

**West Philadelphia Action for Early Learning Initiative**  
Overview as of March 2019

The West Philadelphia Action for Early Learning (AFEL) Initiative is a Drexel University-led collaboration of social service and education agencies and community stakeholders working to create an education support system for students and families in the 19104 zip code, specifically in the West Philadelphia Promise Zone, a federally designated high-need, high-poverty area. AFEL is the early childhood education improvement strategy for the West Philadelphia Promise Neighborhood Initiative. *AFEL’s long-term goals for West Philadelphia children are: (a) Kindergarten readiness and (b) Reading at Grade Level by the end of Third Grade.*

**Promise Zone Demographics**

Total population	38,200
Number of Children under 5	2,000
Number of childcare providers in the target area	40 (approx.)
Number of providers currently in AFEL Alliance of Childcare Providers	25
Number of children in the Alliance childcare centers	1,100 (approx.)
Number of directors, teachers and assistants	250 (approx.)
Percent of residents without a HS diploma	22% (Philadelphia average of 17%)
Percent of families living in poverty	50% (Philadelphia average of 26%)
Unemployment Rate	Up to 25% (Philadelphia rate of 12%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Since 2014, AFEL has established a range of programs to meet its long-term goals so that children can be successful in school and beyond. Below are some of AFEL’s programs organized by implementation goal.

1. Improve Quality of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the Promise Zone

**The AFEL Alliance of Childcare Providers** connects West Philadelphia ECE providers to professional development and resources to improve Keystone STARS levels (STARS range from 0-4), and seeks to strengthen transitions between Pre-K and Kindergarten. Outcomes to date include:

- 25 ECE providers joined the AFEL Alliance of Childcare Providers
- 65% of Alliance providers improved their quality rating
- 30% increase in the number of local children enrolled in high quality providers
- 19 percentile points increase in average pre-literacy score: from 31<sup>st</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup>
- 30 West Philadelphia ECE teachers received **AFEL Child Development Associate** certificate



2. Increase Accessibility to Quality ECE through Community Outreach and Awareness

**The AFEL Family Ambassador Program** seeks to increase families’ access to high quality ECE by implementing a grassroots campaign to build families’ knowledge of the importance of quality ECE.

Outcomes to date include:

- 40 Family Ambassadors – community members – recruited and trained for peer-to-peer outreach
- 23 of those Family Ambassadors (58%) received employment after participation in AFEL
- More than 3,000 community residents participated in AFEL events
- 30 children’s book stations provide free books at businesses along Lancaster Avenue:  
**AFEL Book Depot Program**
- More than 15,000 books distributed to West Philly families through AFEL programs

3. Support Parents/Caregivers as Their Child’s First Teacher

AFEL seeks to build parents/caregivers’ knowledge of child development and resilience factors that contribute to Kindergarten readiness and long-term education success. To achieve this, AFEL partners with multiple organizations, including:

- Training Ambassadors, Parents/Caregivers, and ECE Teachers in early literacy best practices and family engagement
- 25 West Philly families participating in home-based K readiness program



4. Coordinate a Systems Approach

Leverage contacts with citywide agencies to support neighborhood capacity-building that aligns the expertise of ECE partners and supports a place-based approach to sustainability, including **61** connections to citywide agencies, among them:

- Academy of Natural Sciences – 10 sites receive early science support and materials
- Read By Fourth Campaign – 16 Book Nooks and 500 books placed at community centers, shelters and agencies for Promise Zone children
- 15 Ambassadors represent AFEL on community/civic boards or committees

**AFEL Key Partners**

- Academy of Natural Sciences
- Children’s Literacy Initiative
- First Up – formerly DVAEYC
- Drexel School of Education
- Mantua Civic Association
- Mayor’s Office of Education
- Running Start Campaign
- Parent Child Plus – formerly Parent Child Home Program
- People’s Emergency Center
- Philly Reads
- Public Health Management Corp.
- Read by Fourth Campaign
- School District of Philadelphia

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