



# Building a Strong Foundation: Early Learning in SoWashCo Schools

Joyce Beaird, Early Childhood Family Services  
Supervisor

Beth Quist, ECFE Site and Outreach  
Coordinator

**March 27, 2025**



# Presentation Overview



- Highlight the role of Early Learning in SoWashCo Schools
- Overview of SoWashCo Schools Community Education Early Learning programs:
  - Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)
  - Preschool
  - Early Childhood Screening



# 4 Key Factors Highlighting the Critical Role of Early Learning

- The power of brain development in the first five years
- Long-term benefits and return on investment
- Early Learning as the foundation for literacy success
- Strengthening schools through family partnerships



# Early Years – A Critical Window of Opportunity

Did you know?

- 90% of brain growth happens before Kindergarten
- At birth, the average baby's brain is about a quarter the size of the average adult brain. Incredibly, it doubles in size in the first year.
- The brain keeps growing to about 80% of adult size by age 3 and 90% – nearly fully grown – by age 5.



# Early Learning – A Small Investment with Big Returns



INVESTED IN EARLY  
CHILDHOOD YIELDS A  
**\$16 RETURN**

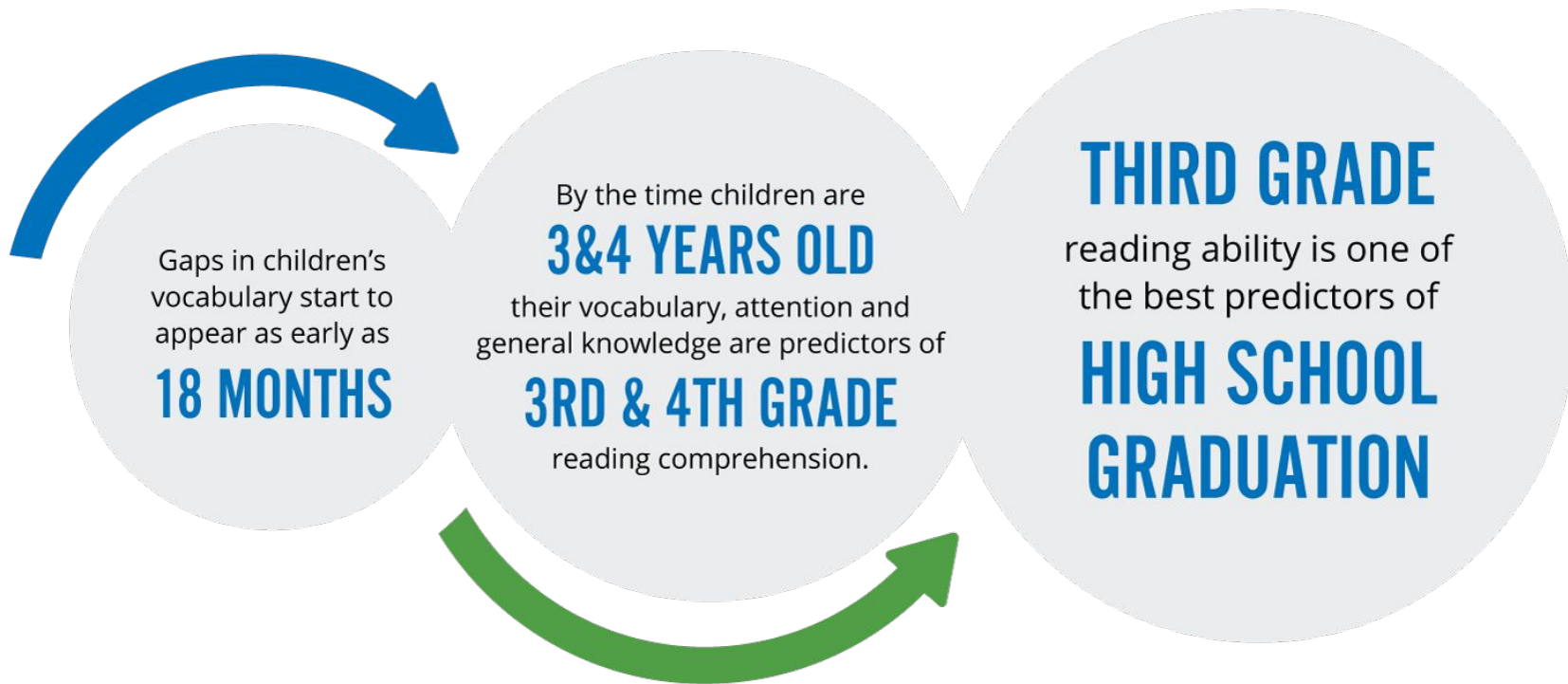
## INCREASED

- High School Graduation
- College Matriculation
- Economic Development & Personal Income

## DECREASED

- Special Education/Remediation
- Dependence on Social Welfare
- Crime-related Costs & Incarceration Rates

# Early Learning and Literacy



# Building Strong Family Engagement from the Start



- **Establishes Early Connections:** Fosters trust between families and SoWashCo Schools from the start.
- **Supports Parenting Skills:** Empowers families with knowledge and strategies to support child development.
- **Creates a Network of Support:** Connects families with schools, community resources and each other.
- **Promotes Two-Way Communication:** Strengthens collaboration between families and educators.
- **Engages Families Long-Term:** Increases involvement in school activities and decision-making.
- **Builds Confidence in Schools:** Encourages positive perceptions of SoWashCo Schools, leading to sustained family engagement.



# Connection between Family Partnerships and Early Learning



## 3,677 Participants

Community Education Birth-5 Services:  
Early Childhood Family Education, Preschool and  
Early Childhood Screening

## 817

## Community Referrals

(2023/24 Program Year)



### Parent Support Outreach Program



Follow Along Program





# Supporting Our Youngest Learners and their Families



## 76 Staff in 12 buildings!

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE): 21 Teachers, 16 Paraprofessionals = 37 staff

Preschool: 15 Teachers, 19 Paraprofessionals = 34 staff

Support & Administrative Staff = 5

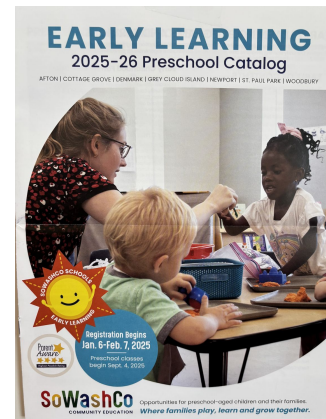
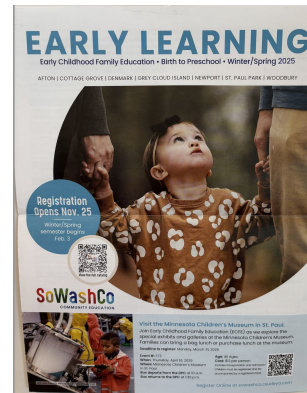
2 Office Coordinators, 2 Site Coordinators (OR/ECS)

1 Supervisor



# Enrollment for Early Learning

- All Early Learning enrollment is handled through our Early Learning Office at Liberty Ridge Site II
- 44 sections of preschool annually each spring
- 84 sections of Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) during two semester enrollment opportunities: Fall/Spring
- Early Learning office annually enrolls participants in 128 various classroom sections for day and evening learning opportunities.



# Community Education Early Learning Program Sites



**Located at 12 sites with 27 classrooms throughout SoWashCo Schools:**

## **2 centralized sites, 14 Community Education classrooms**

- **Liberty Ridge Site II**
  - Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and Preschool classes
  - Early Learning Program offices
- **District Program Center**
  - ECFE and Preschool Classes
  - Early Childhood Screening

## **10 Elementary sites, 13 Community Education classrooms**

Armstrong (1), Bailey (1), Cottage Grove (1), Crestview (1), Hillside (3), Newport (1), Pullman (1), Royal Oaks (1), Valley Crossing (2), Woodbury (1)

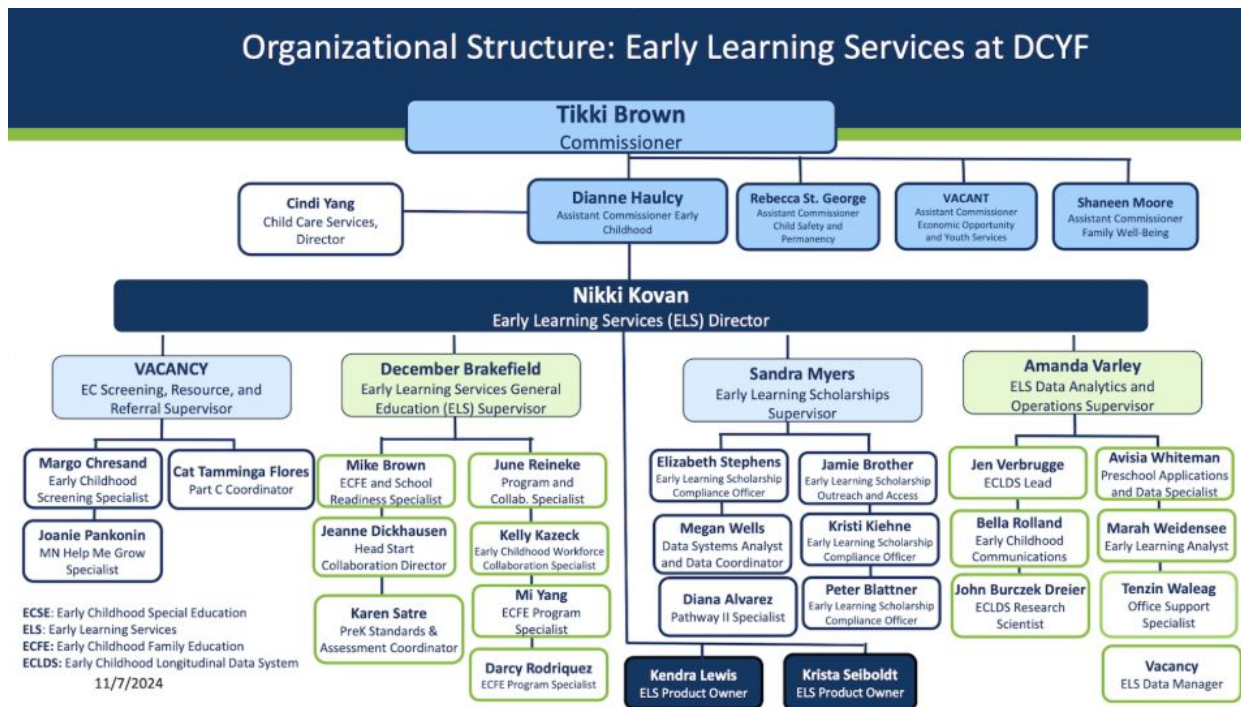
# The Structure of Early Learning

- State structure for Early Learning
- Structure of Early Learning in SoWashCo Schools
- Community Education Early Childhood Funding
  - Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)
  - Preschool
  - Early Childhood Screening



# Early Learning Structure – State Level

Early Learning Transitioned from the Minnesota Department of Education to the Department of Children, Youth and Families July, 2024



# Early Learning Support

## THE UMBRELLA PROGRAMS

### Universal Supports

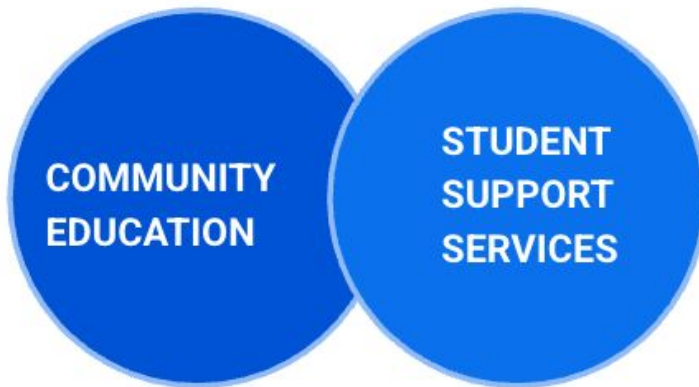
Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)

- Prenatal to 5 years old

Preschool

Early Childhood Screening

- 3-5 years old



### Special Education

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

Preschool

- 3-5 years old

Home Visiting

- Birth to 2 years old



# Funding of SoWashCo Early Learning



## Partial state-allocated funding

- 9 funding streams for 3 programs

**Preschool** (6 funding streams): School Readiness, Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), PWI and PWII scholarships, parent fees, Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) fees.

**ECFE** (2 funding streams): ECFE partial state funding and a sliding fee scale for all participants. No family is turned away for the inability to pay.

**Early Childhood Screening** (1 funding stream): Per child state-allocated retroactive funding. ECFE funding helps support Early Childhood Screening.

- Age 3 - \$98/child
- Age 4 - \$65/child
- Age 5 - \$52/child
- Age 6 - \$52/child

# Early Learning Program Overview





# Preschool (Child Only 3-5)

- Preschool age eligibility is 3 and 4 years old by September 1
- State funding streams and related state statutes determine program requirements such as:
  - Eligibility (For age and financial assistance)
  - Curriculum and instruction
  - Licensure requirements for teachers and administrators
  - Service hours
- Every classroom section has: 6 fee pay slots, 6 financial assistance slots and 6 Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) slots
- 44 sections of preschool with the capacity of 800 3 and 4 year olds per year



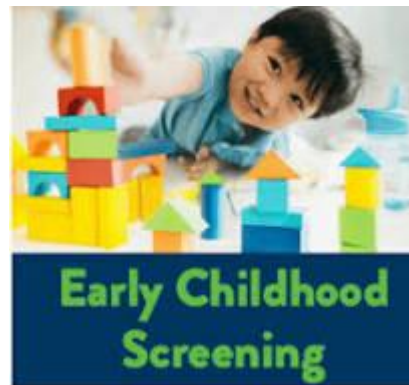
# Early Childhood Screening

## Purpose

- Promote healthy development
- Identify children who may need further evaluation
- Connect families to resources in the community

## What can be expected during a screening appointment?

- Vision, hearing and height/weight check
- Activities where children demonstrate:
  - Large and small muscle development
  - Thinking skills
  - Language and speaking skills
- Family report of Social/Emotional development
- Immunization review
- Review of health care coverage
- Resource connection



# Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)



**SoWashCo Community Education**  
*Lifelong learning and community connection  
throughout SoWashCo Schools*

**Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)**  
*Education and support for all families  
with children ages birth to five*

## Roles of ECFE

*ECFE has a multifaceted approach to  
providing family education and support.*



**Partner**



**Connector**



**Service  
Provider**

*"Thank you for loving  
our children, for  
teaching them new  
skills and for helping  
them to develop  
their confidence and  
for fostering their  
early friendships."*

*"I can't believe  
this program  
doesn't exist in  
other states. Truly  
a wonderful  
opportunity."*



**EARLY CHILDHOOD  
FAMILY EDUCATION**

# Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)



- Began 51 years ago as a pilot in Mounds View
  - In 1984 became a national model for parent and early childhood education, emphasizing the importance of family involvement in a child's development
- Our largest Early Learning enrollment program served: **1,756 participants** in the 2023-24 school year
- Our team consists of licensed Early Childhood Educators and licensed Parent Educators as well as specific licensure for administrators
- ECFE classes include primarily three areas:
  - Early Childhood Education
  - Parent/Child Interaction Time
  - Parent Education
- Field trips and family events
- Home Visiting
- Community Outreach



# ECFE Community Outreach



The ECFE outreach programming role is to:

- Identify new and underserved populations
- Identify child- and family-risk factors, particularly those that impact children's learning and development, and assesses family and parenting education needs in the community (Minn. Stat. 124D.13, subd. 2(6)).
- Provide programs and services that are tailored to the needs of families and parents as prioritized in the community needs assessment (Minn, Stat. 124D.13, subd. 2(7).
- Raise awareness of Early Learning programming services throughout the community (internally and externally)



# SoWashCo ECCE Outreach Areas



- Infant services
- Families learning together
- Licensed child care support
- Preschool and screening parent liaisons
- Organizational outreach and social media

*"...one of the best supports we had at home for our son's social anxiety was the parent consultation. She met with us, gave us great ideas for books and language to use that was the same as school, parent encouragement, and it made a huge difference." [preschool parent]*





# Outreach Highlights 2023-24



## Parent Consultations (487 total)

- 7 prenatal consultations
- 110 new baby consultations
- 15 toddler consultations
- 331 preschool consultations
- 24 Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup> grade

## Parent And Child Preschool Nights

### *Includes parent presentation*

- North sites – 110 adults, 87 children, 3 siblings
- South sites – 110 adults, 86 children, 3 siblings

## Licensed Child Care Provider Training

- 209 adults trained



# Community Connections

- Washington County Public Health Family Home Visiting
- Washington County WIC (Women, Infants and Children)
- Washington County Child Care Licensing
- Washington County PSOP (Parent Support Outreach Program)
- Cottage Grove Fire Department
- Stillwater ECFE Prenatal Class
- Washington County Public Libraries
- Canvas Health
- SoWashCo CARES





# THE FIRST FIVE YEARS SHAPE A LIFETIME

*Thank you for supporting Early Learning*

