



Quality Investments in Indiana's Early Childhood Programs: An implementation evaluation

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Key Highlights

- Most participants were very grateful for the quality investment initiative, finding it highly beneficial.
- The primary reasons providers chose to participate were to enhance overall center quality, support children, and support teachers.
- Most survey respondents reported that both the curriculum initiative and LENA Grow were easy to implement, engaging for and supportive of teachers, and helpful for improving practice.
- Most providers (89%) expressed they would continue with their selected quality investment in the future.
- About a third of respondents indicated no challenges in implementation.
- Among those respondents who did indicate challenges, time constraints were most common, particularly for CEEL participants due to its 18-month commitment. The second most common challenge was difficulty accessing materials and insufficient support for implementation. The third was related to program adaptability and/or material appropriateness in relation to the ages of the children or the setting (i.e. family-based settings).
- All costs were paid for those who chose LENA Grow and CEEL; however, some providers found the curriculum funding insufficient to cover all associated costs, including professional development and materials.
- Key benefits of participation in the quality investments initiative were the ability to learn, the quality and ease of use of the programs' materials, learning new ideas to enhance practice, and gaining insights into their teachers and children.
- Nearly half reported no changes necessary to the quality investments if ELI continued the program.
- Of those who suggested changes, respondents indicated preference for more flexibility around the time commitment, making the program accessible to children of different ages, providing additional support and training materials, expansion to additional classrooms, or having the opportunity to choose a different curriculum or intervention in a next round.
- Important challenges to consider include more time, capacity or support for LENA Grow to be used in small centers/FCCs, addressing teacher turnover, and ensuring teacher and family buy-in, particularly for LENA Grow.

Background

In 2022, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) conducted a landscape evaluation of early childhood programs in Indiana. The project, “[The Evaluation of Early Childhood Programs and Child Development in Indiana](#),” assessed classroom quality and children's development, using standardized classroom observation measures, child assessments, and teacher/director interviews. This study, published in May 2023, reported results from 321 classrooms across 206 providers. Findings indicated that infant, toddler, and pre-K classrooms generally exhibited high to moderate levels of quality in responsive caregiving (for infants), emotional and behavioral support (for toddlers), and emotional support and classroom organization (for preschoolers). However, areas related to language and instructional support scored low across all classroom types and age groups. In response to these findings, Early Learning Indiana allocated funds to enable participants in the study to implement selected strategies to improve program quality.

Subsequently, in the fall of 2023, classrooms that took part in the evaluation were given a choice of four different quality investments to consider: implementing a new curriculum, adopting a language and literacy intervention (LENA Grow), enrolling in the Harvard Certificate in Early Education Leadership (CEEL), or participating in a study of a math curriculum (which was evaluated separately and not included in the discussed findings). A total of 84 classrooms in 64 programs opted for one of the three quality investments offered by Early Learning Indiana (ELI). For the current study, all programs participating in three of the four quality investments (curriculum, LENA Grow, and CEEL) were surveyed. A small subset of these providers had not been included in the aforementioned observational study of quality.

A survey assessing the implementation of ELI quality investments was completed by 49 providers. Follow-up interviews were conducted with nine providers to gain additional insight into the implementation process. This report summarizes the findings from these surveys and interviews, aiming to understand why programs chose specific quality investments, the impressions of their experience with the quality investment, and to provide insights and advice for ELI as they contemplate a second round of funding for additional quality investments.

Study Methods

This is a multi-site study of providers who opted to implement one of three quality investment interventions. The three quality investments are:

- 1. Curriculum and Related Vendor Provided Professional Development and Implementation Support.** Programs were provided guidance by ELI on how to choose a curriculum that has a research base, meets the needs of their children, and enhances their

current curriculum. They were given the option to choose the specific curriculum that met the needs of their program.

2. **LENA Grow** is a professional development initiative in two five-week sequences, including coaching and data, to improve instruction and literacy outcomes for children. Programs completed the 10-week cycle of professional development.
3. **Harvard's Certificate in Early Education Leadership (CEEL)** is an 18-month program. Participants were surveyed about mid-point in the program. ELI facilitated a local Professional Learning Community following each of the four modules in the 18-month program.

Early Learning Indiana staff conducted two sessions to share the specific requirements of the funding opportunity. The first session was held in November 2022 and described the options for funding. A follow-up session was held in February 2023 to provide specific information on the curriculum options and requirements. ELI staff provided some coaching and follow-up support, tailored to each intervention, as described below.¹

- **Curriculum:** Providers choosing the curriculum quality investment were provided with a rubric and information choosing a research-based curriculum. They submitted their choices to ELI staff for approval, with every final choice meeting the requirements. Funding was initially \$3,000; however, based on feedback from providers an additional \$1000 was offered to providers and most did access the additional funds (totaling \$4,000). Funding could be used to purchase curriculum in the classroom participating in the quality study or aligned professional development and/or to support staffing hours to implement the curriculum. Participants are required to submit a final financial report.
- **LENA Grow:** ELI staff registered and paid for providers choosing the language/literacy LENA Grow program and secured the necessary technology. ELI staff had access to the data collected and reports produced by LENA, periodically reviewing these to monitor implementation and completion of two five-week cycles of the program. ELI staff provided coaching to three of the sites that did not have internal capacity for this role.
- **CEEL:** ELI staff paid for participants' registration and received reports as participants completed (or did not complete) modules in the 18-month program. Participants who have persisted in the certificate are still in the process of completing the courses, with an expected completion date of July 2024. ELI staff facilitated a peer cohort of individuals from Indiana enrolled in CEEL both through this opportunity and those participating through Getting on Track, offering group meetings discussing the application of coursework and other happenings in the field, and office hours to address individual concerns.

Data collection for the present study included online surveys conducted from December 2023 to February 2024² to capture insights into implementation issues and the overall experience with quality investments. Phone interviews were conducted with selected providers in March of 2024.

¹ Communications for this effort included the following: 1. Curriculum Info Session (Feb. 1, 2023) – 29 registrations with 19 attendees. Post webinar email with recording and resources; and 2. Quality Investments (Nov. 16, 2023) – 51 registrations with 26 attendees. Post webinar email with recording and resources.

² The study was approved by the Rutgers Institutional Review Board, protocol No. Pro2023001856.

The providers interviewed were selected as a convenience sample, representing different types of programs and varying experiences to the quality investments indicated in their survey responses.

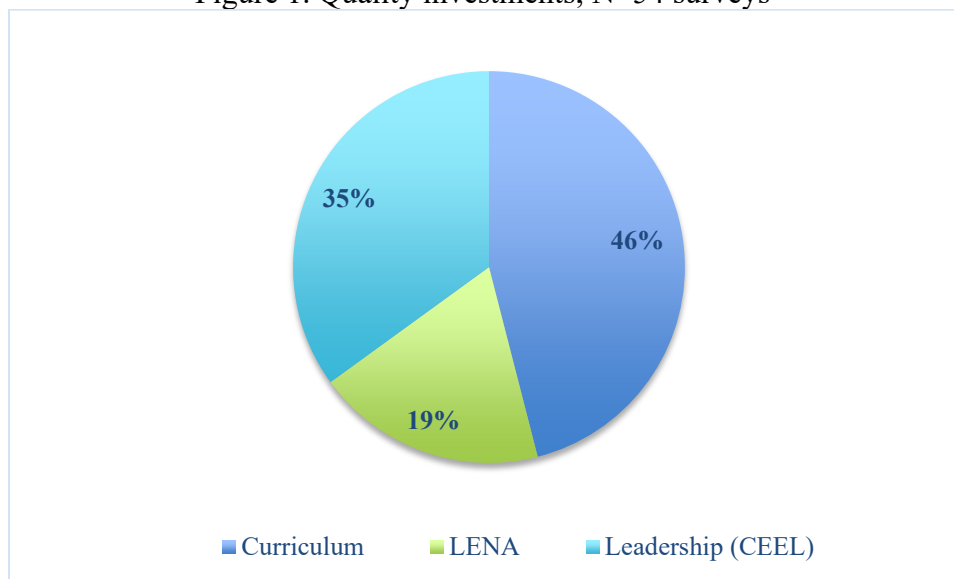
This report addresses the following research questions:

1. Why did programs choose the specific quality investment?
2. What are the programs' impressions of the experience with the quality investment?
3. What are the programs' perceived benefits and challenges of the quality investment?
4. What insights/advice do programs have for ELI?

1. Sample

A total of 74 providers³ participated in the three quality investments. The providers in the sample were working in center-based programs (26), home-based childcare (25), registered ministry programs (12), local education agency programs (3), and other programs (4). Programs in the sample were all rated in Paths to Quality (PTQ) as follows: ratings of 4 (16), ratings of 3 (30), and programs rated less than 3 or unrated (22). Surveys were distributed to the center directors for 61 providers (excluding those that chose the Math quality investment), and responses were received from 49 of them (80%) for a total of 54 complete surveys. **Figure 1** below therefore represents the 54 unique survey responses received.

Figure 1. Quality investments, N=54 surveys⁴



For reference, those that participated in the initiative map adequately with the diversity of the original sample in the NIEER study (2021-2022) referenced above, in terms of types of programs and PTQ rating. For example, 18 centers participated and 35 opted out; 19 home licensed

³ Does not include 5 providers that opted in but dropped without substantial participation: 2 licensed home providers and 3 ministry programs; their selected interventions were: 1 math & CEEL, 2 curriculum, 1 leadership, 1 LENA).

⁴ N=54 surveys from 49 providers. Note: The number of surveys distributed to each program varied based on the quality investment(s) selected.

programs opted in and 28 opted out, 3 LEAs participated and 14 opted out, 10 ministry programs participated and 42 opted out, and 3 programs described as “other” participated and 5 opted out.⁵ This also holds true for PTQ rating (although many programs have experienced a rating change since our previous study) and for region. Our sample for the intervention includes an additional 8 programs who were not part of the NIEER referenced study.

2. Measures and Procedures

Provider Survey

The survey questions explored providers’ motivation for participating in the quality investment initiative, experience with their chosen quality investment, perceived benefits and challenges, feedback for future investment strategies, and information related to the program director’s background and experience.

Surveys (and consent forms) were distributed to the participating providers based on the quality investment. One survey was distributed per quality investment type, given the differing nature of each. Program directors received one or two surveys depending on whether they implemented one or two interventions. Quotes from the survey responses included in the report are identified with NIEER’s study IDs to protect respondents’ anonymity. Open-ended questions in the survey were coded into emergent themes and the discussion below includes summaries of these themes. We refer to providers or respondents when referring to the responses of each director throughout the rest of the report.

Selected Provider Interviews

Follow-up individual phone interviews were conducted with nine providers; including six that participated in the study and three providers that were offered but chose not to participate in any of the quality investments. These interviews aimed to delve deeper into the rationale behind the choice of quality investment, the experiences encountered, implementation successes and challenges, and suggestions for future opportunities.

Results

Survey Respondents

A total of 54 survey responses were received from 49 participating providers. Most surveys were completed by providers with one participating classroom. Eight surveys were completed by providers with multiple participating classrooms that selected the same quality investment; 10 surveys were completed by providers with multiple participating classrooms that selected different quality investments, supported by ELI. Therefore, these 54 survey responses represent 62 classrooms.

⁵ These numbers from the NIEER study exclude the 29 programs affiliated with Building Blocks, a non-profit serving 28 counties in Southern Indiana.

Of the 49 providers that completed the survey:

- 27 (55%) are centers directors,
- 18 (37%) own the center,
 - 9 of the 18 are owners/directors,
 - 3 of the 18 also teach in the classroom,
- 4 (8%) are teachers, ECE specialists, and/or coaches.

Survey respondents ranged in age from 28 – 63 years old, with a mean age of 46 years old; the majority are white (78%). The level of education across all survey respondents is in similar proportions across the following three categories: Associate’s degree (27%), Bachelor’s degree (31%), and Master’s degree (27%). Most (61%) report Early Childhood Education to be their area of study, and most (82%) do not have any teaching certifications in the state of Indiana. Survey respondents have been working in their current position between 6 months and 35 years, with an average of 10.5 years.

This report summarizes results from these 49 providers (and the 54 surveys they submitted in total given some participated in more than one quality investment). Responses below include common threads across all survey respondents and themes by investment type.

Why did providers participate?

The top three reasons why providers participated in any of the three quality investment initiatives were:

- to improve overall center quality,
- to support children,
- and to support teachers.

Curriculum Findings. Of the respondents that indicated the reason they participated was to improve overall center quality, 62% of these selected the curriculum option. Among the respondents that chose the curriculum option (N=25),

- 64% indicated an interest in having a new curriculum as the reason for their participation, with 28% specifically indicating an inability to afford one,
- 32% noted that supporting children was a contributing factor.

The most common curricula selected by respondents were:

- Five providers chose Creative Curriculum,
- Eight chose Frog Street,
- Seven chose Funshine Express,
- One program chose MotherGoose, Pinnacle, or InvestiGator Club.

The following statements from the open-ended questions in the survey provide more insight into providers’ reasons for choosing the curriculum option:

We choose to participate to provide better quality of care for our children. We wanted to have an updated curriculum, as ours was more than 20 years old and cut and pasted together. Getting Frog Street will allow us to reach Level 3 on

Paths to Quality by allowing an easier way to ensure we are aligning to the Kindergarten readiness standards.” (Director #597, Curriculum, 1/24/2024)

[Center name] has never had funds to purchase a research base curriculum and we were excited for the opportunity to be able to purchase creative curriculum” (Director #4925, Curriculum, 2/1/2024)

LENA Grow Findings. Of the providers that chose LENA Grow (N=10), respondents cited the following specific reasons for their choices:

- supporting teacher-child interactions (60%),
- supporting children in the classroom more generally (50%),
- and supporting teachers (30%).

CEEL Findings. Respondents reported that they chose the CEEL quality investment to improve individual skills and knowledge, though some providers report doing so to support children and teachers. Specifically,

- 42% indicated a need to improve their leadership abilities,
- 16% wanted to improve their understanding of early care and education and/or early childhood development,
- 11% cited supporting children and supporting teachers.

Two of providers indicated that they dropped out at the start of the quality investment period; both selected the Harvard Leadership (CEEL) training. These respondents stated they withdrew from CEEL due to timing and time/staff constraints.

What did the funding support?

ELI directly paid for the LENA Grow and CEEL programs, and only those in the curriculum option had some choice on how to use their funds. Responses to this question indicate the perceptions of survey respondents on what program elements the funding supported in their program. **Table 1** below summarizes the responses by program element and quality investment type.

Table 1. Program elements funded by quality investment type.

Program Elements	Curriculum (N=25)	LENA (N=10)	CEEL (N=19)
Materials	23 (92%)	10 (100%)	7 (37%)
Professional Development	14 (56%)	6 (60%)	17 (90%)
Online Portal	12 (48%)	8 (80%)	7 (37%)
Support	12 (48%)	9 (90%)	9 (47%)
Child Assessments	12 (48%)	5 (50%)	2 (11%)
Other	3 (12%)	-	-

Table 1 indicates that while most of the providers who chose curriculum (92%) or LENA Grow (100%) agreed that materials were included within the funding initiative, elements like professional development and support were less commonly reported as included in the funding.

- 60% of the respondents who chose the LENA quality investment cite professional development (PD) as being included in their provided funding, and 90% of the respondents cite support as being included.
- Only 47% of providers that chose CEEL felt that support was included in the program, while 90% felt that PD was included.
- Only about half of the providers that adopted a new curriculum indicated that PD (56%) and support (48%) were included in their provided funding.

An example from an open-ended response to this question explains the cost limitations experienced by some programs:

“We were grateful for the opportunity to purchase this curriculum and will continue to use it in the future, but I might consider making sure there is funds available for training of [the] curriculum.” (Director #4925, Curriculum, 2/1/2024)

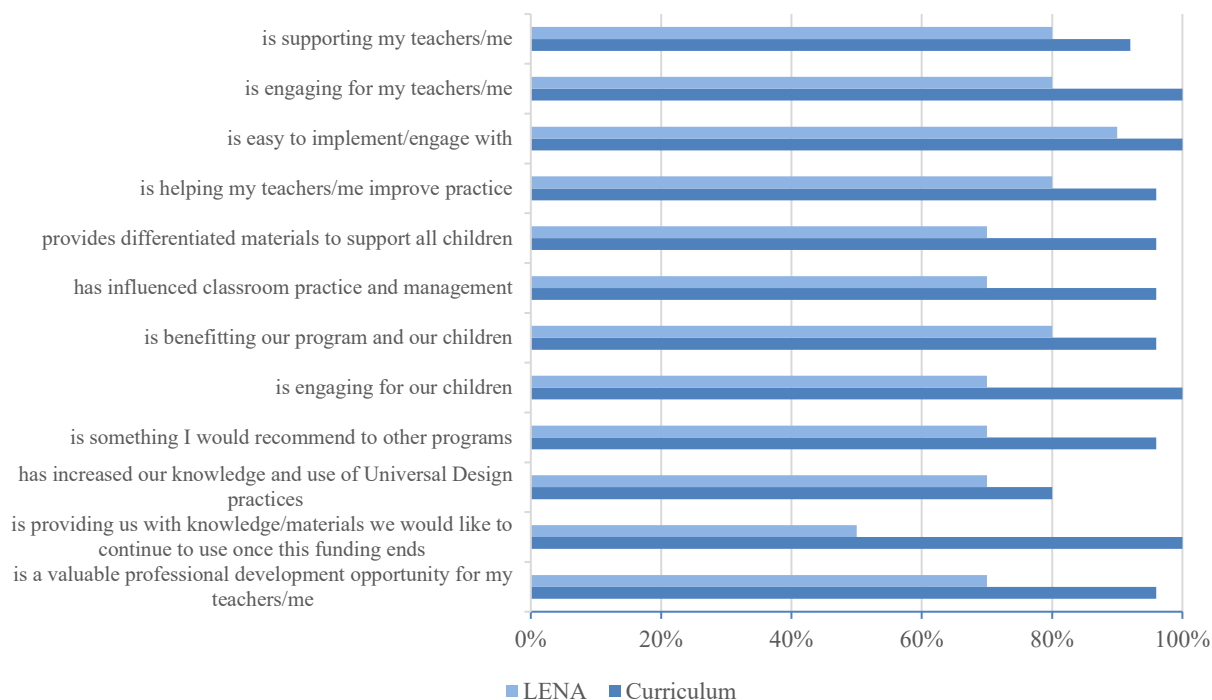
Also, only half of LENA Grow participants reported child assessments as included in the program. This may indicate confusion about the child-level data collected as part of LENA Grow, which has an embedded child assessment component.

Impressions of their experience with the quality investment

For the quality investments that required implementation at the classroom level, the curriculum and LENA Grow, participants were asked to rate these on their ease of use, engagement, and the degree to which they supported teachers in improving practice. **Figure 1** summarizes their responses to a series of statements regarding the implementation of these two quality investments. These figures illustrate the percentage of respondents who either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the specific statements.

Figure 1. Aspects affecting the implementation of the curriculum initiative and LENA Grow

"The quality investment I selected ... "



In general, as shown in **Figure 1**, respondents reported that both the curriculum initiative and LENA Grow were easy to implement, engaging for teachers, supportive of teachers, and helpful in improving practice. These overall positive experiences are exemplified in the following quotes:

This was a beneficial experience. It would be interesting to do this each school year and follow ages through EOY Pre-K. (Director #1184, LENA Grow, 12/19/2023)

I was grateful for the opportunity to participate in an initiative that will allow us to improve our learning outcomes for the children in our program. (Director #3883, Curriculum, 12/19/2023)

The proportion of positive responses to these questions was slightly lower for the LENA Grow respondents than the curriculum respondents. The lower trend for LENA Grow may be attributed to two of the ten providers who chose this quality investment. They chose either the ‘neutral’ or ‘disagree’ option to many of the Likert scale questions, as illustrated below. The following two quotes represent these respondents’ perceptions of the program,

I think it would be a valuable tool for infants and young toddlers, it just isn't a great tool for PreK children. (Director #1184, LENA Grow, 12/19/2023)

We liked the idea of Lena Grow and what it meant and stood for, but once doing it I don't think it's something our small center would continue to use. (Director #5951, LENA Grow, 1/29/2024)

In addition, we also asked providers about the cost, time commitment, materials, and support provided during the implementation of all three investment options. **Figures 2 and 3** below depict respondents' perspectives on statements related to the curriculum initiative, LENA Grow, and CEEL. As in figure 2, both 'agree' options are combined and represented below in one single bar.

Figure 2. Providers' perspectives of various aspects of implementation

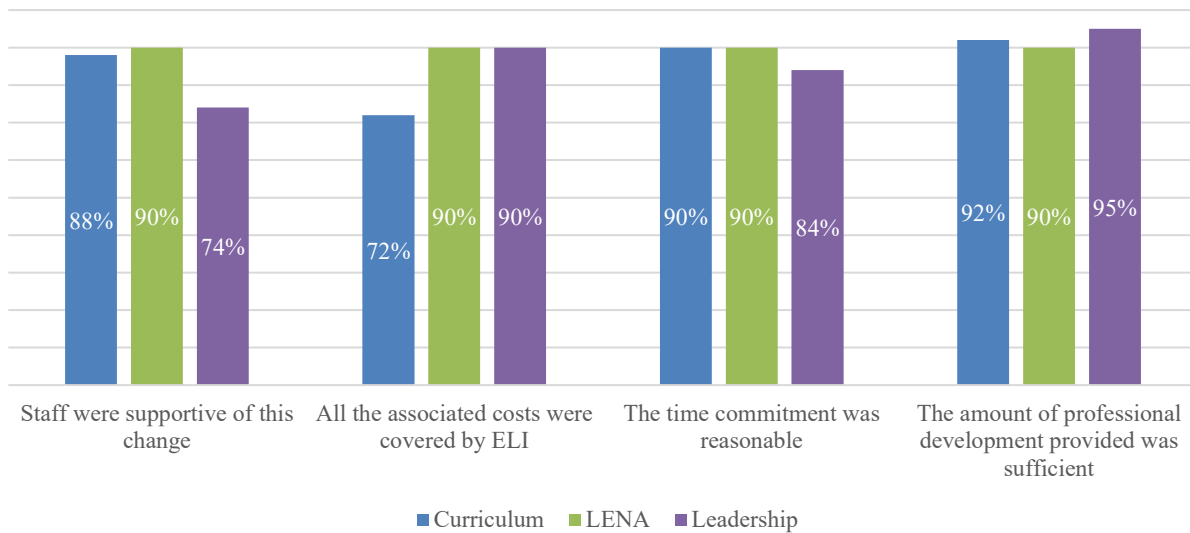
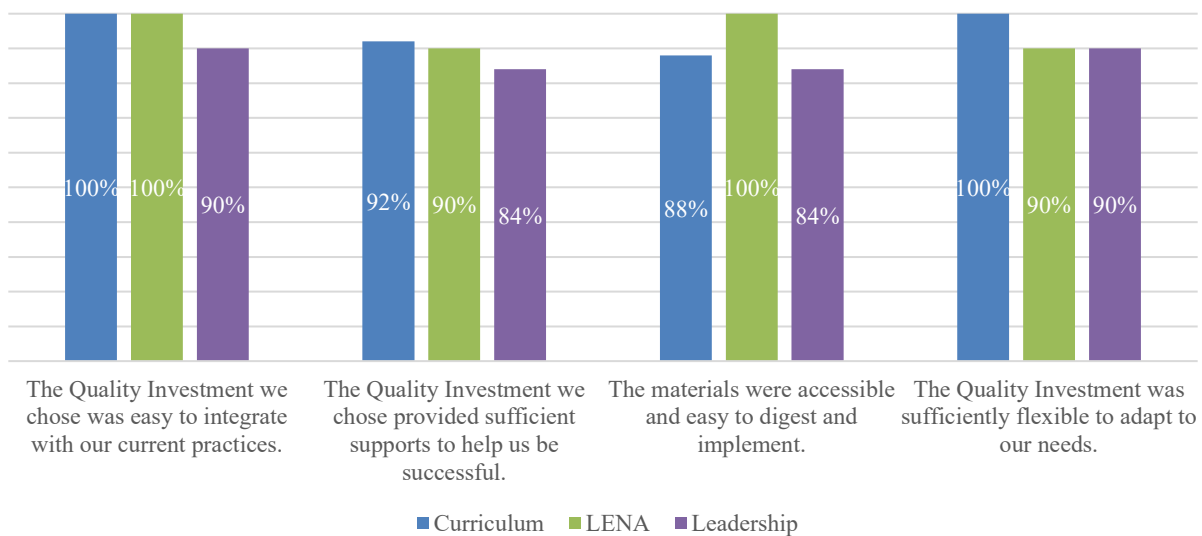


Figure 3. Providers' impressions by quality investment



As **Figures 2 and 3** indicate, across all three quality investments, there was general agreement around satisfaction with time commitment, the professional development and support provided, and the accessibility and usability of the materials. ELI paid the full cost of LENA Grow and CEEL options, and only the providers choosing the curriculum option had some flexibility in how they used the funding. Consistent with this, fewer providers in the curriculum initiative (72%) reported all related costs were covered by the funding received from ELI, as compared to LENA Grow (90%) and CEEL participants (90%). One provider noted:

The cost was more than what the program gave us to buy it so it took us some time to come up with the extra funds and we didn't get the whole curriculum because we could not afford all of the parts that came with it. (Director #4928, Curriculum, 1/26/2024)

There was a slightly lower agreement with the statement related to staff being supportive of the CEEL program. We did not collect information on reasons for responses, so we are unable to describe why this was the case. It may be that staff did not know the director was engaging in this experience, or that negative perceptions could emerge if administrative tasks were being shifted around.

Perceived Benefits of Quality Investments

Most respondents (89%) expressed they would continue with their selected quality investment in the future. Survey results across all three quality investments indicate that the most beneficial part of respondents' participation was the ability to learn (37%) and the quality and ease of use of the programs' material (32%). Specifically, respondents reported that they appreciated learning new ideas to enhance practice (24%) and gaining insights into their teachers and children at a particular site (17%).

Curriculum Findings. Of the providers that implemented a new curriculum (N=25):

- 60% of the respondents indicated that the material was easy to use,
- 24% enjoyed feeling supported as if they had someone to lean on,
- 12% felt the most beneficial part of the program was witnessing the children in their class learn new things.

These statements illustrate what participants reported about the curriculum initiative:

I am just so thankful for the grant I would have never personally been able to buy on my own this quality curriculum. (Director ID #3793, Curriculum, 1/4/2024)

It was so nice to have this investment into my program. My parents and children look forward to our projects and hearing all about our new circle time themes. (Director ID #1587, Curriculum, 12/20/2023)

Providers that implemented a curriculum cited the alignment of their daily program with standards, assessments, and best practices as the elements that most improve their practice. They mention the following examples in relation to how the new curriculum supported their program:

- New activities for children that foster new skills,
- Pre-planned lessons free up teachers’ time,
- Provides structure.

LENA Grow Findings. The majority (80%) of LENA Grow participants (N=10) identified learning new things as the biggest strength of the initiative and 10% of these appreciated the collaboration with others. The following statement illustrates a positive experience with LENA Grow among respondents:

We absolutely LOVED this program and if given the opportunity to purchase, earn, or be granted it we would use it at least twice a year to see growth and help with language in our homes. Thank you for this opportunity! (Director #3959, LENA Grow, 1/2/2024)

Table 2 below illustrates respondents’ perceptions of what the LENA Grow tool specifically allowed providers to do. Notably, all respondents indicated that LENA Grow enabled them to look at child-specific data and trends over time. Most of LENA Grow users (90%) also indicated that the tool allowed them to engage in discussions with families about their children’s language development. Aspects of using LENA Grow data to modify instruction, interpret data, inform lessons, and facilitate language were scored lower by respondents. This could be related to the time needed to change practice and learning how to use this type of data.

Table 2. The use of LENA Grow allowed directors and teachers to do the following:

Program Characteristics	Count	Percent
Look at child-specific data and trends over time	10	100%
Interpret data on children	8	80%
Modify instructions/strategy based on data	7	70%
Use data to inform lessons/strategies around language	8	80%
Facilitate children’s language outside of instructional time (ex. meals)	8	80%
Talk to families about children’s language development	9	90%

CEEL Responses. Among CEEL respondents, 42% indicated that collaborating with others was the program’s most compelling strength of participation in the CEEL program (N=19). In a follow-up interview with a CEEL participant,⁶ the discussion groups were identified as a strong component of the initiative, as they provided an avenue to gain a deeper understanding of the content. Participants in the CEEL program emphasize their increased ability to support teachers’ wellbeing, and their ability to better individualize that support, as the program’s biggest strength.

Perceived Implementation Challenges

About a third of the 54 total survey respondents (32%) stated they did not have any implementation challenges with their quality investment. This trend was consistent across the intervention types:

- 7 of the 25 providers (28%) that chose curriculum indicated no challenges,

⁶ Director #168, interview on 3/14/2024.

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- 6 of the 19 providers (32%) that chose the CEEL leadership program indicated no challenges,
- 4 of the 10 (40%) providers that chose LENA indicated no challenges.

Implementation challenges reported by some participants included the amount of time required, the types and number of materials required, adaptability/appropriateness of the quality initiative to their setting or children served, parent and teacher buy-in, and teacher turnover. These are discussed below.

Time. Among those respondents who did indicate specific implementation challenges, the most common across all groups was the time commitment required. This was most strongly represented among those in the CEEL program. Of the 19 responding providers that participated, 7 (37%) indicated the time commitment as a challenge.

Materials. Some respondents (n=5) reported issues with materials and/or not receiving enough support during the implementation phase of the intervention. Respondents that fall into this category are further described below:

- 3 of the providers that chose curriculum,
- 1 that chose the CEEL program,
- 2 that chose LENA Grow.

Notably, the 3 respondents that cited material and/or support issues with the curriculum include only programs that selected Funshine Express and/or Frog Street Curriculum. One of these directors stated:

The initiative is amazing, great ideas; however, those of us working with children [in] poverty do not have the additional funds to buy the proper materials to go with the curriculum to ensure the children get the complete educational quality they deserve from this curriculum. (Director #179, Curriculum, 1/18/2024)

Some respondents implementing LENA Grow also found some issues with materials, though many noted these were fully resolved within the first few weeks. Both survey and interview data indicate that some providers encountered hardware and software issues with the LENA devices.

Minor issues were experienced with the device setup, charging, and syncing data. In one interview, the director noted the difficulty that some teachers had in encouraging children to wear the devices, however, this director stated that “[a]fter a few weeks it became routine, and Tuesday became vest day. The kids would look forward to it.” (Director #580, LENA Grow, interview 3/28/2024).

Adaptability/appropriateness. Another common concern identified by five respondents was related to the adaptability of the program and/or the appropriateness of the materials for the ages of the children in the classes where these interventions were implemented. Five respondents cited these issues, with four of them belonging to the group that selected a new curriculum. For example,

Funshine Express didn't offer many supplemental items in the preschool age category. More available and having other options would be nice. (Director #1752, Curriculum, 12/17/2023)⁷

An additional challenge expressed by one provider that chose CEEL was its relevance to family childcare providers, stating “*the entire program was designed for centers and does not pertain to Home Programs.*” (Director #2657, CEEL participant, 1/5/2024)

Parent and Teacher Buy-In Concerns with LENA Grow. In one interview, a director cited parent buy-in as a significant implementation challenge to implementation of LENA Grow.

Parents are still asking questions, they don't really understand. One of our parents almost pulled her child out of the program because she thought we were recording her child. The technology itself is difficult to understand, and people were skeptical about it. Even in the second round, after they knew what it was, even after parents got the results. We would tell them 'your child had seven more talk turns last week, you can see their growth' and the parents just don't understand. (Director #3959, LENA Grow, interview 3/14/2024)

A couple of respondents shared that they did not choose LENA Grow because of perceived judgments of them or their teachers from reviewing data collected.

We thought it might deter teachers and kids from talking as much as they normally do due to nerves and anxiety [around wearing the LENA devices]. We really wanted to do this, but we were not confident in the outcomes. If the teachers were more used to this, maybe it could be successful, but everyone was worried about the judgement, especially because we have children with severe disabilities. We worried about what might be recorded. (Director #4928, Curriculum, 1/26/2024)

Teacher Turnover. An important thread that came up across several providers, both those who participated in CEEL and a few who did not, is how the high level of teacher turnover makes committing to any type of professional development for quality improvement difficult for a school administrator.

Insights for ELI for future quality investments

Participants were asked to provide feedback to Early Learning Indiana based on their experiences for future quality investments. A large proportion of the sample (44%) indicated that they would not change anything about their experience. Only a few respondents provided feedback, most of which expressed their gratitude for the chance to participate, and/or praised the initiative and highlighted the opportunity as “great,” “wonderful,” and “beneficial and professional.” This aligns with the overall positive perceptions of this opportunity. The following provider statements illustrate some of the feedback:

⁷ Funshine Express offers 0-3 and 3-5 kits.

I do think with the proper supports, many of the tools can be very helpful when being used with the appropriate age group. I think it's a great initiative towards creating and maintaining quality programs. However, all of the tools take time, and time isn't something most program directors and teachers have, so the marketing around the tools needs to show that while it may take time now, there will be support along the way and it will make things easier in the future. There needs to be established a return on investment for programs. (Director #1184, LENA Grow, 12/19/2023)

More trainings need to be offered with the focus on home childcare providers. There is such a high demand for math, because that is an area rarely covered in training. (Director #2657, CEEL, 1/5/2024)⁸

Participants were asked what changes they would like to see in a similar quality investment initiative in the future. Almost half (44%) said they would not change anything, and a few respondents left this question blank (n=8). Below is a summary of the types of changes providers would like to see in the future:

- 2 respondents indicated they would provide more flexibility around the time commitment,
- 3 respondents would make the program more accessible to children of different ages,
- 4 respondents indicated needing supplemental materials and/or resources,
- 2 respondents would have preferred additional support and training materials,
- 3 providers indicated that they would like to be able to implement the curriculum or LENA devices in additional classrooms,
- 6 providers wished they had chosen a different curriculum, or a different intervention.

Concerns, and potential areas to address in the future, were raised by some respondents. These are:

- Provide more information on CEEL before committing to participate.
- Better alignment between the quality investments offered, existing PTQ training, and CDA requirements would be beneficial.
- Regarding LENA Grow, a respondent suggested that it may improve children's comfort and motivation to wear the device if children are allowed to personalize the devices. This respondent also suggested that it would be helpful if more specific webinar-type training around the use of LENA was provided, and to provide training asynchronously.
- The importance of teacher and/or parent buy-in was expressed by some respondents.

Discussion of Findings & Recommendations

ELI's investments in the quality initiatives that were the focus of this study were beneficial to most of the providers that participated. Providers appreciated the additional resources to improve their practice. Each of the quality investments focused on different aspects of quality—implementing a research-based curriculum, implementing a proven language intervention, and participating in and completing, a certificate designed to improve leadership skills. While there

⁸ This provider also received the math intervention discussed above.

were some implementation challenges, and some providers dropped out of the quality initiative, for the most part, there was high agreement among survey respondents that they valued the opportunity offered by ELI and would like to continue to have this opportunity to gain additional resources to improve the quality of their programs.

Should ELI choose to continue the investments in quality interventions, some changes would be needed, such as ensuring that providers fully understand the specifics of the intervention and the requirements of robust implementation. Facilitating discussions regarding the time and resource commitments necessary for effective implementation, along with engaging interested programs in conversations with the initial cohort, can strengthen future initiatives.

In the case of the curriculum intervention, it may be that ELI would want to reconsider how they fund this initiative and the level of funding. Curriculum costs differ across curriculums, and programs have different levels of resources. Flexibility in funding levels, coupled with considerations for resource availability and professional development needs, could optimize the impact of this initiative. Similarly, for LENA Grow, integrating discussions and resources on culturally relevant approaches to working with teachers and families could enhance uptake and bolster stakeholder buy-in.

The scope of this study focused only on the participants' perceived interests, benefits, and challenges of implementing the quality investment selected; we have no data on whether these efforts to improve quality resulted in any change in practice. ELI may want to investigate a more sustained initiative, that would include a planning/getting ready phase for providers; more support for fidelity of implementation, and independent assessments of quality, related to the purpose/scope of the initiative.

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Appendix A. Survey Protocol

PART I. QUALITY INVESTMENT INFORMATION:

1. What supports from Early Learning Indiana did you select for this initiative (Check only ONE)?

- Harvard's Certificate in Early Education Leadership (CEEL)
- LENA Grow
- Curriculum → If yes, which curriculum did you select? [Skip pattern question, only shown for those that answered this]
 - Creative Curriculum
 - High Scope Curriculum
 - Tools of the Mind
 - Curiosity Corner
 - Connect 4 Learning
 - Bank Street
 - Opening the World of Learning (OWL)
 - Frog Street
 - Mother Goose
 - Pinnacle Curriculum
 - Three Cheers Pre-K Savvas
 - InvestiGator Club
 - Funshine Express
 - Other, please specify: _____

2. Why did you choose to participate in this Quality Investment? (Select all that apply).

- To improve our program's knowledge and skills in early childhood education
- To support teachers in my program by providing them with new knowledge and skills
- To cut costs on professional development/resources
- To interact with and learn from other early childhood professionals
- To increase children's developmental opportunities
- Because it is aligned with Indiana Paths to QUALITY
- None of the above

3. Can you explain in your own words why you chose to participate in this Quality Investment?

[Only if they answered Curriculum in question 1]

4. Can you explain in your own words why you chose this specific curriculum?

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5. What did the funding cover? Select all that apply.

- Materials
- Professional development
- Online portal or platforms
- Support
- Child assessments
- Other, please specify: _____

[For LENA Grow and Curriculum choices in question 1]

6. How accurately do the following statements describe the supports you chose to engage with this year?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Quality Investment I selected. . .					
a. Is easy to implement/engage with.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Is engaging for my teachers/me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Is supporting my teachers/me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Is helping my teachers/me improve practice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Is engaging for our children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Is benefitting our program and our children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Has influenced classroom practice and management.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Provides differentiated materials to support all children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. Is a valuable professional development opportunity for my teachers/me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. Is providing us with knowledge/materials we would like to continue to use once this funding ends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. Has increased our knowledge and use of Universal Design practices.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l. I would recommend this investment to other programs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m. I am satisfied with our Quality Investment choice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n. We found this investment hard to engage with and utilize in our program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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o. We would like to participate in another Quality Investment opportunity from ELI.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
p. Our teachers are satisfied with our Quality Investment choice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Only if they answered LENA Grow in question 1]

7. The use of LENA Grow allowed the teachers/me to do the following (Select all that apply).

- Look at child-specific data and look at trends over time
- Interpret data for the children using the LENA
- Modify instruction or strategies for the children based on the data from LENA
- Use the data from LENA to inform lessons or classroom strategies around language
- Think about how to facilitate children's use of language outside of instructional time (e.g., during meal/snack time)
- Talk to families about children's language development using data from LENA

8. Please let us know which of the following aspects impacted implementation of this Quality Initiative:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Staff were supportive of this change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. All the associated costs were covered by ELI	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. The time commitment was reasonable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. The amount of professional development provided was sufficient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. The Quality Investment we chose was easy to integrate with our current practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

f. The Quality Investment we chose provided sufficient supports to help us be successful	○	○	○	○	○
g. The materials were accessible and easy to digest and implement	○	○	○	○	○
h. The Quality Investment was sufficiently flexible to adapt to our needs	○	○	○	○	○

9. What have you found most beneficial about the quality supports you selected?

10. What challenges have you had with the quality supports you selected?

11. If you could change one thing about the Quality Investment you selected, what would you change?

12. What is one piece of feedback you would give to Early Learning Indiana based on your experience in this initiative?

13. Can you give an example of how you have used this Quality Investment to improve your program’s practice and better meet the needs of children in your program?

14. In the future, will you continue to implement the Quality Investment (e.g., continue with the curriculum, continue using LENA, or use information learned through the CEEL)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not sure