



**SPARK**  
LEARNING LAB

# Annual Report

## TO OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND

On behalf of SPARK Learning Lab, thank you for another tremendous year of serving the early childhood education and care programs of Indiana. Together, even as a pandemic continued to impact our work, our wellness, and the wellness of our children and families, we increased the safety and quality of identified early education and care programs throughout the state. This year, the number of programs participating in Paths to QUALITY™ increased and more than 200 Paths to QUALITY™ programs (28%) advanced at least one level, increasing access to quality early learning and care. I am also pleased to announce that thanks to our team's work, along with our partners and the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning, safe sleep is no longer in the top ten regulatory citations. SPARK targeted this key regulatory violation with nine new resources and provided ongoing technical assistance to a cohort of programs with previous citations, 95% of which did not experience a recurrence.

The work of SPARK Learning Lab is driven by our five core values: Open Communication; Teamwork and Community; Data-Informed Learning; Embracing Diversity; and Follow-Through. These values underlie our work, dictate how we behave, and guide which strategies and activities we employ. Each and every SPARK Learning Lab team member is dedicated to living these values and we hold ourselves accountable for ensuring they are at the forefront. This year, we put a keen focus as a team on our value of Embracing Diversity.

In a recent session with Iheoma U. Iruka, Ph.D., Founding Director of the Equity Research Action Coalition, SPARK's leadership had the opportunity to see the data that demonstrates the effects of the systemic racism and injustices against people of color in today's educational system. Dr. Iruka asserted that, as a nation, we must include equitable access, equitable experiences, and equitable outcomes when redesigning an educational system that supports all children and families. SPARK is committed to building upon the great work over the past two years and focusing on ensuring equitable access, experiences, and outcomes to all of Indiana's children and families.

Throughout the year, we looked inward and grew individually and as a team. With the addition of our Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Specialist, SPARK, in partnership with our Acelero Learning and Shine Early Learning networks, engaged in four multi-day learning opportunities that included conversations about our own identity, the historical context that created the systemic injustices that we see today, and building our awareness of microaggressions that occur each day.

# CARE PROGRAMS, OUR PARTNERS, AND OUR FRIENDS,

To carry this work further, SPARK team members created an Equity Community of Practice. This voluntary community gives team members the opportunity to look at their own practices through an equity lens in a safe yet challenging environment. Participants choose the topic based on their own needs then bring research, information, and their own stories to support the conversation.

In Year 3, we look forward to continued development. SPARK Learning Lab will move through a strategic planning process, redesigning internal policies and practices while continuing to support programs in thinking through the experiences they are providing to children and families. It is our vision that every child and family in the state of Indiana not only has access to high-quality early childhood education and care, but that the experiences in every high-quality program are culturally responsive and reflective, so that every child feels a sense of belonging and can achieve.




**Mike Bachman**

Project Director  
SPARK Learning Lab





# SPARK ECOSYSTEM



**SPARK LEARNING LAB BRINGS TOGETHER THE EXPERTISE OF LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS INTO A PROGRAM-DRIVEN TIERED QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SUPPORT SYSTEM.**

We believe establishing strong partnerships and a shared vision with the community is foundational for tangible results. We strive to deliver exceptional engagement that always goes above and beyond expectations. By engaging both local and national subject matter experts, we are able to accelerate the impact of SPARK's services and provide programs with the tools and knowledge they need to improve outcomes for Indiana's children and families.



## **Early Childhood Education and Care Programs**

SPARK Learning Lab relies on the expertise of the early childhood education and care workforce in Indiana to create a responsive technical assistance system that truly supports the early childhood education and care programs in the areas where they need it most and is provided in a way that is accessible and effective. The workforce is SPARK Learning Lab's first priority.

## **Regional Advisory Councils**

SPARK Learning Lab's goal is to provide the best support possible to Indiana's early childhood education and care professionals who work every day to improve the lives of Hoosier children and families. In order to achieve this goal, we need input from professionals and partners from across the state. The SPARK Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) provide vital feedback through quarterly meetings to ensure the success of our technical assistance approach.

## **Shine Early Learning**

Shine Early Learning develops early learning programs that deliver positive results for children, families, and communities from coast to coast. Shine offers resources and a programmatic approach to help early childhood education and care programs reach their own ambitious goals. SPARK Learning Lab brings Shine's wealth of expertise in producing high-quality resources and their menu of learning opportunities to early childhood education and care programs in Indiana. Shine Early Learning directly employs Content Specialists—each with their own area of expertise, Coaches who support cohorts of programs, Coaches who support programs on an individual basis, and Coordinators who support programs that are in need of assistance of any kind.

## **Geminus Corporation and Erikson Institute**

Geminus Corporation and Erikson Institute have comparably extensive experience providing technical assistance with a specific focus on family child care. Geminus is one of few agencies in the country and the only organization in Indiana to be a direct service provider, a Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) sponsor, a child care subsidy hub, a Child Care Resource & Referral agency, and a technical assistance provider, ensuring that its staff is well-versed in every aspect of child care operations. Geminus directly employs the SPARK Learning Lab Family Child Care Coaches who support both cohorts of programs and individual programs, as well as lend their expertise to the development of training, resources, and peer learning opportunities that are specific to family child care. Geminus also brings to the SPARK Learning Lab ecosystem the higher education expertise of Erikson Institute.

Erikson Institute is the nation's leading provider of graduate-level programs in early childhood education. Through Town Square ([www.townsquarein.org](http://www.townsquarein.org)), it has created a content-rich portal specifically to address the unique professional development needs of providers running family child care programs. In collaboration with Geminus, Erikson Institute develops and deploys training, resources, and peer learning opportunities that are specific to family child care using Town Square.

## **Engaging Solutions of Indiana**

A management consulting firm with extensive experience managing customer-focused call centers, Engaging Solutions manages SPARK Learning Lab's Help Desk. With a goal of resolving all customer questions, concerns, and issues, the SPARK Learning Lab Help Desk directs providers to appropriate resources and provides critical project performance and customer satisfaction data.

## **Transform Consulting Group**

Transform Consulting Group (TCG) is an Indiana-based strategic and data-informed consulting firm focused on serving government, nonprofit, education, and community entities with a specialty in early childhood education and care. TCG helps advance SPARK's mission by providing expertise in stakeholder engagement, communications, and data collection, analysis, and visualization by employing SPARK's Data Analyst, Communications Manager, and a Content Specialist with expertise in early childhood education and care business management and administration.

## **Briljent**

Briljent is at the forefront of smart, innovative, and effective learning. Their deep expertise in adult learning, instructional design, and training delivery makes them the ideal partner in supporting SPARK Learning Lab's digital professional development efforts. Briljent supports SPARK by packaging all of our Content Specialists' expertise into high-quality materials for adult learners.

# What We Do



Our tiered model provides coaching, training, resources, and peer learning all under one roof through Supports for All, Targeted Coaching and Support, and Intensive Support. The available quality support services vary in scope, sequence, and intensity, according to the individual needs of each program.

This year, we continued to build and implement a responsive system based on the feedback and input from the field. We were able to expand and deepen our offering of quality support services through the launch of My SPARK Learning Lab, bring new local, best-in-class expertise and experiences by introducing the Better Together Collaboratives and Go NAPSACC, improve child outcomes in important areas such as Safe Sleep, and increase the number of high-quality learning options for families across the state.

The goal for SPARK Learning Lab heading into our second programmatic year was to exceed expectations in supporting Indiana's identified early childhood education and care programs in becoming safer and higher quality. To track our progress, SPARK identified and defined seven objectives, regularly reviewed our progress, and shared the data with our Regional Advisory Councils. By the end of the year, we exceeded our goals in all seven measures.

## The seven objectives were:

1

Maintain the percentage of programs that were enrolled in Paths to QUALITY™.

**Result:** Percentage of programs enrolled was increased by 0.72%

2

Increase the number of programs advancing at least one level in Paths to QUALITY™ by 5%.

**Result:** Number of programs advancing in Paths to QUALITY™ increased by 28%

3

Ensure that at least 90% of programs identified by Indiana's child care licensing as needing assistance completed a quality improvement plan.

**Result:** 100% of quality improvement plans completed

4

Refer at least 90% of those interested in increasing their education to the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children and the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program.

**Result:** 100% percent of those interested were referred

5

Create 12 resources, training opportunities, or events that promote education opportunities for the early childhood workforce.

**Result:** 13 resources, training opportunities, and events created

6

Target programs with a previous safe sleep violation and ensure that no less than 80% do not have another safe sleep violation.

**Result:** 95% of programs did not have a repeat violation

7

Create six resources, training opportunities, or events that promote best safe sleep practices.

**Result:** 9 resources created



# STARTING THE JOURNEY



***IN INDIANA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SYSTEM, OUR PARTNERS AT THE STATE'S CHILD CARE RESOURCE + REFERRAL (CCR+R) AGENCIES HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SUPPORTING PROGRAMS WITH THE INITIAL LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR EXEMPTION PROCESS.***

To do so, CCR&Rs provide guidance to SPARK on resources or training that can be created to support this process and use content that already exists in My SPARK Learning Lab. Once a program has successfully received a license, registration, or certification of exemption, SPARK is available to assist with maintaining compliance, correcting noted regulatory violations, and pedagogical or business improvements.



SPARK partners with the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning's (OECOSL) Licensing and Legally Licensed Exempt Consultants to offer coaching when regulatory noncompliance is identified. This year, Indiana's Licensing Consultants referred 78 programs to SPARK Learning Lab for compliance coaching. Forty-six (59%) of these programs declined SPARK's services or were unable to be reached. SPARK supported 25 programs (32%) in completing quality improvement plans, embedding best practices, and making it less likely for a program to have a similar recurrence. At the end of the year, seven programs (the remaining nine percent) were either in progress or pending. With their quality improvement plans and SPARK's support, programs addressed such issues as safe sleep, supervision, and staff-to-child ratios.

A primary objective for SPARK was to decrease the number of unsafe sleep instances by targeting a cohort of programs with safe sleep violations and supporting them with coaching, training, and resources to embed best safe sleep practices in their program. Through this work, SPARK identified that safe sleep violations are more likely to occur when a teacher or caregiver who does not regularly have the responsibility of caring for and educating infants finds themselves doing so. Many times it is just a lack of knowledge that places infants in possibly life-endangering circumstances. To solve this, SPARK's subject matter experts deployed nine resources or learning opportunities in both English and Spanish to support these individuals. Using visuals and printed checklists, any person can now enter an infant sleeping environment and immediately identify both safe and unsafe sleep practices. SPARK successfully distributed these materials to 100% of programs in our cohort, and 95% of participating programs completed the year without a safe sleep violation recurrence. **In September 2021, OECOSL reported that safe sleep violations were no longer in the top ten of most cited violations in Indiana.**



# ADVANCING THE JOURNEY

**SPARK'S PROGRAM SUPPORT INITIATIVES ARE INFORMED BY THE LATEST ADULT LEARNING RESEARCH, WITH A STRONG FOCUS ON OFFERING MULTIPLE COACHING OPPORTUNITIES, INCLUDING MODELING, OBSERVATION AND REFLECTION, AND FEEDBACK SESSIONS, THAT IMPROVE PRACTICES.**

As a result, leaders grow, change behavior, and increase the likelihood of sustained program quality. Thus, children's learning accelerates, and they make developmental gains across domains. As opportunity gaps close, there is increased opportunity in kindergarten and far beyond for children, their families, and communities.

In becoming a licensed, registered, or certified exempt early childhood education and care program in the state of Indiana, an applicant must create an account with Indiana's Licensing and Education Access Depot or I-LEAD. I-LEAD provides access to background and registry checks, a program's staff list, Indiana Learning Paths, and My SPARK Learning Lab.

Once in the I-LEAD portal, SPARK Learning Lab offers a self-assessment, access to compliance and quality improvement resources, and high-quality training through Indiana Learning Paths (ILP) and My SPARK Learning Lab. Launched in November 2020, My SPARK Learning Lab is a repository of resources (i.e., tools, templates, and job-aids), learning opportunities (i.e., recorded webinars, videos, and discussion boards), and a program-level self-assessment. The Salesforce-based platform allows the early childhood workforce to easily access the services they need any time of day. In the first month of launch alone, My SPARK Learning Lab reached 1,159 users. By the end of the year, My SPARK Learning lab reached 10,874 unique users. Each month, My SPARK Learning Lab had an average of 3,477 sessions.



# Indiana Self-Assessment Tool

To continue the quality journey, pedagogical and business leaders must first identify specific areas they want to develop. SPARK Learning Lab's Indiana Self-Assessment Tool (ISAT) is just the tool for that. The ISAT is located in My SPARK Learning Lab and is a program-level rubric composed of seven standards and nearly 50 quality items providing a comprehensive look at program quality. The ISAT is composed of standards and quality items from Indiana's Paths to QUALITY™ as well as national accreditation and respects that quality looks different in different program types.

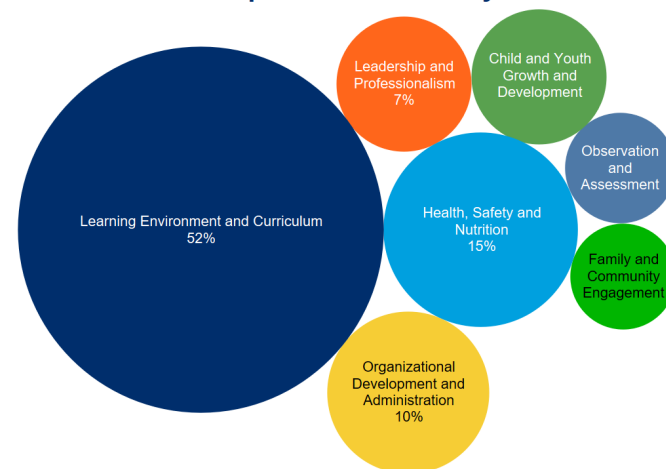
In November 2020, the ISAT was relaunched on My SPARK Learning Lab after undergoing major improvements for its users. The newly relaunched version includes enhancements such as a mobile-friendly interface, card-style navigation to make information consumption more reasonable, and the ability to skip standards or indicators, allowing the program leader to customize their ISAT experience.

While program leaders continued to submit ISATs for their programs, SPARK listened to their needs. SPARK heard that program leaders wanted to better understand their progress as they moved through the ISAT, needed to move more seamlessly back and forth between standards and indicators, and most of all have the ability to stop, save, and restart the ISAT at a later time. In July 2021, SPARK released a version of the ISAT that responded to all of these needs. But, we aren't done yet ensuring the ISAT meets the needs of the field.

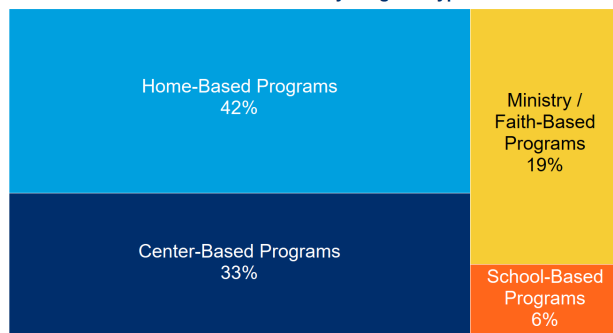
With 500 ISATs submitted by year's end, we continued to hear that further enhancements could be made to improve the user experience. To bring solutions for these needs to life, SPARK engaged our partners at Blue Sky Commerce shortly after the July 2021 release to begin development of the next ISAT experience.

The ISAT opens the door to targeted resources, training, and coaching that support a program's quality improvement journey. After completing the ISAT, a program leader is able to review their responses, choose an area of development to focus their efforts on, and see a list of resources and learning opportunities found in My SPARK Learning Lab and Indiana Learning Paths that can support them along the way.

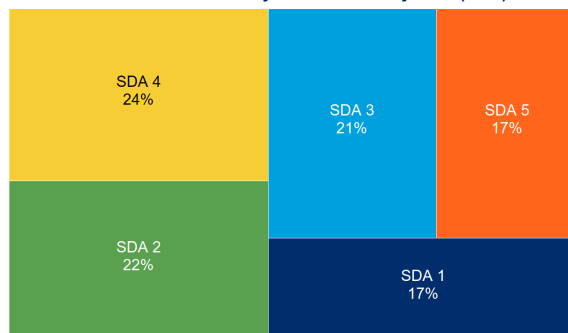
Most Completed I-SAT Quality Items



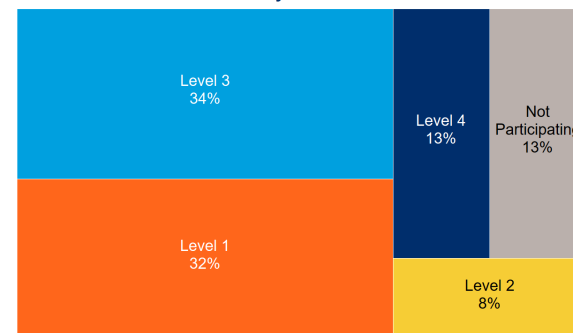
I-SAT Submissions by Program Type



I-SAT Submissions by Service Delivery Area (SDA)



I-SAT Submissions by Paths To QUALITY™ Level



# Training, Resources, & Learning Forums

Upon completion of the ISAT, programs choose one or more areas of their programming to improve and are provided a list of training that can support their knowledge and skill building. Indiana Learning Paths is Indiana's Learning Management System where SPARK houses over 50 asynchronous training modules and offered over 150 live webinar or face-to-face learning opportunities just this year. To date, SPARK's training has provided more than 15,000 hours of training to Indiana's early childhood workforce. A training that had a high level of engagement this year was The SPARK! Fundamentals to Business Sustainability Collection. This collection brings together seven separate training modules and resources into one learning opportunity offering programs tips and tools for budgeting, performing a cost benefit analysis, and increasing staff wages. This collection has been completed by over 3,000 programs.

SPARK delivers training varying in scope, intensity, and frequency according to the needs of local providers. We provide a menu of both virtual and in-person training opportunities on key topics. This year, types of training included face-to-face, webinars, asynchronous training, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. Whether it was through active marketing on social media or ensuring a no wrong door approach to access through Indiana Learning Paths or My SPARK Learning Lab, we put a particular emphasis on ensuring easy access to the training. This work had a strong impact with eight in 10 training survey respondents indicating the training was easily accessible. The training offered also had a positive impact on the participants. Ninety percent of training participants indicated they felt confident to apply the new knowledge learned, 86% were satisfied, and SPARK training had a Net Promoter Score of 40.



**What is a good NPS score?**

Along with training, program leaders need the tools, templates, and job-aids to support putting knowledge into action and achieving their quality improvement goals. My SPARK Learning Lab puts the resources program leaders need in the palm of their hands. Professionals can select items on an individual basis using My SPARK Learning Lab's advanced search features, pursue their very own "Favorite" list, or review the pre-populated list of targeted resources provided after completing the ISAT. My SPARK Learning Lab offers a catalogue of over 500 items, including resources on Organizational Development, Financial Health, Learning Environment and Curriculum. Thirteen resources specific to increasing the education of Indiana's early childhood and out-of-school-time workforce were added just this year. SPARK has also given special attention to the impact of COVID-19 on the welfare of children, families, and program staff.

# 504

**Available  
Resources**

# 120

**Resources  
Added**

# 28,298

**Resources  
Downloaded**

## Resources by the Numbers

Often when thinking through quality improvement opportunities, program leaders are in search of ideas and examples from their peers. To maximize this type of peer learning, SPARK added Groups to My SPARK Learning Lab in March 2021. Now visible in the My SPARK Learning Lab navigation bar, Groups offers the Indiana early childhood workforce a discussion-board-style experience where professionals can post their experiences, seek advice from others, and network with other teachers, leaders, and caregivers from across the state.

Since its launch, SPARK has added seven different affinity groups to help professionals join the conversation, including Líderes y Maestros Educativos; Paths to QUALITY™; Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in Early Childhood; and All Things School-Age. In less than a year, 100 teachers, directors, and caregivers have joined this professional learning community.

## Face to Face and Webinar Training

157 Sessions

1,192 Unique Learners

685 Unique Programs Represented

43 Total Unique Trainings

34 Partner / Collaborative Trainings

## Asynchronous (On-Demand) Courses

13,909 Unique Completions

6,307 Unique Learners

2,839 Programs Represented

## Overall Training

15,693 Total Unique Training  
Completions (Live Sessions &  
Asynchronous)

6,927 Unique Trainees

2,947 Unique Programs Represented

## Training by the Numbers

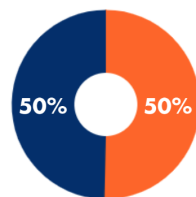




## Town Square

SPARK Learning Lab understands that quality looks different in our family child care homes than it does in large group education and care. Along with a discussion board in the Groups feature of My SPARK Learning Lab, Town Square Indiana remains an essential partner in our efforts to support the more than 2,253 family child care programs in the state of Indiana. Over the course of the past year, Town Square has added 30 resources and created 12 asynchronous learning opportunities specifically to support these essential early childhood education and care programs.

In Year 2, Town Square focused on fostering relationships with Indiana Family child care providers; within these relationships, providers shared their voice and expertise, helping develop multiple resources. One major highlight from this year was a provider that created an entire module focused on her program philosophy on the importance of child-led and nature-based learning. Additionally, we saw increased engagement with over 3,000 page views and a 25% increase in registered accounts.



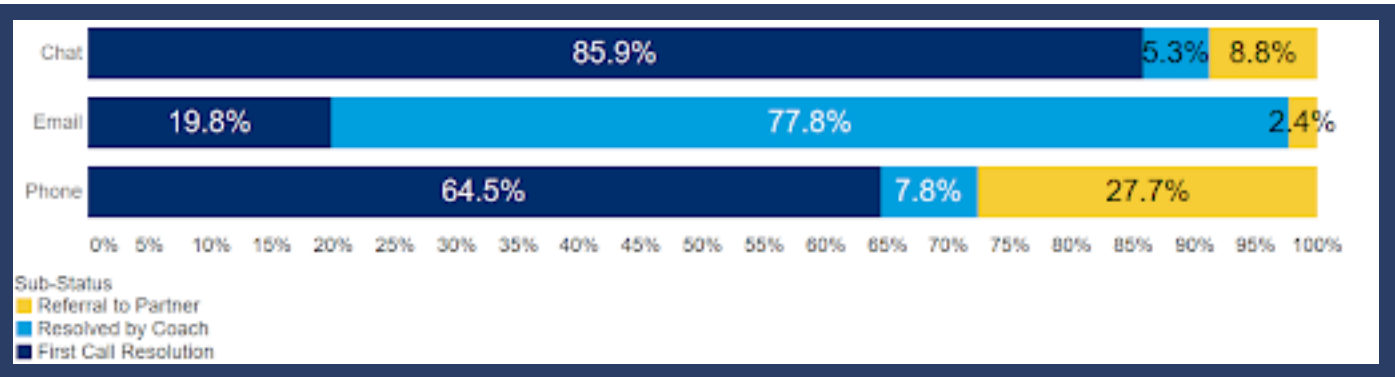
### Town Square Users

■ New Users   ■ Returning Users

## Help Desk

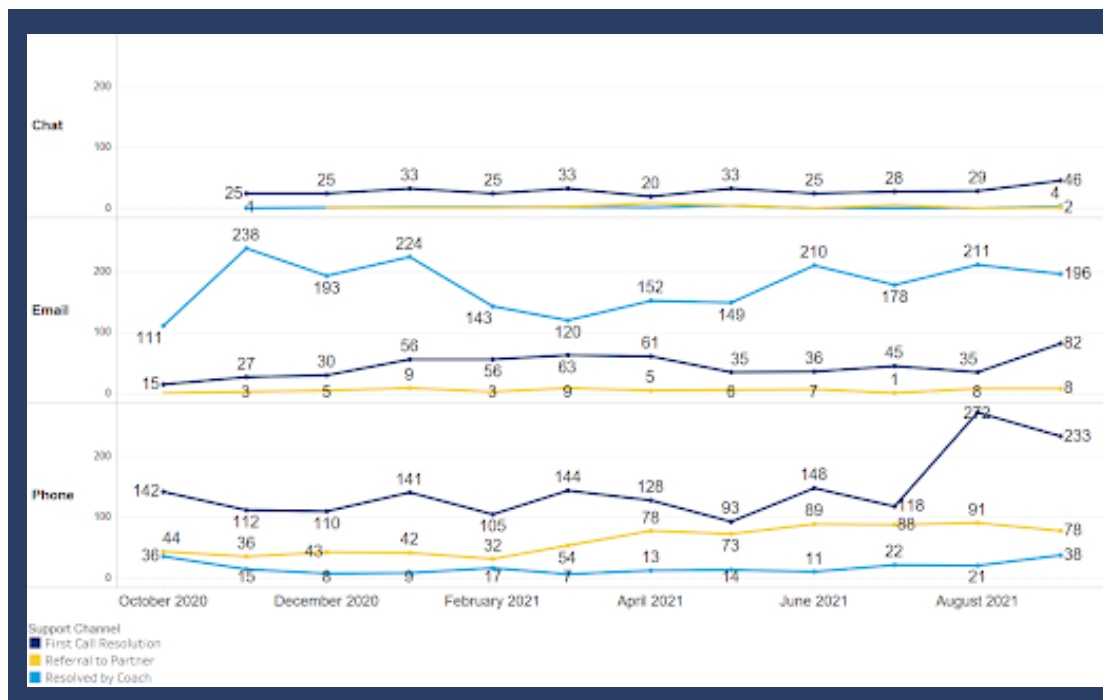
Whether a provider is having trouble accessing I-LEAD, Indiana Learning Paths, or My SPARK Learning Lab, needing assistance in identifying where to start, or could use a little help thinking through new knowledge or implementing new practices, SPARK Learning Lab provides support at every step. The SPARK Help Desk is designed to get early childhood education and care programs the answers they need so they can remain focused on the children and families they serve. To do so, the highly trained SPARK Learning Lab Support Team answers questions via phone, email, and chat on a wide variety of topics, including accessing Indiana Learning Paths and My SPARK Learning Lab, Paths to QUALITY™ enrollment and advancement, and grant support.

## Resolution by Support Channel



The Help Desk meets programs where they are in the format that is most convenient for them. SPARK's no wrong door philosophy means we coordinate with all system partners, and the Help Desk Support Team connects providers with the appropriate experts. For instance, during this year, 100% of program leaders interested in increasing their education or the education of their staff were connected to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program or Workforce Development project at the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children.

All in all, the SPARK Help Desk Support Team responded to more inquiries than ever before in the past year, answering nearly 2,500 questions from 1,495 unique early childhood professionals while maintaining a net promoter score of 62.



## Resolution by Support Channel Over Time

## Coaching

When improving in specific areas of quality found in the ISAT, program leaders may benefit from joining a cohort of other program leaders seeking to improve in the same area. SPARK offers group coaching experiences that bring together up to 10 program leaders with similar quality improvement goals in a virtual environment over three months for facilitated conversation with each other and a SPARK Coach. In the last year, 304 early childhood professionals participated in 34 group coaching opportunities improving the quality of programming for 301 unique early childhood education and care programs across the state of Indiana.

In other areas represented in the ISAT, more intensive, longer-term coaching may be needed to develop and embed more complex systems and skills. To respond to programs in need of this type of intervention, SPARK provides nine months of individual, in-program coaching that includes goal setting, action planning, observation of practice, and feedback. Forty-four programs chose this intervention to improve the quality of their programming; 94% indicated that coaching met their needs and the needs of their program, and 87% indicated they were able to apply the new knowledge in their program.

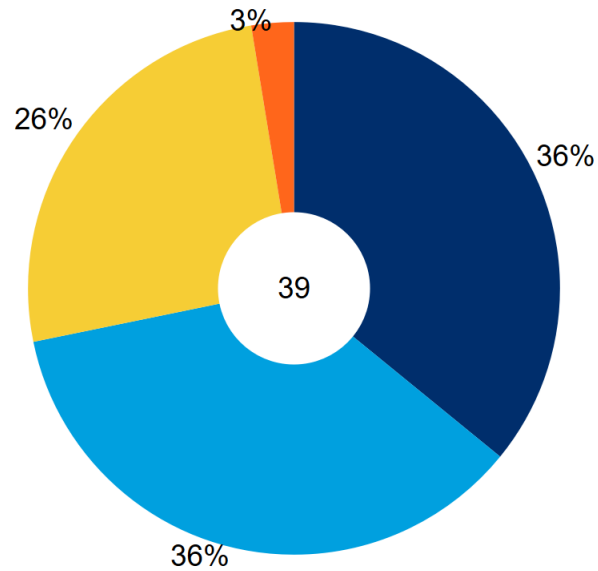
# 94%

**OF PARTICIPANTS INDICATED  
COACHING MET THEIR NEEDS**



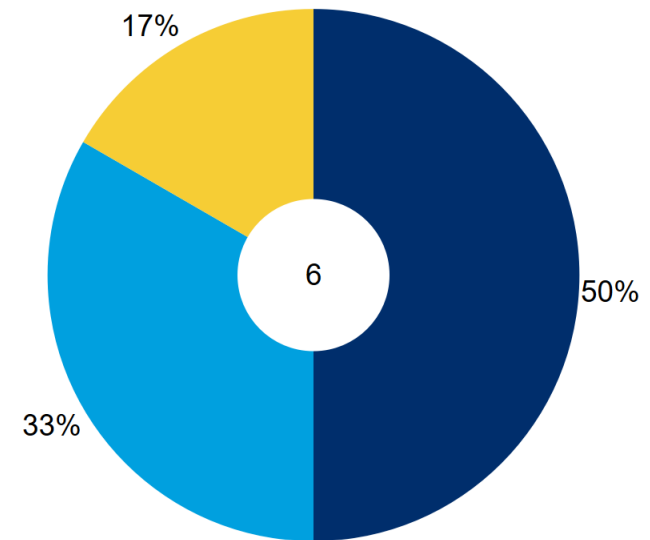


Individualized Coaching Experiences by Program Type



Facility Type Description  
 ■ Center-Based Programs  
 ■ Home-Based Programs  
 ■ Ministry-Based Programs  
 ■ School-Based Programs

Group Coaching Experiences by Program Type



Facility Type Description  
 ■ Center-Based Programs  
 ■ Home-Based Programs  
 ■ Ministry-Based Programs





# BE RECOGNIZED



***AS PROGRAMS INCREASE THEIR PATHS TO QUALITY™ LEVELS AND EARN NATIONAL ACCREDITATION, SPARK IS THERE TO SUPPORT THEM.***

Once a program is licensed, registered, or, in specific cases, certified exempt, it can be recognized for that effort by enrolling in Paths to QUALITY™. Due to the pandemic, programs were weary from positive cases, quarantines, continued sanitation, mask mandates, and temperature checks. Indiana wanted to encourage programs to continue to participate in the voluntary recognition system. Programs leaving Paths to QUALITY™ would send ripple effects through the state's pre-K program and Indiana's supply of high-quality early education and care.

To further support the state of Indiana, early childhood education and care programs, families, and children, SPARK Learning Lab implemented a two-pronged strategy to both maintain the programs enrolled in Paths to QUALITY™ and to bring newly eligible programs into the system.

First, SPARK deployed an automatic communication feature that sends a series of emails to newly eligible programs and provides them easy-to-follow steps for enrolling in Paths QUALITY™. SPARK monitored email open rates and engagement, called recipients who did not complete the process, and provided support where needed. To kick start enrollment and advancement, SPARK provided group coaching for interested programs.

To further meet providers, SPARK Learning Lab launched an asynchronous version of the Paths to QUALITY™ Introduction Session, a prerequisite for Paths to QUALITY™ enrollment, making Paths to QUALITY™ enrollment more accessible than ever before.

SPARK also utilized the ISAT and group coaching intervention to bring together cohorts of program leaders struggling to maintain their Paths to QUALITY™ level and enrollment. The group coaching sessions allowed program leaders to share struggles and successes with their peers, gain new ideas, and receive the expert support of a SPARK Coach.

Through these initiatives and our Paths to QUALITY™ resource development, SPARK Learning Lab not only assisted in maintaining the percentage of programs enrolled in Paths to QUALITY™ (74.73%), but actually increased the percentage of programs enrolled (75.45%) even during the pandemic when stabilization needs often outweighed increasing quality.

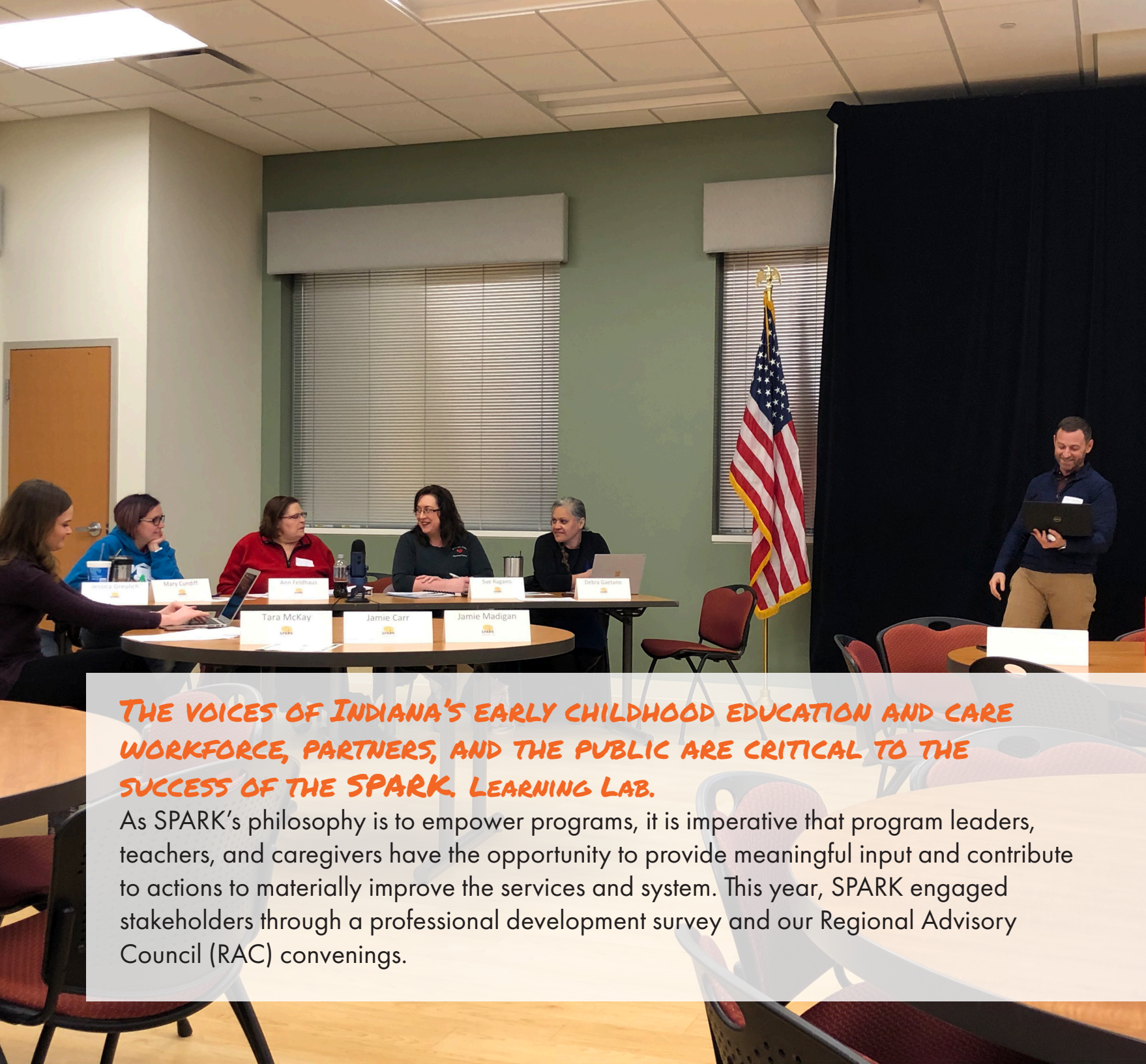
As programs continue their quality journey, they become eligible for higher levels of recognition. To support these programs, in 2020, SPARK Learning Lab created group coaching opportunities known as Paths to QUALITY™ advancement cohorts. These group coaching opportunities focus on the knowledge and skills needed to embed higher-quality practices in the early childhood education and care program. These practices then reflect the standards or quality found in the higher levels of Paths to QUALITY™ and a program can request to be rated to receive recognition for this improvement. SPARK also supported programs requesting their Paths QUALITY™ rating and worked closely with OECOSL to streamline the rating process, making it a more efficient and easier experience for programs.

All of these efforts contributed to an increase in Paths to QUALITY™ advancement at a rate of 28%, 23 percentage points higher than SPARK Learning Lab’s stated objective, with more than 200 programs advancing at least one level during SPARK’s second year.





# BE A VOICE



*THE VOICES OF INDIANA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE WORKFORCE, PARTNERS, AND THE PUBLIC ARE CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE SPARK. LEARNING LAB.*

As SPARK's philosophy is to empower programs, it is imperative that program leaders, teachers, and caregivers have the opportunity to provide meaningful input and contribute to actions to materially improve the services and system. This year, SPARK engaged stakeholders through a professional development survey and our Regional Advisory Council (RAC) convenings.



In June 2021, SPARK Learning Lab collaborated with OECOSL and Indiana's CCR&Rs to publish a professional development needs assessment that was distributed to more than 28,000 early childhood education and care professionals, partners, and families throughout the state of Indiana. This year's survey returned 1,305 responses which was a 346% increase from the 2020 survey. The responses represented all 92 counties, all program types, various levels of employment within the early childhood education and care programs, as well as government administration, parents, and community partners. The assessment provided SPARK Learning Lab, OECOSL, and our CCR&R partners rich data about the workforce's professional development needs. Four key findings assisted SPARK in creating a better professional development experience for the workforce.

1. Provide training at intermediate and advanced levels for experienced professionals.
2. Offer workshops or conferences either in a live webinar or face-to-face format.
3. Keep face-to-face training local (1 hour or less of travel time), and respect participants' time by limiting training to 1 hour.
4. Maintain common COVID-19 protocols for in-person training, such as mask wearing, social distancing, and self-screening prior to the event.

SPARK Learning Lab convenes five Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), one for each Service Delivery Area (SDA). The RACs are composed of 10 to 15 members who serve 2-year terms. Members represent all four types of early childhood education and care programs, partner organizations, and other community organizations that have a vested interest in early childhood education. RAC members are to act as ambassadors for SPARK Learning Lab and bring not only the voice of their organization but that of their community to the table to strategically aid and advise SPARK on our services.

Members join the RACs through an application process. In Year 2, SPARK received 72 applications for membership, a decrease of 20%. Of these applicants, 39 accepted an invitation to join one the RACs. RACs met quarterly and, even in the midst of a pandemic, SPARK successfully held all 20 meetings virtually with a total overall attendance of 554 members, partners, and those from the public.

During 2020-2021, RAC members continued to impact changes and enhancements to professional development for Indiana's early childhood education and care workforce. They offered feedback on Paths to QUALITY™ non-cash incentives, such as adding social-emotional learning materials and memberships to recognized national early childhood professional organizations; identifying the need for an on-demand Universal Precautions training, a Paths to QUALITY™ Introduction session, and Spanish versions of the four required Health & Safety Orientation modules which SPARK is currently creating or has since published on Indiana Learning Paths; and testing new OECOSL initiatives such as the Build, Learn, Grow Stabilization Grant application process.

## RAC INITIATIVES



Spanish Safe Sleep  
On-Demand



Mandatory Classes On  
Demand (Spanish)



Tested BLG Stabilization  
Grant Application



On-Demand version of  
Universal Precautions



Paths to QUALITY  
Introduction Session  
On-Demand



Updated Path to  
QUALITY Non-Cash  
Incentives

# NATIONAL ENGAGEMENT & RESEARCH

## **SPARK LEADERS STAY UP TO DATE WITH THE EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE FIELD**

by remaining connected to leading national organizations, actively engaging in national conversations with notable thought leaders, and presenting the work of SPARK Learning Lab.



SPARK Learning Lab is currently represented on the National Association of Family Child Care's (NAFCC) Accreditation Council. This council has the responsibility of annually reviewing and revising the standards for NAFCC Accreditation and ensuring the process is equitable and efficient in operation. Mike Bachman, SPARK Learning Lab Director, currently sits as the Incoming Chair of the Council and will act as Chair from 2022-2024. As part of this work, SPARK Learning Lab also has a voice in the development of NAFCC professional development opportunities for family child care homes. Mike co-facilitates a national community of practice with Tammy Dwyer (Maine) for agencies that provide technical assistance to family child care homes seeking or maintaining their NAFCC national accreditation. Through this engagement, SPARK has access to cutting edge research on family child care home education and care, as well as emerging best practices.



Multiple members of SPARK Learning Lab are engaged in Equity by Design (eXd), a Shine Early Learning cohort in which participants learn how to systematically dismantle the systemic injustices that are present in our educational structures today and design a better educational experience for all children and families. Through this work, all SPARK team members have engaged in a full year of professional development and conversation regarding individual identity, the historical context that has led our country to where we are today, and how SPARK's services can support others to do the same. SPARK team members created an internal community of practice to leverage this learning and discuss how it impacts daily practice. For SPARK, the principal takeaway from this work is that each individual is in a different place in their journey, and SPARK is committed to the ongoing exploration and implementation of better practices.



SPARK participated with representatives from OECOSL and Early Learning Indiana on the First Children's Finance Collaboratory. The experience provided access to national experts, the latest research, and a framework to analyze essential financial elements. Through a process of mapping and synthesizing Indiana's child care financial ecosystem data, the team identified strengths, opportunities for improvement, and next steps. Notable identified areas for improvement were to develop statewide child care business competencies, identify scalable elements from the shared services pilots, and increase access to capital.



Executive leadership was selected to be a part of the Promising Ventures Fellowship. This accelerator program is designed to meet the unique needs of social entrepreneurs in early childhood development. Participation provided SPARK connections to national experts, access to the latest research and thought leadership, and resources that can now be found in My SPARK Learning Lab.



SPARK leadership joined OECOSL leadership as members of BUILD's Technical Assistance Leader Community of Practice. Through a participatory process, key areas of technical assistance were explored, such as virtual coaching, use of technology, coaching for equity, developing professionals, and evaluation. Learnings from the community of practice were used to inform the development and deployment of SPARK services.



SPARK continued a partnership with JUMP IN for Healthy Kids to implement the Better Together program which focuses on instilling healthy eating and physical activity habits early in life through program-level and system-level improvements targeting early care and education settings. Through this tremendous work, early care and education providers participated in learning collaboratives, received coaching and technical assistance, and accessed Go NAPSACC, a web-based platform that assists in the adoption of best practices and healthy habits. Learnings from this year were featured and shared nationally and statewide at conferences, including at the National Help Me Grow Forum and the Indiana School Health Network Virtual Conference. Additionally, the work has provided opportunities to collaborate across the state with organizations to focus on statewide systems-level change.



# What We Learned

To continuously improve, we conduct ongoing research, engage with Shine Early Learning and our national partners, and evaluate our processes, services, and solutions are on the cutting edge of the best practices in the field. Through our research, outreach, and evaluation, SPARK Learning Lab has identified the following common technical assistance needs and trends.

1

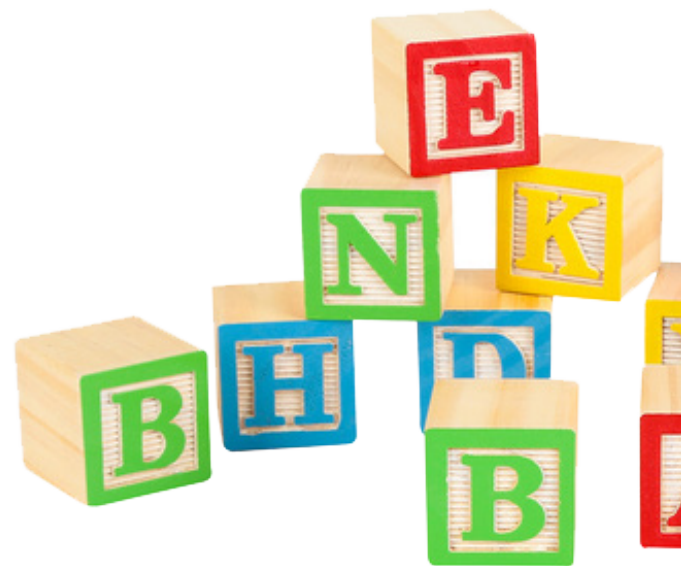
Center the technical assistance system on ensuring children and families have equitable access to, equitable experiences in, and equitable outcomes from high-quality early childhood and out-of-school-time programming.

2

Increase access to coaching and training by offering learning opportunities in a hybrid environment that includes simultaneous face-to-face and virtual options.

3

Professional development is needed, including coaching and training on best business practices that cover workforce needs, business efficiency and efficacy, access to capital, supply-building, facilities, partnerships, and financing.



evaluate our services to identify opportunities for innovation, enhancement, and improvement. This essential work ensures research and survey efforts, as well as data analysis from completed ISATs, training requests, and targeted coaching plans,

4

COVID-19 continues to impact the early childhood field and specific needs include staffing; the mental health & wellness of staff, children, and their families; supply shortages; policy changes; and requirements for funding opportunities.

5

Workforce recruitment and retention is a key factor in the stabilization of early childhood education and care businesses, as well as the mental health & wellness of our workforce.



# YEAR 3: ENGAGEMENT IS KEY

*AS SPARK LEARNING LAB REFLECTS ON YEAR 2 AND PLANS FOR YEAR 3, IT IS APPARENT THAT SPARK WILL CONTINUE TO EVOLVE OVER TIME BASED ON FEEDBACK FROM OUR STAKEHOLDERS AND NATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, BUT THE SERVICES WILL ONLY SUPPORT AND IMPACT THOSE WHO ACTIVELY ENGAGE AND PARTICIPATE.*

For this reason, SPARK Learning Lab has determined that our Year 3 priorities will focus on increasing engagement of both new and returning early childhood education and care professionals with SPARK Learning Lab in activities that create safer and higher-quality programming for children and families.



**For Year 3, in addition to the identified performance measures, SPARK will measure and monitor its success by tracking six defining engagement objectives:**

**Increase the number of ISAT submissions**

**Ensure that My SPARK Learning Lab includes resources and training to support all of the practices found within the ISAT**

**Increase the number of training completions**

**Increase the number of programs that accept SPARK's coaching when there is an identified regulatory need**

**Increase the number of new professionals using SPARK's services**

**Convert the professionals who use SPARK's services for the first time into returning customers**

As with previous years, SPARK Learning Lab will also continue to have an impact on Paths to QUALITY™ enrollment and advancement, reducing the number of critical regulatory violations by supporting the embedding of best practices, and increasing the opportunity for the education advancement of the workforce. Key strategies to doing so include, but are not limited to, continuing to focus on equitable accessibility, providing the right intensity of training and coaching at the right time, and strengthening our relationship with partners to decrease existing inefficiencies for professionals.

Finally, with the implementation of the American Rescue Plan Act's Build, Learn, Grow Stabilization Grants and the possibility of the passage of the federal Build Back Better bill, SPARK Learning Lab will heavily focus on supporting the increase of program leaders' business acumen, as well as increasing mental health & wellness across the workforce, in the coming year. SPARK has learned from our stakeholders and national relationships that these two content areas are a high priority and can drive SPARK engagement. Specific activities in Year 3 will include additional Facebook Live and local business events, increased business group coaching, and supporting conversations for professionals with licensed clinical social workers.

# SPARK's Vision for Tomorrow



**More professionals throughout the state are empowered by SPARK's services**



**More businesses are sustainable and the sector stabilizes**



**More of the workforce feels healthy and well**



**More children and families have equitable access to, equitable experiences in, and equitable outcomes from high-quality early childhood and out-of-school-time programming**





# SPARK

LEARNING LAB

[www.indianaspark.com](http://www.indianaspark.com)

