

Maximize Love,  
Manage Stress

Count, Group,  
and Compare

Read and  
Discuss Stories

Talk, Sing  
and Point

Explore Through  
Movement and Play

# ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR | 2024

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

In the Words of...

A Parent

“ Sometimes all you need is a little reminder and a simple idea to take your child’s learning to the next level.”

A Community Partner

“ Parent engagement when we present The Basics has been great! Their interest and attention towards the material is consistent and the feedback from using The Basics in their households has been positive.”

A Backbone Leader

“ We have found that, as we engage community partners, they are enthusiastic about The Basics and eager to participate.”

Contents

Letter from The Basics Founder ..... 3

Our Vision, Mission, Principles..... 4

Our Strategy ..... 5

A Growing Movement ..... 6

Local Backbones ..... 7

Our Impact on...

    Communities..... 8

    Providers..... 9

    Families..... 10

Spotlight: Basics Research..... 11

The Basics Learning Network  
Featured Community:  
The Basics Boston Alliance ..... 12

Our Conference Greensboro, NC..... 14

The Basics Learning Network  
Featured Community:  
The Basics Waccamaw..... 16

Next Up for FY 25 ..... 18

Team and Board ..... 19

Financial Report FY 24 ..... 20

Donors ..... 21

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Another year has passed, and the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic on early childhood development are still with us, particularly among children of color and from less advantaged families.

In light of these ongoing challenges, we are heartened to report that research is yielding positive findings regarding parental use of The Basics Principles of early childhood caregiving and associated impacts on development. Testimonials from families that benefit from our work are inspiring and numerous. In addition, the Basics Learning Network (BLN) comprising many dozens of communities in the U.S., Australia, Bermuda, Brazil, and Canada continues to mature.

As I write this, we are immersed in strategic planning to optimize our impact on community-level capacity in the U.S. for making The Basics Principles daily routines with children aged from birth to five.

The strategic plan will help us manage growth and expansion in ways that continuously improve the integration of our work into state and local systems where BLN backbone organizations and their collaborators representing multiple sectors are engaging parents and other caregivers around The Basics Principles as a unifying framework for early childhood flourishing.

Five core values continue to guide us.

**LOVE** is the master key. The Basics Principle, “Maximize Love, Manage Stress,” is the first and most foundational. It deepens parent-child attachment and bonds us together in The Basics movement.

**HOPE** is the sense of possibility we share regarding the potential of every child to experience life abundantly. It is a bias toward optimism about human potential, broadly conceived.

**EQUITY** is served through cultural responsiveness and respect and a commitment to investing in communities that have been marginalized.

**LEARNING** equips families, our allies, and each of us as individuals with the understanding required for playing our roles. It grounds us in current knowledge while leaving room for innovation.

**COMMUNITY** is the vessel through which we pool our efforts and resources toward achieving what none of us could do alone. It acknowledges the importance of social environments in the lives of children and families and the benefits of collective action across our network.

Together we are making a growing difference. Thanks for being an ally!

Yours truly,  
**Ron Ferguson, PhD**  
Founder and Executive Director  
The Basics, Inc.



Cover Illustration by Jennifer O’Grady. Produced as part of a project to bring The Basics Principles to life led by Professor Irena Roman at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in collaboration with The Basics Boston.

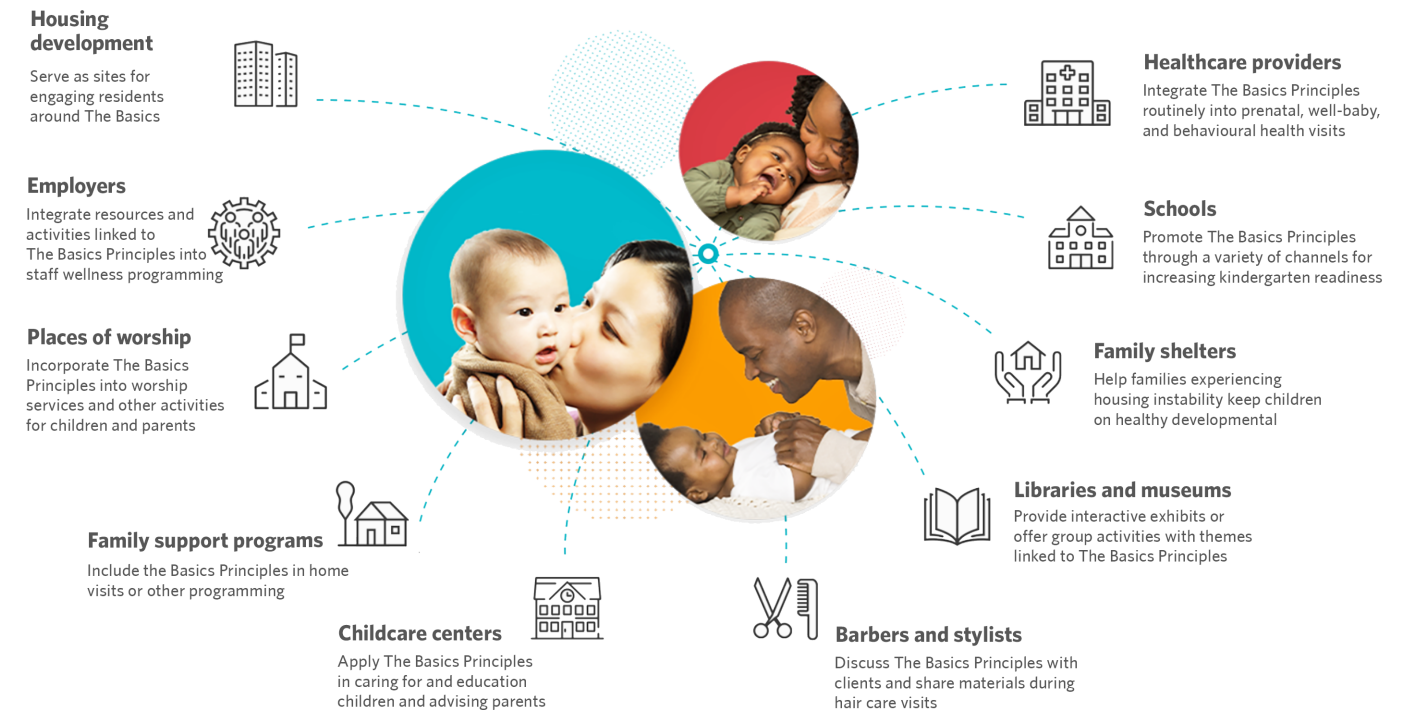
# The Basics Principles

All our work is grounded in five science-based tenets for early caregiving.



# Our Strategy

The Basics strategy is to guide institutions in multiple sectors to apply **The Basics tools and resources** to reach and support parents and caregivers *where they are* through trusted messengers.



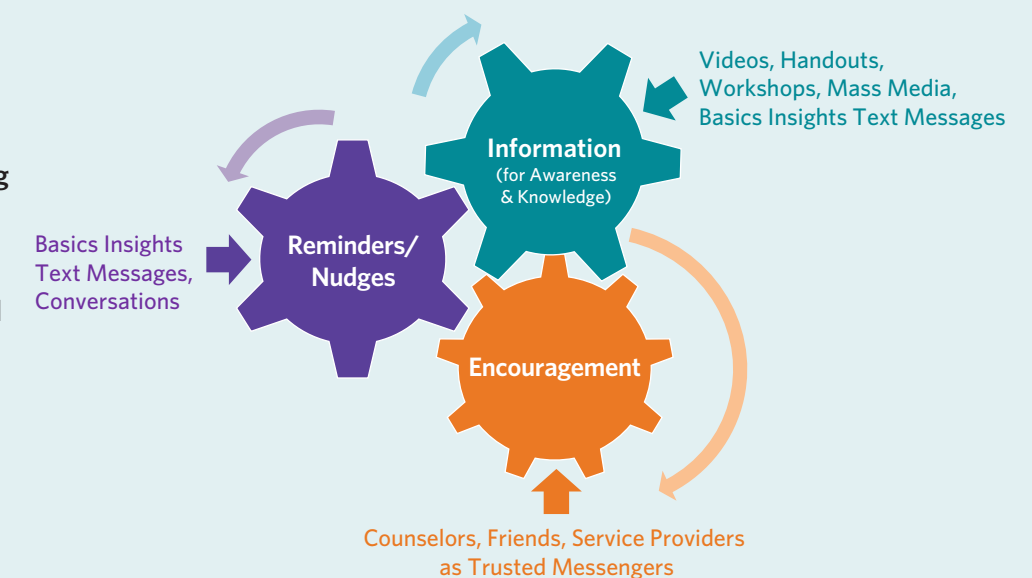
## Our Vision

The Basics vision is a world where infants, toddlers, and preschoolers of all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds are on track to achieve their full potential — having benefited from early experiences that foster healthy brain development, learning, joy, and resilience.

## Our Mission

The Basics, Inc. mission is to cultivate collective, cross-sector commitment and capacity in communities to support families in promoting children's wellbeing and development through piloting innovative approaches and scaling effective practices to create sustainable change in the systems and cultures that support families.

The Basics three gears support parents and caregivers in applying The Basics Principles in everyday interactions with their children. The Basics, Inc provides tools and resources that help organizations implement the gears.





# We Are a Growing Movement

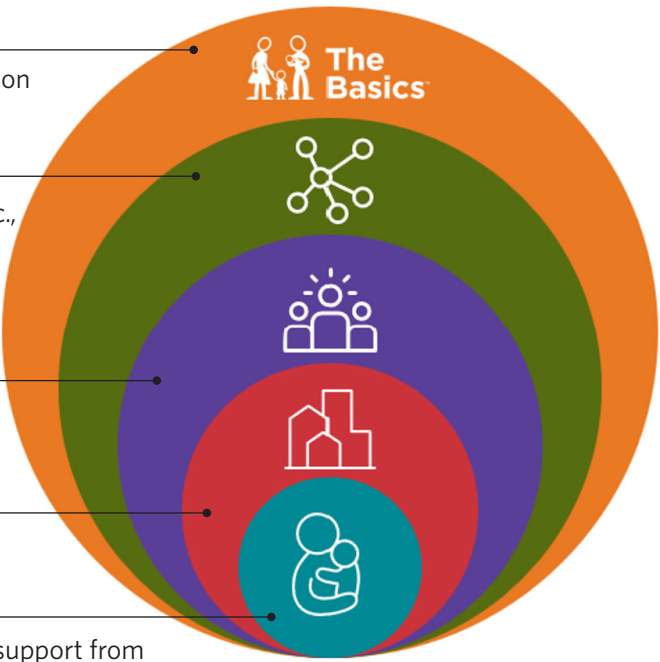
**THE BASICS, INC.** develops tools and resources for implementation and provides technical assistance to Basics Learning Network communities.

**THE BASICS LEARNING NETWORK**, convened by The Basics, Inc., provides regular opportunities for peer learning, innovation, and sharing best practices across member communities. Member communities are licensed to implement The Basics Strategy in their regions and pay a small annual fee to participate.

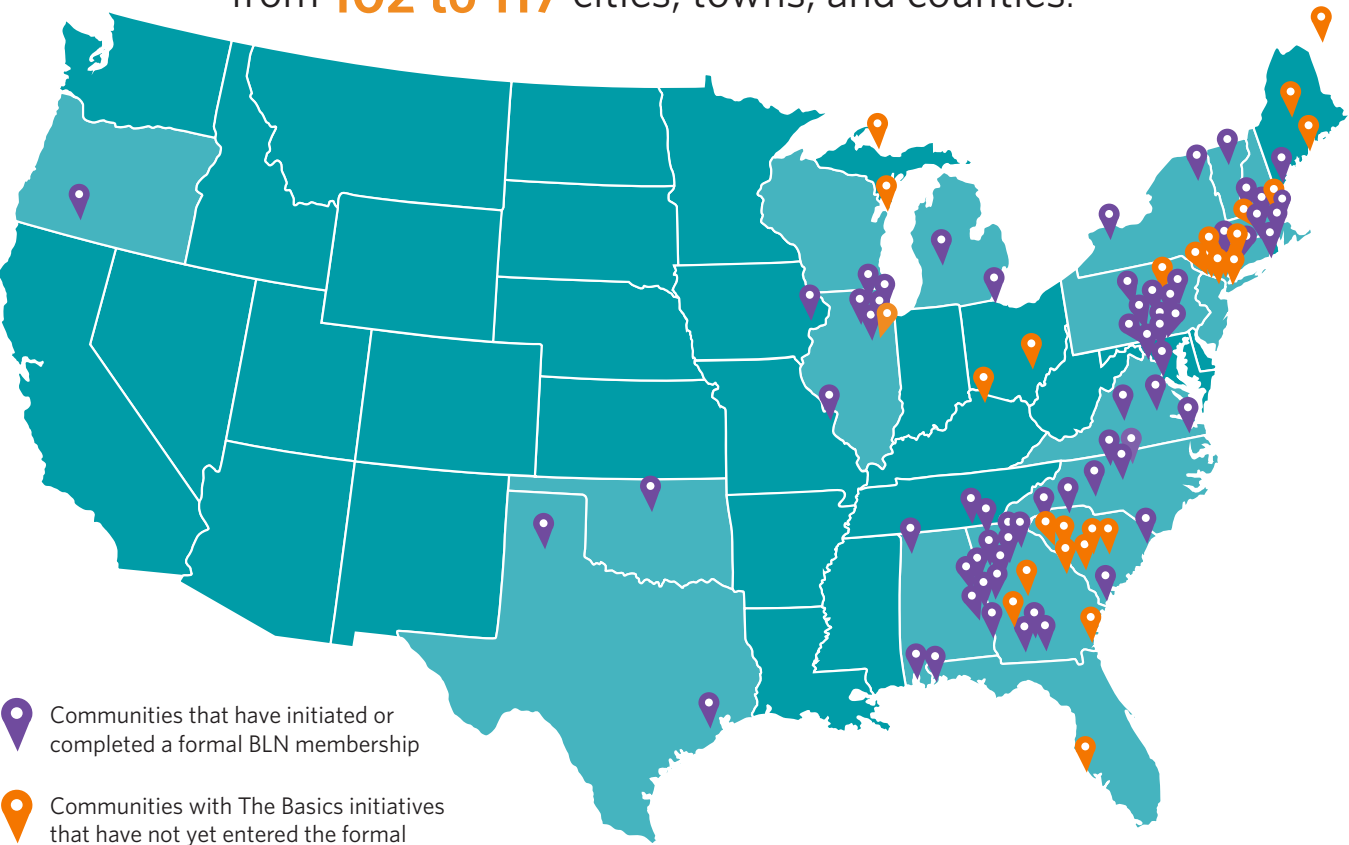
**BACKBONE LEADERS** recruit and train cross-sector community partner organizations to join the local Basics movement and embed The Basics Principles into their work with families.

**FRONTLINE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS** make sharing and reinforcing The Basics Principles part of their routines.

**FAMILIES** receive information, nudges and reminders, and social support from trusted messengers to make The Basics Principles everyday caregiving routines.



In FY24, **The Basics Learning Network** expanded from **102 to 117** cities, towns, and counties.\*



Communities that have initiated or completed a formal BLN membership

Communities with The Basics initiatives that have not yet entered the formal membership process

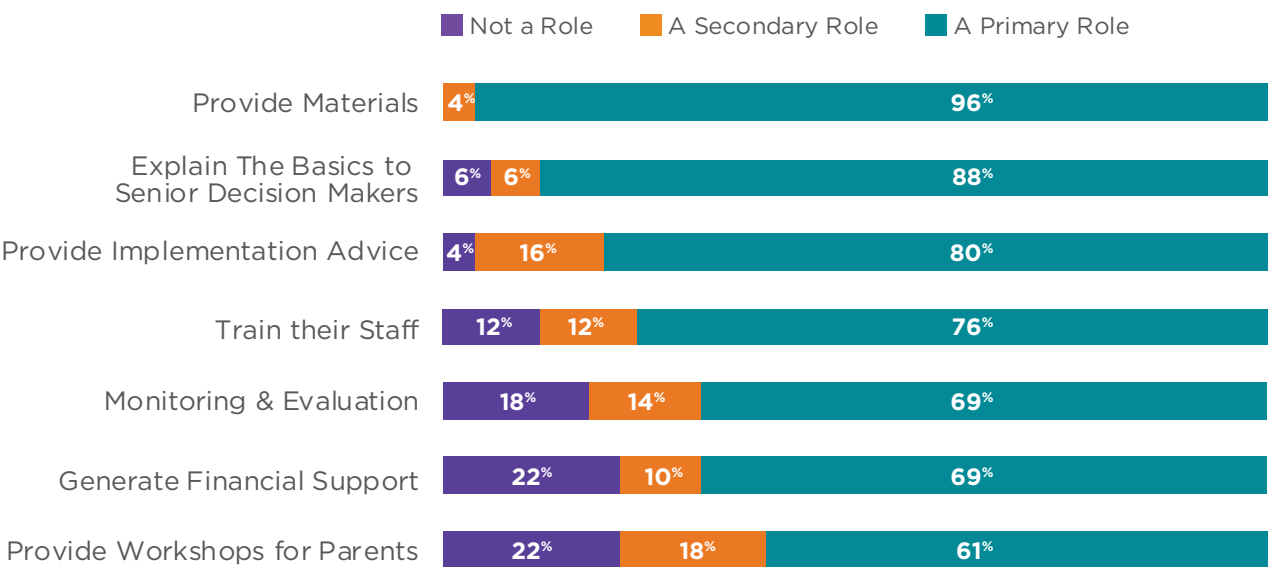
# Our Local Backbones Are Building Community Capacity

The Basics local Backbones tend to be housed in larger organizations, representing a variety of sectors such as collective impact initiatives, early education and care, school districts, public health, and others. Backbones recruit and train cross-sector partners to engage families with The Basics Principles and provide support and overall coordination for their local movements.

First meeting of community partners on The Basics Elgin (Illinois) launch team. They represent pediatric healthcare providers, food banks, schools, libraries, the health department, and WIC.



## Ways That Local Backbone Organizations Support Partner Organizations\*



\*Data are from 51 communities that responded to the relevant item on the 2024 network-wide Census



# Our Impact on Communities is...

## Cross-Sector Engagement and Alignment

Across member communities, Backbones are recruiting and supporting partner organizations from a wide range of sectors to engage families with The Basics Principles. Together, these partner organizations are working toward socioecological saturation, reaching families where they are.



“Partnership with the local mental health dept, schools and libraries has been fabulous. It’s a great way to join forces and share information via multiple methods.”

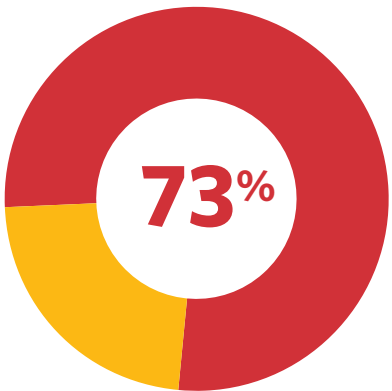
Partner Survey respondent

Data are from 51 communities that responded to the relevant item on the 2024 network-wide Census

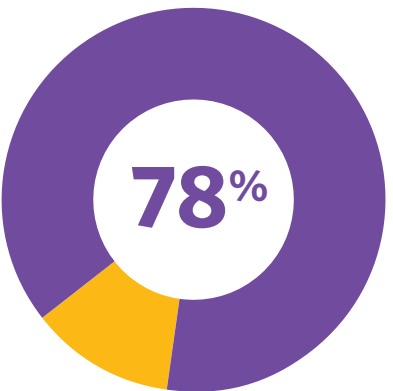
# The Impact on Providers is...

## Enhanced Skills and Communication with Families

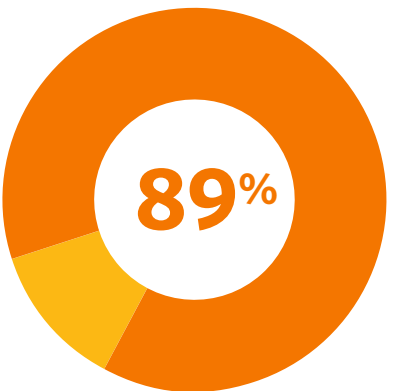
Providers in participating communities are learning to become more effective in supporting families. Survey results indicate multiple types of enhancement in their capacity to communicate about Basics-related topics and more attention to such topics during routine interactions with parents and caregivers.\*



Agree or strongly agree that sharing The Basics Principles helps them do their **job more effectively**.



Communicate **more frequently** with parents about The Basics Principles and related ideas now, compared to before they learned about The Basics Principles.



Communicate **more effectively** now about the types of ideas that The Basics Principles cover, compared to before they learned about The Basics.

“The materials are detailed and explain the program well. This makes it easy to incorporate them into existing programming and share the information.”

Partner Survey respondent

Train the Trainer session with staff from community partner organizations led by The Basics Richmond County (GA)



Professional development session on The Basics offered by Children’s Museum of Richmond (VA) to community partners



\* Data are from 296 responses to our annual partner survey of frontline providers in participating communities.

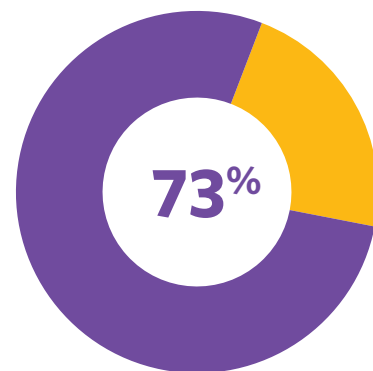
# The Impact on Families is...

## Increased Awareness of The Basics Principles and Ways to Apply them in Caring for Children

Backbones in communities that responded to the 2024 Annual Network Census collectively aspire to impact over half a million families over the next three years.\*



The Basics Cobb County (GA) at a tableting event



Of frontline partner survey respondents agree or strongly agree that **parents do The Basics Principles more frequently** after they talk about them.



Basics parent-child playgroup hosted by Children's Museum of Richmond (VA)



Bilingual Basics parenting and family literacy group focused on Explore through Movement and Play (Pickens County, SC)



Basics-themed activities at the Howard County (MD) Early Childhood Advisory Council's annual Children's Discovery Fair

“Families in our community easily recognize The Basics and when I talk to them. I think they trust me sooner because it is familiar. More and more, when families are asked about Basics Insights text messaging they are already enrolled and express gratitude.”

Provider on the annual Partner Survey

## SPOTLIGHT

# Basics Research

## New evidence that text messages boost use of positive caregiving practices

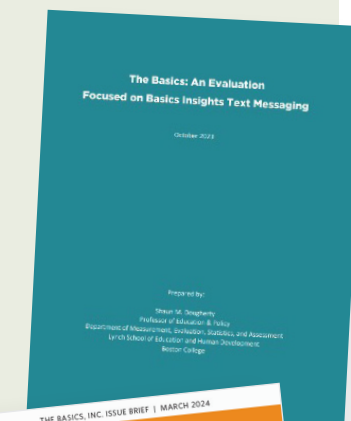
We expanded our research agenda during FY24 on Basics Insights, our text messaging program that delivers two messages each week to parents and caregivers. Messages provide practical strategies and information for incorporating The Basics Principles into everyday interactions with children. To assess the impact, we commissioned an external evaluation by Professor Shaun Dougherty at Boston College and conducted internal research. These efforts culminated in the report and Issue Brief below, marking the beginning of an ongoing series. We are excited to share the positive findings from both studies!

### The Basics: An Evaluation Focused on Basics Insights Text Messaging (OCT 2023)

This evaluation study by Dr. Shaun M. Dougherty, Professor of Education & Policy at Boston College's Lynch School of Education and Human Development, analyzed baseline and follow-up survey data from parents and caregivers receiving Basics Insights text messages. Adjusted for normal changes associated with age, findings indicate that Basics Insights effectively promotes parent behaviors and adult-child interactions linked to healthy child development within the first 3.5 months of participation. | [Read the full report here.](#)

### The Basics, Inc. Issue Brief: Evidence that Basics Insights Text Messaging Increases Use of Key Birth-to-5 Parenting Practices and Reduces Initial Disparities Between Different Language Groups (MAR 2024)

This Issue Brief from The Basics team analyzes survey and interview data from parents and caregivers receiving Basics Insights messages. Initially, Spanish-speaking parents reported practicing The Basics Principles less frequently on average than English speakers. However, after 3.5 months, this gap had significantly narrowed. It was nearly eliminated after an average of 1.5 years of receiving the messages. The findings highlight Basics Insights' ability to foster positive parenting behaviors across demographic groups while reducing disparities. [Read the report here.](#)



“

They're great! Sometimes I run out of ideas or am just tired, and they give me the motivation to get up to try something. They help me remember what I can practice with my daughter :). Thank you”

Parent Survey respondent

“

I appreciate these messages as they give me more ideas and remind me to take the time when there is so much going on.”

Parent Survey respondent



THE BASICS LEARNING NETWORK

FEATURED COMMUNITY

The Basics Boston Alliance

by Amanda Gray | Interviewees: Ron Ferguson, Keyla Kelley, and Nimrah Bakhsh

As the first community in the Basics Learning Network, The Basics Boston launched in 2016, through a collaboration between the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University, the Black Philanthropy Fund, WGBH Public Broadcasting, the Boston Mayor’s Office of Education, and the Pediatrics Department at Boston Medical Center.

Since that time, the organization has trained over 1,100 Boston-area providers representing 70 organizations to integrate the Five Basic Principles into their work. It has become a staple in Boston’s early childhood community, where partner organizations provide information, encouragement, and reminders to make The Basics Principles family routines.

And lots of families are being reached: Parents and caregivers to over 4,700 children have signed up through Boston organizations to receive Basics Insights text messages, whereby users receive twice weekly messages, each related to one of the five Principles.

Most recently, The Basics Boston Alliance was formed in 2024 as a new approach to aligning activities and messages across the city. The “Alliance Cycle” features one Principle at a time for two to three months of an annual rotation that covers all five Principles.

During each phase, “Anchor Organizations” involved in early childhood development help drive a critical mass of co-branded communication, incorporating everything from print collateral with talking points to virtual “Share and Learn” events.

Also widely disseminated, is the Basics Boston Calendar, featuring more than 60 images created by digital art students at the Massachusetts College of Art depicting The Basics Principles. There will be new images for each calendar year.



Grove Hall Children’s librarian Angela Hobs showing off Basics talking points that are distributed at local branches

Billboard featuring the first Principle, Maximize Love, Manage Stress

Tara Agrawal, Director of Community Investment at Boston Children’s Hospital says, “We jumped at the chance to collaborate with our sister hospital [Boston Medical Center] to expand the exposure that families have to The Basics Principles.” And Dr. Marilyn Augustyn at Boston Medical Center reports, “The medical residents have really loved The Basics because it gives very easy talking points that they feel comfortable using.”

In addition, with materials available in Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, and Vietnamese, Program Director Keyla Kelley emphasizes, “We have a serious commitment to cultural inclusion, so we are always working to ensure that children from multiple language and cultural groups have opportunities to experience all five Basics Principles every day.”



Parents and caregivers following a Basics workshop hosted by Parent Champions from East Boston Social Centers

“We have a serious commitment to cultural inclusion, so we are working to ensure that children from multiple language groups experience ‘all five Basics Principles every day.’”  
Keyla Kelley,  
Boston Program Director

“We jumped at the chance to collaborate with our sister hospital [Boston Medical Center] to expand the exposure that families have in Boston to The Basics Principles.”  
Tara Agrawal,  
Director of Community Investment  
at Boston Children’s Hospital

The Basics Boston team wants The Alliance to be part of “one big story” about how Boston supports young children and their families. “By aligning efforts, we are amplifying the impact for families and contributing to a citywide culture of early learning,” says Kelley.

Program Manager Nimrah Bakhsh adds, “It seems too simple to say this, but it is all built on relationships. There is warmth communicated when you’re talking to someone from a partner organization who is doing something because you are problem-solving together. You’re on the same team. It’s inspiring.”

“The medical residents have really loved The Basics because it gives very easy talking points that they feel comfortable using.”  
Marilyn Augustyn, MD, Boston Medical Center



# Gathering in Greensboro

## NATIONAL CONVENING OF THE BASICS LEARNING NETWORK



Susan Schwartz, Executive Director of The Cemala Foundation, welcoming attendees to the conference.

The Basics Learning Network (BLN) convened in Greensboro, NC, on October 23-24, 2023, for a conference titled, “The Basics in Context: Building Blocks for the Movement.” The two-day event brought together 147 participants representing 37 communities across the country and abroad (shoutout to our friends who made the journey from Gururujá, Brazil!). Held at the Marriott Greensboro Downtown and co-hosted by The Cemala Foundation and Ready for School, Ready for Life — a collective impact initiative that leads The Basics Guilford — the conference was made possible by generous financial and in-kind support from a number of

foundations, businesses, and civic organizations. (See page 21 for a list of conference supporters.) Action Greensboro provided top notch planning and logistical support.

A key panel featured our Guilford County hosts discussing how The Basics has been integrated into local pediatric services, family literacy programs, and father support groups. BLN Backbone leaders participated in additional sessions on building community partnerships, developing shared implementation “Playbooks,” and empowering parents and caregivers as leaders in The Basics movement.

Attendees also heard from national experts such as Dr. David Willis, who spoke on early relational health, and Dr. Brenda Jones Harden, who highlighted the social context of early caregiving. Presentations on early literacy and identity development, playful learning, and new evaluation research on Basics Insights enriched the program further.

On the first evening, participants visited the Miriam P. Brenner Children’s Museum, where they explored an exhibit showcasing The Basics Guilford during a lively cocktail hour, followed by a celebratory dinner at the Steven Tanger Center for the Performing Arts.

The conference successfully generated new ideas and strengthened connections across the BLN community. As one attendee noted, “It was so encouraging to hear and see what other communities have accomplished, and it makes us even more enthusiastic about what we can do in our community.” This sentiment captured the spirit of the event as participants returned home inspired to continue building The Basics movement.



Panel discussion among Backbone leaders (L to R): Victoria Hughes (Amarillo, TX); Irene Barton (Cobb County, GA); Donte Sheppard (Pensacola, FL). Facilitated by Zoe Hansen-DiBello (The Basics, Inc.).

“  
The 2023 Annual Conference was everything I expected and MORE! It was great to build and strengthen relationships. Thank you for all your hard work to bring us together, a true labor of love.”

Scan for a short video recap!



Cocktail hour during a visit to the Miriam P. Brenner Children’s Museum.



Conference participants soaking it all in.



Dr. Brenda Jones Harden, Professor at the Columbia School of Social Work, giving her dinner keynote address.

# THE BASICS LEARNING NETWORK

## FEATURED COMMUNITY



Basics kits distributed to families across the community

Richard Williams, Jr. is the Early Education Program Manager for United Way of Horry County, South Carolina, where his job includes mobilizing The Basics Waccamaw, encompassing Horry County and the surrounding area. He is also a pastor.

Richard says that when it comes to starting a movement, “It’s all about who you know!”

In only a year, the initiative has progressed rapidly as Richard’s high energy, extensive personal network, thirst for learning, and strategic mindset has attracted many local partners.

At first, he thought that the numbers reflected mainly low-income families. But he says that “In just the past year, I’ve learned that even families with resources can struggle to prepare their children for kindergarten.”

Richard’s introduction to The Basics was when he attended the Basics Learning Network national conference in October 2023, where he says, “A light bulb went off in my head.” He met enthusiastic peers from other cities and learned about exciting ways mobilize the community back home around The Basics Principles as daily routines.

Since then, he has applied what he learned to engage strategically with numerous decision makers in potential partner organizations, including many from beyond his existing network.

For example, he engaged a local coffee shop to host monthly discussions that he calls “Basics and Brew” sessions. The Basics and Brew conversations have led to multiple partnerships,

including with a countywide health system that has started to incorporate The Basics materials into pediatric and OB/GYN care.

Another key partnership is with Susan Jones, a Family Literacy Specialist who coordinates the Family Literacy Program for Horry County Schools’ Adult and Community Education. She and her staff have begun to introduce The Basics Principles to adult learners who have young children.

She says that when Richard introduced The Basics ideas and materials, she discovered the “missing piece” of the parenting puzzle.

“There was a genuine need to connect parents with their children’s learning in the Family Literacy program,” said Susan. “The Basics is practical, allowing parents to implement learning strategies with their children in a meaningful and enjoyable way.”

His own radio show is among the creative ways that Richard has found to get the word out. After being a guest on a local radio show where he talked about The Basics, the station offered him a bi-monthly spot to continue sharing. He says that he and his guests talk “all things Basics.” Some are partners already and others are from organizations that he is cultivating to become partners.

The Basics Waccamaw is still young, but Richard describes the community as very receptive from the beginning.

He says, “Whether it’s stakeholders who are just learning about The Basics, current community partners, or politicians, everyone has been incredibly supportive, always asking, ‘What do you need?’”



Richard presenting to community partners



# Next Up for FY25

We had a busy FY 2024 and we're looking forward to the coming year!

LAUNCH OF STRATEGIC PLAN

MORE DATA BRIEFS

IN-PERSON NATIONAL CONFERENCE

DEEPENING CONNECTIONS WITHIN THE BASICS LEARNING NETWORK



# Team and Board

## Staff



**Ronald F. Ferguson, PhD**  
Founder & Executive Director



**Keyla Kelley, MS, CCLS**  
Program Director



**Katherine Vogt, MPH**  
Program Manager



**James Quane, PhD**  
Director of Operations



**Zoë Hansen-DiBello, PhD**  
Senior Liaison to the Basics Network



**Nimrah Bakhsh**  
Program Manager



**Jocelyn Friedlander, EdM**  
Director of Learning & Innovation



**Ji Hye (Esther) Park, PhD**  
Research Associate



**Olivia Smith**  
Part-time Program Manager

## Board of Directors



**Turahn Dorsey**  
Chief Impact Officer  
Eastern Bank Foundation;  
Past Chief of Education,  
City of Boston Mayor's Office



**Tom Manning**  
Past Chair & CEO Dun &  
Bradstreet, Alumnus Advanced  
Leadership Initiative at  
Harvard University



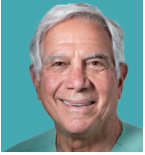
**Jeri Robinson**  
Chair, Boston School Committee;  
Retired VP, Boston Children's  
Museum



**Jeff Howard**  
Co-Chair of  
Black Philanthropy Fund;  
President, Efficacy Institute, Inc.



**Katherine S. McHugh**  
Retired Boston Philanthropic  
Leader; 32 years as Trustee  
of Northeastern University



**Michael Yogman, MD**  
Pediatrician; Co-Chair,  
Board of Playful Learning  
Landscapes Action Network;  
Assistant Professor Harvard  
Medical School



**Wendell Knox**  
Co-Chair of  
Black Philanthropy Fund;  
Retired CEO Abt Associates  
(17 Years)



**Mehrdad Noorani**  
Founding Partner Global  
Infrastructure Partners;  
Alumnus, Advanced Leadership  
Initiative at Harvard University

## Technology Partner

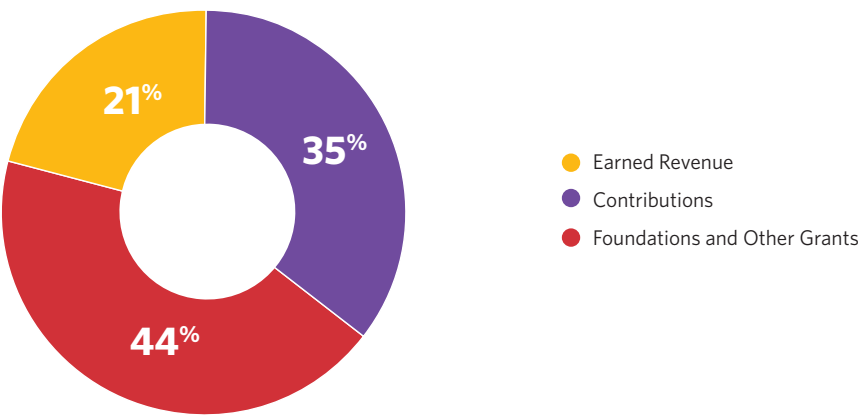


**Jitendra Vyas**  
MyBliss Technology

# Financial Report FY 2024

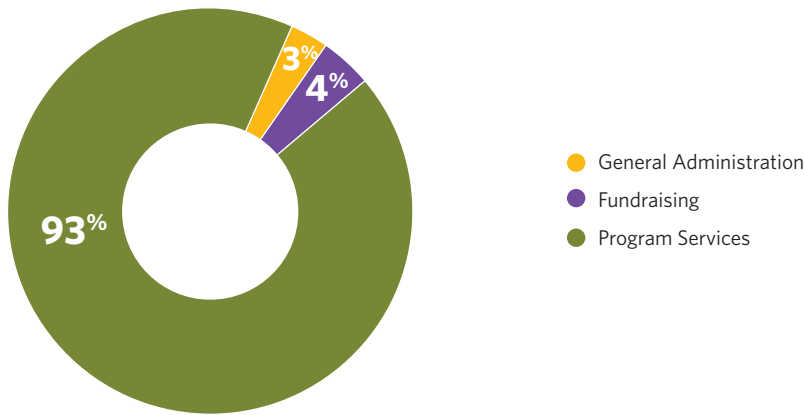
July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

Total Revenue \$1,054,549\*



\*This does not include funds carried over from FY23

Total Expenses \$1,155,828



# Thank You to Our Contributors

## Individual Donors

### Supporter (\$1-\$1,249)

Jonathan Abbott  
Anne Auerbach  
Susan Ash  
Judy Bunnell and  
Joseph Olchefske  
A Clinton Cavanaugh  
Barbara Costa  
Turahn Dorsey  
Michael Douvadjian  
Susan Dubuque  
Darren Ferguson  
Shari Ferguson  
Robert Friedlander  
Ruth Goldway  
Reuben Harris Jr.  
James Hoyte  
Carolee Matsumoto

Katherine S. McHugh  
Lymott Neal  
John Portz  
Meg Ramsdell  
Geraldine Robinson  
Barry Bluestone  
Dianne Tsitsos  
Kenneth Weill  
Thomas Wilson  
Michael W. Yogman

### Patron (\$1,250-\$2,499)

Mario Baeza  
Matt Knox

### Champion (\$2,500-\$4,999)

Zachary Carter  
Jeff Howard  
Peggy Koenig

### Trailblazer (\$5,000-\$12,499)

Glenn C. Loury  
Michael Marshall  
Jennifer Eplett Reilly  
and Sean Reilly

### Benefactor (\$12,500-\$24,999)

Thomas Manning

### Visionary (\$25,000+)

Don and Pam Hawley  
Wendell Knox  
Merilee and Mehrdad Noorani  
Ron and Helen Ferguson

## Foundations

Bruhn-Morris Family Foundation  
Robert R. McCormick Foundation  
Liberty Mutual Foundation

Eastern Bank Foundation  
Boston Children's Hospital

The Baupost Group  
A. C. Ratshesky Foundation

## National Conference Funders

The Cemala Foundation  
Action Greensboro  
Atrium Health  
Build a Brain, Build a Life,  
Build a Community

Cone Health Foundation  
Contec  
Greensboro North Carolina  
Convention & Visitors Bureau  
The Joseph M. Bryan Foundation

Kindermusik  
Lincoln Financial Group  
Steven Tanger Center  
for the Performing Arts

Our impact would not be possible without generous contributions from individuals and foundations on this page and the millions more contributed to local backbone organizations across the Basics Learning Network. Also not reflected here are investments by our technology partner, MyBliss, that enable and sustain delivery of Basics Insights text messaging.



The Basics, Inc. operates under the fiscal sponsorship of Third Sector New England (TSNE), a 501(c)3 corporation. Contributions for The Basics, Inc. are made to TSNE and are tax deductible.

To donate, go to [thebasics.org/donate/](https://thebasics.org/donate/) or scan here





