

# FAQs–Futures Report

## WHAT IS THE GREAT FUTURES REPORT?

Great Start has published the GREAT FUTURES REPORT to illustrate the troubling conditions facing young children and their families in our six-county region. Charts, graphs and quotes from leaders like you, help frame the challenges before us in a compelling way.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GREAT FUTURES REPORT?

We hope the report serves as a starting point for a discussion that will lead to a regional **Early Childhood Action Agenda**. (We welcome your input and participation in this process. A January public planning session will be announced.)

- The data being shared is both qualitative and quantitative – the report provides a snapshot of the conditions and challenges facing 0-5 children and their families
- The report challenges assumptions about where and what the needs are in our region
- Data helps make the case for advocacy that supports smart public policy
- We hope that quotes from leaders in the region will inspire communities to take a variety of actions on behalf of the issues facing 0-5 children

## WHAT IS GREAT START?

The Great Start Traverse Bay/Manistee Collaborative ([www.tbgreatstart.org](http://www.tbgreatstart.org)) is the local decision-making body established by Michigan’s Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) to address barriers to accessibility, funding stream inadequacies and overlaps and gaps in early childhood services in northwest lower Michigan.

## WHO IS GREAT START AND WHICH COUNTIES ARE INCLUDED IN OUR REGION?

Local community and parent leaders representing all sectors of our region are partnering to create a comprehensive, coordinated system of resources and supports to ensure young children in our six counties have foundational experiences for a great start in life – bodies, hearts and minds.

Our six-county region includes Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, and Manistee. There are a total of 55 collaboratives in Michigan.

## WHAT IS THE GREAT START SYSTEM?

The Great Start System is comprised of five distinctive, yet intertwined areas that offer the greatest opportunity to positively impact the lives of our youngest citizens and their families.

The areas are:

- Pediatric & Family Health
- Social & Emotional Health
- Child Care & Early Education
- Parenting Leadership
- Family Support – Basic Needs, Safety, Economic Security



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## WHAT DOES GREAT START DO?

In partnership with committed leaders from the private and public sector as well as parent representatives from our six-county region, Great Start identifies and responds to early childhood needs by mobilizing resources toward the development of a sustainable, regional Great Start. The Collaborative's core functions are to:

- Collect data and review infrastructure
- Convene and coordinate organizations and direct providers
- Support parent leadership through Great Start Parent Coalition
- Provide early childhood resource information
- Address barriers to and gaps in services and programs
- Support early childhood advocacy at the local and state level
- Develop and leverage funding through a variety of partnerships

## HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT? IS THIS JUST ANOTHER COSTLY LAYER?

Currently, our region is working hard to support young children. We love kids and that shows when you compare the services and programs we offer with other rural areas in the state. Great Start was created to put systems design and the decision-making process back into the hands of the local leaders so that working to improve early childhood is more coordinated. Building a sustainable and effective system of services and programs that is more efficient requires an understanding of the unique circumstances in our region. Responding regionally to local issues will increase the ability to remove barriers and properly fund what's working for our youngest citizens.

## WHY NOW? WHY HERE?

There is a direct correlation between northwest lower Michigan's economic development goals and the need to improve early childhood success in this community. We cannot afford to postpone this investment, the economic future of our region and this state is at stake.

- The outlook for generating tax revenue is dismal—spending wisely has never been more important
- Early learning is the most cost effective way to decrease the number of unskilled workers in the future
- The fastest economic growth occurs in communities that support the youngest citizens
- The knowledge and creative economy will not wait for Michigan to “catch-up”
- Cost of K-I remediation and retention are burdening the K-12 system
- Early in a child's life the time is right to affect social skills, parent leadership and family habits
- Success in life is about achieving human potential – 80 % of brain development occurs by age 3 – 90% by age 5. “Toxic” stress in an infant's life affects brain development.



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## WHAT WILL THE “RETURN” ON EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENT LOOK LIKE ?

- Makes the region a great place to live by improving social infrastructure, developing human capital and by attracting and retaining successful businesses
- Increases personal income and tax revenue
- Strengthens health and wellbeing of all families
- Improves K-12 system and improves high school graduation and matriculation rates
- Reduces entitlement and other social costs
- Reduces demand on law enforcement and judicial system
- Improves productivity and quality of workforce –now and in the future

## WHAT CAN I DO RIGHT NOW – AT MY BUSINESS, IN MY ORGANIZATION OR IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD?

- Join the Great Start Collaborative and add your expertise and voice to the initiative
- Ask how your business or organization can create a “Read to Kids Zone”
- Renew your membership to the Chamber to ensure ongoing legislative advocacy for early childhood
- Talk to elected officials, fellow business leaders, employees and the public about the vital role early childhood care and education plays
- Survey your organization’s employees to determine ways you can be supportive of their early childhood needs
- If you are an employer, support parents of young children by considering such family friendly options as flexible schedules, telecommuting, access to reliable childcare resources and services, and flexible spending accounts to cover childcare costs
- Arrange to provide on-site employee parent education and service opportunities through Great Start
- Promote early childhood with check stub inserts, informational posters and handouts through your Human Resources department
- Fund early childhood projects either financially, with direct volunteerism or through in-kind contributions
- Provide your expertise to groups working to solve issues related to young children and their families
- Spread the word that if we wait until Kindergarten to invest and intervene with children it will be too late
- Nurture a supportive environment in your neighborhood. Assist your friends and neighbors who may need parenting support by helping them connect to resources and information
- If you are a parent, educate yourself about child development and creative play activities for your child.

## IF I HAVE SPECIFIC IDEAS OR WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION, WHO DO I CONTACT?

Mary Sue Wilkinson, Great Start Specialist at 231-233-2948.



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