

ANNUAL REPORT 2024 - 2025



A reflection of our shared commitment to building a future where every child has the support they need to flourish.

This report is also available at flowersearlylearning.org

Table of Contents



Growing Together	02
Our Leadership	03
Our Mission & Message from the Director	04
Who We Serve	05
Local Impact: Growing Together With Families	06
Enrollment	07
Family Engagement	08
Elevating Parent Voice	09
Kindergarten Readiness	10
The Childcare Crisis	11
Transforming Early Childhood Education	12
Financial Report	13
2025/2026 Budget and Monitoring Results	14
The Future of Early Childhood	15
Community Partners	16

Growing Together



At Flowers Early Learning, we believe that every child’s potential blossoms when nurtured with care, education, and unwavering support. This past year has been a testament to our commitment to early childhood education and to the families, caregivers, and communities that make learning possible.

We have stood side by side through challenges and triumphs, cultivating an environment where children feel safe, valued, and inspired to grow. From expanding our wrap-around services to deepening our family engagement efforts, we have continued to plant the seeds of lifelong learning and resilience.

As we reflect on this year’s impact, we celebrate the collective strength of our educators, partners, and families—each playing a vital role in shaping a brighter future for our children. This report is more than numbers and milestones; it’s a story of transformation, hope, and the power of community.

Thank you for growing with us. Together, we are building a foundation where every child can thrive.



Our Leadership

Flowers Early Learning is proud to be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit supported by strong leadership and engaged families. Our Board of Directors—comprised of committed community leaders—guides our strategic direction and mission. Equally vital is our Policy Council, made up of elected parents who help shape program decisions, review budgets and policies, and ensure that the voices of families remain at the heart of our work.

Board of Directors

Chair - Brian Saxton

Vice Chair - Arthur Havlicek

Secretary - Linda Tinsley

Danielle Persky

Kacee Dochenetz

Policy Council Chair - Kahli Lorenz

Policy Council Vice Chair - Mary-alice Wirick

Policy Council

Chair - Kahli Lorenz Cass EHS

Vice Chair - Mary-Alice Wirick Niles HS

Treasurer - Sydney Whittker Watervliet EHS

Secretary - Hailey Marbut Bangor EHS

Amelia Espinosa Bangor HS

Ariana Blaylock DEC HS

Berlisha Lamar DEC EHS

Sarah Newman Decatur/GSRP

Kyra Kasiewicz Gobles/GSRP

Megan Mallory Mattawan/GSRP

Khyra Kimble Millburg HS

Kieshazsa Davis Millburg EHS

Amanda Simpson New Buffalo HS

Kristen Survoy New Buffalo HS

Katherine Arnett Paw Paw/GSRP

Samantha Litaker SMC/GSRP

Katlynn Valente Watervliet HS

Mellody Buzalski Cass GSC - Community Member

Sherry Bennett Van Buren GSC - Community Member

Jenilee Moody Berrien GSC - Community Member

A Message From Our Director

At Flowers Early Learning, we believe in planting the seeds of the future—nurturing children, families, and communities with care, intention, and unwavering commitment. As we reflect on the past year, **I am filled with gratitude for the incredible work of our staff.**

They are **the heart of everything we do**—the magic behind the daily moments that lead to lifelong impact.

In a time of both opportunity and challenge for early childhood education, our team has continued to lead with excellence, resilience, and compassion. They have adapted to change, welcomed new families, opened new doors—literally and figuratively—and remained steadfast in their belief that every child deserves a strong start.

The Head Start model has long been rooted in evidence, equity, and holistic support. At Flowers Early Learning, we build on this legacy with innovation and integrity, striving every day to help children and families not just succeed, but truly thrive.

Thank you to our staff, our families, and our community partners. **Together, we are growing bright futures.**

—Chanda

Our Mission

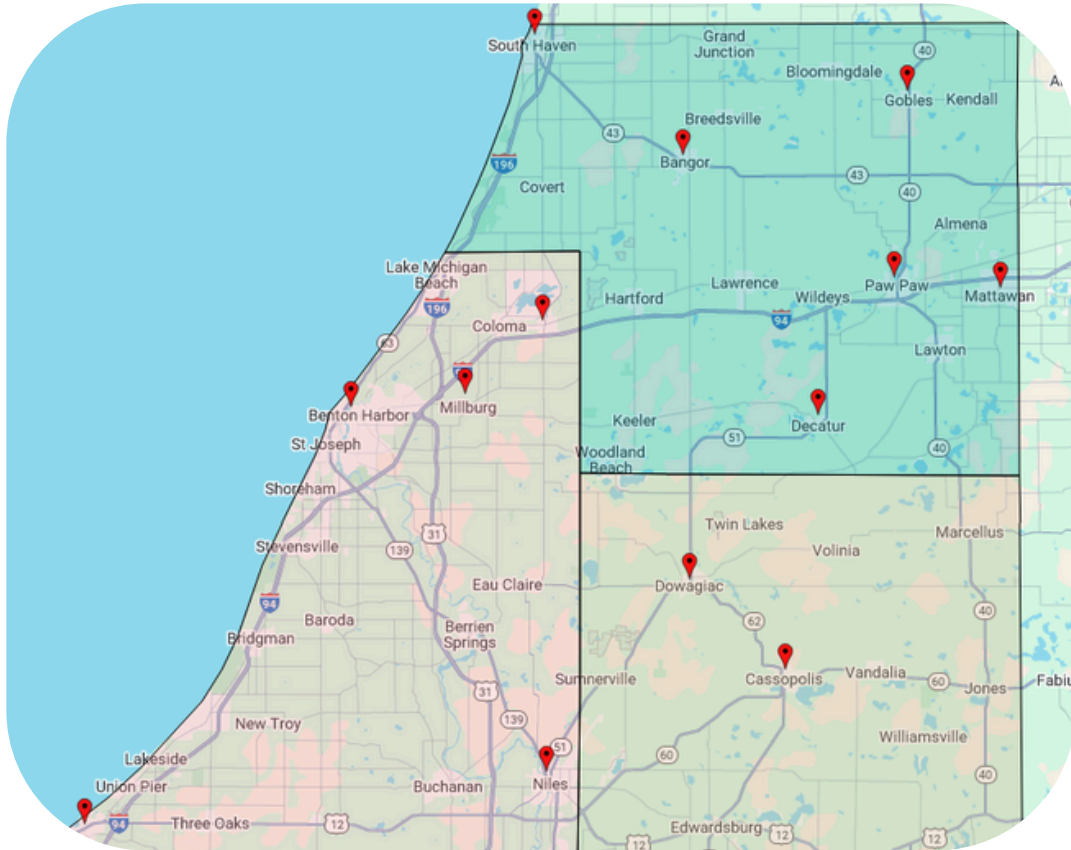
To build a future where children, families, and communities thrive.



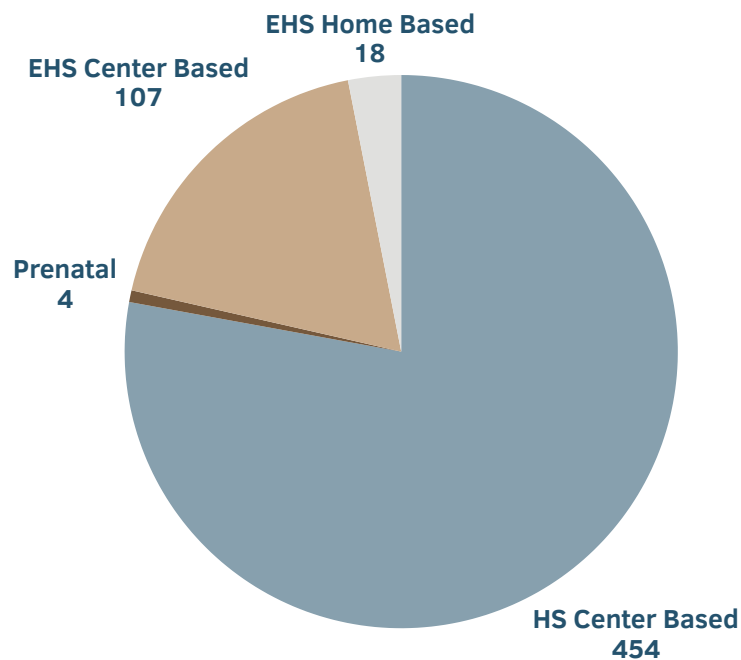
Serving Southwest Michigan

17 locations | 41 classrooms

Three Counties - Berrien, Cass, & Van Buren



Funded Slots



Local Impact: Growing Together With Families

Every day, we support children and families across Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties—helping them grow, thrive, and build a better future through education, care, and connection.

Each number tells a story of resilience, growth, and care in our community.

- **83%** of enrolled families experience food insecurity
- **27%** have been affected by domestic violence or substance abuse
- **15%** of families experience homelessness
- **18%** of children receive disability services
- **89%** of enrolled families are working parents
- **600+** document translations and **189** live interpretations for Dual Language Learners and Families
- **275+** children remain on our waitlist, underscoring the community's urgent need for more care
- **47% of our 200+** staff members are current or former Head Start parents. This powerful statistic reflects our commitment to growing leadership from within our community.

Our impact goes beyond the classroom. In 2024–2025, over **\$2.8 million** was paid into Michigan-based businesses, helping boost the local economy and sustain jobs in our region.



Cumulative Enrollment



578

Total Number of Families



496

Average Monthly Enrollment

83%

Children Enrolled 1+ Years

36%

Average Daily Attendance

84%



4,500+

Books Distributed
This Year



275,000+

Meals and Snacks
Served This Year



98%

Enrolled children that
received medical
exams



65%

Enrolled children that
received dental
exams

Types of Eligibility

20%

Income
≤100%

14%

McKinney
Vento

54%

Public
Assistance

3%

Foster
Care

4%

Over Income
101–130%

5%

Over Income
131%+

Transportation



Total number of miles driven: **52,499**

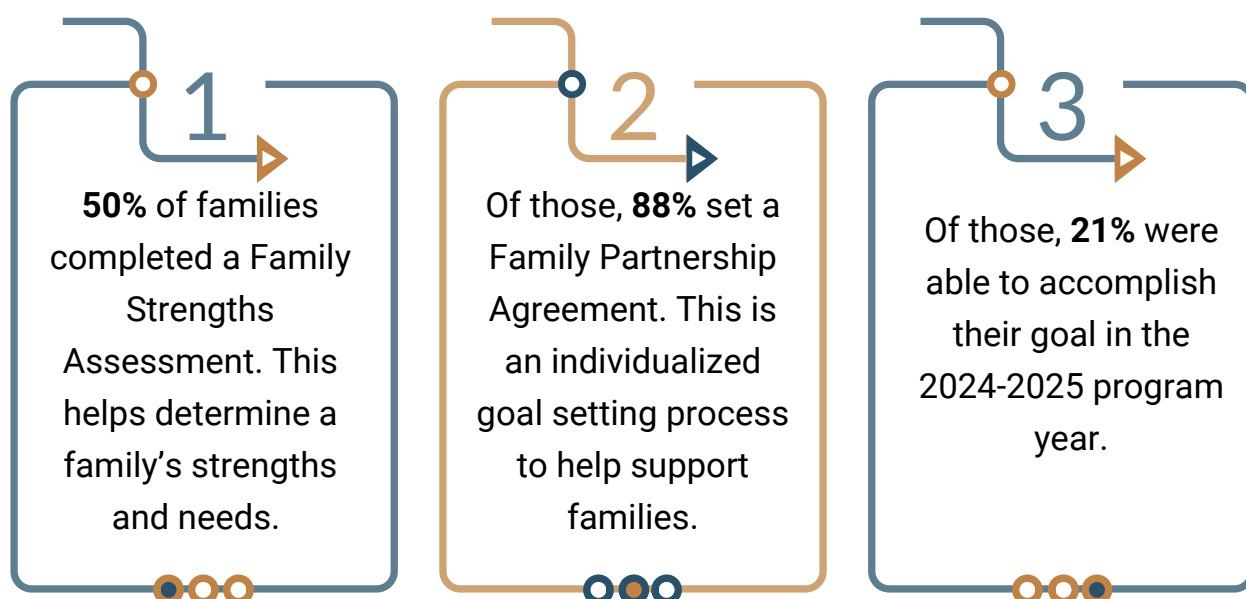
Number of potential student riders: **287**

Average number of students riding the bus per day: **78**

Family Engagement



At Flowers Early Learning, we support the entire family by providing engagement, education, and personalized assistance. Each family is paired with a dedicated Family Advocate who builds strong, trusting relationships, supports them in meeting their needs, and helps them set and achieve their goals.



Family Activities

- Policy Council
- Family Committee Meetings
- Family Fun Nights
- Conscious Discipline Classes
- Book Clubs
- Fantastic Fathers and Families



Elevating Parent Voice

Parent Voice In Action

In alignment with our commitment to meaningful parent engagement, Flowers Early Learning continues to center parent voice in every aspect of our work. We believe that families are a child's first and most important teachers—and their insights are essential to our continuous growth. Each year, we conduct a comprehensive parent survey to gather feedback on program quality, child development support, and family services. The insights from this survey directly inform decision-making, from classroom experiences to policy and program improvements.

Parents also play an active role in governance through Policy Council participation and Family Committees, ensuring that family perspectives shape the direction of our services. We remain deeply committed to honoring and implementing the input of our families in ways that reflect their priorities, preferences, and needs.

"I wish I had known earlier how rewarding and even fun it would be to serve on Policy Council. I was a little nervous at first, but I quickly realized that it's a supportive environment where everyone's input is valued."

- Policy Council Member



Kindergarten Readiness

Each year, our teachers consult with local kindergarten educators to identify the most critical skills for a successful transition into kindergarten. The chart below illustrates the percentage of our three and four-year-old students meeting or exceeding age-level expectations in each area. Readiness is more than just academics—it's about being prepared to learn, grow, and participate in a structured classroom environment. These milestones are key indicators of kindergarten readiness.

Skill	COR Objective	% at Age Level
Self-help skills	Personal care & healthy behavior	99%
Sitting for sustained periods	Initiative, planning, sustained plans	90%
Regulates emotions	Emotions	86%
Writing own name	Writing	83%





Childcare Crisis

Access to affordable, quality childcare is not just a family issue—it's a serious **economic challenge**. Nationally, over half of families searching for care are placed on waitlists, with many waiting more than three months for a spot.

The economic impact is significant:

- **\$122 billion** is lost annually in the U.S. due to reduced earnings, productivity, and tax revenue (Strong Nation, 2023)
- In Michigan, the childcare crisis costs **\$2.88 billion each year**, including:
 - **\$1.26 billion** from absenteeism
 - **\$1.04 billion** from employee turnover

Locally, families in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties face long waitlists, limited infant and toddler care, and high costs. These barriers prevent parents from working and children from accessing the early learning experiences they need.

Without meaningful investment, the burden on families, businesses, and communities will continue to grow.



Transforming Early Childhood Education

We are proud to support families in **Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren** counties. In 2024, we were honored with the National Head Start Association's **Program of Excellence award**—one of only twelve programs nationwide to receive this recognition, highlighting our commitment to high-quality early childhood services.



The purchase of our **Millburg Campus** marked a significant milestone, providing us with a permanent learning space. However, much of our infrastructure remains **leased** or **temporary**, and the need for **expansion is urgent**.

Head Start is more than education—it's a vital link to health services and family support in communities facing high poverty, low preschool enrollment, and population decline. We are building strong foundations and expanding opportunities where they are needed most.



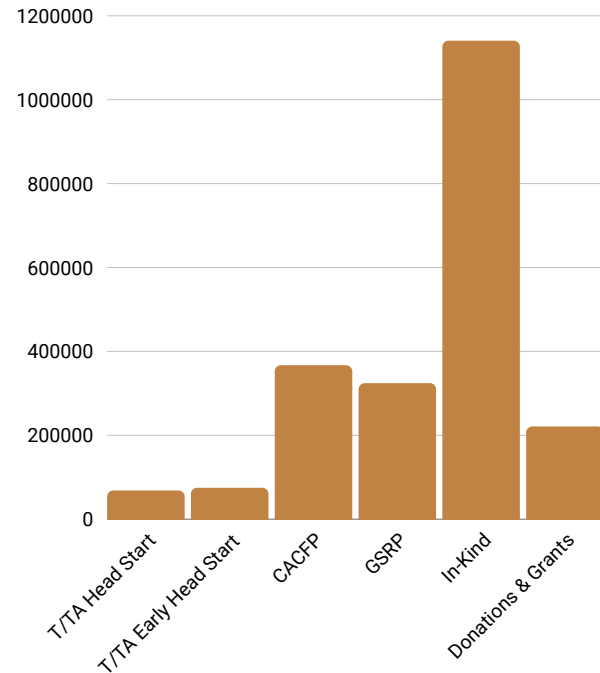
FINANCIAL REPORT

FEBRUARY 1 2024-JANUARY 31 2025

Operations

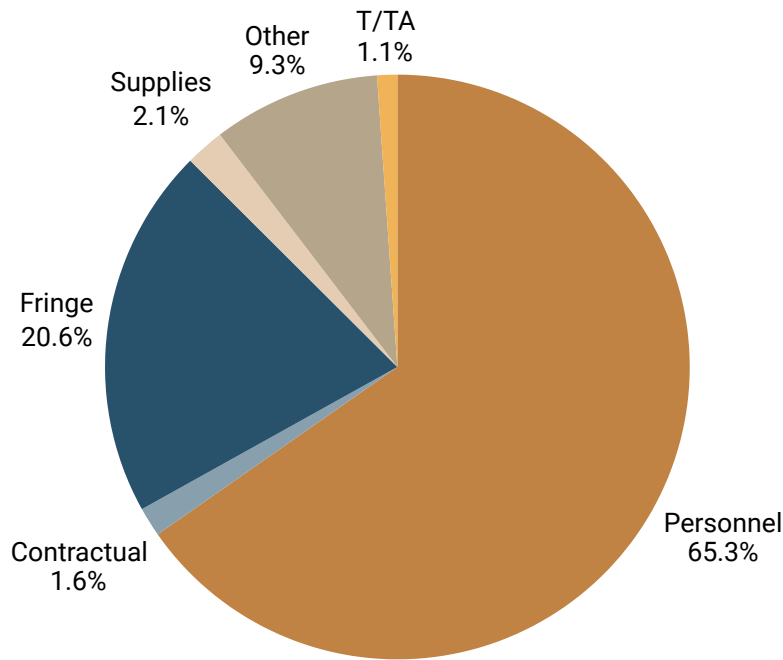
Head Start \$8,845,720	Early Head Start \$3,748,200	ARP \$346,000
----------------------------------	--	-------------------------

Additional Funds Received	
T/TA Head Start	\$68,411
T/TA Early Head Start	\$74,866
CACFP	\$366,997
GSRP	\$324,254
In-Kind	\$1,140,713
Donations and Grants	\$221,100
Grand Total	\$15,136,259



Donations and Grants		
Capacity Building	\$136,753	Foundation (\$135K), Misc (\$1,753)
Facilities	\$50,000	Carolyn's Kids Berrien Community Foundation
Professional Dev.	\$2,000	Heart of Cook Berrien Community Foundation
Staff Wellness	\$350	Gates Chevy
Classroom Specific	\$9,345	Local 357 (\$6,768), Rotary (\$1K), Misc (\$1,577)
Family Specific	\$2,600	Helping Hands of Cass County
Family Specific	\$20,052	Michigan Department of Education - Trusted Advisor Grant Program

2025/2026 BUDGET



Flowers Early Learning is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through a Head Start grant, with a fiscal year running from February 1 to January 31. We operate both Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) programs, offering high-quality early education and family services for children from birth to age five.

In addition to our federal programs, we offer blended classrooms that integrate Michigan's state-funded Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), creating a balanced and supportive learning environments that meet the needs of all children and families we serve.

Monitoring Results

An annual audit for fiscal year 2024 was conducted by Kruggel Lawton, CPA, and independent auditor, with no findings.

As part of our Federal Grant Award, three monitoring reviews are conducted, results of the most recent reviews are as follows:

- Focus Area 1 Monitoring Review: January 2021 - No Findings
- Focus Area 2 Monitoring Review: December 2022 – Area of Noncompliance: Background Checks (Head Start Act 648A(g)(3)) Area of Concern: Teachers with waivers and on compliance plans (HSPPS 1302.91(e)(1) and 1302.91(e)(2)(ii) (Both findings have been corrected)
- CLASS Review: March-May 2023 Video Pilot

Domain	Score	Quality Threshold	Competitive Threshold
Classroom Support	6.1250	6	5
Emotional Support	5.5333	6	5
Instructional Support	2.9750	3	2.3

The Future of Early Childhood

A Call for Sustainable Investment

The future of early childhood education depends on our ability to create sustainable systems that meet the evolving needs of families. At the heart of this effort is Head Start, which serves over 1 million children annually, providing vital services in education, health, and family support.

The Impact of Head Start

Children in Head Start are more likely to:

- Graduate from high school
- Attend college or vocational training
- Enjoy improved lifelong health outcomes

Every **\$1** invested in early childhood programs yields up to **\$7** in societal savings through:

- Reduced crime
- Higher lifetime earnings
- Lower reliance on public assistance



Our Vision for the Future

We are working toward a more sustainable and resilient funding model to preserve and grow our impact for future generations.

This long-term approach will help us:

- Expand our services to reach more families
- Invest in building, renovating, and securing facilities
- Increase financial flexibility through funds that can carry over and generate interest
- Safeguard our mission from disruptions caused by the loss of any single funding source

By broadening and strengthening our funding base, we can continue providing uninterrupted, high-quality services and build a brighter, more stable future for children and families.

Thank You To Our Community Partners

Benton Harbor Sunrise Rotary Club	Van Buren Great Start Collaborative
Berrien Community Foundation	Southwestern Michigan College
Bill Nygren Foundation	Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren
Carolyn's Kids	Wings Etc. Niles
Gates Chevy World	Heart of Cook
Helping Hands Cass County	Frederick S. Upton Foundation
Kiwanis Club South Haven	United Way Valley Food HUB
South Haven Chamber of Commerce	HOPE Resources
South Haven Community Foundation	Van Buren Court
Southwest Michigan Chamber of Commerce	DeGroot Family Foundation
UAW Local 357	Special-Lite
Berrien Great Start Collaborative	Big Furry Friends
Cass Great Start Collaborative	Hardings Coloma
Kelly Laesch - Berrien Co. Sheriffs Deputy	Nabisco
Illiff Chiropractic	Amanda Marie Bakery
Piedt Farms	



Flowers Early Learning is a 501(c)3 organization funded through grants and community support.

This report is also available at www.flowersearlylearning.org

Approved by Board and Policy Council: June 18, 2025

775 Hazen St, Paw Paw MI 49079
269-657-2581