

August 15, 2025

To: Commissioner, Chakira Johnson, Dist. 4

From: Virginia Baker, Executive Director, and Morgan Birch, Director Programs & Operations  
Scottdale Early Learning

RE: Funding support (Scottdale Early Learning)

Dear Commissioner Johnson,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us recently at our Warren Avenue Center. It was a true pleasure to host you and give you a tour to see our programming for our early learners in action.

The following information will give you a complete picture of who we are as an organization, those we serve, and the impact we have on those learning, living, and working in DeKalb County.

### **Our Mission**

The mission of Scottdale Early Learning is to provide early education that fosters the intellectual, creative, social, emotional, and physical development of our students. We mitigate socioeconomic disadvantages through high-quality education, family involvement, and community engagement, ensuring that all students we serve are ready for kindergarten. We have been serving DeKalb County since 1977.

### **Who we are**

Scottdale Early Learning was created to fill a community need for accessible, affordable, high-quality early childhood programs. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of the children we serve through both our center-based and community-based programming come from culturally diverse backgrounds. SEL's leadership team reflects the unique communities we serve with diverse staff who are Somali, Ethiopian, Iraqi, Nigerian, Hispanic/Latina, and African American. Our goal is to ensure that children are healthy, safe, prepared for, and successful in school. Our vision is that all children in DeKalb enter kindergarten ready to learn with a sound foundation to ensure success. To accomplish our goal, we provide both center-based and community-based early care and education services for over 400 children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Scottdale Early Learning was founded on the premise of social justice and equity to ensure that all children in central DeKalb County have access to an affordable, high-quality early learning experience. Over the years, as demographics in central DeKalb have changed, SEL has prioritized access to resources for low-income families to ensure we are serving the children we have committed to. In recent years, despite SEL's sliding scale fee system, many families that need our center-based programs have been unable to afford even our lowest tier of rates and have required additional scholarship assistance from us to attend.

### **What makes Scottdale unique among Early Learning in DeKalb County**

Our program is unique in DeKalb County for many reasons including that we offer both center and community-based programs. Our students represent a rich and culturally diverse community living today in DeKalb County with 65% of the families speaking a language other than English as their first language. In addition, we serve low income refugee children ages 3-4 years old through programs in Clarkston and Stone Mountain with a free, half-day, early learning and family engagement program through our community-based READY school program.

DeKalb County has 237 childcare centers and of those only 19% are Quality Rated (QR) with only 20 NAEYC accredited. SEL holds both NAEYC and QR accreditations.

### **Why we need the Scottdale Early Learning program**

Several studies have shown that investing in “early childhood programs is a billion-dollar boost to the U.S. economy.”

#### **1. Workforce Productivity and Economic Growth**

When parents have access to reliable, affordable childcare, they can participate more fully in the workforce, driving economic output.

#### **2. Stronger State and Local Economies**

State economies benefit directly from increased employment in the childcare sector and from the long-term economic gains of well-educated future workers.

#### **3. The Economic Power of Head Start & Early Head Start**

Federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs have been proven to strengthen local and national economies by improving educational outcomes, workforce readiness, and reducing future costs associated with poverty.

- Children who participate in Head Start are 12% more likely to graduate high school, leading to higher lifetime earnings and increased tax contributions. ([National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021](#))
- Every \$1 invested in Head Start returns \$9 in economic benefits through higher wages, lower crime rates, and reduced social service costs. ([Brookings Institution, 2023](#))
- Communities with strong Head Start programs experience greater job stability among parents, leading to increased workforce participation and productivity. ([Center for Poverty and Inequality, 2022](#))

#### **4. Long-Term Workforce and Economic Competitiveness**

Investing in early childhood programs today builds the skilled workforce of tomorrow, strengthening America’s global competitiveness.

(Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/investing-early-childhood-billion-dollar-boost-us-economy-parker-vq4ae/>)

### **The communities we serve**

Scottdale Early Learning serves 80 children across DeKalb County, with families residing in the following zip codes: 30083, 30032, 30083, 30034, 30038, 30030, and 30088. (final page)

These zip codes fall within DeKalb County's District 4, a diverse district that spans several communities including Clarkston, Decatur, Avondale Estates and portions of Tucker. These areas are key contributors to the educational and family landscape within District 4.

Scottdale Early Learning is proud to serve as a trusted partner in early childhood development across these communities. Through partnerships with families, schools, and civic leaders, we remain committed to closing opportunity gaps, promoting kindergarten readiness, and building a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Together, we are investing in the next generation; one zip code at a time.

To see a full list of the schools into which our students will ultimately attend, please see the addendum.

### **Our urgency**

SEL has been a proud partner of the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), which has provided vital support to our Early Head Start (EHS) program through a federal grant since 2015. Unfortunately, we were notified at the end of 2024 (well into our current fiscal year) that our EHS funding would not be renewed for 2025. That loss of funding is affecting our organization this current fiscal year, with the absence of a little more than \$1 million that sustains the tuition-free EHS slots for 54 children from socio-economically disadvantaged families. The board and executive director are in the process of pivoting to re-establish a sustainable budget in the coming year and beyond as we find ourselves in what CEO/President Ellyn Cochran of Quality Care for Children deems a "unique situation."

The loss of vital funding is putting SEL at risk of reducing its program which will directly affect families who depend on our services to earn an income.

### **Our funding request**

We are requesting \$150,000 from DeKalb County and from your district 4 any contribution at \$50,000+ or more will invest in our Early Scholars Program (ESP) which serves 54 children. The funding will help us address an unexpected loss of federal funding. The students in this program are from low-income families who desperately need ESP childcare in order to maintain employment and earn a living here in DeKalb County.

### **Conclusion**

We are actively reaching out to our community leaders to help us close this gap in our funding which allows us to continue our program for these children and families without interruption. I hope that we can depend on you to provide support in this time of urgent need. Commissioner Johnson, thank you for your time.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Virginia Baker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Virginia Baker  
Executive Director

Morgan Birch  
Director, Programs and Operations

cc: Cara Schroeder, Schroeder Resources

## **Addendum 1: Scottdale Early Learning Enrollment by Zip Code**

Scottdale Early Learning serves 80 children across DeKalb County, with families residing in the following zip codes: 30058, 30032, 30083, 30034, 30038, 30030, and 30088.

These zip codes fall within DeKalb County's Super District 4, a large and diverse district that spans several communities including Stone Mountain, Clarkston, Pine Lake, and Avondale Estates. These areas are key contributors to the educational and family landscape within District 4. Scottdale Early Learning is proud to serve as a trusted partner in early childhood development across these communities. Through partnerships with families, schools, and civic leaders, we remain committed to closing opportunity gaps, promoting kindergarten readiness, and building a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Together, we are investing in the next generation; one zip code at a time.

Elementary Schools Serving These Zip Codes Include:

30030 (Decatur): 10

30032 (Decatur): 35

30033 (Decatur): 12

30034 (Decatur): 8

30035 (Decatur): 15

30038 (Lithonia): 7

30058 (Lithonia): 18

30079 (Scottdale): 40

30083 (Stone Mountain): 12

30087 (Stone Mountain): 3