

THE DISTRICT CORRESPONDENT

Connecting our community

December 2024



Our littles are off to an incredible start!

By Ashley Schutte, Communications Coordinator

The Madison Consolidated Schools Early Learning Center is up and running...and so are our littlest learners! In August, the district opened the doors to Phase One of a critically needed childcare center for employees. Immediately filled to available capacity, the district leadership knew that our community needs and would benefit from a larger-scale solution, so work began exploring opportunities for a short-term Phase Two expansion and a longer-term, community-wide solution.



Grant funding and a bit about our 'WHY'

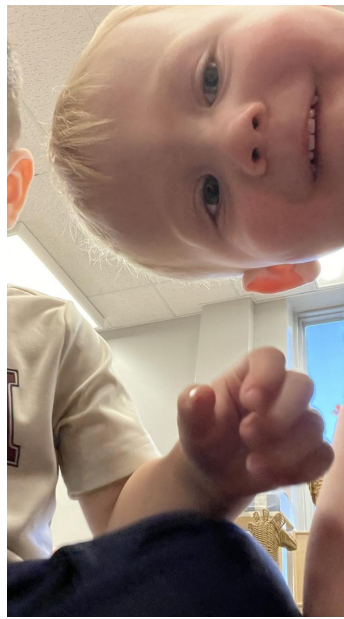
Earlier this year, the district was awarded a \$750,000 Employer-Sponsored Childcare Grant from the Office of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA). The grant application was a very detailed process where the district dug into several data points around early care facility availability within our community, academic data impact when part of early care, and a better understanding of how a lack of child care impacts other local employers. "We know what our data looks like around missed work days when families are trying to find childcare," shared Shannon Allman, Director of Human Resources. "When families cannot find a childcare provider they can rely on to be open, safe, and nurturing, it creates a great deal of stress and then you add lost work time and pay for either or both parents and it can create a huge burden very quickly."

As part of the grant application requirements, the district reached out to several other local employers to share the opportunity and gauge interest in the project. "Everyone is facing the same challenges," shared Superintendent, Dr. Teresa Brown. "When parents have to miss work because they cannot find reliable childcare, it impacts our entire community in a trickle-down effect. The lost work impacts the productivity of the workplace. In our case at school, missing teachers or support staff directly impacts the quality of learning in the classroom, or a bus route that has to be adjusted at the last minute to accommodate a driver shortage. Subs are increasingly hard to find to cover any absences. The lost wages for the day for the family can oftentimes create a tighter budget or take away the opportunity for a family getaway because they have used all of their available days to cover childcare," Brown continued. "The grant process required a great deal of community support from others who seek a solution to a larger problem. Once the

Grant funding and a bit about our 'WHY' cont.

district was notified of the grant award last winter, work began immediately to better understand what it would take to facilitate a larger-scale solution available for more families."

The grant is funding the early stage work necessary to determine feasibility and what next steps make sense. "In the beginning, we reached out to Cummins to learn how they have created and sustained an incredible facility for their employees," Brown shared. "They graciously offered their resources and consulting (at no cost) as they also understand the need for high-quality child care and share a passion for early childhood education and related services that can be provided." Several teams from MCS have visited this, and other facilities, as plans came together for our current three-room facility at MJHS. Rick Roll, CEO of e|solve Solutions, was contracted to conduct an extensive community needs assessment around childcare. "I have had conversations with several local industry leaders, HR professionals, city and county officials, and community partners to try and get a better understanding of what the needs are for Jefferson County families," Roll shared. "We began this project as a way to meet the direct needs of the school district employees but quickly realized that Jefferson County is nearly a childcare desert. There is minimal access to high-quality, affordable, licensed childcare, provided within the state-mandated child-to-adult ratios, with hours of available service and reliability to truly accommodate the needs of working families." Through these discussions, it was discovered that the city was working on a community housing study as part of its overall plan. The two projects have since been able to collaborate to share information and data. The initial results indicate the likely potential for growth within our community if there is affordable housing available to help recruit and retain local talent across all local employers. "We have had high-quality teachers, who wanted to work within our district, tell us they chose another job because they could not find affordable housing in Madison," shared HR Director Shannon Allman. "This should be concerning to everyone."



Fun with selfies, these babies are naturals! Miss Kim (Lyons) - Director of Early Childcare, loves to play during the day.



One of two of the *Gathering Trees* found in our toddler room. Students will read books, play find the animals, and admire classmates artwork displayed through the year.



Currently...

At the November 2024 board meeting, the Board of School Trustees approved the recommendation to contract with Schmidt Associates to begin high-level work to determine cost estimates and design elements based on a list of desired amenities for a new Early Learning Center that would be built on the existing E.O. Muncie property owned by the district. "We knew there would be a special need for that land, and while the building itself has outlived its use, the real estate, location, and opportunities it provides for a project like this are very exciting," Brown continued. "We are very, very early in this process but are excited at the prospect of a community solution and the opportunities it could provide for families and their children."

All fees associated with the work done to date have been paid for using the grant funds awarded through FSSA. Grant compliance requires that all funds are spent prior to the spring of 2025 or the district must return the funding.

We've come a long way, babies!

In August 2024, the MCS Early Learning Center opened its doors to 18 children. "We wanted to provide our employees with reliable, safe, nurturing care for their young children where there was an intentional focus on developmentally appropriate, play-based learning taking place," shared Kim Lyons, Director of Early Childcare. Hired in July, Lyons was charged with opening a brand new, converted space within Madison Junior High School that would become the home of the district's littlest learners - children ages birth to three years old. The MCS Early Learning Center is offered as an added benefit to their employees who have small children. "Part of our strategic plan is to recruit and retain top talent," stated Dr. Brown. "To do that we realized that we must create solutions that ease the burden of reliable childcare for as many of our employees as possible."

Reflecting recently on the progress since August, Lyons shared "it is hard to believe we have already watched so many of our babies transition from floor play to crawling, to walking and into the toddler room! The daily development, growth, and the celebration of each milestone is so special for all of us here." The center was as full as possible when it opened for the 24-25 school year. "We had an application process, a waiting list, and a great deal of excitement as we were putting the finishing touches on the room just prior to our inspection. The final product was so worth every minute. We have a beautiful space for all of the children that can be very flexible based on numbers and needs." Currently, we have six infants and 12 toddlers we care for each day between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. allowing our families flexibility.



Our team is the best!

The educational team includes Tracy Shelton, lead teacher, and ISPs Kim Kline and Emily Litchfield caring for infants from birth to twelve months. Angela Gregory is the lead teacher for our one-year-old class and Deborah Minks is the lead teacher for the two-year-old class. Each of these classes is supported by ISPs Michaela Welch and Courtney Lossiah; Joanna Scott and Whitney Wehrman will begin as floating ISPs in early December. "I can't say enough about the care our kiddos receive from this team," Lyons continued. "They all go above and beyond daily to make sure these littles have an excellent experience with us. The relationships I have seen develop with our staff, children, and their families have been so incredibly special to watch."



Tracy Shelton
Lead Teacher
Infants Class



Emily Litchfield
ISP, Infants



Kim Kline
ISP, Infants



Kim Lyons,
Director of Childcare



Angela Gregory
Lead Teacher
1 Year Old Class



Deborah Minks
Lead Teacher
2 Year Old Class

Hired in July, 2024, Lyons holds a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education from the University of Houston.

She has spent her career in early childhood education either as a teacher, provider or assisting families who are trying to find quality care for their children.

As a teacher, Kim has first-hand classroom knowledge and experience and understands the demands. She has experience teaching Preschool and Kindergarten, and worked as a teacher and Center Director for OVO. As a provider, she owned and operated CAMPUS KIDS, a licensed family child care home that was Paths to Quality Level 4 certified, and held a national accreditation from NAFCC. Most recently, she worked with Building Blocks as a Program Engagement Specialist/Program Resource Navigator and stepped away from the CCR&R Program Director position to help MCS launch the Early Learning Center.



Michaela Welch
ISP, 1 & 2 Year Classes



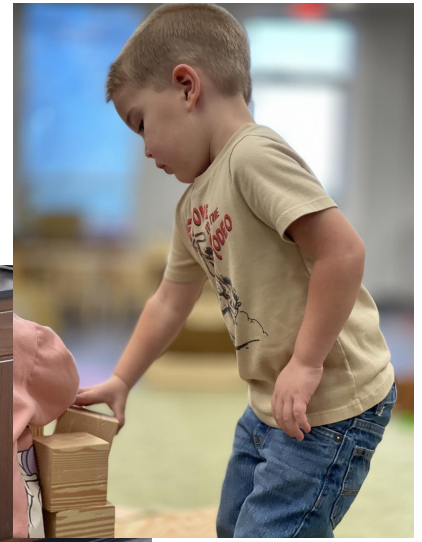
Courtney Lossiah
ISP, 1 & 2 Year Classes



Phase Two Expansion

The district is creating solutions that can be scaled up later to meet a more community-wide need. Part of the grant requirement is a community component for childcare with seats allocated for outside employer families. "We have worked with a few local employers since the beginning to understand what they are looking for and are willing to help support," Brown shared. "Whether that is funding spots for their employees, offering a shared-cost/discounted rate as part of a benefit package, or reserving and funding spots for future use - several ideas are floating around as possibilities. The out-of-the-box thinking is very exciting and gives me hope that we are on the right track for a larger-scale solution."

MCS is currently in the process of renovating a fourth room that will be able to accommodate toddlers (ages 2-3) from families employed outside of the school district. "Currently, we are an MCS employee-only program, which provides us some flexibility at startup. We are working to renovate an additional space and change our licensure status so that we can provide care to children of families outside of our employment," Lyons shared. The goal is to offer space in the spring of 2025. "We know there are families who are in dire need of quality care for their children before preschool," Brown continued. "We want to be that provider of choice where families can feel confident that we are open, ready to serve their child, will love and care for them, and nurture them in a safe, clean, and stimulating environment while being affordable and flexible."



Have questions?
Feel free to reach
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