



CAROLE ROBERTSON CENTER
for Learning



Annual Report
FISCAL YEAR 2025



PATHWAYS TO
POSSIBILITIES





EVERY CHILD, FAMILY, AND EDUCATOR WALKS A DISTINCT PATH.

At the Carole Robertson Center for Learning, we don't define the paths—we illuminate them so everyone can realize their own possibilities.

This year's report reflects our unwavering dedication to creating **affirming, nurturing environments that empower children, support families, and uplift the professionals** who guide them.

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JOINT LETTER FROM Our CEO and Board Chair

DEAR FELLOW CHAMPIONS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES,

Every year brings new challenges and opportunities—this has been especially true of 2025. Through all the change and uncertainty, one thing has remained our North Star: **our mission to educate, enrich, and empower children and families.** It guides every decision we make and keeps us focused on what matters most—delivering high-quality programs and services, creating meaningful employment and growth for our staff, and building strong, lasting partnerships in our communities.

Our theme this year, **Pathways to Possibilities**, reflects the many ways in which the Center provides opportunities for our children and youth to realize the fullness of their potential in school and life.



Carter Culver
Carter Culver
BOARD CHAIR

At the same time, the Center continues to fulfill its promise to be a **beacon of best practices, innovation, and positive impact in early childhood and youth development.** Even as the policy landscape around us shifts, we remain steady and confident in our direction. Across the nation, there is shared recognition of the importance of high-quality, accessible early childhood education and youth development programs—a shared belief that investing in children today shapes the future we all want to see.

As we stand at the threshold of our **50th anniversary in 2026**, we renew our commitment to lead with purpose and integrity at the core of our work. We're looking ahead—and forward—to our next 50 years.

The road ahead is bright. **Guided by our mission and driven by possibility**, we'll continue to chart new pathways for the children, families, and communities we serve—together.



Bela Moté
Bela Moté
PRESIDENT & CEO

 WE ARE GUIDED BY OUR TRUE NORTH: TO EDUCATE, ENRICH, AND EMPOWER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

MAPPING THE JOURNEY: Our Service Map

PEOPLE ON THE PATH: WHO WE SERVE

15K children and adults reached annually through our direct service programs, community partnerships, workforce development efforts, and support services for independent child care providers.

2.5K children directly served from prenatal to 17 in our early education and youth development programs.

AGES OF CHILDREN SERVED, 2024-25

41%
BIRTH TO AGE 3

33%
AGE 3-5

26%
AGE 5-17

For early childhood developmental outcome data and health care access, see pp. 22-23.

RACIAL & ETHNIC IDENTITY OF CHILDREN SERVED*



49%
Latino



37%
Black or African American



8%
Asian

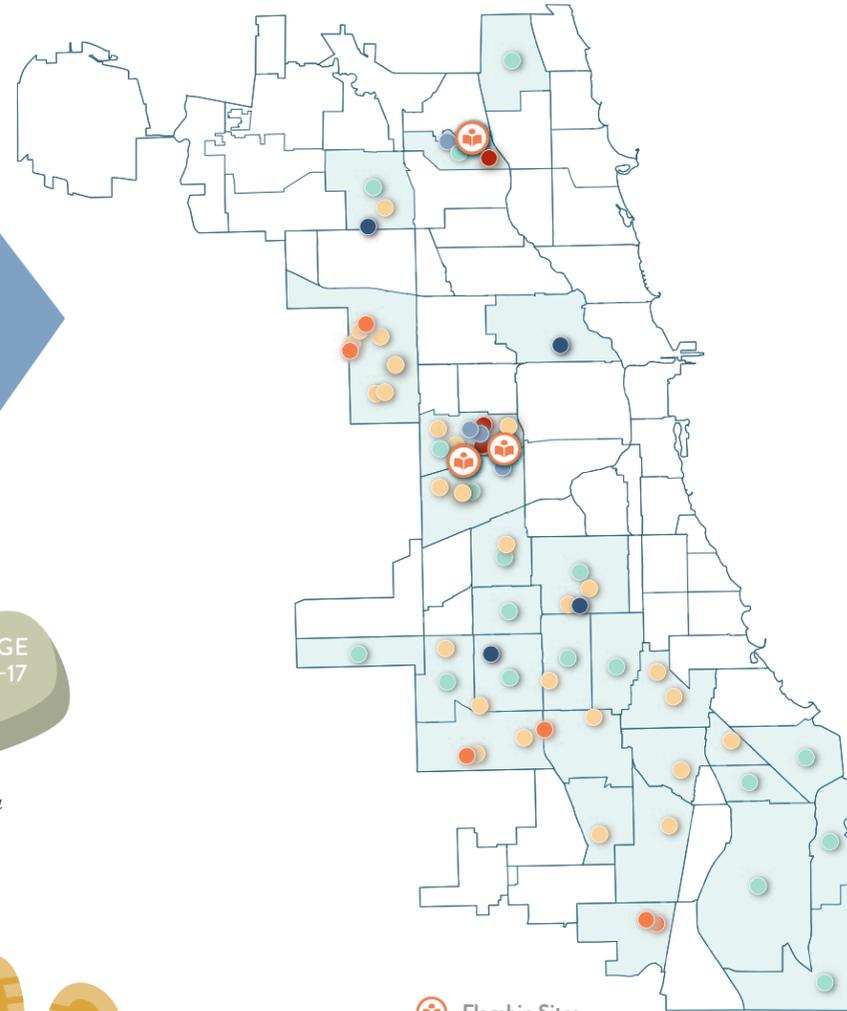


3%
Biracial/
Multiracial



2%
Other

**Some data for racial and ethnic identities are not available.*



- Flagship Sites
- Micro Centers
- School-Based Partners
- Family Child Care Network
- Center-Based Partners
- Home Visiting Communities
- Subrecipient Organizations

MILESTONES Along the Path

AUGUST 2024 | Teens in our Environmental Program ended their summer on the airwaves, collaborating with WRZD 88.3 FM, Northeastern Illinois University's student-run radio station, on a live podcast to raise awareness of environmental issues impacting our city. This broadcast was the students' culminating project.



SEPTEMBER 2024 | Ana Hernandez, a home visitor at the Carole Robertson Center, received the **Chicago Region Home Visiting Impact Award**. Ana was recognized at the Illinois Home Visiting Summit Celebration Dinner, part of the Annual Prevent Child Abuse Illinois Statewide Conference.



OCTOBER 2024 | Community leaders, elected officials, funders, staff, and board members convened at our Little Village flagship site to celebrate upcoming renovations with a ceremonial groundbreaking. The capital improvements are supported by Invest Today, Empower Tomorrow, the Carole Robertson Center's first large-scale fundraising campaign, and will allow our early childhood and youth development classrooms to become inspiring learning spaces.



JANUARY 2025 | The Carole Robertson Center for Learning was awarded a **\$1.15M Community Development Grant** by Chicago's Department of Planning and Development to support capital improvements to our Little Village flagship site. The renovation includes upgrades to all classrooms as well as community and staff spaces throughout the building.



FEBRUARY 2025 | **Contessa Houston**, Center board member and Chair of the Center's Family & Parent Policy Council, had her impact story featured by the **Illinois Head Start Association** at their annual conference, along with other Head Start parents and alumni.



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:

Pathways to Healthy Early Development Through Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the foundation for how children learn to navigate the world—how they manage emotions, form relationships, and solve problems. It starts at birth and carries them through the teen years and into adulthood.

At the Carole Robertson Center for Learning, we map lessons with **SEL woven into every part of the day**—it's that important to the foundation for lifelong learning and the well-being of each child. Our expert staff put our comprehensive SEL model to work to support each child's unique development journey.

79% OF CHILDREN WERE MEETING OR EXCEEDING DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS IN SEL IN SPRING 2025, AN INCREASE FROM 64% OF CHILDREN IN FALL 2024.



We focus on:

- **Building Positive Relationships** – Creating safe, connected environments between children, caregivers, and teachers.
- **Encouraging Positive Behaviors** – Using classroom strategies that reinforce empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving.
- **Fostering Self-Confidence** – Helping children develop curiosity, emotional awareness, and resilience.



PORTRAIT OF A PRE-KINDERGARTEN GRADUATE



In the classrooms, SEL doesn't exist in its own lane. It moves with purpose through every interaction we have with our children. Some examples of how SEL is embedded into our programs include:

- Using affirmation and “feeling walls” to help children **identify and show how they feel**. Teachers build on simple responses like “mad” to help young people develop greater self-awareness and strategies for dealing with strong emotions.
- Designating quiet corners in every classroom where children can **take a break, reflect, and calm down** when feeling overwhelmed.
- Using puppets with our youngest learners that reflect the pre-K students in the classroom to make SEL lessons more **relatable and affirming**.

CORNERSTONES OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING



Social-emotional skills form the foundation for a child's ability to build relationships, manage emotions, and respond to others with empathy. These early skills lay the groundwork for future success in school and life. By using the widely used assessment tool Teaching Strategies GOLD to track progress, the Center can better support each child's growth and strengthen the skills that matter most for their future.

Every child is supported in discovering their strengths, interests and agency. Educators act as guides, nurturing meaningful growth and development.

THE PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN MEETING DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS IN THEIR ABILITY TO FORM RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS INCREASED FROM **61%** IN FALL 2024 TO **75%** IN SPRING 2025.



GROWTH IN ABILITY TO SOLVE SOCIAL PROBLEMS INCREASED FROM **68%** IN FALL 2024 TO **82%** IN SPRING 2025.





YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: Paving the Road to Potential and Opportunity

At the Carole Robertson Center, **Youth Development** is more than a program—it’s a promise to **nurture potential and expand opportunities**. Since our earliest days, we’ve been dedicated to creating enriching spaces where Chicago’s young people can learn, grow, and dream. For 50 years, our commitment to empowering future leaders has paved pathways for young people to discover their own direction and potential.

Our youth programs are built around **hands-on learning and creative expression**, giving children and teens (ages 5–17) the chance to build confidence, curiosity, and resilience.



Above: Illinois State Senator Ram Villivalam hosts Albany Park youth for a civics field trip.

During the academic year, the Center offers two distinct models:

- A comprehensive **afterschool experience** that supports academic success and social-emotional growth.
- A **club-style format** that encourages exploration of specific interests and talents.

FAMILY SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

92% OF CENTER FAMILIES FEEL THEIR CHILD IS BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS BECAUSE OF THEIR TIME AT THE CAROLE ROBERTSON CENTER AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM.



91% OF CENTER FAMILIES ARE SATISFIED WITH THE CAROLE ROBERTSON CENTER AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM.

Source: Family Survey

Our approach to learning equips youth with skills that **support their growth in and out of the classroom**. By integrating science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) alongside social-emotional learning (SEL), we ensure that academic exploration is accompanied by opportunities to develop empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. As youth progress, they steadily **build a toolkit of age-appropriate strategies that prepare them for lifelong success**.



To support this growth, Youth Development instructors at the Center work to create environments where well-being comes first. Through access to **mental health resources and family support services**, they cultivate safe spaces in which youth and families can thrive.



“Exposure to STEAM competitions has led to a spark of interest in computers and engineering [for my child]. The exposure to a higher level of education has also been very inspiring and has started the conversation.”

– PARENT AT LITTLE VILLAGE FLAGSHIP SITE

NATIONALLY, **79%** OF PARENTS AGREE THAT AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS SUPPORT CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.

Source: Afterschool Alliance

Pathways to the Future

Our programs prepare youth for what comes next by **building readiness** for elementary school, high school, and college, along with **career exploration and opportunities for leadership and civic engagement**. We strive to ensure every student at the Center has the tools and vision to chart their own path.



WORKFORCE:

Pathways Begin with Our People

At the Carole Robertson Center, our greatest strength lies in our workforce, **325 dedicated brain builders and transformational partners** who work alongside children and families to create pathways to lifelong success.

At every level, we are intentional about creating a workplace where **staff feel valued, supported, and empowered to grow**. When our people thrive, our mission thrives—and that’s the Center’s most important investment.



Through the **TransformED apprenticeship**, we address the growing need for qualified professionals in the early childhood sector, while expanding employment and education opportunities for Chicago residents. We continue to strengthen the structures within our TransformED model to support participants in earning their entry-level Child Development Associate certification and advancing toward additional certifications and degree attainment. We are proud to meet the needs of families and the workforce in tandem—**promoting socioeconomic mobility across generations and ensuring our youngest learners benefit from high-quality teachers and support staff.**



“I’m so proud to work here, where support and purpose go hand in hand.”

– CANDICE WASHINGTON, KINDERGARTEN READINESS COMMUNITY LIAISON

Investing in people. Opening pathways. Creating possibilities.

We believe meaningful work flourishes when our team members are supported—personally and professionally.

From tuition reimbursement and health savings contributions to comprehensive health coverage, life insurance, and retirement matching, we are committed to **providing thriving wages and competitive benefits for the security and well-being of our employees and their families.**

By offering ongoing opportunities for continuing education and professional development, we provide positive experiences for our staff to **grow, develop, and excel in their chosen careers.**



Why a career with the Carole Robertson Center for Learning?

At the Carole Robertson Center for Learning, we are not just a workplace, we are a community of individuals who share a common passion for enhancing the lives of Chicago’s children and their families. Join us in making a difference and be a part of something transformational.



CLICK OR SCAN FOR MORE INFO

STAFF SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS



92% OF RESPONDENTS FEEL LIKE THEY ARE MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

86% OF RESPONDENTS REPORT FEELING RESPECTED BY THEIR COLLEAGUES.

80% OF RESPONDENTS SAY CAROLE ROBERTSON CENTER FOR LEARNING OPERATES BY STRONG VALUES.

Data from Winter 2025 Employee Engagement Survey

FAMILIES:

Supporting the Whole Journey

At the Carole Robertson Center, we know that families are children's first and most important teachers. It is from the deeply rooted relationship to family that healthy humans develop. By partnering with families and providing support that reflects their needs and strengths, we help create a circle of support that empowers communities and fosters confidence from the very start.



Supporting the whole child means **offering resources that reflect the individualized strengths and needs of those we serve.**

Knowing that a strong family is critical to the development of a strong and independent child, we surround our families with layers of partnerships and supports.

Our **Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) team** connects with parents and caregivers across Chicago, helping them access programs that fit their family's needs.

Once enrolled, families are paired with a Family Support Specialist who walks alongside them during their time with the Center, connecting them with wraparound services to foster long-term stability, such as housing and food assistance, health care, nutritionists, therapists, and more.



The Importance of Family Choice

We also recognize that one size does not fit all children and families, and so we offer many ways for families to access educational options that work best for them. We follow the family's lead in determining the best choice, whether early childhood education or youth development programs are requested.



A socialization event for Home Visiting families.



Home-Based Learning and Care

Meeting families where they are is key. Through our **Home Visiting program**, educators bring early education and prenatal support directly into the home, creating learning experiences tailored to each family while also fostering community through regular socializations with other families with young children.

The Home Visiting model ensures high-quality education in a familiar, supportive setting, laying the foundation for lasting success.

In collaboration with Illinois Action for Children, the Center piloted the Community Saturation Program to support kindergarten readiness for young learners in North Lawndale. The program combines the distribution of free literacy learning kits with Circle of Security caregiver trainings, equipping families with tools to support children's early development.



I help families understand that children learn through play—how to use a toy, how to engage with it. We talk about parallel play. At the same time, they're building a bond with their child. These seem like little things, but they have a big impact."

— MARIA ROSAURA SAAVEDRA, EARLY HEAD START HOME VISITOR



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: Shared Pathways, Shared Purpose

The Center’s work is amplified through the **collaboration and expertise of our community partners**. We are deeply grateful for the organizations and institutions that share our commitment and actively advance our mission alongside us. Together with our partners, we create pathways that empower our staff, fortify our programs, and help launch the next generation.



Above:
In 2025, MSRN won the Chicago Community Trust **Outstanding Community Plan Award** at the Chicago Neighborhood Development Awards.

Here are just a few examples of our valued partnerships:

- **Engaging in music, movement, and visual arts** fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and spatial awareness—foundational for lifelong learning and academic success. Through our ongoing partnership with Chicago’s revered **Old Town School of Folk Music**, trained music and dance educators join our classrooms to complement and enhance the creative experiences our teachers nurture every day.
- **Our collaborations with higher-education institutions** play a vital role in expanding pathways for the early childhood education and youth development workforce, supporting staff who seek to add credentials, and enriching the pipeline of future educators and social workers. Two such institutions are **Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU)**—see Partnership Spotlight on the opposite page) and **Erikson Institute**, a premier graduate school. These partnerships also offer internship and practicum opportunities for individuals new to the field, providing hands-on experience that prepares them for meaningful careers.
- **Membership in neighborhood alliances**, such as the **Marshall Square Resource Network (MSRN)**, provides an avenue for the Center to deepen our engagement and impact in specific communities we serve. MSRN is a coalition of 60+ nonprofits and neighbors with a shared vision of promoting the health, safety, and vibrancy of the historic Marshall Square neighborhood in South Lawndale.

Partnership Spotlight: NEIU

The Center’s **partnership with Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU)** has opened doors for both Center staff and NEIU students—building bridges between academic opportunity and real-world experience.

While pursuing her bachelor’s degree in social work at NEIU, **Amy Munoz** was drawn to an internship opportunity at the Carole Robertson Center for Learning. Her familiarity with the neighborhood, its families, and the social services available nearby allowed her to connect deeply with those she served. Now a Social-Emotional Learning Advisor at the Center, Amy helps children and families, using her expertise to build trust and advocate more effectively for the needs of those she supports.



“What started as an internship became a doorway to something so much bigger. Working here didn’t just help me grow professionally—it showed me what’s possible when people believe in your potential.”

– AMY MUNOZ, FORMER INTERN AND CURRENT STAFF MEMBER



ADVOCACY AND POLICY IMPACT:

Voices That Move Us Along the Path

Staff, families, and youth don't just experience policy—they **help shape it**. The Center is committed to ensuring they have **meaningful roles in decisions** that affect their daily lives, at every level: local, state and national.



12 STAFF MEMBERS
ENGAGED
WITH ELECTED
STATE OFFICIALS ON EARLY
CHILDHOOD ADVOCACY DAY.



The Center's **Empower & Engage Learning Collective**, a staff-driven committee, keeps staff informed about key developments and provides space for them to share their perspectives with decision makers. Staff voices remind our elected officials of the impact of the Center's work inside our walls with our children, and how policymakers can champion policies that benefit the early childhood and youth development workforce.

To elevate the voices of our families, the Center **hosts Town Halls** that explore topics central to those we serve and provide opportunity for feedback. Civic participation and education are also woven into our annual Family Orientations at every program site. Parents and caregivers play an active role in advocacy, shaping decisions and driving lasting change in their communities.

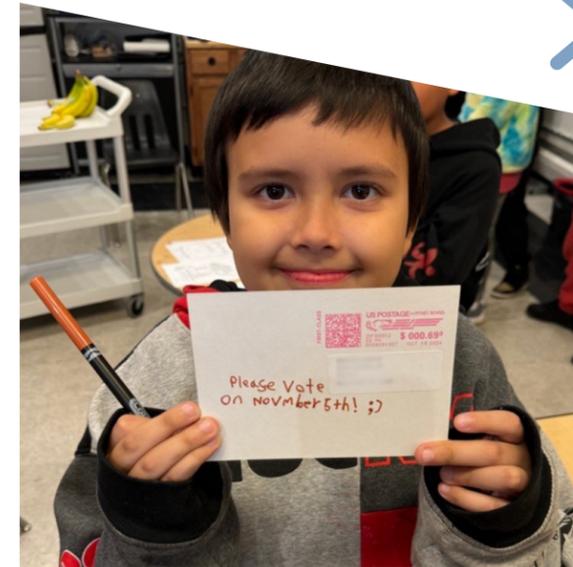
Our **Family & Parent Policy Council and Policy Committee** allows allow parents to remain informed on current issues, sharpen their advocacy skills, and learn how to engage in issues that are important to them.



In FY25, staff, parents, and youth **shared personal stories** highlighting the importance of investing in early childhood and youth development.

These stories, along with the efforts of other community-focused organizations and leaders, are essential to protecting a robust early learning and youth development ecosystem within a changing political landscape.

As our **influence in shaping policy** continues, so does our ability to provide a platform for community voices. From empowering parents to share their experiences to encouraging staff to share their journeys at the Center, it is vital that we **uplift the communities we serve**.



The Center's "Tiny Mic, Big Voices" series shares the perspectives of our children, staff and families.

100+
"GET OUT THE VOTE" CARDS
WERE SENT BY CHILDREN,
STAFF AND FAMILIES DURING
THE 2024 ELECTION CYCLE.



CENTER STAFF PARTICIPATE
IN MORE THAN **20** EXTERNAL
TABLES AND COMMITTEES

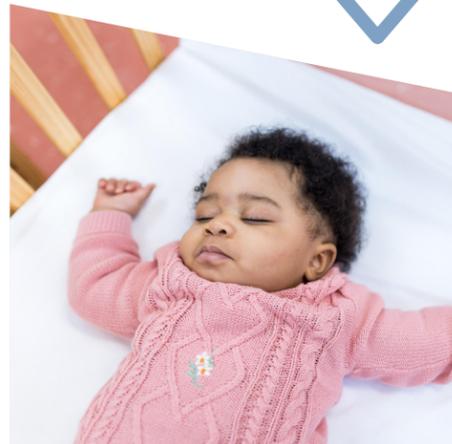
THROUGH OUR ENGAGEMENT
EFFORTS, THE CENTER SECURED
\$350K
IN STATE FUNDING FOR CAPITAL
IMPROVEMENTS AT OUR NORTH
LAWDALE FLAGSHIP SITE IN FY25.



MAPPING THE JOURNEY: Data and Progress Indicators

At the Carole Robertson Center for Learning, **data is our compass**—an essential tool that keeps us oriented on the many pathways toward stronger outcomes for children, families, and communities.

Data is not just collected—it’s activated. It helps us see where we are, measure progress, and chart new routes toward impact. Through intentional analysis, reflection, and planning, we ensure that every insight leads us further to our **True North: delivering high-quality, evidence-informed programs that empower children and families.**



Data in Action

The **Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)** is an observational tool used to evaluate the quality of teacher-child interactions. The Center conducts in-depth Data Dialogues with teachers about their CLASS scores to promote improved teaching practices, which foster stronger child development outcomes. For example, an infant teacher who receives a lower score in the area of “Early Language Support” may receive dedicated coaching and training in that domain to promote her professional growth and the language acquisition of the children in her classroom.



Our **Learning, Evaluation, Scaling, and Dissemination (LESD) team** plays a central role in this effort, ensuring data is accessible, transparent, and actionable. Staff engage with findings in real time through **Data Dialogue sessions**—spaces designed for collective reflection, learning, and innovation.

Guided by data and grounded in purpose, we continue **mapping pathways that lead every child and family toward possibility.**



BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES, Brick by Brick

With funding provided through our **Invest Today, Empower Tomorrow** campaign, the Carole Robertson Center broke ground this fiscal year on capital improvements at our **Little Village flagship site** at 2929 W. 19th St. The facility, originally owned by the State of Illinois, became the home of the Center’s first early childhood education Head Start program (ages 3–5) in 1989, and soon expanded into school-age programming.

We know that the environment is the “third teacher,” shaping how children learn alongside families and educators. Guided by this knowledge, we have reimagined our Little Village flagship site as more than a building—it is a **vibrant, welcoming learning environment that actively supports teaching, growth, and belonging.** As a trusted beacon in the Little Village community, our renovated space is safe, bright, nurturing, and intentionally designed to help children and families thrive.

Our new facility reflects what research and science tell us is essential for children, families, staff, and the broader community to flourish. Thoughtfully designed to foster curiosity, connection, and well-being, the space has been shaped by input from our youth, staff, families, and community members—ensuring it truly reflects their needs, voices, and hopes.

Construction is slated to be completed in January 2026.



BEFORE



AFTER



We are grateful for the many private and governmental gifts that have underwritten the transformation of our educational environments.

To learn more about the **Invest Today, Empower Tomorrow** campaign, visit www.carolerobertsoncenter.org/invest-today/





FINANCIALS:

Navigating with Transparency

Fiscal year ending June 30, 2025 (Audited Financial Statement Extracts)



LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

CURRENT LIABILITIES

Accounts payable	\$1,058,198
Accrued expenses	\$1,032,758
Current portion of capital leases	\$131,569
Total current liabilities	\$2,222,525

NONCURRENT LIABILITIES

Total noncurrent liabilities	\$3,662,249
Total liabilities	\$5,884,774

NET ASSETS

Without donor restrictions	\$17,896,449
With donor restrictions	\$3,627,477
Total net assets	\$21,523,926
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$27,408,700

ASSETS

CURRENT ASSETS

Cash and cash equivalents	\$3,176,835
Investments	\$7,297,437
Receivables (All)	\$5,061,830
Prepaid expenses	\$703,259
Total current assets	\$16,239,361

PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT

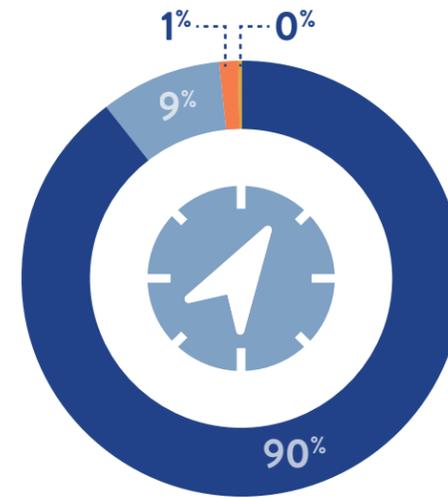
Land	\$1,800,000
Facility	\$7,699,766
Other property and equipment	\$1,219,198
Construction in progress	\$1,612,678
Less: Accumulated depreciation	(\$6,228,871)
Net property and equipment	\$6,102,771
Other Assets	\$5,066,568
Total Assets	\$27,408,700



View full audited financials at www.carolerobertsoncenter.org/financial-statements/



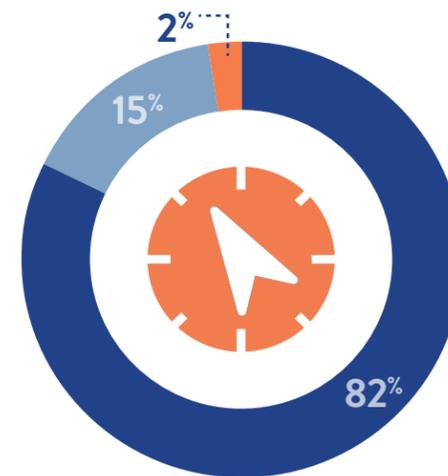
REVENUE BY CATEGORY



- Public Funding—includes Federal, State, City and County Contracts
- Corporate, Foundation & Individual Contributions
- Events, In-Kind & Other
- Program-Related Fees

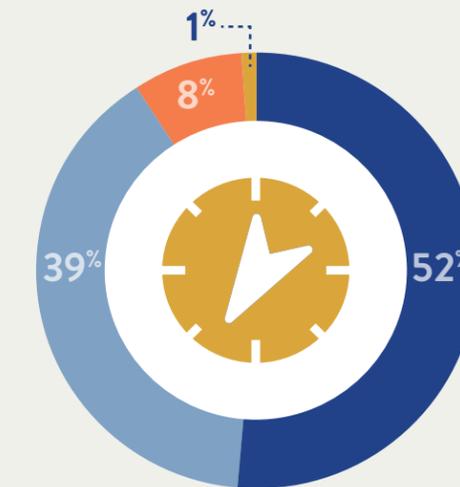


EXPENSES BY CATEGORY



- Programs
- Administration
- Fundraising

BREAKDOWN OF PROGRAM EXPENSES BY TYPE



- Infant-Toddler (0-3)
- Early Childhood (3-5)
- School-Age and Youth
- Community Programming

APPENDIX A:

**Early Childhood
Education
Developmental
Outcomes
Fall 2024/
Spring 2025**

(not including subrecipients)



**CHILDREN 0-3 MEETING
OR EXCEEDING WIDELY
HELD EXPECTATIONS**

Social-Emotional Learning



Physical



Language



Cognitive



Literacy



Mathematics



Note: The Carole Robertson Center collects and reports metrics indicating children's development according to "widely held expectations" as defined by Teaching Strategies Gold, the assessment tool used in conjunction with Creative Curriculum, a best-practices ECE curriculum used by Center educators.

APPENDIX B:

**Health Care Access
Fall 2024/Spring 2025**

Our family support team partners with families to provide an array of supports, including facilitating access to medical and dental care for their children.



**CHILDREN AGES 0-3 IN OUR ECE PROGRAMS
WHO ACCESS VARIOUS TYPES OF CARE**



**CHILDREN AGES 3-5 IN OUR ECE PROGRAMS
WHO ACCESS VARIOUS TYPES OF CARE**



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Howell

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Parent Policy Council

Parent Representative

Jill Washington

PEOPLES BANK

Rani Williams

UI HEALTH

Dianne Robertson

Braddock

Honorary Robertson Family

Representative

Jamellah

Braddock Ellis

Honorary Robertson Family

Representative

Bela Moté

CAROLE ROBERTSON CENTER

FOR LEARNING

President & CEO, Ex-Officio



CAROLE ROBERTSON CENTER

for Learning

OUR MISSION

To educate, enrich, and empower children and families.

FOR FAMILIES, BY FAMILIES, WITH FAMILIES

Carole Robertson Center for Learning pairs high-quality education and enrichment for children and youth with one-on-one support services to open opportunities for the whole family.

AN HONOR AND RESPONSIBILITY

Since its inception, the Center has worked to honor the life and memory of Carole Robertson who, together with her friends Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, and Denise McNair, was killed in the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

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To view our Donor Honor Roll, visit our website:

www.carolerobertsoncenter.org/giving-honor-roll/



To view the Report for the Office of Head Start, visit our website:

www.carolerobertsoncenter.org/head-start-annual-report-addenda/