

# SPARK RttT: Year Two

# Fidelity and Implementation

March 2016

*An evaluation presented to the Early Childhood Resource Center documenting fidelity and implementation related to the expansion of Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) under Ohio's Race to the Top (RttT) Early Learning Challenge*

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## DEFINITIONS

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**Ages and Stages (ASQ) (ASQ:SE)** are assessments designed for developmental and social/emotional screenings to uncover developmental delays (<http://agesandstates.com/>)

**Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC)** promotes the healthy development of young children by strengthening families, improving the quality of early learning experiences, increasing school and community readiness, and informing public policy.

**HOME (Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment) Inventory** (Caldwell & Bradley, 1984, 2003) is designed to measure the quality and quantity of stimulation and support available to a child in the home environment. The focus is on the child in the environment, the child as a recipient of inputs from objects, events, and transactions occurring in connection with the family surroundings. (Caldwell, B.M., & Bradley, R.H. (2003). Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment: Administration Manual. Tempe, AZ: Family & Human Dynamics Research Institute, Arizona State University.)

**Learning Plan** is completed together by the Parent Partner and Learning Advocate using the information gathered from the Intake Form and screenings, in addition to any concerns presented by the parent. The Parent Partners and parent periodically review the Learning Plan and update or create a new Learning Plan as needed (SPARK Parent Partner Handbook).

**Let's Talk** is a process used with pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children and their parents. It is designed to enhance verbal language skills as a foundation to success in learning to read. (SPARK 4-year Old Let's Talk Manual, p. 1)

**Learning Advocate** is a family member who acts as the child's active and consistent learning supporter. (Sustain in the Early Grades Demonstration Project Proposal, SPARK Ohio, October 2012)

**Parent Partners** are trained educational facilitators who guide SPARK families through structured lesson plans as well as individual learning plans that are aligned with Ohio's Early Learning and Development Standards and tailored to each child's academic, developmental, and socio-emotional needs. (<http://sparkohio.org/educators/faqs/>)

**Ready Schools**, a partnership with SPARK Ohio, Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators, is a philosophy and set of principles that guide schools in meeting the needs of children and families they serve and a framework for organizing activities and data collection efforts regarding family and community engagement and learning supports. While not a core requirement for the SPARK programs, Ready Schools is considered a critical element of the SPARK Ohio approach by helping to ensure that strong linkages between families and schools will continue to support the success of SPARK children. Ready Schools focuses on seven components ranging from leadership to home-school connections utilizing a nine-step implementation process. (Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton, SPARK Community Presentation. Power Point Presentation; 2-12-13)

**Responsive Services Team (RST)** is the social services component of the SPARK program and may include a child psychologist, early childhood educational specialist, a speech and language therapist, a mental health consultant, and school-based personnel. The team meets monthly to discuss results and share concerns. While the ongoing developmental issues of some children are monitored, the team refers others to the school district for assistance or to community organizations that provide services.

**RttT Early Learning Challenge Grant** is a federal Race to the Top grant that awarded Ohio \$70 million for 2012-2015 to help close the kindergarten readiness gap for high needs children. The SPARK rural pilot sites described in this document were funded through this grant.

**SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids)** is a family-focused intervention that uses structured lesson plans and activities to help children get ready for school through building reading, language, and social skills, while seeking to create a seamless transition into school for children ages 3-6. The focus of the RttT SPARK pilot sites is on 4-year olds.

**SPARK Evaluation and Data Protocol Manual** was first published in 2008 and later revised in 2013. It provides guidance on evaluation for program sites. Research questions are included but not methodology.

**The SPARK Management Information System (MIS)** is a web-accessible FileMaker Pro data platform that all sites are required to use to enter (at a minimum) core participant/family and service delivery data. The SPARK MIS has been custom designed by the ECRC.

**Team Surveys** – Questions were drawn from the SPARK Evaluation and Data Protocol Manual (2013) to develop survey instruments for SPARK program directors, supervisors, Parent Partners, and members of the Responsive Services Team.

**Woodcock-Johnson III** is a co-normed set of tests for measuring general intellectual ability, specific cognitive abilities, oral languages, and academic achievement. (<http://www.riverpub.com/products/wjIIIComplete/>)

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# INTRODUCTION

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SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIPS TO ASSURE READY KIDS™ (SPARK) is a school readiness program for children ages three to five that assists families with preparing their children for kindergarten in the areas of reading, language, and social skills. SPARK's Parent Partners make home visits with structured lessons and facilitate group-based activities. Program completion is determined by the presentation and facilitation of a minimum of eight lessons taught sequentially. Additional screenings and referrals are also provided to families. Since 2003, SPARK has helped more than 5,300 Ohio families prepare and transition their children to kindergarten. Initially directed by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton, today the Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) manages the SPARK program (<http://sparkohio.org/what-is-spark/>).

In 2013, SPARK Ohio was awarded an Ohio Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant. The SPARK Race to the Top (RttT) pilot sites and this Implementation and Fidelity Evaluation Report focus on 4-year olds in the program from Sandy Valley, Logan Elm, Mississinawa, Franklin Monroe, and Minerva.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**FIDELITY** – To meet the RttT grant enrollment specifications in the second year the state of Ohio approved the addition of 20 randomly selected students from the existing rural SPARK site of Minerva to be added to the three original RttT sites. Sandy Valley, Logan Elm, Mississinawa/Franklin Monroe, and Minerva have shown fidelity to the SPARK model by adopting the required core elements:

- Evaluation
- Four-Year Old Program
- Parent Partners’ Professional Development
- Education Continuity: Supporting Schools
- Oversight and Monitoring
- External Communications

**IMPLEMENTATION** – Sites have focused on implementation by:

- Recruiting and providing services to 188<sup>1</sup> children and their families, 113 of whom transitioned to kindergarten
- Conducting group visits at least 151
- Conducting at least 1,044 home visitations
- Continuing the work of the Responsive Services Teams with supporting social services personnel
- Demonstrating a high degree of program implementation by Parent Partners through their activities and service delivery

Two sites (Logan Elm and Franklin Monroe) will not participate in SPARK beyond the grant term. For both sites, the SPARK program was perceived as a valuable asset by Parent Partners, administration, and parents. However, the geography of sparsely populated rural counties with a great deal of distance between homes, high poverty and cultural barriers, a strong homeschooling community, and the lack of a matching budget were barriers to continued implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the total number of children who showed an interest in SPARK, it includes those who did not receive an initial visit because of leaving the program, those who withdrew from the program, as well as those who transitioned to kindergarten.

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## HISTORY AND PERSPECTIVE

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Developed in 2003 by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton with a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, *Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids* (SPARK Ohio) is a family-centered kindergarten readiness program that works with families, schools, and the community. From the initial sites in Stark County, SPARK Ohio expanded and is currently located in Clarke, Cuyahoga, Darke, Franklin, Hamilton, Montgomery, and Summit Counties. SPARK Ohio's well documented results and continued support from the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton have made the program a model for replication.

In 2013 funds from Ohio's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RttT) enabled the expansion of the program to three high need rural communities, Logan Elm District's Laurelville Elementary School in Pickaway County, Mississinawa Valley's and Franklin Monroe's Elementary Schools in Darke County and Sandy Valley Elementary School in Stark County. In mid-2013 overall management of the program was transferred to the Early Childhood Resource Center in Canton, Ohio. In 2014, Minerva's Elementary existing SPARK program was designated to fill 20 additional available RttT seats.

Dr. Joseph Rochford from Stark Education Partnership (SEP), and Dr. Deric R. Kenne at Kent State University, conducted evaluations of the RttT sites. As Dr. Rochford has retired, Christina Ughrin and Dr. Liza Grossman have served in the role of evaluator for the second year report. Using the SPARK Evaluation and Data Protocol Manual (2013), the evaluators assessed how well sites adhered to and implemented the SPARK model. Dr. Kenne reviewed program outcomes.

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## METHODOLOGY FOR FIDELITY AND IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

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This report, similar to the 2014 Year One report, mirrors the methodology previously used by the former SPARK evaluator, Dr. Peter J. Leahy, to evaluate replication sites. In conducting those evaluations, Dr. Leahy wrote the SPARK Evaluation and Data Protocol Manual to identify relevant research questions. Research questions numbered in this document are drawn from the manual. Dr. Leahy's team used these questions to develop survey instruments for SPARK program directors, supervisors, Parent Partners, and members of the Responsive Services Team, which are employed in both the Year One and Year Two evaluations. Data for this report comes from entries in the SPARK MIS, responses to survey instruments by SPARK program directors, supervisors, Parent Partners, and members of the Responsive Services Team, interviews with administrators, and focus groups with parents.

A midpoint MIS data check was conducted in January 2015 by SEP, and Angela Moses and Mary Brady of the ECRC. SEP's review of year two MIS data was conducted between May and September, 2015. In addition, surveys were administered between January and March of 2015.

The Mississinawa/Franklin Monroe program has two sites. For the purposes of this report, they are treated as one site in the MIS data, but as two sites in the survey, focus group, and site visit data.

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## LIMITATIONS

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Data from the SPARK MIS were reviewed between May and September. Persons in charge of MIS data collection and input at each of the sites have varied responsibilities and different levels of familiarity with the software. Data entry at different sites proceeded at different rates. Survey data have inherent limitations: whether all questions were understood similarly by participants and whether answers represent true depictions of program elements. Finally, fidelity and implementation data are reported, but outcome data are provided in a separate report by Dr. Kenne.

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## CONTEXT

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Prior to the beginning of the 2014-15 school year, the ECRC conducted two workshops to strengthen the skills of the Parent Partners and the SPARK program at RttT sites. In June 2014, a daylong workshop was held to introduce new lesson plans and familiarize Parent Partners with the goals, objectives and order of each of the lessons. SEP videotaped the presentations. In July 2014, a half-day workshop familiarized Parent Partners and others with the new FileMaker MIS data collection system and iPads to be used in the field.

Between February and June of 2015, Dr. Adrienne O’Neill (SEP) and Adele Gelb (SEP) made personal visits to five schools and their administrators at Sandy Valley, Logan Elm, Mississinawa, Franklin Monroe, and Minerva. The trips were key to understanding the context of the implementation data as well as for collecting additional parent focus group data. All five schools demonstrated positive feedback from parents. Two schools, Sandy Valley and Minerva, worked to establish exemplary relationships with partners and the community.

Sandy Valley continued SPARK this year building on a foundation of trained and dedicated administrators, social service partners, and a talented team of Parent Partners. Sandy Valley has garnered administrator buy-in, support from key partners, strong Parent Partners, and continues creativity in recruitment efforts. The partnership with the Stark County District Library was particularly key to their success. Parents in the focus group mentioned that the one-on-one relationship with their Parent Partner and child has been one of their favorite aspects of the program. One parent noted: “I’ve seen my child come out of himself.”

Mississinawa’s principal, serving as a SPARK Supervisor, demonstrated evidence of success and sustainability which secured the superintendent’s commitment to increasing funding. They have reached out to the local university and have added student teachers. Parents noted how their children have increased in their ability to listen, attend, and interact more. The parents have watched the Parent Partners closely and have increased reading to their children.

Twenty students were randomly assigned from Minerva SPARK to the RttT cohort. In Minerva, there was a high level of cooperation between the school and SPARK as demonstrated by the new principal who has a child in the program. Minerva incorporated some creative recruiting ideas this year and plans to build on those next year ranging from tent cards in restaurants to the more traditional approach of letters on school letterhead to potential parents. Parents reported making changes to their home such as labeling their cabinets and have noticed their children doing better when interacting with other children.

SPARK positively impacted two schools who are unable to continue with the SPARK program due to extenuating circumstances.

Logan Elm faced a number of challenges this year and will not continue with SPARK beyond the grant term. Low and declining enrollment were the primary concerns despite incentives and publicizing through churches and family services. The principal cited poverty, cultural resistance to formal early education and a large population of homeschoolers as contributing factors. Despite these challenges, participating parents involved love SPARK. The school hopes the positive impact of SPARK will continue with the following strategies: the creation of a community service high school mentor program to connect with early childhood students; the continuation of Early Childhood Team collaboration with Head Start; increasing emphasis on early childhood with an Early Childhood Leadership Team; intentional planning for their younger population; and continued collaboration with community agencies. Parent Partners noted that the work is rewarding and mentioned how close they became with the families and how much growth they saw in the participating children and parents. Parents mentioned loving that the activities are child centered, appropriate, and lead to child independence. Parents are more attentive and read more books with their children.

Franklin Monroe experienced some challenges 2013-14 with SPARK as the principal was new and unfamiliar with the program. Franklin Monroe will not be continuing in the SPARK program. Participation and recruitment have been particular challenges, with open enrollment being one noted barrier. Parent Partners observed some challenges with the community, but felt very positive about the participating families. Parents also mentioned how excited they were for SPARK meetings and liked becoming more familiar with the school.

The site visits by SEP were key to understanding the context of the implementation data providing depth to the data outlining the struggles of two school sites in terms of implementation and fidelity while recognizing the positive outcomes the participating parents noted. The face-to-face meetings were also key to eliciting more information on best practices employed at Sandy Valley, Minerva, and Mississinawa.

# MODEL FIDELITY

Fidelity to the SPARK Model means that all required core components of the program will be present at each site. Additionally, sites may elect to implement highly desirable or optional characteristics. Table 1 outlines the components in each category.

*Table 1 – SPARK Replication Program Components*

Required Core	Highly Desirable	Optional
Evaluation	Three-Year Old Programs	
Four-Year-Old Program	Get Ready for School	Incentives, Rewards, and Resources
Parent Partners’ Professional Development	Let’s Talk	Early Childhood Professional Development
Education Continuity: Supporting Schools	Program Quality Improvement	Resources and Materials
Oversight and Monitoring	Family Child Care Support	
External Communications	Library Backpacks	

# THE REQUIRED CORE COMPONENTS

The following section outlines how sites insured fidelity to each of the core components of the SPARK program (see Table 1 above). Where appropriate, research questions are included from the SPARK Evaluation and Data Protocol manual.

## EVALUATION

All sites have complied with the evaluation requirement to maintain records on participant demographic and family characteristics as well as SPARK service delivery.

The majority of children in SPARK for year two were white (94%), lived in a house their parents owned (70%), and over half were boys (58%). According to the Federal Register under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service guide, the poverty level for families of four was a yearly income of \$23,850 in 2015. Further, families of four earning \$44,123 a year qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch for school-age children<sup>2</sup>. In the SPARK program for 2015, 57% of households received some form of assistance. Assistance being received by families with children enrolled in SPARK included medical (50%), food stamps (31%), TANF OWF (2%), child care subsidies (3%), and Free and Reduced Lunches

<sup>2</sup> Please see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2014-04788.pdf>, retrieved February 23, 2016.

(7%). The median annual income for families with children in SPARK (2015) was between \$35,000 and \$49,999. Please see page 24 for more detailed demographic data on children enrolled in SPARK for year two.

## THE 4-YEAR OLD PROGRAM

### ***1. How many children were recruited, began SPARK, and completed the SPARK treatment as defined?***

Year two recruitment for the four-year old program at sites took place between May and August of 2014 with home visitations beginning in August. Year Two target enrollment varied per site.

**Table 2 – Children Recruited/Began/Completed SPARK**

4-Year Olds	Sandy Valley	Logan Elm	Mississinawa/ Franklin Monroe	Minerva
Target Enrollment*	60	35	55	20
Recruited/Began	53	21	40	20
Withdrawn	9	7	5	0
Completed	44	14	35	20

*Notes: In 2014-15 (20 RttT) seats were randomly assigned from the SPARK program in Minerva from the larger cohort. Sandy Valley serves an area with a high degree of mobility due to poverty. Data for Table 2 came from the MIS.*

*\*Does not include students who never had an initial visit.*

### ***2. How many home and group visits were held?***

Home visits were the primary means of SPARK services delivery. However, two lessons (lessons four and ten), were held as group lessons.

Logan was the only site that experienced an issue reaching eight visits per child. A review of the MIS database by Angela Moses and Mary Brady noted issues with home visits and lesson order at the midyear. Immediately upon learning of the issue of fidelity at Logan, steps were taken by administrators to rectify those problems. Additionally, professional development was offered to schools.

**Table 3 – Percent of Children With Eight or More Visits**

Visits	Sandy Valley	Logan Elm	Mississinawa/ Franklin Monroe	Minerva
N (Sample Size)	44*	14†	35*	20*
Frequency of Children with 8 visits	43/44	10/14	34/35	20/20
% of Children with 8 or more visits	98%	71%	97%	100%

*Notes: Averages based on those who completed SPARK. Alternate visits were combined with Home and Group visits. Data for Table 3 came from the MIS.*

*\*A few lessons not taught in order.*

*†Majority of lessons not taught in order.*

**3. How many screenings of each type were conducted?**

A review of the SPARK MIS indicates that Parent Partners at all sites administered the three primary program screening instruments (ASQ, WJIII, and HOME) to all students. Trauma, Health, and Speech screenings varied by site and are administered by qualified RST professionals.

**Table 4 – Screenings\***

Screening	Sandy Valley	Logan Elm	Mississinawa/ Franklin Monroe	Minerva
Ages and Stages	86	24	70	34
Woodcock-Johnson III	86	29	69	37
Home Observation Measurement of the Environment	79	32	68	37
Trauma Screening	44	0	19	20
Health Screening	49	21	19	20
Speech Screening	15	8	19	2

*\*Note: Counts are for participants completing SPARK and include multiple administrations of Ages and Stages, Woodcock-Johnson III, and HOME. Table 4 is reporting data from MIS.*

**4. What percentage of the children received such screenings?**

Ninety percent of children enrolled in SPARK were administered the entire screening panel (ASQ, WJIII, and HOME) by Parent Partners.

**5. Was a Learning Plan developed for each child?**

**Table 5 – Learning Plans**

Site	Percentage of Children with Learning Plans	Percentage of Learning Plans Updated at Least Once
Sandy Valley	100%	95%
Logan Elm	100%	100%
Mississinawa/Franklin Monroe	83%	72%
Minerva	100%	90%

*Note: Percentages are for participants completing SPARK; data source is the MIS. The learning plans updated percentage in the second column is calculated for children with a learning plan.*

**6. *What was the amount and nature of individual therapies received by children?***

A scan of the SPARK MIS shows that health is the most widely received screening service with 81% (89) children served. This number may have been larger, but only those who transitioned to kindergarten are counted in the report here.

**PARENT PARTNERS**

**1. *What pre-service training activities occurred?***

All eleven of the Parent Partners responding to the survey noted that they have completed professional training in the last 12 months for a total of 12.8 hours with 55% of respondents rating the training as “Very Useful” or “Useful.” Professional development included the following topics: 4-year old development, Parent Café, Social Skills, introduction of new lesson plans, goals, and objectives, and Flip-it.

**2. *What in-service activities occurred? When? For whom?***

Twelve out of twelve of the Parent Partners who responded to the Parent Partner survey indicated that they had participated in professional development meetings since the program began in their district. In addition to the SPARK-related professional development, sponsored by the Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC), the ECRC also provided external consultant training centered on the new lessons.

# EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY: SUPPORTING SCHOOLS

A comprehensive summary of activities and progress among SPARK RtT sites in implementing their Ready Schools plans can be found in *Sustain in the Early Grades Project Progress Update – Ready Schools Component Reports*, submitted to the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton in July 2015.

## OVERSIGHT AND MONITORING

### 1. What oversight and monitoring efforts were put in place?

SPARK directors report meeting weekly to quarterly with supervisors. Supervisors meet with Parent Partners weekly to bi-monthly.

**Table 6 – Percentage Affirming Content Routinely Covered In Regularly Scheduled SPARK Planning Meetings**

Responses by Role	Director	Supervisor	Parent Partner
Evaluation updates/issues etc.	100%	73%	100%
Kindergarten transition planning	100%	91%	100%
Parent engagement and involvement	100%	91%	75%
Professional development in identified needed areas	100%	100%	100%
Recruitment strategies	100%	100%	75%
SPARK program procedural reminders	100%	82%	--
Crisis monitoring	75%	91%	--
Materials preparation	75%	73%	75%
Responsive Services Team reporting	75%	100%	75%
SPARK program development and planning for the group activities	75%	100%	100%
Budget/financial issues	50%	19%	50%
Model a lesson plan	50%	73%	75%
SPARK Lesson planning	50%	91%	75%

Notes: Table 6 reports data from the SPARK survey.

**2. What efforts were made to ensure project sustainability?**

Based on administrative interviews, three of the schools have had success in ensuring project sustainability. Sandy Valley, in particular, has been exemplary with administrative buy-in at all levels, support from partners (such as the Stark County District Library), strong Parent Partners, and continued innovation in recruitment. Recruitment innovations include:

- Flyers sent to homes through preschools
- Flyers at the post office and the New Towne Mall
- Promotion of SPARK at kindergarten night and through older sibling programs
- Promotion through churches, homeschool clubs, and at Quaker Digital Academy

Plans for next year (2015-16) include canvassing surrounding communities including: Malvern, Waynesburg, East Sparta, and Friendship Center.

In Minerva, there is a high level of cooperation between the school/principal and SPARK. SPARK is presently a stand-alone program, but there is a desire to integrate it. Minerva would also like to see SPARK have a closer relationship with the Stark County Educational Service Center, the district’s preschool provider. Recruitment has been creative with the use of:

- Signs on pizza boxes
- Tent cards in restaurants
- Door-to-door
- Costumed outreach at street festivals
- Facebook
- Outreach to faith-based institutions

Next year’s goals include directly contacting school families and using school letterhead for recruitment.

The Superintendent in Mississinawa was impressed with the outcomes presented by the principal and is on board with extending funding. Mississinawa face challenges in serving Hispanic families and providing key professional roles such as Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy.

With a new principal at Franklin Monroe, there were some initial challenges that contributed to Franklin Monroe not continuing in SPARK. Logan Elm also faced a number of challenges such as high poverty and a culturally resistant community. They will not be continuing with SPARK.

**Table 7 – Presence of Highly Desirable or Optional Components**

Highly Desirable	Sandy Valley	Logan Elm	Mississinawa/ Franklin Monroe	Minerva
Three-Year Old Programs				X
Get Ready for School	X	X	X	X
Let’s Talk	X		X	X

*Notes: Table 7 reports data from the SPARK survey.*

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The following research questions are from the SPARK Evaluation and Data Protocol Manual to guide the evaluation of program implementation.

**1. To what extent did program processes and systems operate as planned? What are the reasons for the deviations?**

The following data indicating processes and systems operations were derived from directors, supervisors, and Parent Partners responses to their respective surveys.

SPARK sites hold regular staff planning meetings. Schedules vary with one site meeting quarterly, one meeting monthly, and two bi-monthly. According to directors, three of the four sites had directors and/or supervisors at all meetings. All four sites had Parent Partners at all meetings. Two of the four sites included Responsive Services Team members, and only one of the four sites included parents at planning meetings.

**Table 8 – Staff Meeting Frequency**

	Weekly	Bi-Monthly	Monthly	Quarterly
Sandy Valley		X		
Minerva	X			
Mississinawa/Franklin Monroe				X
Logan Elm			X	

Notes: Data reported from the SPARK survey.

**Table 9 – Staff Meeting Attendance**

	Director	Supervisor	Parent Partners	RST
Sandy Valley	X	X	X	X
Minerva	X	X	X	X*
Mississinawa/ Franklin Monroe	X	X	X	
Logan Elm	X	X	X	X

Notes: Data from the SPARK survey.

\*Minerva’s responsive service teams (RST) met every other week.

According to the SPARK survey, three of the four sites reported following the SPARK curriculum lesson plan as sequenced in the SPARK manual. One of the sites covers all lessons, but not in sequence. For three of the four sites, if a child joins the 4-year old SPARK program mid-year, they begin with the first regularly scheduled lesson *Little Red Hen*, in the SPARK sequence. One of the sites, begins with the *Doorbell Rang*, but then returns to the missed lessons starting with *Little Red Hen*.

All five schools developed Learning Plans for each SPARK child which were reviewed with the Learning Advocate. Four of the five schools developed the Learning Plan at the first visit with one site developing the Plan at a later visit.

**Table 10 – Learning Plans Reviewed with Learning Advocate**

	Yes	First Visit	Later Visit
Sandy Valley	X	X	
Minerva	X	X	
Mississinawa	X		X
Franklin Monroe	X	X	
Logan Elm	X	X	X

Notes: Data from the SPARK survey.

Finally, SPARK sites noted mixed reviews of the usefulness of MIS. Two supervisors noted using MIS data for their own reports. No directors use the data for their own reports. All of the directors and supervisors agreed that more training would be useful.

**Table 11 – SPARK MIS Usage**

Question	Director	Supervisor
Who enters SPARK MIS	At three sites a specific Parent Partner, at one site a Program Supervisor	Not Applicable
Who accesses/uses SPARK MIS data	At two sites everyone, at one site a Supervisor, and a Parent Partner, and the fourth site, just a Parent Partner	Not Applicable
Have you used/seen SPARK MIS?	Two of the four Directors have seen or used it	Not Applicable
Does your site use the Report features?	Two of the four Directors answered yes	Not Applicable
Rating usefulness of MIS to site	Three of the four Directors rated MIS somewhat useful with one Director rating it neutral	All of the Supervisors rated the MIS somewhat useful to useful for their site
Does your site need additional training on MIS	Two Directors strongly agreed and one Director strongly disagreed with the need for additional training	Three of the four Supervisors strongly agreed and one of the Supervisors strongly disagreed with the need for additional training
Do you only enter required SPARK data?	Three of the four Directors agreed or strongly agreed and one of the Directors strongly disagreed that they only enter required data	Three of the four Directors agreed or strongly agreed and one of the Directors strongly disagreed that they only enter required data
Reports generated by MIS are useful for the management of my program	Two of the four Directors disagreed or strongly disagreed and one was uncertain about the usefulness	Half of the Supervisors strongly agreed that the reports were useful while half of the Supervisors disagreed or strongly disagreed
I download the MIS data to create my own reports frequently	All four Directors strongly disagreed	Two of the Supervisors agreed or strongly agreed and one disagreed
Training would be more useful if up and running first	All four Directors agreed or strongly agreed	All four Supervisors agreed or strongly agreed

*Notes: Data from the SPARK survey.*

**2. To what extent did program processes and systems operate as planned: A Parent Partner View?**

Eleven Parent Partners responded to a series of statements in their survey instrument regarding their implementation of the SPARK Program (please see Table 12 below).

**Table 12 – Program Processes and Systems: A Parent Partner View**

To what extent do the following statements reflect your implementation of SPARK?	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
The concerns of the families on the Individual Learning Plan (ILP)	73%	18%	9%	–	–
The outcomes specified for the child on the ILP	82%	9%	9%	–	–
I review previous visit summary notes	64%	18%	18%	–	–
The child's developmental issues not included on the ILP	82%	18%	–	–	–
The concerns of the families on the Individual Learning Plan (ILP)	64%	18%	9%	9%	–
The health needs of the child	82%	9%	–	9%	–
The SPARK curriculum and lesson sequence	73%	9%	9%	–	–
Planning for the next goal; setting the stage for development	73%	27%	–	–	–
I add enrichment materials to SPARK activity plans	45%	18%	9%	9%	18%
I contact families to confirm the scheduled visit	64%	18%	9%	–	9%
I often discuss planned home visits with my supervisors/colleagues	36%	–	64%	–	–
I feel at ease/comfortable in families homes	73%	9%	18%	–	–
I provide education and/or information for the learning advocate	73%	27%	–	–	–
I follow a predictable routine with each family	82%	18%	–	–	–
I review the previous visit and homework activities	55%	18%	18%	–	9%
I articulate the sessions learning goal to the child and advocate	91%	9%	–	–	–
I read a book to the child during the activity	100%	–	–	–	–
I use materials present in the home	9%	–	82%	–	9%
I encourage the child and learning advocate's lead in the activities	64%	36%	–	–	–

To what extent do the following statements reflect your implementation of SPARK?	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I interact with the child while talking to the caregiver about what I am doing and how he/she can do the same thing	64%	27%	9%	–	–
I include other non-SPARK children in planned activities	36%	–	64%	–	–
The learning advocate is often not involved with the visit	–	27%	18%	18%	36%
I assist in goal setting with the learning advocate	64%	27%	9%	–	–
I problem solve with the learning advocate	64%	36%	–	–	–
I provide emotional support to the learning advocate	82%	18%	–	–	–
I observe caregiver/child interactions	82%	9%	9%	–	–
I model or demonstrate interaction with child for advocate	82%	9%	–	9%	–
I evaluate/provide feedback on caregiver/child interactions	45%	18%	18%	18%	–
I address family concerns related to the child	64%	18%	–	9%	–
I provide crisis intervention	18%	9%	–	9%	55%
I make connections/referrals to community services	64%	18%	9%	9%	–
I stop the visit if the parent/learning advocate is uninvolved	9%	9%	27%	–	55%
I articulate expectations for homework	55%	18%	–	–	27%
I contact the Responsive Services Team	64%	18%	9%	9%	–
I contact the family between visits	64%	18%	–	–	18%
I contact school/preschool for follow-up	55%	9%	18%	9%	9%
I contact community services for follow-up	36%	9%	–	27%	18%

Notes: Data from the SPARK survey.

3. *Did the responsible organization(s) have the resources and capacity in place to implement the program?*

**Table 13 – Resources and Capacity for Implementation**

Parent Partner View of Organizational Culture	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Are there necessary materials available to the staff?	64%	36%	–	–	–
I have to follow rules in this program that conflict with my best professional judgment	–	18%	–	9%	73%
My administrators are receptive to change and experimentation	27%	73%	–	–	–
Staff frequently share ideas with one another	55%	36%	9%	–	–
Staff and program administrators work collaboratively to identify needs for improvement of the program	45%	18%	9%	27%	–
My SPARK families appreciate my service to them	82%	18%	–	–	–

Notes: Data data from the SPARK survey.

**Table 14 – Response Services Team: Services Available**

	Sandy Valley	Logan Elm	Mississinawa	Franklin Monroe	Minerva
Psychologist	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Early Childhood Specialist	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
MH Specialist	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Speech Director	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Language Pathologist	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parent Partner Supervisor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupational Therapy (OT)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
School District Representative	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Other	Spec Ed, PS t, County Psych			Principal	

Notes: Table 14 reports data from the SPARK survey.

#### **4. *Did recruitment meet targets? If not, why not?***

According to the administrative interviews, Sandy Valley came close to meeting their recruitment target of 60 with 53 enrollments. High poverty and mobility may have been a factor in not reaching their target recruitment. Sandy Valley plans to build on their recruitment success with the following efforts:

- Flyers sent home through preschools;
- Flyers posted at other frequented locations such as the post office and mall;
- Promotion at kindergarten night and older sibling programs; and
- Promotion at other venues such as faith-based organizations, homeschool clubs, and through the Quaker Digital Academy.

Twenty participants were randomly assigned from the Minerva cohort to fill RtT seats. Overall, Minerva has had recruitment success. There is a high level of cooperation between the school (especially the principal) and SPARK in Minerva where they have successfully used a number of recruiting strategies including:

- Facebook;
- Faith-based organizations outreach;
- Signs on pizza boxes;
- Tent cards in restaurants; and
- Costumed outreach at street festival.

Minerva plans to directly contact school families and recruit on school letterhead in future years.

Logan Elm and Mississinawa/Franklin Monroe fell short in their recruiting goals. Logan Elm had a goal of 35 and enrolled 21 children. Despite offering incentives (such as \$50 gas card), Logan Elm struggled with recruitment noting the large geographic area, high poverty rate, and cultural resistance to early formal education. According to the principal, there is also a large population of homeschooling parents who are not comfortable with public education.

Mississinawa /Franklin Monroe had a recruitment goal of 55 and enrolled 40 children. Mississinawa cited serving Hispanic families to be a challenge. However, most of the challenges were encountered by the Franklin Monroe site. Franklin Monroe noted that the previous year they had transitioned a new principal who did not make SPARK a priority. The geographic area covered was large, therefore many visits happened at the school rather than in participants' homes. Also, open enrollment was cited as "creating a different dynamic for recruiting."

#### **5. *What is the relationship between the program and the environment in which it operates?***

Across all four sites, the majority of participants are male, Caucasian, and/or from families with married parents/guardians who own their own homes. However, in Sandy Valley and Mississinawa, around 40% of the families rent and in Logan Elm, almost 40% of the parents/guardians are single parents. Finally, income varies greatly both within and across the four sites.

**Table 15 – Gender of Participants**

	Sandy Valley	Logan Elm	Mississinawa / Franklin Monroe	Minerva
Male	55%	69%	74%	44%
Female	45%	31%	26%	56%

Notes: Data from the SPARK MIS.

**Table 16 – Housing Status of Participants**

Housing		
Own	123	70%
Rent	51	29%
Temporary	2	1%

Notes: Data from the SPARK MIS.

**Table 17 – Marital Status of Participant Families**

	Sandy * Valley	Logan* Elm	Mississinawa / Franklin Monroe	Minerva
Married	61%	55%	74%	100%
Single	20%	5%	9%	–
Divorced	7%	10%	3%	–
Widowed	–	5%	–	–
Domestic Partner	–	5%	–	–
Living with Boy/Girlfriend	9%	--	11%	–
Other	–	5%	3%	–

\* Notes: Due to rounding, columns may not sum to 100%; data reported in Table 17 from SPARK MIS. For Sandy Valley, 2% of respondents did not report; 15% of respondents from Logan Elm did not report.

**Table 18 – Race of Participants**

	Sandy Valley	Logan Elm	Mississinawa / Franklin Monroe	Minerva
Caucasian/White	98%	100%	87%	94%
African American/Black	–	–	–	–
Biracial	–	–	5%	3%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	–	–	–	–
Hispanic/Latino	2%	–	8%	1%
Asian	–	–	–	–
Multiracial	–	–	–	–
Other	–	–	–	1%

Notes: Due to rounding, columns may not sum to 100%; data reported from SPARK MIS.

**Table 19 – Family Income of Participants**

	Sandy Valley (average family size)	Logan Elm (average family size)	Mississinawa /Franklin Monroe (average family size)	Minerva (average family size)
Not Reported	25% (4.14)	46% (8.33)	13% (5.75)	9% (3.88)
Less than \$5,000	2% (5.00)	–	5% (4.00)	3% (5.50)
\$5,000 to \$9,999	14% (4.86)	–	3% (4.00)	4% (3.33)
\$10,000 to \$14,999	6% (4.33)	–	3% (5.00)	6% (2.75)
\$15,000 to \$24,999	10% (4.40)	8% (3.00)	–	3% (5.00)
\$25,000 to \$34,999	12% (4.17)	8% (4.00)	16% (4.17)	16% (5.09)
\$35,000 to \$49,999	6% (5.00)	23% (4.67)	24% (4.78)	10% (5.57)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	25% (3.69)	15% (5.00)	21% (4.75)	45% (4.48)
\$75,000 to \$99,9999	–	–	11% (5.00)	3% (6.00)
\$100,000 plus	–	–	5% (5.00)	1% (4.00)

Notes: Due to rounding, columns may not sum to 100%; data reported from SPARK MIS.

**Table 20 – Assistance Received by Participants’ Families**

	Sandy Valley	Logan	Mississinawa/ Franklin Monroe	Minerva
Medical Assistance	19/22	5/5	7/9	2/3
Food Stamps	15/22	4/5	3/9	1/3
TANF OWF	1/22	–	–	–
Child Care Subsidy	2/22	1/5	–	–
Free and Reduced Lunch	1/22	–	4/9	–
Other Assistance	1/22	1/5	–	1/3

Notes: Each column contains the count / the number of participants receiving assistance per site; data source: SPARK MIS.

**6. *What is the relationship of the program to the stakeholders in early childhood education?***

To strengthen rural SPARK sites, SEP explored resources at regional colleges, universities and social service agencies. According to data collected during administrative interviews, principals/site directors were made aware of the interest and capacity of the resources and contact information. Meetings between districts and providers occurred between Sandy Valley and Malone University and Mississinawa and Indiana University East.

- Mississinawa is now hosting student teachers, however they are still in need of personnel for the psychologist and social worker positions on the Responsive Services Team. A lack of qualified supervisors is the roadblock to placing interns.
- Stark County districts, Sandy Valley and Minerva, have been successful in forming collaborations with the Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health and Care Teams.
- Sandy Valley has been able to leverage important support in the capacity of a Parent Partner and additional resources from the Stark County District Library.
- Minerva has expressed interest in a broader communication and collaboration with the Stark County Educational Service Center, the provider of preschool in the district.
- Stark Education Partnership, Inc. invited each program to submit site-specific details and photos for a customized *Prezi* presentation for use in recruiting. Sandy Valley and Mississinawa supplied data and photos and received completed presentations.

All site directors received information regarding the use of Title I funding. It is not evident that all schools pursued this potential funding resource.

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# CONCLUSION

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Data supporting the above conclusions come from entries in the SPARK MIS; responses to survey instruments by SPARK program directors, supervisors, Parent Partners, and members of the Responsive Services Team; interviews with administrators; and focus groups with parents.

During the second full year, SPARK pilot sites (Sandy Valley, Mississinawa, Franklin Monroe, Logan Elm, and Minerva) in the Race to the Top (RtT) Early Learning Challenge Grant have shown fidelity to the SPARK model by adopting the required core elements for replications programs:

- Evaluation
- Four-Year Old Program
- Parent Partners' Professional Development
- Education Continuity: Supporting Schools
- Oversight and Monitoring
- External Communications

Sites have focused on implementation by:

- Recruiting and providing services to 113 children (who transitioned to kindergarten) and their families
- Conducting at least 1,044 home visitations
- Continuing the work of the Responsive Services Teams with supporting social services personnel
- Demonstrating a high degree of program implementation by Parent Partners through their activities and service delivery

This was year two of the programming for four rural programs (five sites). Sandy Valley, Minerva, and Mississinawa exhibited fidelity and adherence to implementation protocols and will continue with SPARK into next year.

There were challenges in recruitment and implementation for Logan Elm and Franklin Monroe. The geography of sparsely populated rural counties with a great deal of distance between homes, high poverty and cultural barriers, a strong homeschooling community, and lack of a matching budget were barriers to continued implementation. In spite of sincere efforts to overcome the challenges, neither of these sites will continue next year. When fidelity issues emerged, SPARK administrators intervened to correct fidelity and successfully implemented course correction.

In all sites there has been a commitment to fidelity and implementation. Three of the five sites demonstrated strong fidelity. In some areas, such as creative recruitment strategies and implementation of program components, these three schools have also demonstrated exemplary practices.

According to focus group data, parents, parent partners, and most principals exhibited genuine enthusiasm for the SPARK program, and appreciation for its positive impact on parents and their children. While Logan Elm is not continuing with the program, the sentiment was that SPARK had a positive impact on their community and helped them to collaborate with community agencies; parents noted their favorite parts of the SPARK program as “child-centered,” a child growing in independence, learning about how they can aid their child’s learning, and the quality of the materials.

The favorite aspects of SPARK for parents were the resources for children and parents (e.g. speech therapist, parent partner, etc.), book bags, and the opportunity for socialization. One principal noted also that SPARK children had better transitions to school. Positive changes noted by parents included having more books, not just read, but owned in the home and also reading to their children every night, making time for puzzles, games, and trips to the zoo and library. As one parent said, “SPARK is a blessing.”