

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF COUNTY READINESS

Instructions: Your written statement may not exceed **eight (8)** single spaced pages. Additional pages will not be reviewed or considered. A copy of the language of HEA 1004 may be found on the [website](#) of the Indiana General Assembly. An authorized representative for the respondent *and any co-respondents* must sign this cover page.

RESPONDENT INFORMATION	
County: <u>Elkhart County</u>	
Legal Name: <u>Horizon Education Alliance</u>	Mailing Address: <u>124 East Washington St. Goshen, IN 46528</u>
Contact Name: <u>Brian Wiebe</u> Contact Title: <u>Executive Director</u> (Single point of contact for communication)	Contact Phone: <u>(574) 849-7173</u> Contact Email Address: <u>bwiebe@hea.indiana.org</u>
COUNTY INFORMATION	
Co-Respondents (please list):	Estimated Number of Children to be Served (county-wide): <u>500 of the 1172</u> <u>unserved children in Elkhart County</u>
	Estimated Number of Eligible Providers (county-wide): <u>23</u>
AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	
I HEREBY CERTIFY that, to the best of my knowledge, the information contained in this statement is correct.	
Designated Representative (Printed Name): <u>Brian Wiebe</u>	Title: <u>Executive Director</u>
Signature of Designated Representative: <u>Brian Wiebe</u>	Date: <u>6-30-14</u>
Additional Signatures (of co-respondents, if necessary):	

I. Executive Summary

Horizon Education Alliance (HEA) is pleased to submit Elkhart County's Statement of County Readiness for the Early Learning Pilot Grant Program on behalf of a strong coalition of early education providers, school districts, non-profit organizations, United Way of Elkhart County, Early Childhood Alliance, the Elkhart County Community Foundation, local government, and local business. The Early Learning Pilot comes at an ideal time for Elkhart County: with a well-developed, evidence-based plan in place for expanding high quality preschool and key strategic partners committed to action, Elkhart County is well-prepared for the expansion in capacity that this pilot opportunity would provide. We are poised to begin implementation, working at improving quality over the coming year and then expanding capacity the following year. HEA is committed to providing the leadership to drive action on this plan and ensure effectiveness and the Early Learning Pilot would align perfectly with existing efforts to expand access to high-quality preschool for low-income children in Elkhart County.

Our Statement of County Readiness documents the many innovative, collaborative programs that already exist in Elkhart County to serve our young children from low-income families. HEA, a non-profit organization that supports collective impact to improve educational outcomes across the lifespan in Elkhart County, has developed a strong network of community leaders and practitioners working to improve outcomes for our county's young children and is launching several population-level initiatives aimed at improving family engagement and early learning opportunities. Additionally, the United Way of Elkhart County has a long history of working to improve early childhood outcomes, particularly through supporting the professional development of early childhood practitioners. The Early Learning Pilot would build on this solid foundation of collaborative action and commitment to early childhood education.

Over the past year, HEA has convened a committee of fifteen Early Childhood experts, leaders and practitioners, including representatives from school districts, Head Start, the Early Childhood Alliance, preschool providers, and local non-profits to develop a strategic plan for expanding the capacity and quality of preschool in Elkhart County. This plan articulates a shared mission, vision, beliefs and philosophy to guide future expansion of high-quality preschool. This plan identifies a commitment to partnerships between families and community agencies to increase access and quality of preschool. It also delineates the shared beliefs that learning begins at birth, children are active learners and that play is the most important vehicle for children's learning. The plan articulates a definition of quality that includes both the process of learning and the structure and environment in which learning takes place. The work of the committee also involved defining kindergarten readiness (which will drive a common assessment process for monitoring and tracking kindergarten readiness in the future), identifying best practices for high-quality preschool programs and selecting an evidence-based curriculum. After rigorous research into multiple curricular options, the committee selected the evidence-based curriculum "Tools of the Mind" because of its strong focus on teaching self-regulation through play. Tools of the Mind will be used to improve quality in preschools across the county.

II. Community Engagement

A. Elkhart County is a community with significant need but also significant resilience. Over the past decades, Elkhart County's leaders have worked collaboratively on multiple occasions to identify strategies to support Elkhart County's economic and social development, particularly in the face of economic crises. In 2010, Elkhart County leaders and community members chose education as the most important strategy to ensure Elkhart County's future. In response to this decision, all seven school superintendents and key Elkhart County business leaders came together in 2012 to form the board of the Horizon Education Alliance (www.heaindiana.org). Since 2012, HEA has brought together over 125 Elkhart County leaders committed to improving educational outcomes across the lifespan to support the development and launch of community-wide initiatives targeting each stage of life.

HEA's leaders have consistently advocated for the important role of early childhood education in transforming Elkhart County, with parent engagement and kindergarten readiness as two of our six key strategic goals for our community. This commitment has led HEA to create two steering teams comprised of community leaders, experts and practitioners dedicated to early childhood, with one group focused on parent engagement and the other focused on early education opportunities. These steering teams have identified and begun implementation of four innovative, evidence-based, population-level initiatives in the area of early childhood, with high-quality preschool as one of these initiatives. These four initiatives targeting early childhood outcomes are at the foundation of HEA's set of ten initiatives working to improve educational outcomes across the lifespan, including initiatives such as STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) education in elementary and middle schools and Early College programs in high schools.

In addition to the HEA initiatives, collaborative initiatives for early childhood in Elkhart County have been led by multiple organizations, including the United Way of Elkhart County, the Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties Head Start Consortium, the Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) and Child and Parent Services (CAPS). Some highlights of these collaborative initiatives include:

- United Way of Elkhart County leads the annual Success by Six summit which brings together more than 200 leaders from business, schools, child care and the community to conduct workshops, organize a service project and explore ways to strengthen local efforts to help our young children succeed.
- The Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties Head Start Consortium brings together school districts across two counties to ensure high-quality learning programs that meet the needs of low-income children and prepare them for success in Kindergarten.
- United Way also organizes and leads the Minds in Motion Elkhart County Network. Elkhart County has more Minds in Motion programs than any other community in the world. Childcare, public schools, preschools and ministries routinely have their children participate in NASA-inspired exercises to improve their balance, visual focusing and overall concentration.
- Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) is a leading advocate for quality early education, providing services to families, children and service providers across 10 counties in

Northern Indiana. ECA provides resources and referrals to Elkhart County families, as well as professional development, support and resources to providers to advance on Paths to QUALITY.

- United Way of Elkhart County and ECA are working together to help Elkhart County be a community where early childhood programs thrive. A series of collaborative initiatives were launched in 2014 including a) an outreach effort with child care ministries to explore joining Paths to Quality, b) a Child Care Provider Reception in the Fall of 2014 to increase local providers knowledge of the services and resources available and c) in the Spring of 2015 a regional conference for child care providers will be hosted in Elkhart County.
- Child and Parent Services (CAPS) runs the “Building Blocks” Preschool program which serves high-need children, including children who are victims of abuse, children who have emotional, social, and behavioral problems, as well as children who have developmental delays. CAPS works with many local partners to ensure referrals for children that are most in need of this program.
- Mayor Allan Kauffman of Goshen, Mayor Dick Moore of Elkhart, and the Elkhart and Goshen Chambers of Commerce have all expressed their endorsement of the Early Learning Pilot and their support for the expansion of early childhood opportunities for children in Elkhart County.

B. United Way of Elkhart County funds several Early Learning initiatives through its annual funding campaign. These initiatives contribute significantly to the expertise and quality of early learning services in Elkhart County, reaching children across the county. Child and Parent Services (CAPS) raises approximately \$750,000 annually to support their seven programs. All of CAPS programs reach families with young children as part of their target population, and two of their programs (Building Blocks Preschool and Healthy Families, described below) are specifically designed to impact positive outcomes for young children. It is estimated that CAPS services reach approximately 700 young children each year. Churches and/or local fundraising efforts support many individual early learning programs financially, with an estimated \$100,000 raised by these organizations to support preschool and childcare programs. HEA and Goshen College have raised over \$28,000 in private grants and donations to fund the Music Together Program (described below), which serves parents and infants. This program has served approximately 160 parents and infants over the past 18 months.

Two school districts are piloting preschool programs using Title I dollars. Goshen Community Schools has used approximately \$200,000 in Title I funds to provide pre-kindergarten for approximately 68 students and Elkhart Community Schools is currently developing a program to be piloted Fall 2014.

III. Family Engagement

A. Elkhart County has several innovative programs to provide support to new parents and parents with young children. Some key examples of these programs include:

- HEA and CAPS, together with twenty additional community partners, are launching the “Triple P- Positive Parenting Program” in Elkhart County in 2015. Backed by more than

30 years of ongoing research, Triple P provides practical evidence-based strategies that parents can adapt to confidently manage their children's behavior and build healthy relationships. Triple P has proven success in improving family and child outcomes across the population. With multiple levels of intervention, Triple P provides resources to all parents, including those needing a single intervention to respond to a parenting challenge to those at-risk families needing intensive intervention. It is estimated that Triple P will serve about 5,000 families during its first year, with capacity growing with additional years of implementation. Many preschool programs have expressed interest in being trained to implement Triple P with the families they serve.

- The Elkhart County Health Department offers the Healthy Beginnings suite of programs, aimed at improving the health and education of parents and young children from low-income families. Healthy Beginnings was awarded the Covering Kids & Families of Indiana Community Leadership Award in 2013 for its effectiveness, leadership and commitment in improving health care outcomes for young families.
- Child and Parent Services (CAPS) provides the Healthy Families program to parents of new babies who need support with the transition to parenthood. This home visitation program helps new parents to recognize and respond to their baby's needs appropriately, create a safe and nurturing home environment, and connect to community resources. In addition to Healthy Families, CAPS also runs home visitation programs and parenting classes for parents with children of all ages. Many of these programs serve parents with young children.
- The Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties Head Start Consortium has a well-designed, effective parent engagement component. Family engagement is a critical part of Head Start programs and Head Start provides an important model and resource within our community for effectively engaging parents in their child's learning and development. Head Start has also launched the Early Head Start program in Elkhart County for parents of infants and toddlers.
- The United Way of Elkhart County partners with WNIT Public Television to produce positive parenting messages. These 30-second spots air in the morning between PBS's children's television programs. The third round of spots, produced in summer of 2014, focused on Parents As Consumers and delivered messages that help parents learn how to spot quality child care facilities.
- The Maple City Health Care Center (MCHCC) is one example of many health centers in Elkhart County that provide affordable health care services and resources to new mothers and their babies and young children. MCHCC specifically serves low-income families and has done groundbreaking work that has been recognized nationally in effectively serving families from diverse cultural backgrounds. MCHCC is focused on community-building in order to provide healthy outcomes for patients.

B. Two examples of innovative programs for engaging parents in their child's learning at a community level have been piloted in Elkhart County, with very successful results:

- Elkhart Community Schools, Elkhart County's largest school district, has created the innovative "Supporting Parents with Preschoolers" Program. Parents with Preschoolers is an initiative in Elkhart's Title I buildings that supports parents in meeting their children's developmental needs in terms of language, literacy and learning, and social and

emotional skills. Parents and children learn together, with the help of the Parent Support Coordinator, in the school setting that they are familiar with and where they feel comfortable. Through various activities and modeling opportunities that can be transferred to the home setting, the program is designed to enhance the capacity of parents to help their children learn new skills, as well as develop confidence and community connections.

- HEA and the Goshen College Music Center offer the Music Together at Birth program as a gift to Elkhart County parents and their infants. The Music Together at Birth program teaches parents hands-on strategies for engaging with their young children through music and movement. The classes also incorporate parent messages focused on teaching parents about their child's development and providing resources to help parents engage effectively in their child's learning. The Goshen College Music Center also provides Music Together classes to many area preschools, including Head Start programs and other programs that serve low-income children and their families.

There are several organizations positioned to provide support to eligible providers in meeting the family engagement requirement of the pilot. The Early Childhood Alliance works closely with both families and providers and will play a role in supporting the family engagement component. The Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties Head Start Consortium has committed to helping other providers to provide a family engagement component, based on their strong family engagement model, if Elkhart County is selected for the pilot. HEA's Parent and Child Engagement steering team works to promote parent engagement in Elkhart County and currently oversees the Music Together and the Triple P programs. This steering team will be an important resource in providing leadership to expanding the parent engagement component across Elkhart County preschool providers and ensuring existing resources are leveraged to align with the requirements of the Early Learning Pilot.

C. As described above, Elkhart County has many organizations that work to provide services to high-need families and young children. Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties Head Start Consortium serves many low-income children, but they consistently have an Elkhart County waiting list of about 400 eligible children that they are not able to serve. These currently unserved children will be a priority for enrollment in the Early Learning Pilot, and Head Start is committed to partnering with HEA and other organizations to assist with this recruitment and enrollment process. All of Elkhart County's school districts are committed to expanding preschool access and will assist in creating awareness among the families they serve of the opportunities provided by the pilot.

HEA is already working to expand outreach to low-income families across the county to ensure access and participation in HEA's population-level programs. HEA will draw on the relationships it has built across the county with organizations that serve low-income families to support the recruitment efforts for the pilot program and to ensure that families with the most need are reached. Given the ethnic diversity that exists within Elkhart County, HEA has already built capacity in ensuring its programs are culturally responsive, with both the Triple P and Music Together program providing fully bilingual offerings. HEA will leverage this capacity and expertise to ensure the pilot program enrolls eligible children from diverse backgrounds.

IV. Provider Capacity

A. Elkhart County currently has 13 providers at Levels 3 or 4 Paths to QUALITY, including eight licensed child care centers and five licensed family child care homes. Two additional child care centers are on track to be at PTQ level 3 this coming year. It is estimated that these providers would have the capacity to serve between 100 - 200 additional students.

B. There are several initiatives currently underway in Elkhart County to increase the capacity to serve children in high-quality preschool programs. If Elkhart County is selected for the preschool pilot, these initiatives will be leveraged and expanded to help ensure adequate capacity exists. The Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) is currently in conversations with approximately fifteen providers who have expressed interest in advancing in Paths to QUALITY and could potentially be eligible to participate by July 2015. There are several initiatives aimed at improving the skills of the workforce in early childhood, which is necessary for expanding quality care. For example, a partnership between United Way of Elkhart County and ECA will bring a Child Development Associate (CDA) training program to Elkhart County in August 2014. Working with local child care providers, twenty-five current child care workers will have the opportunity to improve their professional skills through this program. Through this partnership with United Way, the ECA is currently providing outreach to Child Care Ministries in Elkhart County around the Paths to QUALITY process. It is expected that this work will also lead to additional providers becoming eligible to participate in the Early Learning Pilot. We estimate that by July of 2015 there would be capacity to serve at least an additional 100 eligible children through supporting providers in advancing to a Level 3 PTQ.

All seven of Elkhart County's public school districts have expressed an interest in being part of the Early Learning Pilot program. School districts have committed to providing space for preschool classrooms and to launching high-quality preschool programs as resources are made available. It is estimated that among the seven school districts, there would be potential space available for 16-20 new preschool classrooms to support preschool expansion over the coming years. School districts are willing to work with HEA and other organizations to develop programs that would align with Paths to QUALITY, if a process for establishing eligibility for new providers can be put in place for the Early Learning Pilot. Some school districts have also expressed interest in exploring creative partnerships with existing private providers to support the expansion of preschool capacity. Over the long-term, it is part of HEA's strategic plan to work with school districts in establishing and sustaining preschool programs. HEA is committed to launching new high-quality preschool programs in collaboration with school districts by July 2015. It is estimated that school programs could serve at least an additional 150 - 250 eligible children during the first year of the Pilot program if each public school program can be fast-tracked to level 3 on Paths to QUALITY by July 2015.

This August, HEA will train teachers from at least 20 preschool classrooms across Elkhart County to implement the Tools of the Mind curriculum, an evidence-based curricular model that has demonstrated significant impact on children's self-regulation, executive functioning and school readiness. The Preschool Research Committee that HEA convened this past year selected the Tools of the Mind (www.toolsofthemind.org) curriculum because of its alignment with the

committee's early childhood mission, vision and beliefs for high-quality preschool in Elkhart County. Tools of the Mind is considered by many to be the leading preschool curriculum that integrates the multiple types of high-quality play experiences necessary for children to develop socio-emotional and cognitive self-regulation. Research has demonstrated higher literacy and math scores for students that participated in Tools of the Mind preschools and fewer discipline problems and special education referrals. Tools of the Mind has been proven effective with all children, including English Language Learners and students with special needs, making it particularly attractive given Elkhart County's diverse population. HEA expects to host a second round of Tools of the Mind training for additional preschool classrooms in summer of 2015. Through providing access to professional development and curricular materials, HEA, with the assistance of ECA, will support existing and new providers, including school districts, in reaching Paths to QUALITY Level 3.

V. Financial Match

A. Horizon Education Alliance (HEA), United Way of Elkhart County, and the Elkhart County Community Foundation (ECCF) are committed to raising funds to assist with the required match. HEA has worked to build a strong base of private funding in support of educational initiatives across the lifespan, with high-quality preschool as one of these key initiatives. ECCF has prioritized Youth Development, including early childhood services, as one of three community investment priorities. ECCF will be expanding its giving in coming years due to the generous, unrestricted gift of \$150 million received by the foundation in 2012. ECCF has voiced strong support for a collaborative approach in Elkhart County. ECCF has committed to supporting HEA in securing the funds for the required match (see attached letter of commitment). The United Way of Elkhart County has committed funds for the Pilot Program match (see attached letter of commitment) and will collaborate on fundraising efforts to raise the match if Elkhart County is selected. Given the strong commitment and support from these three organizations, HEA is confident in Elkhart County's ability to raise the required match for the Pilot Program.

B. The Early Learning Pilot aligns with priorities and strategies already in place in Elkhart County to support the expansion of preschool over the coming years. This alignment means that Elkhart County is not only ready to support the effectiveness of the Early Learning Pilot but we are also prepared to work towards sustainability of preschool services beyond the term of the Pilot Program. The Early Learning Pilot would provide an opportunity for needed early learning opportunities for unserved children in Elkhart County in the short-term and at the same time build quality and capacity to continue to serve a greater number of children over the long-term. HEA will continue to work with school districts on developing, evaluating, and sustaining preschool programs beyond the term of the Pilot Program as part of a long-term strategic plan focused on moving towards a prevention model, rather than a remediation model, to improve educational and life outcomes across the lifespan.

VI. County Readiness and Program Implementation

Elkhart County will be ready to implement the Pilot Program requirements by July 1, 2015. Eligible children will be recruited using a network of organizations that currently serve low-income families. The Head Start waiting list will provide an important resource for recruitment

and enrollment as these families are already identified as meeting eligibility and have expressed an interest in enrolling their child in preschool. Over the coming year, HEA will work with its existing network of organizations that provides support for other collaborative initiatives, including Music Together and Triple P, to create a plan for recruiting and enrolling additional eligible children and ensuring that diverse families have access to the program.

By July 1, 2015, at the start of the Pilot program, it is anticipated that Elkhart County would have sufficient capacity to enroll 500-600 new students. We would then work to expand capacity for future years in order to build sufficient capacity to serve all of the approximately 1100 eligible students identified by FSSA that are unserved. HEA, along with United Way of Elkhart County and the Early Childhood Alliance, will continue working with providers, including school districts, that have expressed interest in advancing in Paths to QUALITY to ensure they have access to the resources they need to meet eligibility requirements by July 2015. One specific contribution HEA will provide will be the professional development training and curricular materials for Tools of the Mind, with cohorts in both 2014 and 2015.

HEA has a strong organizational commitment to evaluation and assessment, with a full-time Research Director on staff, and our county is pleased to learn of the plans for rigorous assessment and longitudinal study of the Pilot Program. The High-quality Preschool Research Committee examined assessment as a key component for future work and conversations about the need for a countywide kindergarten readiness assessment process have already begun. This work provides an important foundation for the assessment and evaluation that will happen as part of the Pilot Program. The plans for program evaluation, the assessment of kindergarten readiness and the longitudinal study of outcomes for the Pilot Program align very well with HEA's research and will greatly assist and supplement HEA's evaluation efforts.

HEA will be working with preschool providers on expanding access to the Triple P training. This will allow all preschools in Elkhart County that need to develop a family engagement component to have access to an evidence-based parenting program with the potential to greatly enhance long-term outcomes for the young children they serve.

Finally, if Elkhart County is selected for the Pilot Program, HEA, Elkhart County Community Foundation, and United Way of Elkhart County would begin fundraising work immediately to ensure that the funding commitments would be in place by July 2015, and we would also convene the key stakeholders in early childhood education in Elkhart County over the coming year to guarantee that the all structures are in place for the Pilot Program to be successful in our county when it is launched in July 2015. We would be delighted to see Elkhart County selected as one of the five Indiana counties for inclusion in the Pilot Program.



June 30, 2014

Ms. Melanie Brizzi
Family and Social Service Administration
402 W. Washington Street
W361, MS-02
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Ms. Brizzi:

I am privileged to write a letter of support for the Elkhart County Statement of Readiness for the Early Learning Pilot Program, which the Horizon Education Alliance (HEA) is leading on behalf of a strong coalition of organizations. This alliance is an impressive collaborative between all seven Elkhart County public school superintendents, local government, youth and family serving not-for-profit organizations and private industry. The visionary mission of HEA is to identify and deliver innovative and collaborative programs that improve educational outcomes across the lifespan in Elkhart County. HEA's focus on early learning is one of the driving priorities of this organization.

I highly commend Elkhart County to you as one of the five Indiana Early Learning Pilot recipients. HEA is uniquely prepared to effectively and immediately support the pilot of the State of Indiana's Early Learning Pilot Program on behalf of Elkhart County. HEA has the professional personnel, community leadership structures, commitment of the public school leadership and organizational architecture necessary to effectively support the state's Early Learning Pilot Program.

The Elkhart County Community Foundation (ECCF) holds the Horizon Education Alliance in the highest regard. Since HEA's inception in 2012, ECCF has provided more than \$500,000 in grant funding for this important organization and we will be proud to continue our support in the future. HEA is an organization committed to fulfilling their mission of excellence in education as well as a trustworthy steward of the resources ECCF has invested in them. ECCF is committed to supporting HEA in securing the required match if Elkhart County is selected for this pilot program.

Please feel free to contact me directly if I can be of further assistance in your decision-making process.

Cordially,

Peter L. McCown, Ph.D.

President
The Elkhart County Community Foundation

**United Way
of Elkhart County**

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**United Way
of Elkhart County**

June 25, 2014

Melanie Brizzi
Family and Social Services Administration
402 W. Washington St. W361, MS-02
Indianapolis, IN
46204

Dear Melanie,

United Way of Elkhart County is pleased to support Elkhart County's Statement of County Readiness for the Early Learning Pilot Grant program. United Way of Elkhart County is actively involved in local early childhood efforts and is pleased to add our endorsement to the effort.

United Way is willing to be a part of the effort to secure local matching dollars for the grant and, if awarded, is prepared to bring a funding request before our volunteers to directly support this initiative.

United Way is deeply committed to the children of Elkhart County is committed to helping them succeed in school and life.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Rieth".

Bill Rieth
President

LIVE UNITED.®