



HEAD START

FY24 ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024





Loving parents want to provide every opportunity for their children to learn, grow, and thrive. Yet often, the high cost of child care and the inability to access excellent early childhood programs close to home can create barriers for many families.

That is why Illinois Action for Children (IAC) partners with Head Start to deliver the high-quality early learning programs families depend on—throughout communities once considered child care deserts.

Every child, regardless of their life circumstances, race, or ZIP code, deserves a strong foundation. This includes a stable home life, access to nutritious food, education, love and care, and more. With this in mind, **our programming extends beyond the classroom to support parents working to achieve family stability. We also elevate parents as their child's first and most important teacher by:**

- **Engaging families** through at-home activities, educational workshops and training sessions, family fun days, and more.
- **Promoting leadership** development through service opportunities on our Policy Council, Parent Committees, and IAC Board of Directors and through participation at Illinois Head Start Association and National Head Start Association conferences.
- **Coordinating virtual social-emotional learning (SEL) Parent Cafés** to equip parents with essential tools that reinforce learning at home, provide a forum to discuss family challenges, and offer peer support and guidance.

The value of these resources is immeasurable, but we are pleased to provide a window into their impact through stories and program data from the 2024 fiscal year. **Enjoy exploring our Head Start Annual Report.**



Sincerely,
April Janney
CEO
Illinois Action for Children

ABOUT ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Our History

“What about the children?” When Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) founder Sylvia Cotton raised this question in 1969, Illinois was in a child care crisis. As increasing numbers of women joined the workforce, limited child care availability, conflicting licensing requirements for providers, and scant government funding put children at risk for widespread abuse and neglect. Over the last 55 years, IAFC has evolved from a grassroots advocacy organization to a nonprofit leader with a range of 26 vital programs, laser-focused on ensuring children receive the support they need to thrive.

Our Approach

We recognize that, to be self-sufficient, American families need access to high-quality, safe, and affordable child care and early education. This allows parents to go to work with confidence, knowing that their children are in good hands.

In addition to increasing access to child care through our own early learning programs, IAFC works to improve the early childhood system at all levels. We **strengthen communities facing barriers to essential resources**—promoting the well-being of children and serving parents as they work toward family stability. We also **invest in professional development for early childhood educators** to help them become the best possible teachers and leaders for the next generation. And we **advocate for equitable, supportive early childhood policies** and legislation.

When children succeed, everyone benefits. That is why IAFC advances the highest quality early childhood education and care for all children.

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ABOUT HEAD START

Federally funded, Head Start and Early Head Start programs prepare children to succeed in school and in life through learning experiences tailored to their changing needs and abilities. These programs support children's social and emotional development from birth to age five. They also provide families with health and nutrition resources alongside additional services.

Head Start and Early Head Start champion children and families who might not otherwise be able to access early education due to their economic circumstances. They promote the highest standards of quality by delivering evidence-based and comprehensive early care and education.

Early Head Start programs provide educational, socialization, and supportive opportunities for expectant families and children up to three years old. Through both home- and center-based programs, families experience weekly home visits with Parent-Infant Educators, center-based biweekly socialization groups, opportunities to develop relationships with other children and families, prenatal support, other resources for parents and families, and a seamless transition from Early Head Start to Head Start programs.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Grantee

Illinois Action for Children

Program Number

05CH10105: Illinois Action for Children

Address

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Telephone

312.823.1285

Fax

773.561.2256

Head Start Director

Carisa Hurley Davis
carisa.davis@actforchildren.org

Agency Website

www.actforchildren.org

Early Learning Website

earlylearning.actforchildren.org

SITE LOCATIONS

Directly-Operated Sites

Chicago Heights

202 S. Halsted St., Lot C1
Chicago Heights, IL 60411

Ford Heights

1055 Berkeley Ave.
Ford Heights, IL 60411

Harvey-South Holland

16515 S. Park Ave.
South Holland, IL 60473

Dolton

729 Engle St.
Dolton, IL 60419

Partner Sites

First Step Child Care Center Inc.

22025 Governors Hwy.
Richton Park, IL 60471

A Step Up Career Academy Center

2745 Bernice Rd.
Lansing, IL 60438

IAFC grounds our multidisciplinary approach on leading research and science about child brain development. At each of our program locations, children benefit from warm, nurturing interactions with adult educators; support for basic mental, dental, and physical health; and developmentally appropriate school-readiness education.

Families participate in a variety of activities to support children's development and build strong parent-child relationships that align with each family's specific goals and needs. Additionally, IAFC's Head Start and Early Head Start site locations are fully equipped for remote instruction.





Families participate in a variety of activities to support children's development and build strong parent-child relationships.

SITE PROGRAM DATA



408

Children Served



395

Households Served



350

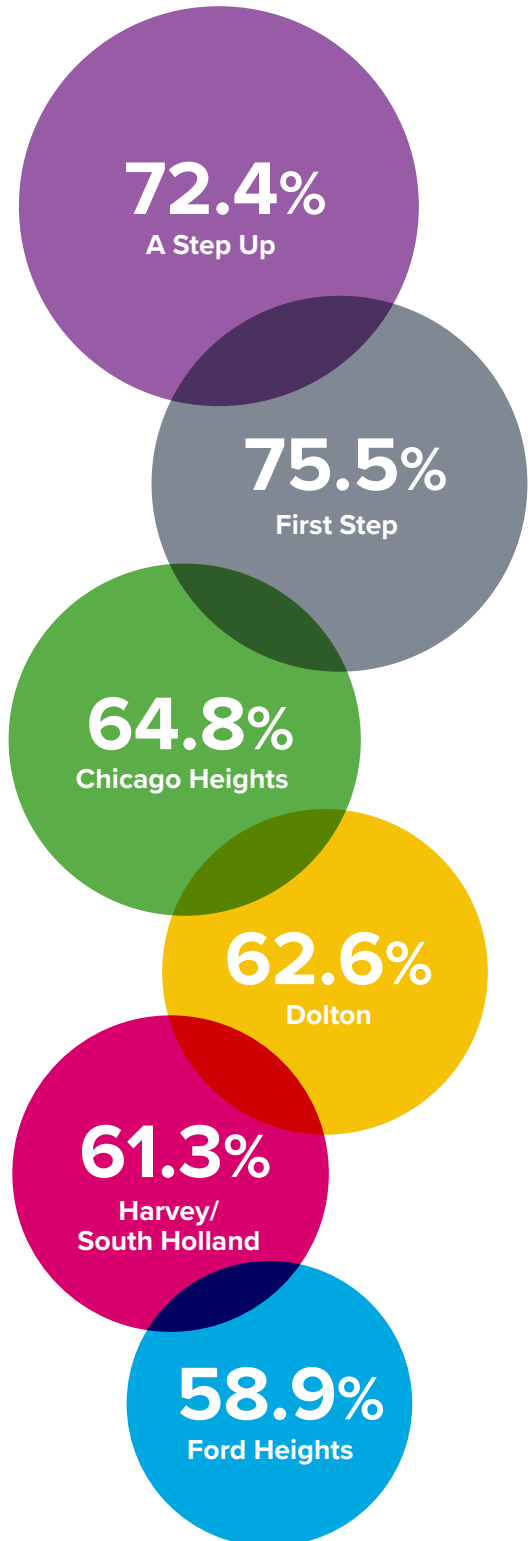
Children Now Up-To-Date on Age-Appropriate Health Care



64%*

Average Monthly Attendance Across Sites

Monthly Attendance Per Site:



*Does not include First Step, which began midyear.



CURRICULUM AND PROGRAM MODEL

IAFC’s Early Learning programs employ practice-based coaching, a cyclical approach that supports effective teaching and promotes positive outcomes for children. The method includes focused observations, reflections, and feedback on teaching practices, actions, goal setting, and planning.

Programs are inclusive, allowing children with previously identified disabilities to learn alongside their typically developing peers. This helps prepare children and their families for school at an earlier age.

During FY24, IAFC’s Early Learning programs continued their participation in *Lead, Learn, Excel*, which Start Early (a peer early childhood organization) facilitates. Through this work,

IAFC is enhancing classroom environments, fostering positive teacher-child interactions, and equipping educators with systems and routines for continuous learning and quality improvement. Elements of *Lead, Learn, Excel* include data dialogues, team lesson planning, professional development, and peer learning communities, which support teachers as they work one on one with families to improve specific outcomes for each child.

Moreover, IAFC aligns our programming with the Illinois Early Learning and Development standards, incorporating:

- **The Pyramid Model**, which cultivates healthy social-emotional development. This framework's tiered approach provides universal support that promotes children's wellness and includes targeted supports and intensive services for those who need them.
- **Creative Curriculum**, a research-based curriculum. Educators use observations, pictures, videos, audio recordings, and children's work to assess their competency in learning domains that are essential for school readiness. Each year, following completion of three checkpoints, the team analyzes results, guides classroom and individual instruction, and plans for teachers' future professional development.
- **Teaching Strategies GOLD®**, an assessment system that helps teachers monitor children's development. It is based on observation and performance tasks. GOLD collects data on children's development and learning. This data is used to develop lesson plans and address individual needs.
- **Parents as Teachers**, a research-based curriculum employed in IAFC's Home Visiting program, which increases parents' knowledge of early childhood development and improves parenting practices to prepare children for school. Home Visiting supports children younger than age three and their parents.

Early Learning program staff partner with families to support each child's success.

Regular screenings of children's hearing, vision, and overall social-emotional development help the team determine each child's needs and refer families to appropriate services when necessary.

During parent-teacher conferences in fall and spring, teachers share Teaching Strategies' GOLD® Development and Learning Reports with parents, discuss each child's strengths, and help plan for a smooth transition for children starting kindergarten.



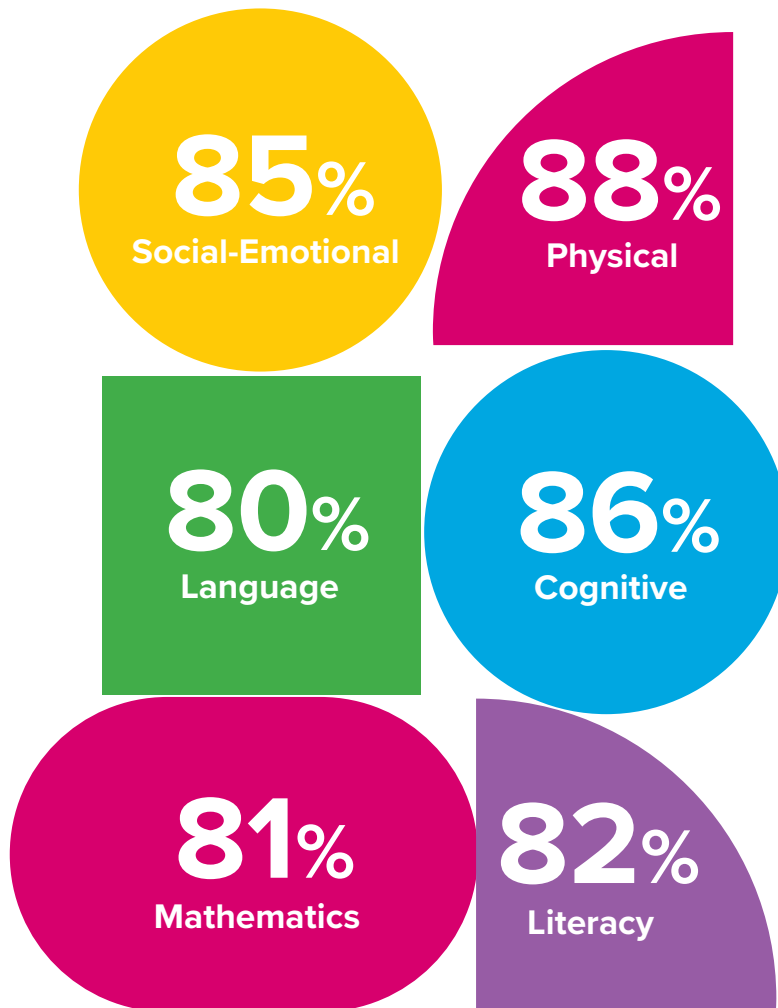
EARLY LEARNING DATA

Teaching Strategies GOLD® provides IAFC’s Early Learning teachers and administrators with valuable data, collected and reported three times a year to track each child’s progress. This data also helps assess progress in each classroom and each site, providing an overall snapshot of performance.

Teaching Strategies GOLD® covers all domains designed to assess school readiness in the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

Children Ages 0 - 5

The data table for Early Head Start and Head Start provides results for the 2023-2024 spring checkpoint. We have highlighted children’s performance level by age in each development area. The percentages below show how many children met the expectations outlined in Teaching Strategies GOLD®.



POPULATIONS SERVED

IAFC's Early Learning programs promote access—recruiting and enrolling children and families who may be furthest from opportunities.

13 Unhoused Children

13 Unhoused Families

18 Children Under the Care of a Guardian

323 Single Parents

72 Two-Parent Families

3 Parents with Disabilities

12 Children in Foster Care

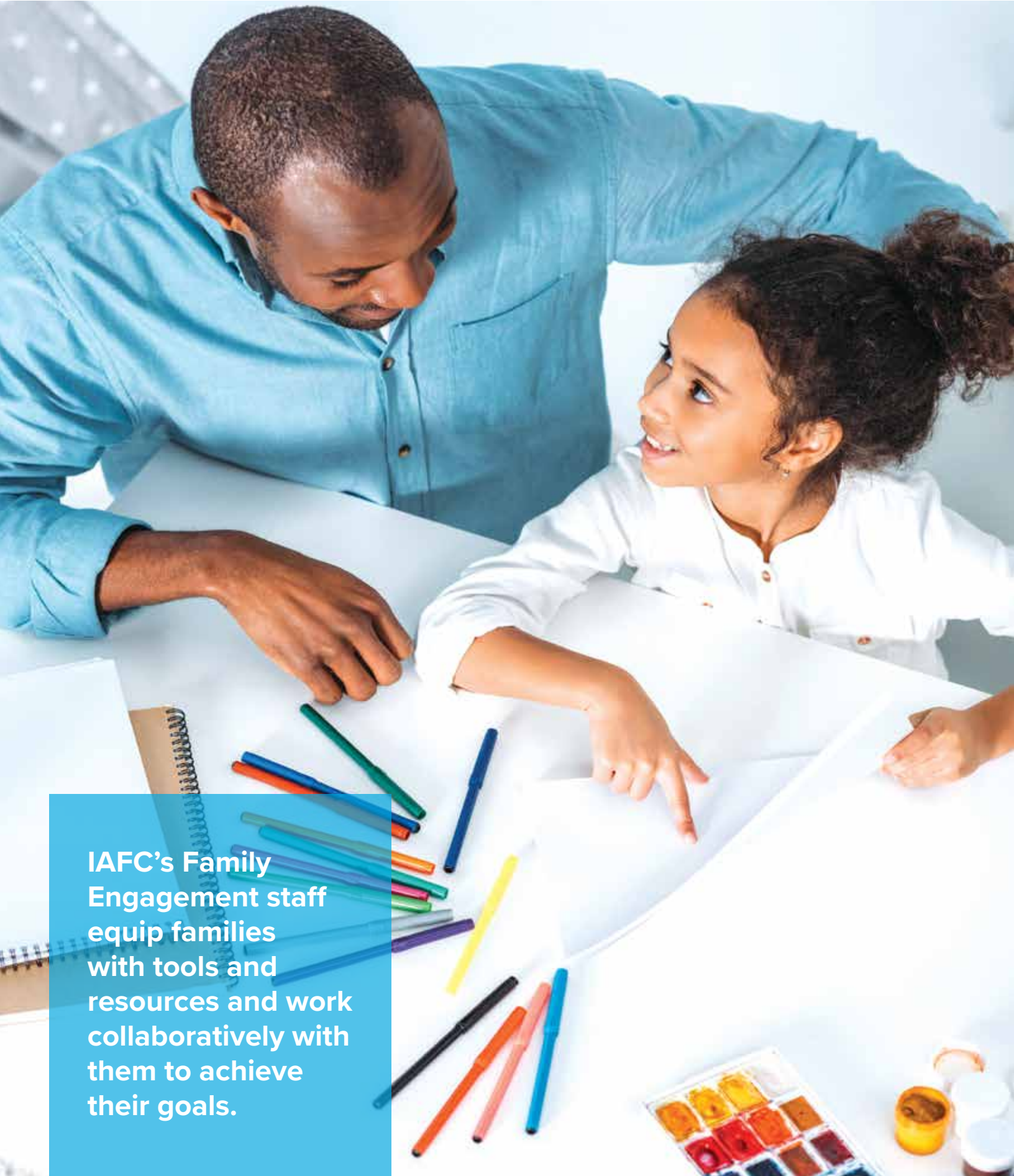
156 Families Receiving WIC

16 Families Receiving TANF

270 Families Receiving SNAP

21 Children with Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

14 Children with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)



IAFC's Family Engagement staff equip families with tools and resources and work collaboratively with them to achieve their goals.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Parent Committees and the Policy Council—bodies of our Early Learning programs—meet virtually, in person, and through a hybrid model to sustain high attendance.

IAFC also encourages family support of children’s learning through at-home activities; educational workshops and training sessions; family fun days, father and father-figure engagement; Parent Cafés; and other parent-child interactive activities.

Likewise, IAFC promotes leadership development among parents and caregivers. Through the Policy Council and IAFC’s Board of Directors, families strengthen their leadership skills and voice. One parent was elected to the Illinois Head Start Association’s Board. Several families benefitted from participation in Illinois Head Start and National Head Start Associations’ conferences. Alongside IAFC’s Human Resources staff, families participated in Early Learning programs’ employee candidate screening.

IAFC’s Early Learning programs coordinated six virtual social-emotional learning Parent Café sessions for 58 participants and 18 facilitators in early 2024. These 75-minute sessions integrated Strengthening Families Protective Factors,

Pyramid Model parent modules, and Be Strong Families Parent Café Cards.

Parent Café sessions provide a forum to discuss families’ successes and challenges related to their children’s early social-emotional learning, allowing participants to offer each other support and guidance. In this setting, parents build support networks beyond school staff, helping them sustain healthy parenting practices.

Ultimately, IAFC’s Family Engagement staff equip families with tools and resources and work collaboratively with them to achieve their goals.

IAFC uses a variety of online and offline channels to enhance communication with families, including a website, texts, emails, phone calls, newsletters, virtual meetings, parent events, parent-teacher conferences, and more. IAFC customizes our written and verbal communications to reflect each family’s preferred language.

Family Engagement Data

395

Families Served

323

Single-Parent Families

72

Two-Parent Families

15

Father Figures Engaged as Primary Caregivers

130

Employed Families

167

Families Not in the Workforce

25

Families Received at Least One Service

71

Father Figures Engaged as Secondary Caregivers

IMPACT STORIES

Caregiving and Leadership Skills

“ I am the legal guardian of two of my grandsons.

My five-year-old grandson and I were facing challenging behaviors...When he was three years old, I registered him in the Harvey/South Holland Head Start Learning Center. He had a hard time adapting and sharing with other children, and I had to adapt to new routines and responsibilities, as well. He received individualized activities to come up to speed with other children his age.

All the staff have been very understanding of our challenges. Little by little, my grandson became comfortable in the classroom and started to learn directions and routines. I also spent time getting to know all the students in my grandson's classroom. I am affectionally known to all as 'Nana.'

I have participated in Parent Cafés where other families and staff have conversations and learn from each other's parenting experiences. I also participate in mental health workshops, which have helped me with day-to-day stresses.

I have had the opportunity to participate in professional development at a national level, attending the Parent Family Engagement NHSA [National Head Start Association] Conferences in 2023 and 2024. Sessions I attended have helped me to understand more about the program and other family subjects.

The program has also provided me with resources and services that have met our needs, such as referrals to a food pantry, clothing, and even a referral to financial help [through IAFC] to pay the fees for my grandson's graduation.

I didn't think I had a lot to offer to the program, however, staff motivated me to volunteer and to nominate myself for one of the Parent Committee/Policy Council positions. Last year, I was elected Chair of the Parent Committee and was a Policy Council Representative.... Currently, I am not only the Chair of the Parent Committee at my center, but I was also nominated and elected Chair of the Policy Council and member of the IAFC Board.

The staff has supported me from the beginning of my journey with Head Start. I continue to learn each day. I am very grateful for the program and IAFC's Early Learning staff.”

– Grandmother of a Harvey/South Holland student



Support with a Developmental Milestone

“Several impactful moments [from the program] stand out, but my daughter’s successful potty training at age four is paramount. Due to extenuating circumstances, I couldn’t dedicate the necessary time and attention; however, [her teachers] provided exceptional support. Within a week of starting their program, my daughter’s potty training was complete, and she has remained consistently dry, both day and night. Their outstanding efforts are deeply appreciated, as I lacked the resources to achieve this milestone myself.”

– Parent of a Ford Heights student

A Warm Welcome + Essentials

“I have a family from Ghana [at my learning center]. A few weeks ago, I gave them a goodie bag that contained a coat, some clothes, books, diapers, and wipes. Mom was having financial issues, and her child did not have a coat. When she received the coat, she was so happy....She was smiling from ear to ear and kept telling me, ‘Thank you! Thank you!’ It was very touching.”

– Early Head Start educator at Ford Heights center



STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS

Current Assets	\$ 10,726,014
Noncurrent Assets	\$ 11,276,119
Total Assets	\$ 22,002,133

LIABILITIES

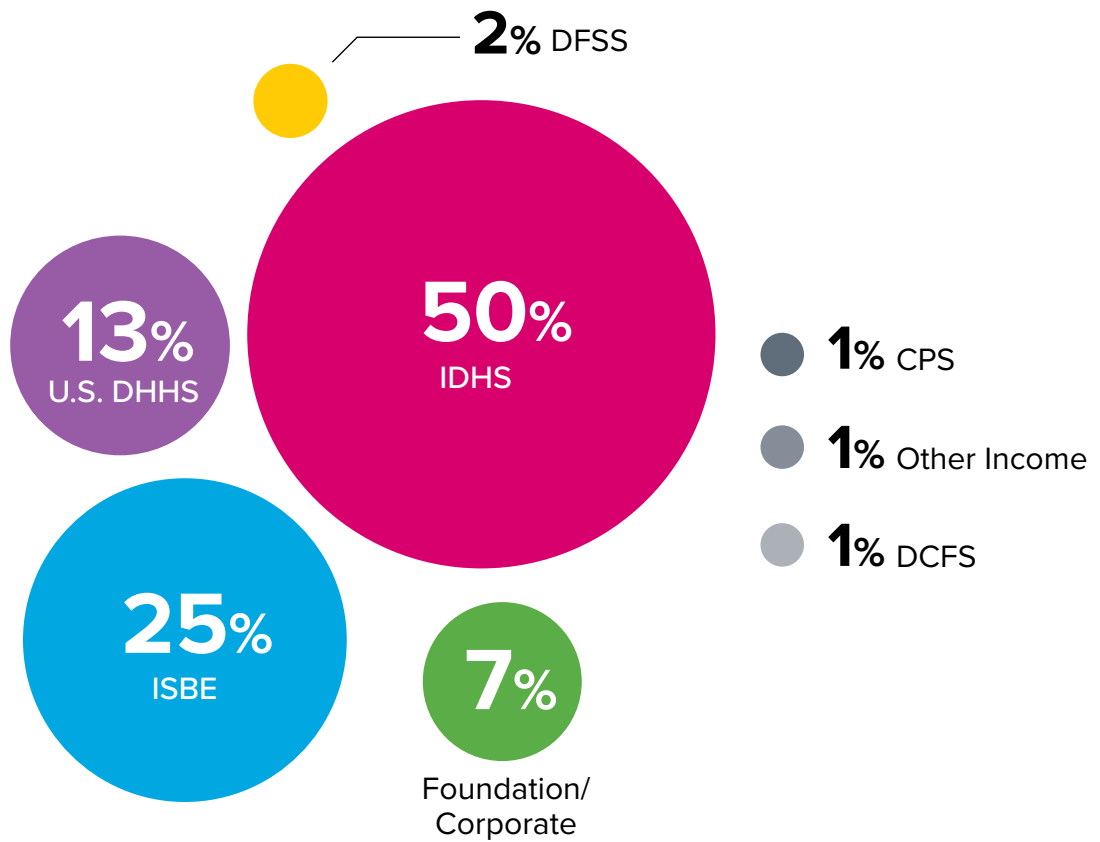
Total Liabilities	\$ 14,287,339
Total Net Assets	\$ 7,714,794
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 22,002,113



SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Government Contracts

IDHS	\$ 29,479,119
DFSS	\$ 1,083,286
CPS	\$ 795,000
DCFS	\$ 284,934
ISBE	\$ 14,740,435
U.S. DHHS	\$ 7,785,169
Foundation/Corporate	\$ 3,988,798
Other Income	\$ 460,076
Total Support and Revenue	\$ 58,616,817



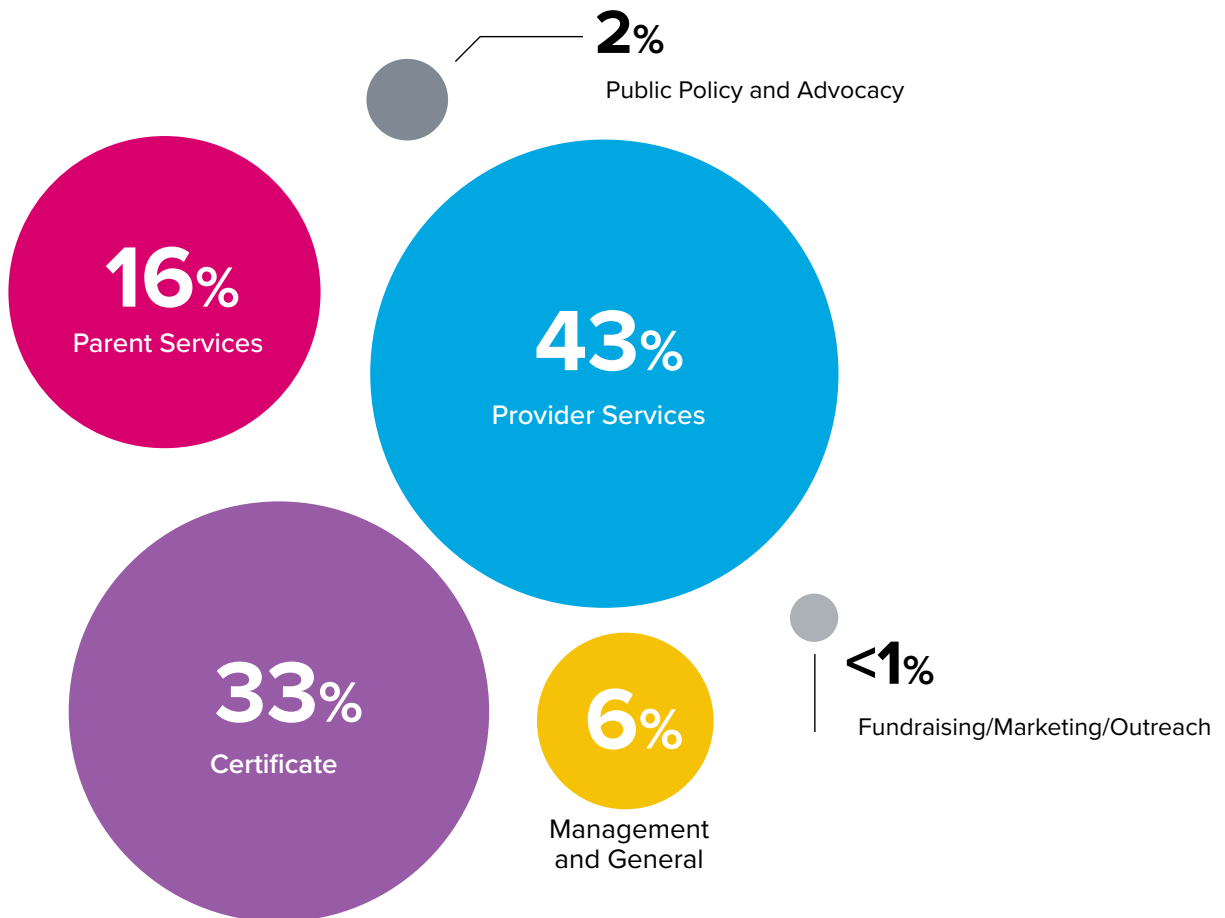
EXPENSES

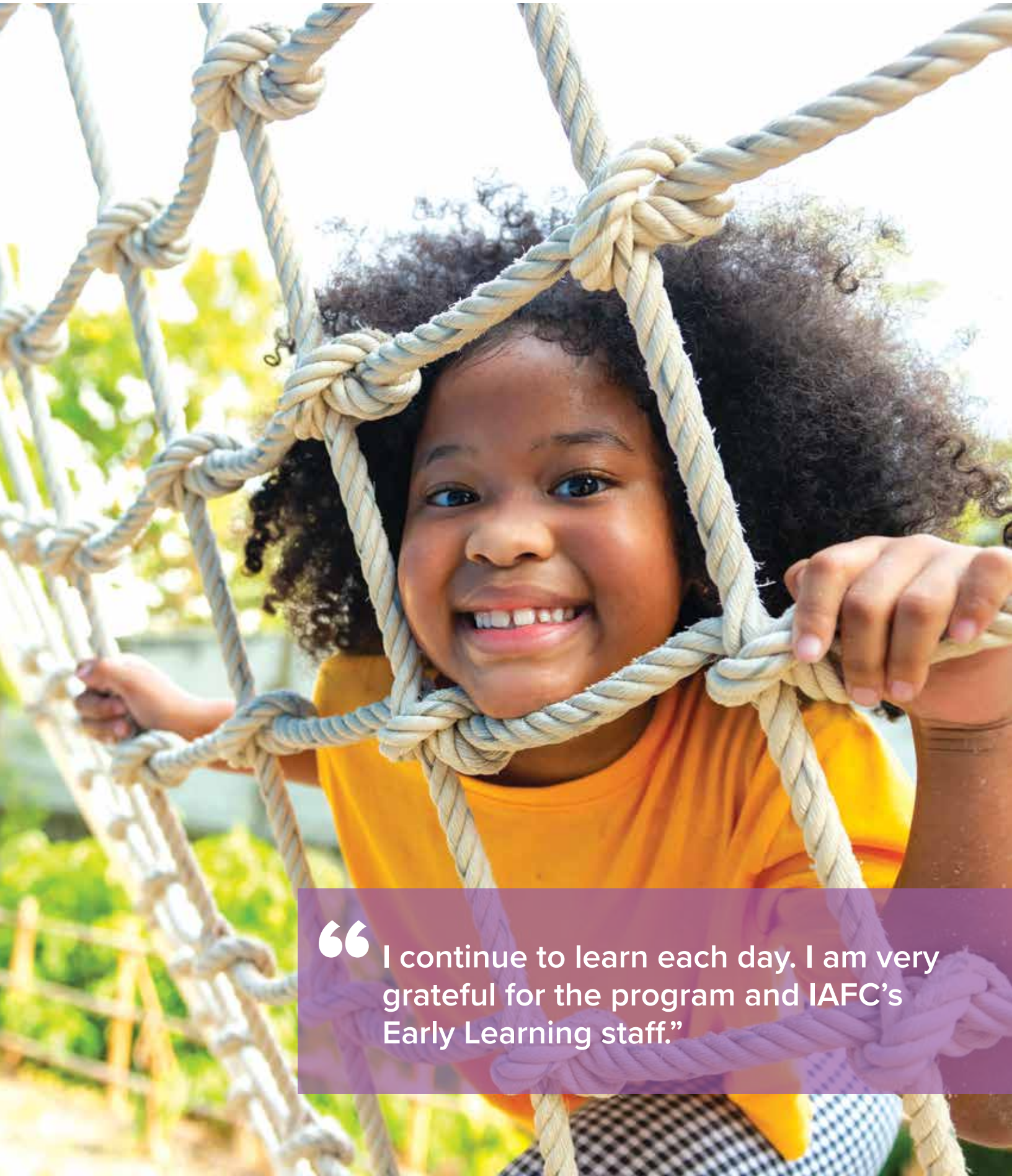
Program Services

Parent Services	\$ 9,201,319
Provider Services	\$ 24,588,051
Certificate	\$ 18,685,527
Public Policy and Advocacy	\$ 1,105,708

Supporting Services

Fundraising/Marketing/Outreach	\$ 199,996
Management and General	\$ 3,756,830
Total Expenses	\$ 57,537,431
Change in Net Assets	\$ 1,079,386





“ I continue to learn each day. I am very grateful for the program and IAFC’s Early Learning staff.”



Illinois Action for Children is a catalyst for organizing, developing, and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most.

www.actforchildren.org
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