

Action for Early Learning Initiative

The Action for Early Learning (AFEL) Initiative is a Drexel University-led collaboration of social service and education agencies and community stakeholders working to **ensure equitable access to quality early childhood education (ECE)** so that all children are Kindergarten ready. AFEL is Drexel’s early childhood improvement strategy, providing a **Circle of Support** model that puts the child at the center of an early childhood education eco-system. AFEL believes that every child deserves a high-quality early childhood education experience so that children are prepared for success in school and beyond.

West Philadelphia Promise Zone Demographics

Total population	38,787
Number of children under 5	2,025
Percent of residents without a HS diploma	22% (Philadelphia average of 17%)
Percent of families living in poverty	55.7% of families live below 200% of the poverty line (39.6% of families citywide)
Unemployment rate	10.6% (Philadelphia rate of 10.2%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2018 American Community Survey

AFEL Alliance of Childcare Providers Demographics

Number of childcare providers in the target area	40 (approx.)
Number of providers currently in AFEL Alliance of Childcare Providers	17
Number of children in the Alliance childcare centers	400 (approx.)
Number of directors, teachers and assistants	100 (approx.)

Source: AFEL Annual Alliance Demographic Survey 2021

Since 2014, AFEL has established key strategies to support more equitable access to quality ECE for children. These strategies include:

1. Supporting Early Childhood Educators through **The AFEL Alliance of Childcare Providers**, which connects ECE providers to professional development and resources to improve Keystone STARS quality rating. Outcomes to date include:

- 25 ECE providers joined the AFEL Alliance of Childcare Providers
- 69% of Alliance providers improved their STARS quality rating, with 57 % at high quality
- 35% increase in the number of children enrolled in high quality providers, from 42% to 77%
- 7 Alliance sites awarded 115 free Pre-K slots through PHL-Pre-K
- 50+ West Philadelphia ECE teachers completed **AFEL Child Development Associate** course



AFEL’s evaluation results have found that not only have Alliance sites shown impressive improvement in their quality rating, but the factor most highly correlated with a site’s STAR rating increase is their level of engagement in AFEL. Additionally, providers that are highly involved in the Alliance demonstrated better Kindergarten readiness scores among assessed children than providers with low levels of involvement in the Alliance.

2. Increase accessibility to quality ECE through **Community Outreach and Awareness**. AFEL’s Family Ambassador Curriculum includes 8 Workshops geared toward grassroots community outreach to increase families’ awareness of and access to high quality ECE by promoting the importance of quality ECE, how to access it and what to look for. Outcomes to date include:

- 40 community members recruited and trained as Family Ambassadors for peer-to-peer outreach
- 23 of those Family Ambassadors (58%) received employment after participation in AFEL
- 54% parents/caregivers understand what quality childcare looks like, up from 47%
- 30 children’s book stations provide free books at businesses along Lancaster Avenue: **AFEL Book Depot Program**, with more than 45,000 books distributed

3. Support transitions between Pre-K and Kindergarten through the **Summer Kindergarten Bridge Program**. Benefits include:

- **Children:** Preparing children for Kindergarten
- **Families:** Connecting parents/caregivers to school staff and engagement opportunities
- **Teachers:** Strengthening the pathway for college student-teachers into Philadelphia public schools as well as Pre-K Classrooms
- **Schools:** Supporting Kindergarten registration



4. Build collaborative partnerships through AFEL’s **Circle of Support Systems Approach**, which puts the child at the center of an ECE eco-system. With Drexel as anchor institution, AFEL leverages contacts and resources to support a place-based approach to sustainability, including more than 70 connections to citywide, regional and national agencies, among them:

- **Academy of Natural Sciences** to support access to early science/STEAM
- **Sesame Street in Communities** to support social-emotional learning for Kindergarten readiness
- **Corporate Volunteers:** more than 500 Family Resource Bags created through support from local Corporate Volunteers and distributed to families

AFEL Key Partners

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| ➤ Academy of Natural Sciences | ➤ First Up |
| ➤ Black Child Development Institute | ➤ Mayor’s Office of Education |
| ➤ Children’s Literacy Initiative | ➤ People’s Emergency Center |
| ➤ Devereux Center for Resilient Children | ➤ Read by Fourth Campaign |
| ➤ Drexel School of Education | ➤ School District of Philadelphia |
| ➤ Early Learning Resource Center Region 18 | ➤ Sesame Street in Communities |
| ➤ Fab Youth Philly | |

Funding for AFEL is has been made possible by the support of the following: Lenfest Foundation, PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning, PNC Foundation Grow Up Great Campaign, US Department of Education Promise Neighborhood Initiative, Vanguard Foundation Strong Start for Kids Program, United Way and William Penn Foundation Great Learning Program.

For more information on Action for Early Learning:

CONTACT Cory Johnson, Project Manager, cdj46@drexel.edu

VISIT our website: <https://westphillypn.org/early-childhood-education-action-for-early-learning>

CONNECT with AFEL on social media: @AFELphilly