A great teacher makes a great difference in a child’s life.

With national teacher appreciation week approaching, we are devoting this newsletter to the hard work of our early educators - the ones who wipe noses, bottoms and tears; the ones singing the ABC Rock song for the millionth time; the ones who help children understand and deal with their emotions; the ones who teach children how to be a good friend and a helpful member of their classroom and in turn, of society; and the ones who are inspiring young children to be lifelong learners.

A teacher has an enormous impact on a young child. Teachers provide enriching and stimulating experiences that help children develop and grow physically, socially and academically.

Your support makes it possible for more children and families to benefit from high-quality early care and education and for us to focus on advancing the early learning profession in our centers and our whole state.

**TEACHERS BY THE NUMBERS**

132 Day Early Learning teachers educating 1,000 children everyday

689 Years of teaching experience amongst our Day Early Learning teachers

331 Teachers statewide who are enrolled in degree or credential programs that we’re supporting

774 The number of early education trainings Child Care Answers led in 2017.
Finger Painting
Baby's first Valentine painting! Infants discovered the sensory fun of painting with their fingers (left).

Paint Ball Toss
Pre-K practiced their motor skills by throwing cotton “paint balls” onto paper (right).

Bubble Wrap Color Theory
One of our pre-K classrooms explored the fun texture of bubble wrap and discovered what happens when you mix different colors.

Experimenting with Different Mediums
Little scientists experimented with paint and ice orbs in the pre-K sensory bin (left) and observed paint as it dripped and flowed when they poured it onto tall blocks (right).
Kay Cunningham: Educating Young Minds In the Classroom & Beyond

Kay was determined from a young age to forge her own path. She was the first person in her family to go to college. She knew that she wanted to be a teacher. One professor especially influential in Kay’s decision to pursue a career in early childhood education espoused the belief that teaching the youngest children was more than a babysitting job - It was the most important job in educating a young mind. This resonated with Kay, leading her to receive her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in early childhood education from Southern Illinois University.

“My first job as a kindergarten teacher landed me in a makeshift classroom in a gym with 35 students,” said Kay. “The school was under construction, and the room was not finished. The administration gave me $50 and told me to go buy supplies.”

With determination, innovation and a lot of imagination, she survived her first year of teaching kindergarten and thrived in her role in early education. She went on to “educate the educators” by teaching at Southern Illinois University.

Teaching the youngest children was more than a babysitting job - It was the most important job in educating a young mind.

Kay moved to Indiana in part to be closer to family here. One afternoon, she took her niece to the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis, an experience that proved to be life-changing. “As soon as I walked in, I knew it was a place I wanted to work,” said Kay. “I immediately called them to see if I could get a meeting, and the timing was perfect – they were looking for someone with a background in early childhood education.”

Kay began her career at the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis in 1979 and retired in 2006 as the Vice President for Education and Experience Development. She created the museum’s first Playscape in 1982 and then shepherded its growth as it doubled in size in 1993. Kay was instrumental in creating the Dinosphere and Power to the Children exhibit. She says her experience at the museum was a period of personal growth. “I had the opportunity to meet and work with people who had a much broader view of life.”

Her nearly 30 years at The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis cemented her belief that children need a lot of opportunities to play and use their imagination, which can be successfully mixed with science and math.

“I worry that children are being robbed of play and imagination is stifled,” says Kay. “Some kids do not like school because they do not have the opportunity to use their imagination.”

Her background in education and her role in creating learning experiences gives her a unique perspective in early education. Kay is a proponent of Day Early Learning centers and the importance of high-quality early childhood education. For more than 25 years, she has supported Early Learning Indiana qualifying...
her also to be in our newly launched Loyalty Society, which honors those individuals who have made consecutive gifts to our organization for more than 20 years.

Early childhood education, young children and families continue to motivate Kay. Although she retired from The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis more than a decade ago, Kay commits her time to making a difference in our community. She recently joined the Day Nursery Auxiliary to help support early learning at our centers. She also invests her time as a CASA volunteer, serving as a voice for children in dire situations, and works with for Dress for Success, where she has served as a board member and a personal shopper.

As she reflects on an amazing career, Kay says, “I had a lot of opportunities that a classroom teacher doesn’t get to experience.” Kay has made the world her classroom and continues to teach families that determination, innovation and imagination serve one well.

“I love working with individual children but working at the museum, I had the sense of providing an experience for the entire family. We were helping parents and children learn together.”

On February 15, we named Maureen Weber, a highly respected and innovative leader in education and human capital development, as Early Learning Indiana’s new president & CEO effective March 5th.

“We are extremely pleased to welcome Maureen Weber as our new president & CEO,” said Jennifer Dzwonar, chair of Early Learning Indiana’s Board of Directors. “Despite being more than 100 years old, our organization has grown and changed significantly in the past few years, and we need a dynamic and passionate captain at the helm. Maureen’s leadership, varied experiences and her energy for both people and processes, along with amazing and diverse references from community leaders, make her a great fit. I believe Maureen is the type of CEO our board, 350-person staff, funders, volunteers and supporters were hoping we could find.”

Maureen currently serves as chief strategy officer at Project Lead The Way, an Indianapolis-based nonprofit that provides a transformative learning experience for K-12 students and teachers across the country. She has previously worked as a vice president at Indiana University Health and in various operational and policymaking roles for Indiana Department of Education, the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles and the Indiana Department of Workforce Development.

“I’m incredibly honored to join this venerable organization that has long been synonymous with the highest quality of care and education for our youngest Hoosiers,” said Weber. “While much progress has been made to improve early education across the state in recent years, a significant challenge remains. Drawing upon our rich heritage, we will continue our work to ensure that every young child in Indiana has access to the critical building blocks of learning that are foundational to a lifetime of success.”

With both a bachelor’s and a law degree from Georgetown University, Maureen is an active member of the community, serving on a variety of boards and commissions, including chairing the board of Purdue Polytechnic High School.

She lives on the Northside of Indianapolis with her husband and two children, one of whom attends a Day Early Learning Center.
That's how Lee Ann Kidwell and Jennifer Hurst describe the children they interact with each day as preschool teachers for Day Early Learning. However, those same words are often used to describe great teachers, and they can certainly be used to describe this mother and daughter who have made a career out of educating Indiana’s youngest learners.

As a military wife, Lee Ann often found herself running her household and serving as the primary caregiver for her three young children while her husband was serving in the Navy. During that time, she decided to run a home-based child care so she could teach her children while also providing help to other families.

“I started caring for kids in my home, but once I decided this was a good career for me, I moved on to work in Navy child care centers,” said Lee Ann. “That is where I learned what quality care looks like.” Nearly 95 percent of the Department of Defense’s more than 800 centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and are considered among the highest quality centers.

When her family moved to Indianapolis, Lee Ann’s knowledge and skills made her a perfect fit for a position at Day Early Learning. “I started working at IU Health Day Early Learning almost 14 years ago, soon after the center opened,” said Lee Ann. “I know what quality care looks like, and I would only work for a place that provided the best care possible for the children it serves.”

Lee Ann’s daughter, Jennifer, volunteered in the Day Early Learning centers as part of her community service projects. After graduating, Jennifer studied dance at Ball State University but she found herself drawn to the centers over college breaks.

“At first, I just needed a job while home from college, so I served as a floating teacher at the centers,” said Jennifer, but she became hooked over time. “I loved being around the kids.” Jennifer began to feel the tug of teaching. “Our parents are our first teachers,” said Jennifer. “Growing up, I watched my mom teach young kids and I loved how she interacted with the kids, always teaching, yet always learning.”

Jennifer picked up a few college courses in early childhood education while at Ball State. In 2012, she started working at Day Early Learning State Government Center. Since that time, Jennifer got married and had children of her own, three and five year old boys and an eleven-year old step-daughter. Her youngest son attends IU Health Day Early Learning.

Both Lee Ann and Jennifer are driven to be the best teachers possible, which is why they are investing in continuing education. In 2016, Lee Ann graduated with a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education and will complete her master’s certificate in teaching in May of 2018.

“Because of the education I have received, I have a better understanding of brain development in young learners, and that helps me understand just how important my job is,” said Lee Ann. “Having a degree gives me the tools and resources I need to be a better teacher. I am motivated to do my best each day.”

A great teacher means a high-quality education for a child. DONATE TODAY.
Through a partnership with the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children, Early Learning Indiana offers a tuition assistance program for full-time teachers through a program called T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood INDIANA. Inspired by her former curriculum director and center director to return to school, the T.E.A.C.H. program made degree advancement a reality for Lee Ann. “I don’t think I would have been able to do it otherwise,” said Lee Ann. “It removed the barriers that would have prohibited me from completing my degree.”

Lee Ann encouraged her daughter to finish her degree in early childhood education. “Mom is a never-ending resource. She is so creative and is always giving me ideas,” said Jennifer. “She is always learning; whether she is teaching the class, or participating as a student, she is always acquiring new knowledge that makes her great at her job.”

Jennifer is applying to T.E.A.C.H this spring in hopes of completing her bachelor’s degree in early childhood education within the next two years. Early Learning Indiana provides paid time off for teachers to study and attend class, as well as substitute teacher coverage. Jennifer admits that it will be a big challenge to return to school while working full time and raising a family of her own. “I definitely could not do this without the paid time off to attend class and complete work.”

Lee Ann has impacted many young lives. Several families come back to the centers to visit Lee Ann. “I see these kids off to a great start and know that they will do great things. But my biggest hope is that we have helped them to develop the social and emotional skills to care for each other - to create a better world,” said Lee Ann. “We are getting them ready for life.”

Lee Ann passed on her passion for teaching to her daughter. “I want the children I teach to keep that drive to learn, to stay passionate, curious and resourceful,” says Jennifer. With teachers that embody those traits, a solid foundation is being laid that will certainly create a better world for our next generation of learners.

“Because of the education I have received, I have a better understanding of brain development in young learners, and that helps me understand just how important my job is”

“I definitely could not go back to school without the paid time off to attend class and complete work.”
Early Learning Indiana is extremely grateful to have received a $15,000 grant from the Women’s Fund of Central Indiana for our Workforce Development through Continuing Education program. The Women’s Fund of Central Indiana creates transformative and sustainable change for women and girls in Central Indiana by providing opportunities through grantmaking. With over 97 percent of Early Learning Indiana’s educators being women, we are committed to giving our teachers the opportunity to advance their education and increase self-sufficiency. We are thankful that the Women’s Fund of Central Indiana supports this effort.

Professional and skilled teachers make our classrooms high quality. Through the Workforce Development program, Day Early Learning women educators receive the tools and financial support they need to earn a degree in early childhood education while receiving paid time off each week to complete course work. As the opportunity for advancement grows within the field of early childhood education, Early Learning Indiana is pleased to partner with the Women’s Fund of Central Indiana to ensure that our staff is ready for those opportunities.

“Women’s Fund is pleased to support the work of Early Learning Indiana. Providing opportunities for employees to pursue education and personal growth paired with much needed high-quality child care makes Early Learning Indiana a true asset to Central Indiana,” said Jennifer Pope Baker, executive director of the Women’s Fund.

By partnering with organizations like the Women’s Fund of Central Indiana to create strategies that motivate and develop teachers, our industry will see increasing levels of success with teachers, both personally and in the classrooms.

There Aren’t Enough Early Education Teachers

As Indiana’s state-funded pre-K program expands, attracting and retaining qualified teachers must be a top priority.

Indiana is facing a projected 8,195 shortfall in early childhood care and education teachers by 2026, according to Indiana’s Early Learning Advisory Committee. Our most recent policy brief, “Mile Markers: Teacher Education Requirements, Skills & Compensation” examines state-and national-level research on the impact of college education on teacher quality and the experiences of other states and communities.

We need to increase teacher education, support and compensation, all with the goal of improving child outcomes.

Specifically, the report urges:

- Creating different pathways for early childhood teachers to earn a degree
- Embedding teacher education standards into existing state programs
- Developing and maintaining a comprehensive professional development system
- Working to raise wages of early education professionals
- Examining and implementing forthcoming recommendations from national studies on financing the early education workforce

Learn more and read the full report at EarlyLearningIN.org/advocacy.

43%

of Day Early Learning teachers are pursuing new degrees or credentials through our continuing education program.
Early Learning Indiana sparks statewide Child Development Associate classes in Spanish

Since October 2017, 55 early childhood professionals have gathered almost weekly to supercharge their skills, knowledge and competencies as caregivers. They’re pursuing the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credentials, which is a pretty common process for professionals in the field. It’s also a requirement for aspects of licensing and Indiana’s Paths to QUALITY™ system.

Until recently, though, those educators, who gather both in the central and northern parts of the state, would not have had the chance to earn their CDA. Why? They happen to speak – and read and write primarily – in Spanish. Before our Partnerships for Early Learners and Child Care Answers bilingual support team launched those two classes, Spanish-speaking providers were unable to complete the coursework in their native language. While many are able to speak both English and Spanish, the extensive reading and writing involved in CDA coursework kept the credential out of reach for them.

Just like any other CDA class, these professionals are exploring core competencies and functional areas including how to maintain safe, healthy learning environments, supporting physical and cognitive growth, nurturing social-emotional development, building positive relationships with families, managing programs and building a sense of professionalism. They just happen to be doing so in Spanish.

Working towards those learning outcomes in these classes provides students with the chance to expand their knowledge and to build a stronger professional network. Much of the learning is very hands-on, and it all aims to prepare them to educate young learners, many of whom come from Spanish-speaking families, to higher and higher standards.

This class has allowed both the individual students to increase their competency and whole programs to advance in Paths to QUALITY. Amy Torres, who has shepherded the program, reports, “There are three sites that will be advancing to Level 3 very soon, and two sites have already moved to Level 2.”

In addition to the two current classes, additional classes will launch later in 2018. In fact, recruitment is already underway – in Spanish.
FAMILY FEATURE

Teachers: One Family’s Partner and Extended Family

Watching their eldest daughter blossom from a timid, shy toddler into a confident, sociable leader in her junior kindergarten classroom reinforces Brad and Anneliese Williams’s belief that Day Early Learning Lilly Family Center was the right choice for their family.

Nearly six years ago, Brad and Anneliese learned they were expecting a baby and soon began the overwhelming process of researching child care. “We immediately knew that high-quality child care and education was a priority,” said Anneliese.

They researched dozens of child care options and toured six different centers, including Day Early Learning Lilly Family Center, based on recommendations from colleagues with children there. “We loved the feeling when you walk in the door,” said Anneliese. “The teachers were well-equipped to teach and very engaged in the classrooms.”

Day Early Learning Lilly was just opening its infant room when their daughter Elena began attending in Ms. Jeanette's classroom. They loved the care and attention that she gave their daughter and the other children in the infant room. As Elena progressed through the center, they saw how each teacher nurtured and helped her to develop and grow. “The teachers are fantastic,” says Brad. “The amount of learning and social development that takes place in the classroom is amazing.” Elena not only gained knowledge, but also grew in her confidence and leadership skills.

Elena transitioned to junior kindergarten this past fall. Her parents report that she was well-prepared. According to Brad, “Her breadth of knowledge put her miles ahead of her peers, and she has acclimated quickly to a new setting (junior kindergarten).” He gives credit to teacher, Ms. Marti with preparing Elena for a smooth transition.

Their second daughter, Matilda, now attends the infant room at Day Early Learning Lilly Family Center. Today, they see the same level of care and educational opportunities that they saw with Elena. “The teachers partner with the parents and do a great job of keeping us informed and updated each day,” said Anneliese. “Together we are like one big extended family, providing the best possible care for our children.”
Our mission is to ensure the highest level of early care and education for children in Indiana.

BE A CHAMPION FOR CHILDREN

Your support is important to a developing mind. DONATE TODAY. Give online at EarlyLearningIN.org/give or mail a check. Leave a lasting legacy, become a member of Early Learning Indiana’s Next Century Society with a bequest in your will for Early Learning Indiana.

JOIN OUR SOCIAL NETWORK

Follow us for cute pictures of kids and news from Early Learning Indiana and the field of early education, plus resources for parents and providers!

SIGN UP FOR LEARNING IDEAS

Sign up or share Bloom Bright, our free service for families! Text ‘BLOOM’ to 95577 or visit BloomBrightIN.org for free texts full of fun, simple learning ideas for family time for children age 0 to 8. Family time is learning time.