

MICHIGAN EARLY CHILDHOOD

CHAMPIONS' PERSPECTIVE
ON BEST PRACTICES



W.K.
KELLOGG
FOUNDATION™

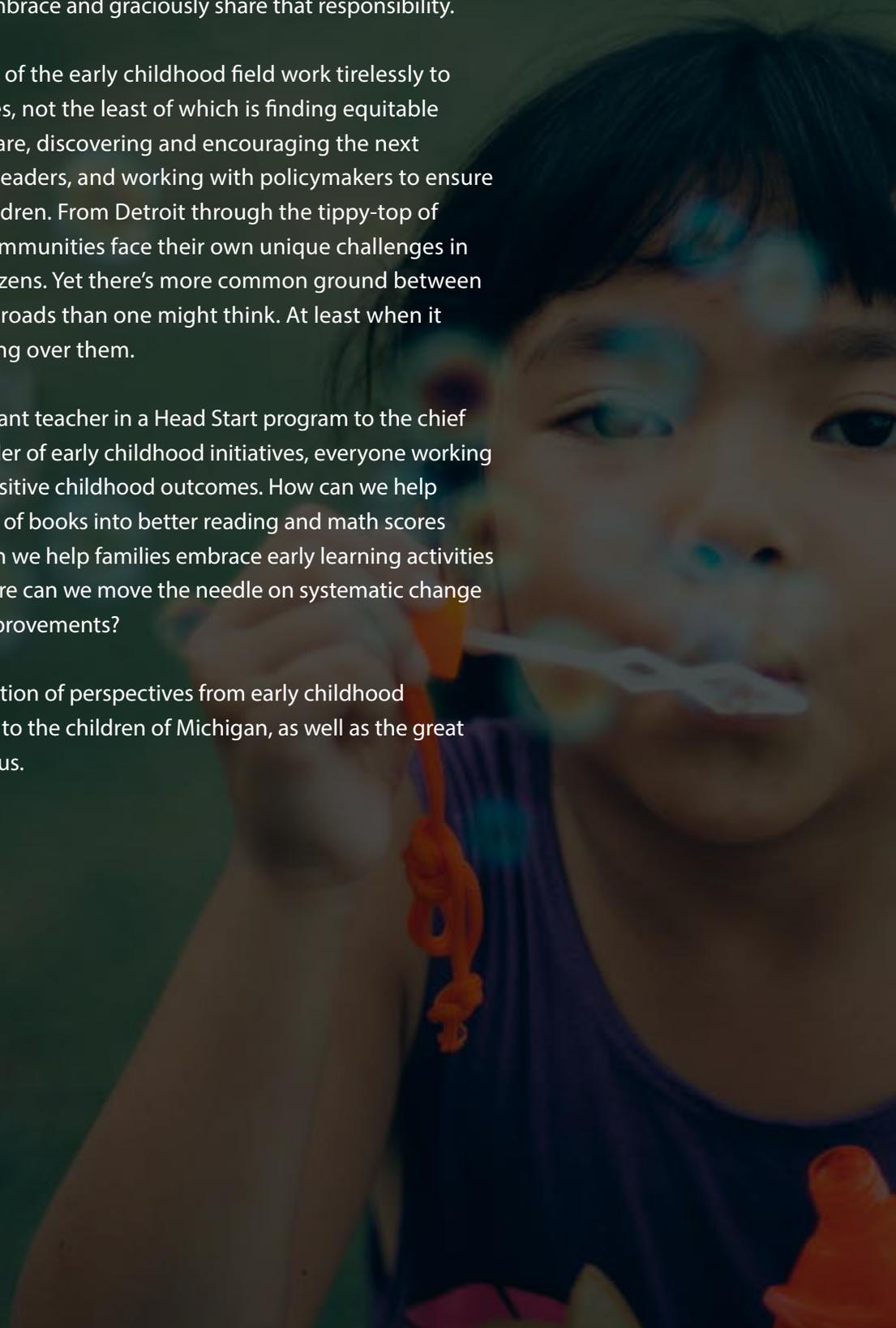
Michigan Early Childhood

Regardless of where a baby is born, or wherever he or she might end up, no one has more influence on a child than his or her parents and guardians. As such, having children may be one of the greatest responsibilities of adulthood. Early childhood providers, the first caregivers and educators entrusted by families, embrace and graciously share that responsibility.

In Michigan, champions of the early childhood field work tirelessly to address many challenges, not the least of which is finding equitable access to high-quality care, discovering and encouraging the next generation of teaching leaders, and working with policymakers to ensure better futures for all children. From Detroit through the tippy-top of the Upper Peninsula, communities face their own unique challenges in serving its youngest citizens. Yet there's more common ground between city streets and country roads than one might think. At least when it comes to children passing over them.

From the first-year assistant teacher in a Head Start program to the chief financial officer at a funder of early childhood initiatives, everyone working in this field strives for positive childhood outcomes. How can we help translate a toddler's love of books into better reading and math scores down the pike? What can we help families embrace early learning activities with their children? Where can we move the needle on systematic change that leads to societal improvements?

This publication, a collection of perspectives from early childhood champions, is dedicated to the children of Michigan, as well as the great promise they offer all of us.



Beginnings

Since its founding in 1930, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has set forth — with guidelines to trustees and staff from W.K. himself — to “use the money as you please so long as it promotes the health, happiness, and well-being of children.” Over 88 years, the foundation has granted millions of dollars to early childhood programs throughout Michigan and other states to enhance that well-being.

In June 2015, Central Michigan University (CMU) hosted an Early Childhood Summit, where nationally renowned speakers and statewide experts focused on “shifting mindsets.” With project managers in attendance, the possibilities of a CMU-Kellogg partnership emerged.

Last fall, a CMU team of researchers — after some pilot interviews on campus — hit the road with a list of qualitative questions for Michigan champions of early childhood programs. Although the primary visits were to Kellogg-funded sites in Battle Creek, Detroit and Grand Rapids, the road also led to Flint, Holland, Houghton (in the U.P.), and Traverse City.

After much listening, transcription, and some debate, this winter report is an attempt to synthesize the leadership voices from 26 Michigan programs. These champions of early childhood spoke of best practices in granting access to families, addressing gaps in services that affect quality services, and the various ways they engage their community stakeholders.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Michigan Early Childhood: Champions' Perspective

In Michigan, the priority cities for W.K. Kellogg Foundation funding are  Battle Creek programs  Detroit programs  Grand Rapids programs  CMU and 5toONE

BEGINNINGS

- 1** W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Central Michigan University Partnership
- 4** Child-Centered Programming:
 Central Michigan University

ACCESS

- 10** Leveling the Learning Field
 Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan  Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative  Grand Rapids Public Schools  IFF  The Kresge Foundation  New Level Sports
- 16** Access Granted
 Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative
- 18** Ending Economic Segregation
 Policy Equity Group
- 22** Through an Equitable Lens
 Calhoun Intermediate School District
- 24** Northern Exposures
 5toONE  BHK Child Development  Head Start Kent County
- 28** Honest Answers
What does racial equity mean to you?
- 30** Charting a Path to College
 New Paradigm for Education
- 32** Extra, Extra!
The comprehensive and wraparound services that lead to greater access for families

QUALITY

- 40** Who's Ready for Whom?
 5toONE  Battle Creek Public Schools  First Steps Kent  Grand Rapids Public Schools  Kent Intermediate School District  Office of Great Start Policy Equity Group
- 46** Learning for the Long Haul
 Battle Creek Public Schools
- 48** Lansing Leaders
 Office of Great Start

50 Good News Agent
★ New Harvest Christian Center

52 Adventures in Space
★ IFF

56 No Child Left Inside
★ Grand Rapids Public Schools

60 Honest Answers
How do you create a positive school climate?

62 Building Early Learning Communities
★ United Way of Southeast Michigan

64 Grand Opening
Community College builds state-of-the-art Early Childhood Learning Laboratory

COMMUNITY

70 Listening for a Change
★ BHK Child Development, BC Pulse ★ Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan
★ Detroit Public Schools ★ Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative ★ First Steps Kent
★ Ready for School Holland

76 Navigating a System of Systems
★ BC Pulse

78 In Partnership with Parents
★ Detroit Public Schools Community District

80 Family Focused
★ Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan

82 First Steps' Negotiator
★ First Steps Kent

84 Honest Answers
How can you create systematic change within early childhood?

86 From Humanitarian Crisis to Community Model
★ University of Michigan-Flint

88 Hope Starts Here
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation contributes \$25 million to Detroit's early childhood initiative

FORTHCOMING

92 Featured Programs
A who's who with a bit of organizational philosophy

98 Publication Contributors
The voices behind the voices in this report



Child-Centered Approach

*Central Michigan University puts constructivism
at core of early childhood program*

Even at a university founded as a teacher's college in 1892, educators can often be dismissive of the early childhood development profession. After all, how hard can it be just letting children play when the real teaching begins in elementary school?



The early childhood experts within the College of Education and Human Services at Central Michigan University (CMU), however, would tell you that it's through these hands-on activities that children construct knowledge. And the importance of those building blocks cannot be overstated. Through the Child Development and Learning Laboratory (CDLL), as well as an emerging online early childhood major and a community engagement philosophy based on the findings of a Harvard pediatrician, CMU is pushing this child-centered philosophy outward in the areas of access, quality, and engagement.

Access to Exploration

Inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, which views each child as strong and resilient, CMU's CDLL provides a playful environment where children lead their own learning. For Margaret Desormes, the longtime director, the lab's inclusiveness is a far cry from her early teaching days when classrooms were separated into Head Start, at-risk, and tuition-paying children. "The tuition room was by far the biggest and had all the new toys," she says. "I knew I wanted to change that right away and mix those groups."

With 64 children in the mix, two-thirds of whom are Head Start, the teachers engage with children in their play, often asking questions to encourage critical thinking. These 3- and 4-year-olds choose between four different centers, which are four entire rooms named for indigenous trees, for their exploration and hands-on learning. The Walnut room has a science and technology focus. Children build with construction blocks in the Oak room, create art in the Maple room, and focus on dramatic play in the Pine room.

Considered a model program for its approach, Desormes, nevertheless, hopes to see

improvements within the program that will allow greater access to the community. "We've got this incredible space, but we'd like to go from four to five days a week because parents sometimes struggle to find Friday options for their children," she says. "We'd also like to develop an infant/toddler program, bringing the Reggio philosophy to that."

Though the town of Mount Pleasant isn't known for its racial diversity, the campus offers a setting for cultural exchanges. "We have many children of different nationalities, races, and religions," Desormes says. "Every year we have at least one child, and sometimes up to five, who do not speak English when they first arrive. And we always try to learn something from their languages."

In addition to granting learning access to CMU students (last year, an estimated 400 gained experience through various classes, observations, and practicum experience), the CDLL hosts the Powerful Children's Conference, funded by PNC Bank, offering free professional development for up to 150 regional providers.

Quality Outreach

Cheryl Priest is well aware of the path of the nontraditional student, having traveled it herself. An associate professor of early childhood education, Priest worked full-time through her graduate school days in pursuit of the doctorate that led to her academic post at CMU, her alma mater. Now, as one of the architects and the director of a new online education program, she's helping to extend the quality of early childhood development through the ranks of working folks who may not have the time or resources to attend a university in person.

Launched in fall 2017, the early childhood development and learning online major, or ECDL Online, offers bachelors' degrees, as well as the ZS endorsement for elementary education teachers. "This is truly CMU's core program, which we've modeled after the accreditation standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children," Priest says.

More than 40 students enrolled in ECDL's first run, and as of September, nearly 100 were working their way through the admission processes. Priest reports that many of them are assistant teachers in Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program, or Head Start, looking to become lead teachers. Supported by the CMU Global Campus program, the ECDL has far-reaching capabilities, ultimately improving the quality of early childhood education in many ways.

Time is always of the essence in the early childhood field, making the most of that window of time where brains are developing is crucial. "Yet the people supporting children and working with them in the trenches often don't have the tools of education and knowledge they need," Priest says. "I believe wholeheartedly that our online program can benefit anyone in the workforce through the enhancements of skills, competencies, and best practices. That knowledge gained could result in better opportunities for children."



Footprints: Preschool children lead their own learning in CMU's Child Development and Learning Lab, finding their footing in subjects ranging from science to the arts.



Community Touchpoints

In another initiative aimed at making exponential impact within communities, CMU is using Touchpoints to empower parents. Based on the research and teachings of T. Berry Brazelton, a pediatrician and Harvard professor, Touchpoints has brought revolutionary changes to the field of early child development through a better-practices' approach, finding a home in everything from doctors' offices to daycare and preschools. In short, it's a set of strength-based assumptions to help providers engage in relationships with parents.

"Touchpoints training helps providers to strengthen their relationships with families," says initiative director, Holly Hoffman, professor of early childhood development and learning. "It's helpful to remember that parents are the most influential teachers in any child's life. They are the first teachers."

In spring 2016, six early childhood faculty went to Boston for Touchpoints training. A couple months later, two representatives from the Brazelton Touchpoints Center trained 25 people on CMU's campus, including CDLL staff, providers from the community, and local leaders.

Embracing a Touchpoints philosophy can help leaders to reprioritize. In her first year of teaching, Hoffman recalls the advice of one speaker. "I know you're thinking about your lesson plans and how your reading area should look and maybe even drop-off and pick-up routines. I'm telling you, your energy should be spent on building those relationships with families. And if you make those positive connections, who cares what your reading area looks like?"

To begin shaping better communities within early childhood development, Hoffman is hopeful that CMU can become a Touchpoints training center, extending that philosophy to other parts of Michigan. "It's a truly interactive-based philosophy," she says. "It's not some sort of product that's going to help your child's math scores. Touchpoints builds a connection and a confidence so there's more belief in that child."

CHAMPIONS' PERSPECTIVE

ACCESS

Remove barriers for families

Create equitable learning opportunities

Provide resources leading to whole child development





Photo by Vincent Walter

Leveling the Learning Field

Reaching Michigan's most vulnerable populations

On November 10, 2017, Detroit officially launched the framework of Hope Starts Here, a robust early childhood partnership funded, in part, by a combined \$50 million from the Kellogg and Kresge foundations. And though a pair of \$25 million grants can go a long way in uplifting children throughout the city, it's the collective effort of funders and providers, as well as parents and educational partners that will pay dividends in healthier children and families.

At the Friday morning launch, Nikolai Vitti, superintendent of Detroit Public Schools Community District, said, "Detroit doesn't have an achievement problem, it has an equity problem."

With the goal of leveling that playing field, leaders of Hope Starts Here spent one year planning and listening, effectively looking at the barriers within the systems that could be holding families back. The next decade will see a coordinated effort of funding partners to break down silos and create stronger connections between early childhood, health services, and education.

How to better serve the underserved

Of course, Detroit doesn't have the market cornered on equity problems. Throughout Michigan, and the rest of the country for that matter, it's often the neediest of the needy who lack access to early childhood programs. Just ask Pastor Chris McCoy about everything he's seen working with children and families in Battle Creek. "I've been working with youth since I was a youth. They were just younger than me," says McCoy, now the executive director of New Level Sports Ministries.

In African American communities, churches have long been a centerpiece gathering place beyond houses of worship. Many of the marches and protests of the Civil Rights Movement came from

plans hatched in church basements. That larger sense of family often brings people together in discussions about early childhood issues.

The church connected to New Level Sports Ministries has been a beating heart within the Battle Creek community for more than 40 years. Preschool, after-school, and a host of early childhood services have informally marked its mission since its inception. "We had no paid staff for 16 years," says McCoy, who built the program around sports in 2001. "We just had the community of people. Some would offer to cook, others would offer to drive kids around."

Continued on next page →

Nkechy Ezeh (see spotlight on page 16) is well aware of the urban inequities. As a professor of education at Aquinas College she dug into data that showed 83 percent of children in Grand Rapids were not ready for kindergarten and discovered that only two of 10 children from certain neighborhoods had access to quality preschool.

Several “cream-of-the-crop” early childhood programs within the downtown area were unintentionally pushing children away from their neighborhood schools — and sometimes out of the system — forcing longer bus rides to lower-quality preschools. With a startup grant and some training from the Kellogg Foundation, Ezeh founded the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative in 2011.

The seven place-based centers within ELNC allow for parental choice and nearby access for children. “ELNC started because there was a gap,” says Ezeh, who is now exploring how to replicate the collaborative in other communities. “The model is working because we know how to hook it into other systems.”

Yet it took some pushing back against an inequitable system. “The U.S. is the most researched country in the world. We have all this research about what’s good for children,” Ezeh says. “But we never ask, ‘Who is not getting this?’”



Photo by Vincent Walter

Access Advocate: Nkechy Ezeh, founder of the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative, is focused on providing the neediest children in Grand Rapids with access to quality early learning opportunities and programs closer to their neighborhoods.



Photos courtesy of New Level Sports Ministries



“ Families are charged a \$50 fee for football, but that’s always been negotiable. Football helmets cost more than \$100, so that’s the best price in the nation. If someone needs a payment plan, they could pay \$10 a week for five weeks. If you cannot pay, you can volunteer. ”

—Chris McCoy, New Level Sports Ministries

Public school inclusion

Matthew Beresford, executive director of early childhood and elementary at Grand Rapids Public Schools, has coordinated efforts with Ezeh on the access front, trying to minimize the number of city kids falling through the preschool cracks. One particular point of inclusion in the last couple years focused on breaking down some silos. “Typically, preschoolers with special needs did all their learning in one building for the whole district,” he says. “They were passing many of their neighborhood schools to get their supports in that one location.”

After some national conferences and some heavy lifting within the district, Beresford figured out how to create some inclusion hubs that brought young learners together across the city. “The feedback from parents has been terrific,” he says. “The children who are typically functioning learn empathy and make friends, and the children with IEP’s [individual education plans] are hearing rich vocabulary around them, making other friends and given the same high-level expectations for learning.”

Beresford bristles at the notion of “at-risk” students. “It’s a term I push back on,” he says. “We’re all at risk for something. I like to frame it up as the promise these

children hold for the future. I believe we have kids in our classroom today that are going to Harvard, or MIT, and they’re going to do great things.”

Early learning access, one might argue, is a precursor to greatness. Kim Carter, superintendent of Battle Creek Public Schools, says inadequate state funding adversely affects the students most likely to be left behind. “When you’re educating a vulnerable population, there are many things that keep children from attending school,” she says. “It takes more resources to address truancy and chronic absenteeism to ensure children have access to a quality education.”

Working along Chandra Youngblood, director of early childhood education (see story on page 46), Carter believes preschool success translates into higher achievement in high school and beyond, even overriding the socioeconomic factors that do put students at risk. Still, leveling the playing field is more easily preached than put into practice. “In this community, we’ve seen a significant racial disparity based on our school choice policies,” Carter says. “That and other adverse policies can get in the way of creating equitable access to early childhood programs.”

City barriers, building renovations and great opportunities

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan is philanthropic service that helps other organizations make a positive impact on communities. In the early childhood space, the foundation manages the Head Start Innovation Fund, an \$11 million initiative designed to improve outcomes for children and families in the Detroit region. Part of their mission is to provide learning opportunities for the various Head Start programs throughout Detroit — from best practices to professional development strategies.

On the funding front, sometimes there's just not enough to go around. "There are not enough early childhood resources for all levels of income families in Detroit," says Kamilah Henderson, a senior program officer.

And even though with great funding comes great responsibility, a certain economic segregation may have hampered the recovery efforts of Detroit as a whole. Katie Brisson, vice president of programs, thinks coordinated efforts could go a long way. "One of our goals for 2018 is to better blend and leverage those funding streams together," she says. "Though I can confidently say that's a statewide issue we should be looking at."

When revamping early childhood in Detroit, for example, even with a \$50 million budget, the existing system in its entirety bears examination. For Kirby Burkholder, the president and social impact accelerator at IFF, that means looking at everything from racial equity to funding streams to the buildings that house preschool programs. Indeed, a primary mission of IFF is to fund nonprofits through real estate ventures.

"It's important for people to understand the issue of facilities," Burkholder says. "Detroit has a little bit of Stockholm syndrome around facilities. It's been bad for so long that the bar is set very low. People have essentially said, 'Well, it's just Detroit.' But that's not acceptable, right?"

Just as substandard housing, workplaces, and schools are unacceptable, so too are substandard opportunities for children and families. In 2018, Hope Starts Here turns a plan into full-fledged action. That big city revival, an early childhood effort that could be reflective of most any collaborative throughout Michigan, begins with the promise of better access.



Photo by Vincent Walter

Owner Operator: Monique Snyder, Brainiacs Clubhouse Child Development Center, meets with IFF real estate team members to talk about purchasing the early childhood facility she's now leasing.



“African-American and Latino children, and children from low-income families, are **the least likely** to attend **high-quality** early childhood programs”

Research Says

Photo courtesy of BHK Child Development

Over the last few decades research on brain development has shown that access to quality environments is imperative to young children's development. African-American and Latino children, and children from low-income families, are the least likely to attend high-quality early childhood programs and are the most likely to attend low-quality early childhood programs, which leaves them far less prepared to start kindergarten than their peers (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2015). Head Start reaches less than half of eligible preschool-age children, and Early Head Start

reaches less than 5 percent of eligible infants and toddlers (National Women's Law Center, 2015). Michigan has begun to address the issue of preschool access with the Great Start Readiness Programs for 4-year-olds. As the Hispanic population and other minor populations are growing in Michigan while the white population continues to decrease (Pendel, Gold, Treskon, & Fudge, 2017), it becomes increasingly important to ensure all children are receiving equitable access to high-quality programming.



Access Granted

Program: Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative

W.K. Kellogg Funding: \$5.55 million

Mission: Through training and building rehabilitation efforts, ELNC is partnering with neighborhood organizations in Grand Rapids, allowing the city's most vulnerable children to attend quality preschool programs close to home.

Champion: Dr. Nkechy Ezeh

A funny thing happened to Nkechy Ezeh on her way to law school some 30 years ago. Pregnant with her first child, relatively new to America, and far away from her native Nigeria, she ducked into the Grand Rapids Community College library one winter day. It was warm inside. Her eyes landed on a college brochure advertising the child development program. And she was hooked.

What began as some reading Ezeh thought would help with her own family turned into an academic passion. She never made it to law school. But she earned degrees in early childhood all the way up through her doctorate and taught preschool and held other positions in the field. Soon enough, she was teaching others at Aquinas College.

Perhaps that old desire to become a lawyer, an advocate for underrepresented children and families, led to her leadership position at the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative. Ezeh learned early the benefits of a collaborative learning system from her father, a Nigerian chief who met with village leaders twice monthly.

Ezeh parented her five children the way her parents raised her. And as she learned more about early childhood, she did it a little differently. And she became an advocate for the most vulnerable children in the city. Her half dozen thoughts to follow, in no particular order, shares her passionate perspective on early childhood.



Photo by Vincent Walter

Reading Ready: Nkechy Ezeh reads to children in one of seven partner organizations with the Early Neighborhood Learning Collaborative.



Neighborhood Numbers

Established in 2011, the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative used nearly \$6 million of funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to provide, expand, and sustain high quality early care and education in vulnerable neighborhoods in Grand Rapids.

The problem at hand. At that time, research showed



66 percent of families in the targeted areas were at or below poverty level.



55 percent of new mothers lacked a high school diploma.



80 percent of children failed to meet school readiness standards.

The ELNC addressed gaps in access to quality care, engaged parents and caregivers through support and education, and provided resources and technical assistance to existing organizations who were already building intentional preschool programs in the area.

ELNC's primary goal is to provide access by focusing on place-based child care where children gain entry to quality early education in their own neighborhood. In the early stages, staff went door-to-door to inform parents in the neighborhood of opportunities ELNC provided. Ezeh says they took the time to respect and listen to parents — the key stakeholders. "We asked, 'How can we support you? What does early childhood mean to you and what does it look like?' They told us exactly what they wanted. They wanted it in their neighborhood and small — home-like and intimate. They also wanted staff that looks like their children."

The turnaround. "The ELNC uses a collaborative system of leadership with a shared vision," Ezeh says. "From experience, I know that for any change to happen, we must give power back to the people. People have the inherent capacity to solve their own problems."

- In 2017-18, ELNC **funded 632 early childhood education slots**. To date, the program has served 1,812 students.
- Overall, ELNC has renovated and opened 32 classrooms, secured over **\$31 million for early childhood services** for vulnerable families, **created at least 50 jobs** within their targeted neighborhood.
- **100 percent of ELNC centers** met the organization's standards of quality, which include professional and qualified staff, culturally competent environments, and a place-based and family centered philosophy.
- All programs received a minimum **4-star QRIS rating**.
- **95 percent** of children in ELNC programs were assessed at "meeting/exceeding widely held expectations," the measurement used by Grand Rapids Public Schools to determine kindergarten readiness.
- ELNC supports parents through the EPIC (Empowering Parents, Impacting Children) Model, which provides a family coach to help identify and address barriers preventing them from meeting their basic needs and develop a family-centered social capital building plan.
- ELNC developed an intentional professional development strategy that targets and recruits potential teachers of color who encounter multiple barriers to a career in early childhood services.



Ending Economic Segregation

Policy Equity Group examines blended funding for fairness in early learning

Anyone who has ever managed multiple grants knows the many challenges inherent in coordinating funding to implement a high-quality early childhood program. Beyond the balanced spreadsheet, however, is the very real problem that similar at-risk children may have very different early childhood experiences based on the source of the funding.

Two adjacent early childhood classrooms funded by different federal or state programs could be

completely different in terms of resources like books and toys, and the credentials, experience, and training of the teacher in the classroom. Low-income children in the relatively well-resourced federal Head Start program learn from a highly qualified teacher in literacy-rich environments while next door, children receiving support through the state subsidy program may lack any substantial learning materials and have a teacher with only a high school diploma.

Jeffrey Capizzano knows something about government regulation and funding. After working at the Urban Institute to conduct policy-related research in early childhood, PK-12 education, and youth policy, he served as an early childhood policy advisor in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services during the Obama administration. He founded the Policy Equity Group to help empower socially conscious organizations by supporting how they conduct advocacy, research, and communications.

“I wanted to support organizations in the way they do advocacy, to ensure policy is informed by current practice and the realities in the field,” Capizzano says. “Policymakers should care more about practitioners because they’re the ones implementing policies on the ground. But they don’t. We’re trying to bridge the gap between practitioners and policymakers.”

In the early childhood funding world, separate means unequal. Capizzano says the differences in Head Start — a childhood development program — and the Child Care Development Block Grant — a program that primarily provides subsidies to off-set the costs of child care while parents work — illustrate the problem. “Those programs are separate and have different rules that impact the quality of the environment experienced by children. Even though they’re basically serving the same group of at-risk children, the regulations make the experience very different for children and the funding is very difficult to coordinate.”

Part of Capizzano’s work in Detroit has centered around the Early Head Start–Child Care Partnership model, a federal program designed to spread the benefits of Head Start throughout the child care community by placing Early Head Start slots in child care programs serving a high percentage of children receiving child care subsidies.



Photo courtesy of IFF.



Photo courtesy of Policy Equity Group.

“ Policymakers should care more about practitioners because they’re the ones implementing policies on the ground. ”

—Jeffrey Capizzano, Policy Equity Group

Through this program Head Start funding is combined with child care subsidy funding to provide a higher-quality early learning experience for children. “The child care providers must meet the Head Start requirements for Head Start-funded children within that center, but all the children would get some tangential benefits from the infusion of Head Start money,” he says. “That could be a more highly qualified teacher, better ratios, or just additional money that administrators could decide how to best use to support quality.”

Creative funding efforts help directors get closer to high-quality care. But unfortunately, says Capizzano, some of the rules within Michigan’s mixed delivery model system can be a barrier to quality. “One of the biggest issues in early childhood is the fragmentation of funding — the rules and regulations associated with the different funding streams create different experiences for children in different programs and make the funding very difficult to blend.”

Head Start helping hand

In 2013, Detroit, which had one of the largest Head Start grants in the country, was in danger of losing \$50 million in federal funding. The 2011 Head Start Act determined that Head Start programs not meeting high-quality standards should have to compete for the money.

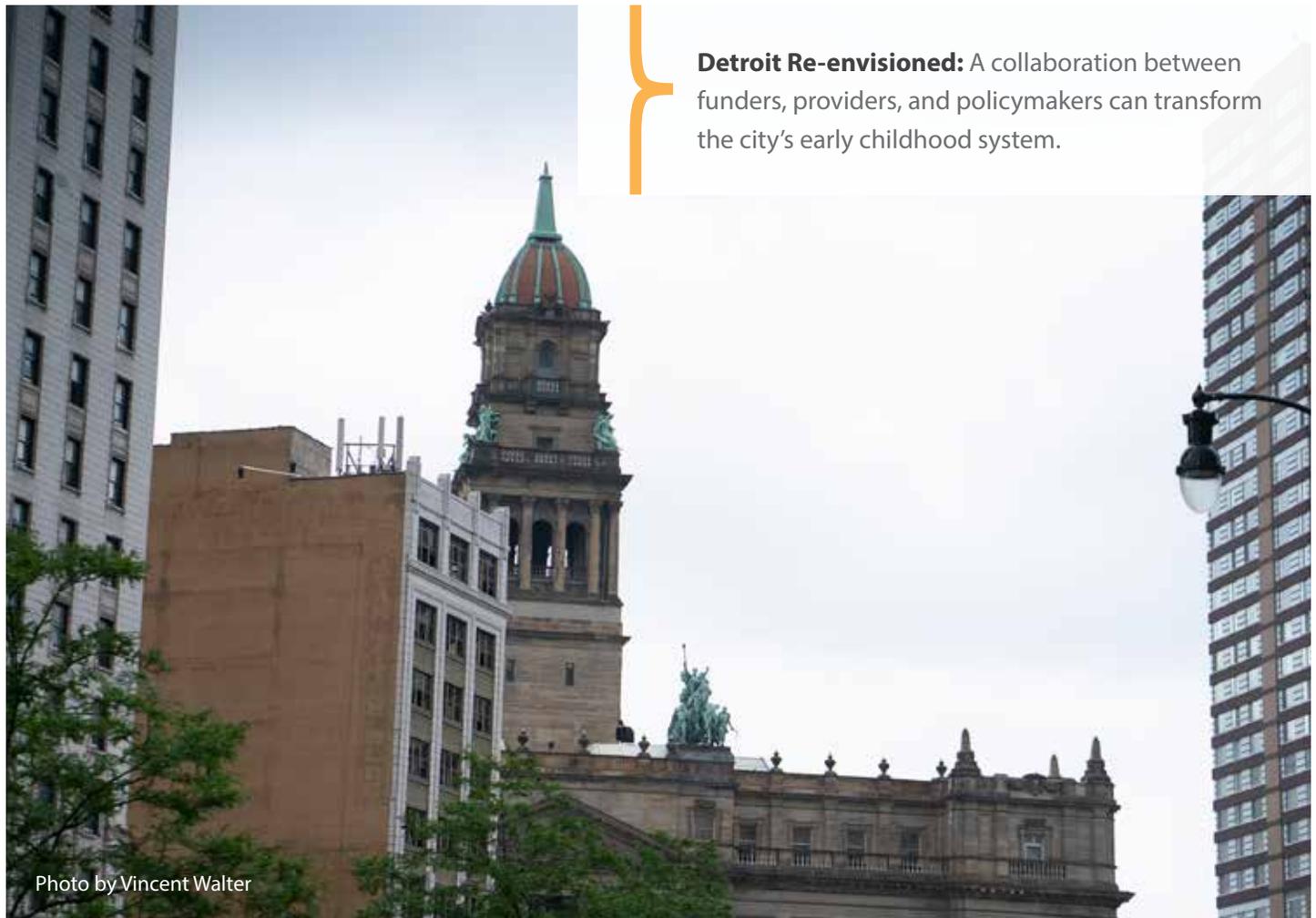
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation asked Capizzano to provide technical assistance in helping the delegated agencies compete for the grants. In his senior policy advisor role with the Department of Health and Human Services he helped oversee more than \$16 billion worth of federal programs. He knows his way around a grant application.

With Detroit Head Start funding in the balance, he recalls, "At community meetings, I started by saying, 'Okay, here's the opportunity. This is a pretty good chunk of money, but at the same time, you've got 1,600 regulations to comply with.' Ultimately there weren't many new entities

that wanted to apply, so I worked with delegates from the city, including Matrix, Children and Families, Starfish, New St. Paul."

Fortunately, with Capizzano's assistance, the organizations wrote effective grants while gaining a better understanding about where the administration was moving with Head Start. Best of all, they kept the money in Detroit.

These days, through the Policy Equity Group, Capizzano continues to consult with foundations and agencies about how they can use data to improve the quality of their programming. He also contributed to the *Detroit Head Start Educator Report*, which offers innovative ways to invest in teachers by increasing salaries, coaching, professional development and leadership opportunities.



Detroit Re-envisioned: A collaboration between funders, providers, and policymakers can transform the city's early childhood system.

Photo by Vincent Walter



“It’s time to go beyond braiding and blending to fund early learning.”

Research Says

Photo by Vincent Walter

Blending and braiding are frequently used approaches to pool funding for early learning, but they are very different. Most states promote and provide mixed models of funding that include revenue sources ranging from (highest-to-lowest): federal sources, state grants, and local sources, according to the National Institute for Early Childhood Education (NIEER).

Braided funding, which is often the only option for programs, requires significant coordination, tracking, and accountability reporting. Braided funding often leads to the segregation of eligible populations and forces a disproportional allocation of resources to meet designated stipulations for each funding stream. In contrast, blending involves pooling funds into a single pot, where programs can draw down funds to pay for all services needed for given populations. While blended funding strategies are more flexible and less complicated to administer, many funders still require programs to implement accountability reporting to ensure outcomes are achieved. And some funding streams are not allowed to be blended, due to concerns about supplanting. For this reason, many funders are only willing to invest smaller amounts to blended financing models.

To close gaps and ensure access for all, Michigan’s early learning industry needs to go beyond traditional grant-based models of braiding and blending. Public and private initiatives need to be incented to create innovative financing strategies to fuel Michigan’s undercapitalized early childhood ecosystem. “Because the majority of early learning programs young children attend are funded through parent fees and most parents cannot afford to pay more, it is time to take a serious look at a more effective way to fund the overall system of early learning in this country,” (U.S. DHHS & U.S. DOE, June 2016).

Innovative solutions are emerging in communities across the nation that are engaging collaborations among parents, employers, philanthropic organizations, as well as state and federal funding sources. Promising solutions include: shared services models (to offset operational costs, pool benefit offerings), interest-free sources of working capital for childcare program providers, and workforce tax credits to name a few. Working together across programs, systems, and communities we can finish preparing Michigan’s early learning nursery and begin nesting innovation to more equitably fund all programs that serve our youngest.



Through an Equitable Lens

Calhoun ISD uses critical self-assessment to better serve families and develop future teachers

For all the work to be proud about that essentially serves a greater good, early childhood champions remain ever vigilant about what's working and what's not working in regard to accessible programs. There's rest for the weary or resting on laurels.

"That's something we monitor very closely," says Erika Burkhardt, assistant superintendent of early childhood services at Calhoun Intermediate School District. "From our 2015-16 school year, we noticed the number of participating African American families was way down. So in 2017 we focused on specific communities to identify their needs and look at any unintentional barriers that make it difficult or unappealing for them to participate."

Fortunately, the number of African American families in the Calhoun ISD doubled in 2017. "We

spend a lot of time looking at the demographic data and making sure we're viewing our programs through an equitable lens," says Burkhardt, who points to current political climates and other factors that could keep families at bay. "Everything within the news, both nationally and locally, affects our families and how much they can trust."

Trust factors heavily into any field that is so dependent upon building strong relationships with families. That's true in towns a fraction of the size of Battle Creek and Grand Rapids, as well as communities seemingly less embattled than Detroit. To better inform, engage, and empower families about raising children, Burkhardt and her colleagues at the ISD work hard to build that trust.

Developing teaching leaders

An ongoing challenge throughout early childhood is finding and developing the next generation of teachers. Burkhardt reports they had to close one childcare center because they couldn't staff it. "Staffing is definitely a huge issue," she says. "We're trying to develop a pipeline of a diverse teaching staff through our career center."

High school students can take an early childhood class at the career center, even getting hands-on experience through the ISD preschool. As seniors, they can earn the child development associate degree, which would enable

them to be assistant teachers in a Great Start Readiness Program or a Head Start classroom.

Although the associate degree can be compelling, coordinated efforts with colleges are needed to keep the pipeline active. Burkhardt says the Miller College closing took the wind out of some folks looking to stay on the early childhood course. Even Kalamazoo is too far for some folks to get to, so emerging online programs like that offered by Central Michigan University (see story on page 4).



Photo by Vincent Walter

Winter Carnival: A mid-December 2017 gathering at the Calhoun Intermediate School District brought together families with early childhood providers for an evening of fun, prizes, and educational games.

Raising a Reader

Research has cited a “30 million-word gap,” or the lack of language children may be missing from homes without books or rich and frequent parent-child interactions, and possibly with too much television. The Calhoun ISD tackled that challenge with some assistance from a W.K. Kellogg grant.

Specifically, the Raising a Reader (RAR) grant was given to improve early literacy and family engagement outcomes in children ages birth to 5 in Battle Creek through the implementation of an evidence-based early literacy and family engagement program. RAR rotates bags filled with books into children’s homes on a weekly basis,

exposing children to over 100 books per year. Local implementers are trained in read-aloud techniques that stimulate early brain development and language acquisition. They also train parents and caregivers in how to engage in book-sharing with children.

In order to reach as many young children in Battle Creek as possible, including vulnerable or isolated families, the project serves children primarily through a system of services (Early Childhood Connections) as well as through a preexisting network of stakeholders who are committed to educating young children and strengthening families.

- Since 2011, Raising A Reader has been enjoyed by **over 8,000 children enrolled** in area child care centers, preschools, and Great Start Readiness Program classrooms.
- Pre- and post- RAR program family surveys in 2016-17 showed: **An increase from 20.9 percent to 38.7 percent of families who read to their children 15 minutes or more at a time;** A significant increase from 34.5 percent to 63.3 percent of parent/guardians who asked their child questions while reading a story to them; An increase from 45.1 percent to 73 percent of children asking questions about the book being read to them.
- **Students who participated in RAR and GSRP scored 3.675 points higher** on letter identification in the fall of their kindergarten year than children who did not have RAR and GSRP (2016-17 evaluation).
- The RAR classroom sets are constructed to reflect the children in the classrooms and to provide materials which introduce families to diverse cultures.
- Every GSRP classroom in the greater Battle Creek area provides the opportunity for students to participate in RAR.



Northern Exposures

The part and parcel challenges of serving families in rural Michigan

Location, often thrice repeated, may be everything in the real estate business. But it also plays a critical role in the early childhood world. Some of Michigan's most scenic landscapes, known for proximity to Great Lakes and treed wilderness stretching for hundreds of miles, present unique challenges in reaching families. Throughout the Upper Peninsula, as well as the northern Lower Peninsula, that lush land is simply home to fewer people.

A combination of creative funding streams and dogged determinedness help programs like BHK Child Development in the U.P. and 5toONE, a Great Start initiative in Traverse Bay, extend outreach efforts. Although single stoplight hamlets are not exclusive to northern Michigan. Consider Cedar Springs, a lumber town just north of Grand Rapids.

U.P. with families

Cheryl Mills, BHK's executive director, drives 60 miles to work each morning. Never mind the extremes of lake-effect weather that dump nearly 20 feet of snow every year on commutes and frigid temperatures that make Houghton one of the coldest cities in the country. A registered nurse who started in public health, Mills has spent nearly two decades with Head Start, bringing a decidedly two-generational approach to the sprawling area made up of three counties — Baraga, Houghton, and Keweenaw (hence the name BHK).

With 220 employees working at 16 sites, which includes nine schools, BHK covers a large swath of land. "We have about 2,500 miles of service area," Mills says. "From our farthest site south to our northern sites, it's probably about 80 miles."

That coverage calls for some creativity when dealing with certain state and federal regulations, including switching children from school buses to BHK buses to

break up the limited hourlong ride. "They wouldn't be served otherwise because there's no way their parents could afford to drive them to programs," Mills says.

A collaborative center that serves about one third of the eligible families in the area, BHK looks to connect families to programs at all levels. "We're trying to be bigger than Head Start because so many more people could benefit from the services beyond just the eligible-income families," Mills says. "Our philosophy is to promote universal school readiness through an active learning approach."

Lisa Schmierer, the BHK systems' navigator, utilized a W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant built around open access to help eliminate barriers to service. "We used 'welcome baby bags' to enroll families at the hospitals, or families could call in to register for home visits and developmental screenings," she says.

Traverse City startup

In 2010, conversations around economic development spurred the beginnings of 5toONE, which now provides children and family services throughout the counties of Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Kalaska. A tall order given the acreage. “We’re the biggest collaborative in the state land wise,” says Mary Manner, the Great Start coordinator. “It’s about the size of the state of Delaware, but we only have 175,000 people in a highly dispersed population.”

Manner, who came to early childhood as a trained zoologist and became the director of education at the Great Lakes Children’s Museum, has long seen early childhood through a holistic lens. “It’s thinking about things from a system’s perspective and taking a multigenerational approach,” she says. “The museum work was fun because it involved parents and children, not just a curriculum aimed on a certain goal. We created environments where kids, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and siblings all learned together.”

That system focus, beginning with buy-in from the business community alongside the solicitation of family ideas, was critical in developing a model not often addressed by federal grants. In what Manner refers to as “zero-dollar and knowledge-based startups,” the centers are built for sustainability through collaborations with existing organizations. The first center, established at a church in Lake Ann, opened as a playgroup in 2014. 5toONE now offers nine neighborhood hubs for family activities.

“We have geographical isolation, as well as social isolation, with a lot of poverty hidden by the grandeur of the beaches,” Manner says. “If you drive along the coastline or around Torch Lake it’s hard to imagine that people are living back in the woods in trailers patched up by duct tape. It’s important for us to develop universal programs that meet the needs of all people in our community.”

Kent County outskirts

When MaDonna Princer stepped into her new role as executive director of Head Start for Kent County a couple years ago, she learned about the rural Cedar Springs, sinking through the cracks of a system primarily focused on Grand Rapids. “During a sequestration, when all Head Start programs had to make blanket cuts across the board, they cut some of the out-county services because those are the most expensive to run,” Princer says. “Cedar Springs is our poorest per capita area in Kent County. Since our mission is to serve the neediest of the needy, I really didn’t feel good about not having services up there.”

With unique school partnerships, they revived the programs for 3- and 4-year-old children in Cedar Springs. Part of the solution came by redistributing some of the “oversaturated resources in the city. “We have to be responsive to the access needs of the community,” Princer says. “There were three programs in Grand Rapids and all of us were struggling to find enough kids. So we ask ourselves where else are we needed?”



67%

of Michigan counties are rural

Research Says

In general, rural families' economic and social characteristics differ from overall national and state averages. Poverty levels are often higher in rural areas while education levels are typically lower. Travel distances to employment opportunities, key mental, social, health, and educational services may be long. Sometimes these services are not available. Child care options and early childhood education opportunities are fewer and harder to access (Perroncel, 2000; Whitener, Weber & Duncan 2002). Yet, rural families possess such strengths as having the perception of neighborhood safety and

development of social competence through typical family interactions like eating meals together more often than urban families (Grace et al., 2011). Promoting the well-being of young children is particularly challenging in rural areas, and studying their unique characteristics is problematic for researchers, perhaps too far from isolated areas (Capizzano & Fiorillo, 2004). According to the 2010 Census, 56 out of 83 (67%) counties in Michigan are considered either mostly or completely rural. As such, many families are affected by rural environmental factors that should be considered by policymakers.

Honest Answers
What does racial
equity mean to you?



““ In this community, we’ve seen a significant racial disparity based on our school choice policies. That and other adverse policies can get in the way of creating equitable access in early childhood programs. ””

— Kim Carter,
Battle Creek Public Schools

““ Racial equity is removing all barriers, so everyone has a level playing field. In all our work, we are constantly taking steps to address anything we do through an equity lens. Sometimes it means taking a couple steps backwards because historically we may not have looked at things that way. ””

— Michael Ghareeb,
Kent Intermediate School District

““ Detroit doesn’t have an achievement problem, it has an equity problem. ””

— Nikolai Vitti,
Detroit Public Schools Community District



Charting a Path to College

New Paradigm for Education prepares students for long-range achievement

It's the first Friday in December and Ralph Bland leads a couple on a tour through the Detroit Edison Public School Academy. As they peek into classrooms for preschoolers, little ones uniformed in red shirts and black pants wave to Bland, the founder and president of New Paradigm for Education. Throughout the various stairwells of a building that was once a tomato processing plant in the city's Eastern Market, the words "COLLEGE BOUND" loom large — a not so subtle reminder of the ideal destination for every student — PK through high school senior.

One of six nonprofit charter schools within New Paradigm, Detroit Edison, established in 1998, serves as the flagship school. Granting access to families from all over the city, the academy is seeing a second generation of sorts as alumni enroll their own children and sometimes return as teachers. Those repeat customers, so to speak, say something to the quality education Bland espouses. And it's that community impact he may be most proud of. "That's testimony to the belief that we're doing things right," he says.

Incremental impact

Inside the gymnasium, Bland points out the revamped dock areas where trucks once unloaded millions of tomatoes. They added a second story to the building when they turned it into a school. Perhaps seeing how an industrial space could be converted into an educational home for kids in red shirts has sharpened Bland's eye and kept him on course for making a difference in his hometown. The college placement rates, national awards, and the working model in a half dozen Detroit schools speak to a sound working system.

The New Paradigm philosophy is built, in part, around the same discipline and camaraderie that led Bland to become a scholarship football player at Kentucky State. When he returned to Detroit, he tapped into that old teamwork as a young teacher, encouraging his first-graders to chant during a phonics' exercise. Now, with approximately 2,500 students in the charter school

network, Bland is hoping to both raise voices and "move the needle" on city-wide impact by reaching more students and families in the coming years.

Continued success is dependent on many factors that could turn any struggling classroom into a launchpad for greatness. "It's about talent, getting the right people on the bus," Bland says of the constant challenge of finding classroom leaders. "It's recreating the right culture that students can learn in and families can thrive in."

That culture is key, Bland believes, especially for children who, time and again, have not been put in the right circumstances to achieve. "Coming into a new culture can be difficult, but it's a change that has to happen," he says. "We try to provide a place where everyone can learn. We call it our tier learning system where students, parents, and teachers are all learning. It's just a continuous cycle."



Photo courtesy of New Paradigm for Education.

Single-Minded: From preschool through middle school, children in the New Paradigm for Education are intensely focused on going to college.

Great expectations

Bland used funding from W.K. Kellogg to strengthen the organization’s capacity to establish early childhood educational centers and provide more high quality educational options within the pre-kindergarten through 12th grade space in Detroit. Building on its own proven track record, New Paradigm has sought to establish a leadership pipeline for its schools and provide more high quality educational options for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

Detroit Edison Public School Academy (DEPSA), New Paradigm’s flagship offering, is a pre-K through 12 school that has become one of Detroit’s top performers with most of its 1,500 students meeting or exceeding proficiency on state assessments. After matriculating to the K-12 environment, their pre-school students have consistently outperformed their peers on norm-referenced exams.

model by opening additional schools, including a 1,500-seat pre-K through 12th grade school and an 8,350-seat Kindergarten through 12th grade school. To accomplish project goals, administrators participate in...

- Preplanning the opening of schools;
- Developing plans for an early childhood educational/health center for families;
- Providing quality pre-k through 12th grade educational programming in Detroit’s most underserved neighborhoods; and

Out of five, five-star programs in Detroit, as determined by Michigan’s Great Start to Quality program, only New Paradigm for Education has two schools. Both New Paradigm College Prep and Detroit Edison Public School Academy made that list.

High marks

■ From 2015-16 data: **63 percent of kindergartners** at New Paradigm College Prep met their individual growth target in reading; **60 percent of kindergartners** at Glazer Academy met math growth targets.

■ That early success is reflected that go beyond third grade. The M-STEP scores of 3-8 grade DEPSA students in the third to eighth grade **exceed Detroit and Michigan students in six of six grades in reading and two of six grades in mathematics.**



“Extra, Extra!”

The comprehensive and wraparound services that lead to greater access for families

To truly make changes that can have long-lasting community effects, the neediest of families need a boost in breaking the cycle of poverty. A good turning point could be securing a first-rate education for their children. As such, those families often need a nudge to simply learn about the schooling options available to them.

Within a two-generation approach that seeks to improve the lives of both children and parents, that may mean meeting folks where they live and

discovering what might be holding them back from signing up for preschool. The wraparound services, or extras, go the extra mile in securing those families with quality spots in programs. Transportation, early drop-off and after-school hours, even nutrition-rich breakfasts and lunches are some of the wraparound services that can get them to the table.

5toONE, the Traverse City based collaborative that's helping to deliver access over a large five-county area, has made a pediatrician available for health screenings at various playgroups in their neighborhood centers.

BHK Child Development in the Upper Peninsula, like 5toONE trying to serve fewer families over many miles, offers both transportation services and health screenings to families.

Calhoun Intermediate School District connects early with families through various "welcome baby" and home visits and offers transportation services to the playgroups that steer children toward preschool. They also partner with health agencies to provide checkups.

Community Action of South Central Michigan provides a slew of services for the entire family. A recent initiative encourages parents to drop their kids in a childcare center and take those few hours to attend classes in a GED program.

Grand Rapids Community College, with unique access to health professionals in training, offers additional support to children from future occupational therapists, nurses, even dental hygienists.

Head Start Kent County transports kids to preschool in big yellow buses and offers comprehensive two-generational coverage for families with various parent workshops.

New Harvest Christian Center offers a van to pick up children, especially important on bad-weather days in Battle Creek. The program is also developing a full-service kitchen.

New Level Sports has long provided drop-in care, even to give parents a break for a couple hours. They routinely pick up children from schools to give them afterschool care, homework tutoring, and a hot meal.

New Paradigm for Education has both preschool activities and an afterschool enrichment program, as well as other extras.

University of Michigan-Flint offers year-round, full service child care that's open from 5:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Partnering with the Eastern Michigan Food Bank, they provide healthy foods that are prepared on site and known to mitigate lead. Other partners deliver food that parents can take when they leave or have snacks on the weekend.

The United Way of Southeastern Michigan, intensely focused on empowering parents, gains access to families by recruiting from food banks and churches.

What 11 Michigan programs offer in the ways of wraparounds.



Early Head Start: Volunteering parents and teachers alike help jumpstart reading passions through the program offerings of the Community Action for South Central Michigan.

Photo by Vincent Walter

Enhancing community action

Community Action of South Central Michigan offers services across a lifetime — from getting children off to better starts to keeping senior citizens active. Sometimes they even combine those groups. “We have a foster grandparent program that brings those people into educational settings,” says Michelle Williamson, the CEO at the nonprofit.

From daycares to public schools, the seniors connect with the youngest of students, as well as teachers, in cross-generational exchanges that can result in remarkable learning outcomes. The seniors can also earn a stipend for the visits.

Shifting paradigms

Children at New Paradigm for Education (see story on page xx) have access to a nurse practitioner, a counselor, and a therapist in the Henry Ford Clinic. “The great thing about the clinic is they serve preschoolers, as well,” says Nancy Garvin, an early childhood specialist and director of school and community partnerships. “So kids can get their immunizations. They do care plans with parents and educate.”

Children get vision tested and can get glasses with or without insurance. New Paradigm tries to remove any stumbling blocks for parents that would inhibit their child’s ability to learn. “The health component in preschool is very important,” Garvin says. “It’s part of our foundation.”

Rapid developments

In the heart of the city, Grand Rapids Community College (see profile on page 54) provides early childhood care in a new, state of the art facility. Just as children's minds are developing rapidly, they're close to numerous campus professionals from multiple disciplines. "There's a dental clinic on campus, so we help make pathways for that," says JaneAnn Benson, director of the GRCC Preschool. "We have a nutritionist

available, as well as our culinary arts program. We are really pretty deep with resources."

Tapping into learning communities becomes a two-way street. "They also need those learning experiences," Benson says. "When you have nursing students who have only seen children who are sick, it's important for them to see typically developing children."



Photo by Vincent Walter

JaneAnn's Portal: In keeping with the nautical theme, the Laboratory Preschool offers JaneAnn Benson, director, a view into the children's playroom.





Access Summary

Recently, researchers and policymakers developed definition of access in term of early childhood: "Access to early care and education means that parents, with reasonable effort and affordability, can enroll their child in an arrangement that supports the child's development and meets the parents' needs" (Friese, S., Lin, V., Forry, N. & Tout, K., 2017). Within the definition are four indicators that can be measured to determine the access of early childhood programing for families, including

- 1) requires reasonable effort
- 2) is affordable
- 3) supports child's development
- 4) meets parent's needs.

Early childhood champions in Michigan are advocating and working to meet these four access indicators

1

From developing schools for children in their neighborhood to the creative scheduling of busses, program leaders are breaking down the barriers families have in getting their children to school and other learning environments with reasonable effort. Yet, between program locations and policies surrounding transportation, getting children to preschools remains a challenge in many geographic areas of the state.

2

While Head Start and Great Start Readiness Preschool classrooms are free to qualifying families, program administrators often use creative accounting to blend/braid funds for all-day care for working families. Other programs share the barriers to receive enough funding. Without equitable funding to make programs affordable for all families, there can be no other type of equity. Barriers to funding should be removed for programs that serve the most vulnerable children and families.

3

The existing programs support 4-year old development, but many Michigan early childhood champions talked about a gap in services for three-year old children. With the funding focus on preschool programing for the 4-year-old children, the 3-year-olds are left underserved. Yet, that year is arguably more important in supporting a child's development. The increase in language development and the number of brain synapses developing is greater in 3-year-olds than 4-year-olds.

4

Finally, multiple programs offer services for meeting parent's needs, including comprehensive wraparound services are offered by most community-based organizations. Michigan schools, from elementary through universities, also offer programing to support parents in meeting families' needs.



Photo by Vincent Walter

Access References

Bockstette, V., Gopal, S., & Wilka, M. (2016, May). Improving the odds: Seven principles for investing in early care and education. FSG. Retrieved from <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/25685/25685.pdf>

Capizzano, J., & Fiorillo, A. (2004). Young children and the rural information gap: The weaknesses of major data sources for examining the well-being of rural children. Mississippi State University: National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives.

Center for American Progress. (December, 2014). Why we need a federal preschool investment in 6 charts. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2014/12/09/102737/why-we-need-a-federal-preschool-investment-in-6-charts/>

Child Trends. (February, 2015). Preschool and kindergarten: Indicators of child and youth well-being. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/preschool-and-prekindergarten/>

Friese, S., Lin, V., Forry, N. & Tout, K. (2017). Defining and measuring access to high quality early care and education: A guidebook for policymakers and researcher (OPRE Report #2017-08). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Grace, C., Zaslow, M., Brown, B., Aufseeser, D., & Bell, L. (2011). Rural disparities in baseline data of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. In D. A. Williams & T. L. Mann (Eds.), *Early childhood education in rural communities: Access and quality Issues*. Fairfax, VA: Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute.

National Institute for Early Education Research. (2017). *The state of preschool 2016: State preschool yearbook*. Rutgers Graduate School of Education.

National Women's Law Center. (2015). Gaps in support for early care and education. Retrieved from https://nwlc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/08/gaps_in_support_for_early_care_and_education_june_2015.pdf

Pendel, R., Gold, A., Treskon, M., & Fudge, K. (2017). *Future of the Great Lakes: Michigan state facts*. Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/future-great-lakes-michigan-state-facts>

Perroncel, C. B. (2000). *Getting kids ready for school in rural America*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Spark Policy Center (n.d.) *Blending and braiding toolkit*. Retrieved from <http://tools.sparkpolicy.com/overview-blending-braiding/>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *American fact finder*. Retrieved from <http://factfinder.census.gov>

U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *A matter of equity: Preschool in America*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/early-learning/matter-equity-preschool-america.pdf>

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and U.S. Department of Education. (June, 2016). *High-Quality early learning settings depend on a high-quality workforce: Low compensation undermines quality*. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecl/high-quality-early-learning-settings-depend-on-a-high-quality-workforce>

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation. (November, 2017). *Factsheet: Estimates of child care eligibility & receipt for fiscal year 2013*. Washington, D. C.

Whitener, L. A., Weber, B. A., & Duncan, G. J. (2002). *As the dust settles: Welfare reform and rural America*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

CHAMPIONS' PERSPECTIVE

QUALITY

Support private and public entities to align systems, policies, and practices

Focus on “whole-child” development through culturally appropriate practices rooted in racial equity and community engagement opportunities

Ensure a healthy start toward school readiness and third grade success



Photo by Vincent Walter



Photo by Vincent Walter

Who's Ready for Whom?

*Perspectives on
kindergarten readiness*

Imagine having to boil down all the challenges within early childhood to one thing. Topping that list of challenges for many champions — practitioners and policymakers alike — would be the idea of school readiness. How do we collectively prepare children for a kindergarten experience that can jumpstart lifelong learning and lead to future success?

From early learning playgroups to Head Starts and Great Start Readiness Programs, the professionals in this field work tirelessly to prevent children and families from slipping through the cracks in the system. Creating access to quality programs is a good start. In 2017, Battle Creek Public Schools introduced a five-week summer program for preschoolers that's already proven successful in assessments (see profile on page 46). Likewise, Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) has sought to bring children into classrooms for full days of purposeful play in summer and winter (see profile on page 56). That play, in part, helps "children build a relationship with the school where they will attend kindergarten," says Matthew Beresford, GRPS executive director of early childhood and elementary.

Policy and reality

So how do you define kindergarten readiness? The short answer, says Jeffrey Capizzano, founder of the Policy Equity Policy Group in Washington D.C., is "every state has defined what school readiness is. Michigan has a set of early learning standards that children should know and be able to do a year before entering kindergarten."

Capizzano, who helped write the learning standards in Arkansas, believes a state's guidelines typically are broad enough to encourage ownership at the practitioner level. In Michigan, he says, the standards are characterized by social-emotional development,

motor development, cognitive development, as well as language and literacy.

"Although the definition of school readiness is defined broadly, it's important to talk about a 'whole-child' approach," Capizzano says. "Then there's the conversation around schools and if it's more important that the schools be ready for kids instead of the kids being ready for school. But I think both sides are important."

[Continued on next page →](#)

The Office of Great Start within Michigan's Department of Education (MDE) is tasked with early learning outcomes. "Our charge is essentially that all children, birth to 8 years old, and especially those in highest need, have access to high-quality early learning and developmental programs, and are entering kindergarten prepared for success," says Shulawn Doxie, special assistant to the deputy superintendent of P-20 System and Student Transitions.

It's an admittedly large charge for the state office and something Doxie says they address through close relationships with the Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy-born children, for example, fall outside the wheelhouse of the Department of Education. Those coordinated efforts, however, between health and education better address the "whole-child" approach that Capizzano and countless champions in the field often reference.

Though there could be a catch 22 whenever a statewide mandate tries to get buy-in at every level. "Frankly, it's tricky sometimes," says Kaitlin Ferrick, director of the Head Start State Collaboration Office. "Locally, there's a lot more authority and flexibility over definitions of school readiness."

Such local control is not the norm of other states like California and New York, at least from the perspective of Ferrick, who lived and worked on both coasts. "A lot of our money goes to intermediate school districts or school districts, and they distribute the funding," she says. "We offer parameters and guidance, and we're also responsible for monitoring. But they have a lot more decision-making power."

Through a 2016 pilot program, the Office of Great Start has made assessment tools available, including the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). With positive feedback from teachers, the programmers hope to develop and distribute more tools like the KRA.

Making the Case: Advocates from First Steps Kent, led by CEO Annemarie Valdez (center), share studies that show how successful early childhood programs lead to exponential benefits for communities.

Photo by Vincent Walter



Data driven

Yet it is the data that's driving many decisions, especially when it comes to measuring school readiness at places like the Kent Intermediate School District. "Along with the emphasis on third grade reading, kindergarten readiness is one of our two main goals," says Michael Ghareeb, director of early childhood education at Kent ISD. "There are four domains we really look at to see if children are ready, but there is some vagueness because we haven't had a consistent measurement to determine whether or not children are entering kindergarten with appropriate skills."

Whether it's the KRA, or something else, the assessment tools are important in determining directions for improvement. "We want to look at those elements where we're not doing well in and hopefully get better each year," Ghareeb says.

Simply put, the four domains, perhaps equal parts smarts and well-being, set the achievement bar. "We know kindergarten readiness is just as much social emotional and physical motor readiness as it is math and English," Ghareeb says. "Because they should be successful in those areas, but also ready to learn."

Bettering the odds for kindergarten success is the primary goal of Ready for School, which serves the communities of Holland, Zeeland, and Hamilton, launched its program 10 years ago. Donna Lowry, MD,

president and CEO, applies her experience as a medical doctor to the healthy child and healthy family approach. In 2009, they formalized a definition of school readiness based on guidelines from MDE and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

"Then we synthesized the definition into something that's accessible to parents," Lowry says. "We followed that by asking parents of all incoming kindergarteners about the barriers that could keep their kids from being ready for school."

A half dozen years of trend data and maps have helped Ready for School identify the county areas with the highest concentration of children deemed not prepared for school. Through the DIBELS, they've been able to show a significant turnaround. Lowry says fewer than 50 percent of children were prepared for kindergarten a decade ago, whereas the figures in 2017 showed that 63 percent were ready.

In addition to defining readiness parameters, Ready for School has helped families eliminate financial barriers and navigate systems to better benefit from Michigan programs. The program's engagement initiatives (see story on page 80) have been particularly effective in creating community-wide change.

“ We know kindergarten readiness is just as much social emotional and physical motor readiness as it is math and English. Because they should be successful in those areas, but also ready to learn. ”

— Michael Ghareeb, Kent Intermediate School District

Social outcomes

For all the discussion of measurables, including the letters to numbers children should know by the time they're 5 years old, being simply ready to learn could be something less tangible. "I will tell you what a superintendent in Leelanau County tells me," says Mary Manner, the Great Start coordinator at 5toONE in Traverse City. "He wants kids who are kind, caring, and know how to share. He's says, 'We're teachers, we can do the rest.'"

Manner believes many parents resent the idea of kindergarten readiness as it may promote a "cookie cutter" mold for simply getting them into school. That could inhibit their ability to explore and develop in their own ways.

"As far as emotional and social needs go, essentially, children should be ready to be in a classroom with other children," Manner says. "They should be able to transition from one task to another and follow directions from an adult who is not their parents. It really has almost nothing to do with letters, numbers, and colors."

Just as being ready to learn can have positive long-term impacts, the opposite holds true in very measurable ways. A recent report from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy revealed that 32 million American adults are functionally illiterate. That's one in seven people.

Annemarie Valdez, executive director of First Steps Kent (see spotlight on page 84), has worked in the nonprofit world for two decades. In Detroit, she helped run one of the nation's largest youth employment programs. Working with other nonprofits, they focused on getting young people ready for the workforce through viable work experience.

Some of the companies interviewed the teens for "real jobs," requiring them to take English and math tests. "None of the kids passed," Valdez says. "We were all heartbroken, especially for the kids. I thought, this is too late. We've got to do this earlier, and if we don't, it's never going to end."

Those are the same markers — third grade reading and eighth grade math — that point to the achievement gaps within the education system, Valdez says. "If we start earlier, we can move the needle and turn that all around."

From standardized assessment tools that effectively measure the learning abilities of preschoolers to the training and resources that could better prepare their first teachers, the definition of school readiness remains open for examination and debate. As for improving the overall quality within early childhood, it's the first order of business.

Sleeping Beauties: Studies show that healthy births and quality infant/toddler programs help pave a path to kindergarten readiness.



“School readiness calls for shared responsibility between families, communities, early childhood programs, and schools”



Photo by Vincent Walter

Research Says

Consensus on what constitutes “all children start[ing] school ready to learn” has evaded researchers and policymakers since the objective was first put forth by the National Education Goals Panel in 1991. The topic of school readiness continues to garner attention as federal funding for Pre-K programs steadily increases. Investment in early childhood programs has had positive results, with data showing preschool-aged children’s math and literacy skills improved over the last 20 years (Child Trends databank, 2015). Although national efforts toward school accountability and standardized testing originally led to a narrowed focus on cognitive and language abilities, measurement of school readiness has shifted to include other developmental domains such as social and emotional learning and physical well-being (Blair, 2002; Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Clear links between early cognitive and language skills and later academic achievement have been established (Duncan et al., 2007; Jordan, Kaplan, Ramineni, & Locuniak, 2009; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman, & Nelson, 2010), but relationships between social and emotional development

in preschool and later school success are still being explored (Davies, Janus, Duku, & Gaskin, 2016; Denham, Bassett, & Brown, 2015; Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014). Kindergarten teachers in some studies placed greater importance on self-regulation and interpersonal skills at kindergarten entry than on academic abilities (Abry, Latham, Bassok, & LoCasale-Crouch, 2015; Hustedt, Buell, Hallam, & Pinder, 2018).

In terms of school readiness, stakeholders in the field of early childhood have called for shared responsibility between families, communities, early childhood programs and elementary schools (Child Trends, 2001; High, 2008; Pianta, 2007; Winter & Kelley, 2008). Researchers continue to ask not only if young children are ready for school, but if schools are ready for young children. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) suggests schools are ready when curriculum builds on prior learning, individual cultural and linguistic differences are considered, and early grade teachers have child development and early education training.



Learning for the Long Haul

Administrators focus on early learning initiatives of Battle Creek Public Schools

For visitors to Battle Creek, Michigan, there's no mistaking the looming presence of the public high school that's been part of the community for generations. The large pillared schoolhouse, erected in 1908 and remodeled in 2011, Battle Creek Central High School takes up a city block on Van Buren Street. For the city's youngest residents, success at BCCHS, or any school in town for that matter, often begins before kindergarten. It's the

potential of play-based learning that instills a love for lifelong learning.

Just down Van Buren at the Battle Creek Public School (BCPS) offices, Kim Carter and Chandra Youngblood share that long view on the possibilities of education. Carter, BCPS superintendent, and Youngblood, director of early childhood education, know that access to quality Pre-K programs can be terrific launching pads.

In with a ROAR

In 2017, Youngblood took the reins on a Battle Creek Summer Pre-K program called ROAR into Kindergarten. The ROAR, which stands for "Ready, On-Track, Active, Rising," provided a free, full-day, five-week program designed to get kids emotionally and academically ready for school.

Reaching more than 100 "rising kindergartners," ROAR made some noise right out of the gate, based on the DIBELS assessment (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). "Our students who attended the summer program scored twice as high as the students who did not attend," Youngblood says.

The early childhood focus is a critical component of the W.K. Kellogg \$51 million grant to strengthen BCPS, announced in May 2017. Without too much time to pull together the July and August program, Youngblood was both pleased with the results and eager to build on the success. "We had some community partnerships, but we didn't get to develop the community and parent involvement piece as much," says Youngblood whose doctoral work focused on that same subject.

Through marketing campaigns that include yard signs, flyers sent home through elementary students, Facebook, and the BCPS website, the administrators spread the word to families in many ways. Still, from an access perspective, Carter believes finding more of those "invisible families" can lessen the number of kids who show up for the first day of kindergarten without any schooling. "With all the strategies we have, we're still trying to figure out how we are still missing some children in this area," she says. "It's continuously thinking about what's going on in terms of creating equitable access."

Often, it's a matter of maintaining connections. BCPS made a deal with Head Start to take the 3-year-old children, so Youngblood only sees the 4-year-olds. "I've found that some families had to drop out because of life circumstances," she says. "So those kids' names don't come to me. Ideally, we'd have a list of families that didn't complete the year, so I could get to them earlier."



BC Champions: Chandra Youngblood, director of early childhood education, and Kim Carter, superintendent of Battle Creek Public Schools, know quality preschool options better prepare children for high school down the road.



Photo by Vincent Walter

Accentuate the positive

Once children are inside, that's where a play-based learning culture starts to take shape. "A positive school climate is really about ensuring that students feel safe, comfortable, and engaged in their environment," Carter says. "Implementing supports, programs, and instructional practices allow us to do that."

Additionally, Carter says they focus on practicing positive behavior support systems across schools. BCPS offers a behavior interventionist in every school building, as well as literacy tutors and principals with early childhood experience. "We make sure that our staff is trained to understand the challenges that students have so they can respond appropriately."

A teacher's challenges in a kindergarten classroom can be great. "The idea of school readiness has shifted," Carter says. "We absolutely want children to come in with key social and academic skills. However, if we're talking about universal access, then those cannot be barriers. How do we respond when kids don't have that?"

Much of the Kellogg grant will go to teacher training for supporting students with such diverse needs — from the kid who comes in with two years of preschool to the rambunctious child who's never been too far from home. Another thing Youngblood would like to explore through greater interaction with parents, who sometimes think it's better to keep a child from school because of potential behavior issues. "We need to shift that in the community," she says. "Those kids should be in preschool, so we can help them get ready, and put some supports in place. Even for the family."

From one child to one family to the community at large, Carter and Youngblood continue to work through challenges inherent in delivering quality experiences. Not the least of which, are "the resource issues that create a gap between racial and economic disparity and programming," says Carter. "That's one of the strengths of Battle Creek. We don't see these as school issues, but community-wide needs. And everyone takes an all-hands on deck approach."

Lansing Leaders

The Office of Great Start collaborates with early childhood programs throughout the state

For all of the local challenges facing early childhood leaders and practitioners in Michigan, every one of them, in some aspect or another, runs through the Lansing capital. There, at the Office of Great Start, which is housed in the Department of Education, champions like Shulawn Doxie and Kaitlin Ferrick help coordinate services from downstate through the Upper Peninsula. Much of their work seemingly revolves around discussions held with statewide constituents.

From city to state, those broader discussions are informative and instrumental in moving the needle on change. To further the various causes, the Office of Great Start convenes an advisory committee from across the state that includes providers, various early childhood stakeholders, and parent representatives.

Though much of their direct work is with the different intermediate school districts, Great Start has helped to coordinate some shared services throughout the state. “If there’s work going on at the local level that the state may not be involved with, we can play a role in coordinating agencies together to ensure that everyone is working toward the same goal,” says Doxie, special assistant to the deputy superintendent of P-20 System and Student Transitions.

Additionally, through their work with places like the BUILD Initiative, a consortium of private foundations intent on improving early childhood outcomes, the Office of Great Start furthers collaborative work that can make a difference. “Over the last few years, there’s been a lot more focus on the quality of early childhood programs,” says Ferrick, director of the Head Start State Collaboration Office. “We participate in a lot of learning tables, trying to learn from other states and adopt best practices.”

Capitol Building: With direct connections to policymakers, the Office of Great Start helps to establish quality programming throughout early childhood.



Photo courtesy of Kenneth J. Garcia via Visualhunt.com

GSRP beginnings

In 2013, the Office of Great Start engaged with stakeholders across Michigan to develop a comprehensive plan for achieving positive early childhood outcomes by focusing on the following areas: **leadership, parent education and involvement, quality and accountability, coordination and collaboration, efficient funding, and access to quality programs.** At the urging of Governor Rick Snyder, the Michigan legislature provided \$65 million in increased funding for the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), the state's preschool education for 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families. The legislature added another \$65 million in funding to GSRP in 2014. As a result of the \$130 million expansion:

- In 2015, **more than 37,000 4-year-old children enrolled in GSRP — a 61 percent increase** in two years.
- A **\$10 million designation for transportation** helped eliminate another roadblock for many low-income families. Now thousands of Michigan 4-year-olds have transportation access to get them to and from preschool programs.
- The number of **half-day preschool “slots” increased by 32,000**, more than doubling accessible spots for children before the expansion.

Governing guidelines

In 2016, State Superintendent Brian Whiston unveiled strategies to support his plan for Michigan to become a “top 10 education state.” The plan includes strategic goals to construct and sustain a P-20 system to educate all students for success and partner with employers to develop a strong, educated and highly skilled workforce. The action plan specifically calls on professional organizations to contribute by supporting the vision as well as collaborating with the Michigan Department of Education to ensure alignment and cohesion of the initiatives.

A report prepared for Governor Snyder by the 21st Century Education Commission in 2017 suggests that the state should continue to invest early in early childhood. In granting Michigan children access “to safe, quality, and affordable early childhood care and education that prepares them for long-

term educational success and supports whole-child development,” the report made several recommendations. Among those recommendations:

- Continue support of GSRP while better coordinating it with the federally funded Head Start program.
- Develop and retain of an early childhood workforce by addressing salary concerns, promoting professional development opportunities, considering loan forgiveness, and more.
- Enhance the quality of service through an improved coordination between systems, such as healthcare and school districts.
- Create an early learning outcome measurement system that could be used throughout the state (see below).

Data driven

With some assistance from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Office of Great Start is developing a state-level early childhood data system. The Michigan Coordinated Early Childhood Data System will support the submission, synthesis, and analysis of data needed to make informed policy decisions. Great Start administrators hope an early

learning data system will provide information on children across departments and programs, enabling the state to better understand the quality of care and education experiences of its youngest learners. The data, available to families, educators, researchers, and others, will support early learning improvements.

Good News Agent

Program: New Harvest Christian Center

W.K. Kellogg Funding: \$225,000

Mission: Converting an old newspaper building into a church-based early childhood center, the New Harvest Christian Center is building on its two current classrooms that serve 4-year-olds through the state's Great Start Readiness Program.

Champion: Pastor Ivan Lee

If these walls could talk, they might tell a million other stories first delivered from the longtime home of The Enquirer in Battle Creek. But on a cold December Tuesday in 2017, in rooms perhaps once reserved for reporters and copyeditors working furiously toward daily deadlines, two classrooms of 4-year-olds sing ABC songs and connect building blocks. For Pastor Ivan Lee, converting an old newspaper building into a church and an early child care center provides a smart start for traditionally underserved children, as well as a new beginning for himself.

For years, Lee made a living as a UPS driver, primarily delivering packages and news around the college town of Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Through his ministry at New Harvest Christian Church, he had also been delivering food and getting members of his congregation off to work. As he heard more about the lack of preschool options, especially for families of color, he threw his hat into the early childhood business.

"I'm feeling pretty good about what we're accomplishing here in this space," says Lee. "It's not just the childcare, but the community events surrounding that. We've hosted GSRP teachers from all over the county, as well as a National Hispanic Heritage Month event."

As the big building on Van Buren continues its transformation, contractors discovered large windows tucked behind bricks of a storage room. Beyond the new view of the Battle Creek River, those windows may represent a new way of approaching the early childhood field.

Photo by Vincent Walter





Photo by Vincent Walter

Ivan the Wonderful: Whether he's working to convert an old newspaper building into a church and early childhood center or laughing with kids in one of two Great Start Readiness Program classrooms, Pastor Ivan Lee is committed to achieving a greater good.

Here are four other things Lee has discovered.

1

The church helps us reach into the corners of the community a little deeper.

That helps us tremendously because I can just make the call out: "Hey, where are the 4-year-olds? I've got slots. They're free!" People get on the horn and start calling others. Before you know it, I've got calls coming in. It's just another access to children for us.

2

One of the first things I've noticed is how relieved families feel.

They don't have financial worries about putting their kids into a quality program. At the same time, they realize certain adjustments need to be made, like making sure kids are here between 8 and 8:30, so they don't miss reading time or something else.

3

Our model is a shared program. We share resources, so the center itself is not solely responsible for utilities and everything. That makes a big difference. I know there's more talk about shared services between agencies and that's something I can help with.

4

In the nonprofit world, you learn how to get other things to pay for what you need.

Let's say you're a grocery store. Maybe a certain line doesn't sell as well, but removing it impacts everything because people need it when they need it. So what pays for it? It's everything else that pays for it.

Adventures in Space

IFF addresses the importance of place in early childhood

In Detroit, a city recovering from bankruptcy and years of urban blight, abandoned homes and buildings dot many neighborhood landscapes. The city's rebirth is taking place through a commitment to real estate renovations. Within the early childhood realm, facility upgrades are centerpiece in the effort to improve overall quality.

"We fundamentally believe that facilities should reflect the dignity of people who are in them every day," says Kirby Burkholder, the president and social impact accelerator at IFF. "That's children, staff, board members, and constituents."

Burkholder says high-quality space is characterized by good indoor air, natural light, enough space to move, and a universal design that allows people of all abilities to access the building. As a nonprofit, IFF offers specialized real estate expertise in helping other nonprofits solve facility challenges. Within his work, however, he'd like to change the narrative, reframing the question of high quality early childhood education as a statewide issue. From urban to rural, and from perspectives ranging

from practitioners to parents to architects, IFF facility investments have helped build facilities from Detroit through Flint and into Traverse City.

In the preschool setting, Burkholder believes the environment is an additive. "It doesn't take away from the learning experience," he says. "Rather it is additive and important. Feeling good about being there contributes to a positive learning environment. And that helps take things to the next level."



Photo courtesy of IFF

Fixing funding

Whether they're operating Head Start programs or in-home daycares, the people caring and educating the country's youngest children are likely better acquainted with early childhood best practices than they're familiar with real estate markets. Still, survival in a nonprofit world makes them dependent on managing multiple grants. Applying all the rules to various to various grants can be prohibitive when trying to maintain high quality care.

Burkholder believes the broken nature of funding is one of the state's most pressing problems. "as you know, Michigan is one of the few states that sends money back to Washington D.C." he says. "If our organizing principle is that every child should have access to a high-quality seat in their neighborhood, then we need to look at the bifurcated nature of our delivery system. Unlike some other states, we have a long way to go for blended funding."

One Detroit project, with funding input from several entities, including W.K. Kellogg is helping to turn around Detroit's Regent Park. Larry Johnson, executive director of LifeBUILDERS, worked with IFF to turn Tracy Macgregor Elementary School, a former abandoned Detroit Public Schools, into a high-quality Head Start program operated by United Children and Family Services (UCFS).

"People were selling drugs out of here and there was abandonment and blight all over the place," says Johnson, who has helped to positively impact youth and families in the community for 13 years. "There was no place for kids to play and we were tired of watching Detroit neighborhoods fall into despair."

The Head Start with UCFS, led by Roxanne Campbell, an early childhood champion, opens in August 2018. The facility includes three Early Head Start classrooms for babies and toddlers zero to 3 years old, two Head Start classrooms for children 3- to 5 years old, a kitchen, a parent room, and a teachers' lounge.

Robin Toewe, director of real estate services at IFF, speaks to the importance of IFF's partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. "In improving facilities of early childhood providers, IFF always want to work with provider, not for them," she says. "It takes more IFF staff time to have thoughtful and patient conversations with providers about about what to prioritize. Kellogg understood this, providing funding to complement a facility improvement grant program between IFF and another funding partner."

“We fundamentally believe that facilities should reflect the dignity of people who are in them every day. That's children, staff, board members, and constituents.”

—Kirby Burkholder, IFF

New Lifelines: Larry Johnson, executive director of LifeBUILDERS, helped create a new home for Roxanne Campbell's Head Start program in Detroit's Regent Park.



Photo by Vincent Walter

From blight to build

Aided by funding from W.K. Kellogg Foundation, IFF seeks to improve the quality of the early childhood education in Detroit by conducting real estate assessments of early childhood education centers and sharing findings and recommendations with stakeholders. This project supports a framework for moving families, participants, leaders, stakeholders, funding programs, and communities towards an organized system of early childhood education — a system where all parties are part of a continuum whose purpose is quality, efficiency, and success for all. IFF's quality early childhood system initiative focused on three components:

- strengthening the current system through advocacy and capacity building
- facilities improvement and growth, and
- new state-of-the-art centers.

IFF in action

- IFF **identified a core stakeholder group** for regular dialogue and communication to promote and inform the effort. This group included philanthropy, CDFIs, banks, business, government, and sector experts and leadership.
- IFF worked with **10 center-based early childhood providers who manage 86 sites in Detroit**. As part of this initiative, IFF conducted: tours of child care facilities to understand and document key issues, facility assessments to evaluate conditions, feasibility assessments to determine the providers' true financial capacity, and lease contract reviews to highlight opportunities to enforce and/or modify leases to support high quality facilities.
- IFF **viewed 34 early childhood facilities** under the scope of work through direct site visits, market scans, and direct RES consulting engagements. They found the majority of sites exceeded the provider's financial capacity to purchase or renovate the space. In

IFF's initiatives

- Assist nonprofits in the field of early childhood to improve their management and financial capacity, so they can grow to serve more families and children. This includes identifying funding and financing opportunities that will help build balance sheet assets as well as community assets that focus on families, so that future growth can be driven by the early childhood education field itself.
- Support and help to develop advocacy initiatives that will bring about the work of combining different programs and their revenue streams on all levels of government.
- Improve the economic and physical condition and status of a large number of child care centers throughout Detroit in a compressed time period, to coincide with the economic development in Detroit and to support working parents.
- Establish several large state-of-the-art early childhood centers that will focus on Detroit families and will serve, teach, and educate children and families. These centers will serve infants, toddlers, and 3- to 5-year-olds, and provide after-school and summer programs. As beacons in their communities, these centers will convey that children are a priority in community development.

addition, many sites were too small to accommodate four to six classrooms, which is IFF's minimum recommendation to meet families' needs and achieve the economies of scale necessary to be financially viable.

- They **completed geospatial GIS mapping** to move beyond anecdotes and provide tangible data regarding attendance patterns by site to inform long-term planning regarding location(s).
- They shared **findings and recommendations from the real estate assessments with early childhood providers** individually and then aggregated to share with the stakeholder groups.
- IFF helped **implement recommendations, including overseeing facilities improvements**, participating in meetings with early childhood funders to discuss facility planning and confirm requirements, and meeting with various landlords and child care partners to address facility issues to prioritize and agree on action items.



“High quality environments lead to higher achievement.”

Research Says

Photo by Vincent Walter

Structural quality characteristics of an environment in an early childhood setting include features like classroom sizes, materials, toys, furniture, lighting, décor, and health and safety features (Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997). The structural quality characteristics are easier to observe and influence using regulations than are process quality characteristics, which consist of ongoing activities and interactions in the child care environment that impact children directly (Fulgini, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo, & Lynn, 2009). These characteristics can be used to predict and influence process quality characteristics like teacher-child interactions (Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2000). Structural and process quality characteristics combined make up the overall quality of a program. We also know that higher

quality early care and education leads to more positive, longer lasting outcomes for children, and that there are larger effects for children from low-income homes (Geoffroy, 2010).

It's important for all children to attend high overall quality early care and education, but this is especially true for children from families in which the parents have low-educational attainment. Overall quality child care can help prepare children to do well in school through high school (Vandell et al., 2010). Attending poor overall quality child care has the potential to set children on a less positive trajectory (Pinto et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to provide equitable high overall quality early care and education for young children.



No Child Left Inside

C.A. Frost Environmental Science Academy instills passion for outdoor education

A Grand Rapids' mid-December Monday is greeted by the first good snow of the season. Not too messy on the streets to cancel school, so this snow day is open at the appropriately named C.A. Frost Environmental Science Academy. For its youngest pupils, the preschoolers bundled up in coats, hats, and mittens, any day warmer than a 10 degree wind chill means time spent exploring the great outdoors. Today's activities include tossing around shovelfuls of snow before romping through the woods with teachers.

Next door to the Blandford Nature Center, which offers 143 acres of woods, meadows, and streams, C.A. Frost puts students from every grade — PK through 12 — in touch with an environmental laboratory. On their excursion, children look for

animal tracks in the snow and examine various fallen branches and pine cones while chatting with classmates and teachers about their discoveries.

"In the last two years we've done a lot of professional development on natural teaching and learning," says Matthew Beresford, executive director of early childhood and elementary at Grand Rapids Public Schools. "C.A. Frost is our flagship school for outdoor education because of its location, but it's supported throughout the city using local parks and greenspace. With three classrooms next to the nature center, kids can hike into the pine trees. There's also an outdoor classroom that they're in every day as much as they are indoors."

Nature's course

Four-year-old children are curious about nature. With questions beyond the blueness of sky, they look eagerly to the changing seasons to comprehend the world around them. It's that curiosity that drew Beresford to the early childhood field. Not long after a six-year stint in the U.S. Navy aboard a San Diego-based aircraft carrier, he began using his telecommunications' training to install fine electronics in the movie-theater rooms of million-dollar homes along the Michigan lakeshore. Often young children, amidst the apologies of mothers, trailed and peppered him with questions about his tools and the wires he pulled from behind the walls.



Photo by Vincent Walter



Winter Mentor: Matthew Beresford discusses an outdoor art project with a couple of preschoolers.

Photo by Vincent Walter

Beresford enjoyed these potential “lightbulb learning” moments with kids. Alongside a desire to have a greater impact on the world than what high-quality sound systems can offer, he considered the career change. “Suddenly I knew what I was going to do with my G.I. Bill,” Beresford says.

Fast forward through a few degrees and work in schools and Beresford is now in a leadership position in GRPS, reflecting on the lessons learned from the season’s first snowfall and the possibilities of investments in early childhood. “We’ve got 48 preschoolers who laugh and learn in the woods at C.A. Frost,” he says. “We take care to remove any barriers, so all kids can get outside and play. It’s healthier and we’ve got the research to prove it. The

parents like it because it helps to build some hearty kids.”

As for potential generational changes for children and families, Beresford is happy to be in a city of burgeoning collaborative work where the leaders “play nice in the sandbox.” The various programs have come together in the last five years,” he says, knowing they’re stronger together with the same outcomes in mind. “We know you’re going to get a return of \$7 for every dollar invested in early childhood. I think Grand Rapids definitely gets that.”

Bundled Up: Unless it's really really cold, children get outside to wander and play for at least an hour a day at the C.A. Frost Environmental Science Academy in Grand Rapids.



Photo by Vincent Walter

GSRP in the GRPS

The Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), a state-funded, income-based program, has been instrumental in effectively helping more families gain access to quality early childhood programs. Beresford believes this is truly an equity piece that could help the neediest kids in the city. “We know four-year-old children in the suburbs are often engaged in different activities, from sports to summer family vacations,” he says. “That’s not the story for most of the children we serve.”

Beresford would like every child within GRPS to have at least one year, ideally two years, of preschool learning before kindergarten. “But that takes some sustainable funding in the three-year-old space and the state is not there yet,” he says. “That’s definitely our highest local gap, the 0 to 3 childcare space.”

Still, with every child they can reach, a positive school climate — both indoors and out — enhances the quality of education. For Kate Lara, the GRPS director of early childhood, it’s about literal and figurative building blocks. “Looking at that natural curiosity and initiative, we build on that love of learning,” she says. “Setting up that foundation for school success is a big part of our climate.”

All the better if the climate should take the children outside. The outdoor classroom is not the sole commodity of C.A. Frost in Grand Rapids. “Anyone can look at Google Maps for the nearby city parks,” Beresford says. “What a liberating freedom being outside can be for a child who struggles sitting on an alphabet rug, staying on his letter A. When you take him outside for the read-aloud, he’s able to pull some grass, or crunch some leaves beneath his feet.”

“What a liberating freedom being outside can be for a child who struggles sitting on an alphabet rug, staying on his letter A. When you take him outside for the read-aloud, he’s able to pull some grass, or crunch some leaves beneath his feet.” —Matthew Beresford, Grand Rapids Public Schools



“Let the kids
play outside!”

Research Says

Photo by Vincent Walter

It is widely documented that daily contact with nature improves children’s social, psychological, academic, and physical health. Natural play spaces have many direct benefits on a child, such as improved cognitive skills, increased creativity, refined interaction with adults, reduced attention deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms, and reduced stress and aggression (Cosco, 2005; Kellert, 2005). However, today’s children and families,

especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minorities, increasingly have limited opportunities to connect with the natural environment. Children living in urban areas experience environmental inequality of overexposure to pollution and underexposure to nature and green spaces (Downey, 2005; Strife & Downey, 2009).

Honest Answers

How do you create a
positive school climate?



““ Having a positive school climate means children, families, teachers, and community members want to be in your space. They want to come to school and see it as welcoming place to learn. They also want a voice in decision-making processes. ””

— JaneAnn Benson,
Grand Rapids Community College

““ One of the first steps to a positive school climate is focusing on the individual of not just families and students, but also staff. By learning what everyone needs, you can focus on change. I’ve learned it’s not a field where you can say, ‘I’ve got this positive school climate thing down.’ There are new challenges every year. ””

— Erika Burkhardt,
Calhoun Intermediate School District

““ A positive climate is a place where you feel safe in school and can learn to grow as a person. The environment should be an additive, not taking away from the learning experience. ””

— Kirby Burkholder,
IFF

Building Early Learning Communities

Program: United Way for Southeastern Michigan

W.K. Kellogg Funding: \$2.1 million

Mission: By engaging parents and supporting Early Learning Communities, the United Way for Southeastern Michigan hopes to increase kindergarten readiness within Detroit from less than 50 percent to 80 percent.

Champions: Jeffrey Miles and Dr. Lisa Sturges

It goes beyond a village. To dynamically uplift children and effectively empower Detroit families to make generational changes requires a city-wide effort. With both state and national support. Anyone working in early childhood, from providers to funders to teachers to trainers of teachers, can benefit from a diverse perspective to further the cause. At the United Way for Southeastern Michigan, Jeffrey Miles and Lisa Sturges work shoulder to shoulder, each blending their unique expertise for the greater good.

Miles, director of innovation and early childhood, brings professional experience and a perspective from his time at the Michigan Public Health Institute in Lansing. "We're trying to find and include more data from parents and providers about the impact we're seeing," says Miles. "Literacy, for example, is a primary focus of the United Way. When we think about that, as well as digital literacy, we can empower parents and providers to drive their children's success."

Sturges, the Early Learning Community (ELC) program manager, has significantly broadened her own perspective that started with a school focus and has shifted to a funding and community view at the United Way. "By focusing on Early Learning Communities," she says, "we're looking at one piece of the system, which is improving quality." Through the Bib to Backpack program, a multifaceted strategic plan to better prepare Detroit children for kindergarten, the United Way funds Early Learning Communities while providing them with technical support. The spaces also promote parent empowerment, offering support groups, workshops, and lending libraries at no cost.

Through the Bib to Backpack program, a multifaceted strategic plan to better prepare children from Greater Detroit for kindergarten, the United Way funds ELCs while providing them with technical support. The spaces also promote parent empowerment, offering peer-to-peer groups, workshops, and lending libraries at no cost.

United Front: Jeffrey Miles and Lisa Sturges lead the Early Learning Community efforts at the United Way for Southeastern Michigan.



Family-focused funding

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the United Way for Southeastern Michigan hopes to improve kindergarten readiness within Detroit through targeted parent engagement and support of neighborhood ELCs. Using a parent and provider engagement strategy developed in 2015, Bib to Backpack strategy reinforces the message that education begins at birth, and that all adults in a child's life have the power to make that child better prepared for school.

The United Way launched ELCs in 2008 to support early child development and school readiness in low-income communities in Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland counties. ELCs historically have had three guiding purposes, including:

- Promoting and supporting positive caregiver-child relationships and early child development learning through training and technical assistance to the adults who care for them;

- Building a well-equipped workforce of all providers — center-based, home-based and family, friend and neighbor providers (FFNs); and
- Empower parents to understand and expect high quality early care and education.

The project is part of a system-level effort to ensure children ages 0-5 years will be ready to learn, support families and caregivers in nurturing children's development, and strengthen communities through promoting children's well-being. "As we look to increase the quality of care, our ELCs work with all provider types," Sturges says. "We consider caregivers by the role they play in a child's life, including parents, grandparents, and guardians; unlicensed providers, which could be paid or unpaid; licensed home providers; and licensed center providers."

ELC findings

- In partnership with six **ELC hubs** run by neighborhood service organizations, United Way collaborates to engage parents and caregivers in increasing knowledge, skills, and best practices for early learning and child development. ELC training follows an evidence-based curriculum developed by HighScope Educational Research Foundation.
- Overall, approximately **4,300 individuals** of different provider types enrolled in the Early Learning Communities in 2016. The largest group (2,220) included staff, administrators, and owners of childcare centers.
- Overall, **caregivers received 14,316 hours of early childhood development training** during the three-year grant.



FEAST Forum: The Oakland Family Services offered Feeding, Eating and Succeeding Together, or FEAST, as part of a four-part nutrition series in one Early Learning Community. Participants discussed healthy ways to develop relationships with food and problem-solving scenarios on better dinnertime dilemmas, such as picky eating, mealtime tantrums, and refusal to eat.



Grand Opening

Early Childhood Learning Laboratory on campus becomes heartbeat of the community

In the end, JaneAnn Benson, director of the Early Childhood Learning Laboratory (ECLL) at Grand Rapids Community College, got nearly everything she and her colleagues wanted from the multi-purpose facility that opened in January 2017. In 15 years of planning, she was often the only early childhood person at the table, yet her input with contractors and the architect helped deliver a building design that fits perfectly with the college's education and care goals.

That persistence led to the state-of-the-art facility. "We really wanted to create a hub of excellence

for early childhood that people in the community knew had a heartbeat," she says. "It's also a place of professional development."

A heartbeat in the middle of the city campus has been a gathering place for other professionals in the early childhood community, as well as a site for press conferences and various board meetings. On-site classrooms give students insight into the field while providing hands-on experience in the lab. The access to the college campus gives families certain wraparound services (see page 32) that only enhance the quality of that education and care.

Much of the Grand Rapids' environment is reflected in the interior design of the ECLL. The river images, rocks on the wall, even the portholes that visitors can peer through to classrooms, help to inspire the children's curiosity about nearby nature. The good lighting and immediate access to an outdoor playground further blend the building's form and function.

"A big part of our work is to support all the missions of the college," Benson says. "As an open-enrollment school, we have dual-enrolled high school students, as well as someone in their late 60s for credentialing. Our goal is to meet all students where they're at, which mirrors what Grand Rapids looks like."

Given its name, mission, and location, the ECLL at Grand Rapids Community College is a thriving component of the city. It provides learning and work experience for students and high quality early childcare for residents. It's an important mix. "We have students' children, as well as children from downtown doctors and lawyers and middle-class families, says Benson. "We're about

50 percent families who would fall under those most vulnerable populations and 50 percent dual-income families, or families above the threshold of poverty."

Additionally, the new space provides an inviting meeting room to convene the programs from the community. "We work closely with First Steps Kent, who's doing a lot of work around programming," Benson says. "We've tried to really hard to keep our ear on community needs. Not just to fill it, but to become a partner at the table."

“We really wanted to create a hub of excellence for early childhood that people in the community knew had a heartbeat. It's also a place of professional development.”

— JaneAnn Benson, Grand Rapids Community College



Photos by Vincent Walter

City Center: The Early Childhood Learning Laboratory at Grand Rapids Community College sits in the middle of a vibrant campus.



Built to thrive

Grand Rapids Community College used more than \$2 million in W.K. Kellogg Foundation funding to build a laboratory preschool on the campus. The goals of the project: to increase high quality early learning opportunities; offer shared services with family, friend, and neighbor care; and create a hub for community early learning partnerships through the development of the ECLL.

The program builds capacity for educational services designed to propel vulnerable children to succeed. The ELCC's Collective Learning Project responded to community input that informed the vision for the construction of a new preschool that serves as a central location for expanded access to early childhood educational services for a broad range of learners.

For 40 years, GRCC's Child Development and Education Department and Lab Preschool has been an influential force in west Michigan's early childhood system. The ELLC has been awarded a five-star Quality Rating from the State of Michigan and accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, signifying the program meets the highest quality standards to support the optimum development and education of children.

A primary function of the ECLL is to serve as a real-world laboratory for college students enrolled in GRCC's Child Development and Education program. Through this pathway, students gain experience working with children in the preschool while earning a degree or certification. Students go on to become directors, teachers, paraprofessionals, and aides at child care centers and public school systems.

Funding takeaways

- W.K. Kellogg Foundation funding helped build a new learning laboratory, which in turn increased access for children, families, teachers, and caregivers served in a state-of-the-art building that inspires learning.
- Two more classrooms, one funded Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) and an Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative grants, serve 16 children. The other, an Early Head Start classroom, serves the city's most vulnerable families.
- Approximately 200 college student use the building each week for course work and hands-on experience. They can apply best practices learned here in GSRP, Head Start, private preschool, and other early learning programs after graduation.

Quality Summary

High-quality early childhood education has lasting positive effects on later academic achievement, as well as social, emotional, and physical well-being. The effects are magnified when children come from challenging socioeconomic backgrounds. Early childhood program quality should be addressed via an ecological approach that includes multiple contexts and all domains of development.

For champions in this study, several dimensions of early childhood program quality are integral to the work they do: training, recruiting, and retaining a highly qualified and diverse workforce; preparing preschool children for elementary school in several developmental domains; and creating physical environments that foster healthy development.

According to the Michigan State Board of Education's *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten* (2013), a "definition of a single set of *Quality Program Standards* does not imply that every preschool/prekindergarten classroom in Michigan will or should look the same. A variety of curricula, methodology, and program implementation strategies are required to meet the needs of the diversity of children and to provide choices to meet families' goals and preferences."

To meet the needs of diverse families, several grantees recognized the importance of **diversifying the teaching workforce** of early childhood educators. In an educational setting where teachers do not mirror the diversity of their students, the quality of instruction

can suffer, and children can experience discontinuity between their home and school environments. A notable component of diversity specific to early childhood education is recruiting males to the field; many of the male champions in the study got into early childhood via a career change.

Many of the grantees who were interviewed echo confusion over a definition of **school readiness** that is debated at the national level. Many people who were interviewed recognized the need to include developmental domains in consideration of school readiness, with a particular focus on social and emotional development, an area traditionally omitted in measures often used for accountability and assessment. The necessity of taking a "whole-child" approach to school readiness was forefront for many in the study.

Environment as the *third teacher* is a Reggio Emilia philosophy that was apparent in conversations with champions in the study. Many identified finding and designing a high-quality space for young children as the first step in addressing community-level needs.

Structural quality characteristics of an environment in an early childhood setting include features like classroom sizes, materials, toys, furniture, lighting, décor, and health and safety features (Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997). Combined with process quality characteristics, higher quality environments lead to more positive, longer lasting outcomes for children (Geoffroy, 2010).



Quality References

- Abry, T., Latham, S., Bassok, D., & LoCasale-Crouch, J. (2015). Preschool and kindergarten teachers' beliefs about early school competencies: Misalignment for kindergarten adjustment. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 31*, 78-88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.01.001>
- Blair, C. (2002). School readiness: Integrating cognition and emotion in a neurobiological conceptualization of children's functioning at school entry. *American Psychologist, 57*(2), 111-127.
- Carlton, M. P., & Winsler, A. (1999). School readiness: The need for a paradigm shift. *School Psychology Review, 28*(3), 338-352.
- Child Trends (2001). *School readiness: Helping communities get children ready for school and schools ready for children*. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/school-readiness-helping-communities-get-children-ready-for-school-and-schools-ready-for-children-2nd-printing/>
- Child Trends Databank. (2015). *Early School Readiness*. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=early-school-readiness>
- Cosco, N. (2005). Environmental interventions for healthy development of young children in the outdoors. Open Space Conference 2005, Scotland. Retrieved from <https://naturalearning.org/environmental-interventions-healthy-development-young-children-outdoors>
- Davies, S., Janus, M., Duku, E., & Gaskin, A. (2016). Using the Early Development Instrument to examine cognitive and non-cognitive school readiness and elementary student achievement. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 35*, 63-75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.10.002>
- Denham, S. A., Bassett, H. H., Brown, C., Way, E., & Steed, J. (2015). "I know how you feel": Preschoolers' emotion knowledge contributes to early school success. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 13*(3), 252-262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X13497354>
- Downey, L. (2005). Single mother families and industrial pollution in metropolitan America. *Sociological Spectrum, 25*, 651-675. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732170500256633>
- Duncan, G. J., Dowsett, C. J., Claessens, A., Magnuson, K., Huston, A. C., Klebanov, P. ... Japel, C. (2007). School readiness and later achievement. *Developmental Psychology, 43*(6), 1428-1446.
- Eggum-Wilkens, N. D., Fabes, R. A., Castle, S., Zhang, L., Hanish, L. D., & Martin, C. L. (2014). Playing with others: Head Start children's peer play and relations with kindergarten school competence. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 29*(3), 345-356. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.04.008>
- Fulgini, A. S., Howes, C., Lara-Cinisomo, S., & Karoly, L. (2009). Diverse pathways in early childhood professional development: An exploration of early educators in public preschools, private preschools, and family child care homes. *Early Education and Development, 20*, 507-526. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409280902783483>
- Geoffroy, M., Cote, S. M., Giguère, C., Dionne, G., Zelazo, P. D., Tremblay, R. E., & Seguin, J. R. (2010). Closing the gap in academic readiness and achievement: The role of early childcare. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 51*, 1359-1367. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2010.02316.x.
- High, P. C. (2008). School readiness. *Pediatrics, 121*(4), e1008-e1015. doi:10.1542/peds.2008-0079
- Hustedt, J. T., Buell, M. J., Hallam, R. A., & Pinder, W. M. (2018). While kindergarten has changed, some beliefs stay the same: Kindergarten teachers' beliefs about readiness. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 32*(1), 52-66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2017.1393031>
- Jordan, N. C., Kaplan, D., Ramineni, C., & Locuniak, M. N. (2009). Early math matters: Kindergarten number competence and later mathematics outcomes. *Developmental Psychology, 45*(3), 850-867. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0014939>
- Kellert, S. (2005). *Building for life: Designing and understanding the human-nature connection*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.
- La Paro, K. M., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). Predicting children's competence in the early school years: A meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(4), 443-484.
- Phillips, D., Mekos, D., Scarr, S., McCartney, K., & Abbott-Shim, M. (2000). Within and beyond the classroom door: Assessing quality in child care centers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15*, 475-496. doi:10.1016/S0885-2006(01)00077-1
- Phillipsen, L. C., Burchinal, M. R., Howes, C., & Cryer, D. (1997). The prediction of process quality from structural features of child care. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 12*, 281-303. doi:10.1016/S0885-2006(97)90004-1
- Pianta, R. C. (2007). Preschool is school, sometimes: Making early childhood education matter. *Education Next, 7*(1), 44-49.
- Pinto, A. I., Pessanha, M., & Aguiar, C. (2013). Effects of home environment and center-based child care quality on children's language, communication, and literacy outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 28*, 94-101. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2012.07.001

CHAMPIONS' PERSPECTIVE --- COMMUNITY

Engage communities to ensure equitable design of programs

Implement federal, state, tribal, and local policies more effectively

Support community-wide efforts for healthy starts, school readiness, and third grade success



Photo by Vincent Walter



Photo by Vincent Walter

Listening for a Change

*How hearing what families have to say
builds better programs*

Hearing what someone has to say in “normal” times is tough enough. In times of political discontent, however, listening with empathy and a willingness to respond appropriately is even more critical. Early childhood providers bring an openness to work every day — hearing the concerns of parents and guardians at drop-off and pickup times, interacting with teachers and staff to ensure quality programming, and being ever attentive to those young voices in their care.

Systematic change at community and state levels begins by soliciting feedback from the traditionally underrepresented, or those people often not heard from. In helping launch Hope Starts Here in Detroit, early childhood champions connected with families through more than 300 listening sessions. In Grand Rapids, Spanish speakers representing the burgeoning Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (ELNC) knocked on doors in specific neighborhoods to better understand their community needs. And Ready for School used potluck lunches and street fairs to convene members of its community for listening and recruitment opportunities.

Parental input

Some 18,000 Detroiters helped shape Hope Starts Here, the multimillion dollar plan to revitalize early childhood in the city. Over the course of a year, surveys collected at public gatherings and through social media tools provided voices from families to help co-create a program that could forever change early childhood education in the city.

Nikolai Vitti, superintendent of Detroit Public Schools Community District (see profile on page 78), knows the importance of community buy-in when it comes to Hope Starts Here. “We recognize that if you’re going to positively impact a child’s life — academically, physically — you have to have a relationship with their family,” he says.

Soliciting feedback from within a community can undo some of the mistrust that comes with being ignored.

“One thing I’ve learned about vulnerable families is that if you neglect them long enough, even if you arrive with a new shiny object, they won’t come,” says Nkechye Ezech, founding director of ELNC, acknowledging that families have seen various Head Start programs open and close in their neighborhoods. “So walking the ground, we make sure to have authentic people. When we canvas in a Latino neighborhood, our ‘natural helpers’ are Latino families.”

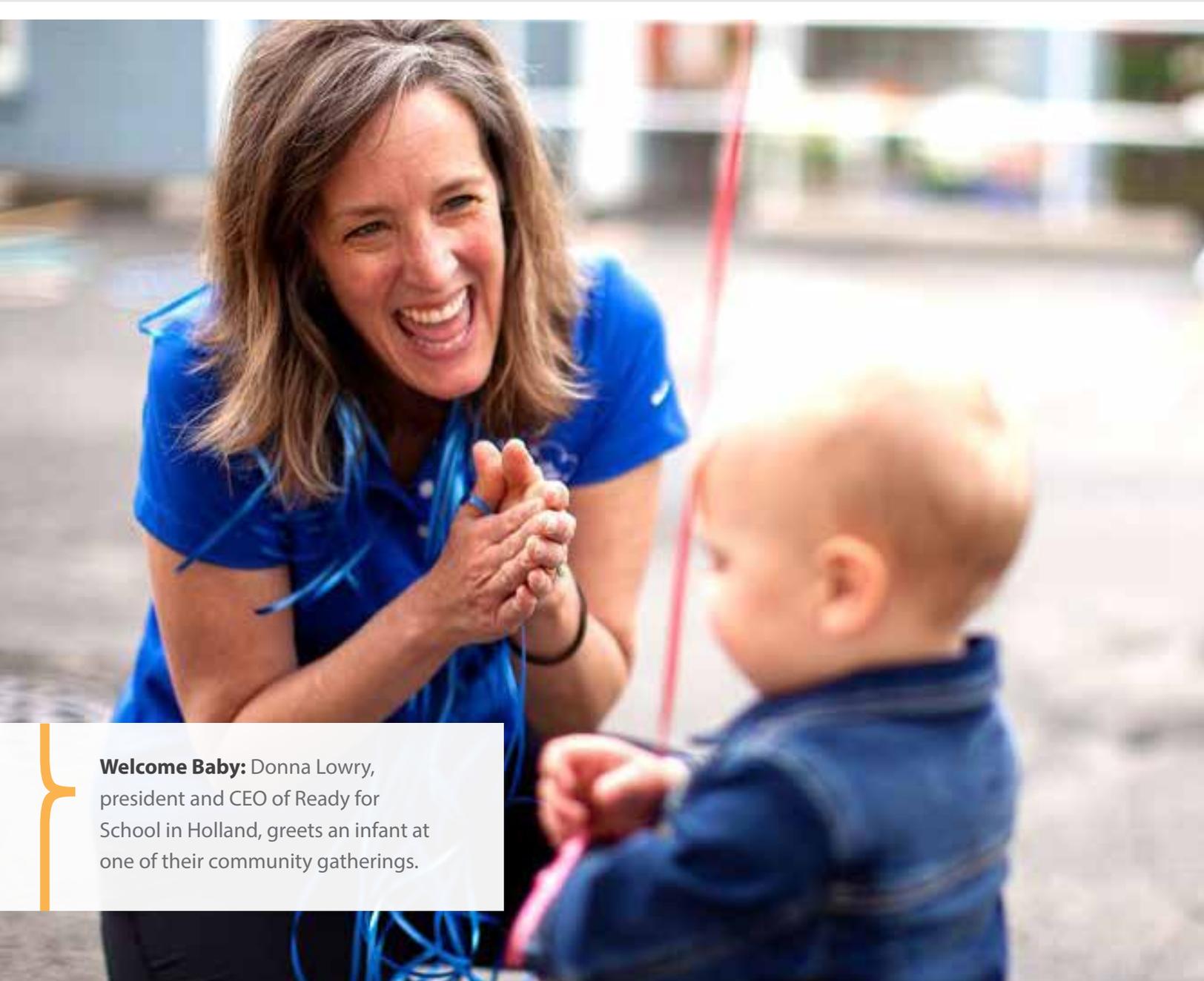
Beyond alerting families to new preschools, Ezech believes listening informs programming. “We ask people what early

[Continued on next page →](#)

childhood means to them and what it should look like," she says. "Ultimately, they're the ones who told us they wanted preschools in their neighborhood."

Ready for School has dropped into specific neighborhood playgrounds in Holland, Zeeland, and Hamilton with potluck lunches to connect with families. In addition to recruitment initiatives, the data gathered helps inform area school districts about vulnerable populations. "We've gone from 43 percent kindergarten readiness in 2008 to 63 percent readiness in 2017," says Donna Lowry, MD, president and CEO.

Listening, of course, is a two-way street. With no plans to stop at a 63 percent success rate, Lowry is sharing their data and best practices at the regional level. She sits at the table of Talent 2025, a regional workforce development entity made up of 100 CEOs. Informing business leaders about the family expense of early childhood, as well as the financial challenges for anyone trying to make a living in the field, pushes the needle toward systemic change.



Welcome Baby: Donna Lowry, president and CEO of Ready for School in Holland, greets an infant at one of their community gatherings.



Photo by Vincent Walter

Bridging Gaps: Programs like BC Pulse and First Steps Kent help providers navigate early childhood systems in Battle Creek and Grand Rapids, respectively.

Resource sharing

Most anyone can be trained to listen better. For program funders like the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and system navigators like First Steps Kent (see spotlight on page 82) and BC Pulse (see profile on page 76), there can be no adequate response without first hearing from the community.

Annemarie Valdez, executive director of First Steps Kent, says her team has bolstered their listening skills through trainings with the National Equity Project out of Oakland, California. To further the training, they teach volunteer parents the techniques, enabling them to facilitate listening sessions with other families.

“We truly need to hear from parents all over to find out what their issues are, rather than guessing at them,” says Valdez. “Or even worse, telling them what their issues are.”

Through their work with Detroit early childhood providers, program managers at the Community Foundation can effect change. Much of that comes from learning about what those providers do best. “Often, when we put the lens on lower-income environments, we might say, ‘They don’t need that. They just need the basics.’ And we don’t realize we’re making these assumptions,” says Kamilah Henderson, a senior program officer, who points to unique incentive programs of one Head Start program.

“New St. Paul has designed a really beautiful way of connecting with their teachers,” says Henderson of things like health fairs and parties to celebrate teacher outcomes. “It shows them that they’re valued and it’s a place they could work for a long time.”

For Kathy Szenda Wilson and Maria Ortiz Borden, the co-executive directors at BC Pulse, nothing can replace the benefits of listening when trying to tailor specific solutions. Though they often help organizations implement evidenced-based solutions, they realize what works somewhere else may not work in Battle Creek. “Sometimes really smart people come up with a great solution that doesn’t fit the population we’re serving,” Borden says. “So then you realized you should have asked that population.”

With their focus on systems, Wilson wants to engage program leaders around capacity and advocacy issues. How can communities invested in early childhood make things bigger while maintaining quality? “How can we all understand what advocacy looks like?” she asks. “What does education look like around different bills and laws that are going to be passed in the legislation?”

New beginnings

Just as that legislation helps set a course for children, the program leaders working directly with families are ever-mindful of their dynamic needs. Although challenges vary by location, the lessons learned are worth sharing at a state level. For administrators and program directors off the beaten path and not so far from cities (see story on page xx), listening to families is critical to helping them succeed.

For Mary Manner in Traverse City, that means establishing neighborhood centers across a large, five-county area that maintain consistency in early childhood philosophies. “The basis for all of our work rests on involving parents at all levels of decision-making,” says Manner, the Great Start coordinator. “They’re involved in the meetings, part of the discussion, and are the problem solvers. We provide support for helping them to identify the needs of families.”

Those community touchpoints inform much of the programming at Head Start for Kent County, too. “We can write procedures and believe we’re doing the right

things, but if that’s not the perception of the people we’re servicing, then we need to know that and address it,” says MaDonna Princer, executive director.

Akin to all the listening is the relationship building with families, a daily practice at BHK Child Development. “It seems best to go into any relationship with strengths first,” says Cheryl Mills, executive director. “Starting there, we work with goal setting and ask questions about how we can partner with parents to be successful as families.”

From better relationships to family-centered programming, community change can begin one child at a time. For those committed to making monumental impact in early childhood, those possibilities emerge by asking others what they think.

“The basis for all of our work rests on involving parents at all levels of decision-making. They’re involved in the meetings, part of the discussion, and are the problem solvers. — Mary Manner, 5toONE ”





“Making systematic change calls for an all-hands approach from early childhood providers, and community leaders.”

Research Says

Photo by Vincent Walter

New ideas and approaches for building community engagement embrace the act of engaging (bringing people and communities together) and the product of engagement (the spread of new knowledge, practice, and solutions) to improve access and quality of early care and education for all children. Both the acts and products of engagement must be reciprocal and mutually beneficial; where partners engage in mutual planning, implementation, and assessment of programs and activities (Fitzgerald et al., 2015).

In Michigan, 57 percent of children under 4 years old are raised in households with both parents working, which underscores the demand for high-quality childcare (PSC & CRC, 2014). Lasting systems' change cannot be achieved without engaging parents in the development of solutions for assuring high-quality care and a stable, educated early childhood workforce.

Parent and community engagement must be a mutually beneficial endeavor. Strategies must help families and fuel community action to establish local solutions to critical early childhood needs by equipping parents with information to engage with employers and state policymakers to bring about systems change.

Michigan's Great Start to Quality (GSQ) provides tools, resources, and technical assistance to 54 collaborative

organizations and 60 parent coalitions throughout the state (www.ecic4kids.org). Collaboratives are leading approaches that include Strengthening Families programs, parent cafes, ABLEChange planning initiatives, and various forms of parent-community partnerships.

However, working families experience challenges that impede their own engagement in local early childcare networks, including time constraints, transportation access, and their own mindsets about how they and their children will benefit from change initiatives. Childcare providers can help communicate the true costs and benefits of quality early childhood as a key portal to involve and educate parents.

Facilitation of local neighborhood centers and parent networks, which are part of the state's GSQ initiative, could be broadened to include local providers, businesses, and higher-education programs to collaborate and provide joint professional development opportunities that include both parents and providers. Parent networks can be supported and encouraged to identify areas of parenting education that would be helpful and meaningful to them. Additionally, higher-education early childhood programs could work more closely with local providers to design and deliver programs.

Navigating a System of Systems

BC Pulse helps Battle Creek programs work smarter

Professionals in any field learn how to work smarter over time. Through trial and error, they discover efficient work practices within a single system that helps them to get the job done. But too few of us, perhaps, ask about how that job aligns with the larger system.

A kindergarten teacher, for example, might learn that one of her students is distracted from learning because he's hungry or not getting enough sleep because of problems at home. In that case, early childhood is butting up against notions of healthcare, as well as social welfare. The team at BC Pulse are asking programs in Battle Creek to consider the bigger picture. In meeting with these champions, they're strategizing options for collaborative work that might make the systems more negotiable.

Upstream possibilities

Kathy Szenda Wilson and Maria Ortiz Borden, the co-executive directors at BC Pulse, are well-acquainted with the uphill battle of nonprofits. In 17 years as a funder, including work with W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Wilson says, "at some point I realized we couldn't fund our way out of the problems we were seeing in the community."

Borden, who worked on the front lines of programs helping women and children, became frustrated about what seemed like band-aid solutions. "When I worked in the domestic violence field and started to see the children of the parents come into the same shelters, I wanted to go upstream," she says. "I needed to focus on shifting systems to better serve families."

Listening to families and the people working with them, as well as building community throughout the various sectors, defines much of BC Pulse's work. "We're facilitators of building an early childhood system," Wilson says. "It involves building capacity that understands systems, connecting people to each other, and building those relationships. It's also identifying need for changes within the system and targeting the resources to actually fix things."

BC Pulse is working with community programs to help them understand the conditions of the systems in place. Through data analysis and the design of action models, program leaders are led from cause and effect to potential solutions. They also seek to build a variety of partnerships within the community — from folks working in healthcare, law enforcement, business, education, and more. Wilson and Borden believe it takes that collective variety of professional eyes to address problems in early childhood.

Collaboration Counselors: Kathy Szenda Wilson (in glasses) and Maria Ortiz Borden encourage early childhood leaders to step outside of their silos and comfort zones, examining the systems at large.



Photo by Vincent Walter

Taking BC temps

In promoting an effective and equitable early childhood system in Battle Creek, BC Pulse works to increase coordination, accessibility, quality and responsiveness through facilitation of cooperative planning. Since their

beginnings, the organization have led to cultural shift within the community because of strategic coaching and a call for mutual accountability.

The following numbers illustrate the rising tide in Battle Creek when it comes to systems' work.

- BC Pulse strives to develop authentic partnerships for systems change. In 2015-16, **57 organizations** engaged in system building work.
- BC Pulse helped create **a shared position with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Calhoun Intermediate School District** to improve access and coordination within the systems.
- **235** new individuals have engaged in system building efforts.
- BC Pulse developed **a network of 17 organizations** committed to shared goals, practices, and a learning community in support of children's social and emotional development.
- BC Pulse helped develop a **shared services alliance and hub** to improve high quality care and education.
- **63 percent** of BC Pulse participants reported being more effective at gathering input from families and other residents about the problems they are facing and possible solutions to inform their organization's strategic planning.
- **74 percent** of the participants said they are now more likely to share information about system conditions with individuals in the community who are best positioned to address those conditions, and **79 percent** said they are now more likely to coordinate actions with other stakeholders, groups, and efforts in the community.
- **81 percent** of participants said they now have a greater awareness of how health, early childhood, and family economic security factors influence one another.

ABLE Change

Through integration of the ABLe Change Framework for collective problem solving, BC Pulse has developed a cross-sector network of over 25 organizations and 35 residents. Their collaborative work helps remove barriers that limit all children birth to 3rd grade in Battle Creek from having equal opportunity to experience health,

safety, early learning, economic security, and nurturing care. The ABLe Change Framework is a research-based process developed by Michigan State University created to empower parent voices in the early childhood system. The framework allows for parent perspectives, feedback, and leadership to be key drivers of systems change.



In Partnership with Parents

Detroit Public Schools Community District administrators know children succeed when families succeed

Turning around an entire school district is a tall order. That's especially true in a place like Detroit, still recovering from a financial crisis and what has sometimes felt like an exodus from public education in the city. In rebuilding the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCA), administrators are taking a three-pronged approach, based on best practices proven elsewhere, to restore quality education from preschool on up.

Nikolai Vitti, superintendent of DPSCA, returned to his hometown in 2017 after helping turn two low-performing districts in Miami and Jacksonville, Florida, into high-achieving ones. Working alongside

early childhood champions like Sharlonda Buckman, assistant superintendent of family and community engagement who previously led the Detroit Parent Network, Vitti has focused on a first-year mission to better engage with parents as partners in the educational process.

In March 2018, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation furthered that cause with a \$3 million grant to help the district empower parents and families. The grant specifically provides funding for DPSCA's Parent Academy, the Kindergarten Transition Program, and the Parent Teacher Home Visits Program.

Public relations

So much of education is dependent upon successful relationships. From the bonds created between teacher and students to the philosophy — literally the “love of wisdom” — of making children passionate about their own learning. For working class families, however, Vitti knows it's understandable that many parents may not be comfortable advocating for their children educationally. “Because it was foreign to them or they didn't do well, these parents may feel they're not respected,” he says.

That's a script they want to flip through the Parent Academy and the home visitation program. “We need to engage parents in an authentic and equal basis,” Vitti says. “We do this by saying, ‘Yes, we are the educators who teach your child math, science, and social studies. But we can learn from you how best to engage with your child so we're both working to help them achieve their God-given academic and civic potential.’”

As they create alliances in the education of children, the Parent Academy also seeks to uplift entire families. “We're very focused on helping parents matriculate in life,” Buckman says. “We've been very intentional about creating career opportunities for parents looking to enter the workforce, find better jobs, or even start their own businesses.”

More than 500 teachers are building relationships through the home visits, Buckman reports. The first visit typically covers parental hopes for a child's education and a general plan of action. A second visit, sometime after a report card or two, helps the parents and teacher strategize about particular strengths and areas for growth, and how to move forward.

Buckman says the early evaluations of the home visits are showing that parents are becoming more confident in working with their children. “Attendance and behavior is better,” she says. “We're scoring high in every evaluation category, and parents feel the information is valuable, the presenters are of high quality, and it's worth their time.”



Photos by William Meiners

Curious Minds: Sharlonda Buckman (upper left) talks about the Parent Academy at the Detroit Public Schools Community District while a reporter from *Chalkbeat* takes notes about the experience of one parent.

Kindred spirits

Academic achievement, perhaps first measured in kindergarten, begins long before that. The revamped Detroit district is employing a “kindergarten boot camp,” a preschool initiative attended by both children and parents. For the former, it’s a chance to work on things like language and fine motor skills. The parents are encouraged to become stronger educational advocates as a child’s first teacher.

In concert with their work with parents, Vitti hopes the Kindergarten Transition Program shows their core values. “These initiatives are opportunities in a new district to show that we want to work differently with parents,” he says. “We recognize that we also have to show the humility to admit that we don’t have all the answers. So we trust in those family relationships to better engage with the children.”

Granting greater access and serving families where they live are primary goals of DPSCA. Working with a number of faith-based organizations, they’ve been able to spread the word about new programs throughout Detroit. Since March 2018, Buckman says they’ve worked with about 100 students in the kindergarten transition program. They’ve served more than 2,000 students through the home visitation program, and more than 1,800 parents have participated in the Parent Academy.

Though the challenges loom large, Vitti believes hard work and humility can make a difference in a city

turnaround that will reap benefits for generations. School choice options and economic factors have left Detroit schools somewhat racially isolated, with a vast majority of African-American students. Regardless of their race, socioeconomic background, or native language, however, students deserve high quality education.

Even as they hope to have more diverse, racially balanced schools in the future, Vitti says racially homogenous schools are not a road block to a high-quality education. “I would argue that for those students, achievement is higher because their culture is more reinforced as opposed to a suburban school district where their identity is not reinforced and valued.”

“ We are the educators who teach children math, science, and social studies. But we can learn from parents on how best to engage with children so we’re both working to help them achieve their God-given academic and civic potential. ”
— Nikolai Vitti, Detroit Public Schools Community District



Family Focused

Community Action of South Central Michigan seeks to better serve families through extended hours and adult classes

An agency by any other name may not be as focused on making significant changes within a community. Yet the Community Action of South Central Michigan is actively fighting poverty at the systems level. So that means helping entire families with various needs.

In business since 1966, Community Action is one of 29 such agencies in Michigan and about 1,000

nationwide. Though the whole-family focus informs much of its mission, early childhood accounts for its largest programs, which include Head Start and Early Head Start. “Our main objective is to help people achieve and maintain independence,” says Michelle Williamson, CEO of the Battle Creek program. “Family service advocates consider family needs, including food, shelter, employment, and education.”

Rewarding active parenting

Action happens here when parents better themselves through classes, as well as volunteer and paid-work opportunities. Several employees have worked their way up to leadership positions. “We’ve found that our staff wants to grow,” Williamson says. “Through the training and education, many of them have gone from para pro to assistant teacher to lead teacher. In addition to funding CDA credentials, we help pay for staff who want to earn associate and bachelor degrees.”

To that end, Community Action have paid for teachers to earn the Child Development Associate credential. “Fortunately, Head Start provides specific training dollars every year to put toward staff,” Williamson says. “Beyond tuition assistance, we offer training and professional development opportunities throughout the year. We’re willing to work with staff on their professional goals.”

Battle Creek collaborative

Williamson says close relationships with other early childhood champions, including Battle Creek Public Schools, B.C. Pulse and the Calhoun Intermediate School

District, have helped present a united front in the city. From the consistent messaging to shared best practices, the programs find it’s better to work together than simply compete for the same grant dollars. “Many of the local agencies are having trouble getting qualified staff,” Williamson says. “We work together as a collaborative partner in many of those group settings.”



Photo by Vincent Walter

Mama Time: A worker from Denso volunteers after work at an Early Head Start program, reading to her daughter.

More hours in a day

A grant from the W.K. Kellogg foundation supported piloting the expansion of Early Head Start via extended hours and weeks of early learning and care. The pilot expanded access to vulnerable families with children ages 0-3 and helped determine what is most needed and desired.

This project allowed Community Action's Early Head Start program to better serve its existing low-income families, preparing preschoolers for later success in school.

Previously, their Early Head Start center-based program ran from September to mid-June, with hours from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. (the minimum allowed by federal funding). The funding also ensured the program could provide year-round coverage for nine hours of service per day. The expanded full-day slots serve 24 infants and toddlers up to 3 years old.

- In 2016, 983 children from 916 families received services through Community Action's Head Start and Early Head Start programs, including 826 children in Head Start and 157 children in Early Head Start.
- Parents reported improved employment status, including 100 percent noting fewer midday disruptions; 86 percent who could work more hours; and 80 percent who said they were more secure in their employment.
- Children attending the Community Action Early Head Start program showed increases in developmental growth as measured by TS Gold assessments. The positive growth was greater than that of peers in a controlled group.

Spreading the word

W.K. Kellogg Foundation funding also boosted a Community Action Agency campaign to increase awareness among Battle Creek area families of the importance of early childhood education and the availability of enrollment opportunities. The agency created a consistent message to share with the community.

In order to increase the awareness of available early childhood education opportunities, staff are working to create an advertising campaign that any institution providing services can utilize to enroll children into the program. The campaign seeks to increase the

understanding among community members of the necessity for quality pre-kindergarten education for their children. Community Action has been in discussion with local school districts, private preschool providers, and non-profit organizations to create a consistent message within the community in support of early childhood education initiatives. By creating a comprehensive, collaborative advertising campaign, stakeholders can help fill all available enrollment slots for young learners and can work to educate families on the importance of early childhood education.

“Head Start provides specific training dollars every year to put toward staff. Beyond tuition assistance, we offer training and professional development opportunities throughout the year. We're willing to work with staff on their professional goals.” — Michelle Williamson, Community Action of South Central Michigan

First Steps' Negotiator

Program: First Steps Kent

W.K. Kellogg Funding: \$150,000

Mission: From improving prenatal care to helping families navigate early childhood education options, First Steps Kent improves county-wide systems through research and innovation.

Champion: Annemarie Valdez

Among the notable goals of First Steps Kent is the desire to “build political and public will to support and sustain” the early childhood system. Through a public education campaign, they’ve used billboards to blast images and statistics alerting residents of Grand Rapids to some of the pitfalls of lackluster early education, such as the lack of proficient third grade readers.

For Annemarie Valdez, executive director, First Steps represents the legacy of a nonprofit career that previously focused on workforce development in Detroit and, more recently, increasing healthy birthrates in Chicago. “Prior to this, everything had been done in separation,” she says. “Here, in Kent County, it’s coming all together.”

Part of the harmony, Valdez believes, is understanding collaboration, the importance of bringing more people to the table, especially knowing how important parent voices are. An advocacy organization, First Steps works across the spectrum of early childhood, aiding the work and facilitating grant dollars instead of competing with organizations for them.

“We make sure that we’re listening to what’s going on in the community to know what the needs are,” Valdez says. “We want to be that trusted resource, able to connect providers with the resources they need.”



Message in a Billboard:

Annemarie Valdez, CEO of First Steps Kent, is spreading the word about the importance of investment in early childhood.

Photo by Vincent Walter



In about two and a half years at First Steps Kent, here are five things Valdez has learned.

1

The groundwork, previously done here, is understanding that it's about health. It's not just early literacy or early education. Our holistic approach looks at family economics security, the social determinants of health — everything that affects a child and a family and their ability to succeed.

2

We focus on evidence-based demonstration projects. We don't have a narrow view of just what's going on in Grand Rapids. Looking for national context, we have partners across the country, including think tanks like the Center for the Study of Social Policy out of Washington, D.C. They're working with 10 communities, including ours, and we can learn from all of them. We can ask, "What are you doing about this? How's it working?"

3

We have the staff that can write grants and build capacity for other funding. For example, we were able to give money from the Office of Great Start to three different home-visiting providers.

4

Removing the barriers that create systemic racism is a heavy lift. To change that we need to align with programs that are working to benefit families of color. Beyond that, it's important for people to be educated and informed. We're trying to turn that around, but it takes some time.

5

Child care is probably the biggest expense for any parent or family. Often larger than a mortgage or car payment. In our gap analysis, we've put the cost between \$7,000 and \$10,000 a year. That's huge. And it's something businesses need to address. We work with a group called Talent 2025, which represents about 100 CEOs across the region. They're facing these concerns with their employees all the time.

Honest Answers

How can you create
systematic change
within early childhood?



““ What we’re trying to rebuild and accomplish in Flint should be a call to action for legislators, policymakers, and mayors. The argument is that if this early childhood model can work here, it can work anywhere across the state. ””

— Robert Barnett,
University of Michigan-Flint

““ It’s really all about the system and figuring out coordinated ways to improve the lives of children. It’s about data, workforce development, program quality, screening and assessment, and family engagement. ””

— Jeffrey Capizzano,
Policy Equity Group

““ The strategic direction of our program’s relational model has created a vision for 2020. The framework sustains our work around school readiness, allowing us to better understand barriers and equity issues so we can better address them as part of a system. ””

— Donna Lowry,
Ready for School



From Humanitarian Crisis to Community Model

How the University of Michigan-Flint is helping a city rebound from tragedy

The story of the Flint water crisis is still unfolding. When a city's residents are poisoned by their own drinking water, the fallout is devastating and potentially long-lasting. A destruction and demoralization that could turn a city into a ghost town. Like any tragedy in America, there are both heroes and villains, many of whom are still to be determined.

Among the heroes, including Mona Hanna-Attisha, the pediatrician who blew the whistle on lead in the water, are people looking to rebuild the city. Administrators from the University of Michigan-Flint are at the vanguard of these rebuilding efforts, having settled on the logical goal of creating and supporting a robust early childhood system.

Call and response

In April 2018, UM-Flint hosted the Summit on Early Childhood Education. There Robert Barnett, dean of the School of Education and Human Services, shared the story of his community's effort, prompted by the water crisis, to greatly improve access to and the quality of early childhood services.

Barnett says, "Once Dr. Mona's [Hanna-Attisha] report came out about the impact on children, I went to the superintendent of Flint Community Schools and said, 'Balal [Tawwab], we have to do something.'"

That something, in Barnett's mind, was to turn a closed elementary school into an early childhood center serving infants to 5-year-olds. A confluence of local and national funding, resulted in Great Expectations Early Childhood Program at Cummings Community School. The first million dollars from the C.S. Mott Foundation helped retrofit the school to fix some of the existing structural problems.

With the capacity to serve up to 200 children and families, Great Expectations offers a host of wraparound services,

including year-round, weekday care from 5:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and transportation. Partnering with the Eastern Michigan Food Bank, they've chosen healthy foods known to mitigate lead, Barnett says. Additionally, families can pick up a case of water in the morning when they drop off kids and take another home at pickup time.

The UM-Flint services go far beyond intervention. "We could be doing far less and still be doing good by people," Barnett says. "What we want is high quality everything. That includes our curriculum and high-quality food and health programs."

From the great expectations inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, early childhood students and professionals alike are working to uplift Flint's most-vulnerable citizens. "When we opened Cummings in 2016, just about everyone agreed that this should be an opportunity for children all the time," Barnett says. "It's not just because they've been poisoned by lead in the water. Children at-risk need the most developmental support. Even if we're doing this because of the crisis, it should be the standard."



Photo by William Meiners

Mobile Mentor: The University of Michigan-Flint's Pop-Up School delivers learning materials to children throughout the city.

Capacity opportunity

Students at UM-Flint work in the “living laboratory” on campus at the Early Learning Development Center and in other centers across the city. “We’re holding on-site early childhood research classes at Cummings, which includes an 8-foot window cutout for observations in a kids’ classroom,” Barnett says.

Just as students further their education, the community programs are decidedly two-generational. On the same sites where their kids are in high-quality care, parents can work on earning their high school equivalencies or in workforce development programs. “You can’t lift these children out of poverty without lifting their families out of poverty,” Barnett says. “Staying engaged with the community is key.”

From Barnett’s perspective, the children receiving that high-quality care show signs of quick turnaround. “I see kids coming in at the beginning and see them now, and it’s like they’re not even the same kids,” he says. “They’re thriving, and their parents are so happy.”

To build on that excitement, community events are offered at each center. One event, “Eat the Alphabet,” drew about

600 participants and vendors from all over the city who shared food, as well as information on health, nutrition, and various social services. “It’s just another value-added service we offer to grant greater access,” says Barnett, who’s also particularly proud of the pop-up van that delivers books and other early childhood materials to neighborhoods throughout the city.

With 5,000 children under the age of five in Flint, Barnett knows that the extensive waiting lists for seats indicate that they cannot eradicate poverty in their community. Although, he’s hoping that through a community commitment, a high tide can raise all boats. In December 2017, Educare Flint opened the doors on a \$15 million early childhood center on the Durant-Tuuri-Mott Elementary School campus.

Furthermore, the model could be replicated in other cities — something else surely discussed at April’s campus conference. “This should be a call to action for legislators, policymakers, and mayors,” Barnett says. “The argument is that if this early childhood model can work in Flint, it can work anywhere across the state.”



Hope Starts Here

W.K. Kellogg Foundation puts \$25 million toward a 10-year effort to improve early childhood outcomes in Detroit



In November 2017, one year after launching its partnership with the Kresge Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation announced its \$25 million commitment to Detroit's Hope Starts Here initiative, matching the \$25 million from Kresge. Unveiling the framework for the plan, the foundations outlined a 10-year plan for placing young children and families at the center of public policy and business decisions.

"Detroit's residents have told us their hope for this city starts with the success of their children," says president and CEO La June Montgomery Tabron. "Hope Starts Here will engage the community to build high quality, early childhood experiences for all 80,000 of Detroit's children. Today, one in three of our children in Detroit lacks access to quality early learning care and only one out of 10 of our third graders are proficient readers. So, the time to act is now."

The community-driven partnership is supported by the foundations to make Detroit a city that puts its young children and families first by creating a stronger connection between early childhood, health and education; and improving the quality of and access to early childhood services. The Community Framework, directly informed by more than 18,000 Detroiters who contributed to a yearlong planning, hopes to ensure that children are born healthy, prepared for kindergarten,

and ready for success by third grade and beyond. The framework is comprised of six strategic imperatives and 15 supporting strategies and 26 public policy priorities, which are all essential for implementation and success.

Six strategic imperatives

1. We must promote the health, development and well-being of all Detroit children, starting before birth and through age eight.
2. We must transform systems to support parents and caregivers as children's first teachers and champions.
3. We must increase the quality of Detroit's early childhood programs, both formal and informal, and the knowledge and skills of the city's professionals.
4. We must guarantee safe and inspiring learning environments for our children.
5. We must create the structures and tools to better coordinate the various systems that impact the well-being of children and families.
6. We must find new ways to fund Detroit's early childhood system and better ways to use the resources we already have.



Supporting the second imperative

According to a Wayne State University Center for Urban Studies 2014 report, Detroit has the smallest percentage of two-parent households with children, and the city has the highest percentage of family households with children under 18 led by single mothers in Southeast Michigan. With this data, the Detroit Public Schools Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation set out to partner on the District's Parent Academy and Parent Teacher Home Visit Program (PTHVP). These programs are research-based and not experiments or pilots.

"Our commitment of \$25 million in grants related to the Hope Starts Here Community Framework is both a catalyst for change and a public challenge on behalf of Detroit's children," says Tabron. "This is the first of those awards and it centers on two things Detroit children need in order to achieve success in school — ongoing community engagement and strong partnerships across sectors. Children are at the heart of everything we do at the Kellogg Foundation. We are proud to be part of this effort and many other endeavors that envision a future in which all children thrive."

The Parent Academy will promote parental involvement and support for student and family success. This will be identified through Parent Interest Surveys, which will align opportunities and resources identified as needs by nearly 6,000 survey participants. Due to the W.K. Kellogg grant, Parent Academy and PTHVP will be at no-cost to parents. The Parent Academy will incorporate a variety of classes, trainings, and workshops offered in schools, libraries,

community centers and faith-based institutions across Detroit — serving an expected 7,000 parents and caregivers.

The PTHVP will reach 60 schools in DPSCD to increase academic performance and decrease attendance issues. This program will engage teachers and building staff during non-school hours in the student's home. This program provides students with one-on-one guidance while engaging parents. The teacher, parents and student will be able to discuss goals for the student, and teachers will provide tools and strategies parents can use to bolster their child's performance.

Additionally, a component of the Parent Academy is Kindergarten Bootcamp, a transition program serving DPSCD's early childhood development, which will operate during the summer months. The program prepares pre-kindergarten students and their parents to successfully enter kindergarten. Support and learning will be provided to parents on literacy, kindergarten academic expectations, and how to engage children at home. Classes will be guided by early learning specialists, giving parents the opportunity to learn and practice kindergarten-readiness skills as often as possible. With best practices taken from Phoenix Public Library's Kindergarten Bootcamp, the kindergarten transition portion of this program will better prepare students and parents for school. DPSCD is expecting to serve 900 pre-kindergarten children in the upcoming academic year.



Photo by Vincent Walter

Community Summary

According to Zero to Three (2016), community engagement consists of building a constituency to support investment in a system of services for young children and their families. Decisions about policies and practices are informed by and responsive to the needs and interests of a broad array of stakeholders.

Michigan has dozens of champions that support investment in a system of services for young children and their families. They are working hard advocating and building capacity through expanding access to children while continuing to improve the quality of the programming. Numerous leaders said they would like to hear about what others are doing to engage stakeholders in their communities. Within Michigan's larger communities like Detroit, Flint, Battle Creek, Traverse City, and Grand Rapids early childhood advocates are already communicating around ways they can work together to improve children's outcomes

Multiple champions had stories that illustrate the importance of listening to families in the communities they serve to determine the unique needs of the

community. It is through hearing the concerns that the programs build trust with the families to engage with the system of services. The programs can tailor the programs and policies to best support the children and families.

Other community engagement strategies include shared services with other non-profits. Michigan's Great Start to Quality provides tools, resources, and technical assistance to 54 collaborative organizations and 60 parent coalitions throughout the state (www.ecic4kids.org). Collaboratives are leading approaches that include Strengthening Families programs, parent cafes, ABleChange planning initiatives, and various forms of parent-community partnerships.

Through listening to the families the programs are able to adjust their policies to increase access to families who were once not being reached. Programs also continue to improve the quality of their programs by implementing the voices of those they serve. It is through these steps the programs are best able to build capacity.



Action Agents: In December 2017, BC Pulse hosted its annual “joint action team meeting,” bringing together team members to network and celebrate achievements.

Community References

Friese, S., Lin, V., Forry, N. & Tout, K. (2017). *Defining and measuring access to high quality early care and education: A guidebook for policymakers and researcher* (OPRE Report #2017-08). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Geoffroy, M., Cote, S. M., Giguère, C., Dionne, G., Zelazo, P. D., Tremblay, R. E., & Seguin, J. R. (2010). Closing the gap in academic readiness and achievement: The role of early childcare. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 51, 1359- 1367. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2010.02316.x.

Phillipsen, L. C., Burchinal, M. R., Howes, C., & Cryer, D. (1997). The prediction of process quality from structural features of child care. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12, 281-303. doi:10.1016/S0885-2006(97)90004-1

Zero to Three. (2016, November). *Community Engagement and Public Awareness in Early*

Childhood Systems. Retrieved from: www.zerotothree.org/resources/1633-community-engagement-and-public-awareness-in-early-childhood-system

CHAMPIONS' PERSPECTIVE

FORTHCOMING

Work challenges in
early childhood

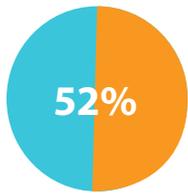
Featured programs
and partners

Research and
creative teams

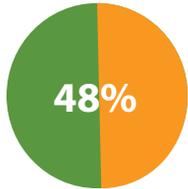


Photo by Vincent Walter

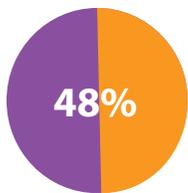
Work Challenges in Early Childhood



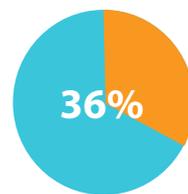
Grantees and other interviewees were asked what challenges exist within their local communities that relate to the field of early childhood. Several trends emerged from their responses, revealing that many of these champions experience similar struggles. Many times, **funding** was the immediate answer to this question. The majority (52%) of those interviewed mentioned access to funding and resources as a challenge. Champions often described the frustrating process of recognizing a community need, having relationships within the community, but lacking adequate funding to address those needs.



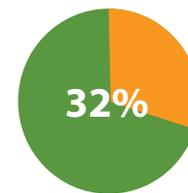
Other notable trends also related to funding issues: **navigating systems** and gaining access to families. Forty-eight percent of the interviewees found navigating systems to be a challenge, especially in the coordination of services. Several respondents described the policies and regulations of funding sources as a barrier to their work. Others were frustrated with the long timelines that often result from having to maneuver multiple systems.



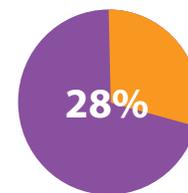
Gaining **access** to “hard to reach” families was a common concern (48% mentioned). Challenges within this realm included geographic location, transportation, and what is referred to as “the 3-year-old gap.” Many early childhood advocates in Michigan recognize the immediate need for public preschool programs for 3-year-olds in this state.



More than a third (36%) of those interviewed saw challenges related to the early childhood **workforce**. Additional issues impacting this workforce were echoed in many responses: higher pay, highly-qualified teachers, addressing retention/turnover, and diversifying the workforce. The same issues are at the forefront of many conversations occurring at the national level.



Nearly a third (32%) of the respondents listed **space** as a commonly faced challenge. Despite having money and access to the community, several champions were dealing with poor quality buildings and lack of sufficient space to house their programs.



A final theme that emerged from this question related to **trust within the community**. Twenty-eight percent of those asked mentioned community or trust in some form. Some recognized a struggle of remaining a “backbone” organization while touting results and effectiveness. They saw a challenge in gaining the trust of the community and balancing self- or organization-interest with community-interest.



Champions recognized similarities among their personal challenges and the challenges of others in the early childhood field. As Nkechye Ezech, director of the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative, stated, “Rural areas and urban cities have the same challenges. It’s just different circumstances.” And IFF’s Kirby Burkholder noted, “Everyone thinks their challenge is unique. It may be slightly unique, but there’s a lot of commonality around our experience.”

Recommendations

- Promote creative ways to combine funding streams to increase equitable distribution and reduce barriers to receive multiple funding options at one time.
- Create more spots for 3-year-old children in early childhood programs.
- Provide support for organizations working to professionalize the early childhood education workforce. Areas of higher pay, highly qualified staff, and diversity in the workforce are of specific concern.
- Encourage an agreed upon and well-communicated definition of school readiness that addresses multiple developmental domains, including social and emotional development and physical well-being.
- Listen even more to those served by programming to ensure that family voices become part of the decision-making process on policies and practices. Families know the supports they need to successfully raise their children.
- Design a sustaining method for Michigan's early childhood champions to communicate and be supportive of each other's efforts.

Featured Programs

5toONE

Using a Strengthening Families approach, 5toONE, based in Traverse City, currently has nine neighborhood centers throughout a sparsely populated five-county area. An economic development plan built around a multigenerational approach, the far-reaching program has three main goals. “We want to improve kindergarten readiness, increase family access to quality early care, and reduce abuse and neglect,” says Mary Manner, the Great Start Collaborative coordinator.

Articles/Pages: “Northern Exposures,” (24); “Extra, Extra,” (32); “Who’s Ready for Whom?” (40); “Listening for a Change,” (70).



Battle Creek Public Schools

Though Battle Creek Public Schools (BCPS) focuses on education from preschool through high school, they’ve made a concerted effort to improve all of it through a comprehensive early childhood program, which included a new summer program in 2017. An agreement with the local Head Start program took in the 3-year-old children that BCPS sees the following year. “I love for our kids to have two years of preschool, and we don’t need to compete,” says Chandra Youngblood, director of early childhood education.

Articles/Pages: “Leveling the Learning Field” (10); “Honest Answers” (28); “Who’s Ready for Whom?” (40); “Learning for the Long Haul” (46).

BC Pulse

As a Battle Creek program that helps early childhood providers navigate the various systems of compliance, funding, and more, BC Pulse pays as much attention to what’s working as to what’s not working. “A lot of our work revolves around research and strategy development,” says Kathy Szenda Wilson, co-executive director, who alongside Maria Ortiz Borden, relies on years of professional experience in the nonprofit world.

Articles/Pages: “Listening for a Change” (70); “Navigating a System of Systems” (76).

BHK Child Development

Atop Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, BHK Child Development serves children and families in three counties — Baraga, Houghton, and Keweenaw. With the inherent challenges of serving families over such a large mass of land, BHK uses a child-focused mission to uplift the whole family. “That goes hand in hand with the Head Start philosophy that parents, as the first teachers, can make the most difference,” says Cheryl Mills, executive director. “With a snapshot of their time, the more impact we can have on the family progressing, the better we’ll be.”

Articles/Pages: “Northern Exposures,” (24); “Extra, Extra,” (32); “Listening for a Change” (70).

Calhoun Intermediate School District

Based in Battle Creek, Calhoun ISD uses a “full-family focus” and a birth-to-12-years approach through a parent coalition. “Though families can enter at any point,” says Erika Burkhardt, assistant superintendent of early childhood services, “oftentimes they’re introduced to the program through Welcome Baby Visits at hospitals and Welcome Baby Education in homes.” Various programs to follow, including Parents as Teachers and Raising a Reader, lead children into

Great Start Readiness and Head Start in preparation for kindergarten.

Articles/Pages: “Through an Equitable Lens” (22); “Extra, Extra!” (32); “Honest Answers” (60).



Central Michigan University's Child Development and Learning Laboratory

Serving 64 children and families from the community and hundreds of students from the university with a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, the CDLL is a one-of-a-kind NAEYC accredited preschool. Two-thirds of the slots are funded by Head Start and the remaining are paid for by tuition. “The child leads the learning here,” says Margaret Desormes, lab director.

Articles/Pages: “Child-Centered Approach” (4).

Central Michigan University's Online Early Childhood Bachelor's Program

Launched in summer 2017, there are well over 100 new Early Childhood Development and Learning majors enrolled in the program. Scholarships are available and students who already have associate degrees from a NAEYC-accredited college need only take the upper-level courses at CMU. “It's truly CMU's core program that follows NAEYC's accreditation standards,” says Cheryl Priest, the program's coordinator.

Articles/Pages: “Child-Centered Approach” (4).

Central Michigan University's Touchpoints Initiative

Administrators in Human Development and Family Studies are completing the process to make CMU a certified Touchpoints Site. Through a collaboration with the Brazelton Institute in Boston, they plan to infuse components of Touchpoints training into college courses, so students can graduate ready to utilize those approaches with children and families. “Touchpoints focuses on the value parents bring to the table,” says Holly Hoffman, professor and coordinator of the program.

Articles/Pages: “Child-Centered Approach” (4).

Community Action of South Central Michigan

Based in Battle Creek and serving Barry, Calhoun, and St. Joseph counties, Community Action coordinates the Head Start and Early Head Start programs and offers a host of family services. “Within our childhood education programs, we work with not only children, but also qualifying families,” says CEO Michelle Williamson. “Our family advocates address various needs, including food, shelter, and employment.”

Articles/Pages: “Extra, Extra!” (32); “Family Focused” (80).

Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan

The Detroit-based Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan works with other foundations to support the Head Start System throughout Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties. Through the Innovation Fund, they invest in system-wide needs and innovations within individual agencies. They also bring the Head Start agencies together through a Learning Network. “We're

Featured Programs

building relationships within the system and identifying system-wide changes to support the programs,” says Katie Brisson, vice president of programs.

Articles/Pages: “Leveling the Learning Field” (10); “Listening for a Change” (70).

Detroit Public Schools Community District

In a renewed attempt to improve K-12 education in Motor City, administrators in the Detroit Public Schools Community District are taking a decidedly whole-family approach, which includes a Parent Academy. “One of the best places to support children is to support their parents to do better,” says Sharlonda Buckman, assistant superintendent of family and community engagement. “That’s part of what the Kellogg Foundation funded us for.”

Articles/Pages: “Honest Answers” (28); “Listening for a Change” (72); “In Partnership with Parents” (78).

Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative

Research shows that only two out of 10 children from certain neighborhoods in Grand Rapids are considered kindergarten ready. The ELNC is hoping to reverse those numbers by helping early childhood programs reach the most vulnerable children in those areas. “Our job is to empower those community-based organizations through educational, technical, and financial assistance, so they can do the work of getting the children ready,” says Nkechye Ezech, founding director.

Articles/Pages: “Leveling the Learning Field” (10); “Access Granted,” (16); “Listening for a Change” (70).

First Steps Kent

Working principally as a liaison between operating programs and the larger systems in which they operate, First Steps Kent is an early childhood advocacy organization. Their comprehensive approach looks at health, government, business, and education as it relates to children and families. “From the beginning, First Steps has been a backbone organization that works with all the different entities in the community,” says Annemarie Valdez, director.

Articles/Pages: “Who’s Ready for Whom?” (40); “Listening for a Change,” (70); “First Steps’ Negotiator” (84).

Grand Rapids Community College

Part of the Department of Education and Child Development at GRCC, the Early Childhood Learning Laboratory in the heart of the city campus opened in January 2017. “As part of our two-fold mission with the college, we serve both the community and the students,” says JaneAnn Benson, director. “The lab provides a place for student learning and early childhood care for the community.”

Articles/Pages: “Extra, Extra!” (32); “Honest Answers” (60); “Grand Opening” (64).

Grand Rapids Public Schools

With a culturally diverse staff focused on individualized learning goals, the GRPS holds preschool in 26 locations around the city. “Our mission is to provide world-class learning opportunities for the youngest learners,” says Matthew Beresford, executive director of early childhood and elementary. “As we grow our programs, we’re very focused on keeping our quality and communicating that with parents.”

Articles/Pages: “Leveling the Learning Field” (10); “Who’s Ready for Whom?” (40); “No Child Left Inside” (56).

Head Start Kent County

Ten sites with about 80 classrooms in total offer mostly full-day early childhood preschool options throughout Kent County. Transportation offerings help break down access barriers for many families, and the Head Start premise takes a decidedly two-generation approach. “We cannot work with the child in isolation,” says MaDonna Princer, executive director. “We can make great gains in a full day working with children, but we also help families become self-sufficient and learn skills to advocate for their kids.”

Articles/Pages: “Northern Exposures” (24); “Extra, Extra!” (32).



IFF

Through research and evaluation practices, IFF works with nonprofits around the nation on full-scale assessment needs. Their vital services work, which includes early childhood education services, has focused on real estate development in Detroit and Flint. “Although many people may think their challenges are unique, a large part of our job is to link best practices with other municipalities,” says Kirby Burkholder, president, social impact accelerator.

Articles/Pages: “Leveling the Learning Field” (10); “Adventures in Space” (52); “Honest Answers” (60).

Kent Intermediate School District

Kent ISD has several early childhood offerings, including Early On and Bright Beginnings. As a Great Start to Quality resource center, the program also provides resources and training to child care centers, home

providers, and unlicensed providers. “We also house the second largest Great Start Readiness Program in the state, employing 140 teachers,” says Michael Ghareeb, former director of early childhood education.

Articles/Pages: “Honest Answers” (28); “Who’s Ready for Whom?” (40).

New Harvest Christian Center

Based in the old Enquirer Building in Battle Creek, the New Harvest Christian Center opened its doors to early childhood in 2016. Today the program serves two classrooms of 21 4-year-olds through Michigan’s Great Start Readiness Program, but Pastor Ivan Lee is hoping to build on that. “We like being able to make a difference in lives,” he says. “When you open yourself to an opportunity to listen, maybe provide some leadership, the world becomes less isolated.”

Articles/Pages: “Extra, Extra!” (32); “Good News Agent” (50).



New Level Sports Ministries

As a program that infuses education and sports with arts and industry, NLS continues to expand its early childhood offerings in Battle Creek. In his time with the program, Pastor Chris McCoy, also executive director, has evolved the program to include afterschool enrichment, summer education programs, parenting empowerment, and more. “Our mission is to make sure that urban kids are developing fully,” he says.

Articles/Pages: “Leveling the Learning Field” (10); “Extra, Extra” (32).

Featured Programs

New Paradigm for Education

For more than 15 years, Ralph Bland has brought an entrepreneurial spirit to nonprofit charter schools in Detroit. With six schools throughout the city, New Paradigm has set many children on a course for college. “We’ve seen students and parents take what we give them to impact the larger community,” says Bland, president and founder. “And I think our best work is yet to come as we continue to impact more families.”

Articles/Pages: “Charting a Path to College” (30); “Extra, Extra!” (32).

Office of Great Start

Born out of an executive order from the governor, the Office of Great Start is charged with the early childhood outcomes. Housed in Michigan’s Department of Education, the office works with a host of statewide programs, as well as the Department of Health and Human Services. “Our mission is for children to be healthy, thriving, and developmentally on track from birth through third grade,” says Shulawn Doxie, special assistant to the deputy superintendent of P-20 System and Student Transitions.

Articles/Pages: “Who’s Ready for Whom?” (40); “Lansing Leaders” (48).

Policy Equity Group

This Washington D.C.-based consultancy was founded by Jeffrey Capizzano, a former senior policy advisor for early childhood in the Obama administration. The Policy Equity Group’s mission: to help make socially conscious organizations better advocates of their own work. “There’s not a great connection between the practitioner and the policymaker,” says Capizzano, who has often worked in Detroit. “We’re trying to bridge that gap.”

Articles/Pages: “Ending Economic Segregation” (18); “Who’s Ready for Whom?” (40); “Honest Answers” (84).

Ready for School

For nearly a decade, Ready for School has made a business case for community investment in early childhood in the communities of Holland, Zeeland, and Hamilton. By recruiting families into preschool and empowering parents with knowledge to negotiate the system, they’ve provided access to the most vulnerable families. Donna Lowry, president and CEO, is perhaps most excited about the organic growth of their organization. “We’ve been successful because our community leaders and stakeholders have identified a problem that needs to be addressed.”

Articles/Pages: “Who’s Ready for Whom?” (40); “Listening for a Change,” (70); “Honest Answers” (84).

University of Michigan-Flint Early Childhood

A leader in early childhood education before the Flint water crisis, UM-Flint has simply been spurred onto greater action because of that tragedy. Along with various degree offerings in the program, students gain real-world experience through the Early Child Development Center on campus and several revitalized preschool and care facilities around town. Robert Barnett, dean of the School of Education and Human Services, hopes that current models will build capacity. “We have 5,000 kids under the age of five in Flint,” he says. “That’s why it’s so important to try and lift all boats through community education.”

Articles/Pages: “Extra, Extra!” (32); “Honest Answers” (84);
“From Humanitarian Crisis to Community Model” (86).



United Way for Southeastern Michigan

One of the largest philanthropic organizations in the world, the United Way has long supported access to quality care for families. In Detroit, efforts like the Bib to Backpack program supports Early Learning Communities in a community-wide effort to improve school readiness. “We focus our services on the areas of greatest need, but the United Way serves all of the tri-county area of Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties,” says Jeffrey Miles, director of innovation and early childhood.

Articles/Pages: “Extra, Extra!” (32); “Building Early Learning Communities” (62);



EHS Building: Opened on the campus of Central Michigan University in summer 2009, the Education and Human Services Building helps prepare students for a variety of careers, including early childhood.

Central Michigan University

Research and Development Team

Principal Investigator:

Joellen Lewsader
Assistant Professor
Human Development and Family Studies

Co-Principal Investigator:

Kimberly Davidson
Assistant Professor
Human Development and Family Studies

Research Associate:

Alison Arnold
Director
Interdisciplinary Center for Community Health and Wellness

Director of Development:

Megan Moreno
College of Education and Human Services

Creative Team

Writer/Editor:

William Meiners
William Meiners Writing

Photographer:

Vincent Walter
Fine Photography by Vincent Walter

Designer:

Erin Ingram
Indianapolis Freelance Designer



W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The contributors thank the leadership team at W.K. Kellogg Foundation, including Megan Russell Johnson, Khaliah Burt Gaston, Yazeed Moore, and Regina Bell.



W.K.
KELLOGG
FOUNDATION™