



EARLY CHILDHOOD



The QCCI improved early childhood programs by providing professional development for educators, accreditation facilitation for centers and preschools, and support for family child care providers, and by raising public awareness of early childhood issues.

The Early Childhood Resource Center and the SPARK kindergarten readiness program both emerged as a result of the QCCI. The Early Childhood Resource Center continues to provide early educators crucial support, assistance, and professional development, while also working directly with families – and SPARK has prepared more than 10,000 Ohio children for kindergarten.

As demand for high-quality early childhood programs continues to increase, the Foundation is determined to keep Stark County reaching for the stars, thereby ensuring its children the best possible foundation for learning and for life.

Give Hope Through Education

STARK COUNTY: REACHING FOR THE STARS

The State of Ohio uses its *Step Up To Quality* rating system to categorize early childhood programs. More stars mean higher quality, with five-star programs at the very pinnacle of excellence. Five-star programs go far beyond basic licensing standards. Their highly trained teachers have demonstrated a commitment to partnering with families to devise and implement individualized plans for children’s development and learning. Families can be confident that five-star programs are continually improving as they work to help children grow, learn, develop – and thrive.

Stark County boasts 28 five-star programs, including all of the county’s largest: all Canton City School

District preschool classrooms, JRC Learning Center, and the YWCA Early Childhood Learning Center have five stars. And the number of five-star programs continues to grow.

What does that five-star designation mean to the providers themselves? According to Linnea Olbon, the Canton City School District’s Early Childhood Director, it means hard work and excellence: “We’re proud to offer our students, families, and community the highest quality of education, as all seven of our sites recently earned the five-star rating. Approximately 45 teachers, assistants, and specialists have worked diligently to earn this rating, which allows us to serve

over 370 students (and growing) in our program. We’ve been recognized for excellence in safety, teaching and learning, and compliance. So much time and effort goes into the *Step Up To Quality* process, and we couldn’t be more pleased to be an exemplary program right here in Stark County.”

We’re fortunate that Stark County has made such great strides in early childhood quality, but it didn’t happen by accident. The groundwork was laid in 1998, when the Foundation made an ambitious \$1 million investment to establish its Quality Child Care Initiative (QCCI). The QCCI was created to ensure that Stark County’s children receive the finest early education and care in the country.



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