

YEAR IN REVIEW 2024

Empowering Families to Thrive





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A Message from

Start Early Leadership

In a year filled with divisive, polarizing issues, education and care of our youngest children are among the few areas of growing consensus.

Decades of explaining the science of developing brains have brought greater attention to early education; the lingering effects of the pandemic have highlighted how challenging it is for every family to find quality, affordable child care. It feels like the drumbeat for change is louder and more pervasive than ever before.

And yet, millions of children under age 5 in this country are still living in under-resourced communities and without access to quality early learning programs – programs that we know can have a lasting, positive impact for children, families and generations to follow.

From our roots in Chicago's South Side and rural Illinois, we now influence early childhood programs and policies **across all 50 states**. This past year, our role as on-the-ground practitioners remained the bedrock of our expertise and source of innovation and leadership in the field.

We also expanded our direct service footprint significantly, opening new programs in Lake County, Illinois, a diverse community with huge unmet need for early education and care. Despite our pride in this year's accomplishments, we know that there is more to be done.



Start Early believes that **early learning and care should be a public good**—widely accessible, publicly funded and locally controlled—so that every child has an equitable opportunity to reach their full potential.

We leverage our programmatic and systems-building expertise to create, test and scale innovative solutions that transform the early childhood field. Our efforts drive policy change at local, state and federal levels, ensuring that our impact is both broad and deep.

As we look ahead, we remain uncompromising in our pursuit to ensure that every child in America can reach their full potential. Together, we are stronger, and together, we transform lives.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to our mission.

Sincerely,

Diana Mendley Rauner, Ph.D.
President

Mary Hasten
Chair, Start Early Board of Directors

Our Commitment to

Children & Families



Mission

Start Early advances quality early learning for families with children, before birth through their earliest years, to close the opportunity gap.

Every child has equitable opportunity to reach their full potential to thrive in school and in life.

Vision



Advancing Equitable Access & Opportunity

The first five years of a child's life are crucial in shaping their future. Circumstances such as race, ethnicity, ZIP code and socioeconomic status significantly influence the opportunities for success available to children, leading to disparities in educational outcomes and achievements.

Start Early believes early care and education is a public good and should meet the diverse and unique needs of all young children, families and those who care for them. We are committed to transforming the early childhood system to ensure every child has an equitable opportunity to thrive.



Champions for Early Learning & Care

As champions for children and families, Start Early collaborates with families, communities and the early childhood field to promote and provide equitable access to effective early learning programs and services – prenatally through age 5.

The **depth of our expertise** – in prenatal and family supports, Early Head Start and Head Start programs and services for learners who have been marginalized based on race or ethnicity – and the **scope of our work** has allowed us to build long-standing partnerships with program leaders, policymakers, researchers and local, state and federal partners to scale best practices and innovations.





Strategies for Impact

Leaders in the early learning and care field, Start Early operates at the epicenter of **direct service, professional learning** and **systems change**. Our credibility and proven track record in these areas position us to influence policies, practices and funding, ensuring every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

We believe that it's through the successful advancement of the three below, interconnected strategies, **children and families will have equitable access to effective programs and services throughout the early childhood years.**



Directly Serving Children & Families

Deliver excellent, data-driven programs that achieve field-leading outcomes for children and families while innovating to support educators and caregivers.



Strengthening & Supporting the Workforce

Building on direct programming learnings, partner with families, organizations and the workforce to scale quality practices, share knowledge and build coalitions - creating broader proof points to inform policy.



Transforming the Early Childhood System

Building on broader proof points and evidence, champion policy and systems change at all levels by shifting mindsets, building relationships with families and providers and advocating for equitable access to services.

Improving Outcomes for Families

Our demonstrated results in delivering exemplary child and family programs, deep experiences in early learning and care and focus on serving learners historically marginalized, give us credibility with parents, providers and systems leaders to produce program innovations and advance sustainable policies.

We continue to drive towards a more equitable, accessible and effective early childhood system, guided by three areas of focus:



Healthy Births & Thriving Families: Support baby's growth and brain development by supporting the health and well-being of families – before, during and after their child is born.



Effective Early Learning Programs: Ensure all families have access to quality early learning and care programs that are inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive.



Strong Early Childhood Systems: Transform the early childhood system to a prenatal-to-age-5 continuum of publicly funded, effective programs that meet the unique needs of children, their families and those who care for them.



Impact

by the Numbers

Last year, through broad and innovative efforts to advance equity for children birth through age 5 and their families, Start Early:

3,387

Directly served **3,387 children** through our Head Start and home visiting programs.

4,087

Reached **4,087 children** through our support of the Educare Network.

\$1.52 billion

Enabled public sector leaders and advocates to secure an additional **\$1.52 billion** in new early childhood funding across the country.

756,714

Reached **22,940 professionals** across all **50 states** through our professional learning services and the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement to improve early learning experiences for **756,714 children**.

Healthy Births & Thriving Families



Support baby's growth and brain development by supporting the health and well-being of families – before, during and after their child is born.

Start Early envisions a future in which our country collectively supports the unique needs of families – before, during and after a child is born. We know that stable, safe and supportive environments in the earliest days are critical to the healthy growth and development of our youngest learners.

Positive environments that support young children are only made possible when we work with and learn from families, caregivers and communities to understand what they need from an early learning and care system.

To ensure families have what they need to support the health and well-being of their children, Start Early is committed to:

1. Creating a **prenatal-to-age-5 continuum of care** that meets the unique needs of all families
2. Increasing access to **effective behavioral and mental health services**
3. Sharing **best practices, innovations and funding strategies** to ensure more families can access supportive services



Implementing a Continuum of Care

Since 1982, Start Early has provided home visiting and doula services across Illinois, coaching young parents on building strong relationships with their babies and creating safe, stimulating home environments.

Today, through our **Healthy Parents & Babies program**, we continue to support families in under-resourced communities in Chicago, offering both in-home and virtual services to pregnant women, young parents and children from birth to age 3. Research shows that these evidence-backed home visiting models improve birth outcomes, increase the likelihood of families having a primary care physician and boost children's literacy and high school graduation rates.

Our goal through this work is to empower parents and strengthen their parenting practices as their child's advocate and first teacher.

In addition to providing our own home visiting and doula programs, Start Early's **Home Visiting & Doula Network** supports 30 home visiting programs throughout Illinois. This network allows us to expand our supports to focus on families furthest away from opportunity who often face some of the most difficult challenges in life – from extreme poverty to homelessness and food insecurity. We partner with other organizations to share our lessons learned with community programs across the country.

This past year, Start Early continued to prioritize the mental health of families with young children, including new mothers. Across several **Home Visiting & Doula Network** programs, we piloted **Moving Beyond Depression**, an evidence-based home visiting approach that equips programs and providers with the tools they need to identify, treat and serve mothers at-risk of or suffering from depression. This added level of care is proven to support mothers in effectively caring for their new child, but also in caring for themselves. Over the next two years, Start Early is expected to serve **100+ parents** with the Moving Beyond Depression innovation.



Partnering with community-based agencies in the Chicagoland area, Start Early expanded its direct programs and services by launching the **Early Head Start Network** in 1985. As a federal Head Start grantee, Start Early provides early learning and care to **over 1,817 children and their families** living in under-resourced communities across Illinois. Each agency embeds its unique and local perspectives into strategies for enhancing the classroom experience, increasing family engagement and strengthening the early childhood field.

Children and families in our programs perform better than state and national benchmarks on key outcomes related to maternal health, child health and economic security.

For example, Early Head Start Network:

- Families demonstrate **more positive parent-child interactions**, including high engagement of fathers.
- Mothers have **higher rates of prenatal and postnatal care and mental health treatment**.
- Children have **high immunization rates and near-universal screening rates**, which ensure developmental, social and emotional delays are caught early and supported immediately.
- Families gain **access to employment, education, housing and legal resources**, along with support services that foster economic stability and promote their children's healthy development and educational success.

CARPLS LEGAL SERVICES

The Early Head Start Network brought in legal services partnerships, in response to identified needs across families and delegates. Now, CARPLS is providing quarterly "As a Lawyer" sessions for families to receive free legal consultation.

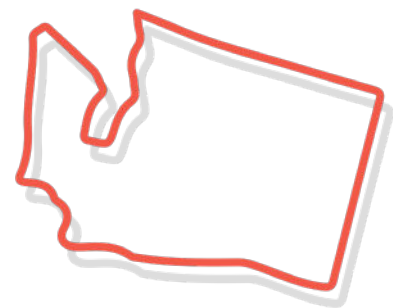


So far, families have learned how to legally advocate for children with IEPs who were not receiving the appropriate supports or services, steps to take towards addressing a wrongful termination of a rental agreement, support with completing documentation for sole parental rights and more.

Delegate Site

Across Washington state, children and families continue to benefit from **Start Early Washington's** efforts to ensure every family has access to the supports and services that promote healthy mothers and babies, child development, parent-child interactions and school readiness and that help ensure positive and lifelong cognitive, social, emotional outcomes.

In 2024, we reached more than **392 home visiting professionals** through **65 programs** across the state and delivered over **1,100 technical assistance sessions** to home visitors that provided strengths-based, positive coaching to more than **4,600 young children and their families**.



The 13th annual **National Home Visiting Summit** brought together over 1,200 federal, state and community systems leaders, policy advocates, researchers, program and practice leaders, family leaders and philanthropists with a focus on re-envisioning systems to ensure that all children and families are supported fairly and equitably.

“

The Summit got me thinking about our data collection and how we might be able to restructure the collection and/or analyses with more of an equity lens.

Systems Leader



“

As a researcher in the early childhood field who went into the Summit with minimal knowledge about home visiting, I learned a lot about the services that home visitors provide, how various programs differ and how programs are evaluated.

Researcher



HIGHLIGHTS

➤ **Over 100 Capitol Hill Visits** were conducted during the 2024 Summit.

➤ **Plenary sessions** focused on key equity issues, such as the impacts of climate change on pregnant and parenting people, the importance of the intersectional professional workforce and the impact of fathers on early childhood outcomes.

➤ **Most attendees (87%)** indicated that the Summit provided them with **strategies to bring about actionable change** toward advancing equity and high-quality home visiting services, structures and systems.



The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (NCPFCE), led by Start Early, provides training and technical assistance to build capacity and strengthen Head Start professionals' relationship-based practices. The National Center supported **16,756 professionals across all 12 Head Start regions** nationwide, both virtually and in-person.



I believe this three-day training should be required for all Family Services Workers. It is such a great training!

Home at Head Start Institute Attendee



A culture of HOPE and Home at Head Start. Hardship is a season; there is a new season on the horizon.

Home at Head Start Institute Attendee



HIGHLIGHTS

➤ This year, NCPFCE expanded its commitment to supporting **children and families experiencing homelessness**. NCPFCE hosted a virtual, multi-day national institute (Home at Head Start) for more than **2,000 participants** focused on strategies for recruiting, enrolling and supporting unhoused children and families. They also developed online tools and information to help families navigating housing challenges. These resources garnered more than **5,000 website views**.

➤ NCPFCE led a groundbreaking, four-part webinar series on engaging **LGBTQIA2S+ parents, families and staff** to ensure all Head Start programs can provide families with inclusive and equitable services and supports.

Supporting the Unique Needs of Families

Research shows that when families have the ability to engage and be involved in their children's learning in and out of school, parents are in a better position to support their child's development and positive outcomes. Start Early works closely with community partners and providers to help connect families with **community-based supports that focus on the whole family**, including parent education programs, mental health and Early Intervention services and public housing, legal and job assistance support specialists.



Last year, Start Early's direct service programs **connected hundreds of families to community resources** that helped ensure parents have the customized support they need to best care for their young child.

Benefits of Empowering Parents as their Children's First & Most Important Teacher



Holistic Development

Ensuring children have access to comprehensive services that support their physical, cognitive and emotional development.



Early Identification

Early detection of developmental delays or issues allows for timely interventions, which can significantly improve long-term outcomes.



Family Support

Connecting families to resources helps alleviate stress and provides them with tools to better support their children.



Community Engagement

Building strong connections between families and community resources fosters a supportive network that benefits both children and their families.

Advancing Equity for Infants & Toddlers

Five years strong, the **Raising Illinois coalition** has continued to make significant strides in its multi-year plan to establish a fair and unified support system for expecting families, infants and toddlers across Illinois. As the coordinating organization of the coalition, Start Early provides strategic and comprehensive leadership and support to the coalition's **more than 2,000 members**.

This past year, Raising Illinois continued to support transformational policy changes to improve the economic health, well-being and success of Illinois' infants, toddlers and their families.



HIGHLIGHTS

- Engagement of over 400 parents, providers and other advocates across two public all-Coalition events highlighting the new Department of Early Childhood and the maternal care experiences of birthing people and their providers, respectively.
- Collection of over 650 letters to lawmakers from parents, providers and other advocates in support of increased Early Intervention (EI) funding.
- Engaged families and providers through a series of town halls and “know your rights” workshops to improve public awareness of families’ procedural rights, including the right to file a state complaint if there has been a violation of EI timelines.





Effective Early Learning Programs



Ensure all families have access to quality early learning and care programs that are inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive.

All children and families deserve equitable access to early childhood experiences and services where their unique learning and developmental needs are nurtured. At the core of our programs are inclusive, early learning settings that prioritize the parent voice and involvement in their child's development, supported by well-trained professionals.

Start Early's direct service professionals provide effective and equitable instruction, which the Office of Head Start measures across three domains: emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. Last year, **our network of educators consistently scored above national averages**, and in some cases in the top 10% of the nation, on its classroom instruction scores.

Research shows that higher scores are related to improved child development outcomes, which is reflected in data that represents the developmental growth and learning of children enrolled in Start Early's center-based programs.

In fact, last year, **every child enrolled in our Early Head Start or Head Start programs met or exceeded developmental expectations** beyond our own 75% goal.

Taking an Inclusive Approach to Learning

There is clear research on the benefits of inclusion for both young children with disabilities and their typically developing peers in early childhood programs and services. Despite this, young children with disabilities and delays and their families continue to face challenges with accessing inclusive early childhood services individualized to their needs in all settings, particularly young children of color.

In the fall of 2023, Start Early, in collaboration with five other federal Head Start grant recipients and the Chicago Public School System, launched the ***Strengthening Inclusion for Young Learners in Chicago pilot*** to bring inclusive special education services into community-based early childhood settings. The goal of this pilot is to develop, implement and assess feasible strategies for delivering special education services to children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) directly within the Head Start programs they attend.



For our daughter, it was a no-brainer. She has flourished because she's in an environment where she feels comfortable, supported and loved by her teachers, her peers.

Parent of Pilot Parent



HIGHLIGHTS

FROM THE FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION:

- Pilot staff felt more strongly about the importance of inclusion, the collaborative teaching model and providing services to children in community-based settings.
- Pilot staff felt they had developed new and improved skills related to early childhood special education after participating in the first year of implementation.
- Pilot staff are building strong relationships across the Head Start and Chicago Public Schools systems.
- Staff and parents alike reported improved outcomes for children and have shared they are grateful to be a part of the pilot.



Start Early's Educare Network Schools

Educare Chicago serves children from 6 weeks to 5 years old through a curriculum that is designed to promote the success of the entire family – socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively. Programming encompasses education, health and wellness, family engagement and developmental services, delivered by highly qualified teachers in a nurturing and safe environment.

Partnering with families, health care professionals and an interdisciplinary team of nutritionists, Educare Chicago's **innovative garden harvest program** provides resources and hands-on engagement opportunities that help families achieve healthier outcomes. In the garden, children not only learn where their food comes from but also develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

They gain knowledge about the life cycles of plants and the importance of sustainability, instilling in them a sense of responsibility toward the planet. Beyond the educational benefits, time in the garden nurtures the whole child by encouraging physical activity, enhancing motor skills and boosting their mental well-being.





Expanding to Lake County, Illinois

Building on a strong foundation and long history of providing Early Head Start and Head Start services to families, Start Early has expanded its footprint to northern Chicagoland to help address the critical lack of early learning and development programs available to families throughout Lake County.

Educare Lake County is being designed and built alongside the Lake County community to help ensure the school can serve families with the types of programs and services that they feel they need most to thrive. Opening in 2026, Educare Lake County will provide:



While Start Early is in the process of building the permanent school in the City of Zion, we launched interim programming in **two temporary locations in Waukegan and Beach Park** to immediately support **150 children** through center- and home-based programming, doula services and family child care homes.

38,000+ square footage of learning spaces, outdoor play areas and family support services

Full-day, full-year programming

High-quality early learning experiences to 182 infants, toddlers and their families

Safe and nurturing community gathering areas, including an outdoor garden

Facilities focused on gross motor development, STEAM learning and health and nutrition



In 2000, Start Early established the inaugural Educare school in Chicago to support children and families rebuilding their lives after the demolition of the Robert Taylor Homes, one of the city's largest public housing projects. Since then, the **Educare Network** has grown to 25 independent birth-to-age-5 schools, partnering with diverse communities and early childhood advocates to increase access to quality early care and education across the country. **In 2026, the Network's 26th and 27th schools will open their doors to families in Lake County, Illinois and San Antonio, Texas.**

Collaboration is at the heart of Educare schools' success. Each school forms public-private partnerships as a Head Start and Early Head Start provider, uniting local school districts, philanthropic organizations, researchers, policymakers and communities.



4,087

Last year, the Educare Network directly served 4,087 children and their families.



Driving Innovation & Program Improvement

Start Early conducts rigorous research and program evaluations to improve the expertise of early childhood professionals and learning environments for young children and their families. By adopting a research-practice-policy partnership approach, Start Early integrates quality research, evaluation and continuous quality improvement processes into everything we do.

In the last year, we **created over 46 different research products, incubated 13 innovations** and **provided national leadership** on research that will affect early learning and care across the country.

Over the last year, Start Early conducted the **New Arrivals Pilot**, a study to better understand the unique needs of migrant families in Chicago, many of whom live in temporary shelters. The findings highlighted effective strategies such as trust-building and word-of-mouth recruitment, as well as challenges like communication barriers and insufficient, uncoordinated resources. These insights will guide future training and program supports to better serve highly-mobile families.



HIGHLIGHTS

- Supported the *Financing Early Childhood Education Quality & Access for All* project, a first-of-its-kind national study of early childhood education financing policies and practices across Early Head Start and Head Start grantees, delegates and state early childhood administrators.
- Focused on children and families experiencing homelessness by **directly serving 347 unhoused children and families**. Our on-the-ground learning spurred larger change, inspiring Start Early to **convene 200 early learning, child welfare and homeless providers in Chicago** to improve service and collaboration.
- Led three early learning pilots focused on evaluating and scaling the efficacy of:
 1. Increasing doula services across Early Head Start and Head Start programs
 2. Expanding access to maternal depression services through the Moving Beyond Depression pilot
 3. Supporting families and children experiencing homelessness in Early Head Start and Head Start programs

Supporting the Workforce with Professional Learning

By addressing the professional learning needs of the early learning and care workforce, we can ensure effective quality programs, develop highly skilled professionals and increase retention, ultimately fostering the success of our youngest learners.

Start Early aims to strengthen the early childhood workforce by delivering **professional learning opportunities** that help them refine and learn new skills at every stage of their career. From interactive training and resources to technical assistance and engaging events, Start Early helps leaders and staff cultivate powerful practices to elevate the way they teach and learn and enhance the effectiveness of programs for children and families.

We consistently gather feedback from early childhood professionals to identify more efficient ways to support and empower early education leaders. Their collective response drives us to create new, more equitable and culturally relevant learning opportunities.

Last year, we revamped our training offerings to be more effective, culturally responsive and align with accreditation standards. We revised **26 courses (12% of the total catalog) to ensure an equity focus** and were approved as an accredited IACET (International Accreditation for Continuing Education and Training) provider for an additional five years. This accreditation allows us to offer continuing education units for our learning modules that can be applied toward licenses and state registries, a key workforce incentive.





HIGHLIGHTS

- Modifying our curriculum resulted in a **60% increase in Continuing Education Credits** and **over 90% satisfaction** across all professional learning courses.
- Provided technical assistance to **over 346 programs**.
- Served **over 22,940 professionals** across the country and indirectly reached **756,714 children** as a result of this work—the equivalent of all children and direct service staff in Early Head Start and Head Start programs nationally.
- Approximately **91% of professionals** (n=20,875) reported positive changes in practices, indirectly impacting **approximately 688,610 children**.
- **Black and Hispanic professionals** – who represent most of the early learning and care workforce – rate us the highest of all demographic groups in knowledge, behavior, satisfaction and net promoter scores.

Strong Early Childhood Systems



Transform the early childhood system to a prenatal-to-age-5 continuum of publicly funded, effective programs that meet the unique needs of children, their families and those who serve them.

Start Early envisions a future in which our nation prioritizes the needs of children and families, ensuring they have equitable access to a continuum of effective, responsive and inclusive services – prenatal-through-age-5. A system that is shaped by the voices of families and providers, aligned across sectors and sustained by sufficient public funding should exist in every community.

Last year, Start Early's leadership and decades of proven expertise contributed to:

- 1. Increased investments** in and expanded access to a continuum of early childhood programs and services across the country
- 2. Policy changes** that helped meet the unique needs of children, families and providers
- 3. Centering of family and provider voices** in policymaking decisions and advocacy efforts for change

Championing Early Childhood Education as a Collective Good

For decades, Start Early has focused on expanding and protecting policies, practices and funding to ensure equitable access to effective programs and services for children.

Our policy and advocacy efforts center equity and are informed by early childhood experts, families and providers nationwide, who help ensure that early learning policies support their unique needs. In partnership with families, practitioners, advocates and communities, we're strengthening early learning and care systems across country. Last year, we supported **over 64 policy changes** at the state and federal levels, resulting in **\$1.5 billion in new funding** for early learning and care programs across all 50 states.

In Illinois

Start Early led efforts to secure **nearly \$288.45 million in new state funding** for child care, preschool, home visiting and Early Intervention services across Illinois. This includes funding for the first-year operations of the new **Illinois Department of Early Childhood**.

Start Early fostered legislative and public support for Governor J.B. Pritzker's plan to establish this standalone state agency, which led to the Illinois House of Representatives approving legislation to move its development forward.

This new department aims to improve access to critical early learning and care services by better aligning and coordinating programs, data and policies for young learners. It's expected to significantly enhance early childhood education in the state and provide children with a stronger foundation for future success.

In Washington State

In a supplemental budget year, which traditionally doesn't include large budgetary or legislative changes, Start Early proudly led statewide efforts to address key funding opportunities for early childhood programs and services across Washington State.

Through ongoing administrative and legislative advocacy and policy development, we helped drive budget investments to support the allocation of **\$26.9 million in new funding for early learning facilities** and **\$6.2 million to provide a monthly increase in subsidies for child care providers** serving infants through the Working Connections Child Care Program.

In addition, we continue to support the successful implementation of bipartisan legislation responding to the national fentanyl crisis by strengthening supports to families, including the provision of home visiting services to families experiencing substance use disorder.



Consulting for Systems Change

Start Early Consulting helps states and communities build navigable systems that center families, increase equitable access to programs and services, and align systems across sectors to create a prenatal-to-age-5 continuum of care. We help systems evolve with highly customizable support, inviting leaders to leverage our consultants as strategic advisors or to develop and execute implementation plans.

We've expanded our national footprint providing policy and systems support to state and community public sector leaders and advocates. We partner in **21 states** to develop strategic plans, secure funding increases and protect and expand critical services for early childhood programs.



When we started, we were just three angry providers, but with Start Early's help, we are advocates.

Kentucky Early Intervention Providers Association (KEIPA)

Our consulting process prioritizes relationships – from building inclusive project teams to growing support networks long after our engagements are complete. Through tailored projects and end-to-end collaboration, Start Early partners with states and communities to create early childhood systems that meet the needs of locally impacted children and families.



Engagement Co-Design

Listen to & Understand Context

Tailor Scope

Identify Resources

Build Inclusive Team



Collaborative Implementation

Work Together & Apart

Engage Families & Providers

Consult Subject Matter Experts

Track Progress to Goals



Reflection & Impact

Present Deliverables

Plan for Action & Sustainability

Reflect on Impact

Share Feedback



Stay Connected

Share Lessons with the Field

Continue Relationships

Access Start Early Resources

Leverage Our Network



HIGHLIGHTS

- Start Early partnered with the Kentucky Early Intervention Providers Association (KEIPA) to **build their capacity** and help develop a **three-year policy agenda**. With this support, KEIPA secured a 16% increase to the reimbursement rate for early intervention services and prevented the termination of critical telehealth services.
- In partnership with the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, Start Early facilitated the development the **Colorado Statewide Early Childhood Strategic Plan** anchored in family and community engagement – including the voices of parents, professionals and cross-sector leaders – that will influence how all young children and families in the state experience early childhood in the next five years.
- **95% of our consulting clients** reported that Start Early's work met or exceeded their needs.

Affirming Early Education as a Bipartisan Topic

A partner of Start Early, the **First Five Years Fund (FFYF)** is committed to sustaining and increasing federal support for early learning with a goal to expand access to high-quality child care for children and families.

Engaging with a diverse range of supporters, including advocacy groups, policymakers and business leaders, FFYF pursues bipartisan solutions that integrate best practices with effective policies. This strategy ensures that the economic and social benefits of early childhood development last for generations.


Last year, FFYF played a pivotal role protecting funding for essential federal early learning and care programs. Despite a tight budget, several key wins included:

- The Fiscal Year 2024 federal spending package included a **\$1 billion increase** for core early childhood programs.
- The Child Care Development Block Grant received an **additional \$725 million** (totaling \$8.75 billion).
- Head Start and Early Head Start funding **increased by \$275 million** (totaling \$12.3 billion).





Empowering Parents as Advocates



This past year, we continued to advance a shift in power to families, providers and communities in policymaking, advocacy and governance so that those who are most impacted by the system shape decisions, priorities and investments.

With over a decade of experience supporting parents as they step into their power as advocates for their families and communities, the Educare Network continues to grow in their family-led policy and advocacy efforts. As the national coordinating office, Start Early is focused on building a critical mass of Network parents and staff advocates and leaders to influence change at the local, state and federal levels.

The Network's **Family Voice & Leadership initiative** empowered Network schools nationwide to support families in advocating for their children and early childhood education policies. This led to significant legislative advocacy efforts with state and federal leaders in Illinois, Wisconsin, Florida, Oklahoma, Kansas and Louisiana. Educare DC utilized their funds for impactful federal advocacy, with parent leaders addressing multiple House Committees and federal agencies.



In October 2024, at the beginning of the family leadership program Educare DC parent leader Najma Pettiford faced housing insecurity while navigating the district's complex affordable housing programs. Because of challenges she experienced with the city agencies, she chose housing and homelessness as her advocacy focus.

In March, she testified in the DC Council Committee on Housing's Performance Oversight Hearings, recommending policies to better support children and their families.

Her testimony motivated Council Chairman Robert White's office to assist her in navigating the city agency, and she was approved for an affordable housing voucher.

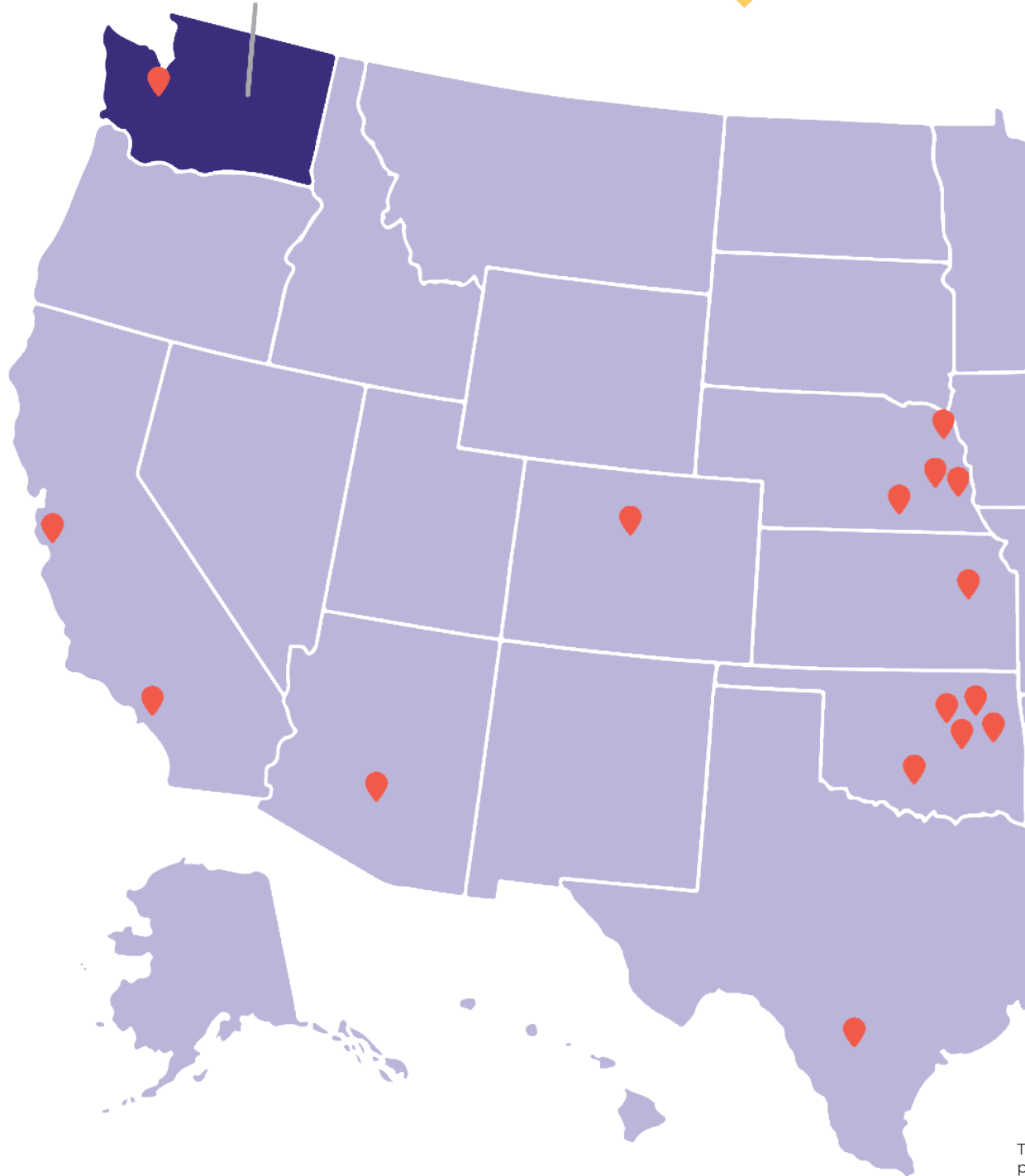
Najma is now housing secure and continues to advocate for making housing programs more accessible.

Where

We Work



Start Early
Washington



3,387

Children Reached
Directly

64

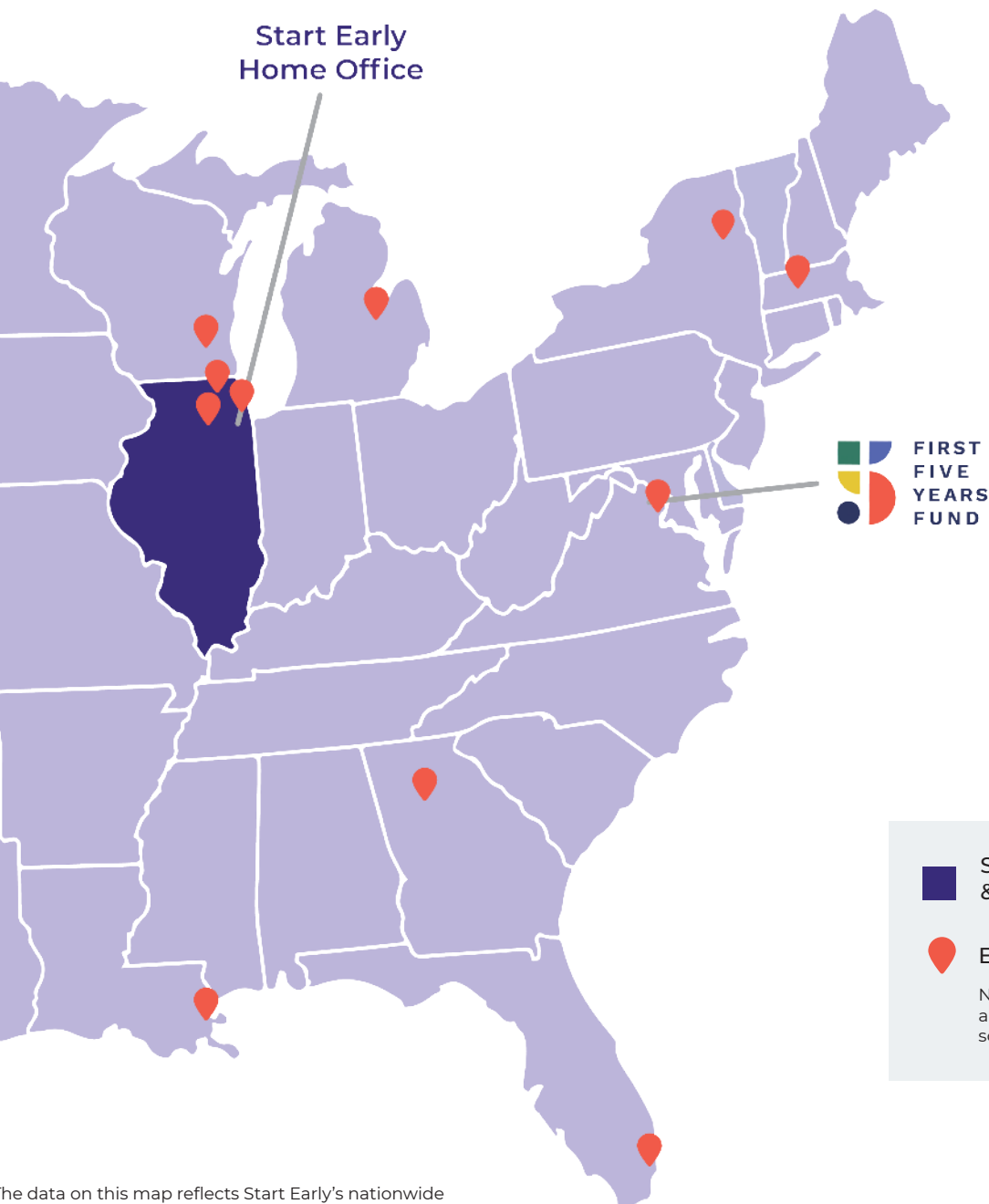
Early Childhood
Policy Wins

22,940

Professionals
Reached

4M

Estimated Children Reached Indirectly Through
Policy, Advocacy & Professional Learning



The data on this map reflects Start Early's nationwide
presence from July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024.

Our Generous Donors

LIFETIME GIVING

Start Early honors its Lifetime donors, who have committed to multi-year and single-time gifts.

\$10,000,000 & Above

Ballmer Group
Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Comic Relief US
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Joan & Irving[∞] Harris
Irving Harris Foundation
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Robert R. McCormick Foundation
Pritzker Children's Initiative
Diana & Bruce Rauner,
Rauner Family Foundation
John & Kathy Schreiber
MacKenzie Scott
Helen Zell

\$5,000,000 To \$9,999,999

Crown Family Philanthropies
Harris Family Foundation
Heising-Simons Foundation
George Kaiser Family Foundation
Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation

\$1,000,000 To \$4,999,999

Alliance for Early Success
Anonymous (3)
Bezos Family Foundation
Blue Meridian Partners
Leslie Bluhm & David Helfand Family
BMO
Jacolyn & John Bucksbaum
The Chicago Community Trust
CME Group Foundation
Early Childhood Funders
Collaborative/BUILD
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