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Pyramid Model instills pre-K skills that help kids thrive

Strong life skills are key building blocks for success. Employers may call them “soft skills,” and say they’re in serious decline. Research backs that up... all the way to preschool! In our region, only 61% of kindergarten students were developmentally ready with these vital skills (based on the Ages and Stages screening tool).

Examples of essential life skills

- Listen and follow directions
- Play well with others
- Identify and express emotions
- Self-control
- Communication
- Problem-solving

While these skills may seem basic to adults, too many children are entering kindergarten without them. Unsurprisingly, it sets them back, hampering learning year upon year. One study showed kids who have strong life skills in kindergarten may be more likely to thrive as adults by living healthier lives, attending college, and securing higher-paying jobs as adults. (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015)

How do we teach these skills?

The Pyramid Model is an evidence-based framework for teaching these life skills in early childhood. In a national study, the Pyramid Model demonstrated its effectiveness: leading to increases in skills and decreases in challenging classroom behaviors. Childcare centers that use the Pyramid Model may also see improvements in staff satisfaction and retention.

Investment: \$350,000 over 3 years to implement the Pyramid Model in early childhood care centers

Over the past three years, the Foundation has invested in bringing the Pyramid Model to our region. In that time, a dedicated program director has provided intensive, ongoing training, coaching and support to a growing number of childcare centers and school districts with 4K and early childhood programs.

At the participating centers, all staff receive initial training as well as ongoing support from both internal and external coaches. The program leverages data, monthly leadership meetings, regular coach check-ins to hardwire educational and relationship best practices.

The Pyramid Model is not a one-time training or easy fix. Most centers work 3 to 5 years to achieve fidelity, where Pyramid Model practices are used consistently throughout the center – all teachers, all the time. It takes practice, leadership, staff buy-in and lots of support to build competence and confidence in this way of teaching.

More than Professional Development

Wisconsin baseline data shows that teachers who attended Pyramid Model training use the practices, but at low rates of fidelity. Data shows that, on average, it takes one year for individual teachers to reach fidelity when provided with regular coaching and support. An entire center may take three to five years to reach fidelity.

MORE

Accountable for Results

In just three years, two local centers - Future All Stars Academy in Juneau and Willows Christian Childcare in Iron Ridge - have reached fidelity with Pyramid Model practices.

"It has been amazing to partner with the team members at FASA and Willows over the past two and a half years and work alongside their leadership teams to support and celebrate as they build Pyramid Model practices to fidelity," says Jill Van Sickle, Early Childhood Learning Innovation Coach. "It is incredible to see, hear and feel the cohesiveness of staff and children in their center-based early care programs."

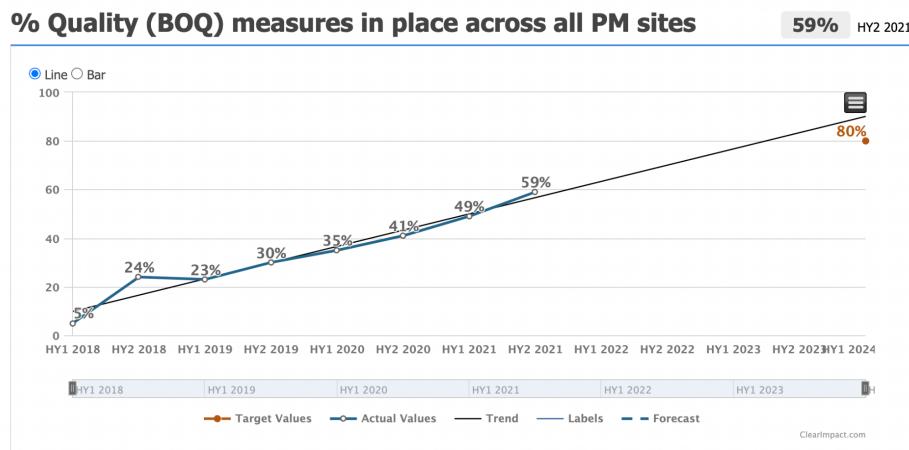
The Foundation utilizes a Results Based Accountability (RBA) approach to evaluate the impact of investments. The practice of RBA asks three questions: *How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?*

Initial results over the first three years include:

- *How much?* A total of 182 children are being served across seven participating sites.
- *How well?* The chart below shows the percentage of Benchmarks of Quality (BOQ) achieved overall, by all participating sites, has steadily increased to 59%.
- *Is anyone better off?* The long term goal of this investment is to improve developmental readiness for school, as measured by the Ages and Stages developmental screening tool. In 2021, 53% of 4-year olds in pyramid model classrooms were meeting all recommended developmental milestones.

Pyramid Model

[Pdf](#)



Let's keep growing

The Foundation plans to expand the Pyramid Model to more centers across Dodge and Jefferson Counties. If you are interested, or would like additional information, please contact Jill Van Sickle, Early Childhood Learning Innovation Coach at jvansickle@watertownhealthfoundation.com. The process is selective and begins with a no-pressure informational meeting. Start-up and training costs are covered by the Foundation.

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To date, the foundation has invested more than \$14 million in its five strategic, child-focused priorities: strong families, kindergarten readiness, school success, social and emotional wellbeing, and healthy eating/active living. To learn more about the foundation and supported initiatives, visit www.watertownhealthfoundation.com or Facebook at Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation.