



ROAD TO READINESS



EPEL
Elgin Partnership for Early Learning

2023-2024 Impact Report



EPEL is proud to introduce the collaboration's new Vision and Mission:

VISION

Young children and their families in the Greater Elgin area have equitable opportunities to thrive.

MISSION

EPEL engages families, organizations, the early childhood workforce, and healthcare providers dedicated to creating a collaborative community-wide system of support for every young child to succeed in school and life.



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Join Us on the Road to Readiness: Building a Strong Foundation for Our Children's Future

Thank you for your ongoing support of EPEL, which continues to serve as a vital hub for our community's early childhood collaboration. EPEL is at the forefront of efforts to raise awareness about the importance of early learning, while providing essential access to resources, services, and care. Last year, I asked you to 'Be A 2,000 Day Champion' for young children, and for FY 23-24, I'm calling on you to continue that commitment by joining us on the *Road to Readiness*. This year has been filled with important work alongside families and the community to continue to transform our early childhood system into one that is equitable, efficient, and responsive to the needs of all children.

- **FY 23-24 Impact:** EPEL successfully supported **18,849** children and families through community and family engagement, outreach, and referrals, raising awareness and building stronger connections.
- **Community and Family Engagement Expansion:** EPEL expanded free playgroups to **29** "Connect and Play" sessions and offered **40** "Learning On the Go" opportunities, bringing family engagement directly into neighborhoods to meet families where they are.
- **Parent and Caregiver Support:** Through the implementation of Parent Cafés, a parent education initiative, EPEL and its partners held 10 Cafés in the Spring, serving **109** participants, with plans to further grow this valuable partnership.
- **Preschool Access Growth:** EPEL analyzed early childhood slot data and worked with 4 community partners to apply for Preschool for All slots, resulting in **222** additional free preschool seats. This expansion significantly increased access to early learning opportunities for local children.
- **Strategic Planning for the Future:** The EPEL board completed strategic planning for the next five years, outlining a clearer vision for early childhood success. In partnership with the EduDream team, EPEL developed a culturally responsive and equitable data strategy to measure our collective actions and outcomes, ensuring accountability and inclusivity in all we do.

I invite the community to be part of a powerful movement. Together, we can lay the groundwork for lifelong success by engaging our children in meaningful, everyday moments that promote early learning. Let's build a strong foundation, ensuring every child is ready to thrive from the very beginning. Join us on this journey and help shape a brighter future for all children!

Together We Can,



Amber Peters
Executive Director
Elgin Partnership for Early Learning



Amber, right, with Ontarioville Elementary School Principal Elizabeth Ma at a Northern Illinois and EPEL mobile food pantry serving Hanover Park families.





EPEL
Elgin Partnership for Early Learning

Road to Readiness



COMMUNITY: System Building

Goal: Ensure a unified system in the Greater Elgin area where children and families have equitable opportunities to thrive.

- Elevate awareness of EPEL as the hub for early childhood communication for the community.
- Raise awareness among community leaders regarding the essential role of early childhood programs and services in fostering economic health and social well-being within the community, thereby influencing their decision-making processes and resource allocation to prioritize and support early childhood initiatives.
- Foster robust community engagement and collaboration within the Greater Elgin areas to support and advance EPEL's goals, mission, and vision, ensuring active participation and alignment with community needs and aspirations.

FAMILIES: Strong Family Partnerships

Goal: Marginalized or under-resourced families with young children have access to programs, materials, and resources that prepare their children to enter the school system ready to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

- Expand and implement targeted outreach initiatives and resource allocation strategies to ensure that marginalized or under-resourced families in the community have equitable access to programs and materials that effectively prepare their children to thrive.
- EPEL partners with families to lead community change efforts in the Greater Elgin Area.
- Foster meaningful engagement and collaboration between families and partners to drive community-led initiatives and effect positive change across various domains.



Raising a young child is an exciting journey, full of both joy and uncertainties. The Road to Readiness is a unique path, and EPEL is here to help families connect and navigate the stops along the way, ensuring there are no roadblocks. With support from our expert partners, the destination becomes clear and accessible, so that children are developing, growing, and thriving by the time they reach kindergarten.



CHILDREN: High-quality and Effective Programs and Services

Goal: Young children in the Greater Elgin area have access to high-quality early care, education, and essential services needed to support each child's holistic development in order to:

- Expand and enhance the availability and accessibility of high-quality early care, education, and essential services by collaborating with community stakeholders to identify and address gaps in service delivery in the Greater Elgin area.
- Raise awareness among community leaders regarding the essential role of early childhood programs and services in fostering economic health and social well-being within the community, thereby influencing their decision-making processes and resource allocation to prioritize and support early childhood initiatives.
- Foster robust community engagement and collaboration within the Greater Elgin areas to support and advance EPEL's goals, mission, and vision, ensuring active participation and alignment with community needs and aspirations.

ORGANIZATION: Organizational sustainability

Goal: EPEL operates as a flexible, future-focused, and fiscally responsible organization.

- Deepen collaborative partnerships with key partners, including local government agencies, educational institutions, childcare providers, and community organizations, to develop and implement initiatives to enhance early care and education services accessibility, quality, and coordination within the Greater Elgin area.
- Advocate for local public policies and practices that support high quality early care and education programs and services for young children and their families.
- To uphold the vision of collaboration and fulfill the mission of our work, EPEL will proactively maintain long-term financial stability by diversifying revenue streams, making strategic investments in our future, and adapting to the changing landscape of early childhood funding sources.
- Adopt a continuous improvement approach for organizational growth.



The first five years of life set the trajectory for a child's future. Children who are healthy and developmentally prepared for kindergarten are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, earn higher wages, and be ready for life. Ready children become ready adults who create thriving communities. **EPEL and our partners are working to change the narrative for our most precious assets, the children.**

THE FUTURE





BY THE NUMBERS

18,849

total children and families served through
Community and Family Engagement

11,000

“Getting Ready for Kindergarten”
calendars distributed

4,548

books distributed, totaling
47,771 since 2018

53

Community and Family
Engagement events serving 4,123

87

early learning
laundromat visits

40

Learning on the Go Neighborhood
Events serving 1,883 families
in 8 weeks

29

“Connect & Play” groups serving
413 children and caregivers

10

Parent Cafés supporting 109
parents

29

mobile and indoor food pantries
served 3,560 families of birth
to five year olds

4,492

connecting with EPEL
on social media

6,216

diapers distributed in partnership with
St. Paul’s United Church of Christ

1,885

in-kind hours were donated, totaling
\$84,825 in human capital investment

2023-2024 HIGHLIGHTS

Engaging and enriching children and families in early learning opportunities helps build foundational skills that are essential to a child's readiness journey.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Engaging Families in Everyday Settings

EPEL coordinates three “Language in the Laundromat” sites, where families connect with community resources and children engage in early literacy activities. Bilingual family ambassadors made **87** visits to reach **365** children.

Community Family Engagement Events

This summer, EPEL provided more than **40** opportunities for families to connect, play, and learn, reaching **1,833** people. “Learning On the Go” expanded its footprint to Streamwood, in addition to Elgin and Hanover Park locations. Free backpacks and nearly **3,000** new books were distributed. EPEL worked with **22** community partners to provide wrap-around services, including mobile library services, healthcare resources, early childhood enrollment, and access to mobile food pantries that served **741** families and distributed **6,126** diapers.

Connecting Families through Play

EPEL hosted **29** free “Connect and Play” bilingual community playgroups for **413** families. These groups provide opportunities to connect with other caregivers and access resources including mobile library services, free play, storytime, and activities that help build foundational readiness skills.

Celebrating Young Children

“Week of the Young Child” was celebrated with **15** fun-filled events attended by **2,013** children and families. Activities celebrated our youngest learners, highlighting the importance of early childhood development and the vital role of early childhood educators.

Promoting Readiness & Literacy

Since 2012, EPEL has distributed more than **120,000** of our signature “Getting Ready for Kindergarten” Family Engagement calendars in English and Spanish, including **11,000** this year alone. **4,548** new Bilingual (English/Spanish) books were distributed. Bringing the total to **47,771** helping provide literature to homes since 2018.

Supporting Families through Parent Education

Parent Cafés provide a safe space for parents and caregivers of young children to come together to share stories, discuss challenges, express concerns, and celebrate wins in navigating the journey toward readiness. EPEL launched its first organized parent education initiative in March 2024, offering **10** Parent Cafés in both English and Spanish to reach **109** parents. EPEL is excited to expand this valuable educational support system.



Top: A family builds readiness skills while doing their everyday chores at a Language in the Laundromat site.

Center: A Learning On the Go friend strings beads to strengthen her fine motor skills for kindergarten.

Bottom: A child at a Week of the Young Child event held in partnership with Elgin Youth Symphony Orchestra





2023-2024 HIGHLIGHTS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH

Convening the Early Childhood Community

Twice a year, EPEL hosts Collaboration Meetings to bring community partners and families together to analyze, discuss, and collaborate. **173** partners and parents participated to create solutions that strengthen the early childhood system and narrow the readiness gap.

Partner Coordination, Outreach, and Referrals

EPEL's approach of meeting families where they are continued to prove effective in 2023-2024. EPEL coordinates community partners to attend food pantries and other engagement events, supporting families with young children by addressing basic needs. Partners offer referrals and resources for essential services. EPEL connected with **3,560** parents of children under five at **29** pantries, making **84** referrals to help families access needed services more easily. Additionally, EPEL received nearly **200** referrals, which were followed up by Family Ambassadors to improve access and ease transitions. Throughout the year, EPEL engaged **4,123** families at **53** community events.

Early Childhood Community Hub

EPEL's early childhood community website, www.elginpartnership.org, available in **12** languages, provides resources to support and connect families with early education and related services. Over the past year, **7,600** families visited EPEL's website, and **4,492** stayed connected through our social media platforms.



Top: Family Ambassadors Lilia, Mariana, and Leticia help children plant seeds at a Learning On the Go family engagement neighborhood site.
Center: EPEL Collaboration Meeting participants
Bottom: Family Ambassadors connect with families in the neighborhoods to ensure they have the needed resources.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS & VOLUNTEERISM

Community Investment

This year, community volunteers, organizations, and board members contributed **1,885** volunteer hours and in-kind services, representing a community investment of **\$84,825** to support young children and families.



Data Strategy Support from EduDream

EPEL was selected by EduDream to receive data strategy support for its early childhood community collaboration. A comprehensive data strategy was co-created to clarify and define EPEL's organizational outcomes, enabling more effective measurement of collaborative community goals. This initiative aimed to advance the early childhood system, ensuring better service for all families and communities. EduDream contributed **242** in-kind hours to this effort.

Northwestern University Partnership

EPEL was selected to collaborate with a group of students from Northwestern University's Department of Nonprofit and Social Impact. Students analyzed and developed a social media plan to help us reach and impact even more families.

Executive Director Honored

EPEL Executive Director Amber Peters was recognized by the Elgin YWCA as recipient of the 2024 Harriet Gifford Leadership in Education. This prestigious award celebrated Amber's deep commitment to the community, early learning, and driving systemic change.



*Top: Family Ambassadors Leticia and Sandra with Andrea Vargas, EPEL Community and Family Engagement Coordinator
Center: United Way Volunteer, Abby Grant, reads with a future kindergartener at JetXpress laundromat.
Bottom: Volunteer Karen Smith (center) is recognized for her dedication to children and service with EPEL in the community.*

Invest in EPEL and support young children and families on their Road to Readiness. Together, we can build a stronger foundation for our community's future.



To give now, scan the QR code to the left with your phone's camera or visit www.elginpartnership.org/donate



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Executive Director,
Elgin Partnership for Early Learning

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Director of Communications
Summit School, Inc

Mary Sunday

Childbirth Educator
Advocate Sherman Hospital

Andrea Vargas

Community and Family
Engagement Coordinator, EPEL



Family building readiness skills at an EPEL Connect and Play group.

Early Childhood System Investors

FUNDERS

Birth to Five Illinois
Elgin Township
Grand Victoria Foundation
Illinois Action for Children
Seigle Foundation
School District U-46
United Way Metro Chicago
YWCA Metro Chicago

CALENDAR DONORS

Alignment Collaborative for Education
Central School District 301

Centro de Información
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Gail Borden Public Library
Greater Family Health
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Financial & In-Kind Support
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Elgin Lions Club
Kiwanis Club of Elgin
Owl's Club of Elgin
The Renaissance Foundation
Weck Auto Group
Wolko Designs (In-Kind)
Zion Lutheran Church



The Seigle Foundation's Mark and Robin Seigle with EPEL staff Amber Peters and Andrea Vargas

SPECIAL THANKS

We extend a special thanks to the following organizations for their invaluable in-kind contributions of research, consulting, and design services this year, which will enhance our impact as an organization.

EduDream co-created a Theory of Change, developed data tools to measure impact, and designed a bank of equitable survey questions to learn from families what they need and want in the community.

Northern Illinois University Center for Nonprofit and NGO Studies' student-led team researched the collaboration and community to design a "Needs Assessment" and a question bank to be used with our community partners and families.

Northwestern University Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact Communication student-led team met with EPEL monthly to analyze our social media data and develop a strategic plan to help the collaboration engage the community more effectively, especially families with children aged birth to five.

Abbey Hambricht, Taproot volunteer and graphic designer, who spearheaded the design and layout of this engaging and informative impact report.

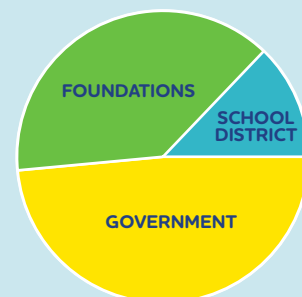
Financial Contributions Champion EPEL's Mission and Vision

EPEL is grateful to our funders for their generosity and commitment to early childhood access for our youngest community members.

2023-2024 FUNDING SOURCES:

49% - Government
39% - Foundations
13% - School District

Total Revenue: \$268,764





Join us to help Greater Elgin's
children learn and grow on the

Road to Readiness!



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Elgin Partnership for Early Learning (EPEL) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

