

ANNUAL REPORT



A REFLECTION OF OUR GROWTH, IMPACT, AND COMMUNITY.

2025-2026

This report is also available at:
www.flowersearlylearning.org

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Rooted in Growth

At Flowers Early Learning, every day is filled with moments that shape a child's future, small victories, new discoveries, and meaningful connections that build the foundation for lifelong success.

This past year, we have had the privilege of walking alongside hundreds of children and families across our communities. Behind every number in this report is a story, of a child gaining confidence, of a parent reaching a goal, of a family finding stability and support when they needed it most.



Our work goes far beyond the classroom. Through education, family engagement, and comprehensive services, we are helping to create stronger, healthier communities where children and families can truly thrive. From expanding opportunities to deepening relationships with families and partners, this year has been one of growth, resilience, and continued commitment to our mission.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our staff, the trust of our families, and the support of our community partners. Together, we are building more than school readiness, we are building confidence, opportunity, and hope for the future.

As you read through this report, we invite you to see not just the progress we've made, but the lives that have been impacted along the way.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us.

Guided by Purpose

Our Mission

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

Our Vision

Every child dreams fearlessly, creating a world of endless possibilities.

Our Philosophy

Rooted in strong, nurturing relationships, we believe children thrive when families thrive. Our whole-family approach honors each family's unique journey, walking alongside them as trusted partners in growth and discovery.

We prioritize social-emotional development as the foundation for school readiness and lifelong success, empowering children to build confidence, empathy, and resilience.

Through inclusive, transformative early learning experiences and deep community connections, we support children and families in dreaming fearlessly and building a future full of possibility.



Quick Facts



533

Children served



17

locations across Berrien,
Cass & Van Buren counties



44

classrooms



180

dedicated staff



275,000

meals and snacks served



4,500

books distributed

Our Leadership

Flowers Early Learning Board Members

Brian Saxton, Board Chair – Former CEO, Boys & Girls Club of Benton Harbor

Arthur Havlicek, Vice Chair – President & CEO, Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber

Linda Tinsley, Secretary – Executive Director, Meals on Wheels

Danielle Persky – Executive Director, Van Buren/Cass District Health Department

Kacee Dochenetz – Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, Berrien County

Michael Mompremier – Director of Business Solutions, Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren

Stacey Stephens – Vice President, Senior Commercial Loan Officer, Horizon Bank

Haylei Shepard, Policy Council Chair

Sara Parkhurst, Policy Council Vice Chair

Flowers Early Learning Policy Council Representatives

Amelia Espinosa – Bangor HS

Evelyn Garcia – Bangor EHS

Micah McCree-Davis – Benton Harbor DEC HS

Kadeejah Lee-Rodgers – Benton Harbor DEC EHS

Sara Parkhurst – Cass EHS

Deborah Thrasher – Decatur HS

Destinee Wadkins – Dowagiac HS

Antonia Ledesma – Gobles HS

Destiney Walston – Mattawan HS

Khyra Kimble – Millburg HS

Mykayla Kirby – Millburg EHS

Kristin Survoy – New Buffalo HS

Annie O'Connell – New Buffalo EHS

Haylei Shepard – Niles HS

Alli Harman – SMC Dowagiac HS

Madison Gil – South Haven HS

Jennifer Russell – Watervliet HS

Sydney Whittker – Watervliet EHS

Mary-alice Wirick – Home Visiting

Jenilee Moody – GSRP Behavior Consultant

Sherry Bennett – Van Buren GSC

Betsy Bradley – Strong Beginnings Family Liaison



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LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS





Innovative Learning Environments

Our classrooms are designed to spark curiosity, creativity, and connection. Through hands-on learning and play-based experiences, children explore, discover, and build critical skills in a supportive environment.

Whole-Child Approach

We support every aspect of a child's development, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive, ensuring children are not only ready for school, but ready for life.

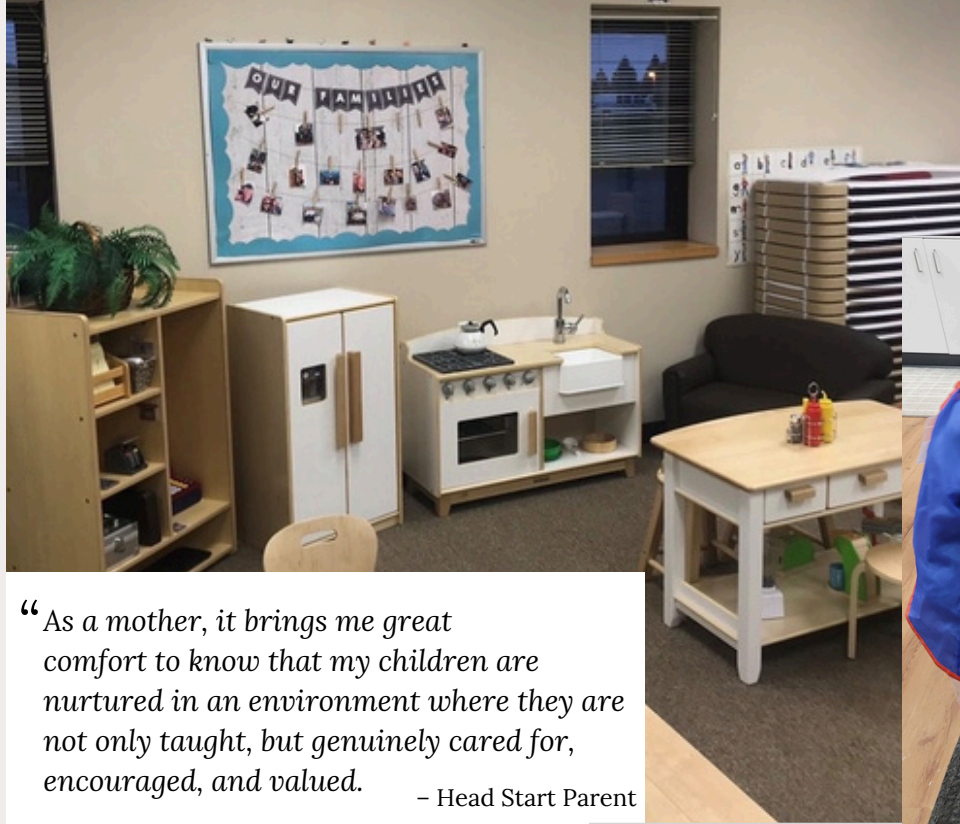
Family-Centered Services

We partner with families through individualized support, goal setting, leadership opportunities, volunteer opportunities, and resources that promote stability, growth, and long-term success.

Health & Wellness Integration

Children receive access to:

- Medical and dental screenings
- Nutritious meals and snacks
- Mental health and developmental support



“As a mother, it brings me great comfort to know that my children are nurtured in an environment where they are not only taught, but genuinely cared for, encouraged, and valued.

– Head Start Parent



Classroom Descriptions

Our classrooms are designed to meet the developmental needs of infants and preschoolers. Each space includes engaging learning areas that promote exploration, independence, and collaboration. Materials are age-appropriate, culturally responsive, and adjusted to reflect children’s interests and learning goals.

Play-Based Learning

Play is central to learning. Through hands-on experiences, children build thinking skills, language, and social-emotional growth. Teachers support learning by observing, engaging, and extending play in meaningful ways that help children understand the world around them.

Safe & Nurturing Spaces

We provide safe, welcoming environments where children feel secure and valued. Consistent routines and caring relationships help children build confidence and belonging. Staff create warm, responsive classrooms that support each child’s emotional and physical well-being.

Millburg Campus

Our Millburg campus is a certified outdoor classroom, intentionally designed to connect children with nature through hands-on exploration, discovery, and play. These outdoor learning environments invite children to learn in natural settings where curiosity is sparked, questions are encouraged, and discovery happens through meaningful, real-world experiences. This approach supports problem-solving, independence, and whole-child development beyond the traditional classroom.



Our Millburg campus is also a designated Monarch Waystation, providing a protected habitat for monarch butterflies and supporting broader efforts to sustain pollinators. Children take part in purposeful, hands-on learning as they observe life cycles, plant and care for pollinator-friendly spaces, and witness the connection between living things and their environment. These experiences help build early understanding of science concepts while fostering responsibility, patience, and environmental stewardship.

CHILD AND FAMILY EXPERIENCE





At Flowers Early Learning, we support the whole family through engagement, education, and personalized support. Each family is paired with a dedicated Family Advocate who builds trusting relationships, helps navigate needs, and supports families in setting and achieving meaningful goals.

Families stay connected through opportunities such as Policy Council and Family Committee meetings, Family Fun Nights, Conscious Discipline workshops, family book clubs, and special events that celebrate and strengthen family connections.

61%

of families completed a Family Strengths Assessment, helping identify strengths and needs.

91%

of those families developed a Family Partnership Agreement, an individualized goal-setting process to support families.

31%

of those families were able to accomplish their goal in the 2025-2026 program year.

This reflects ongoing progress as families build skills, access resources, and work toward meaningful outcomes.



Family engagement is a cornerstone of the learning experience across our centers. Throughout the program year, families are invited into classrooms and school communities through a variety of meaningful opportunities, including field days, family fun nights, Fantastic Fathers and Families events, and hands-on classroom projects with children. These experiences create welcoming spaces where families can actively participate in their child's learning, build relationships with educators, and connect with other families in their community.

These moments of engagement are shared experiences that strengthen the foundation of each child's development. When families and educators work together, children benefit from consistency, increased confidence, and a stronger sense of belonging in their learning environment. Family participation also reinforces the importance of early learning at home and in the classroom, helping children see that the adults in their lives are partners in their growth and success.

03

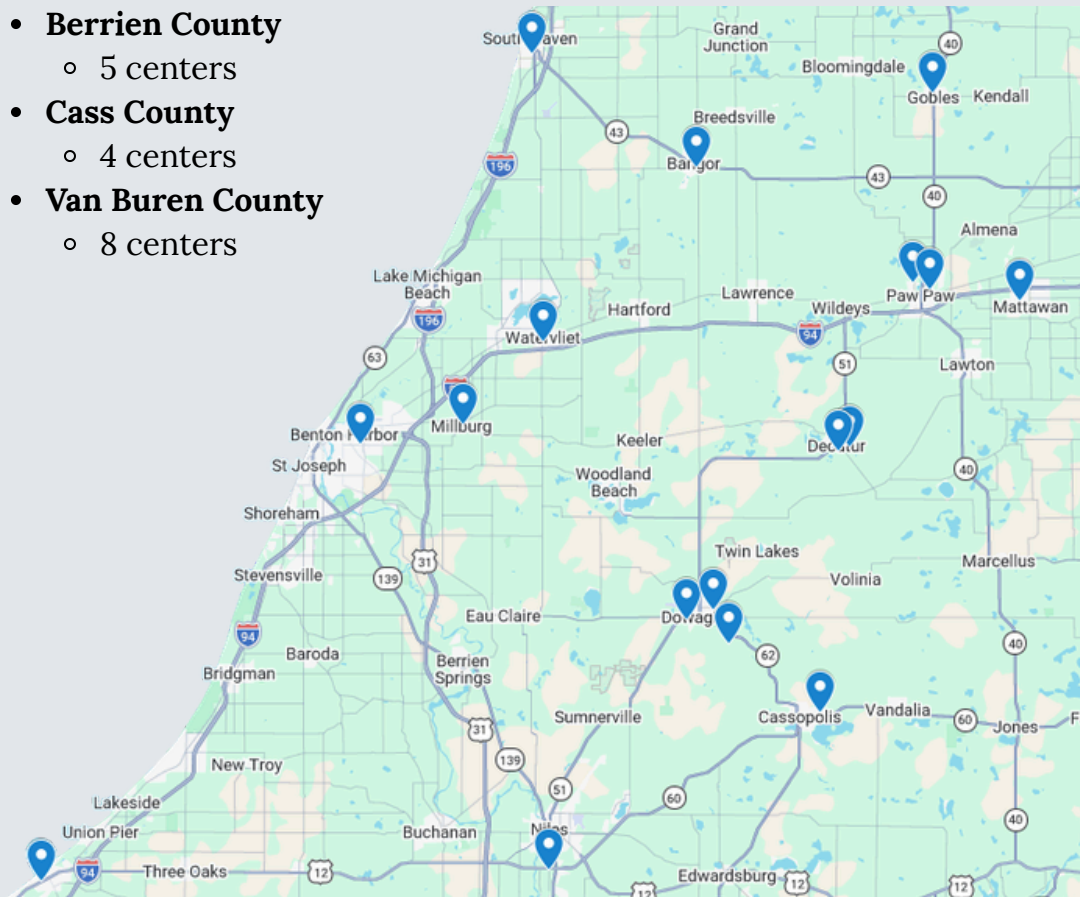
PROGRAM AT A GLANCE



Our Service Area



- **Berrien County**
 - 5 centers
- **Cass County**
 - 4 centers
- **Van Buren County**
 - 8 centers



533

Children Served

17

Locations

44

Classrooms

Program Overview & Enrollment Data

533 Cumulative
Enrollment

130 Early Head Start

403 Head Start

457 Families
Served

77% Average Monthly
Enrollment

41% Children Enrolled 1+
Years

81% Average Daily
Attendance



Types of Eligibility

Income
at/below 100% **21%**

McKinney Vento **10%**

Public Assistance **57%**

Foster Care **3%**

Over Income 101-
130% **2%**

Over Income 131+ **7%**

Received Disability
Services **21%**



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS





We know we can't do this work alone. Through meaningful partnerships across our communities, we connect families to critical resources, enhance our services, and work together to create lasting impact for children and families.

Through our partnership with Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren, and Southwestern Michigan College, we are growing the next generation of early childhood educators through the Child Development Specialist Apprenticeship.

This paid, full-time program combines 4,000 hours of hands-on classroom experience with college coursework, preparing teachers for infant, toddler, and preschool settings. Apprentices earn while they learn, receive tuition support, and gain access to resources that reduce barriers to success.

As participants progress, they build skills, increase their earnings, and move along a clear pathway toward long-term careers in early childhood education, strengthening our workforce and the quality of care for children and families.



Volunteer Impact

These partnerships reflect the impact of community investment in early childhood education. Every volunteer hour and act of service helps create meaningful experiences for children while strengthening families and communities.



During the FY 2/1/2025–1/31/2026, a total of 1,021 volunteers contributed 36,218 hours of service. Of these volunteers, 662 were parents or former parents actively engaged in supporting classrooms, events, and family engagement efforts. Volunteer efforts generated an estimated \$897,116.86 in in-kind value.

Key partnership highlights included:

Southwestern Michigan College – Student Aide Program

The Student Aide Program launched near the end of the fiscal year, providing meaningful, hands-on learning opportunities for early childhood education students.

- 3 student aides participated in classroom settings through a grant-funded opportunity
- Students gained real-world experience in early childhood education environments
- The partnership generated \$2,784.33 in in-kind contributions during its launch period

Lake Michigan College & Southwestern Michigan College – Early Childhood Education Programs

Early childhood education students from both colleges completed classroom observation requirements, strengthening connections between higher education and early learning environments.

Paw Paw High School – Pay It Forward Program

Through this partnership, high school students engaged in meaningful volunteer service:

- Students supported classroom activities at our Mattawan location
- Participants gained valuable community service experience
- The program strengthened youth engagement and community connection

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MEASURING OUR IMPACT



Long-term research supports what families experience firsthand: with 90% of brain development occurring before age five, early experiences play a critical role in shaping a child's future. Participation in Head Start is associated with higher high school graduation rates and increased college enrollment, outcomes that reflect the lasting impact of early support, strong relationships, and high-quality early learning experiences.

TESTIMONIAL



"I have six children who first began their experiences with Head Start as early as 1995. Out of my six children, five have graduated high school, and several have gone on to pursue college and higher education.

The long-term influence of Head Start has been evident in many areas of my children's lives. I firmly believe that the early lessons in nutrition and physical activity contributed to their health, discipline, and success.

As a parent, it fills me with pride to know that Head Start played such an integral role in shaping the future of my children, laying the groundwork for their academic achievements, personal growth, and commitment to service."



The impact of our work extends far beyond the classroom. When children have access to high-quality early learning, families gain stability, parents are able to work, and communities grow stronger.

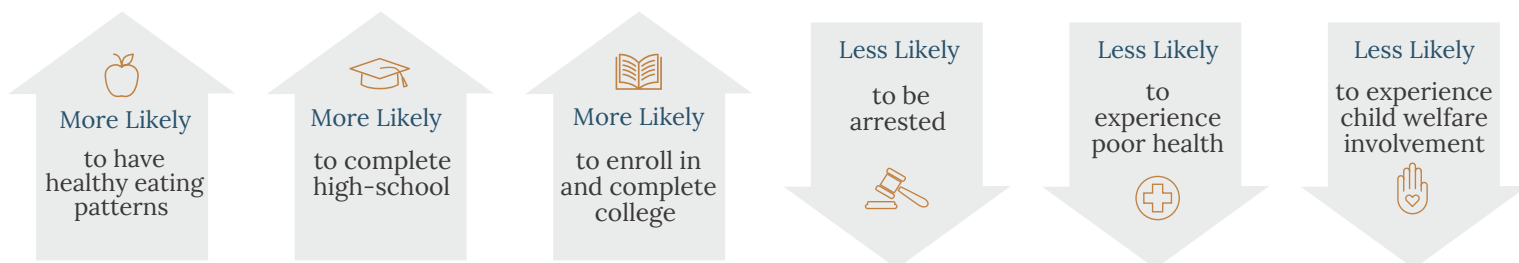
Every day, our programs create ripple effects. Children build confidence, social-emotional skills, and a love of learning. Families receive support, set goals, and access resources that improve their overall well-being. Employers benefit from a more reliable workforce, and local communities are strengthened through increased economic stability.

Through comprehensive services, strong partnerships, and a focus on the whole child and whole family, we are helping create lasting change. The investments made in early childhood today lead to better outcomes in education, health, and economic mobility for years to come.

Together, we are building a foundation for lifelong success, one child, one family, and one community at a time.



Children Who Attend Head Start Are:



Kindergarten Readiness

COR Objective	Percentage of 4-year-olds meeting or exceeding expectations
Independence & Self-Help Skills	97%
Social-Emotional Skills	71%
Communication & Language	61%
Early Academics	60%
Fine Motor Control	81%

Children at Flowers Early Learning develop the skills needed for success in kindergarten and beyond, with a strong focus on social-emotional development, independence, and early learning. These foundational skills, such as emotional regulation, communication, and self-help abilities, support a confident and successful transition to school.

While many children are meeting or exceeding expectations, the data also highlights opportunities for continued growth in specific skill areas. This information helps guide instruction, strengthen individualized support, and ensure that teaching strategies are responsive to the needs of all children.



“Head start taught my daughter to be independent and patient, as well as very helpful both at home and in the classroom, not just with adults but with other children as well.”

– Head Start Parent

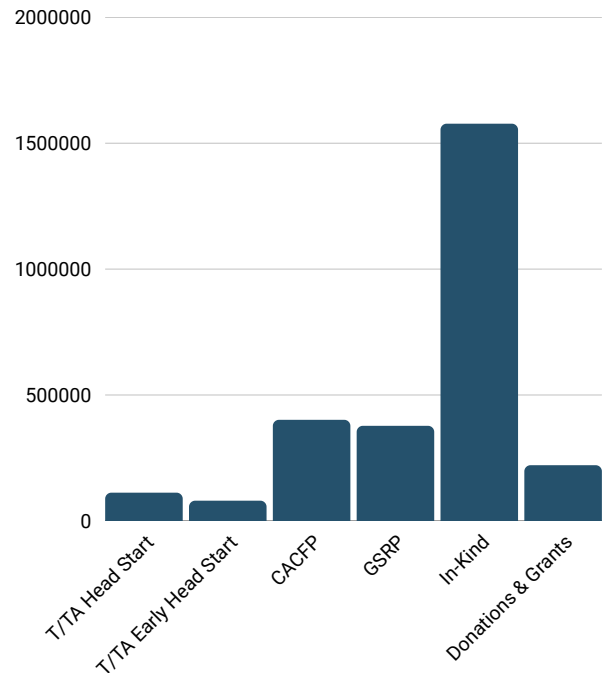


FINANCIAL REPORT

FEBRUARY 1, 2025 - JANUARY 31, 2026

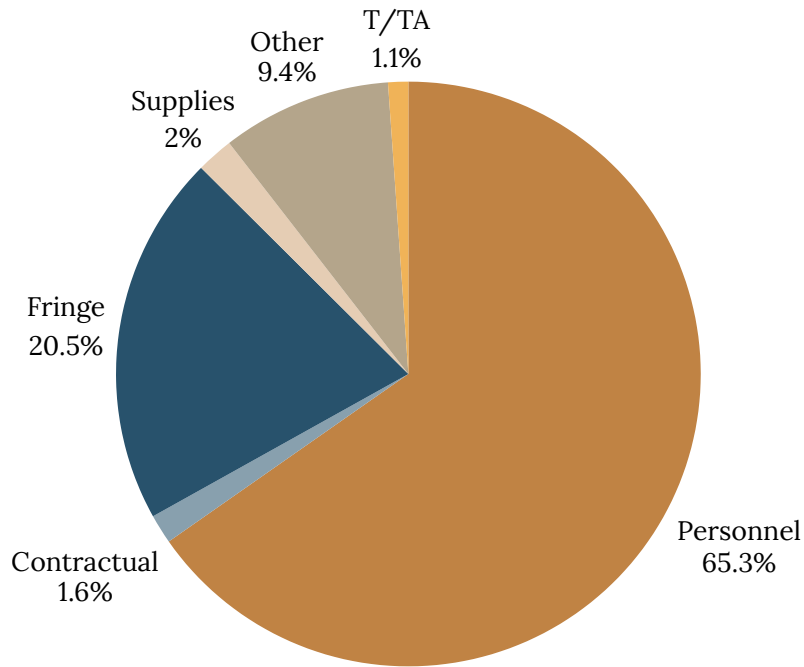
Operations	
Head Start \$7,952,495	Early Head Start \$3,654,419

Additional Funds Received	
T/TA Head Start	\$112,015
T/TA Early Head Start	\$80,171
CACFP	\$400,379
GSRP	\$377,525
In-Kind	\$1,577,544
Donations and Grants	\$283,762
Grand Total	\$14,438,310



Donations and Grants		
Capacity Building	\$261,330	Miscellaneous Donations, Foundation support, Degroot Grant, Upton Grant
Facilities	270	Miscellaneous
Classroom Specific	\$3,732	Miscellaneous, Story Kit Grant, HPS Grant
Family Specific	\$11,500	Lead - Parent Education Grant, Fishing and Phonics
General	\$6,930	Miscellaneous, Carolyn Hanson

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 2026 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: February 2026 - 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

LOOKING AHEAD



Continuing Our Commitment to Children and Families

As we look to the future, Flowers Early Learning remains committed to strengthening the quality and impact of our services for children and families across our communities. Building on the insights gained through this year's self-assessment, we will continue to focus on continuous improvement, responsive programming, and meaningful family engagement.

A key priority moving forward is the expansion of services to reach more children and families who can benefit from high-quality early childhood education and support. This includes exploring opportunities to grow program capacity, strengthen partnerships, and enhance access to comprehensive services across Southwest Michigan.



At the core of this work is our continued commitment to children and families. We will remain focused on ensuring that every child is supported in their growth, every family is valued as a partner, and every program decision reflects the needs and strengths of the communities we serve. Through intentional planning, collaboration, and dedication, we will continue building a strong foundation for lifelong success.

Thank You to our Community Partners

We are grateful for the continued support of our community partners, whose collaboration plays a vital role in the success of our programs. Through shared commitment and strong partnerships, we are able to connect children and families to the resources, services, and opportunities they need to thrive.

Your dedication helps strengthen our communities and expand the impact of our work each day. Together, we are creating stronger foundations for children and helping families build brighter futures.

Thank you for standing alongside us and investing in the well-being, growth, and success of the communities we serve.

Benton Harbor Sunrise Rotary Club
Berrien Community Foundation
Bill Nygren Foundation
Carolyn's Kids
Gates Chevy World
Helping Hands Cass County
Kiwanis Club South Haven
South Haven Chamber of Commerce
South Haven Community Foundation
Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber
UAW Local 357
Kelly Laesch - Berrien Co. Sheriffs Deputy
Illiff Chiropractic
Piedt Farms
Present Pillars
Home Depot
Berrien RESA
Van Buren ISD

Berrien Great Start Collaborative
Cass Great Start Collaborative
Van Buren Great Start Collaborative
Southwestern Michigan College
Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren
Heart of Cook
Frederick S. Upton Foundation
United Way Valley Food HUB
HOPE Resources
Van Buren Court
DeGroot Family Foundation
Special-Lite
Big Furry Friends
Harding's Market Coloma
Nabisco
Amanda Marie Bakery
Silver Beach Pizza
Early On



Where children, families,
and communities thrive.

269-657-2581

www.flowersearlylearning.org

Approved by Board and Policy Council June 17, 2026