



Ready for School. Ready for Life.



Annual
Report
2022–23

Kids' First Years and Our Annual Report

Kids' First Years (KFY) is the coordinating body of early care and education partners in our city. Through the efforts of our collective impact initiative, we are working to create a system that removes barriers and ensures all children and families have equitable access to high quality early care and education supports and services.

"Turning challenges and changes into new opportunities" was our motto for 2022 – 2023 as we officially launched KFY as a standalone nonprofit; joined Ready Region Capital Area; began the design of our Family Council; and kicked off ALX Preschool.

In July 2022, KFY was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia and became its own 501(c)(3) organization. As a result of this effort, KFY is able to serve as an independent fiscal agent and access new funding opportunities to support our early care in education efforts. Prior to this time, ACT for Alexandria served as our primary fiscal agent. We offer gratitude for their leadership and support in that capacity, and will build upon that foundation as we move the organization forward.


In addition to our new opportunities this year, we have been able to continue existing initiatives such as our Community Baby Showers, which connect new parents with services they need. Our Quality Collaborative, now in its eighth year, continues to advance exemplary teaching practices in Alexandria classrooms by training and coaching teaching staff and administrators.

Additionally, KFY officially joined the Ready Region Capital Area network. Through this partnership, we have been better able to align our focus on strengthening quality, building relationships, increasing access, and engaging families with statewide initiatives. This transformative network also brings new levels of coordination and accountability to our early care and education system.

In this next iteration of KFY, I am hopeful that we will propel early care and education in Alexandria as the model for what young children and families have access to in their earliest years. With your continued support, we can ensure that **early care for every child** is a reality that happens in our lifetime.



Michelle Smith Howard
President and CEO



A Special Thank You to Our 2022–2023 Financial Supporters

Alexandria City Public Schools

Bruhn-Morris Family Foundation

City of Alexandria – Department of
Community and Human Services

Frank and Betty Wright Foundation

Virginia Department of Education

Virginia Early Childhood Foundation



Our Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

Vision

All of Alexandria's children
and youth succeed today
and tomorrow

Mission

Every child in Alexandria has a
strong start in life and in school

In order to realize this mission, KFY is building an early care and education system that is:

Aligned: We celebrate Alexandria's mixed delivery system, which is intentionally organized to provide a variety of services based on the diverse needs of children and families

Accessible: Programming is designed to be accessible to all, especially for the most vulnerable, and is centered around what is optimal for children and families

High-Quality: Alexandria's children are entitled to a high-quality, culturally competent learning experience that is in line with local, state, and national guidelines, and research and evidence-based, data-driven practices

Comprehensive: The ECE system spans prenatal through 3rd grade, including educational, health, socio-emotional, family, and community support

Equitable: Every child and family deserves high-quality services that eliminate disparities in life opportunities

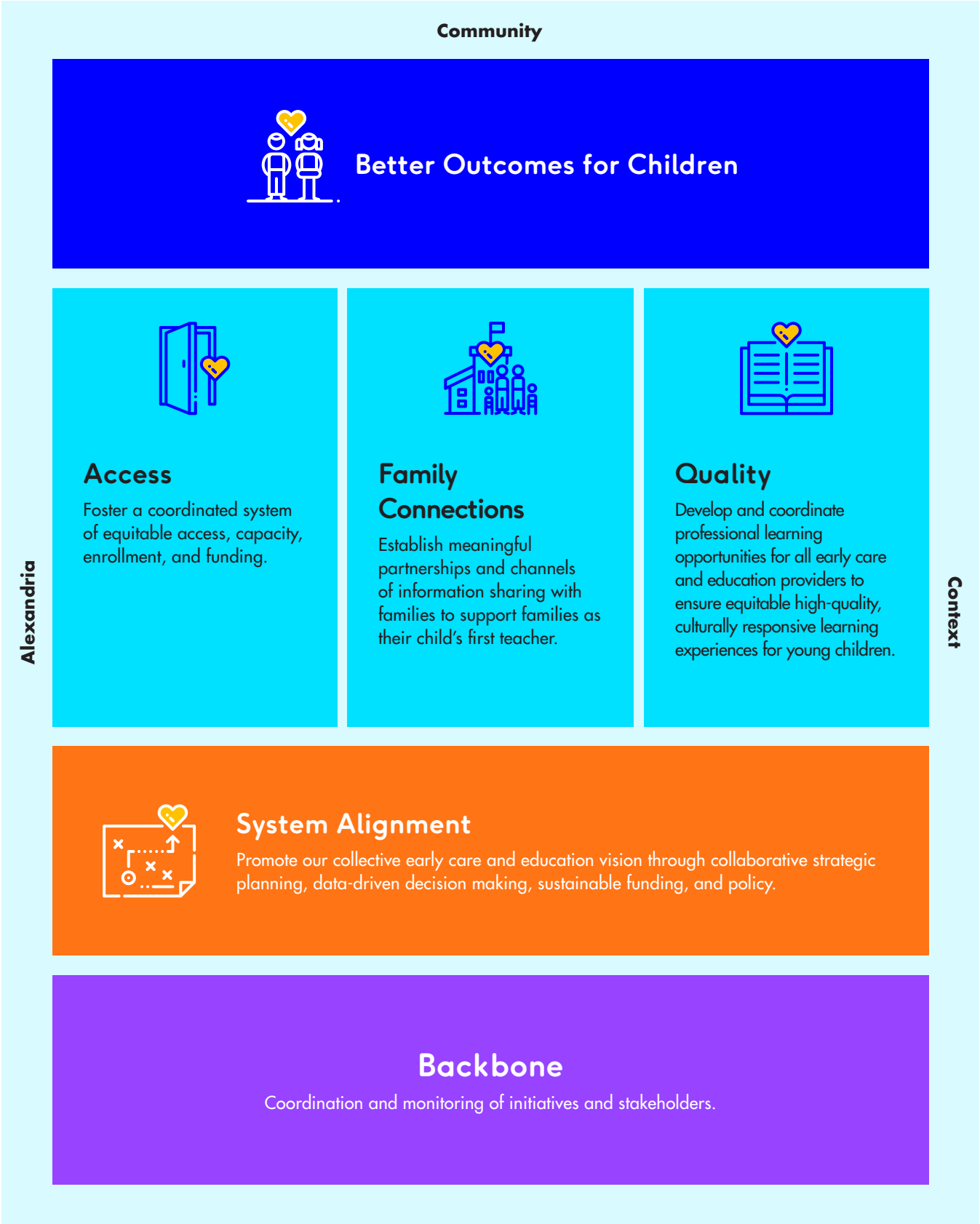
Our work is guided by a set of **principles** that underpin the way we work together collectively:

Children and families are at the heart of everything we do. Together, we are building a system of care that is family and child-centric.

This is a community-wide effort. We need to actively engage parents, community members, voters, funders, and other partners through a unified voice.

Everyone values and respects each other's contributions. We embrace the fact that we are a mixed delivery system and actively seek to have different perspectives at the table.

Commitment to results is crucial. If we arrange our puzzle pieces more effectively and share a commitment to accountability, we can create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.



Understanding Our Community Context

When compared to statewide demographics, the City of Alexandria is linguistically and ethnically more diverse, and with greater economic disparities amongst its youngest population of residents.

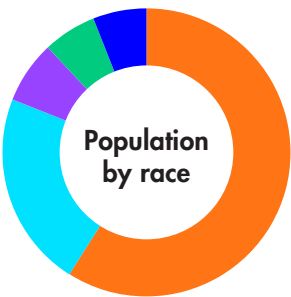
Demographics

158,309

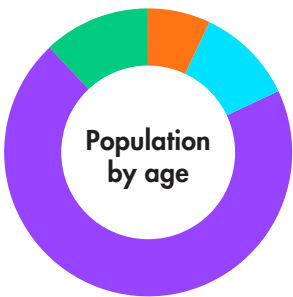
Total population

11,082

Population under age 5

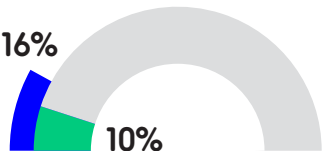


- 60% White
- 22% Black
- 7% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 6% Native or Other
- 6% Two or More

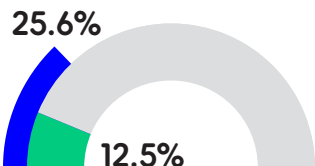


- 7% Under 5 years
- 11% 5–18 years
- 70% 19–64 years
- 12% 65 and over

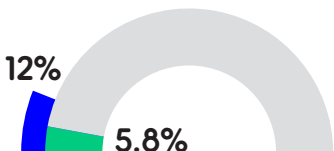
Alexandria Virginia



Percent Hispanic or Latino



Foreign born



Population with limited English proficiency

Understanding Our Community Context

Socio-Economic Conditions

\$80,926 Median household income in Virginia

\$116,000 Median household income in Alexandria City

7,105 Children aged 0–17 participating in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

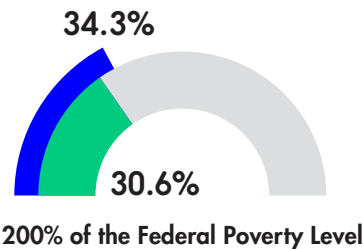
1,417 Children aged 0–17 receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

436 Number of children aged 0–5 accessing child care subsidy

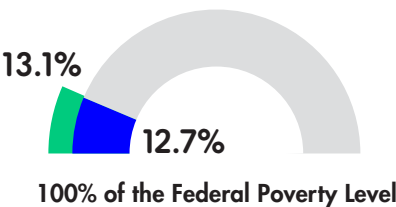
90% Population with health insurance

Children ages 0-17 living at or below:

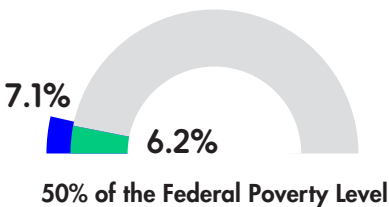
Alexandria Virginia



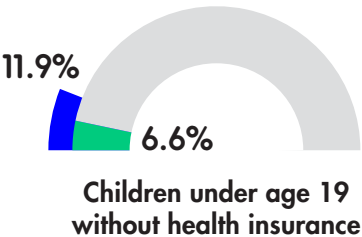
\$52,344
Income for a family of 4 in
2020 at 200% of the FPL



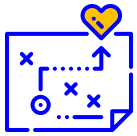
\$26,172
Income for a family of 4 in
2020 at 100% of the FPL



\$13,086
Income for a family of 4 in
2020 at 50% of the FPL



Data Sources: Virginia Department of Social Services, Voices for Virginia’s Children, US Census Bureau, City of Alexandria.
All data included in this report is from its last available year.



SYSTEMS ALIGNMENT

Ready Region & VQB5 Coordination



Using innovative tactics, KFY took the lead in coordinating state initiatives while building local capacity and sustainability.

For 2022–2023, KFY served as the Ready Region Capital Area local coordinator for the City of Alexandria, tasked with the implementation of Virginia Quality Birth to 5 (VQB5), Virginia’s new unified measurement and improvement system. Currently in its second practice year, with full implementation beginning fall 2023, VQB5 will require all publicly-funded providers to focus on the quality of teacher-child interactions. As a Ready Region local lead, KFY leveraged its existing relationships across the city’s publicly-funded birth-to-five programs to design a local approach that focused on continual improvement, access, compliance, and professional learning opportunities. Working collaboratively with our partners within the Capital Area Region on coordination and administration, KFY developed and operationalized an effective VQB5 compliance system that met the expected Ready Region assurances for Practice Year 2.

While actively growing the number of participating programs for the final practice year of VQB5, KFY prioritized building sustainable local Certified Observer capacity, providing training and technical assistance to providers, designing a quality assurance protocol, and creating a city-wide tracking methodology for Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Infant, Toddler, and Pre-K observations. Through monthly newsletters to both site administrators and observers, weekly office hours throughout the entire data collection period, and biannual mandatory orientation sessions, KFY was able to successfully meet the increased need for providing more direct support to our network. Additionally, in the spirit of continuous improvement, KFY was able to simultaneously strategize on how to make improvements from one term to the next by obtaining feedback and input from our stakeholders following the completion of each observation cycle period.

Beginning in 2023, local coordination has transitioned to the City of Alexandria’s Department of Community and Human Services.



**READY
REGION**
Capital Area

VA Regions





ACCESS

Family Survey



Family voices matter! KFY asked families what they wanted and needed to support the success of their children.

The KFY Family Survey served two main purposes:

1. To pilot a city-wide family survey that could assess year-over-year progress toward metrics in the domain of Family Connections, as indicated in the 2021 KFY Indicator Grid, namely:
 - Ease of finding child care in Alexandria
 - Access to child care during the hours and days that families need it
 - Ease of getting to children's child care settings
 - Feeling that child care providers respect families' cultural backgrounds
2. To improve system coordination by gathering data on the child care choices made by families during the 2022-2023 school year, in particular:
 - Rates of participation in the formal child care and early education system
 - Rates of opting out of the formal child care and early education system; that is, participation in informal, family- or community-based care
 - To a lesser extent, the survey may be able to help us understand decision factors for participation versus opting out. However, data on decision factors will be collected at the family level, and some families may engage with the system for some of their children, and opt out for others. This gap will be addressed with subsequent focus groups.

Below are some trends that were noted in the data collected. We recognize that the following trends are not representative of the entire population of the City of Alexandria, however, we share them in an effort to propel our work further for future survey planning and to both acknowledge and thank the individuals who took the time to share with us:

39% of those surveyed indicated that they have a child who participates in the City of Alexandria's ECE system (either via childcare center, public school, or home daycare).

80% of those surveyed indicated that they have a parent, family member or close contact care for their child(ren).

86% of those surveyed indicated that affordable cost is very important in thinking of their family's early care decisions.

84% of those surveyed indicated that convenient location is very important in thinking of their family's early care decisions.

80% of those surveyed agreed strongly that their children's care providers respect their family's cultural background and were currently satisfied with the care that their child receives.



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Community Projects

KFY is working with partners throughout the community to support families directly.

Community Baby Showers

In May of 2022, KFY and its partners began hosting Community Baby Showers. The Community Baby Showers were designed to be a time when partners could celebrate our community's moms, while providing them with information and resources that would help them better navigate family life in Alexandria. In addition to featuring exhibitors, such as The Center for Alexandria's Children (CAC), Inova, Neighborhood Health, Northern Virginia Family Services, Alexandria's PIE Program, Alexandria Library, and the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS), new and expectant mothers also receive useful items that they could take home with them.

Held quarterly, locations have been chosen to make the Community Baby Showers as easily accessible to as many mothers as possible in our community. KFY has alternated between hosting the event in the West End of Alexandria at William Ramsay Recreation Center and the East End, at locations such as Casa Chirilagua, Community Lodgings, and the Leonard "Chick" Armstrong Recreation Center. We are very grateful to all these sites for being so welcoming and supportive of our community's new mothers.

Connect & Play

KFY invites parents and caregivers to have fun playing with their children, while they connect with their neighbors, and learn about the amazing wealth of resources available to them in the City of Alexandria.

Working in collaboration with The Center for Alexandria's Children (CAC), KFY hosts Connect & Play events on the first Friday of every month at William Ramsay Recreation Center. The goal of each session is to connect families with resources, connect families with other caregivers, and connect families with ways to use The Basics. All of this takes place in a joy-filled setting that is based on the CAC's PlayGroups that meet weekly. This allows the children to learn and play together while adults learn how to use The Basics during playtime.

After each facilitator-led play session ends, a guest presenter shares information about different resources with the families. This includes librarians and also presenters from Alexandria City Public Schools who share important information about preschool registration. The families are also given a takeaway, such as a book or a toy, so that they can continue to play with The Basics at home. Families are then invited to stay and connect with one another over coffee and snacks.



The Basics

KFY continues its partnership with The Basics to support families and make age-appropriate learning easily accessible.

Because science shows that around 80% of brain growth happens by age three, KFY is committed to offering all families with young children the information and support they need to give their infants and toddlers a great start. KFY has partnered with The Basics Inc., to launch The Basics Insights, an exciting FREE text messaging program for parents of children aged 0-5. The Basics Insights provides parents and caregivers with science-based facts, and suggested activities to boost their child's brain development and learning. The texts are based on their child's age, come twice a week, are in multiple languages and require no fancy toys to implement. They are designed to be simple and fun – something parents can do as they interact with their child throughout the day. Early research suggests that approximately 98% of parents were likely to recommend the text messages to other parents. KFY is so pleased to be part of this international network of communities that value all of their young children and families. Currently KFY has 250 subscribed families and is actively working with libraries, Pre-K's and other community partners to spread the word.

The Five Basics Principles were distilled from scientific literature by the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University:



Maximize Love, Manage Stress



Talk, Sing, and Point



Count, Group, and Compare



Explore Through Movement and Play



Read and Discuss Stories



The Basics

KIDS' FIRST
11 YEARS

Communication

KFY diversifies its communication channels by expanding its virtual footprint through targeted social media and monthly articles featuring our partners.

In 2022, KFY embarked on a new communications strategy in order to raise awareness about our work and issues related to early childhood education and care. KFY has written monthly articles for The Zebra, a local publication in the city of Alexandria. These articles usually highlight one of KFY's partners or a particular topic, such as playgroups, reading activities, seasonal activities, and even the exciting opening of the Redella S. "Del" Pepper Community Resource Center, a central location for many of our city's early childhood partners. The Zebra article is then adapted and included in a monthly Family Newsletter that is emailed to community members.

KFY is also active on social media. Instagram and Facebook posts support the monthly Zebra article and include activities and tips related to The Basics. Social media is also used to spread awareness about upcoming community events, including the Community Baby Showers and Connect & Play events.

KIDS' FIRST
11 YEARS

City's Early Childhood Services Have a New Home Together

BY MICHELLE SMITH HOWARD, PRESIDENT AND CEO, KIDS' FIRST YEARS

As readers of The Zebra Press know, Kids' First Years (KFY) is a collective impact initiative dedicated to being the unified voice for organizations in Alexandria that collaborate to provide support, care, and education for the city's young children and their families.

It is exciting to share that many of our city's fantastic early childhood partners, who had previously worked in multiple sites around Alexandria, are now under one roof in the new Redella S. "Del" Pepper Community Resource Center at 4800 Mark Center Drive, Alexandria.

The new Redella S. "Del" Pepper Community Resource Center at 4800 Mark Center Drive, Alexandria.

ing is conveniently located next to a public transportation hub with several DASH stops. "There are 800 spaces in the parking garage for staff and visitors," she adds. "Parking is free with proper validation."

Innovative plans are being considered for creative uses of the modern, open, and welcoming space in the Redella S. "Del" Pepper Community Resource Center. Crumley attributed this summation statement to Barbara Paulson, Director of DCHE's Center for Children and Families.

"This site will bring to life an integrated collaborative space that represents strong partnerships across the early childhood community in Alexandria," Crumley also lauded DCHE Director Kate Garvey for helping to bring the vision to fruition.

BASICS INSIGHTS

TIPS TO HELP PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL AND LIFE

During the first four months of 2023, more than 800 city employees moved into the newly renovated building from their former offices. The 10-story structure features 230,000 square feet of office space and is now home to the city's Department of Community and Human Resources (DCHE), the Alexandria Health Department, the Neighborhood Health Clinic, and the Center for Alexandria's Children (CAC).

An overarching goal for the move to Mark Center Drive is to ensure increased access, equity, and collaboration to promote the health and well-being of Alexandria. A long-term benefit of consolidating early childhood partners in shared space is the significant impact it will have on the parents and caregivers responsible for Alexandria's young citizens. Bringing these services together under one roof creates a location where families can get support, resources, and services with seamless transitions among health and community services assistance.

"A 'no wrong door' approach means that families with young children will experience the continuum of services available at all entry points within the building," said Robin Crumley, Chief of Early Childhood Services for DCHE. "Having DCHE Early Childhood programs, benefits programs, and behavioral health services co-located with the Health Department, Neighborhood Health, and CAC will improve employee communication and collaboration as well as community access to services that help to strengthen family resiliency." Crumley noted that the building is conveniently located next to a public transportation hub with several DASH stops. "There are 800 spaces in the parking garage for staff and visitors," she adds. "Parking is free with proper validation."

Join us to Connect & Play

Join us at 10:00am on the first Friday of every month!

William Barclay Recreation Center
1900 Belmont Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22304

Bring your children and learn about fun activities that you can do with them to help them learn and grow. We hope you will stay after our event with new friends and enjoy some refreshments!

To help us plan, please register at: <https://bit.ly/3G8K8K8>

Upcoming Connect & Play Events:
2023: 11/18 - November Events
2024: 1/12 - January Events

Basics Insights

Basics Insights is a free text messaging program that provides parents and caregivers with science-based facts and suggested activities to boost their child's brain development and learning. The texts are based on their child's age, come twice a week, are in multiple languages and require no fancy toys to implement. They are designed to be simple and fun – something parents can do as they interact with their child throughout the day.

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Community Partners

ACT for Alexandria
Alexandria City Public Schools
Alexandria Health Department
ALNE
Brahm-Morris Family Foundation
The Campaign Center
Center for Alexandria's Children
Child and Family Network Centers
Alexandria Dept. of Community and Human Services
City of Alexandria
Creative Play School
First Step's Fund
Frost and Bessy Wright Foundation
George Mason University
Homesite House
INDIA
Neighborhood Health
Northern Virginia Community College Alexandria
Northern Virginia Family Services
Volonté for Virginia's Children



QUALITY

Collaborative Professional Development

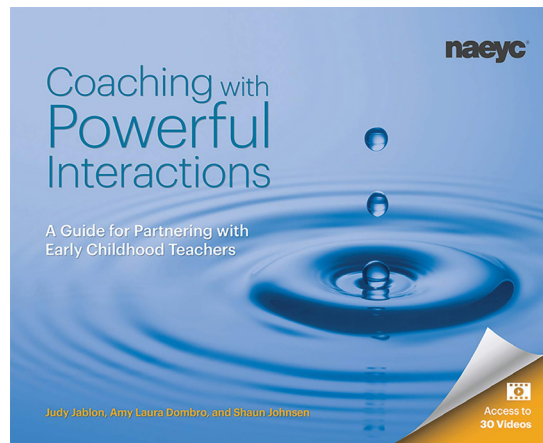
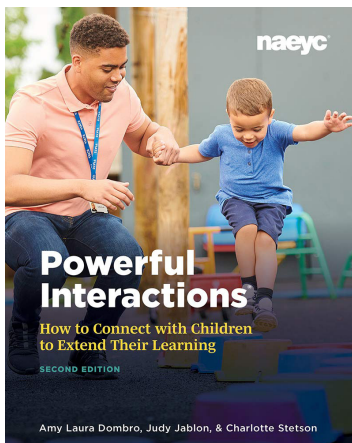


KFY coordinates high quality continuous professional development opportunities for Alexandria's early childhood educators.

In collaboration with the Professional Learning Council, KFY offered professional development opportunities for new VQB5 programs by implementing Powerful Interaction PLC Cohorts. The *Powerful Interactions: How to Connect with Children to Extend Their Learning* book was utilized for these PLCs to support and strengthen educator-child interactions throughout early learning settings in the City of Alexandria. A total of 60 educators registered to participate in the multi-session cohorts. Thirty-four of these educators have completed the cohort; 16 are finishing their last few sessions, and 10 participants could not complete the cohort due to staffing complications.

Returning VQB5 programs were offered continuous development opportunities to enhance teacher-child interactions through a multi-session Coaching with Powerful Interactions cohort. The book *Coaching with Powerful Interactions: A Guide for Partnering with Early Childhood Teachers* was utilized for this cohort. These Professional Learning Community cohorts aim to empower early childhood leaders in our community through coaching strategies while continuing to implement skills gained during the Powerful Interactions cohort session. Upon completing the Coaching with Powerful Interactions cohort, educators can implement the concepts learned during both cohorts to strengthen

and enhance their classrooms' interactions and instructional practices and support other professionals through a turn-key coaching process. A combination of family childcare providers and center-based early childhood educators participated in the Coaching with Powerful Interactions Cohort.





QUALITY

Strategic Planning

KFY and partners use data and professional input to create a strategy to offer coordinated, high quality professional development that supports teacher skills building, professional advancement, and creating the best environment for our children.

KFY gathered stakeholders to engage in a strategic planning process focused on coordinated professional learning for publicly-funded early childhood professionals in the City of Alexandria. Eleven meetings were held from January through March 2023. Twenty-four stakeholders representing early childhood professionals, and state, regional, and local professional development providers worked collaboratively in three workgroups focused on different components of a system of professional learning: in-service, pre-service, and recruitment and retention. The partners developed a shared vision, *“Develop and coordinate professional learning opportunities to ensure all early care and education providers have the knowledge and skills to provide equitable, high-quality, and culturally responsive learning experiences for young children and have access to opportunities for their continuous professional growth and advancement.”* Once the vision was set, a landscape analysis was completed to identify what currently exists in Alexandria through their workgroup lens.

From there, workgroups discussed what is needed to achieve the vision, identified opportunities and challenges, and decided on the following next steps:

1. Coordinate the Professional Learning Council (PLC) to:

- Develop a system for vetting professional learning and work collaboratively to define high quality parameters and expectations.
- Collaboratively identify professional learning needs by reviewing outcome data from statewide measurement tools such as CLASS, Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program, and Virginia PreK Language and Literacy Screener and informal classroom observation data to ensure continuous quality improvement.
- Identify common needs and aligned professional learning opportunities that can be coordinated and centralized across all early childhood professionals

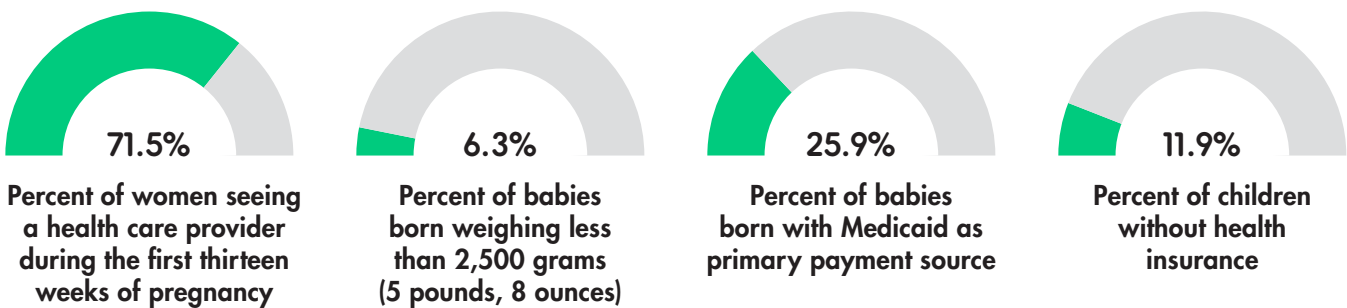
2. Centralize Early Childhood Professional Learning Coordination and Technology

This will include researching and identifying technology/digital platforms or methodology for centralizing information, analyzing needs to determine the best structure, identifying overlapping program requirements, and make recommendations for braided funding models. Examples of information to share include the pre-service career pathways, current prior learning opportunities for credit at Northern Virginia Community College, recruitment best practices, and vetted professional learning opportunities that can be offered in a coordinated, collaborative manner across all early childhood professionals. The work will continue through the already established KFY Professional Learning Council.



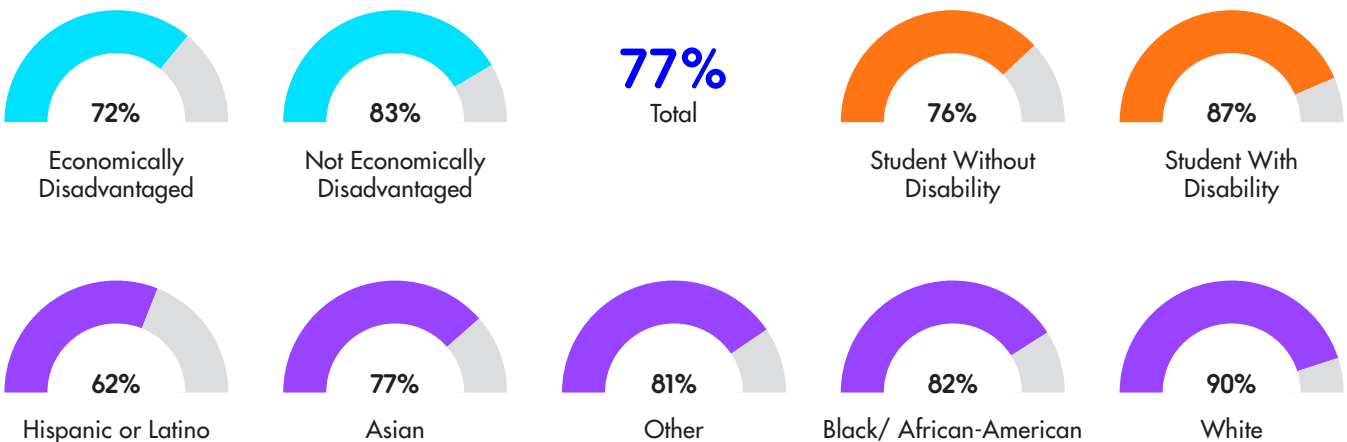
Working Towards Better Outcomes for Children

Health



Academic

Percent of children who had a pre-K experience before Kindergarten



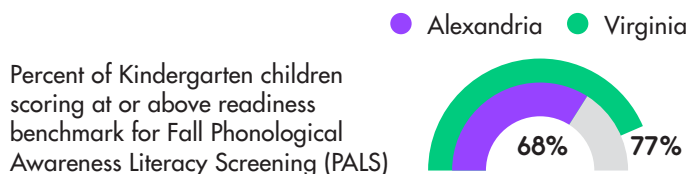
Working Towards Better Outcomes for Children

Literacy

Pre-K Language and Literacy Screener Performance*

Pre-K3 Subtest	Beginning	Growing	Strong
Letter Names	39%	45%	16%
Letter Sounds	82%	9%	9%
Syllable Segmenting	50%	21%	29%
Beginning Sounds Matching	73%	20%	7%

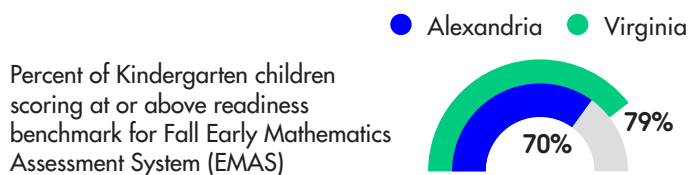
Pre-K4 Subtest	Beginning	Growing	Strong
Letter Names	38%	36%	26%
Letter Sounds	73%	19%	9%
Syllable Segmenting	42%	20%	38%
Beginning Sounds Expressive	74%	13%	13%



Math

Pre-K Early Mathematics Assessment System Performance

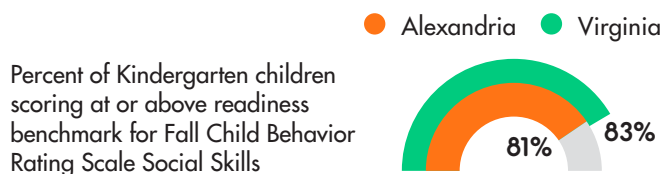
	Beginning	Growing	Strong
Pre-K 3	47%	30%	23%
Pre-K 4	33%	45%	22%



Social Emotional

Pre-K Social Skills Performance on Fall Child Behavior Regulation Scale

	Beginning	Growing	Strong
Pre-K 3	17%	75%	8%
Pre-K 4	18%	70%	12%



Pre-K Self-Regulation Performance on Fall Child Behavior Regulation Scale

	Beginning	Growing	Strong
Pre-K 3	13%	54%	33%
Pre-K 4	18%	68%	14%



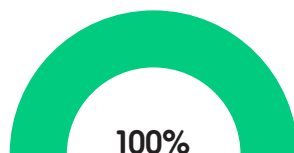
* No published statewide data currently available for PreK.
Data Sources: Virginia Department of Education, Alexandria City Public Schools

Evaluating Our Collective Impact Work

In the spirit of continuous learning, KFY asks its members annually to reflect on how the development and implementation of the early care and education collective impact initiative is progressing.

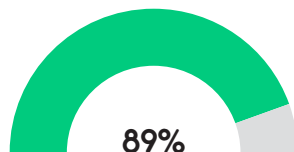
Below are some of the highlights from our most recent survey following the completion of school year 2022–2023, which indicate a strong sense of collaboration among work group members:

There is mutual respect, understanding and trust among the collective



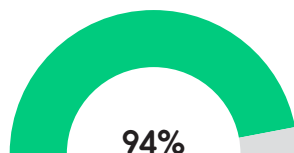
of KFY members agree that in the collaboration, there is trust for one another and that they have a lot of respect for the other people involved in this collaboration

Members see collaboration as being in their self-interest



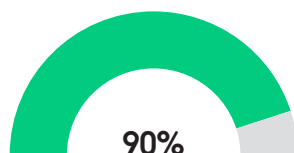
of KFY members agree that their organization has benefited from being involved in this collaboration

There is an appropriate cross section of members



of KFY members agree that the people involved in the collaboration represent a cross section of those who have a stake in what we are trying to accomplish

The collective has concrete, attainable goals, and objectives

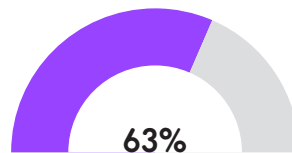


of KFY members agree that people in the collaborative group know and understand the goals



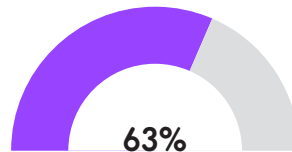
The survey also highlights some areas where there is still room for progress:

There is a need for additional resources



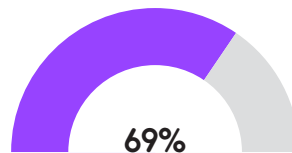
of KFY members agree that the collaborative group has adequate “people power” to do what it wants to accomplish

There is a need for more systems building in the collective’s methods of evaluation and continuous learning



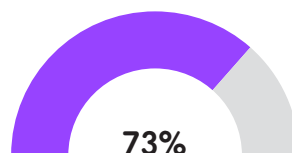
of KFY members agree that a system exists to monitor and report the activity and/or service of the collaboration

There is a need for additional organizational development around delineation of roles and process



of KFY members agree that there is a clear process for making decisions among the partners in this collaborative

There is a need for an expansion of membership



of KFY members agree that all of the organizations we need to be members of the collaborative group have become members

2022–2023

Work Group Members

Laura Basu, Early Childhood Special Education Coordinator, Alexandria City Public Schools

Kara Blankner, Philanthropic Advisor, Frank and Betty Wright Foundation

Dr. Poornima Chandra, Pediatrician, Neighborhood Health

Robin Crawley, Division Chief of Early Childhood, City of Alexandria

Ellen Kennedy Folts, CEO, Bruhn-Morris Family Foundation*

Kate Garvey, Director, Department of Community and Human Services, City of Alexandria*

Chrishonna Greene, Parent and Infant Education (PIE) Program Manager, City of Alexandria

Emily Griffey, Chief Policy Officer, Voices for Virginia's Children*

J. Glenn Hopkins, President & CEO, Hopkins House

Michelle Smith Howard, President & CEO, Kids' First Years*

Dr. Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Superintendent of Schools, Alexandria City Public Schools*

Abbie Lieberman, Policy Manager, First Five Years Fund*

Dr. Tammy Mann, President & CEO, Campagna Center*

Barbara McLaughlin, Executive Director, The Child and Family Network Centers

Lori Morris, President, Bruhn-Morris Family Foundation*

Barbara Paulson, Director, Center for Children and Families, City of Alexandria*

Nanci Pedulla, Director, Healthy Families Program, Northern Virginia Family Services

Giselle Pelaez, Executive Director, The Center for Alexandria's Children

Jane Richardson, Citywide ECE Programs Coordinator, Alexandria City Public Schools

Maritza Rosa, Public Health Nurse, Alexandria Health Department

Fadi Saadeh, Senior Director, Community Health, Inova

Carmen Sanders, Executive Director of Instructional Support, Alexandria City Public Schools*

Dr. Christine Schull, Professor of Early Childhood Development, Northern Virginia Community College Alexandria

Diane Smalley, Owner, Creative Play School

Dr. Bweikia Foster Steen, Associate Professor of Education, George Mason University

Heidi Haggerty Wagner, Principal, Early Childhood Center, Alexandria City Public Schools

Brandi Yee, Chief Program Officer, ACT for Alexandria*

2022–2023 Backbone Staff

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