

Early Language and Literacy Initiative (ELLI) FACT SHEET



The Achievement Gap

- The achievement gap in Connecticut is multifaceted and shaped by disparities in income levels, language, vocabulary, background knowledge, preparedness and opportunity. ELLI was created to close the achievement gap for all children.
- The development of early language and literacy skills lays the foundation for reading and future success in school, work and life. In order to master other subjects and communicate what they have learned, children must be interested, motivated and develop the skills to read and write.

What is ELLI?

- The Early Language and Literacy Initiative (ELLI) is a high-quality, year-round multidisciplinary approach to early childhood education designed to improve school readiness and close the achievement gap.
- ELLI provides essential language and literacy-rich educational experiences for young children that are based on theory, research and community wisdom about what children need to learn and grow up successfully.
- **Stepping Stones** Museum for Children and Literacy How, an organization dedicated to the application of early literacy research, created ELLI to infuse the latest early language and literacy research-based theory and practice into immersive, content-rich science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) learning experiences for museum, classroom and home environments.
- Current ELLI programs include the ELLI Lab School at Stepping Stones (opened December 2012), the ELLI Model Classroom at Fox Run Elementary School (opened November 2014), ELLI at Fairfield University (to open July 2016), Camp ELLI, ELLI Afterschool Adventures and ELLI TeachNET, an embedded professional development program designed for ELLI and non-ELLI early childhood professionals.

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For more information about ELLI,
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ELLI Lead Partners

- **Stepping Stones** Museum for Children is committed to broadening and enriching educational opportunities for young children and enhancing their understanding of the world. With over 250,000 visitors annually, the award-winning museum presents play-based, high-quality exhibits and programs that are designed to inspire lifelong learning and to support parents, caregivers and educators as facilitators of children’s explorations. The museum’s interactive exhibits are safe, supportive educational settings that draw on what research says about the role of play and learning environments in creating conditions that invite, inspire lifelong learning and support children’s language and literacy development. As part of its two-generation strategy, the museum’s Family and Teacher Resource Center provides parents, caregivers and teachers access to the latest and best information and resources about learning through play, early literacy, STEAM education, 21st century life skills and the developmental needs of young children. The museum’s *Open Arms* initiative collaborates with over 100 schools and community-based organizations to ensure all children, regardless of income or other barriers, have access to educational resources Stepping Stones provides.
- **Literacy How, Inc.**, was created to expand the early literacy policy and training efforts of Early Reading Success, Mastering Reading Instruction and the Haskins Literacy Initiative, begun at Haskins Laboratories in 2000. The organization pursues proven and new avenues to improve reading achievement through teaching excellence and focuses on closing the literacy achievement gap between low-income and minority children and their middle-class peers. Since 2000, Haskins/Literacy How project directors and scientists have conducted several federal and Connecticut-based studies that have explored the impact of job-embedded, literacy-focused professional development on teacher knowledge and student achievement. In all of these, mentors have worked in low-income schools with large percentages of English Learners participating in bilingual and dual language programs.

ELLI Leadership

Overall leadership of ELLI is under the direction of Stepping Stones President and CEO Rhonda Kiest and Margie Gillis, Ed. D., President and Founder of Literacy How.

- Ms. Kiest has led Stepping Stones since its opening in March 2000. She previously worked at children’s museums in Indianapolis and Houston. She serves as a vice president on the board of directors of the Association of Children’s Museums and is a national peer reviewer for the American Alliance of Museums.
- In 2009, Dr. Gillis founded Literacy How to continue the work that she and her team began at Haskins Laboratories in the Early Reading Success program, a demonstration project examining the efficacy of professional development in reading instruction for teachers of children in kindergarten through second grade. Literacy How empowers teaching excellence by providing knowledge and the mentor-supported practice that every teacher needs to be effective, but few have experienced.



Strategic Partnerships

Norwalk Public Schools

The ELLI Model Classroom at Fox Run Elementary School in Norwalk opened in 2014 as a result of the close partnership between Norwalk Public Schools and Stepping Stones. The model classroom is open to children ages 3 – 5 and is partially funded with School Readiness funds. ELLI is scheduled to expand to more Norwalk public schools in 2016.

Fairfield University

The long-standing relationship between Fairfield University and Stepping Stones resulted in their partnership for a childhood learning center on the University's campus. Opening in July 2016, ELLI at Fairfield University will serve infants, toddlers, and pre-kindergarten children aged 3 months – 5 years. The full-day, year-round program will be open to Fairfield University employees' children, as well as the general public.

Key ELLI Facts

- ELLI is for all children.
- ELLI is teacher-led and child-powered.
- ELLI is evidenced-based and applies research to successful programmatic and classroom practices.
- The ELLI curriculum is designed by the ELLI teaching team.
- Daily programs introduce opportunities for ELLI students to build essential life skills including critical thinking, creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration while playfully integrating STEAM content.
- ELLI teachers are continuously experimenting with new strategies, refining their models, assessing and documenting the impact on each child's learning.
- Each ELLI experience that children engage in has a language and literacy outcome.
- Classroom themes and topics incorporate community, global awareness, health and the environment.
- The ELLI teaching team has a deep knowledge of children's early language and literacy development.
- ELLI teachers have college degrees in education or related fields.
- The classroom environment is an ever-changing teaching and learning tool.
- ELLI classrooms maintain a 1:6 adult to child ratio.
- ELLI teachers and children's families are partners in learning, meeting regularly for informal and formal events to discuss progress and build community.