



**SPARK Learning Lab
2022 Annual Report**



Letter from the Director

**To our
early childhood
and out-of-school
time programs, our
partners, and
our friends,**

As the 2021-2022 program year draws to a close, we are again grateful for each and every one of you. This year, SPARK Learning Lab experienced monumental growth. In collaboration with the Family Social Services Administration, Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning, SPARK provided intensive mental health & wellness support to early childhood and out of school time programs throughout the state of Indiana. Programs participated in Facilitated Peer Support Groups with Licensed Clinical Social Workers and Learn the Signs Act Early training, received specialized behavioral and mental health support through cohorts and in-program consultation, and, for the first time ever, every early childhood and out of school time professional in the state had access to Building Wellness, a free, comprehensive Employee Assistance Program. SPARK also intensified our business support services. All of our Coaches were trained and delivered the Strengthening Business Practices curriculum which builds upon SPARK's Fundamentals to Business Sustainability Collection in Indiana

Learning Paths. For programs needing deeper training and coaching, SPARK hosted quarterly business cohorts and offered one-on-one business consultation with trained business professionals that understand the uniqueness of early childhood and out of school time business. All of these efforts, along with new training, resources, learning cohorts, and increased coaching, led to an extremely successful year for SPARK Learning Lab.

With all of you, the state of Indiana saw an increase in the safety and quality of early education and out of school time programs throughout the state. This year, more than 200 eligible programs participating in Paths to QUALITY™ advanced at least one level, increasing access to quality early learning and care. SPARK also deployed new content to support professionals in choosing the degree, credential, or certificate that is right for them and referred interested individuals to our partners at the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children for assistance with the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Indiana scholarship. SPARK targeted programs with safe sleep violations to support their practices and added new content to My SPARK Learning Lab addressing best practices in safe sleep.

This year, SPARK Learning Lab also adopted a vision for our work, a new mission, and new core values that better reflect who we are, what we do, and what we want for children and families. Our vision recognizes the innate power that children have, and acknowledges that the current systems, which were designed to strip them of that power, need to be redesigned from the margins. At SPARK Learning Lab, we envision a world where children become champions of their own making; where historical biases and systemic inequities no longer stand in the way of their infinite promise. Our new mission asks us to design and deliver inclusive, anti-bias, and rigorous approaches to eliminate the gaps between young children's inherent potential and their achievement in school and life. With our partners, we accelerate child and family outcomes that honor the aspirations and cultures of the communities we serve. SPARK's new core values center our work and permeate the services we provide. We commit to continuous quality improvement through data-informed learning. We demonstrate integrity, openness and transparency as a means by which to build trust among our team and the communities we serve through transparent and open communication. We embody a growth mindset and believe challenges and barriers are opportunities to refine skills, solutions, and approaches. We never settle for the way things are, we are impatient for change, and dismantle inequities when and where they are present. Finally, through caring teams and community we will be successful in our mission, by building authentic, trusting, caring relationships that connect us through our shared humanity. We look forward to working with programs and partners to help Indiana's children, families, and communities achieve their true greatness.



Mike Bachman
Project Director
SPARK Learning Lab





SPARK Partners

SPARK Learning Lab brings together the expertise of local, state, and national organizations into a program-driven tiered quality improvement support system. We value the inherent worth, dignity, and abilities of all individuals, families, groups and communities. We establish strong bonds with co-workers, peers, and others grounded in compassion and concern for both who they are as people and what they do as professionals. We actively seek out others' perspectives and feelings and take time to understand. By working together in solidarity, building on strengths, and valuing the inherent worth and abilities of all people and groups, we improve access, experiences, and outcomes for our stakeholders: children, families, employees, partners, funders, and the communities we serve.

Early Childhood and Out of School Time 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 and its program partners rely 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. SPARK'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

SPARK Learning Lab is a project of 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.

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 expertise of Erikson Institute. Erikson Institute is the nation's leading provider of graduate-level programs in early childhood education. Through Town Square (townsquarecentral.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

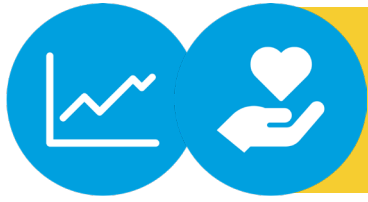
Transform Consulting Group (TCG) is an Indiana-based strategic and data-informed consulting firm focused on serving government, nonprofit, education, and community entities with a specialty in early childhood education and care. TCG helps advance SPARK's mission by providing expertise in stakeholder 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. Additionally TCG provides support and coordination for SPARK's Regional Advisory Councils.

In 2022 TCG partnered with SPARK to host 20 local business support events for providers across Indiana.

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.





New Business and Mental Health & Wellness Partners

The Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning heard you and provided SPARK Learning Lab with additional funding to intensify both our business and mental health & wellness services. To do so, SPARK has brought new local, state, and national experts to support our early childhood and out of school time programs. More information about all of our partners and our intensive business and mental health & wellness programs can be found on the SPARK website (www.indianaspark.com) under SPARK Supports.

Civitas Strategies Early Start

Civitas Strategies Early Start (CSES) is known throughout the nation for building resilient child care businesses and was recently recognized by Tom Copeland, considered the nation's leading expert in family child care business, for their exceptional service to family child care. CSES combines extensive expertise in business management with a deep familiarity of child care and early learning operations. This intersection allows CSES to support child care businesses in increasing revenues and decreasing costs stabilizing the industry in your community. The partnership with CSES brings high quality one-on-one business consultation, training, resources, and coaching to Indiana programs.

ComPsych

ComPsych Corporation is the world's largest provider of employee assistance programs (EAP) and is the purveyor of the services behind Indiana's Building Wellness program. ComPsych's passion to over-deliver on expectations, continual commitment to quality, integrity, ingenuity, unparalleled service and partnership allowed ComPsych and SPARK Learning Lab to create customized programs for every early childhood and out of school time professional in the state of Indiana and their family.

Licensed Clinical Social Workers

Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) are professionals that work in a wide variety of settings to provide emotional support, mental health evaluations, therapy and case management services to people experiencing psychological, emotional, medical, social and/or familial challenges. SPARK has identified and partnered with local LCSWs across the state of Indiana to provide Facilitated Peer Support Groups built on the reflective supervision model and the nationally recognized Learn the Signs Act Early training.

Well Being Informed by Science and Evidence in Indiana (WISE)

In partnership with the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning (OECOSL), researchers from the Center for Evaluation, Policy, and Research (CEPR) at Indiana University are actively conducting an objective, third-party evaluation of all of SPARK's intensive business and mental health & wellness programs. The purpose of the evaluation is to support SPARK in making timely and impactful revisions to services while they are being delivered and to support OECOSL in making data-informed decisions about their investments in these areas for future implementations.



Year 3 Highlights

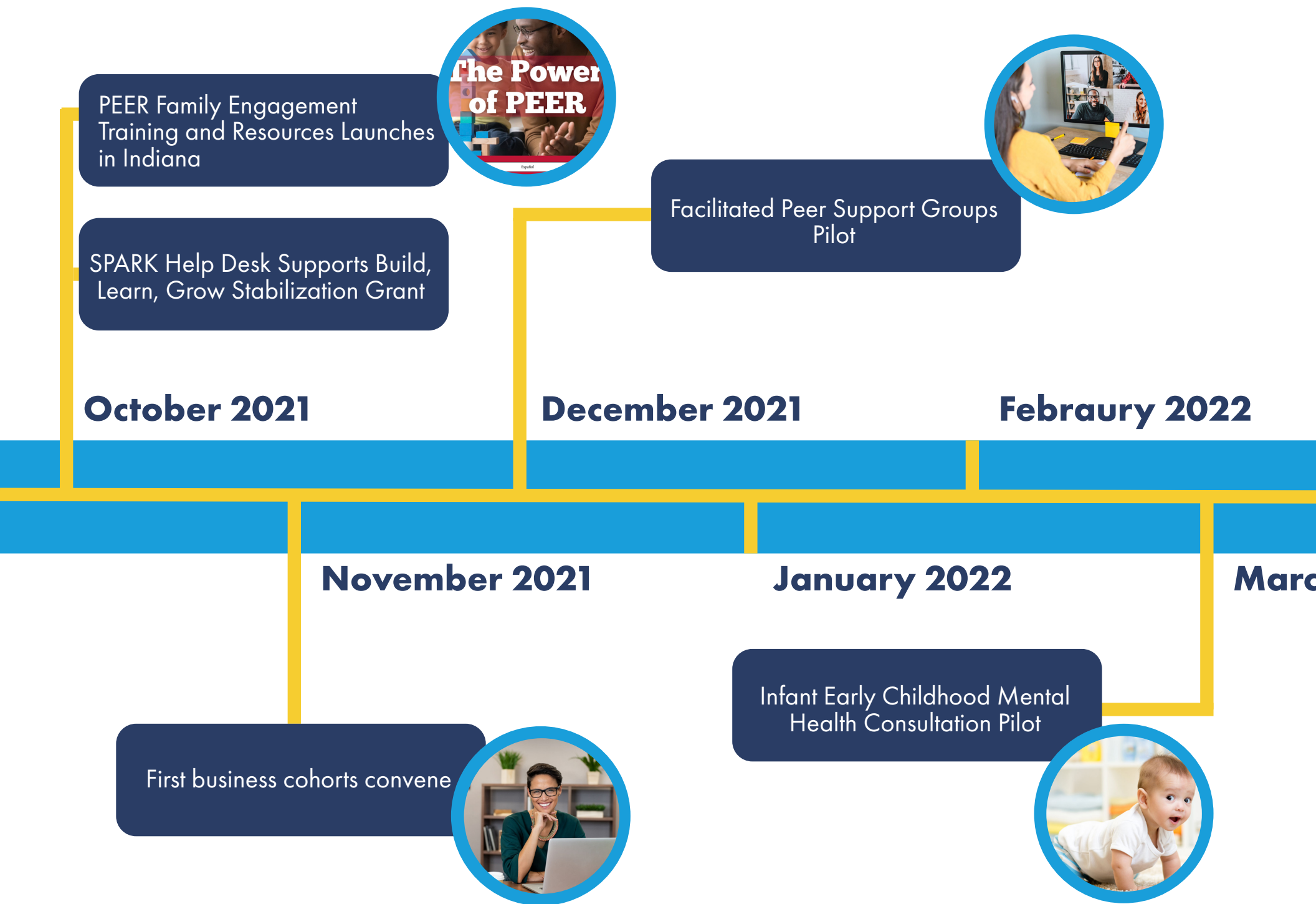
Our tiered model provides coaching, training, resources, and peer learning all under one roof through Supports for All, Targeted Coaching and Support, and Intensive Support. The available quality support services vary in scope, sequence, and intensity, according to the individual needs of each program.

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 Course Collections in Indiana Learning Paths; intensify our business and mental health & wellness supports, including Building Wellness; provide targeted safe sleep support to programs serving infants; and increase the number of high-quality learning options for families by supporting programs in advancing to higher levels of Paths to QUALITY™.

The goal for SPARK Learning Lab for our third 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 objective were:

- 1** Maintain the percentage of programs that were enrolled in Paths to QUALITY™.
Result: Percentage of programs enrolled was increased by +1.67%
- 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 6.5%
- 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 plants 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% of those interested were referred
- 5** Create 8 resources, training opportunities, or events that promote education opportunities for the early childhood workforce.
Result: 10 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: 95.5% of programs did not have a repeat violation
- 7** Create 8 resources, training opportunities, or events that promote best safe sleep practices.
Result: 10 resources, training opportunities, or events created





SPARK Course Collections created

April 2022



Diversity, Equity, Inclusions, and Belonging as Featured Topic created on My SPARK Learning Lab

June 2022

August 2022

March 2022

May 2022

July 2022

September 2022

Building Wellness program begins statewide



Coaching Self-Referral begins



Powering the Empowered

Indiana's early childhood and out of school time programs are empowered professionals with the capability to identify and address quality improvement opportunities in their programs and SPARK Learning Lab is here to support them with training, peer learning, coaching, and resources to make the hard work a little easier.

SPARK Help Desk

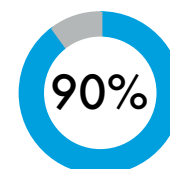
Whether a provider is having trouble accessing I-LEAD, Indiana Learning Paths, or My SPARK Learning Lab, needing assistance in identifying where to start, or could use a little help thinking through new knowledge or implementing new practices, SPARK provides support at every step. The SPARK Help Desk 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 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.

In the 2021-2022 program year, the SPARK Help Desk was a key support for programs learning about and navigating the Build, Learn, Grow Stabilization Grant process and became the conduit for programs with more advanced needs connecting with SPARK business services to ensure successful grant application. In total, the SPARK Help Desk supported 11,078 cases in 2021-2022, an increase of 91% over the previous year. Of those that responded to a follow-up survey after using the Help Desk service, 90% agree or strongly agree that the Help Desk is an easy and quick resource and 90% of respondents felt their question or need was resolved. Overall, 92% of respondents reported being satisfied with the Help Desk Service and are likely to recommend the Help Desk with a net promoter score of 75.

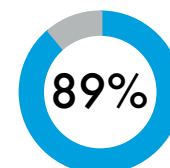
Throughout the year, we have heard from professionals across the state that the best support occurs when it is conveniently available and easily accessible. After digging deeper with our Regional Advisory Councils about how SPARK can better meet needs, SPARK identified a number of significant upgrades to the Help Desk experience to be implemented in 2023. These features include scheduling a call ahead of time based on the caller's availability, the ability to send text messages, and expanding our technology to get customers the answers they need even faster.

Help Desk Satisfaction

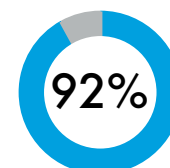
Quick and easy resource



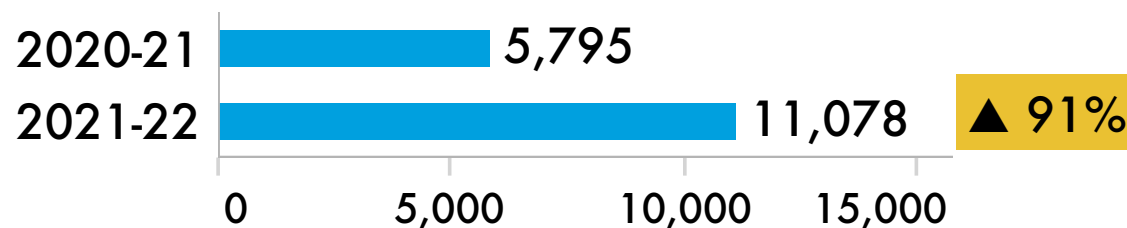
Question or need was resolved



Satisfied with the Help Desk service



Help Desk Support Cases





My SPARK Learning Lab & Town Square

My SPARK Learning Lab, Indiana's centralized knowledge center for early childhood and out of school professionals, houses more than 600 resources, such as job-aids, tools, templates, and learning opportunities, that make it easier for leaders and teachers to put into practice what they learned in training. Town Square is the Family Child Care (FCC) specific area of My SPARK Learning Lab with resources developed by and for FCC programs. Content in Town Square includes videos of actual FCC providers modeling best practices in their home programs. The Featured Topics section of My SPARK Learning Lab indexes all of the resources in relevant areas into one simple click. This year, SPARK continued its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging by adding it as a Featured Topic, making nearly 50 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) related articles immediately available.

At the end of the 2021-2022 year, My SPARK Learning Lab had 21,457 logins from 7,697 active accounts and Town Square had 329 registered users accessing the FCC specific area 1,497 unique times.

SPARK Learning Lab's training supports the early childhood and out of school time professional's knowledge and skill building. From required training to more advanced learning opportunities, SPARK Learning Lab offered 91 unique training titles this year. Some, such as "Preparing for Tax Season", "Using the CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early" and "Trauma and the Brain" were offered as a result of a partnership with SPARK Learning Lab or in collaboration with one of SPARK's partners. This year alone, nearly 40,000 learning opportunities were completed by 14,230 members of the Indiana workforce, a 105% increase in members over the previous year.

As SPARK continued to identify, curate, and create high quality content to support our early childhood and out of school time workforce, we wrestled with concerns of linguistic equity with our training and resources. By the end of 2021-2022 program year, SPARK has produced or made available more than 164 Spanish events, learning opportunities, and resources, however this is only a small percentage of SPARK's library. Moving forward, SPARK will continue to make our commitment to linguistic equity more visible starting with all Paths to QUALITY™ (PTQ) success tools, making PTQ more accessible than ever before.

As part of SPARK's commitment to delivering high quality experiences for all of our customers, over the past year SPARK has engaged BlueSky Commerce for assistance in prioritizing and roadmapping our technology upgrades that will debut during program year four. Early childhood and out of school time professionals will see a refreshed look and feel in My SPARK Learning Lab that promises a new appearance, easier navigation, and a faster and smoother Indiana Self Assessment Tool (ISAT) experience. SPARK will also launch a new My SPARK Learning Lab app for both iPhone and Android that allows professionals instant access to all of SPARK's resources, training, and Help Desk services through their devices. This will also allow SPARK to push notifications out about new resources and training.

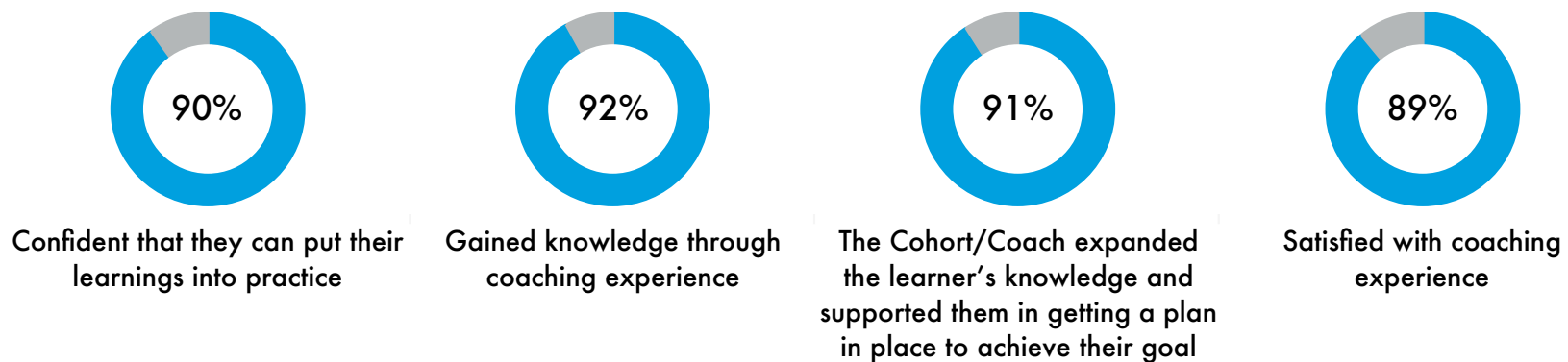
Compliance & Quality Coaching

SPARK Learning Lab continues to offer both group and individual coaching opportunities that occur virtually or on-site and in-program. This year, programs primarily accessed coaching via partner referral (836), with 12 partner organizations making referrals to SPARK, or the Indiana Self Assessment Tool (284). SPARK Coaching supports both compliance needs and quality improvement initiatives.

In total, 679 programs participated in coaching opportunities since October 2021, 149 in individual coaching and 530 in group coaching. Of those that responded to a survey after their coaching experience, 92% agreed or strongly agreed that they gained new knowledge through the coaching experience and 90% agreed or strongly were confident that they could put their learnings into practice. Integral to SPARK's coaching approach is the development of internal systems that set the conditions for program success. 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Cohort/Coach expanded the learner's knowledge and supported them in getting a plan in place to achieve their goal. Overall, 89% were satisfied or very satisfied with the coaching services that they received with a net promoter score of 90.

Programs that participated in coaching experiences this year overwhelmingly agree that their programs are better because of their engagement, but the number of programs participating is less than 17% of all programs. We heard from our Regional Advisory Councils and partners prevalent statements like "Coaching isn't available anymore," "Coaching is all virtual," and "It just takes too much work to get a Coach and I need help now." In response, SPARK is making considerable changes to how programs access coaching services next year. In collaboration with our Regional Advisory Councils, SPARK will build and implement a robust and comprehensive communications plan that promotes our coaching, dispels myths about the services, and gives every program the name and face of the SPARK Coach that is assigned to their program. Program leaders should watch their mail in late November and early December for a coaching flyer that will include more information. SPARK is also launching a referral form on our website that allows programs to self-identify and receive coaching. Go to indianaspark.com and scroll to the bottom of the page for more information. Finally, SPARK will reposition the Indiana Self Assessment Tool (ISAT) as an assessment tool that can be used to identify and prioritize quality improvement goals instead of the barrier between a program in need of coaching and their SPARK Coach.

Coaching Experience Satisfaction





Building Sustainable Businesses

The pandemic and subsequent response and relief opportunities highlighted a business support need for early childhood and out of school time programs. According to Indiana's Early Learning Advisory Committee's COVID Impact Dashboard, over 750 programs closed between March 2020 and June 2021 causing a net loss of 4,500 seats. This year, the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Time launched Child Care Stabilization Grants in an effort to stabilize and sustain businesses that successfully remained operational during the pandemic. SPARK Learning Lab was the identified support system for programs navigating the application process which consisted of providing staffing and enrollment information and projecting how the funds will be spent in alignment with the federally approved expenses. Programs were also required to spend no less than 25% of the award on increasing staff compensation or benefits which meant programs needed to understand the complexities of supporting these increases after the funds were exhausted and the tax implications of receiving the award. The more than 4,000 support cases received by SPARK Learning Lab in this brief six month period demonstrated the need for more intensive business support in building more sustainable early childhood and out of school time businesses, and SPARK answered the call.

Business Resources & Training

SPARK Learning Lab recognizes the importance of building and sustaining an early childhood or out-of-school time business. From building an understanding of the cost per child and annual expenses to marketing to potential families and employees to writing job descriptions and creating equitable salary scales, program leaders must be as business savvy as they are pedagogically inclined. Program leaders expressed a need to develop business competencies and have easy access to the right tools and templates to relieve the administrative burden. In order to meet this need, SPARK hired both a Fiscal Specialist and an Human Resources Specialist and developed a partnership with Civitas Strategies Early Start to identify, curate, and create resources in support of business practices in both English and Spanish. With these additions to the SPARK team and ecosystem, SPARK published more than 30 business resources in My SPARK Learning Lab this year that were accessed 1,256 times by early childhood and out of school time educators.

SPARK also wrapped training around the resources for those program leaders that needed additional support to effectively use the tools and templates found in My SPARK Learning Lab. Training sessions were offered in both English and Spanish in-person, via live webinar, and on-demand. Business training included such topics as creating a business plan and budget, successfully scaling your business, and preparing for tax season. This year, SPARK created 5 new business training titles and saw 966 participants engage with our business training, with 80% feeling confident that they could immediately apply what they learned.

SPARK also invested in the Strengthening Business Practices curriculum offered by the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance by having all our coaches trained in facilitating the curriculum and having three team members become Anchor Trainers to ensure the sustainability of the training. The four-part Strengthening Business Practices series has been offered several times in the past year with 622 providers that have participated, and SPARK is working on developing the series in an on-demand format to reach even more programs that are in need of these essential business competencies.

31

of business
resources or
trainings
created

1256

of resource
downloaded

3055

of unique
providers who
took business
trainings

322

Business
Sustainability
Training
completions

**Business
Training and
Resources
by the
Numbers**

Business Coaching & Consultation

For those programs that wanted to dig deeper, learn from their peers, and receive expert advice from a SPARK Coach, SPARK deployed nine business cohorts led by three SPARK Business Coaches who come to the field with both business and early childhood and out-of-school time programming experience. SPARK saw a significant increase in participation in the cohorts over time, ending the year with 195 total participants. SPARK attributes the increase to a change in outreach practices, moving from an email system to direct outreach from the Business Coach which reinforces the importance of relationship-based coaching. SPARK is hoping to scale this learning into other learning opportunities in the 2022-2023 program year. Those participating in SPARK's business cohorts attested to the value with 90.2%, stating that the opportunity increased their business knowledge and skills.

Some programs are still in need of individualized support. At times, the individualized support required the sharing of sensitive information related to taxes, budget, salary and benefits. To ensure the confidentiality of and security for programs, SPARK Learning Lab leaned on our partners at Civitas Strategies Early Start to provide one-on-one business consultation with experts from across the country. Through the SPARK website, programs can access this free service after a few simple clicks and providing some basic information about their needs. More than 52 programs took advantage of the one-on-one business consultation in 2021-2022 and SPARK is hoping to see this increase 2022-2023 through intentional outreach and referral.

195
**Programs engaged in
the first year of
business cohorts**





Local Business Events

In order to support the creation of sustainable and stable businesses, a strong connection between local business experts and early childhood and out of school time owners is essential. To facilitate these connections, SPARK partnered with 15 local early childhood coalitions and supporting agencies to host 20 events that gave early childhood leaders access to human resources specialists, financial institutions, lawyers, benefit brokers, and more. While the intention was to host local, in-person events, COVID-19 caused SPARK to quickly pivot and offer 18 of the 20 events virtually, using breakout rooms to ensure each attendee was able to ask their questions and begin cultivating long-term relationships with the business professionals in their area. In total, 507 program leaders and 42 business partners participated in the events, including more than 55 program leaders in one event conducted wholly in Spanish.



A Healthy & Well Workforce

SPARK Learning Lab recognizes that for programs, children, and families to thrive, our early childhood and out of school time workforce must be healthy and well. This year, we intensified our efforts to support the mental health & wellness of all early childhood and out of school time professionals across the state. These supports included resources, training, specialized challenging behavior support, and a free, shared Employee Assistance Program.

Provider Support Groups

In October 2021, SPARK partnered with Stephan Viehweg, MSW, ACSW, LCSW, IMH-E to design a space where early childhood and out-of-school time professionals can reflect with a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and a small group of their peers on how they are experiencing children and families in amidst and post pandemic. Through reflective supervision, the LCSW and participants can brainstorm next steps, available support resources, and possible solutions. In the face of difficult times, the groups were designed to relieve some of the anxiety and frustration that comes with being an early childhood or out-of-school time professional and create greater retention. Provider Support Groups were piloted in November and December 2021 and then scaled in January 2022. Since their launch, SPARK has hosted 10 Provider Support Groups and served 104 professionals in partnership with three LCSWs from across the state. In a post survey opportunity, 100% of respondents reported the support group provided them with knowledge and access to resources that can support their health and wellness in the workplace. One participant shared, "The diverse array of people that provided honest feedback and knowledge... allowed me to grow as an individual and implement in our centers."

Building Wellness

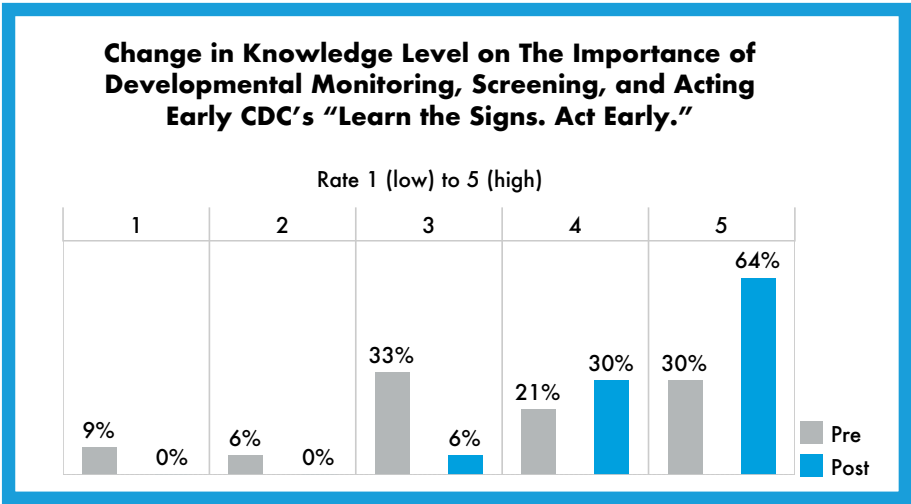
Application data from the Child Care Stabilization Grants provided by the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning using funds from the federal American Rescue Plan Act reinforced that benefits for early childhood and out-of-school time professionals are limited, if offered at all. To begin addressing this need while ensuring all professionals and their families have access to a menu of mental health, business, and lifestyle supports, SPARK Learning Lab leveraged the relationships of Shine Early Learning and Acelero, Inc. to bring the same comprehensive Employee Assistance Program (EAP) available to our own bellwether exemplar Head Start program staff and SPARK Learning Lab employees to the entire early childhood and out-of-school time workforce and their families. Introduced in May 2022, Building Wellness uses the EAP services of ComPsych to support our workforce with resources, consultation, and training. In the first few months, 565 unique users accessed the available services. To increase awareness and engagement, SPARK is implementing a large communications effort beginning in October 2022 that includes a text message campaign and mailing posters, magnets, and postcards to every program in the state. SPARK will also hire three to five Mental Health & Wellness Coaches that can provide information, training, and assist programs in embedding Building Wellness into the culture of their program and benefits plan. SPARK intends to deploy these Coaches in support of Building Wellness and our other Mental Health & Wellness offerings in December 2022.



Training, Coaching, and Consultation

Feedback from programs, including our Regional Advisory Councils, showed that one of the most common stressors for early childhood and out-of-school professionals is navigating, negotiating, and mitigating challenging behaviors, especially in the wake of inconsistent attendance, program closures, and the trauma brought on by the pandemic. To support programs, SPARK piloted and scaled training, coaching, and consultative services that consider the developmental abilities of the child, the mental health of both the child and the professional in the classroom or home, and any wrap around support that is available through Building Wellness, SPARK services, or the community.

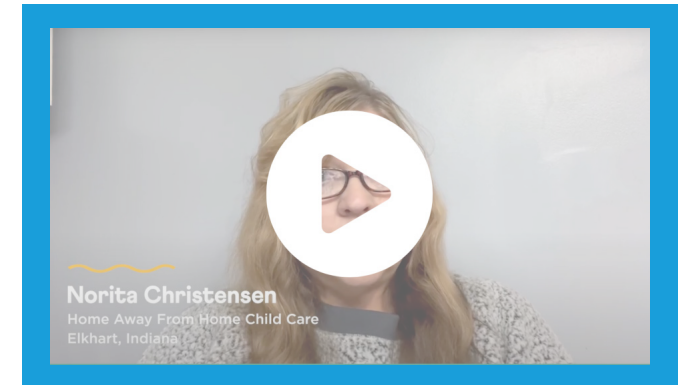
In partnership with Stephan Viehweg, MSW, ACSW, LCSW, IMH-C, SPARK piloted and scaled the CDC’s “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” (LTSAE) training in nine counties. This training teaches professionals in early childhood settings how to use the CDC’s developmental milestones screening tools. The goal of the training is to provide professionals with the tools and vocabulary to support children and families when challenging behaviors arise, as we know the behavior is just a symptom, and many times the cause is found within the developmental abilities of the child. During the 2021 -2022 program year, SPARK was able to offer 10 sessions of LTSAE to 65 professionals around the state. Participants are asked to complete a pre and post-survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the training and rate their knowledge of the importance of developmental monitoring, screening, and acting early on the data it provides on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Before the training, 48% of the participants rated their knowledge between 1 and 3 with 15% choosing either 1 or 2. After the training, the percentage of participants rating their knowledge at 5 doubled to more than 60%, while the percentage of participants choosing a 1 or 2 fell to 0%. Participating programs are also introduced to Help Me Grow Indiana staff to provide supports for scoring the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and connect families to community resources.



SPARK also offered learning opportunities from specialized professionals in conjunction with on-site, in-program support. In February 2022, SPARK embarked on a pilot in partnership with Kids Count Therapy (KCT) in central Indiana where cohorts of programs received coaching around effective strategies in managing behavioral and mental health challenges. Participating programs were eligible for on-site consultation with a certified mental health professional specializing in young children and/or a behavioral analyst. The pilot provided cohort coaching opportunities to 12 early childhood professionals. Those that participated in the cohorts indicated that it provided a chance to learn more ideas, discuss specific areas of concern, and receive feedback. One program that received the on-site consultation said, “It provided us with specific strategies to use to help individual children” SPARK is working with KCT and seeking other mental health and behavioral support organizations throughout the state to determine if scaling these programs is possible.

Better Together Collaborative and Wellness Support

In 2020, Jump IN for Healthy Kids and SPARK Learning Lab received a grant from Nemours Health Systems to implement the Better Together Collaborative in Indiana. Better Together places early childhood programs in cohorts of 15 to 20 to identify areas for improvement using the nationally recognized Go NAPSACC assessment tool and receive training and coaching to improve those areas. The Go NAPSACC assesses seven key areas of programmatic quality specific to the health and wellness of children, including but not limited to breastfeeding, oral health, physical activity, and child nutrition. Programs work with a coach to create a plan for improvement and learn from and with their peers strategies to support their quality improvement. Over the two years of the Collaborative (October 2020-July 2022), SPARK supported 65 programs and 107 professionals in low-income communities serving 2,352 children by providing 146 hours of training and coaching. These efforts increased the number of best practices achieved in Physical Activity, Screen Time, Breast Feeding, and Child Nutrition based pre and post-assessments. While Go NAPSACC has been scaled and is now available statewide, the training from the Collaborative is not. SPARK Learning Lab is working with the creators of this essential content to make it available on-demand and through SPARK's wellness cohorts.



Click to learn more about the benefits of Better Together from an Indiana Provider!



2352

Children served
by the participating
programs

107

Early learning
professionals
trained

65

Programs in
low-income
communities that
participated



Giving More Families Access to High Quality Care

Foundational to the work of SPARK Learning Lab and in alignment with the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Time's vision for children and families is our goal to increase access to affordable high quality early childhood and out of school time programming. In the state of Indiana, quality is measured by Paths to QUALITY™ (PTQ), Indiana's quality rating and improvement system. SPARK allocates resources and delivers support for ensuring compliance with licensing and registration, making formal and non-formal education opportunities and pathways more visible for professionals in the field, and maintaining programs that are enrolled in PTQ; all of which sets the conditions for programs to advance through the four levels of the system.

Licensing Compliance

SPARK Learning Lab works very closely with the licensing body at the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Time in supporting programs with compliance and quality improvement, so families have peace of mind that their child's program is safe and healthy while they are not able to with them. Through a referral system, Licensing Consultants are able to identify for SPARK those programs that have compliance issues or are interested in quality improvement and PTQ. Referred programs are prioritized and are contacted by a SPARK Coach within days of receiving the referral. Programs that are referred due to compliance concerns are immediately eligible for up to nine months of intensive, on-site coaching support. This year, SPARK received 102 referrals for compliance concerns and 394 for quality improvement support. Each year, SPARK would like to see 90% of those programs referred for compliance complete a Quality Improvement Plan that addresses the compliance issue identified in the referral within nine months. During the 2021-2022 program year, SPARK again exceeded this benchmark with 100% of those programs completing the Quality Improvement Plan within that nine month timeframe.

SPARK also continued to target safe sleep with intensive services in an effort to reduce the number of violations in this key area of licensing compliance. To do so, the SPARK team, with our Infant & Toddler Specialist, added 11 safe sleep resources to MY SPARK Learning Lab that support program leaders, teachers, and family child care providers in assuring families that their youngest children are sleeping safely while at the program. The additional resources added this year were viewed 1552 times and bring the total number of safe sleep resources available in My SPARK Learning Lab to 32. In total, SPARK's safe sleep resources have been viewed 7,151 times over our three years of SPARK working to decrease the number of safe sleep violations throughout the state. SPARK was excited to announce after our second year that, for the first time, safe sleep violations were no longer in the top ten most cited violations in the state and, after year three, the trend continues.

Beyond the resources, SPARK also created a cohort of over 200 programs that had safe sleep violations in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 program years and provided this group with coaching opportunities, communications, and resources with the goal of reducing the likelihood of this group of programs having another safe sleep violation. SPARK's benchmark for success for the 2021-2022 program year was 80% of the programs in the cohort would not have another safe sleep violation during that year. SPARK again exceeded this measure with 96% of programs successfully completing the year without another safe sleep violation. Licensing compliance is extremely important as it provides for a safe and healthy environment for children and it is the foundation for high quality programming. If we are to increase access to high quality early childhood and out of school time programming, programs serving children and families must put their health and safety first.



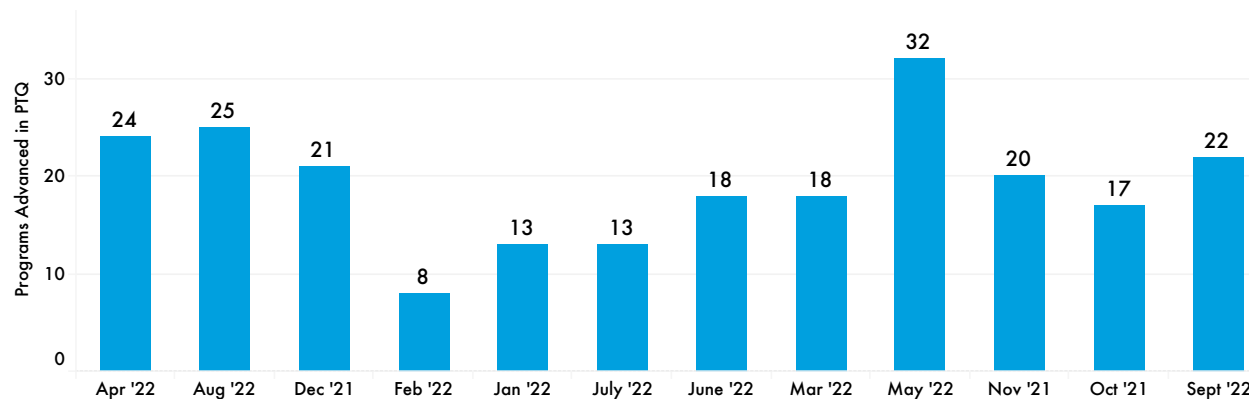
Quality Improvement

In Indiana, high quality early childhood and out of school time programming is measured by programs that are rated a Level 3 or Level 4 in Paths to QUALITY™. If SPARK supports increased access to affordable high quality early childhood and out of school time programming, then we need to support programs that are interested in enrolling in PTQ, increasing their education to meet the qualifications for high levels of PTQ, and advancing levels in PTQ. To do so, SPARK has determined benchmarks for PTQ Enrollment, advancement, and education support and deployed multiple strategies to meet or exceed these measures.

For PTQ enrollment, SPARK has two primary functions. The first is to support programs that are interested in joining PTQ for the first time and the second is to maintain the programs that are already enrolled. For programs to enroll, they must first participate in a Paths to QUALITY™ Introduction Session that has historically been offered live, both in-person and online. This meant that program leaders had to be available and possibly travel to participate in the scheduled training. This year, SPARK launched an on-demand version of the training that is available whenever the leader is available. The on-demand version of this training was completed 46 times this program year. Programs then need to submit enrollment documentation that SPARK Coaches review, provide any needed feedback, and process. During 2021-2022, SPARK Learning Lab processed enrollment documents for and enrolled 279 programs. Our benchmark for enrollment was to have 75.3% of eligible programs enrolled in PTQ and, by year's end, the state saw an enrollment rate of 77% of eligible programs enrolled.

Due to the pandemic, nearly 450 programs across the state started the 2021-2022 program year with an expired rating. This is more than the state had ever seen before and the grace period granted during the pandemic was drawing to a close. To ensure that programs were not removed from PTQ, SPARK allocated resources to assist programs in having a valid rating. This year, we hired our first PTQ Manager whose primary function is to design solutions for SPARK to better support programs with PTQ. We also designated a team of Coaches with expertise in PTQ to complete direct outreach to programs with expired ratings, support them through the process, answer any questions, and process their rating requests. These efforts and resources allowed 74% of expired programs to have a valid rating.. The other programs are still working through the process and SPARK is there to support them into the new year. The learnings from these efforts, however, have changed how SPARK approaches PTQ support. In year four, all Coaches will be formally trained on supporting PTQ, increasing capacity to serve, and will

Programs That Advanced in Paths to QUALITY™ by Month



take a proactive approach by contacting programs before their rating expires to walk them through the process and provide any on-site support that is needed in the preparation for the rating.

In order to advance through the levels of Paths to QUALITY™ and achieve a Level 3 or 4, program staff must meet and maintain the education qualifications for each level. In an effort to support the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning's goal to increase the number of degrees, credentials, and certificates, SPARK identifies professionals that are interested in either formal or non-formal education through our coaching efforts and refers these individuals to the professional development specialists at the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children (IN AEYC). Our goal is to make sure that 90% of those identified individuals receive a referral. This year, SPARK was able to refer 100%.

SPARK also recognizes that the many options and various supporting mechanisms for educational attainment are confusing. So, we work closely with our partners to deploy resources and learning opportunities to make these more visible and demystify any prevalent misnomers. This year, SPARK benchmarked our success at deploying eight unique resources or events around education opportunities and by year's end had exceeded this number by offering 10. This year's published resources have been viewed 504 times on My SPARK Learning Lab. Through these efforts, professionals are able to secure the education that they need and programs can advance to a higher level of quality, making high quality more accessible for children and families.

This year, SPARK set a goal to increase the number of programs advancing at least one level in PTQ by 5% over the 2020-2021 program year or to have a total of 228 programs advance. SPARK provided support to programs interested in advancing through our cohort coaching opportunities and PTQ resources in My SPARK Learning Lab. SPARK offered PTQ Advancement, Voluntary Certification, and Accreditation cohorts throughout the year, all of which support programs interested in advancing. This year, SPARK offered 9 PTQ Advancement cohorts and had 126 participants engage, 1 Voluntary Certification cohort with a total of 15 participants, and 3 Accreditation cohorts serving 46 participants.

Using data from our cohorts and leveraging existing relationships with programs, the SPARK team targeted outreach with robust communications and intensive coaching to ensure more programs are recognized as higher quality and more families had access to higher quality programming. The efforts of the SPARK team paid off and 231 programs advanced at least one level by the end of the program year. This year, SPARK recognized many learnings that we hope to carry forward and scale in year four, such as tracking programs that are interested in advancing and proactively offering support, ensuring that programs know the Coach in their region should they need support, and how we can more efficiently promote our cohorts and carry those programs through to a successful rating advancement.





Affordable Options

In 2021, the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning used pandemic relief funding to provide scholarships to families who were ineligible for vouchers. With the end of this funding in 2022, many children were going to lose their early childhood and out of school time programming as families were unable to pay for high quality without the scholarship. To support these families supplemental funding was used to transition eligible families from the scholarship to vouchers and SPARK was asked to support programs who would need to promote the opportunity and support families through the process. SPARK received more than 200 inquiries from programs, many needing support navigating the complexities of the voucher system, and resolving all questions and concerns. With SPARK's help, more families were able to access affordable, high quality early childhood and out of school learning programming.



Into Year 4

Throughout the program year, SPARK has gathered both quantitative and qualitative data from the field regarding our services. Mechanisms such as our Regional Advisory Councils, Help Desk, TA Needs Survey, and our Customer Relationship Management solution have been used to understand common needs and trends amongst our customers. SPARK's best practices are informed by the latest national research, engagement with local, state, and national organizations, and lived experiences. This plan is informed by such sources as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association for Family Child Care, BUILD Initiative, International Coaching Federation, Health & Human Services's Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services, and the Center for Disease Control.

Throughout this report, we have acknowledged our learnings and identified areas for improvement. From these, five have risen to the top and will be the focus for improvement in year four.

1. SPARK coaching services are more accessible and available when programs need them. The Indiana Self Assessment Tool (ISAT) is used as part of the coaching process to prioritize quality improvement efforts and resources.
2. SPARK's services are available in multiple languages that represent the linguistic diversity of our early childhood and out of school workforce.
3. SPARK prioritizes services and support for topics that programs struggle with the most including challenging behaviors, mental health, and trauma.
4. SPARK diversifies feedback mechanisms that the entire early childhood and out of school time workforce is able to give voice to their needs.
5. Reach a wider audience and equitably meet needs by increasing the production of training in preferred modalities using preferred topics according to professional development needs survey.



Accessible Coaching Services

Through work with our national partners and review of the latest research, SPARK wants to enhance the design of our coaching solution so that it is clearer how programs access our services, further diversify how services are accessed through multiple modalities, and make accessing coaching services easier. We can improve our coaching to be available closer to the moment of need as possible, make it more relational, and better meet professionals where they are. In year four, programs will be able to self-refer for coaching services either online or through the Help Desk which responds to requests via phone, email, and chat. Programs will be able to receive up to 30 days of on-site, intensive coaching without completing the Indiana Self Assessment Tool (ISAT) or having a formal development plan from their local coach whose name, biography, and contact information has been made available to them. Finally, the ISAT will be redesigned using feedback from the field to be easier to move through and offer greater options for customization to better meet the assessment needs of the specific program, all with fewer clicks and requiring less time. Instead of a prerequisite for receiving coaching services, the ISAT will be a tool for the coach and program leader to identify and prioritize quality improvement resources.



Centering Linguistic Equity

To ensure that all professionals throughout the state have access, SPARK will continue to refine our services so that we have culturally and linguistically appropriate policies, procedures, and accountability measures that guarantee all of our resources, training, and coaching services are available in the preferred language of the early childhood and out of school time professionals in Indiana. We will also work to better communicate, in the professional's preferred language, the availability of language assistance services. SPARK will use year four to build into the content development, communications, and feedback processes translation of training, resources communications, and feedback mechanisms so they can be deployed in appropriate languages simultaneously.

Increase Membership

In order to challenge the status quo, SPARK must create more accessible training for formal and informal members. Services are coming in many formats and can be built into the training. Expand as Brook resource available targeted for sustainable



Addressing Challenging Behavior, Mental Health, and Trauma Support

To best support the field regarding topics like challenging behaviors, mental health, and trauma, we must first consider how to make the services more accessible. To better understand the needs of the field, SPARK will work to provide resources and increase the workforce's competency in screening and make screening tools more accessible. Finally, we will train SPARK team members on how to recognize the need for these services and connect the workforce to them. In the coming months, SPARK will introduce an on-demand version of the Learn the Signs Act Early training that will increase the competency of the field while making it infinitely more accessible. SPARK will also expand our partnerships with key organizations such as the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, and the Department of Social Services, to make these resources and a connection to those resources more accessible. SPARK will also provide professional development to our own team to increase accessibility.



Feedback Makes SPARK Better

Feedback from the field has pushed SPARK to continually evolve and improve. Many of the recommendations in this report are based on the qualitative, quantitative, and lived experience data we have collected from professionals around the state. The engagement with our feedback mechanisms, however, is decreasing. For instance, SPARK's annual Professional Development Needs Assessment had fewer respondents in 2021-2022 than in the previous year, attendance and participation in Regional Advisory Committees (RAC) has lessened, and fewer professionals participated in our ISAT focus groups than in previous rounds. In order to increase participation in year four, SPARK will use data to determine the best modalities and frequency for feedback mechanisms and explore new options, such as mailings, Help Desk support for participation, testimonials, and more focus group opportunities. Finally, we will recognize those that provide their time and expertise in meaningful ways, such as compensating RAC members for their participation.



Prioritizing Training in the Preferred Modality

Based on the data and feedback SPARK received in year three, we now have a clearer picture of the field's preferred modalities for learning and training and need to prioritize development to meet that need. According to the Professional Development Needs Survey that SPARK distributed in collaboration and coordination with the Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning and the state's Child Care Resource & Referral network, the three most preferred training modalities were present via live webinar (Large Group Live Webinar 62%, Conference Live Webinar 57%, and Peer-to-Peer Live Webinar 48%). In terms of length, the one-hour Live Webinar received 452 votes while the one-hour on-demand received 366 votes. Four of the five most preferred topics by votes were related to mental health and challenging behaviors (Mental and Social Emotional Health 453, Discipline 448, Family Relationships and Engagement 376, and Positive Guidance 331, and Developmentally Appropriate Assessments 296). The data also indicates that it would be helpful to provide multiple inputs for training feedback and needed topics while regularly evaluating those needs and preferred modality. Based on these, SPARK will make more challenging behaviors, mental health, and trauma topics available in year four, as these are the most requested topics, and prioritize one-hour on-demand and live webinar options, as these are currently the preferred modalities based on the survey data.



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