



# GREAT START COLLABORATIVE OF KENT COUNTY

*Mission: To assure a coordinated system of community resources and supports to help all Kent County families provide a great start for their children from birth to age five.*

## Minutes

**February 22, 2024 – 1:30pm-3:00pm**

**MSU Extension - 775 Ball Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503**

**Attendees:** Marcy Steenstra, Wendy Wheeler, Kasey Young, Ben Brower, Elizabeth Zandstra, Amari Fuller, Marian Russell, Kathleen Neumann, Jaime MacLangs, Pam Shoemaker, Lindsey VanDyke, Shanequa Mosley, Jordan DeRidder, Karrie Roy, Sarah Miller, Bryanna Hopkins, Jennifer Headley-Nordman, Chana Edmond-Verley, Kathy Peppin, Aarie Wade, Sara Proano, Chess VanWyle, Madelyn Olson, Mary Claire Meimers, Maureen Hale, Joann Hoganson, Kristin Gietzen, Tequia Adams, Stephanie McKendry, Karn Lezan, Jaime Mueller,

- **Welcome** Maureen Hale
  - **Approval of minutes for December 14th**
    - Minutes approved as written.
  
- **DEI Activity**

Video: [IF YOU CAN'T RUN THEN WALK | Martin Luther King Motivational Speech \(youtube.com\)](#)

Table discussion: What resonated with you? What is or would you include in your life's blueprint?

  - Knowing when to be still- sometimes being still is just as powerful as walking, running, or crawling through. Being still prepares you to move forward.
  
- **FIMR – Infant Safe Sleep Update** Joann Hoganson
  - Working for years/decades to prevent infant deaths in our community
  - KCHD working with every organization possible to work towards reducing preventable infant deaths
  - 2021- 39 infant deaths- 9 related to unsafe sleep (23%)
  - 2022- 41 infant deaths- 7 related to unsafe sleep – (17%)
  - 2023- 34 infant deaths- 4 deaths related to unsafe sleep (11%)
  - Being culturally sensitive, but using safe sleep risk reduction strategies to mitigate infant deaths
  
- **Great Start Family Coalition Report** Tomarra Richardson  
Shanequa Mosley
  - Upcoming Meetings
    - Book Club January – March
      - Celebration will be on March 14<sup>th</sup>
      - Families are enjoying the book club
      - The book we are reading is Charlie and The Chocolate Factory; one family finished their book in two days.
    - WIC/Healthy Eating -April
  - GSFC - Grand Rapids Children's Museum Partnership
    - Families that attend Great Start Family Coalition meetings will be provided a one-year membership to The Grand Rapids Children's Museum.
  - Parent Cafés
    - February 20th Neland CRC
    - February 22nd Hillview Apartments
  - Diaper Drive Update
    - GSC Partners are invited to organize a diaper drive through their organization. Interested organizations should contact the GSFC at [gsparents@successstartsearly.org](mailto:gsparents@successstartsearly.org).



- Community Baby Shower
  - June 1<sup>st</sup>
  - Still working on finalizing a location
- Books, Blocks & Balls
  - Grand Rapids August 10th – Alger Head Start
  - Sparta September 21st – Sparta Early Childhood Center

- **Regional Childcare Planning Update**

Chana Edmond-Verley

- Vibrant Futures 50<sup>th</sup> year
- Through polling has reached parents, employers, and providers; they had over 1,000 people respond.
- Prioritizing based on needs made clear by the poll
- “The Silent Noise”
  - Absence of affordable care suppressing economic growth
  - Nearly 70% of Kent County homes are saying that affordability/ lack of openings are the main issue
- Top concerns
  - Cost is too high
  - Demand for care exceeds the supply
  - Employment is off the table in many families
  - Careers are suffering
  - Most parents would choose quality if space were available
- 64% said cost was the #1 barrier preventing parents from accessing care
- Diminishing workplace performances, missed work, and mental health issues for parents
- Most important consideration to selecting childcare
  - 72% said health and safety
  - 46% said learning/ school readiness program
- Most parents are using families and relatives to care for their children
- Most parents want a licensed, high-quality care for their children and cannot afford it
- Majority of families would prefer full time care for their children
- Families need to put their childcare bill on their credit card, or choosing between food and childcare
- For 93% of parents, assistance with childcare would increase loyalty to employer
- 3 Reports available on Vibrant Futures website for download (regional, Kent County, and employer)
- The US chamber of commerce did an economic impact report- 2.88 billion dollars for the state of Michigan
- \$279 million dollars of lost economic power in our region due to the issue of childcare
- Employer Report
  - Cost and shortage of childcare are the top concerns of West Michigan Employers
  - 98% of employers said childcare is important to employees
  - 99% of employers believe in making childcare more affordable for parents
  - 82% of workers are distracted, stressed, worried
  - 41% of workers had to leave job due to lack of childcare
- Village Pathways to Childcare
  1. Pushing on public dollars
  2. Maximizing tri-share
  3. Let employers come in where they want, and push this information into their workplace
- Used the “institution of trust methodology” to get the populations for the poll

- **Ready by Five Update**

Jennifer Headley-Nordman

- Kent County Board of commissioners voted today whether the millage would move forward
- Voted to continue at .25 for another 6-year term
- The language of the new milage will include the term “childcare”- the current milage does not
- The vote fell at 17 to 2
- There were 2 commissioners not present
- August 6<sup>th</sup> ballot will be the next phase to move forward



- Currently polling at 77-78% for Kent County residents voting yes (polled at .4)
- Vote of 9 to 10 for .25 vs .35
- Concerns about data and increase of taxes
- More conversations to come about renewal vs. new millage due to the language change, making sure people know this is a continuation of work already taking place

- **GSC Updates**

Paula Brown

- One County One Book
- MiFamily Engagement Centers Update
  - OAISD submitted a grant outlining four high-level goals, with the hopes of fine tuning them, as we learn more from MiLEAP.
    1. Systems Scan – to get an understanding of the current landscape for both literacy (birth-5<sup>th</sup> grade) and family engagement (Birth-12<sup>th</sup> grade)
    2. Action Agenda with concrete implementation steps - this will be based off the systems scan work
    3. Literacy Goal - Build upon work of the literacy hub as well as understanding how the literacy essentials are being utilized region wide, birth through 5<sup>th</sup> grade
    4. Family Engagement - build upon the work of Help Me Grow and Community Schools Network in local areas and understand how to work more closely together and potentially scale throughout Region 4 counties (Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa).
  - Next steps include working on creating a job posting as well as an RFP for the systems scans work/action agenda creation.
- 32p4 Home Visiting Expansion Grant Update
  - Received an increase of \$100,000 this year.
  - Currently funding two programs:
    - Bright Beginnings - \$175,012
    - Baby Scholars - \$174,860
  - Was awarded this grant in 2016 to expand home visiting service in Kent based upon the following criteria determined by the HV Assessment group: target the expansion of HV services to families whose youngest child is 15 months up to 4 years old and focus on the following two outcomes: 1) Child Development & School Readiness: 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency & Number of Students Enrolled in Services for Emotional Impairment; and 2) Family Economic Self Sufficiency: Rate of Children in Poverty for all of Kent County.
  - This grant focused on three goals.
    - Increase school readiness
    - Reduce the need for special education services
    - Increase Family economic self sufficiency
- Early Childhood Capitol Day
  - March 20<sup>th</sup> from 9-4 in Lansing
  - Sponsored by: Think Babies; miaeyc; Mothering Justice
  - GSC Director and Help Me Grow Care Coordinator will be attending along with four Parent Leaders.
  - Coming with 2-3 main bullet points on a postcard for legislators
  - Kent County early childhood professionals should align their goals/agendas with one another for better chances of success

- **Partner Announcements**



- Comprehensive Therapy Center- March 1<sup>st</sup> open registration for summer program (ST and OT receive services through their programming). All insurance accepted. Scholarships available. Ages 2-14.
  - KDL
    - Book Mobile- can go around to 20 libraries- looking for partnerships with programs for ages 0-5 to fill the schedule for reoccurring visits to build relationships with families/ children. They pass out library cards and books to children.
    - KDL baby books directly to newborns in the hospital- looking for ideas for books (diversity, social emotional, multilingual, etc.).
    - This Saturday they are having a Black History Month documentary free event at Celebration Cinema.
  - Baxter Community Center- in partnership w/ UMCH and YMCA received funds for free 3 year old preschool classrooms- 62 combined free 3 year old slots began in January
  - MLPP- shared information on the state budget.
    - You can find all the updates at [this link](#) or <https://mlpp.org/2025-peoples-budget/>.
    - You can access the 2025 budget priority fact sheets for [“Child Care” here](#) and [“Adopting a State Child Tax Credit” here](#).
  - KENT ISD- working on childcare navigation grant in partnership with Vibrant Futures to complement GSQ system. Communication forthcoming in the next few weeks about text system for childcare providers to update system for current openings more easily.
- **Meeting adjourned 3:09 PM**

**Upcoming Meetings:**

**GSC Executive Team: March 12th, 2:30pm-4pm (Zoom)**

**April 9th, 2:30pm-4pm (Zoom)**

**GSC Membership Meeting: April 25th, 1:30-3:00pm**

**KCHD Lakes Room - 700 Fuller NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503**