



**EPEL**  
Elgin Partnership for Early Learning

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2021-2022**



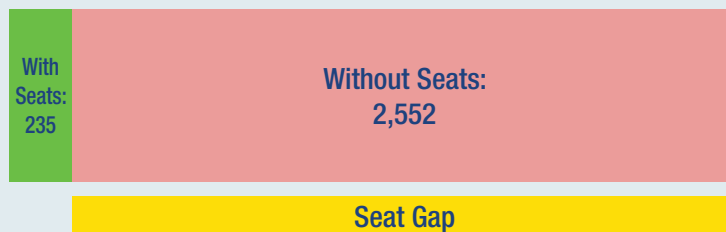
## THE CHALLENGE: INCREASING THE NUMBER OF SEATS AVAILABLE IN PUBLICLY FUNDED EARLY CHILDCARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- There are **18,365 children** from birth to five years old that live in the **11 communities** in the U46 school district.
- Of the 8,503 children who are between birth and 2 years old, **2,887 are living at or below the 185% poverty level**. (\$48,470 for a family of 4.) Only 235 of these children had seats in a program during this year.
- Of the 9,853 children who are 3-5 years old, nearly **3000 are living at or below the 185% federal poverty level**. Only 1,684 of these children had seats in a program this year.

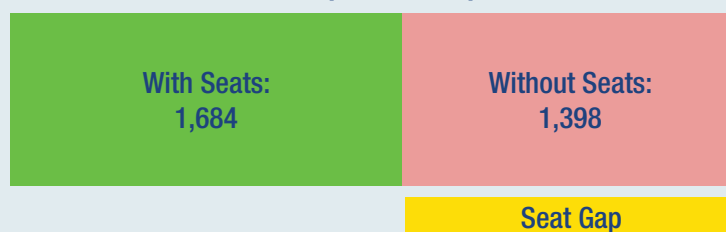
### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Children who live in poverty are less likely to be ready for kindergarten.
- 80-90% of child brain development occurs before the age of five.
- Early education services are effective in increasing the readiness level of young children.
- There are only 2,000 days from the day a child is born until they enter kindergarten.

### ELIGIBLE INFANTS AND TODDLERS (BIRTH–2 YEARS): 2,787\*



### ELIGIBLE PRESCHOOLERS (3–5 YEARS): 3,082\*



\* Eligible for seats = <185% federal poverty level

## EPEL PROVIDES SOLUTIONS

- **Meeting families where they are** is a strategy to engage, learn from and support ALL families throughout the community whether in the laundromats, at neighborhood food pantries, parks or wherever they are.
- EPEL is working with partners to **Build Awareness, Provide Access and Commit to Action** to collectively impact the number of children and families participating in high quality services and programs so all children are for kindergarten.



Learning on the Go



Language in the Laundromat



Food Pantries & Outreach



Collaboration Meetings



StoryWalk



Baby Fest

**Awareness + Access = IMPACT!**

## THE POWER OF PEOPLE AND PARTNERSHIPS



EPEL Partners,

In 2011 community leaders discussed the critical role of early childhood in school outcomes. Leaders agreed that school readiness and success could not just be the responsibility of preschool, but all community services, birth to five. They discussed the complexity of school readiness and the notion of using a cross-system/locally driven approach to increase awareness and access to opportunities for children and families to help close the

gap. This system approach would take collaborative leadership and dedicated partners to create an early childhood community collaboration and EPEL (Elgin Partnership for Early Learning) was formed.

EPEL's vision is for *All Children to be Happy, Healthy, and Ready for Kindergarten*. There are only 2,000 days between the time a baby is born and when that child enters kindergarten. EPEL is dedicated to empowering parents as a child's first and most important teacher. Investing in children's earliest years gives us a lifetime of results for our children, community, and local economy. **The Power of People and Partnerships can help children thrive** by ensuring all families have what they need for a child to succeed in school and life.

Coming out of the pandemic, we learned that resources and opportunities must be more equitable. EPEL meets families where they are with collaborative partners to build connections and increase awareness and access. With increased AWARENESS (knowledge) for families and the community, we can increase ACCESS (means of approaching or entering) for families furthest from opportunities. **The Power of People and Partnerships can create change!**

The readiness data has increased from 10% of children ready for school to 24.2% this year. This 14.2% increase didn't happen alone. Collaborative efforts of educators, families, community partners, funders, resources, services, awareness, and access are building momentum. If we want our children to do better, we must do better for them. **The Power of People and Partnerships can create impact!**

I invite you to join the power of the EPEL collaboration of "People and Partnerships" to bring collaborative action and be a part of the collective impact for our most precious assets in the community, children and their families.

**Together We Can,**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amber Peters".

Amber Peters  
Executive Director  
Elgin Partnership for Early Learning





## INVESTMENT IN EARLY LEARNING IS CRITICAL TO OUR COMMUNITIES' FUTURE

EPEL works collaboratively with community partners to meet families where they are to build connections, increase awareness about the importance of early learning, resources, and access to opportunities that support kindergarten readiness.

Studies show community and family engagement is necessary to improve child outcomes. Positive outcomes are realized if families and communities collaboratively share responsibility for closing the school readiness gap. Community and family engagement begins when a family is expecting a baby and continues through the child's journey in school.

### Together We Can!



**Baby Fest** at Gail Borden Public Library is one of many community and family engagement events EPEL participates in annually to connect with young families. Family engagement increases awareness that parents are their child's FIRST and MOST important teacher and increases access to resources that support young families.



**Collaboration Meetings** are held three times a year for all community partners and families to analyze local early childhood data, discuss birth-to-five system changes and work on solutions to reduce the school readiness gap.



EPEL's **Community-Based Planning** team is a group of cross-sector partners, families and educators who meet to discuss the gaps in early childhood services in the community. The team uses maps created by IECAM (Illinois Early Childhood Asset Mapping) from the University of Illinois to discuss data and form community plans to reduce the slot gap and create more opportunities for birth-to-five children.

**Food Pantries & Outreach** are opportunities to connect with families furthest from opportunities to provide resources and services that support families and young learners in the first 2,000 days of life from birth to five.



## INVESTMENT IN EARLY LEARNING IS CRITICAL TO OUR COMMUNITIES' FUTURE



EPEL designs, prints, and distributes 10,000 **Getting Ready for Kindergarten Family Engagement Calendars** annually in English and Spanish to offer daily tips to prepare children for Kindergarten.

**Language in the Laundromat** is a vehicle to meet families with young children doing everyday chores. Research shows families use laundromats within a mile of their homes and spend up to 2.5 hours a week there, offering time for family engagement. Bilingual family specialists engage families during visits to read books and provide learning opportunities that build readiness skills. **Impact: 520 children and families in three literacy laundromats in 21-22.**



EPEL coordinates and facilitates **Learning On the Go** in eight neighborhoods in Elgin, Hanover Park and Streamwood to engage families and children ages eight and under. Children receive bilingual books, storytime, and engaging learning activities. Instruction is done in Spanish and English with caregivers to provide school readiness tools. Community partners participate in enrolling children in programs, increasing awareness and offering access to resources and services. **EPEL served 1,446 children and 872 caregivers in 8 weeks in 21-22. 15 community partners participated, collectively impacting 808 participants. 1,212 children and adults were served with mobile library services at Learning on the Go sites.**

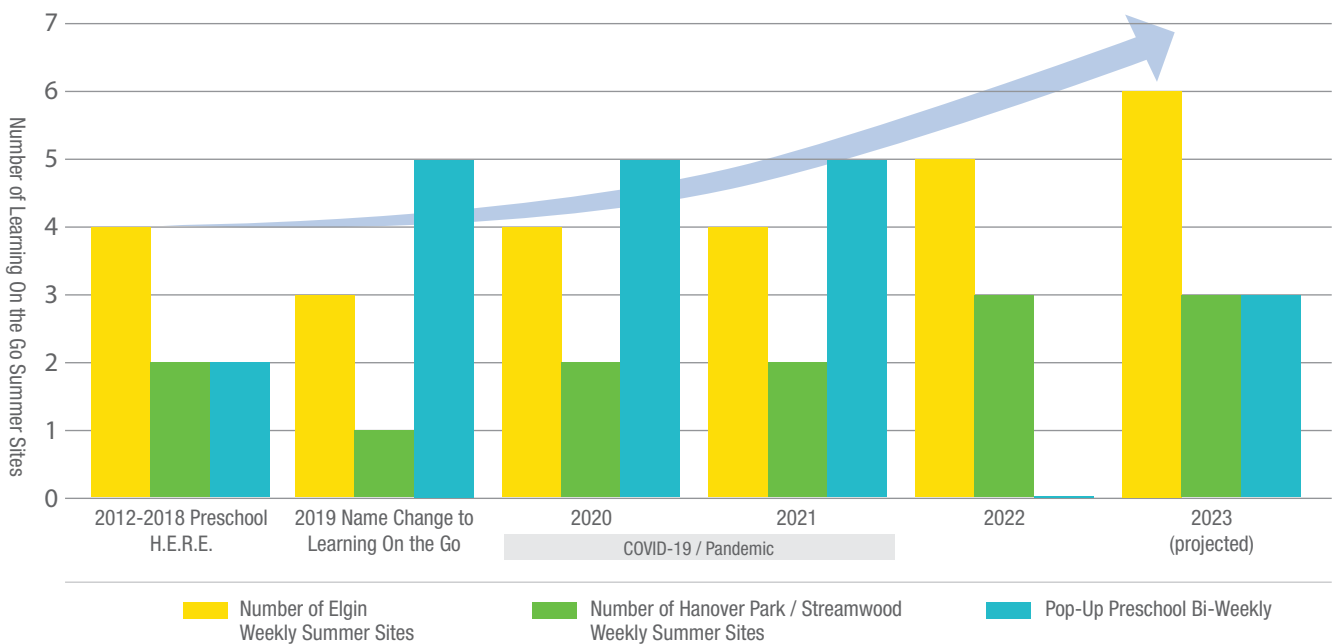
EPEL offers **StoryWalks** in the community, inside or outdoors, in English and Spanish to promote literacy, school readiness skills, exercise, and movement.



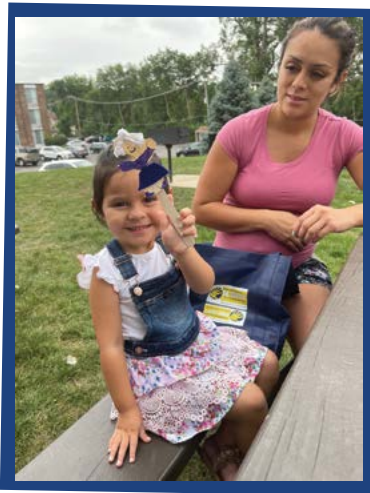
**Week of the Young Child** is a fun week of community and family engagement events to bring attention to the importance of early learning and celebrate young children, early care and education teachers and families. EPEL coordinated the first week-long celebrations across 5 communities with 18 community partners participating to provide engaging hands-on activities to celebrate young children. EPEL and partners connected with 1,120 children and families over the week.



# LEARNING ON THE GO: GROWTH IN SUMMER SITES SERVED



## FOLLOW-UP STORY FROM 2020-21: THE AVINA FAMILY



Andrea and her timid three-year-old daughter Jailyne attended *Learning On the Go* in the Rivers Landing Neighborhood summer of ‘21. Expecting her second child, Mom wanted Jailyne to be around other children her age and make new friends.

By the end of the summer, Jailyne made new friends and fully participated to build needed social-emotional and readiness skills for kindergarten. Jailyne was enrolled in the U-46 preschool program, where she continued to build on the skills she learned.

*“I want my kids to be bilingual, and I was excited for Jailyne to hear teachers read stories and share activities in both English and Spanish.”*

– Andrea Avina



## INCREASING AWARENESS AND ACCESS AT MOBILE PANTRIES



The **Ostapczuk family**, new to Elgin, met EPEL at the mobile food pantry. EPEL noticed Monica had young children in her car, so we stopped to offer resources and invite her family to *Learning On the Go*. Monica and her family, two under the age of five, showed up at not just one site but two each week to connect with EPEL and other families in the community. As Monica met new families in Elgin, she invited new friends to join us too.

*“I’m so happy to be able to connect with EPEL because it has helped push me out of my comfort zone, and seek other venues for self-development. This organization has pulled the darkness part out of my life being a busy stay-home mom. Here, I enjoy meeting up with other parents. Finding something educational and fun for my kids to do, especially locally is exciting. They helped my youngest reach beyond his milestones and prepared my middle child for kindergarten. I have met and feel great sharing my life with people of great value who connect to my interpersonal life and can call them friends. EPEL shines a light on my being inside this community. My family and I finally feel welcome and belong here.”*

– Monica Ostapczuk

## MEETING FAMILIES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA



Scrolling through social media EPEL Executive Director, Amber Peters, noticed a Bartlett mom posted a picture of her child holding the **Getting Ready for Kindergarten Calendar**. Mom, Avita Odoom, was sharing the photo to encourage other parents to pick up a free calendar that offers school readiness activities. EPEL messaged mom to ask for permission to reshare. Avita agreed which started a powerful relationship with the collaboration. EPEL shared activities on social media and their family took advantage of the opportunities to prepare their children for school.

EPEL was forming a community-based planning team to work toward solutions for the slot gap in our birth-to-five services and invited Avita to participate. EPEL has a motto of “no decisions about them, without them.” Parent voices are the most critical ingredient in making early childhood system decisions. Avita joined the planning team and her voice and experiences were incredibly valuable to the process. EPEL could see something special in Avita so we asked her to join the EPEL family to work with the collaboration.



*“It’s rare to make such an instant connection on social media, but I was lucky enough to “meet” Amber on Instagram. What started as a “like”, turned into being part of the EPEL community as a parent, then becoming part of the EPEL family as an employee. I have learned so much in my various roles, and I’m excited to see what the future holds.”*

– Avita Odoom



## ELGIN PARTNERSHIP FOR EARLY LEARNING



**Elgin Partnership for Early Learning (EPEL)** is a non-profit early childhood community collaboration that partners with organizations within the 90 miles of School District U-46 boundaries. EPEL collaborates with community partners and families to increase awareness about the importance of early learning, available resources, and access to early childhood community initiatives and early care and education programs for children ages five and under. EPEL examines data and listens to parent voices to drive decisions to build connected local systems that are easier for families to navigate.

In partnership with our stakeholders, we are committed to promoting policies and practices that intentionally meet the needs of children and families from diverse backgrounds and social identities.

### OUR MISSION

EPEL is building a connected community dedicated to helping all young children thrive.

### OUR VISION

Our children are happy, healthy, and ready for Kindergarten.

### EQUITY STATEMENT

EPEL is driven to ensure that all children have access to quality early care and education in Elgin and surrounding neighborhoods. In partnership with our stakeholders, we are committed to promoting policies and practices that intentionally meet the needs of children and families from diverse backgrounds and social identities.

### OUR PURPOSE

- Ensure a shared vision for young children is clearly held, broadly disseminated, and acted upon in the community.
- Support awareness and access for families to high-quality care and early learning experiences.
- Coordinate efforts across birth to five programs to increase impact.
- Support quality improvement and capacity building of birth to five professionals and organizations.
- Respond to community data about strengths, gaps, and needs that affect children from birth to five.

### OUR GOALS

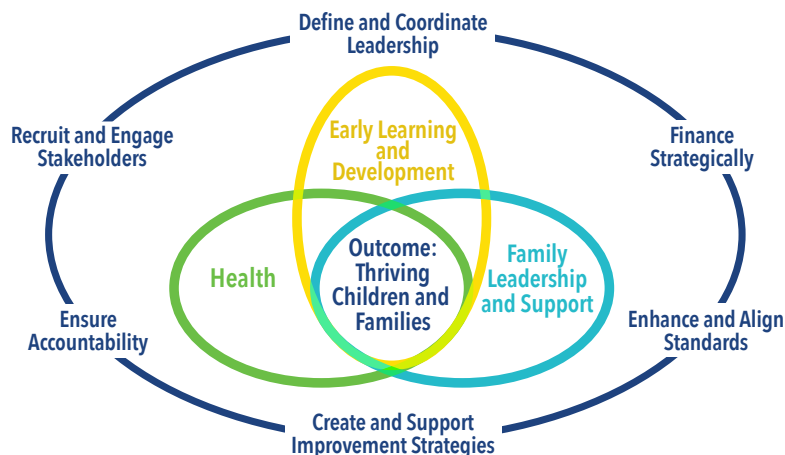
- Increase family and community awareness and access to early care and education information by expanding outreach to meet families where they are and sharing materials. (i.e., 844-KID-INFO cards, materials on city buses, laundromats in Elgin, South Elgin, Streamwood, and Hanover Park, grocery stores, and identified locations families frequent).
- Increase enrollment in early care and education centers and family engagement community opportunities by meeting families where they are (i.e., playgroups, laundromat programs, Learning On the Go, events, etc.).
- Continue community-based slot gap discussions to increase early childhood slots in Elgin, Hanover Park, and Streamwood.



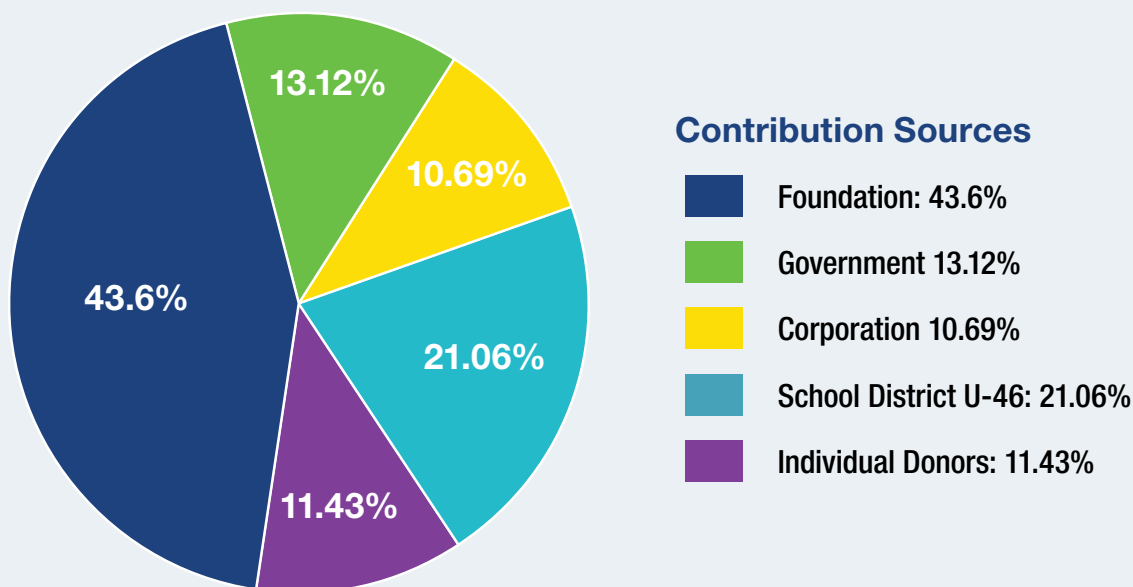


## WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF A COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM?

A connected community plan provides a map for creating a coordinated, high-quality early childhood system that supports all of our community's youngest children and their families, working towards narrowing the achievement gap as they enter Kindergarten.



## FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS SUPPORTING EPEL'S WORK



## PLEASE JOIN US IN EPEL'S IMPORTANT WORK

Join EPEL's **Early Childhood Community Collaboration** in this critical work to ensure all children come to school happy, healthy, and ready for kindergarten.

Help EPEL build a connected and culturally responsive community to increase awareness and access by providing financial and human resources to support and impact children and families in the first 2,000 days of life birth to kindergarten.

### Your donations support:

- Community family ambassadors who connect families and children to resources and services
- New books to build children's brains and literacy skills
- Materials to strengthen school readiness

To make a tax deductible donation to invest in the young children and families in the community scan the QR code or visit our website: [www.elginpartnership.org/donate](http://www.elginpartnership.org/donate).



## 2021-2022 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

### Jennifer Bueche

Gail Borden Library  
Director of KidSpace

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Elgin Partnership for Early Learning  
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### Lynne Bosley

Emeritus Board Member  
Former President/CEO  
United Way Elgin

## THANK YOU TO OUR 2021-2022 FUNDERS

As a small non-profit, EPEL relies entirely on grants and donations to fund our programs and operating expenses. Our work is made possible by the generous support of our major Funders:



BUILDING ON COLLABORATION. INC.

DOLLAR GENERAL



GRAND VICTORIA  
FOUNDATION



United Way  
of Metro Chicago

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

Elgin Partnership for Early Learning is supported by Partner Organizations who are committed to preparing the children of our community to be successful in school and in life.

Academy 4 Kids  
Advocate Sherman Hospital  
Alignment Collaborative for Education  
All Our Kids Network  
Ascension St. Joseph Hospital  
Associates and Peds  
Aunt Martha's Home Visiting  
Bartlett Park District Preschool  
Bartlett Public Library  
Best of Both World's Family Childcare  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church Development Center  
Birth to Five Illinois  
Bizzy Bee's Family Childcare  
Blue Kangaroo Coin Laundry  
Boys and Girls Club - Elgin

Boys and Girls Club - South Elgin  
Candy Care Family Care Provider  
Caravel Autism Health  
Castles and Crayons Family Care Provider  
Centre Preschool  
Centro de Información  
Chesterbook Academy  
Children of America Childcare  
Christine Gomez Family Care Provider  
Christine Monaghan Family Care Provider  
Church of the Brethren  
City of Elgin  
City of Elgin (Police Department)  
COFI (Community Organizing Families)  
Community Crisis Center



## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS (CONTINUED)






Corbella Pregnancy Clinic  
 DayOnePact  
 DCFS Department of Children and Family Services  
 Diane Brunzo Family in Home Care  
 Easter Seals DuPage and Fox Valley  
 Elgin Area Chamber of Commerce  
 Elgin Community College  
 Elgin Community College Early Childhood Lab School  
 Elgin Dental Associates  
 Elgin Hispanic Network  
 Elgin History Museum  
 Elgin Lions Club  
 Elgin Public Museum of Natural History & Anthropology  
 Elgin Township  
 EMSA Elgin Math and Science Academy  
 Erikson Institute  
 Everything Clean Laundromat  
 Explore Elgin Area  
 Familia Dental  
 Family Focus: Healthy Families  
 Family Services Association  
 First United Methodist Church  
 Fit4Mom  
 Food for Greater Elgin  
 Friendship Corner Child Care  
 Gail Borden Public Library  
 Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois  
 Goddard School - Elgin  
 Good Shepherd Preschool  
 Grand Victoria Foundation  
 Greater Family Health  
 Greenbrook Montessori  
 Hamilton Wings  
 Hanover Park - Preschool Program  
 Hanover Park Park District  
 Hanover Township  
 Harvest Christian Academy Preschool  
 Highland Christian Academy Preschool  
 Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
 Home Away from Home  
 Housing Authority of Elgin  
 iGrow-Home Visiting Illinois  
 Illinois Action for Children  
 Illinois Department of Human Services  
 Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development  
 Ivy Early Learning Academy  
 Jackie Kirkpatrick Family In Home Care  
 Jennifer's Preschool and Child Care  
 Jerri Hoffmann Center/Children's Home and Aid  
 JetXpress Laundry  
 Kane County Health Department  
 Kane County Regional Office of Education  
 Kelly Coombs Family Care Provider  
 Kids Above All Home Visiting  
 Kids First Pediatric Dentistry  
 KinderCare Main Lane Child Care Center  
 KinderCare South Street Child Care Center  
 KinderCare Spring St Child Care Center  
 KinderCare Bowes Road Child Care Center  
 KinderCare Brewster Creek Child Care Center

Kiwanis Club of Elgin  
 Kripa Montessori School  
 Law Office of Steffen & Kelly, P.C.  
 Learning Tree East Child Care Center  
 Learning Tree West Child Care Center  
 Lissette Boglio Family Care Provider  
 Literacy Connection  
 Little Bear Academy  
 Little Blessings Home Daycare  
 Little Royals Preschool at Larkin High School  
 Maliha Siddiqui Family In-Home Care Provider  
 Margaret Frank Family In-Home Care Provider  
 Mini Maroon Preschool (Inside Elgin High School)  
 Mini Steps Child Care  
 My Recess Therapy  
 Nancy Nevarez Family In-Home Care Provider  
 Next Generation Pediatrics  
 Northern Illinois Food Bank  
 Office of Representative Anna Moeller  
 Office of Senator Cristina Castro  
 One Hope United Elgin Child and Family Resource Center  
 Poplar Creek Public Library  
 Precious Angels Child Care  
 Precious Tots Preschool Program  
 Primrose School of South Elgin  
 Rivers Landing Apartments (Ollie Besinger)  
 Rosa Rivera Family In-Home Care Provider  
 Salvation Army Elgin  
 "Sandy's Learning House" Family Care Provider  
 SCARCE (School & Community Assistance for Recycling & Education)  
 Schick's Crossing Preschool  
 School District U-46  
 School District U-46 Illinois Park Preschool  
 School District U-46 Independence Learning Center, Bartlett  
 School District U-46 More at Four, Elgin & Hanover Park  
 Second Baptist Church  
 Side Street Studios Arts  
 South Elgin Parks & Recreation Preschool Pals  
 St. John the Evangelist School  
 St. John's Lutheran School  
 St. Joseph's School  
 St. Mary Preschool  
 St. Paul's United Church of Christ  
 St. Thomas More Preschool  
 Streamwood Park District  
 Streamwood Parks and Recreation Preschool  
 Summit Early Learning School, Inc.  
 Tawney Pauling, Family In-Home Care Provider  
 Taylor YMCA  
 Terri's Home Daycare  
 The Learning Experience  
 Two Rivers Head Start  
 United Way of Metropolitan Chicago  
 VNA Family Case Management  
 Well Child Center  
 WOTB (Women on the Brink)  
 YWCA Elgin  
 YWCA Metropolitan Chicago  
 Zion Lutheran Church



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