunch Programs (NSLP) – Pre-K students must eat in the same service area at the same time as K-5. Students are provided the same SBP and NSLP meal pattern as grades K-5. Snacks are not reimbursable during the school day.⁵
2. SBP and NSLP– Pre-K students eat at a different time and/or a different place than other grades, and must be provided the [CACFP meal pattern](#), which has slightly different than requirements in the NSLP for K-5. Snacks are not reimbursable during the school day.
3. Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) – Pre-K students, regardless of when or where they eat, must be provided the [CACFP meal pattern](#), which as mentioned in option two is a little different than NSLP for K-5. The benefit of participating in this program is that snacks are reimbursable when served during the school day.

⁵ LLEP certified programs or Licensed Centers do still require preschoolers to sit with their class and with their teachers in a defined area of the cafeteria.

All programs require meal count records, standardized recipes, Child Nutrition Labels, Product Formulation Statements, etc. to claim reimbursement. It is recommended that the Food Service Director be part of this decision process in analyzing the costs versus benefits of each option.

Consider reviewing these resources for additional information:

[CACFP Trainings](#)

[School Nutrition Programs \(NLSP and SBP\)](#)

For further clarifications, please contact the [Indiana Department of Education's Child Nutrition Programs](#)

Developmental Preschool Programs⁶

Indiana's special education law (Article 7) requires that students be educated with nondisabled peers in the least restrictive environment. Based on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, exceptional preschool learners observe typically developing peers, or models, behaving in various ways. Children then encode those observations to their long-term memory and at some point imitate those behaviors. In 2015 the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education released a joint policy statement](#) on the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs. "It is the Departments' position that all young children with disabilities should have access to inclusive high-quality early childhood programs, where they are provided with individualized and appropriate support in meeting high expectations.



This joint ED and HHS policy statement aims to advance this position by:

- Setting an expectation for high-quality inclusion in early childhood programs;
- Increasing public understanding of the science that supports meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities, from the earliest ages, in early childhood programs;
- Highlighting the legal foundations supporting inclusion in high-quality early childhood programs;
- Providing recommendations to States, LEAs, schools, and early childhood programs for increasing inclusive early learning opportunities for all children; and

⁶ As defined by Section 619 Part B

- Identifying free resources for States, programs, early childhood personnel, and families to support high-quality individualized programming and inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs.

Though this policy statement focuses on including young children with disabilities in early childhood programs, it is our shared vision that all people be meaningfully included in all facets of society throughout their life. This begins in early childhood programs and continues into schools, places of employment, and the broader community. Inclusion in early childhood programs can set a trajectory for inclusion across the course of life, making it critical that we include individuals with disabilities in all facets of society from birth. As the country continues to move forward with the critical task of expanding access to high-quality early childhood programs for all young children, it is imperative that children with disabilities be included at the onset of each of these efforts, and be offered equal opportunities to benefit from these experiences. The case for meaningful inclusion of young children with disabilities, not only in early childhood programs, but in the community more broadly is an essential component of our nation's efforts to ensure equality of opportunity for all Americans" (ED and HHS, 2015). Some Indiana schools and districts have already begun to take an inclusive look at preschool, realizing the value all students receive from an inclusive environment. Rather than creating a separate community preschool for typically developing children, they have expanded their Developmental Preschools to be Inclusive Preschools, enrolling both typically developing children and children with varying needs into the same classrooms. This looks different in each district. Some schools have a preschool teacher who is dually certified in Early Childhood and Special Education, whereas some schools may have one teacher of record certified in Special Education who spends a portion of their day in one class, and a portion of their day in another, and the Early Childhood teacher is scheduled in the classroom opposite the Teacher of Record (TOR). Classrooms where there are 50 percent or more students with IEPs will be considered a Special Education classroom and will require a licensed Special Education teacher. Consideration should also be given to how an inclusive model, defined as less than 50 percent of students with IEPs, would be beneficial to all preschool children, as well as how using the Special Education funding stream can also be leveraged to expand preschool in your school or district. For example, students with an IEP could also use an OMWPK voucher, if the family qualifies, to cover the family cost of any days not covered by the IEP.

Additionally, there is support available to assist schools in the journey towards inclusive preschool. The Early Childhood Center, part of Indiana University's Institute on Disability and Community, has created an Inclusive Preschool Directory. If your school corporation is working toward expanding or enhancing your preschool inclusive services, or wondering how other corporations similar in size to yours address the challenges of preschool inclusion, then [The Indiana Online Directory of Effective Preschool Inclusion Models](#) is a resource for connecting with your colleagues providing high-quality preschool inclusive services. Furthermore, the ECC at IU offers a webinar series titled "What it Takes to Implement Effective Preschool Inclusive Services", available [here](#). Finally, *The Child Impact Project: The Roadmap to Quality Special Education Services for Young Children* was developed by the ECC in partnership with the Indiana Department of Education's Office of Special Education. Its purpose is twofold: 1) to support districts to address data-informed inequities regarding special education service provision for young children with disabilities and 2) to provide guidance on making effective sustainable changes that increase child outcomes. Learn more about this project [here](#).

For more information on teaching in an inclusive preschool classroom, see [this article](#).

Finally, Indiana public school corporations – including public charter schools and State-operated schools such as ISD, ISBVI, and Turnaround Academies, *but NOT Special Education Cooperatives, Interlocals, or Joint Service Centers* – may voluntarily participate in one or both types of Medicaid claiming for school-based services and activities. Indiana statute IC 12-15-1-16 requires all public school corporations to be enrolled as Indiana Medicaid Providers whether or not they choose to participate in Medicaid claiming for covered IEP services. Examples of these services are physical therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT), speech-language/hearing services, applied behavioral analysis (ABA) therapy, audiology, nursing care furnished by an R.N., outpatient mental health, and covered services furnished as telemedicine services. Additionally: IEP-required Specialized Medical Transportation (to/from the service site) on a day when the student receives another Medicaid-covered IEP-required service. Finally, the State of Indiana places no restrictions on schools' use of Medicaid funds; however, there may be local policies, agreements ("MOUs"), or school board decisions that dictate how a local educational agency (LEA) may spend its Medicaid money.

For more information on this, visit our [School-Based Medicaid](#) page. Consider a specific review of the [Medicaid Billing Tool Kit for IEP Services](#) on this webpage.

To further brainstorm the idea of inclusive classrooms, better understand teacher qualifications in inclusive classrooms, or for other related questions contact the Office of Special Education at specialeducation@doe.in.gov.

Charter Schools

The Indiana Department of Education offered a Charter School Program (CSP) Quality Counts grant that emphasized the opening, expansion, or replication of high-quality charter schools to ensure all students, particularly those from underserved populations, have the opportunity to meet Indiana’s challenging academic standards. The funding from this grant was used to provide financial assistance for planning, program design, initial implementation, expansion, or replication of high-quality public charter schools. According to the CSP Guidance on the Use of Funds to Support Preschool Education (December 2014), CSP funds may only be used to support Indiana preschools in charter schools that also provide at least one elementary or secondary grade during the grant period. Important to note, charter schools typically may charge tuition for preschool students in the same manner public schools can do so, however, recipients of this grant may not charge tuition to families to attend the preschool program. Information may be found [here](#) if an additional cohort is added.



Partnerships Focused on Funding

When schools partner with other community organizations, it can enable the school to achieve budgetary, quality, enrollment, or similar goals. In addition to blending and braiding of funding sources, schools may consider thinking outside the box and forming partnerships with other programs, which could involve further blending and braiding of funding or even subcontracting preschool services in their buildings.



Head Start

Partnerships between Head Start and preschool providers that blend funds and deliver full-day, full-year services are one of the pathways to consider. Head Start Grantee and

delegate staff find strategies for building these partnerships in terms of securing funding, expanding existing services, and providing full-day services. See the [Head Start website](#) for more information. Additionally, this article has more information: [Working Together to Help the Youngest](#).

Additionally, if your district has empty classrooms, but is not yet ready or able to take the plunge into preschool, you may consider contacting your local Head Start Grantee. Head Start programs often have extensive waiting lists of families and could be interested in your space. When districts offer space to Head Start, more children and families can be served, leading to a greater number of kindergarten-ready students already familiar with the school. In addition, Head Start programs would likely be eager to partner with schools in this manner, as they are required to bring 20 percent of their grant award back in, either through funds received or in-kind donations. This means if schools were to offer space, utilities, “specials” teachers, or even janitorial staff in-kind, Head Start programs may find it easier to meet their requirement of in-kind donations. Lastly, schools are also able to use Title funds to purchase seats in Head Start Programs, essentially giving Title funds to Head Start Programs to serve Title-eligible students. For additional information on these possibilities, contact IDOE’s [Title Grants and Supports Office](#).

Additional Subcontracting Preschool Examples

Child Care Network: Child Care Network, Inc. (CCN) is a 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit corporation located in Seymour, IN. CCN operates preschools in Jackson County within four public school buildings and two different school corporations. Each program is a licensed child care center at Level 3 Paths to QUALITY™. The relationship with the school system results in CCN using the classroom, receiving custodial/maintenance services, and IT services as an in-kind donation allowing the agency to keep the costs down. The districts allow CCN to hold family nights, preschool sign-ups, and graduations within the buildings in the evenings for little to no charge as well. All of these things assist CCN with providing quality programming. The partnership between CCN and the school system allows each one to better meet the needs of the community in Jackson County.

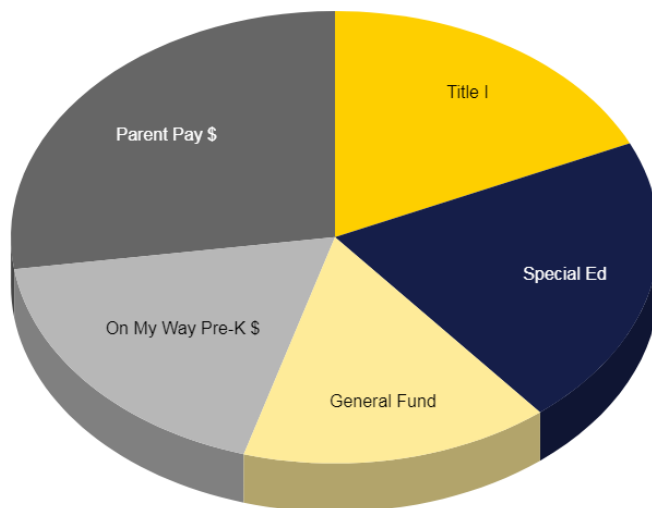
Other funding sources

Because pre-k is not funded with traditional school funding streams, it should be thought of as a business. Schools and districts may be able to expand preschool programs further by adding additional funding sources including general education fund dollars or creating a parent-paid tuition option. If your school or district were to consider a parent pay option, the first step is to determine the cost per child for your program. For example, if Title funds are currently being used to support preschool, divide the total Title preschool budget by the number of children served to get the yearly cost. Child Care Resource and Referral agencies are also available to assist new programs with rate setting, while SPARK is available to assist with this for existing programs.

Additionally, schools may consider pursuing philanthropic funding possibilities including community foundations, private donors including alumni/businesses in the district, as well as local chambers of commerce. In fact for businesses looking to support their employees with young children, an [Indiana Employer Toolkit](#) was released at the 2019 Early Learning Summit for Economic Development. As you meet with local businesses, consider sharing this toolkit, as it provides information to employers about investments they can make in benefits for employees who are parents of young children. The toolkit also describes the return on investment they can expect to see in their business as a result. One example of this in action is at Wawasee Community Schools, featured in [Chalkbeat](#) for their work in improving access to high-quality programs. They offer an early-hours room for the children of employees of a large local manufacturer with whom they partner and receive \$40 per seat per day. This partnership provides hours matching the family's unique work schedule as well as a reduced cost to families.

Finally, nationally accredited programs located in an area with a reasonable proportion of military personnel are eligible to participate in a program called Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN). The MCCYN program provides fee assistance for families of Active Duty Sponsors, Civilians, Guard/Reservist, and Guard/Reserve Technicians who are unable to access base child care. The military pays a portion of eligible families' tuition and the family is responsible for paying the remaining portion. Eligible providers for the MCCYN fee assistance program must have a state child care license, a state inspection report dated within the last 12 months, a complete provider fee assistance application, and must meet additional high-quality accreditation standards. Learn more [here](#).

Funding Sources Example: The more funding sources you have available, the more children you would be able to provide early learning experiences to. If you take away any of these pieces of pie, you would have less funding, and therefore a smaller program.



Partnerships to Consider for Improved Services



Partnerships with Other Programs

When schools partner with other community organizations, it can also allow for quality improvement to their program, additional grassroots marketing, as well as enabling the school to achieve various goals.

Before/After School Programs

Depending on the hours you can offer services, and the needs of the families served, districts may also consider partnering for before and aftercare for preschoolers if the school is not able to offer the service themselves. Explore a partnership with the local YMCA or a community-based preschool located nearby. Many community-based programs will likely offer extended hours that will support working families, and allow students to attend your preschool program, but also have needed care beyond school hours.

Community-Based Preschool Programs

In addition to partnering with these programs for before and aftercare for students attending your preschool, IDOE recommends schools and community-based preschools connect in other meaningful ways. If your school offers developmental preschool, but a student's least restrictive environment is determined to be a typical early childhood classroom, partnering with an outside high-quality community-based program can help meet that requirement. In addition, the transition to kindergarten is a critical time for children and families, yet there are often inconsistencies in expectations between community-based programs and kindergarten teachers. Ideally, effort should be made to create time and space for community-based preschool programs and kindergarten teachers to build relationships and better understand the needs of one another. Consider reaching out to local community-based preschool programs and engaging in ways that make sense for your program. IDOE collaborated with partners to develop a Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit, available [here](#).

Head Start

Districts should consider partnering with their local Head Start Grantee even if they aren't partnering for funding purposes as described in the section above. Districts receiving Title funds are now required to partner with Head Start and other community-based programs through ESSA. Head Starts and districts can collaborate on what they want the transition to kindergarten to look like. Asking one another, "what are some things you're needing



from us?” For example, some districts have created a form stating what specific information they have written family consent to share, e.g. RTI, anecdotal notes, etc. Additionally, Head Start collects a lot of data that could be very useful to districts. Finally, collaborating with the local Head Start enrollment coordinator can lead to referrals of additional children who did not qualify for Head Start, but may be a good fit for your district’s program.

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Today’s [Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) programs](#) prepare young adults for a wide range of high-demand careers. The mission of Career and Technical Education (CTE) in Indiana is to ensure an education system of high quality and equity for the academic achievement and career preparation of all Indiana students. There are likely multiple benefits to partnering with CTE programs within your district or neighboring ones. These benefits could include offering CTE students studying child development firsthand experience in an early childhood setting, offering CTE students in construction/wood/metal programs an opportunity to design and build dramatic play structures for use in the early childhood program, as well as asking CTE students in audio/visual courses to create short videos of the program for marketing purposes!

Libraries

Libraries have a wide range of supports and services that can help support or complement early childhood education program goals. The obvious support would be access to developmentally appropriate books for preschoolers, but many libraries can offer your program additional support and services. Contact your local public library for more information.

Early Childhood Coalitions

Coalitions collaborate to address issues that are bigger than what one person or organization can solve on their own. In Indiana, about 30 communities (cities, counties, and regions) have formed a coalition that is focused on early childhood education. Early childhood education is complex and multifaceted, and it affects so many other sectors’ goals: health, education, workforce, economics, and criminal justice. As communities have started to organize around one of these other issues, such as a desire to increase their talent pipeline, they realize that early childhood education can be a solution to address their goal. The local community coalitions know



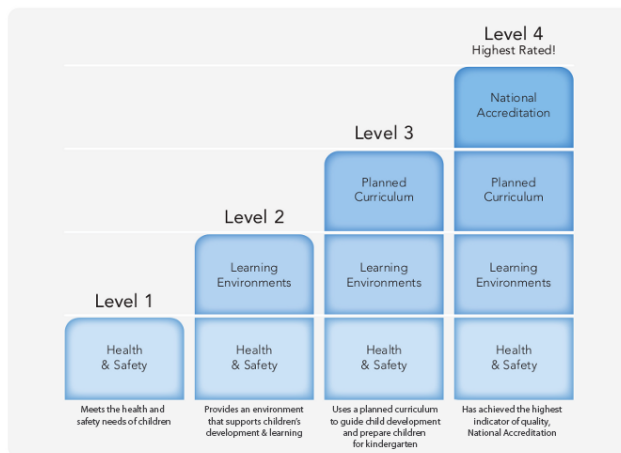
the needs and assets in the community as well as the community's culture to develop a vision and plan for action that makes the most sense. In addition, CCR&R's play a role in coalition building, as they work to initiate, develop and continue relationships with community leaders, organizations, committees, and/or task forces in targeted communities to ensure that the needs of families and early childhood programs are considered when planning community services. Current known Early Childhood Coalitions and their contact information can be accessed [here](#). If your county does not have a coalition, it might be time for your community to organize one. It would be beneficial for schools to be a part of the coalition even if not currently offering a preschool program. The Early Learning Advisory Council ELAC approved a coalition-building toolkit for Indiana in 2019 that can be accessed under resources on the [ELAC website](#).

High-Quality Pre-K



Paths to QUALITY™

[Paths to QUALITY™](#) (PTQ) is a voluntary Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) designed to raise the standard of quality in early childhood education in Indiana. It is a free resource to help families make informed decisions and to help early care and education providers improve the quality of their programs. Public schools are strongly encouraged to consider enrolling in PTQ to help support their quality improvement efforts. Paths to QUALITY™ includes four levels of standards, with each level having progressively higher standards. There are a number of benefits to enrolling



and participating in Paths to QUALITY™, such as free technical assistance, professional development, incentives for level advancement, (typically \$1000 for each level advancement), and tiered reimbursement for CCDF and OMWPK, meaning your reimbursement rate is higher depending on the level you achieve in PTQ. Visit the [Brighter Futures webpage](#) to see videos illustrating each PTQ level. Visit the [On My Way Pre-K Provider](#) page under the Resources and Tools tab to

review the standards for participation in Paths to QUALITY™ for school-based classrooms. These standards will include information regarding teacher qualifications, professional development, annual evaluation, developmentally appropriate activities, observations of children, lesson planning, strategic planning, and more.

After public schools have become either an LLEP or Licensed Child Care Provider as outlined on the previous pages, the next step to becoming an OMWPK provider is to register for Paths to QUALITY™. Even if a school is not considering OMWPK, enrolling in Paths to QUALITY™ allows your program to be officially recognized as a quality provider in your county, and can increase your CCDF reimbursement rate if you accept CCDF vouchers. Some schools have noted Paths to QUALITY™ is also helpful in aligning teacher mindset. Non-public schools are not required to participate in Paths to QUALITY™ to be an OMWPK provider, but the preschool must be accredited through one of the bodies listed in the chapter on accreditation. However, nonpublic schools are still able to participate in Paths to QUALITY™ for the incentives mentioned above.

[SPARK Learning Lab](#) is the agency providing all technical assistance, including TA for programs pursuing Paths to QUALITY™. Please visit their website for additional information.

National Accreditation of Early Learning Programs



There are multiple national accrediting bodies that early learning programs may select from when seeking accreditation. Each of these accrediting bodies requires compliance to a specific set of standards. Through the process of accreditation, Early Learning Providers participate in a series of in-depth self-assessments, independent observation, and assessment by professional experts. In general, accreditation typically assesses the program's staff qualifications, family engagement practices, teacher-child interactions, quality of curriculum and assessment, health and safety practices, and administrative policies.

To meet the highest standards for quality early care and education, Level 4 Paths to QUALITY™ in Indiana's voluntary rating system, the program is required to achieve and maintain accreditation by one of the following nationally recognized accrediting bodies approved by the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning for schools⁷:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)
- Council on Accreditation (COA)
- Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)
- North Central Association (NCA)/Cognia
- National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC)⁸

Accreditation Support

There are national Accreditation Facilitation Projects (AFPs) that support the quality improvement efforts of early learning programs as part of broader efforts to raise program quality. They help programs understand the steps of the accreditation process and the language of accreditation processes. The Indiana Accreditation Project operates through Indiana AEYC and provides both technical assistance as well as

⁷ For more information on these types of accreditation, see Appendix A.

⁸ Schools are not eligible for this accrediting body

financial resources to early care and education facilities that are seeking Level Four in Paths to QUALITY.™⁹ [Here](#) is a link to more information on their website.

Additionally, SPARK Learning Lab, Indiana's technical assistance vendor, can also provide training and resources to support your journey to being recognized by an OECOSL approved national accreditation body. Visit [their website](#) for more information or call the SPARK Learning Lab Help Desk at 1-800-299-1627.

Nonpublic School Accreditation

Nonpublic/Private Schools accredited from one of the following organizations can qualify for On My Way Pre-K without participating in Paths to QUALITY™¹⁰:

- Accrediting Association of Seventh-Day Adventist Schools, Colleges and Universities (AASDAS)
- American Association of Christian Schools (AACCS)
- Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)
- Christian Schools International (CSI)
- Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS)
- International Christian Accrediting Association (ICAA)
- National Lutheran Schools Accreditation (NLSA)
- North Central Association (NCA)/Cognia)

Teaching and Learning in Pre-K: Programmatic Considerations

Principals and other administrators may find themselves overseeing a preschool program and seeking guidance for navigating differences between pre-k and K-12 academics. While IDOE does not recommend or support one philosophy or curriculum over another, this section is designed to provide a high-level overview and additional resources on those components.



⁹ See section above regarding benefits of achieving Level 3 or 4 in Paths to Quality™

¹⁰ The preschool program specifically must be accredited, not just the school. Nonpublic schools must still meet CCDF qualifications by becoming an LLEP, Registered Ministry, or Licensed Center. If you are unsure if your program qualifies as a nonpublic school, please contact [IDOE's Office of Accountability](#).

Curriculum:

IDOE does not require programs to use a specific curriculum or choose from an approved list but would recommend an evidence-based curriculum that is aligned to the [2015 Early Learning Foundations](#). The Office of Head Start (OHS) has [resources](#) on choosing and implementing a high-quality curriculum. In addition to being evidence-based, a high-quality preschool curriculum should be grounded in child development principles and sensitive to individual child's needs. The accompanying daily schedule should offer large chunks of time for hands-on opportunities to learn through experiential learning and play, with a balance of child-directed and adult-directed activities, small and large groups, and indoor and outdoor (when appropriate) time.¹¹ As you consider your preschool daily schedule, [this](#) is a resource to explore and consider.

Physical Environment:

Different philosophies recommend specific aspects of the early learning environment, but the basis across all are similar. While IDOE does not endorse or recommend a specific philosophy, all children need a physical setting, both inside and outdoors, where they can play, explore, and learn safely. The learning environment needs to include engaging and developmentally appropriate materials and is arranged to promote independence and exploration based on children's different stages of development. [Learning centers](#) are clearly defined areas set aside in a learning environment where children can have easy access to materials and engage in independent and self-directed learning activities. They can be an effective way to organize and support developing abilities, encourage interactions, create opportunities for role-playing, and promote literacy skills (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). Additionally, the environment should be warm, welcoming, and reflect the interests of children and their families. Children should be able to see themselves and their families represented throughout the classroom. The Office of Head Start (OHS) has [resources](#) you may consider reviewing regarding the set-up of your environment. Finally, in addition to the indoor learning environment, children need access to outdoor space where they can move and engage with the natural world. Outdoor play has positive impacts on health and has been shown to combat childhood obesity and help develop stronger immune systems. Research also shows that children who play outdoors regularly have more active imaginations, lower

¹¹ Please find more information from the Foundations regarding supporting special populations including dual language learners and exceptional learners in Appendix B.

stress levels, and have greater respect for themselves and others (Workman & Ullrich, 2017).

Consistent and Highly Qualified Educators:

Recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators should be a priority for any early learning program. Knowledgeable early educators intentionally provide learning experiences for children to promote development. Please see the chapter regarding recruiting for more information.

Teacher/Child Interactions:

Teacher-child interactions are the single most important factor in child outcomes.

A well-trained and highly skilled teacher tailors their interactions to fit the needs of the child—using responsive language, engaging all children in classroom activities, fostering independence, and creating a language-rich environment. Effective early childhood teachers proactively prevent and redirect challenging behavior and respond to children’s needs with respect, warmth, and empathy. The experiences children have with teachers in their earliest years can also set the tone for their interactions with teachers in later grades and thus are crucial to promoting positive attitudes about school and approaches to learning (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). The Office of Head Start has created some short 15-minute videos on instructional interactions. For more information view this additional [resource](#).

Family Engagement:

Family engagement is a strong predictor of children's development, wellness, educational attainment, and success later in school and life. There are parallels in Family Engagement efforts in early childhood programs with what is often referred to as Family Involvement in schools. Ultimately, these concepts are centered on the fact that children develop in the context of their environments, which includes families, culture, and community, and supporting families as their child’s primary and most important educator.

In addition, early educators can use IDOE’s [Early Learning Guidance](#) for strategies that they can encourage family members to use at home. This Guidance can be accessed in the Indiana Learning Lab, by creating a free account using your school email. Additional materials for family engagement can be found on our [website](#). Additionally, while more of a support than engagement strategy, early educators and program administrators are also encouraged to be aware of local and state supports available to

vulnerable populations including (but not limited to): 2-1-1 Hotline, shelters, food pantries, WIC offices, and community centers.

If you participate in the On My Way Pre-K Program, you will be asked to use the Family Engagement Toolkit created by the Early Learning Advisory Committee. A copy of the toolkit can be found [here](#) and is available for use by all programs regardless of OMWPK status.

SPARK Learning Lab is available to support a strengths-based process through which early childhood professionals, families, and children build positive and goal-oriented relationships through the use of state-approved family engagement models. Contact SPARK Learning Lab for additional support.

Program Leadership:

Strong leadership is essential in all programs; early learning programs are no different. Leaders must be knowledgeable of and advocate for developmentally appropriate practices for early learners and help early educators implement them in their classrooms. Program administrators must be skilled in organizational management and relationship building. In addition to fostering relationships with families and the community, leaders play a key role in creating a positive atmosphere inside the program, which can minimize teacher turnover, increase program efficiency, and allow teachers to focus on the children (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) released an updated principal competency guide: *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice*. Developed by a panel of leading practitioners, including an Indiana Principal, it defines new competencies and outlines a practical approach to high-quality early childhood education that is critical to laying a strong foundation for learning for young children from Pre-K-3. These practitioners believe understanding lessons learned from principals who are leading efforts to align Pre-K-3 and improve results for children across the country can help other principals build similar systems in their schools (White et. al., 2014). Along these same lines, Indiana has created a place for school administrators with preschool programs to connect with and learn from one another. To join the #INspirEDearly Community of Practice, contact the [IDOE Early Learning Team](#).

Developmentally Appropriate vs. Differentiated Instruction

Elementary educators are often encouraged to implement differentiated, culturally responsive instruction. Differentiated instruction practices encourage educators to

understand their students as individuals and their preferences to create positive classroom climates (Preszler, 2014). Culturally responsive practices acknowledge how critical culture is to learning, in terms of how children communicate and receive information as well as their thinking processes (Brown University The Education Alliance, 2019).

In early learning settings, developmentally appropriate practice (often referred to as DAP) is an approach to daily instruction to promote effective practices in early education programs. The three core considerations of DAP are the following:

- 1) Knowing about child development and learning.
- 2) Knowing what is individually appropriate.
- 3) Knowing what is culturally important (NAEYC, 2009).

These concepts from different environments and with different labels share key concepts important for all early learning settings. Early Learning program leaders must have a clear understanding of DAP and ensure their early educators have received quality professional development around it as well. Key messages from the NAEYC position statement regarding DAP can be found [here](#), and the full statement [here](#). Additionally, [this article](#) from NAEYC provides additional information regarding developmentally appropriate practice and rigor and helps others understand what that looks like in a preschool environment.

Ways to Measure Quality of Programs:

While there is no single nationwide definition of high quality and; therefore, no single measurement tool to determine and compare early childhood program quality across the United States, there are a number of tools and programs that are widely used to assess and report the quality of early childhood programs. Quality programs establish processes for ongoing program evaluation and self-study to ensure continuous quality improvement. Usage of any of these tools to measure the quality of your program is not required, but it is recommended that schools consider at least one tool for continued quality improvement.

- State quality rating and improvement system, or QRIS. In Indiana, this is Paths to QUALITY™, as discussed above.
- National Accrediting bodies, such as NAEYC, also discussed previously.
- I-SAT: Opportunities to take the Indiana Self-Assessment Tool (I-SAT) are now available on Indiana Learning Paths (ILP). The I-SAT is a great way to

understand where your program is now and create a road map for the future. Taking the self-assessment helps to identify the specific resources your program needs to continue your quality improvement journey. Before your I-SAT session, get ready for the I-SAT by taking the required pre-training “Preparing for Program Assessment”. This course, available 24-7 on ILP, will help to define what program assessment is and what it looks like in early childhood education and care. It will also allow you to reflect on the strengths and opportunities of your program and identify evidence and documentation required for a successful program assessment. To take the course, log in or register at ilead.in.gov, choose “Start Your Indiana Learning Path”, and search “Preparing for Program Assessment” in the search bar.

- Environment rating scales: The [Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale](#), or ECERS for children ages three to five, the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, or ITERS, are standardized tools used to measure process quality at the classroom level. The measures contain multiple items on which programs are rated, organized into seven subscales. These subscales include ratings of the space and furnishings, personal care routines, the activities and interactions that take place in the classroom, and how the program engages with families. Ultimately, these tools are designed to assess the various interactions that occur in the learning environment—for example, between staff and children and among children themselves, the interactions children have with materials and activities, and the structures that support these interactions such as the space and the schedule. This tool is not free, but once you spend a small amount to buy the book, you can make copies of the scoresheet to reuse. There is online training available for a fee, but it is not required for use of the tool. There are thorough instructions for use in the book, and an informal online scoring video available on YouTube.
- [CLASS](#): The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), is an observation tool that assesses the interactions between teachers and children that affect learning and development. CLASS has separate scales for different age groups, reflecting the differences in how infants, toddlers, and preschoolers learn. The infant observation has just one domain while the Pre-K observation has three domains. The observation assesses the quality of relationships, routines, the organization of the physical environment, and the way language is used and interactions are facilitated to prompt children to think critically (Workman & Ullrich, 2017). If you are interested in reviewing national CLASS

scores reported for Head Start programs, click [here](#) for 2020 data. There are fees and a multi-day training required to become a certified CLASS observer, as well as a fee for the observer to recertify online each year.

- [PAS](#): Research consistently finds that high-quality administrative practices are crucial for ensuring beneficial results for children and families. The Program Administration Scale (PAS) is designed to reliably measure and improve the leadership and management practices of center-based programs. Using a seven point rating scale (inadequate to excellent), this instrument assesses 25 items grouped in 10 subcategories: human resources development, personnel cost and allocation, operations, child assessment, fiscal management, program planning and evaluation, family partnerships, marketing and public relations, technology, and staff qualifications. The PAS can be used in multiple ways: program self-improvement, technical assistance and monitoring, research and evaluation, and public awareness (Teachers College Press, 2019). There is a small cost to purchase this book, but no further training or certification is required for using the tool internally.

Authentic Assessment

One of the core considerations of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is knowing what is individually appropriate for children. Early educators use the assessment of young children to collect this information. It's important to understand the assessment of young children is vastly different from tools used in formal elementary assessments.



One of the most appropriate methods of assessing young children is through authentic assessment. Authentic assessment is a system of ongoing classroom practices to gather information about a child's skills during their typical routines and activities to identify what they know and can do. Progress is monitored over time, observations are summarized, and these summaries are entered into an assessment tool. These practices provide educators with an accurate record of children's skills, which can be used to inform instruction to promote new skills. It is a systematic approach of planning what skills to promote in a lesson plan, observing those activities with regard to

individual children, documenting what is seen and heard, and then using that child's assessment information to adjust future lesson plans, accurately complete an assessment instrument, and share information with others (e.g. families, other teaching staff). Similar to the K-12 model of the parent-teacher conference, it is recommended that teachers meet with families at least once in the school year to discuss the child's progress, next steps, and how families can support this at home. These conferences may take place in the school, but a home visit could also be considered, as educators often learn so much more about a child and their family when visiting the home. If observation and assessment results cause educators to notice a child is not developing through typical stages or milestones, a more in-depth conference with families is the first step in working to assist this child and family. Just as in K-12, working with families to have students evaluated quickly is key. Find more information about conducting these types of parent conferences [here](#). Educators and administrators may learn more about assessing early learners by creating an account on the [Indiana Learning Paths](#) platform through ILEAD. There are a few modules offered under the subsection ***Observation and Assessment***.

Depending on the funding streams used in preschool programs in schools, there may be a specific assessment tool required, below are two examples of this. [Indiana Student Performance Readiness and Observation of Understanding Tool \(ISPROUT\)](#) is utilized to measure skills in children from infancy to kindergarten. ISPROUT is aligned to the Indiana Early Learning Foundations. ISPROUT is utilized for Indiana students receiving services as part of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to meet the reporting needs of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The web or app-based instrument is utilized by teachers to rate students based on their ongoing observations of children engaged in typical daily routines and activities. While required for students with IEPs, it may also be available for general education preschoolers. Additionally, ISPROUT has new [instructional resource activities](#) tied to Indiana Early Learning Foundations and the Skills, Knowledge, and Behaviors (SKBs). These are practical examples of activities educators can implement in their classrooms to elicit specific SKBs for observation purposes. For more information on these resources, view the webinar in the [Indiana Learning Lab](#). If you do not have a Learning Lab account, create one by clicking the link and using your school email to log in. Past webinars are available via the Learning tab under *On Demand*. For more information contact INassessments@doe.in.gov

On My Way Pre-K programs are legislatively required to administer the State Board of Education approved assessment for Pre-K. More information can be found on the [OMWPK Provider Page](#) or by contacting your [OMWPK Project Manager](#).

Continuous (or Remote) Learning

While remote learning was rarely thought about for preschoolers prior to the COVID-19 crisis, ensuring families had basic tools to continue learning with their preschool-age children became a priority during the global pandemic. Families have always been a young child's first and most important teacher, and during the pandemic, this was magnified further. In response to this need, IDOE pushed up the completion and release of the [Early Learning Family Guides](#) in the spring of 2020 to support continuous learning for children and families. These guides are designed to help families see how they can incorporate learning into daily routines and are recommended for use anytime, not only during a quarantine situation. Additionally, [Mighty Moments](#) video clips were released to share with families how quick routine-based interventions can support early learning. Early educators are encouraged to utilize and share both of these resources with the families they serve. Even during remote learning preschoolers should not be asked to complete worksheets.

Managing Pre-K Programs



Student Enrollment

Once it is time to enroll families in your preschool, there are some options schools may consider. One option would be a parent conference where someone meets with the family to complete



enrollment. While not always necessary, some schools and districts with multiple funding streams choose to collect family income documentation at this conference to help determine which funding may be the best fit for the family, as well as allow the school to maximize all available funding streams. Schools will want to use caution though, as a variety of factors go into family eligibility for FSSA programs. However, when appropriate, families may be encouraged to apply for On My Way Pre-K (OMWPK), leaving Title funds for the families who may not qualify for OMWPK as one example. To further assist families, and the schools themselves in making sure families complete the application for OMWPK, some districts will also help the families fill out the application while at this conference. It should be noted, when families speak with their eligibility office for OMWPK, they can select any OMWPK provider they choose, so schools will want to build a relationship with these families to help ensure they select their program. Schools may also consider reaching out to your local CCR&R's Family and Community Engagement Specialist who can provide support, including how to engage with families and make them feel welcome.

If your school chooses to collect income documentation during enrollment, ensuring it is both current and accurate can be a challenge. However, without a baseline income level, it could be more difficult to determine which funding stream may work best. One school district in Grant County that utilizes multiple funding streams to fund its preschool program has partnered with the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and uses their services on Last Known Employer (LKE). Find information on applying for an LKE account [here](#). There is a one-time upfront cost for this service, for more information contact EmployVerification@dwd.IN.gov.

Final considerations around student enrollment can be as simple as putting the link to the CCDF office in your area on the preschool enrollment page of your website, as well as the link to the OMWPK application to assist families in accessing these programs.

Teacher Child Ratio

Before Enrollment, consider the child/staff ratio your classrooms will follow. If you are participating in any of FSSA's programs, their regulations determine your ratio and group size per the attached chart. If FSSA regulations are not applicable for your program, the ratio and group size chart still is recommended to provide adequate supervision for health and safety. Inclusive preschool programs will want to consider the needs of students as well as educators in determining an appropriate ratio.

Child/Staff Ratios
For Licensed Child Care Centers

Age of the Youngest Child in Group	Maximum Number of Children Supervised By One Caregiver	Maximum Number of Children in One Group
Infant	4	8
Toddler	5	10
2 years	5	10
30-36 months	7	14
3 years	10	20
4 years	12	24
5 years/Kindergarten	15	30
1 st Grade and Above	20	40

Quality Early Educator, Administrator Recruitment and Qualifications

Many educators seek work environments that have a high level of staff cohesion and collaboration, effective administration, and opportunities for teacher leadership. Early Learning educators further look for work environments where sufficient numbers of staff are well versed in best practices in early learning, as a basic element of job satisfaction and their own ability to engage in effective teaching practice. Before you begin your search for high-quality early educators, consider if your program leadership and existing staff meet these expectations.



Teacher qualifications for preschool programs in school settings in Indiana vary by funding sources used to fund the program. See earlier sections on each funding source for specific requirements by funding stream. For General Education Preschool, best practice would indicate educators at minimum should hold a Preschool CDA Credential, but research shows programs with Bachelor degreed teachers scored higher on classroom observation tools like ECERS, suggesting degreed teachers may be one indicator of higher quality classrooms, and high quality leads to better outcomes for children (Vu, 2008). For Preschool Administrators, there is no administrative license specific to preschool, but since 2002 the building administrator licenses issued by IDOE are either “all schools” or P-12, so they would be valid for a preschool program that is associated with an elementary school or early childhood center. If the administrative position isn’t called principal or

assistant principal, it may not necessarily require a building administration license unless the hiring authority specifically made that license a qualification for the job. For recruitment of open positions, begin advertising on popular online sites. You may also include an “Employment Opportunities” section on your website. Beyond that, be creative! Network among people you know including your current employees. Post opportunities on the [INAEYC’s job board](#).¹² Connect with department chairs at local universities and colleges, particularly if they formally help graduates find employment opportunities through placement partnerships. Additionally, many universities and colleges have job fairs where you can set up a booth, as well as job boards on which you can post new or upcoming openings. Finally, the use of social media, particularly LinkedIn can be critical when advertising positions. Keep in mind, as you interview candidates and ultimately decide on the best fit, you will likely want to retain information on other qualified candidates for future openings or better fits elsewhere.

Ensure the hiring process is as streamlined as possible. Major hiring process delays can cause applicants to pursue other opportunities. Additionally, programs that invest in an extensive candidate hiring process may lose that investment as a result of these delays (Detroit Head Start, 2016).

Finally, when recruiting Pre-K educators, keep in mind that young children require consistency of educators, settings, and experiences to have a strong foundation from which to grow and develop. Additionally, educators with a vast knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice are critical to a program’s level of quality. Staff turnover or children moving from one classroom to another because of quality issues and/or staffing shortages means that young children do not have the benefit of that critical consistency. Children’s development can be negatively affected when repeatedly starting over with building new relationships or learning new environments and routines (NCECDTL, 2016). Ensure your search criteria include finding committed educators who fully understand young children’s need for consistency.

For more information about possible interview questions to consider, visit [this article](#) (Gordon, 2006).

¹² Must be a INAEYC member in good standing to post

Professional Development for Early Educators

Professional development is not new to schools, but thinking about early educators' needs in a more focused approach and as a continuum of learning and support activities designed to prepare them for work with and on behalf of young children and their families is critical. These opportunities lead to improvements in the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions of early learning professionals. Additionally, many early learning funding streams (e.g. OMWPK) and programs require a varied amount of annual clock hours of professional development specific to the educator's age group. Finally, IDOE recommends that preschool and kindergarten educators have the opportunity to participate in joint professional development annually, to ensure the academic expectations are aligned for both.



[SPARK Learning Lab](#) provides training and technical assistance (TA) to support early education and care programs in meeting regulatory requirements, as well as improving its development paths. SPARK offers a Self-Assessment and identification of a programs' technical assistance needs to determine the program's Tier of support. They provide TA staff to help programs complete the Self-Assessment, develop a training approach that ensures that the staff are knowledgeable in their job functions, and provide TA to early education and care programs to ensure they meet the standards outlined by OECOSL. SPARK offers coaches, content specialists, web-based resources, in-person training, digital learning, professional learning communities, cohort learning opportunities, and a help desk. Reach the help desk Monday-Friday 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. ET and Saturday 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. ET at 1-800-299-1627. Additionally, Indiana has a newly updated online training portal for early educators called [Indiana Learning Paths](#) that may be accessed through I-LEAD. Indiana Learning Paths offers a variety of courses, including training specific to Indiana's Early Learning Foundations¹³ put out by the Indiana Department of Education, as well as many other topics. In addition, there is general training related to assessing children in early childhood environments, with a focus on authentic, observation-based assessment. If

¹³ The Foundations are Indiana's early learning development framework and are aligned to the 2014 Indiana Academic Standards. This framework provides core elements that children should achieve from birth to age five in order to be ready for future success.

your site is participating in any FSSA regulated program, such as OMWPK or PTQ, or if you are an LLEP or Licensed provider, you should have received an invitation to join I-LEAD. However, early educators from schools not participating in the above OECOSL programs can still create a free account through I-LEAD and have access to a variety of online training and webinars. Instructions to do so are [here](#).

Additionally, there are also broader online professional development opportunities available. Early Learning Indiana compiled a [list of online professional development opportunities](#) that Indiana's early childhood professionals can explore to support their ongoing learning goals.

To learn more about national conferences specific to early learning, see the FAQ at the end of this guidebook.

Finally, the Early Learning Team at IDOE presents at statewide conferences offering professional development on a variety of topics. Subscribe to the newsletter [#INspirEDearly](#) by clicking the orange "Follow" button in any newsletter to be the first to know about upcoming opportunities.

Higher Education and Scholarship Opportunities

Various local colleges and universities offer programs for professionals to advance their education. There are CDA and Associate's degree programs, as well as Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in Early Childhood Education. There are distance learning or blended courses from various colleges offering degrees that fit the needs of early educators. Many of these programs are available in conjunction with the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship mentioned below.

[Indiana AEYC](#) is the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Indiana AEYC is a statewide, nonprofit organization with 15 chapters and over 2,000 members. Their mission is accomplished by concentrating on offering professional development for those in the early care and education profession, improving program quality, and championing public policy pertinent to young children. Indiana AEYC also coordinates the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Help) Early Childhood® INDIANA scholarship program, which can provide financial support for early educators pursuing a CDA credential, Associate's degree, or Bachelor's degree. The Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credential is the

most widely recognized credential in early childhood education (ECE) and is a key stepping stone on the path of career advancement in ECE. Additional information about what a CDA credential is can be found [here](#). Early educators can apply for a scholarship to complete their CDA and receive college credit, as long as their salary is within the range allowed. For early educators at your site to apply for this scholarship, your school must first complete the LLEP process. Find more information about T.E.A.C.H. scholarship opportunities [here](#).

Marketing your program

Marketing upcoming preschool opportunities will be critical to a program's success. If families do not know about the program, they are unable to take advantage of it.



Here are a few suggestions to consider:

- Current families: Send communication out to your currently enrolled elementary students, as they may have younger siblings at home. Suggested forms of communication would be both electronic and paper.
- Kindergarten Roundup: The same message as above, these families may have younger siblings as well. Especially if your program is new, consider passing out information about Pre-K at your kindergarten roundup. You may or may not want to combine kindergarten and pre-k roundup.
- Host a separate Pre-K roundup and enrollment night: Some families are so focused on their kindergarten-age child, that hosting a pre-k roundup the same night may not be as effective as separating it.
- Flyers at Dr. Office: Pediatricians and Primary Care Physicians are often regularly seeing preschool-age children and could be a partner in marketing.
- Area Early Childhood Coalition: Each coalition is different but may have marketing opportunities to help announce your program.
- Yard Signs: Never underestimate a great yard sign to get the attention of motorists in your area. Additionally, programs like On My Way Pre-K and Paths to QUALITY™ will have free yard signs or yard sign attachments that schools can request when participating in their program.
- Also, participation in Paths to QUALITY™ allows your program to be easily found by families on Carefinder and through the CCR&R family help desk line.

- Engaging with other providers in your area: Other providers in your community may be full and operating on a waiting list and could refer families to you. Possibly a Head Start whose requirements for enrollment may be more rigid than yours may send families who don't qualify with them to your program. Working together to see that all children are served in a high-quality preschool environment benefits all stakeholders.
- Engaging with large employers and realtors in your area: Could you partner with them to put flyers about your program in their new hire/new resident packets?
- Social Media: Does your school already have a social media presence you can leverage? Pictures, tweets, and other posts can certainly raise awareness, but check out what BCSC in Columbus did with these four informative videos! If your school has a CTE program with Audio/Visual courses, this could be a great opportunity to partner with them to create these!
[Busy Bees Walk Through](#), [Play](#), [Learn](#), [Explore](#)
- Local CCR&R: If your program is brand new, consider contacting your local [Child Care Resource and Referral agency](#) and ask how they can help you market your program.
- SPARK Learning Lab: [SPARK Learning Lab](#) may also be able to provide technical assistance as it relates to business practices and marketing your program.

Additional ideas for marketing can be found [here](#).

Alternative Options - Starting Small

**JUMP
START**



Kindergarten Readiness Summer Camps:

When unable to immediately provide preschool to all incoming kindergarteners, some schools and districts have formed partnerships with their local United Way, as well as other nearby school districts, to offer a jumpstart program for incoming five-year-olds over the summer. While a full preschool program is likely to show more benefits to children and families, a summer jumpstart camp can help students entering kindergarten without preschool experiences to be more confident and prepared for the classroom setting. It can be a great opportunity to learn school routines and procedures, as well as make social and academic gains. It also allows connections between the school, families, and students prior to the start of kindergarten to be established. In most models, jumpstart camps are taught by the kindergarten teachers, focusing on skills needed for the first semester of kindergarten, and are offered at multiple elementary school sites. Other programmatic considerations are the number of weeks and length of day to offer, based on funding to support the program. Schools may want to consider including transportation and/or at least one meal to both allow families this convenience, as well as the students an opportunity to learn the routines associated with each of these. If the school participates in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), preschool children are also eligible for meals served under this program. Learn more [here](#). If the school does not participate in SFSP, another option to consider is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) that can reimburse schools for preschool meals served. Preschool meal patterns are outlined [here](#). Additional information on all school nutrition programs may be found [here](#). For further clarifications on SFSP or CACFP, please contact the Indiana Department of Education's [Child Nutrition Programs](#)

As with a full school year preschool program, schools should think of how to blend and braid funding to maximize the opportunity. Schools should connect with community organizations including the United Way to talk about possible funding opportunities. The cost to provide this service can then be shared through multiple partnerships. For example, schools could consider partnering with a local food bank to provide meals to children during a jumpstart camp. If only considering a jumpstart camp, programs like On My Way Pre-K and CCDF would not be useful, but other funding sources, like Title I when available, can be leveraged to support jumpstart camps as a part of the transition to kindergarten.

Frequently Asked Questions



Where do we start?

The very first step is likely a brainstorming session and discussion around early learning. IDOE has drafted a [discussion guide](#) to assist schools in this process. This process will likely also involve some data collection. You may find the [Early Learning Data-Informed Decision Making Toolkit](#) of use as well.

If your program plans to apply to be an OMW Pre-K provider or would like to accept CCDF vouchers, the first step is likely to consider achieving LLEP status¹⁴. You typically must have a program up and running to apply to become an LLEP, but contact your LLEP consultant for more information on this process. Some schools begin with a very small program supported by Title, General Education Funds, Special Education, etc., then once they reach LLEP status, they can begin accepting CCDF. Finally once Level 3 in Paths to QUALITY™ is achieved through a rating visit, they can apply to be an OMW provider. As the number of funding streams expands, so can the program. Several chapters in this guidebook are meant to guide school administrators through various phases of the process of starting or expanding a preschool program. Take a moment to review the Table of Contents for more specific topics. For example, for questions on how to set up the preschool classroom environment and related topics visit the section on High-Quality Pre-K: Teaching and Learning in Pre-K-Programmatic Considerations

If your school currently does not offer any preschool programming, you will need to contact IDOE's Office of Accountability to submit a corporation amendment with Board minutes approving the addition of a preschool. If you offer only developmental preschool currently, but plan to offer a separate general education preschool, please contact IDOE's [Office of Accountability](#) for your options. Schools may only submit an amendment between May 1 and September 1 each year.

If you are not sure if your program is considered a school and would meet the requirements for FSSA's school exemption from licensing, please review the [joint FAQ](#) developed by FSSA and IDOE to address these questions. If you are still unsure, please consult with an attorney.

¹⁴ Schools may also consider going through the licensed childcare center process as well. And must go through this process to serve children under three. Private schools affiliated with a religious organization may also choose to go through the Registered Ministry process.

Finally, if your district is considering remodeling an existing building to now offer preschool, IDOE does not have specific building requirements outside of what your local fire marshal requires for preschool. However, if you're considering accessing any of FSSA's funding streams, you'll want to consider their regulations. Licensed centers and LLEP sites both may have regulations regarding building compliance, but for either path, one regulation to consider more in-depth as you remodel is the supervision requirement and the teacher-child ratio, as these are required even in the bathroom. This regulation has prompted some schools to include restrooms in the classrooms as they remodel.

Who can help us?

IDOE has specialists whose roles include supporting schools interested in expanding or creating a Pre-K program, intending to increase the number of inclusive preschools statewide, as well as helping schools understand the blending and braiding of funding to maximize enrollment. IDOE also employs specialists whose primary roles are developing tools and resources to support early educators in developmentally appropriate practices. Reach these specialists at teachingandlearning@doe.in.gov. If your school is unsure if you want to pursue the LLEP status, become a fully licensed child care provider, or a child care ministry if you're a nonpublic school affiliated with a religious organization, you may consider reaching out to your local childcare resource and referral agency to better learn the differences between those paths. If your school has selected your preferred path, the best first contact will be your consultant at the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning. These consultants are in place to help you complete the process of becoming your selected type of provider. They are also the best contact to answer questions about the specific steps to follow. Additionally, once your program is established, there are [SPARK coaches](#) that can support you, as well as guide your program through the process of becoming a Paths to QUALITY™ provider.¹⁵

Finally, there are schools all over the state who are already participating in these programs and may be available to share the story or their journey. IDOE has created a

¹⁵ During the transition period to a new TA partner, The Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children will provide interim coaching support through June 30, 2020 for Paths to QUALITY™ programs. IN AEYC can be contacted by email or phone for questions related to Paths to QUALITY™ at PTQ@INAEYC.org or 1-855-484-2392, extension 3546.

Community of Practice (CoP) for School Leaders overseeing a preschool program. For information on how to join this CoP contact the [Early Learning team](#) at IDOE.¹⁶

What funding streams and models should we consider?

This ultimately is a local decision, but IDOE would encourage LEA's to make data-informed decisions. If many families are living in poverty in the area, then programs like Title, CCDF, and OMWPK could be important to leverage. This type of data can be accessed through ELAC and IYI as mentioned previously.

As schools begin to explore funding streams, IDOE would ask them to consider the benefits of an inclusive preschool setting for all students. To learn how other corporations similar in size and demographics to yours address the challenges of preschool inclusion, visit [The Indiana Online Directory of Effective Preschool Inclusion Models](#). This is a resource for connecting with your colleagues who are already providing high-quality preschool inclusive services. Additionally, there are tiered levels of support for schools through IU's Early Childhood Center as they journey towards an inclusive preschools program. Contact [Special Education](#) for more information.

What Professional Development should we consider?

There are resources for professional development available both locally and nationally. IN AEYC, the Indiana Chapter of NAEYC typically puts on an [annual conference](#) each spring at the Convention Center in Indianapolis in non-pandemic times, and local chapters also offer a fall conference in their region of the state. Other national conferences to consider are the [NAEYC Annual Conference](#), the [Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children \(DEC\) Annual Conference](#), [NAEYC's Professional Learning Institute \(PLI\)](#), and [McCormick Center's Leadership Connections National Conference](#).

[SPARK Learning Lab](#) offers professional development support to all types of early learning programs. Programs would start by taking the Indiana Self-Assessment Tool (I-SAT) on Indiana Learning Paths (ILP) through I-LEAD. As a reminder, early educators from schools not participating in the above OECOSL programs can still create a free account through I-LEAD and have access to a variety of online training

¹⁶ This CoP should not replace the experts who manage the programs out of OECOSL and are most familiar with the regulations, but is meant to provide insight on how fellow schools have navigated compliance.

and webinars; instructions to do so are [here](#). The I-SAT is a great way to understand where your program is now and create a road map for the future. Taking the self-assessment helps to identify the specific resources your program needs to continue your quality improvement journey. Get ready for the

I-SAT by taking the required pre-training “Preparing for Program Assessment”. This course, available 24-7 on ILP, will help to define what program assessment is and what it looks like in early childhood education and care. It will also allow you to reflect on the strengths and opportunities of your program and identify evidence and documentation required for a successful program assessment. To take the course, log in or register at ilead.in.gov, choose “Start Your Indiana Learning Path”, and search “Preparing for Program Assessment” in the search bar. Additionally SPARK has content specialists who can provide expertise in areas such as licensing and operations, staff development, family engagement, education, inclusion, infant-toddler programs, and business management support. See figure for types of training available from SPARK Learning Lab.

Finally, the Early Learning Team at IDOE presents at several statewide conferences offering professional development on a variety of topics. Subscribe to the newsletter [#INspirEDearly](#) by clicking the orange “Follow” button in any newsletter to be the first to know about upcoming opportunities.

Trainings

Web-based Trainings

- Trainings offered online via Indiana Learning Paths
- Videos
- Video Conferencing
- Webinars

Trainings will be in continual development based upon self-assessment data, learners feedback, licensing requirements and data, PTQ needs, best practice changes, advisory council recommendations, among others

In-Person Trainings

- Available in multiple locations in each region
- Distinct and different than Professional Learning Community Meetings
- Will cover a variety of topics and may have content unique of video content.



Additional Resources

Funding for projects:

Playground grants <https://kaboom.org/grants>

DonorsChoose grants with PNC Grow up Great

<https://www.pnc.com/en/about-pnc/corporate-responsibility/grow-up-great/the-impact/grants/donors-choose.html>

OECOSL Capacity Building Grants: <https://www.in.gov/fssa/carefinder/5465.htm>

Walmart Community Grants:

<http://giving.walmart.com/walmart-foundation/community-grant-program>

Administrator/Program Director Resources:

OMWPK provider site: <http://providers.brighterfuturesindiana.org/>

Birth to Grade 3 Indicator Framework: Opportunities to Integrate Early Childhood in ESSA Toolkit

<http://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Birth%20to%20Grade%203%20Indicator%20Framework.pdf>

Educator Resources:

IDOE Early Learning Website: <https://www.doe.in.gov/earlylearning> Our Early Learning Foundations aligned to the Academic Standards are found here, as well as guidance in how to use the Foundations, and resources to share with families.

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) is focused on promoting the social-emotional development and school readiness of young children, birth to age five. CSEFEL is a national resource center funded by the Office of Head Start and Child Care Bureau for disseminating research and evidence-based practices to early childhood programs across the country. This site is helpful for finding

resources to embed social-emotional learning but may also be helpful with practical classroom solutions for challenging behavior. <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>

The Head Start inclusion site may also be helpful in finding practical solutions for challenging behavior. Specifically, here are teacher visual supports:
<http://headstartinclusion.org/teacher-tools#visual>

Indiana's Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit
<https://www.indianaheadstart.org/get-involved>

Head Start Transition to Kindergarten Practices:
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/transitions/article/transition-kindergarten>

The Indiana Core Knowledge and Competencies (CKC's) identify the core knowledge and competencies needed by professionals who work with infants, children, and youth. The CKC's are an essential component of Indiana's comprehensive statewide professional development system.
https://www.in.gov/fssa/carefinder/files/2016_INCKC-upd.pdf

National Association of Young Children (NAEYC) provides quality resources on a broad range of important topics in early childhood from play and developmentally appropriate practices to family engagement. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics>

The Division of Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices were developed to provide guidance to educators and families about the most effective ways to improve the learning outcomes and promote the development of young children, birth through five years of age, who have or are at-risk for developmental delays or disabilities. The version with embedded examples gives specific practical ideas of how to implement these practices. <https://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices>

The WIDA Early English Language Development (E-ELD) Standards were specifically developed to help support the unique language needs of Multilingual Learners, ages 2.5–5.5 years, who are in the process of learning more than one language prior to kindergarten entry. The [Connection](#) document between the WIDA Standards and Indiana Early Learning Foundations may be helpful to educators.

The Virtual Lab School offers seven professional development tracks, providing both comprehensive foundational training, and more advanced, or specialized training with in-depth content and resources. The Foundational Tracks (Infant and Toddler, Preschool, School-Age, Training and Curriculum Specialist, Management, and Family Child Care) each contain 15 courses that align with the CDA competencies and NAEYC, NAFCC, and CYD-AYD standards.

<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/preschool>

The High-Quality Early Learning Project conducts and communicates research about teaching that supports effective learning for young children and their families. Focusing on documentation of those who work with diverse groups of children in early childhood settings, the Project produces videos and professional development resources for teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to strengthen education in the early years.

<https://highqualityearlylearning.org/>

While focusing on kindergarten in this documentary, a high-quality preschool classroom should also be play-based. This documentary explores the advantages associated with a play-based approach in kindergarten and features stories of how two Illinois school districts- Valley View School District 365U and Elgin Area School District U-46- made the transition to play-based learning. The documentary also includes scientific findings about the cognitive and social-emotional benefits of play from experts Dr. Roberta Golinkoff (University of Delaware), Dr. Christina Weiland (University of Michigan), and Dr. Eboni Howard (American Institutes for Research).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdvdfB_7838&feature=youtu.be

A high-quality preschool program can build early literacy and math skills, as well as develop the social and emotional foundation children need to persist in school, but young children only receive the full effect of these benefits when in attendance. Attendance is also the only data point we track every single day. This toolkit can help schools improve attendance in the preschool years.

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/early-education-toolkit/>

U.S. Department of Education Early Learning Web Site

<https://www.ed.gov/early-learning/resources>

Appendix A - Accrediting Bodies

National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC)



National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research. Achieving NAEYC Accreditation is a four-step process that involves self-reflection and quality improvement in order to meet and maintain accreditation over a five-year period. Program Administrators, teachers, and families all participate in the process. Programs are required to meet standards grouped into 10 areas: relationships with children, curriculum, teaching approaches, child assessment, nutrition and health, staff qualifications, relationship with children's families, relationship with the community, physical environment, and program leadership and management (NAEYC website 2019). [Here](#) is a link to an overview of the ten NAEYC Early Learning Program Standards. In [this link](#), there are additional NAEYC accreditation resources, tips, and tools.

National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)



The National Early Childhood Program Accreditation was established in 1991 to encourage quality and recognize excellence in early childhood programs throughout the United States and other countries. NECPA encourages early care programs seeking to improve or receive recognition of their high-quality care, to enroll for NECPA Accreditation, and does not require a specific curriculum type to become accredited. The NECPA Standards were derived from the National Health and Safety Performance Standards, which were developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Public Health Association. The NECPA Standards measure quality in the areas of adult/child interaction, health and safety of the physical environment, staff framing, and the relationship between administration, parents, and the community. Most programs going through accreditation for the first time need approximately one year to complete all steps, but the self-study process allows you to work at your own pace. Once the Self-Assessment Instrument is complete and all necessary documents have been gathered, the program is ready to request a verification visit. We require that programs have been operating for at least one year before requesting

a visit. On the day of your visit, a NECPA Verifier will visit your center to observe teacher interactions, verify documents, and survey the facility. [Here](#) is a link to their website.

Council on Accreditation (COA)

COA offers two types of accreditation for child and youth development entities: programmatic and organizational. In Programmatic Accreditation, each program (site) is reviewed and accredited independently of other programs and its parent organization. Organizational accreditation can be implemented in two formats, standard, or extended review. See the



[Comparison of Programmatic and Organizational Accreditation](#) for more information about COA's CYD accreditation options. Click [here](#) for the process overview.

COA offers a four-year accreditation cycle, in-depth review of the program/organization's services and administration and management functions, and a user-friendly, online process and an Accreditation Coordinator assists the program/organization through the process. Standards and [accreditation materials](#) are free.

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) promotes the value and worthiness of accreditation and encourages each school and early education program to continuously pursue excellence. The "accredited" seal denotes a school that has met institutional standards of quality and verifies a commitment to strategic improvement and ongoing accountability. The process of accreditation involves three significant elements:



1. Intensive, institution-wide self-appraisal, analysis, and improvement planning
2. External consultation, review, validation, and insights from a visiting peer group
3. Ongoing accountability for improvement through annual reporting and renewal.

Mid-America Regional Office 815.282.7070 acsima@acsi.org

Cognia (formerly North Central Association/ AdvancEd)

The Cognia Standards for Quality Early Learning Schools support the learning, growth, and development of young children in a culture of continuous improvement that engages leaders, staff, and parents. Click [here](#) to register for an online webinar to learn more about their Early Learning Standards. To contact Cognia to learn more, complete [this contact form](#).



National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC)¹⁷

NAFCC administers the only national accreditation system designed specifically for family child care providers. Accreditation is awarded to family child care providers who meet the eligibility requirements and the Quality Standards for NAFCC Accreditation. Family child care providers achieve this high level of quality through a process that examines all aspects of the family child care program, i.e. relationships, the environment, developmental learning activities, safety, health, and professional and business practices. Click [here](#) for more information.



¹⁷ Schools are not eligible for this accrediting body

Appendix B - Supporting Special Populations

Supporting Multilingual Learners

Growing up multilingual—or learning two or more languages simultaneously—provides many advantages to a child. Not only are there economic benefits as they grow into adulthood, but also cognitive ones that will help them tackle life’s challenges. For example, research shows multilingual individuals are less likely to develop Alzheimer’s, fare better at critical thinking tasks, and typically outperform their monolingual counterparts in academic settings (For more information about the benefits of being multilingual, see [Head Start’s 2019 Report](#)). An educator validates a multilingual learner’s (ML) distinct language skills by fostering an environment where the first language is not replaced, but viewed as an asset and leveraged to access a new language.

In this Multilingual Learner section, four main topics will be addressed: how languages are learned; ideas for classroom application; WIDA Early Years English Language Development Standards; and supplemental resources. The information described is not meant to be prescriptive and/or exhaustive. Rather, the intention for these tools is to get educators started in developing targeted strategies for their early learning environment that bring out the assets within young MLs.

How Languages are Learned

By the time a child turns one year old, they have gone through key steps in learning how to speak their first language. From zero to six months, the child moves from acknowledging sounds and speakers (e.g. smiling, head and eye turning) to babbling one-syllable utterances (e.g. [ma], [da]). By 12 months, children are replicating identical sound sequences from their first language and showing definite signs of understanding words and simple commands. By the time a child reaches six years old, their vocabulary approaches 14,000 words. For reference, that is 40% of the words in an average pocket dictionary.

These linguistic developments all happen through familial interactions, making social interaction a critical component of language development. This is true for additional language development, too. To enhance English language development for MLs, the best place to start is with their family to gain a better understanding of their personalities, routines, habits, and other social and academic developments. See the [June 2015 issue of WIDA Early Years Focus Bulletin](#) on how to plan for ML development.

Interactions with peers compound English language development exponentially for MLs in an early learning environment. Providing a variety of opportunities for MLs to work alongside and engage with

their English-speaking peers will develop their *Basic Interpersonal and Communication Skills* (BICS). Strong BICS allow MLs to establish friendships, complete daily tasks, and generally be successful in the day-to-day operations of the program. While there may be concern about peer interaction when a student does not speak English, one of the best things educators can do is help them enter into play and engage with their peers.

Learning opportunities that engage pairs or small groups of students increase the amount of exposure to the new language, increase the frequency of repetitive terminology (i.e., common language, BICS), and raise a ML's awareness of language characteristics. *Exposure, frequency, and awareness* are naturally occurring elements of learning a new language in an immersive setting. As an educator, it is critical to facilitate your MLs connecting their first language to the English language. By doing this, you subtly introduce self-monitoring to the young learner. Over time, self-monitoring skills allow an ML to take ownership of discovering the language in which they are immersed and recognizing language that may be new to them. A picture wall (or word wall) is one possibility to begin the self-monitoring process.

Ideas for Classroom Application

Early educators may use this list to begin to think about their early learning environment. These are not prescriptive. Educators know their students best. Additionally, many of these applications are helpful for all children, not just MLs. For additional resources, see the list at the end of this section.

1. *Routine - Routine - Routine*

Adhering to a classroom routine and the use of consistent, strategic instructional language will help all students, but particularly a ML, quickly adapt to you, your environment, and the program. Rely on routine activities or tasks to introduce more complex ideas. For example, when introducing a complex concept, start by building on the ML's background knowledge and use a familiar activity to introduce the topic.

2. *Using BICS as a bridge for Academic Language*

With young MLs, ensuring they have the language they can use with their new friends and educators will set them up to acquire the academic language they need to be successful in their academic careers. It also gives them the skills needed to interact with neighbors and others outside of the learning environment. By allowing students to often use BICS and their home language in the classroom, educators are giving the ML confidence in playing with their peers and in speaking up when they know, or do not understand, lesson objectives.

3. *Choose props or real items over pictures or flashcards*

A context-rich environment allows for easy understanding, and providing tactile experiences is a great way to create it. Pair the language concepts with something all children, but especially MLs, can touch, smell, or hear. This can create a strong memory response of activating what they

already know in their first language and connecting it to a new word or phrase in the new language.

4. *Total Physical Response (TPR)*

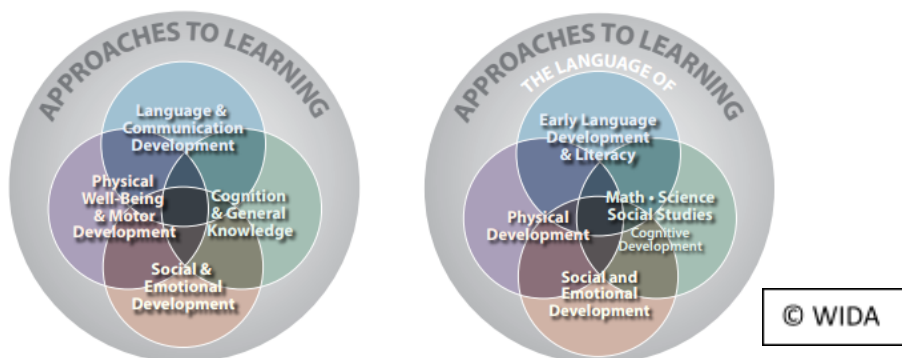
Similar to using props, getting your MLs up and moving can help them better understand new languages. TPR is a language-learning approach that relies on physical movement to increase meaningful learning opportunities. It is also a great way to check understanding and for all students to practice their listening skills. For more information on this approach and to see an example activity, review the following post in [Colorín Colorado](#)—a resource for families and educators.

5. *Warm and welcoming environment—especially for families.*

Establishing a positive classroom ecology that not only welcomes MLs, but also their families takes time and patience. Parent-teacher nights and Home Visits are often standard practice; however, encouraging your ML families to be a part of their student’s educational journey (e.g. reading bilingual texts to the class, collaborating with their child on special projects) will significantly improve your instructional practices as you will better understand your students’ abilities in and outside of your classroom. When engaging ML families, be persistent and ensure communication is conducted in their preferred language. For a closer look at how to go about using assessment as a way to engage families, see [Building the Bridge Between Schools and Families through Assessment of Young English Language Learners](#) (also linked in supplemental resources).


WIDA Early Years English Language Development Standards

One of your best educator resources is the WIDA Early Years English Language Development (E-ELD) Standards and WIDA’s supporting materials (linked at the end of this section). The WIDA E-ELD Standards represent the overarching language skills that MLs need to use with peers, educators, and the standards-based curriculum within the preschool setting. The chart below lists the E-ELD Standards alongside their Indiana Academic Standards counterpart.



Using the WIDA Early English Language Development Standards

The WIDA Early English Language Development (E-ELD) Standards are designed to be used in conjunction with the Foundations to ensure Multilingual Learners are provided necessary support to make learning meaningful while students are acquiring English. The sample E-ELD Standards matrix provides guiding questions for educators to use while creating their own strands and adapting them to their own environments, curricula, and children.

<h2>Indiana Sample Matrix</h2> <p>Guiding Questions for the Components of WIDA Early English Language Development Standards</p>			
		<p>AGES: Foundations age ranges</p>	
<p>E-ELD STANDARD: What Early English Language Development Standard is addressed in this lesson?</p>		<p>Foundation: What is one of the topics addressed in the selected content standard(s)?</p>	
<p>EXAMPLE CONTEXT FOR LANGUAGE USE: What is the purpose of the content work, task, or product? What roles or identities do the children assume? What are the concepts and skills that children will be developing?</p>			
<p>COGNITIVE FUNCTION: What is the level of cognitive development for the given task? Does the level of cognitive engagement match or exceed that of Indiana’s Early Learning Foundations?</p>			
	<p>Level 1 Entering</p>	<p>Level 3 Developing</p>	<p>Level 5 Bridging</p>

	<p>A Strand of Model Performance Indicators:</p> <p>What language are the children expected to process or produce at each level of development?</p> <p>Which language functions reflect the cognitive function at each level of language development?</p> <p>Which language supports (sensory, graphic, and interactive) are necessary for children to access language and content?</p> <hr/> <p>TOPIC-RELATED LANGUAGE: With which age-appropriate words and expressions will all children interact?</p>
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Supplemental Resources

1. [The Early English Language Development Standards](#): The WIDA Early English Language Development (E-ELD) Standards were specifically developed to help support the unique language needs of children ages 2.5 to 5.5 years who are in the process of learning more than one language prior to kindergarten entry, published in 2014.
2. [Indiana Early Learning Foundations and WIDA Early English Language Development Standards Connections Document](#): Early learning WIDA standards for Indiana, published in 2017.
3. [WIDA Early Years Can Do Descriptors](#): The Early Years Can Do Descriptors provide examples of what multilingual learners can do at various stages of language development.
4. [WIDA Early Years Focus Bulletin](#): A great resource for relevant classroom approaches when working with MLs and their families. This link takes you to a descriptive list of each Focus Bulletin from 2015-2016.
5. [WIDA Early Years Guiding Principles of Language Development](#): This informative brief addressed the guiding principles for early language development. It also includes an extensive reference list for those interested in learning more about the how and why behind WIDA’s Early Years work.
6. [Pratt \(2020\). Building the Bridge Between Schools and Families through Assessment of Young English Language Learners.](#): Relevant article published in Indiana TESOL’s Winter 2020 edition. See page 155 of the publication.

Supporting Exceptional Learners

Preschool children enter the early learning environment with diverse learning and developmental needs. Each child has unique characteristics that may require new ways of thinking to meet their needs. It is the role of the program and the educator to provide a learning environment where every child can be successful and to change aspects of this environment to meet the needs of students.

Early learning environments should be inclusive ones where children with disabilities and developmental delays, as well as children who appear ready for more challenging experiences, enjoy learning alongside their typically developing peers. However, inclusion is more than just having children learning in the same physical environment, and programs must be prepared to provide varied support to all students. In 2015, the United States Department of Education along with the United States Department of Health and Human Services issued a draft policy statement on the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs.

“The Departments define inclusion in early childhood programs as including children with disabilities in early childhood programs, together with their peers, without disabilities, holding high expectations and intentionally promoting participation in all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations and using evidence-based services and supports to foster their cognitive, communication, physical, behavioral, and social-emotional development; friendship with peers; and sense of belonging. This applies to all young children with disabilities from those with the mildest disabilities to those with the most significant disabilities.”

The Foundations were designed to be used by all children. The content within this developmental framework provides the breadth of information from which to create goals and experiences that will help children reach their highest potential while capturing their interests and building on what they already know. Educators must emphasize and celebrate all children’s accomplishments and focus on what children can do.

To differentiate instruction is to recognize children’s varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning and interest, and to react responsively. The intent is to maximize each child’s growth and individual success by meeting the individual needs and engaging each child in the learning process. In order for early educators to differentiate instruction, they must first understand the developmental goals a child needs to obtain. ISPROUT reporting features can be used to support educators in providing differentiated or individualized learning experiences based on student needs. This understanding should be used to develop lesson plans and learning experiences that help the child meet the goals. When using the Foundations in developing curriculum, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can also be utilized to give all individuals equal opportunities to learn.

What is UDL?

A UDL curriculum takes on the burden of adaptation rather than leaving it up to the child to adapt. UDL is a theoretical framework developed by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) to guide the development of curricula that are flexible and supportive of all students. It is a collection of best practices from education, special education, psychology, and neuropsychology that educators can use to design lessons and learning environments so all learners have the opportunity to become purposeful, motivated, resourceful, knowledgeable, strategic, and goal-directed. Underneath all of that is a single driving factor: learner variability. The concept of UDL was inspired by the universal design movement in

building architecture. This movement calls for the design of structures that anticipate the needs of individuals with disabilities and how to accommodate these needs from the outset. Although universally designed structures are more usable by individuals with disabilities, they offer unforeseen benefits for all users. Curb cuts, for example, serve their intended use of facilitating the travel of those in wheelchairs, but they are also beneficial to people using strollers, young children, and even the average walker. The process of designing for individuals with disabilities has led to improved usability for everyone.

UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone. It is not a single, one-size-fits-all solution, but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs. It minimizes barriers and maximizes access to both information and learning. With the understanding of universal design, educators adapt or modify: the environment, the adult interactions and behaviors, as well as the curriculum, materials, and equipment to ensure all children can fully participate.

What might this look like in practice?

- Educators become familiar with students' strengths and needs before creating lesson plans.
- Educators create goals that are connected to concepts, not activities. If the goal is for the student to write the letters in their name, they could write on paper using a pencil, marker, or crayon. They could also write their name in shaving cream or sand, or build the letters with manipulatives. These activities do not always have to be structured and can be incorporated into play activities.
- Educators make all options available to ALL students, anticipating the variety and complexity of needs, while also ensuring that all students have the same opportunity and access to learning.

Where can I learn more?

To learn more regarding teaching practices and professional development visit:

<https://www.learningdesigned.org/resources>

To learn more about the theoretical framework of UDL and gain background knowledge of the principles as they relate to how the brain learns visit:

<https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl>

To access more broad information about how teachers can use UDL and find additional resources visit:

<https://theudlapproach.com/>

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