

Strong Start.



Collaboration for
Early Childhood

THE STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD IN
OAK PARK AND RIVER FOREST



Bright Future.

Number of families with children aged 5 years and younger in Oak Park and River Forest.



Children who enter kindergarten in Oak Park's District 97 each year, on average.



Children enrolled in publicly funded preschool programs during the 2019-20 school year.



Center-based child care programs



Family child care providers



Years on average that our local early childhood educators have worked in the field.



Percentage of brain development that happens by age 5.



Percent of kindergarteners who attended preschool in Oak Park or River Forest scoring proficient in the Kindergarten Readiness Test over the past three years.

Oak Park and River Forest:

OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD ECOSYSTEM



The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance.

-Alan Watts

Letter from our Executive Director

For those whose lives have revolved around children, spring is a time of renewal and growth. It is a season of hope. This year, that hope was tempered with the unique and unforeseen challenges that came with a global health pandemic. The emergence of warmer weather also brought to the world a sense of insecurity for adults who struggled to meet the basic needs of their families. We were in crisis.

In the face of the unknown, we remained engaged. We focused on children and families and the systems that support them. We seized on the opportunity to reinforce our value in the community as coordinators, collaborators, and leaders. We held hands and faced whatever challenges came. And there were many. We will always remember that our community endured two public health threats in a year: a health pandemic, and a crisis of racist violence. Sometimes they worked against each other.

Although we were able to shift our programming to virtual offerings so that more people could access them, we also recognized that we were physically far away from families at a time when they desperately needed closeness. At a time when our Black and Brown families needed to see solidarity in action, we tempered the moral imperative to act, rally and march with the very real dilemma of needing to safeguard our health. We spoke, through foggy glasses and thick masks, about George Floyd and how he couldn't breathe. We bumped elbows with people who were crying. It was imperfect. But, we could do nothing but acknowledge the challenges and move with them.

Throughout, we remained committed to our goals. We reached out to families that needed security and mourned the events that would make moments of peace more rare. We did what we could. Importantly, we never closed. We remained present. We answered the phone. We plunged into what was happening around us. We joined others in the dance towards recovery. And in doing so, we learned a lesson about resilience in early childhood.

This is our story for 2020. Welcome to the Collaboration's first annual look at the state of our early childhood community. It is an interesting year to start this annual tradition, but it is a wonderful year to connect to people who believe, as we do, that what we do today for children is an important predictor of what we can expect of tomorrow.

It is a ray of hope that we all need.

John Borrero



You won't find a better return than investing in early childhood education.

Arthur Rolnick, Economist, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

4,062 total professional development hours acquired by educators in 2019-2020 through Collaboration programming.

4,062

As of September, 2020 there were 2,348 visits to the monthly Early Learning online newsletter that launched April 1, 2020.

2,348

The 2020 Symposium held in January was attended by a record 446 attendees.

446

Preschool as Preparation: A kindergarten-ready child has the foundational social-emotional, physical, and academic skills needed to transition into a formal school setting. Kids need to be ready for kindergarten, but kindergarten needs to be equally ready for kids. We're connecting the complex systems that must work together to establish that foundation here in Oak Park and River Forest.

EARLY LEARNING

Through classroom supports and a robust calendar of professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, we are strengthening the success and quality of the preschool classroom experience.

- Organized the 2020 Annual Symposium: "Embrace the Mess: The Complexities of Early Childhood."

- Expanded mental health classroom support and training for teachers with a focus on child regulation, trauma, and social emotional development.

- Hosted bi-monthly meetings for early childhood directors, family child care professionals, and the publicly-funded preschool committee.



HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Our community ensures that children are getting the resources they need to grow up healthy and to remove obstacles to learning as early as possible. By building and maintaining strong partnerships with early childhood, pediatric, and community sites, we're expanding our collective impact.



- 30 early childhood, pediatric, and community sites were trained to administer developmental screenings, facilitate meaningful discussions with parents and families about screening results, and support families to follow up on meeting children's needs.
- Semi-annual screenings were administered across our community by our Hearing and Vision Screening Technician.
- Community vision and hearing screening events were held for all children not enrolled in center-based childhood programming.
- In tandem with the Oak Park Public Health Nurse and home visiting programs like the Easterseals Partnering with Parents Program, the Collaboration ensures moms who need extra support get connected to a home visiting program through a streamlined single point of entry.

Growing Well: Screenings and maternal health are just two pieces of the puzzle. The Collaboration also strengthens health practitioners' awareness of early childhood developmental issues and services by meeting regularly through the Physicians' Network. Making community resources more readily available for health care providers enriches the lives of the children in their care.

1,969

1,969 children received developmental or social-emotional screenings.

61%

61% of children who were referred due to concerns identified through the hearing screening were assessed and received treatment.

52%

52% of children who were referred due to concerns identified through the vision screening were assessed and received treatment.

2,051

2,051 Ages and Stages Questionnaire screenings were completed between July 2019 and June 2020.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Through a mix of capacity-building models, Oak Park and River Forest are empowering parents of children age 0-5 to lead their child's education like never before. Our workshops, parent leadership initiatives, and team of Community Ambassadors connect families to resources, and strengthen parenting skills within our community.

1,118 text messages were sent to families via Ready4K's text-based family engagement curriculum during the 2019-20 school year.

1,118



• Through a new partnership with Welcome to Fatherhood, fathers and caregivers met new peers and gained the skills necessary to better impact themselves and their families.

• Monthly parent workshops engaged parents virtually, covering topics like potty training and what to expect when your child enters kindergarten.

• In spring 2019 the parent-led team Families First | La Familia Primero was created with support from the Collaboration. This group coordinates spaces for parents to come together at family-friendly events and online sessions like their Saturday Parent Circle.

500+ community members received information shared by community ambassadors during 2019/2020 program year.

500+

88% of parents surveyed strongly agreed that they would use the information from a parent workshop in their daily life with their children.

88%

Empowering parents: Our community teaches its parents to be leaders and advocates for their child's learning and development. The Collaboration coordinates two intensive parenting programs: Parent Leadership Training and the Chicago Parent Program. Through the "train the trainer" program model, parents who participate return to their communities ready to serve as teachers and a trusted resource for their parent peers.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Every opportunity to bring the needs of children into the public dialogue is a win for us. The Collaboration works to engage the entire community in the success of our children, leveraging resources from other agencies to support children and families on their journeys to kindergarten.

1,026

1,026 community members followed the Collaboration on Facebook, a 27% increase from fall 2019.

- Parents and caregivers learned about child care and early childhood organizations through the “Early Childhood Resource Directory” booklet, which is also housed in a virtual format on our website.
- The annual Early Childhood Resource Fair, hosted at the Oak Park Public Library, gave parents and caregivers the opportunity to personally connect with representatives from community organizations and child care centers.
- Opportunities and information from all program service areas were represented on our social media; from parent workshops to community spotlights.

Leading Community Conversations:

The screening of *No Small Matter* offered our community an opportunity for rich discussion and re-examination of systems and assumptions in our community. The public conversations around the documentary have presented a vitally important opportunity for the Collaboration for Early Childhood to engage in the larger conversation around the importance of the first five years of a child’s life.



240

240 community supporters attended the November 4th screening and panel discussion of the documentary *No Small Matter*.

3,000

3,000 Early Childhood Resource Directories were distributed.

HEALTH EQUITY

Access to basic needs during a pandemic



The global pandemic has deeply impacted all aspects of the early childhood community. As an equity issue, the presence of a health pandemic has made disparities more evident, and it has helped the Collaboration understand which families and children need our support.

To help mitigate the impact of this time on our youngest children, we:

- Hosted a Virtual Town Hall for 37 child care providers on reopening safely;
- Provided direct support to vulnerable families enrolled in home visiting programs in Oak Park and River Forest;
- Partnered with the Oak Park Public Library and Equity Team Oak Park to launch a virtual program for children transitioning to kindergarten in the midst of COVID-19;
- Launched a resource delivery service for schools and child care centers in partnership with Oak Park Public Library to enhance teaching and classroom quality;
- Provided technical assistance to child care providers on the Illinois Child Care Restoration Grant application: a crucial step in our community's ability to provide child care to first responders and essential staff;
- Hosted a webinar series to address the needs of healthcare providers and the importance of self-care.

At right, Oak Park residents painting the Black Lives Matter mural on Scoville Avenue. Photo by Paul Goyette.

About Equity

Whether you're a parent, provider, or systems leader, caring about children means working to ensure that they have access to opportunity.



The Collaboration for Early Childhood began in 2003 with the purpose of ensuring opportunity for all children. Equity is built into how we work with other agencies and how we partner shoulder to shoulder with the Oak Park and River Forest communities.

On these pages we have outlined some of the other ways in which the events of 2020 have elevated the importance of equity work.

RACIAL EQUITY

The national call for racial equity and social justice



The murder of George Floyd and similar events this year served to remind us that systemic inequities continue

to perpetuate negative life outcomes for Black children in our community. The Collaboration is committed to the goal that Black families and their young children have access to the same opportunities for health, growth and advancement that other families enjoy.

To this end, we are:

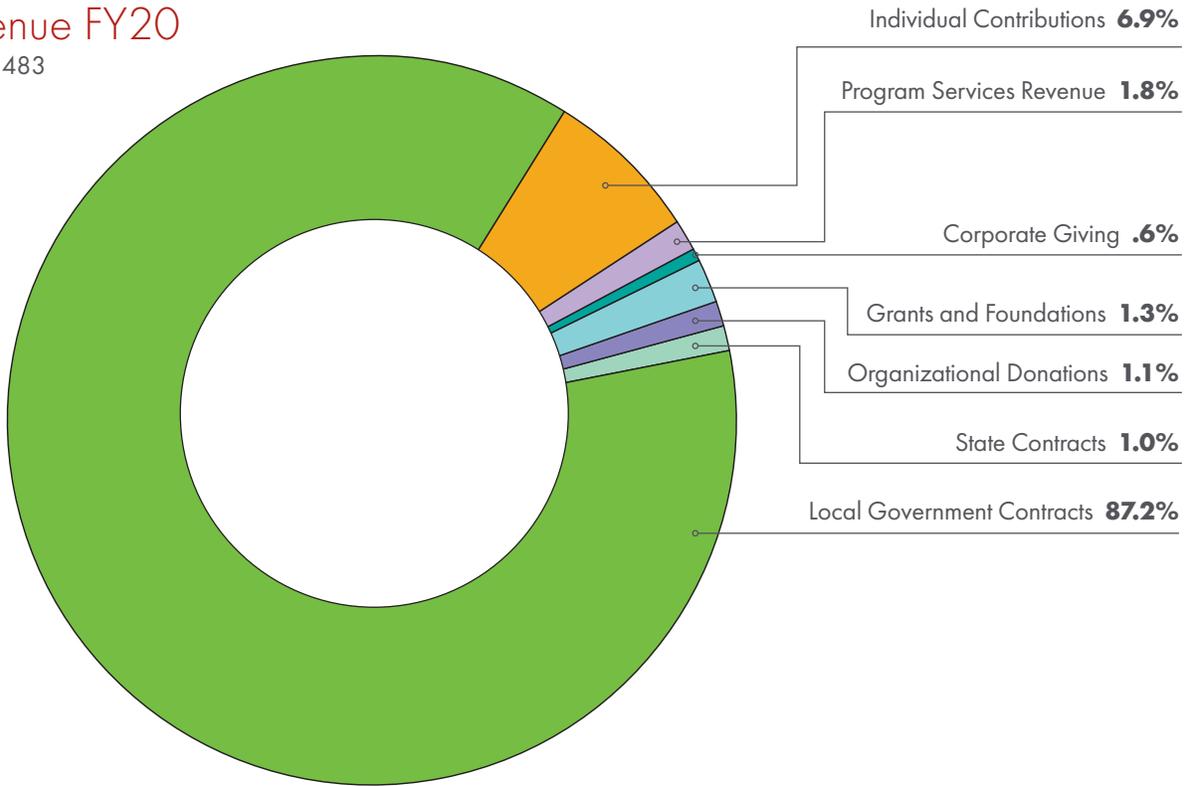
- Deepening our partnership with New Teacher Center to co-facilitate a workshop series around teaching in the context of both a health pandemic and a public health crisis presented by racial violence;
- Collaborating with Erikson Institute to offer telehealth counseling to address the mental health and emotional support needs of children and adults;
- Lending our voice and leadership to the Illinois Action for Children Community Systems Development Equity Workgroup Subcommittee;
- Participating in statewide groups which seek to impact early childhood systems, and joining in dialogues about how anti-racist initiatives can be developed within community-based collaborations across Illinois;
- Inviting our community to reach out to us for support in discussing, confronting, and identifying areas where racism impacts early childhood.



FINANCIALS

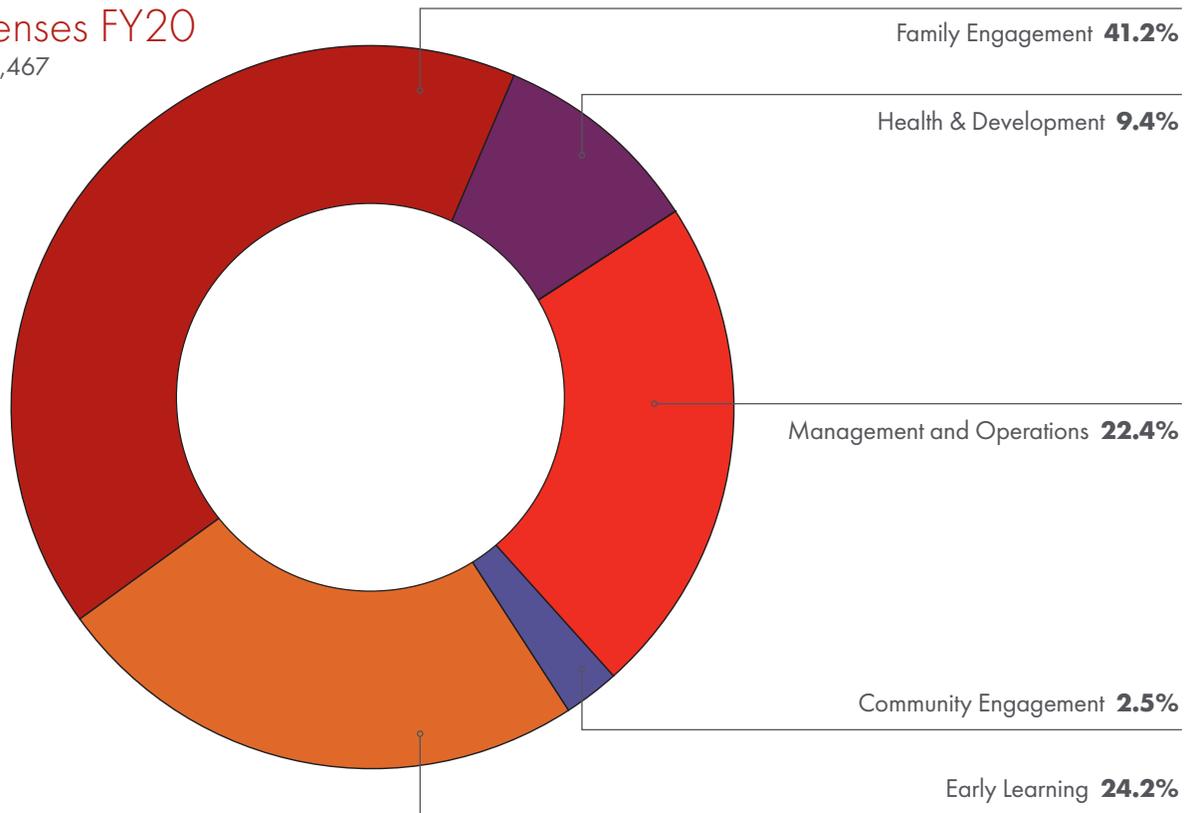
Revenue FY20

\$1,274,483



Expenses FY20

\$1,268,467



To contribute to our ongoing work with an online donation, please visit our website at: **collab4kids.org**.

DONATE



We champion high-quality early childhood care and learning experiences and support for families so all children develop to their full potential.



At 2 years of age, a child has more than **100 trillion** new brain connections...

100,000,000,000,000

...having gained **2 million** every second between the ages of 1 and 2 years

Source: www.theeducationgap.com/blog/surprising-facts-early-childhood-development



**Collaboration for
Early Childhood**
Strong Start, Bright Future

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PROGRAM SERVICES MODEL

