

FY2025 Overview and Highlights



Strong, Prepared And Ready for Kindergarten

*Preparing Aurora's Children for
Kindergarten and Lifelong Success*



MISSION

SPARK (Strong, Prepared, and Ready for Kindergarten), a collaboration, aims to spark a love of learning in every child by providing access to comprehensive early childhood education and support to families in Aurora.

VISION

We envision a thriving Aurora where all families have access to high-quality early childhood education, and resources, leading to a brighter future for our community.

LEADERSHIP TEAM



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FY2025 OUTCOMES & COMMUNITY IMPACT

(JULY 1, 2025–JUNE 30, 2025)

At SPARK, we are grateful for the families, partners, and supporters who make it possible for us to strengthen how we serve young children and their caregivers. During FY25, we focused on advancing kindergarten readiness by trying new approaches to build trust with families, deepen collaboration across early childhood systems, and improve the quality and coordination of services available in our community.



Throughout the year, SPARK evaluated and strengthened internal systems to better understand family needs and respond more effectively. By improving how we track communication, referrals, and follow-up, we were able to connect families to resources more intentionally and reduce barriers to early support—helping ensure children are identified, supported, and prepared before they enter school.



In partnership with community organizations and school districts, SPARK expanded opportunities for families to engage, learn, and feel supported during their child's earliest years. These efforts centered on empowering caregivers with knowledge, strengthening relationships across providers, and creating welcoming entry points to early learning and developmental supports.

This report highlights how, together, we worked to strengthen our early childhood system so that families feel connected, services are more responsive, and children enter kindergarten healthy, confident, and ready to learn.

106

In 2025, 106 playgroups engaged 564 parents and caregivers and 803 children, helping SPARK reach new families and connect them to early learning resources. Playgroups support kindergarten readiness by building motor, communication, social emotional, and problem solving skills, while giving families tools they can use at home.



59

SPARK offered 59 parent education and peer learning opportunities where families built knowledge, shared experiences, and learned more about child development and early learning. These opportunities helped parents feel confident in their role as their child's first teacher and better prepared to support school readiness.



52

SPARK attended 52 outreach events across Aurora to connect families to resources that support healthy development and smooth transitions into kindergarten. We are grateful for our community partnerships, which make it possible to reach new and underserved families and strengthen school readiness throughout Aurora.



“ SPARK has helped me a lot with resources for my children and they have been excellent. ”

“ Spark helped me find a daycare program, developmental screening, and speech therapy. They also provide me with parent cafe's and play groups. I am very grateful and this program is the best. A thousand blessings. ”

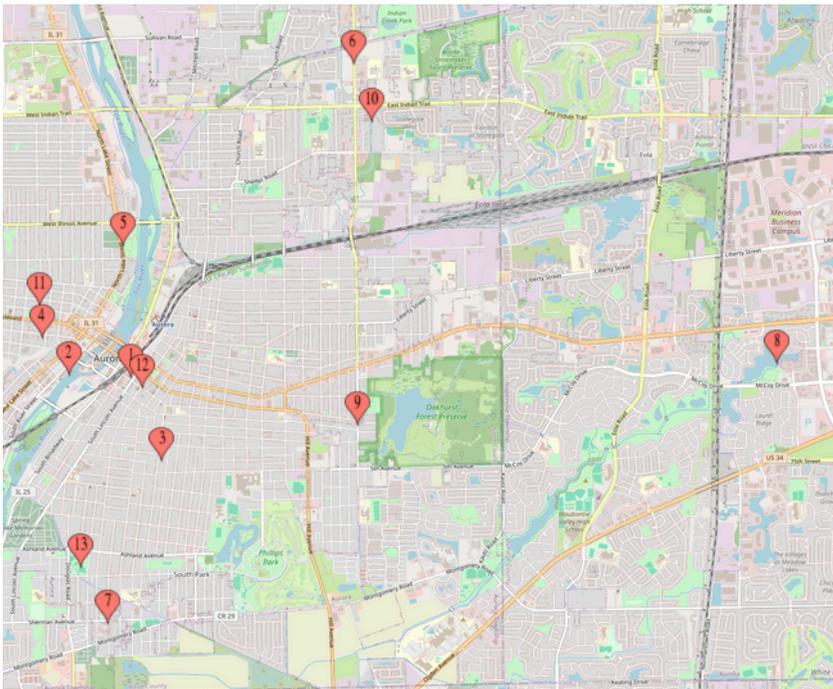
“ I learned how to teach my child how to interact with other children - Play Group Participant ”

SPARK MOBILE LEARNING PROJECT

The Mobile Learning Project allowed SPARK to double the number of playgroups offered in Aurora (106 in FY25 vs. 53 in FY24), expand to new locations such as McCarty Park, launch a Developmental Play Group with the Aurora Housing Authority, and attend 52 community outreach events.

The mobile learning project increased our ability to transport materials, model all ASQ-3 developmental areas, and bring resources to outdoor and indoor events across the city.

The mobile learning project significantly improved access to early childhood resources, allowing SPARK to bring high-quality, development-focused playgroups and screenings directly into neighborhoods. Families experienced fewer transportation barriers, and more children engaged in ASQ-aligned activities because we were able to bring more materials for activities. Community visibility increased through presence at key events such as the aurora farmer's market and back-to-school events. The project strengthened kindergarten readiness support in Aurora.



- 1. Fox Valley United Way**
44 East Galena Boulevard,
Aurora, Illinois, 60505
- 2. Santori Public Library**
101 South River Street,
Aurora, Illinois, 60506
- 3. Northern Lights**
551 4th Ave.,
Aurora, Illinois, 60505
- 4. New England Church**
406 W. Galena Blvd.
Aurora, Illinois, 60506
- 5. Prisco Community Center**
150 W Illinois Ave.
Aurora, Illinois, 60506
- 6. Family Focus**
1444 N farnsworth Ave.
Aurora, Illinois, 60506
- 7. Aurora Housing Authority Southwind**
1449 Jericho Cir.
Aurora, Illinois, 60506
- 8. Spring Lake Park**
396 Springlake Ln.
Aurora, Illinois, 60504
- 8. Spring Lake Park**
396 Springlake Ln.
Aurora, Illinois, 60504
- 9. McCarty Park**
350 E Galena Blvd
Aurora, Illinois, 60505
- 10. Aurora Housing Authority**
417 E. Indian Trail
Aurora, Illinois, 60505
- 11. Blackhawk Park**
Blackhawk Park W. Galena
Boulevard and Blackhawk St.
Aurora, Illinois, 60506

FY2025 Overview and Highlights



SPARK hosted Aurora's 1st Countdown to Kindergarten fair



SPARK joined APLD's 1000 books before kindergarten program as an agency to promote early literacy



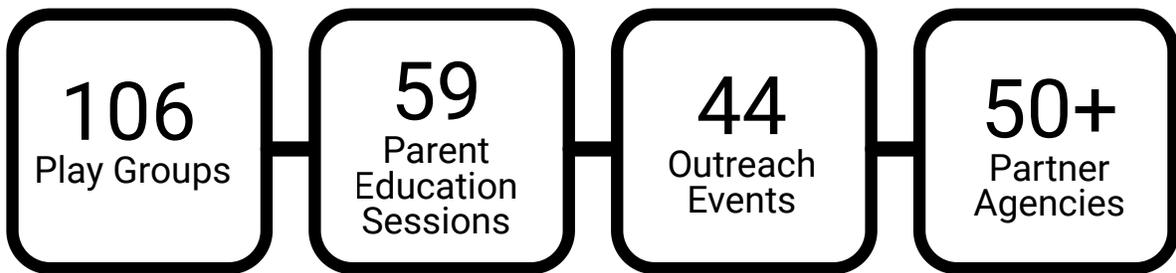
SPARK started a new collaboration with meals on the move



SPARK opened 0-5 play.learn.connect room at Northern Lights Youth Center

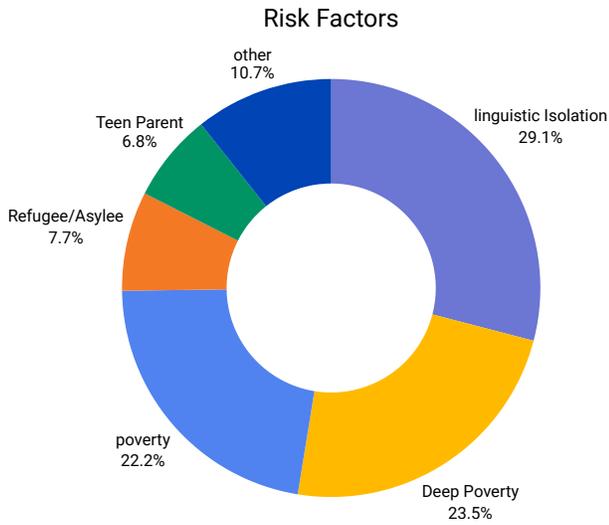


SPARK increased collaborations with faith based and healthcare organizations



In FY25, SPARK completed 231 developmental and social-emotional screenings using the ASQ-3 and ASQ:SE-2. Early identification of developmental and mental health needs supports stronger kindergarten readiness by allowing families to address concerns before children enter school. Screenings also empower parents with clear, culturally responsive information about their child's development, strengthening parent engagement and confidence. By offering screenings at no cost and in community-based settings, SPARK advances equity and helps reduce disparities in early identification and access to supports.

2025 STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS FOR FAMILIES



In FY25, SPARK updated its Gateway intake form to improve inclusivity and strengthen data-informed service delivery. Language was revised from “mother” and “father” to Parent/Caregiver 1 and Parent/Caregiver 2, and new fields were added for household size, single-parent households, expanded income ranges, and additional risk factors. The intake form was also updated to include Middle Eastern or North African as a race category, supporting more accurate demographic data and more targeted referrals.

309
Completed Referrals



SPARK transitioned from basic contact notes to a comprehensive contact log matrix that tracks outreach, intake, follow-ups, screenings, referrals, and supports provided. This system strengthens accountability, improves continuity of care, and enables SPARK to better monitor family progress and service outcomes.



In FY25, SPARK expanded its learning-through-play model through the launch of Developmental, Connect, and Kindergarten Ready Play Groups, offering more targeted and responsive supports for families at every stage of early childhood.

“

SPARK connects the community with different needed resources to give our kiddos what they need to succeed. The playgroups and special events are a place where families can go for activities and guidance.

-Agency Partner

”

2025 GROWING PARTNERSHIPS

One of SPARK's most valuable contributions is its ability to streamline referrals and coordinate access to services, making it easier for families to get the help they need when they need it. That's why we have partnered and improved our Partnerships making it easier for families. Collaboration reduced duplication and helped families navigate systems more easily.

"SPARK brings partners together to educate and inform on the Early Childhood system and connects to families to understand how they are experiencing the system."
-Agency Partner

"SPARK is in the community and offers a variety of ways for families to engage with the community partners they work with. It empowers families by connecting them with resources and each other."
-Agency Partner

"They are a trusted community organization that connects families to resources."
-Agency Partner

"I appreciate frequent communications and reminders about screenings, events, opportunities for networking; opportunities to collaborate; opportunities to serve; utilize my building space for an event or meeting; meet at other agencies' locations to learn more about them;"
-Agency Partner



At the Aurora Public Library District, we introduced playgroups at the Santori branch, creating more opportunities for children to play, learn, and connect. These experiences help lay a strong foundation for kindergarten readiness.



A Program of Northern Illinois Food Bank

We began a new partnership with Meals on the Move to bring activities and resources to McCarty Park (60505), a historically underserved neighborhood. This work is critical, as it helps bridge service gaps and ensures families have equitable access to learning opportunities and community support.



During this fiscal year, we partnered with the Farmers Market to share valuable information and connect with new families. In addition, we collaborated with the Sprouts Club, that is part of the Farmers Market that encourages healthy eating habits and helps children learn where their food comes from.



Another meaningful partnership this year has been with We, the Village, an organization dedicated to early childhood advocacy and parent empowerment. By working together, we help parents feel confident in their role as their child's first teacher, while also strengthening community networks that promote equity, access, and long-term success for young learners.



Through our collaboration with the Aurora Housing Authority, we were provided a space at the Northern Lights Youth Center to host playgroups, beginning in October at the start of the fiscal year. This partnership is vital because it brings early childhood resources directly into the community, reducing barriers to access and giving families a safe, welcoming place to connect.

LOOKING AHEAD: FY26

Improvements made in FY25 to intake, contact log, and referral tracking have already strengthened SPARK's data quality and follow-up, highlighting where families face access gaps and where services can be placed more strategically. These insights are directly informing SPARK's FY26 priorities.

These FY26 priorities build on FY25 systems improvements that have already improved referral tracking and service coordination. Together, they position SPARK to reach more families earlier, strengthen data-informed decision-making, and improve kindergarten readiness outcomes across Aurora.



Expand Countdown to Kindergarten to include more resources and direct services, engaging all public school districts and private schools

Strategically place direct services within each Aurora school district, including expansion to community sites such as the West Branch APLD Library and North Aurora Library

Strengthen collaboration with home-based daycare providers to better connect family child care settings to early learning and readiness supports



Enhance developmental screenings and early identification by creating a private screening space, partnering with Kane County Health Department, and launching an ASQ Awards Program

Build trauma-informed capacity through staff training in Adult Mental Health First Aid, Healing Circles (Fundamentals and Practicum), and Parent Café facilitation



Strengthen collaboration with World Relief to better support refugee and newcomer families and

Strengthen kindergarten readiness during play groups by intentionally integrating early math concepts using Erikson's Bridges Pre-K curriculum