SELF-ASSESSMENT

2024-2025

FLOWERS
EARLY LEARNING
growing bright futures

Strengths, Growth, and the Path Forward:
Our Commitment to Continuous Improvement

A Look at Our Annual Self-Assessment

As a Head Start provider, Flowers Early Learning conducts annual self-assessments to evaluate the overall effectiveness of its services, progress toward program goals, and compliance with federal regulations. This process is essential to identifying strengths and areas of growth across our programs, ensuring that our services continuously evolve to meet the needs of the children and families we serve. The self-assessment is data-informed and collaborative, guiding program-wide improvements and maintaining high-quality early childhood education and family support services.

Founded in 1972, Flowers Early Learning is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, operated by Tri-County Council for Child Development, Inc. Serving 583 children across Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties through Head Start (ages 3-4) and Early Head Start (0-3) programs. We provide services through a combination of center-based and home-based models. Flowers Early Learning operates 17 locations with 41 classrooms. Our continued commitment to family partnership and whole-child development is grounded in our decades-long presence in the community and supported by a strong foundation of staff, partners, and families.

Family Needs and Engagement

Health and Safety Support for Families

Flowers Early Learning continues to play a vital role in early detection and referral for health-related concerns in our community.

- In the 2024–2025 program year:
    - 110 children received Lead Poisoning screenings.
    - 10 children were found to have elevated lead levels.
        - Support and intervention processes were successfully initiated for children with elevated lead levels.
    - 30% of children in our program have experienced exposure to domestic violence or substance use.
    - 82% of families enrolling in our program have experienced food insecurity and rely on supplemental food support.

Family Engagement and Preferences

Feedback from our families reflects strong trust in our program and a high level of satisfaction with services.

- 99% of families would recommend Flowers Early Learning to others.
- 98.15% of families report feeling our centers are safe and welcoming places for their children.
- Communication preferences:
    - Families overwhelmingly prefer to receive information via text or classroom communication apps.
- Care preferences:
    - The majority prefer Monday through Friday care.
    - Only 16% of families are interested in year-round care.

Literacy and Family Education

Early literacy remains a critical area of need for many families we serve.

- Only 30% of children are living in literacy-rich environments
- This highlights a significant opportunity for:
    - Expanding access to take-home books and family literacy materials.
    - Offering parent education on language development through workshops or video-based tips.

Transportation Trends

Bus transportation is available to a select number of families based on need and availability; however, overall ridership among eligible children has been steadily decreasing.

● Bus Ridersip
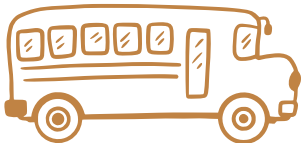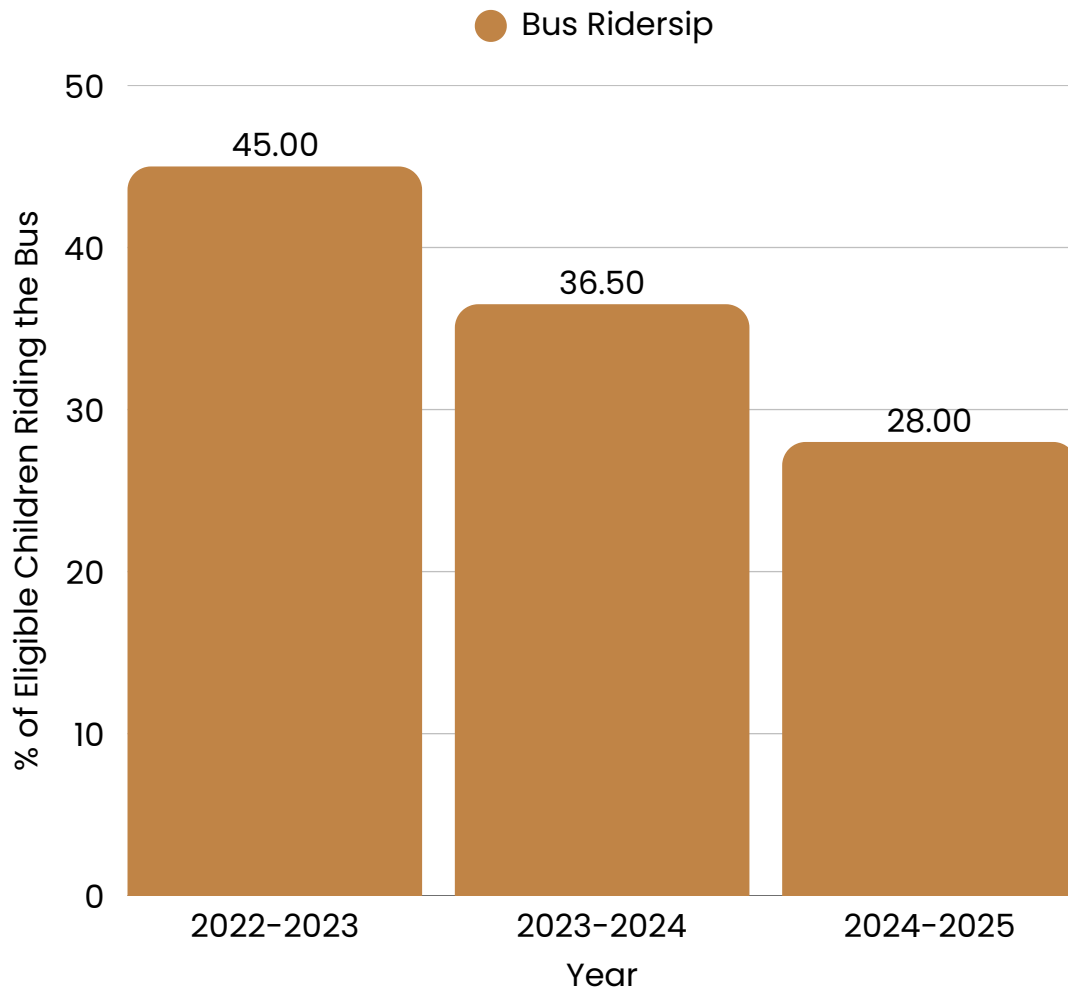
Transportation

Total number of miles driven: 52,499
Number of potential student riders: 287
Average number of students riding the bus per day: 78

Staff Culture and Retention

Staff Actively Seeking Other Employment 2023–2025

While Flowers Early Learning continues progressing in staff engagement and culture, retention remains a key challenge, particularly given broader workforce trends across the early childhood field.

- In December 2024, we were just four positions away from being fully staffed, with 200 active employees out of 205 budgeted positions, a 2% vacancy rate.
- By April 2025, active staff had declined to 192, with 13 funded positions vacant, raising the vacancy rate to 6%—a 30% increase over the past year.
- Applicants per vacancy dropped sharply in early 2025, reaching a low of 1.7 in January, before rising to 5.1 in April.
- The time to hire has lengthened significantly—from 13 days in February to 45 days in April, a 32.4% increase.
- We are encouraged by the most recent survey data, which shows a sharp decline in staff members actively seeking other employment, either within the early childhood field or in other sectors, indicating growing stability and improved satisfaction among current team members.
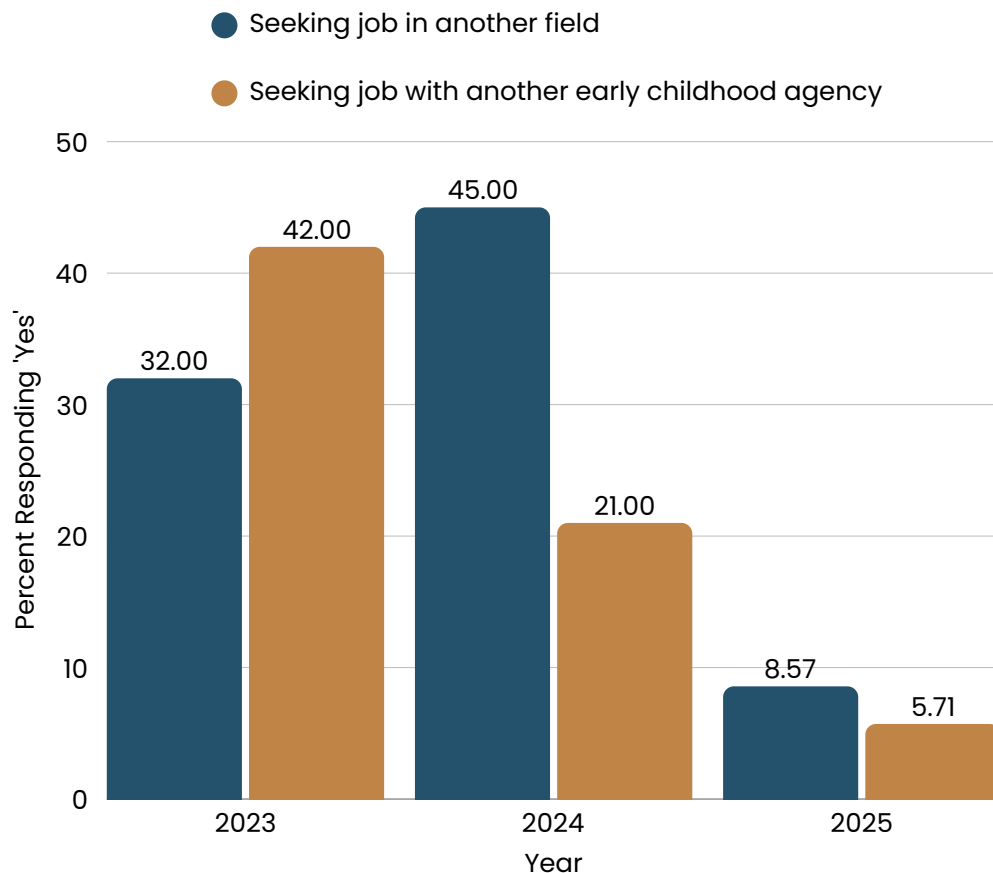
Flowers Early Learning has hired over 100 new employees in the past two years, with a steady retention rate. We expect to retain most of those new hires for over three years. There is also strong interest in our newly launched registered apprenticeship program and paid work-based learning program for high school students, which offer promising pathways for building a more sustainable early childhood workforce.

Staff as Community Members

Our staff composition reflects strong community ties and lived experience among team members.

- 47% of staff are current or former parents, up from 38% in 2022.
- 11.43% of staff are former students of Flowers Early Learning.

Strategic Opportunities for Growth

Reboot of the Family Volunteer Program

Identified Need: Flowers Early Learning has benefited from strong family participation through a structured volunteer program. However, in recent years, participation has declined. While family feedback shows a high level of trust and satisfaction with Flowers Early Learning, opportunities for deeper family engagement—particularly through volunteering—are currently underutilized. Existing structures for family involvement are informal and vary by classroom and site.

Opportunity: Rebooting the Family Volunteer Program could strengthen classroom-community ties and address goals around family partnership, while offering families low-barrier ways to participate in their child's learning.

Next Steps:
- Gather more targeted feedback on what types of volunteer opportunities families would find most accessible and appealing.
- Build classroom-specific volunteer calendars.
- Track participation and feedback to refine the model.

Transitioning the Stress Survey to the Wellness Committee

Identified Need: Staff wellness continues to be a vital focus for Flowers Early Learning, especially amid sector-wide challenges with retention and burnout. The bi-monthly stress survey has been a valuable tool to gauge well-being, but it has continued to have a low response rate.

Opportunity: Transitioning the staff stress survey to the Wellness Committee could formalize support, ensure continuity in responding to staff concerns, and connect stress data with concrete wellness initiatives.

Next Steps:
- Review past stress survey responses to identify recurring themes.
- The Wellness Committee and Human Resources will work together to create a structured survey review and action planning cycle.
- Explore small, feasible staff wellness efforts (e.g., appreciation gestures, peer support, workload input).

Launching Community Gardens

Identified Need: Food insecurity is one concern among our enrolled families, with 82% relying on supplemental food support. Flowers Early Learning does not have community gardens in place, but is actively exploring this as a strategic response.

Opportunity: Launching community gardens could support multiple areas of growth:
- Food access and nutrition education for families.
- Outdoor learning and sensory experiences for children.
- Volunteer opportunities for families and community partners.

Next Steps:
- Identify potential garden sites.
- Apply for grants to expand tools, soil, and raised bed infrastructure.
- Recruit garden leads at each site, ideally staff or family volunteers with experience.

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

This report is also available at www.flowersearlylearning.org

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