

ANSWERING THE CALL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD



EPEL
Enriching Partnerships for Early Learning

2024-2025 Impact Report



OUR 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.

OUR VISION

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

MEET THE EPEL TEAM



Amber Peters
Executive Director



Andrea Vargas
*Community and Family
Engagement Coordinator*



Karen Ceballos
*Basics of Greater Elgin
Coordinator*



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Answering the Call for Early Childhood

For over a decade, EPEL has worked alongside our community to ensure every child enters school ready to learn. Together, we've built strong partnerships and an early childhood system where families, organizations, and community leaders are the hands and feet of this critical work.

This year, we took important steps forward. Our name changed from **Elgin Partnership for Early Learning to Enriching Partnerships for Early Learning**—a name that reflects the heart of what we do: enriching partnerships to create a stronger, more equitable early childhood system. Our daily work remains the same: to convene, collaborate, and strengthen the early learning ecosystem so every child can thrive.

We also achieved exciting milestones in 2024–2025:

- **Launched The Basics of Greater Elgin**, a community-wide initiative giving families simple, powerful tools to support children's early learning.
- **Hired a Basics Coordinator** to lead and expand this effort.
- **Introduced a free weekly texting platform** that delivers two early learning tips directly to families' phones.
- **Increased the number of organizations providing free early learning opportunities** for qualifying families with children from ages 3 to 5.
- **Expanded parent education opportunities** with three new trained facilitators to nurture children's development at home.
- **Enhanced accessibility by expanding from Elgin to Streamwood and Hanover Park**, offering Connect & Play and Learning On the Go sites to ensure more families are able to participate in early learning opportunities.



*Executive Director Amber Peters
with a youngest learner*

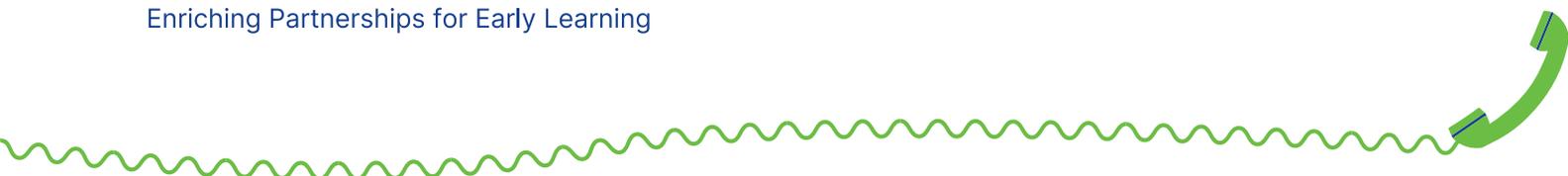
What will the next ten years bring? While we can't predict the future, research is clear: investing in early childhood works. Children who start ready, stay ready. And communities that answer the call together reap the benefits of those investments for generations.

This year, I invite you to join us in **Answering the Call for Early Childhood**. Every partnership, conversation, and action helps build a system where all children have the foundation to succeed in school and in life. We remain committed to enriching lives, empowering families, and building a stronger community for years to come.

Together We Can,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amber Peters".

Amber Peters
Executive Director
Enriching Partnerships for Early Learning



WHY THE CALL MATTERS

4 out of 5 children in the Greater Elgin area **enter kindergarten without the readiness skills** necessary to succeed.



90% of a child's brain development happens before age 5.

More than **18,000 children under the age of five** live in the Greater Elgin area.



2 out of 3 children in the Greater Elgin area **do not have access to a preschool classroom.**



Early learning opportunities pay off. Every \$1 spent returns an average of \$4. For high-risk youth, the return can be as high as **\$13 per dollar invested.**



EPEL IS ANSWERING THE CALL

About EPEL

Enriching Partnerships for Early Learning (formerly Elgin Partnerships for Early Learning) is a nonprofit community collaboration serving as the hub for the early childhood system across eleven communities in Kane, Cook, and DuPage counties. EPEL leads cross-sector efforts to align organizations around a common agenda and shared goals, strengthening the system so every child is prepared for school and life.

Why Are Early Childhood Community Collaborations Important?

Community collaborations are uniquely positioned to understand their local context, respond to and guide how resources can be directed to meet needs, and build the on-the-ground infrastructure that ensures investments are used effectively to strengthen the early childhood system for children and families.

How EPEL Helps

EPEL engages, informs, equips, and supports families to increase awareness and access, address root causes, and reach those facing the greatest opportunity gaps. Through parent education and community and family engagement, EPEL helps build a stronger early childhood system and a brighter, more equitable future for the entire community.



ENGAGE



INFORM



EQUIP



SUPPORT



EPEL
Enriching Partnerships for Early Learning

**NEW NAME,
SAME COMMITMENT**

This year, we changed our name from Elgin Partnership for Early Learning to Enriching Partnerships for Early Learning (EPEL) to reflect our growth beyond Elgin and the heart of our work—enriching relationships that strengthen the early childhood system. While our name has evolved, our mission remains the same: to convene, collaborate, and build partnerships that ensure every child enters school ready to learn.



INCREASING EACH CHILD'S READINESS FOR KINDERGARTEN

READY COMMUNITY + **READY FAMILIES** = **READY CHILDREN**

We all have a role to play in Early Childhood.

What it means to be “ready.”

A ready kindergartner is healthy, developmentally on track, and prepared to learn, with strong social-emotional, language, cognitive, and physical skills that help them thrive. Readiness is multi-faceted and can't be measured by a single test—but families who are supported and ready, along with early childhood system partners that invest in learning, health, and well-being, play a critical role in ensuring children arrive at school ready to succeed from day one.

Click here or scan the QR code to hear from one mom the impact our Learning on the Go program has had on her family (in Spanish).



EPEL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Children are ready when all systems work together. EPEL's Theory of Change keeps our collaboration focused and coordinated, ensuring that every action we take moves us closer to the goal of children entering school prepared to thrive



ORGANIZATION

- Adopt a continuous improvement approach for organizational growth
- Diversify funding streams



COMMUNITY

- Educate partners about the importance of the early childhood system and its long term impacts
- Build partnerships with family services, education, and healthcare providers
- Share information with business and government partners



FAMILIES

- Engage families to establish relationships and facilitate access
- Engage under-resourced and marginalized families around school readiness skills
- Provide opportunities for families to share ideas and recommendations
- Develop family leadership skills that support decision-making processes



CHILDREN

- Identify existing gaps in early childhood, education, and essential service delivery
- Engage community and partners to develop and implement solutions for recruitment into high-quality programs

ORGANIZATION GOALS

- ▶ Ensure a unified system in the Greater Elgin area wherein children and families have equitable opportunities to thrive.
- ▶ Marginalized and under-resourced families have access to programs, materials, and resources that prepare their children to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically in kindergarten and beyond.
- ▶ EPEL partners with families to lead community change efforts in the Greater Elgin area.
- ▶ Young children in the Greater Elgin area have access to high quality early care and education, and essential services needed to support each child's holistic development.
- ▶ EPEL operates as a flexible, future-focused, and fiscally responsible organization.



COMMUNITY IN ACTION

Data speaks louder than words because behind every number is a child, family, and future.

14,814

total children and families served in FY25

85

Laundromat Visits serving 123 adults and 130 children

106

families supported through parent education programs

38

Connect & Play groups utilizing The Basics Principals

10

Parent Education Classes to support families with early childhood development skills

38

Learning On the Go pop-ups serving 1,137 children and 603 adults



\$101,632

in community investment
through 2,258 volunteer hours
supporting early childhood

11,000

"Getting Ready for Kindergarten"
bilingual Family Engagement
Guides distributed

30

mobile and indoor food pantries
serving 3,201 families with birth
to five year olds

12,972

visits to EPEL's website, a community hub
for awareness, access, and connection
across the early childhood system

3,701

books distributed, totaling
51,472 since 2018

4,769

people connected to EPEL
via email social media

7,106

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

270

Community and Family Engagment
events participated in or led

37

events celebrating
"Week of the Young Child"

99

referrals received to connect
children and families to services

Opposite page, top: A Learning On the Go event at Mulberry Park in Elgin.

Opposite page, bottom: A family shows off a project completed at a Coffee with a Purpose parent education event.

Bottom St. Paul's United Church of Christ diaper partners in action.



THE BASICS OF GREATER ELGIN:

An Early Childhood Initiative Call to Engage the Whole Community

The Basics of Greater Elgin is an early childhood, community-wide initiative that focuses on five key principles proven to promote healthy brain development and build school readiness. These principles strengthen everyday interactions between caregivers and children to foster environments that support learning and emotional well-being from birth.

EPEL is proud to be the fourth community in Illinois to launch a Basics network, made possible through funding from the Kane County Health Department, the Seigle Foundation, the City of Elgin, and School District U-46.

As the backbone organization, EPEL mobilizes a diverse network of cross-sector partners—healthcare providers, schools, libraries, businesses, faith communities, and social services—to ensure parents and caregivers consistently receive information and support through multiple, trusted touch-points. This coordinated, community-wide approach builds a culture that reinforces the Basics Principles in daily family life, helping each young child thrive.



The Basics founder Dr. Ron Ferguson (back row, center) with the EPEL Board at the kick-off event in April.

“By investing in early childhood through meaningful collaboration with EPEL, home visits, trauma-informed care, and coordinated community systems, the Health Department is building a foundation for lifelong health, resilience, and equity—starting at birth.”

- Kim Peterson
Director for Community Health,
Kane County Health Department



Click here or scan the QR code to watch a video from The Basics of Greater Elgin kick-off event.





Click here or scan to hear from mom Victoria about how The Basics Insights texting platform has helped her.



The Call Is Being Answered: Cross-Sector Partners in Action

- ▶ **34 cross-sector partners** on the Basics launch team
- ▶ **225 attendees** at Basics launch event on April 11
- ▶ **297 in-kind hours** contributed by partners toward the Basics launch, representing a **community investment of \$10,323**
- ▶ **20 Basics Engagement Stations** installed in locations across the community since April, providing awareness and access to early learning
- ▶ **320 families** enrolled in the multilingual Basics Insights texting platform
- ▶ **6 Basics trainings** offered from April to June



Top left: Exploring the value of PLAY at the National Basics Network Conference

Above: Basics stations engage families in early learning at community locations. Businesses supporting the Basics engagement stations include (from left) Associates and Pediatrics, KCT Credit Union, and Broadway Auto.



Thank you to EPEL's Community Partner Launch Team for your collaboration and dedication in bringing The Basics Greater Elgin initiative to life!

Dennis Anderson
School District U-46

Shirley Bassett
Kane County African American Coalition

Christina Bernardi
School District U-46

Diana Bribiesca
Illinois Basics

Tara Burghart
School District U-46

Karen Ceballos
Enriching Partnerships (EPEL)

Pat Chamberlain
EPEL Executive Board, Grandparent

Randi Chambers
Northern Illinois Food Bank

Julia Contreras-Paniagua
Office of Representative Anna Moeller

Katie Cox
School District U-46

Jenny Davis
Associates in Pediatrics

Felicia Ellis
School District U-46, Mom

Michelle Esquivel
Well Child Center

Sandra Fabela
Associates in Pediatrics

Lisa Fabris
Poplar Creek Library

Courtney Hill
DeKalb County Collaborative for Young Children

Yadi Jaramillo
Associates in Pediatrics

Dr. Risé Jones
Hamilton Wings and Evaluation Solutions, Inc

Julie Kallenbach
Grandparent

Elisa Lara
VNA Healthcare

Gertrude McClain
African American Coalition

Dawn Munson
Elgin Community College

Stephanie Muro
Gail Borden Public Library

Sheryl Nelson
The Goddard School

Lorena Nunez
*Kane County Health Dept,
All Our Kids (AOK)*

Amber Peters
Enriching Partnerships (EPEL)

David Quiroz
Birth to Five Illinois

Lynn Reuter
School District U-46

Raquel Robelo
*School District U-46,
EPEL Parent Ambassador*

Erin Segovia
Greater Family Health

Tiffany Trewartha
School District U-46

Andrea Vargas
Enriching Partnerships (EPEL)

Israel Vargas
Centro de Información, Hanover Park

Kris Young
YWCA Elgin



2024-25 HIGHLIGHTS

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

JULY 2024

- ▶ Our team expanded its capacity this year, with three staff members trained and certified to lead Parent Cafés, creating deeper connections with families.
- ▶ Name changed from Elgin Partnership to Enriching Partnerships to reflect the heart of what we do: enriching partnerships to create a stronger, more equitable early childhood system.



AUGUST 2024

- ▶ EPEL brought together 34 community members to help design and guide the launch and rollout of The Basics of Greater Elgin.

SEPTEMBER 2024

- ▶ Expanded the Connect & Play group to Streamwood. Thank you to Christ Community Church of Streamwood for providing free space to connect and play with other families.
- ▶ Launched Basics Insights Multilingual Texting Platform as Pilot



OCTOBER 2024

- ▶ Introduced the updated bilingual Birth-to-Five Getting Ready for Kindergarten guide, now aligned with The Basics Principles to enhance family engagement and child development.

NOVEMBER 2024

- ▶ Hired Basics of Greater Elgin Coordinator, Karen Ceballos.



*Top: Learning in the Laundromat event
Center: Pic: Dad and son at Connect & Play in Streamwood
Bottom: City of Elgin Mayor David Kaptain reads Early Childhood Proclamation with the EPEL Team for Week of the Young Child*



JANUARY 2025

- ▶ Precious Angel's ChildCare Center answered the call for early childhood by serving as a host site for high school interns, supporting the next generation of educators.



FEBRUARY-MAY 2025

- ▶ EPEL designed and launched "Coffee With a Purpose," a new parent series in partnership with Simplifying Therapy, providing caregivers support and addressing gaps in community mental health.



FEBRUARY 2025

- ▶ EPEL introduced The Basics Initiative to the Elgin Hispanic Network at its largest meeting to date, reaching a broad audience of Hispanic leaders and community members.

MARCH 2025

- ▶ EPEL held our first Community Collaboration meeting entirely in Spanish. This was our first all-Spanish early childhood collaboration gathering focused on the Color Code and created with caregivers of young children in mind. Childcare was provided to ensure families could fully participate.



*Top: Partners in Action at a mobile food pantry in Hanover Park
 Second from top: Elgin Youth Symphony joined EPEL to celebrate Week of the Young Child with a fun Rhythm and Rhyme event
 Center: Andrea Vargas, EPEL's Community and Family Engagement Coordinator, guides children in a fun music activity at Learning On the Go.
 Bottom: EPEL's Karen Ceballos speaking to the Elgin Hispanic Network.*





APRIL 2025

- ▶ Officially launched The Basics of Greater Elgin, an early childhood initiative providing providers and families with practical tools to support children's early brain development.
- ▶ EPEL website was enhanced to highlight The Basics of Greater Elgin, making information and tools more accessible to the community. Explore the site at www.enrichingpartnerships.org.



MAY 2025

- ▶ EPEL selected as a member of the cohort for the Partner Plan Act Coaching Institute.
- ▶ Andrea Vargas, EPEL Community and Family Engagement Coordinator named Maria Whelan Leadership Institute Fellow.



JUNE 2025

- ▶ Expanded Learning On the Go to an additional site in Elgin, bringing the total to three in Elgin, one in Streamwood, and one in Hanover Park, enhancing access to mobile early learning opportunities and resources in the Greater Elgin area during the summer.

*Top: Attendees at EPEL's first Community Collaboration held all in Spanish.
Middle: EPEL Family Specialist building relationships in the community
Above: A community volunteer introduces a child to music, supporting early learning and creative exploration during Week of the Young Child
Below: EPEL Family Specialist team bringing summer Learning On the Go programming to families*





EXECUTIVE BOARD

Karina Nava, Chair
Assistant City Manager, City of Elgin

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Manager of Youth Collection
Department, Gail Borden Public Library

Patricia Chamberlain, Treasurer
Chamberlain Educational Consulting

Michael Isaacson
Executive Director, Kane County
Health Department

Katie Cox
Director of Early Learning Initiatives,
School District U-46

Dr. Jennifer Schening
Owner and Pediatrician,
Next Generation Pediatrics

Fran Teti-Teal
Director of Nursing, Advocate
Sherman Hospital

Joy D'Amico
VP of Youth and Family Potential,
YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

Marissa Raglin
Licensed Professional Counselor and
Owner, Simplifying Therapy

Jaclyn Vasquez
Educational Consultant and Owner,
J V Consultancy, LLC

Amber Peters
Executive Director, Enriching Partnership
for Early Learning

ACTION TEAMS

COMMUNITY & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TEAM

Summit Early Learning
Carla Hinojosa
Linda Breen
Tahlia Bartee

Greater Family Health
Jared Chimil
Lily Pasillas

School District U-46
Tiffany Trewartha
Stacey Deniston
Pilar Garcia
Lynn Reuter

Poplar Creek Library
Lisa Fabris

Kane County Health Dept.
Maria Leon
Isabel Garcia
Lisa Bloom
Cindy Hernandez
Lorena Nunez
Jill Zolfo

Simplifying Therapy
Marissa Raglin

Office of Rep. Anna Moeller
Julia Contreras

Gail Borden Public Library
Jazmin D. Villagomez
Stephanie Muro

Well Child Center
Nancy Lara
Michelle Esquivel

Child and Family Connections
Liz Schaffer

Elgin Parks and Recreation
Kerry Reynolds

VNA Healthcare
Elisa Lara

The Ivy Academy
Cynthia Gonzalez

Youth Build Elgin
Patricia Williams

Birth to Five Illinois Region 31
Alicia Hann
David Quiroz

Three Fires Council/Scouting
Len Bogacki

Boys and Girls Club
Emily Aken
Chrystal Maxwell
Wendy Mendoza

**St. Paul's United Church
of Christ**
Karen Smith

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

Lidia Sonthipanya
Ariel Pennix
Derrick McCollum

Streamwood Montessori
Monae Joyner
Kimberly Bianchini

Kids Above All
Kristina Stone



Top: EPEL Executive Board and staff
Above: A family plays together at Learning On the Go



Action Teams, cont.

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Jennifer Bueche, Chair
Manager, Youth Collection
Department, Gail Borden
Public Library

Tara Burghart
Communication & Media
Relations Coordinator,
School District U-46

Karen Ceballos
Basics of Greater Elgin
Coordinator, EPEL

Lorena Nunez González
Early Childhood Program
Manager, Kane County Health
Department

Rebecca Mace
Director of Communications,
Summit School, Inc

Amber Peters
Executive Director, EPEL

Mary Sunday
Childbirth Educator, Advocate
Sherman Hospital

Tiffany Trewartha
Early Childhood Community
Liaison, School District U-46

Andrea Vargas
Community and Family
Engagement Coordinator, EPEL



DATA TEAM

Karen Ceballos
Basics of Greater Elgin
Coordinator, EPEL

Pat Chamberlain, Chair
President, Chamberlain
Educational Consulting

Katie Cox
Director of Early Learning,
School District U-46

Joy D'Amico
VP of Youth and Family
Potential, YWCA Metropolitan
Chicago

Julie Kallenbach
Community Member

Avita Odoom
Data Consultant, EPEL

Amber Peters
Executive Director, EPEL

Andrea Vargas
Community and Family
Engagement Coordinator, EPEL

Jaclyn Vasquez
Educational Consultant,
J V Consultancy, LLC



*Top: EPEL Basics Coordinator Karen Ceballos talking to a family at Gail Borden Public Library
Above: A young artist and her mother at a Connect & Play event in Streamwood*

Thanks for Answering the Call

- ▶ Basics DeKalb County and Illinois Basics for consulting and supporting our Basics of Greater Elgin launch team to get us to the community launch.
- ▶ Zion Lutheran Church in Elgin and Christ Community Church in Streamwood for generously providing space for our free Connect & Play groups for families with children from birth to age five.
- ▶ Northern Illinois Food Bank and the Elgin Parks and Recreation for partnering to feed families at our Learning On the Go sites in Elgin.
- ▶ St. Paul's United Church of Christ for partnering to supply and distribute diapers to moms at our community and family engagement events to support basic needs.
- ▶ The administration of Ontarioville and Sunnydale Elementary Schools for partnering with us to host Learning On the Go during the summer and for warmly welcoming families each week.
- ▶ Gail Borden and Poplar Creek Public Libraries for their support of Connect & Play and Learning On the Go, helping provide literacy resources for families.

EPEL values the countless community partners who work alongside us to create meaningful opportunities for children and families.

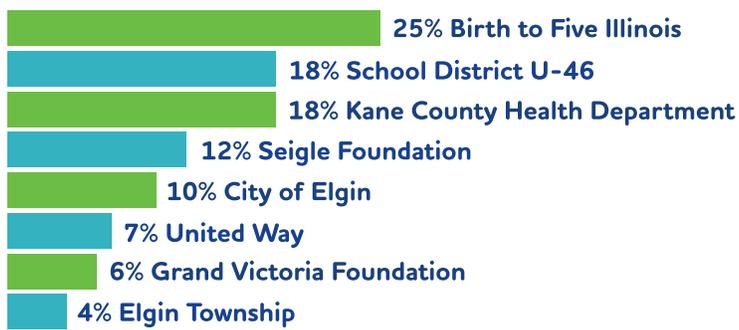
Financial Contributions Champion

EPEL's Mission and Vision

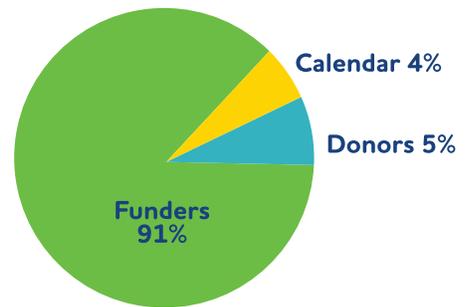
EPEL is grateful to our funders for their generosity and commitment to early childhood access for our youngest community members.

Total Revenue \$407,602

Percentage Breakdown by Funder



Funders by Category



TAKE THE CALL.
SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY.
CHANGE A LIFE!

Invest in EPEL and support early learning by answering the call!



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





Elgin Hispanic Network community member making a wish for a child in our community.

Early Childhood System Investors

FUNDERS

Birth to Five Illinois
 School District U-46
 Kane County Health Department
 Seigle Foundation
 City of Elgin
 United Way of Metro Chicago
 Grand Victoria Foundation
 Elgin Township
 Kiwanis Club of Elgin
 Illinois Action for Children

CALENDAR DONORS

Alignment Collaborative for Education
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 Centro de Información
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 Easter Seals DuPage and Fox Valley
 Elgin Community College
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 Grand Victoria Foundation
 Kane County Health Department
 KCT Credit Union
 School District U-46
 School District U-46 Educational Foundation
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 VNA Healthcare
 YWCA Elgin

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 Dickens, Mason, & Kissel, DDS Ltd
 Elgin Lions Club
 Golden "K" Kiwanis
 Kiwanis Club of Elgin
 The Renaissance Foundation
 Wolko Designs (In-Kind)



EPEL IS ANSWERING THE CALL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Enriching Partnership for Early Learning (EPEL)

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224-325-5123



Family Support Helpline
224-325-5011



www.enrichingpartnerships.org



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