



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.

Great Start Collaborative of Kent County Meeting Minutes

Date: June 26, 2025, 1:30-3:00 p.m.

Location: GRPS University | 1400 Fuller Ave NE | Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Attendance

- Attendees: Julie Guenther, Chess VanWyk, Abby Bishop, Elyse Boardman, Rebecca Boot, Pam Shoemaker, Brittany Price, John Robinson, Amber Jones, Nicole Pratt, Kathryn Steiner, Tequia Adams, Marcy Steenstra, Courney Hess, Ben Brower, Ashley Sturgis, Lindsey VanDyke, Alissa Hofstee, Amy Coon, Elise Memmalaar, Barb Hawkins-Palmer, Betsy Zandstra, Joann Hoganson, Wendy Wheeler.
- Executive Team Members: Kristin Gietzen, Kelly Gerlinger, Renee Dunwell, Kristyn Bomberg
- Staff Members: Paula Brown, Sadie Schalk, Tomarra Richardson
 - **Welcome & Introductions**
Participants introduced themselves, their role and organization.
 - **Review Past Meeting Minutes**
The past meeting minutes were approved.
 - **Community Connection Activity**
Participants discussed and shared self-care ideas.
 - **Great Start Family Coalition Report**
 - Coalition Meetings & Events
 - Young Money Families – 6 Week Series
 - The 6-week series wrapped up June 5th. Families learned a lot of great information on budgeting and finances.
 - Summer Celebration with PNC Grow Up Great
 - Dinner and fun activities will be provided to families at the event today.
 - Diaper Drive Update
 - St Marks Church
 - 5,000 diapers donated.
 - Anonymous donation
 - 15 pallets of diapers, wipes, pull ups, Kleenex and adult diapers.
 - Apple Tree Diaper Drive
 - 10 Apple Tree locations are participating in Diaper Drive 2025
 - The drive will run from July 1st – July 31st.
 - Summer Events
 - Grand Rapids Children’s Museum Day of Play – July 27th
 - Kids Day At The Zoo – August 7th

- Community Baby Shower - August 23rd
- Past Events
 - In The Image Resource Fair
 - The GSFC engaged with approximately 15 families.
 - Laugh & Learn
 - There were over 700 adults and children at the event.
 - The GSFC interacted with a number of those families and provided books to children, which were well received.
 - Rock The Block
- Books, Blocks & Balls
 - 8.09.25 10:00am – 1:00pm Alger Head Start
 - 9.20.25 10:00am – 1:00pm Sparta Baptist Church
 - [Books, Blocks & Balls Partner Registration](#)
- **GSC Updates**
 - Staffing Update
 - Dolores Chanthavong, HMG Care Coordinator, resigned due to school obligations.
 - Kent County GSC is mirroring Ottawa County with a blended role of the Family Liaison and HMG Care coordinator roles.
 - Sadie Schalk will be in a blended role as the Family Liaison and HMG Care coordinator.
 - HV Needs Assessment Overview
 - Risk Factors of Greatest Concern
 - School Readiness
 - Decrease the number of children enrolled in early childhood special education services
 - Improve family economic self sufficiently
 - Increase positive parenting practices.
 - ALICE Data (% of Families living below the ALICE Threshold)
 - 47% Grand Rapids
 - 42% Kentwood and Wyoming
 - 57% Cedar Springs
 - 41% Michigan
 - The process of selecting eligible home visiting models to expand was based on the following:
 - Programs operating at 85% or higher
 - Programs needed to address identified community risk factors
 - Programs needed to enroll families with children 12 Months of age and older
 - Programs that were operating at 85% of capacity were:
 - ❖ Cherry Health MIHP, Health Department MIHP, Early Head Start, Arbor Circle Infant Mental Health, Family Futures - Healthy Families America, Kent ISD Bright Beginnings, Corewell Health Baby Scholars.
 - ❖ The majority of programs did not want to expand; One program did not qualify due to age requirements for enrollment. After this analysis, two programs were left: Bright Beginnings and Baby



Scholars. The two organizations requested \$215,089 and \$208,089, respectively.

- ❖ The grant proposal has been submitted to the State. We are slated to receive a decision in late July/early August.

- **Legislative/Budget Update**

- Both Senate and House both recommend eliminating 32P6 Literacy Funds.
- The House would like to eliminate 32P and roll it up into a new block grant, 22f in the budget for ISDs to use at their discretion as a per student allotment. This is affecting more than just 32P.
- All of the funding for hearing and vision for the schools has shifted to the per pupil allotment. The major difference is that funding will need to be requested now instead of pulling it down automatically. ISDs can decide if they want to use that funding for hearing and vision or if they would like to use the funding for something else.
- Individuals can advocate regarding these changes by contacting your senator and house representative.

- **Preschool Update**

- Kent ISD

- An additional 1,141 more applications than the KISD had on the same day last year.
- 2,417 students have been placed.
- 3,586 applications in the que
- 9,000 students are eligible in Kent County. Partners are encouraged to share this information with parents that have children. There is room for children that qualify that are not placed.
- Intake has been very busy with helping parents place students in schools.
- Students with an IEP need to be at their resident district to receive special education services.
- Sub Recipient partners has grown astronomically; additional partners are requesting to become subrecipients and are being added to a waitlist for next year.
- GSC Partner Question: Expansion is great, but where will the lead and assistant teachers come from? Answer: KISD has posted positions for teachers and have received applications and are currently conducting interviews.
- A child must be 4 years old by December 1st to enroll in GSRP.

- Head Start

- 220 – 3-year-olds enrolled.
- 468 – 4-year-olds enrolled.
- 1,030 slots available.
- Most sites are 50% filled with most at capacity.
- Alger, North Kent, Sparta are not full.
- Received all money for 2025 for Federal.
- Head Start is no longer eliminated in President's budget
- **KENT COUNTY WIN:** Office of Head Start highlighted great work happening with joint enrollment in Kent County!



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- **Public Media Informational Presentation**
 - Celebrated 50 years of service in 2023
 - 6 PBS stations in Michigan
 - A service of GVSU, GVSU holds the WGUV license
 - WGUV is a nonprofit organization and an MLC public media partner
 - 50 full-time staff members
 - 4 staff in WGUV Public Media Education
 - Public Media Funding
 - Federally Funded (25%)
 - Grants, Private Funding etc. (75%)
 - [How Does Public Funding Media Work?](#)
 - Learn more here to [Protect My Public Media](#)

- **Partner Announcements & Updates**
There were no partner updates shared.

- **Action Items**

Action Item	Responsible Party	Due Date
One on One meetings scheduled with GSC director and GSC members.	Paula Brown	Ongoing
If you are interested in leading an activity at an upcoming GSC meeting – please fill out the Community Connection Activity Sign Up .	GSC Members	Ongoing

- **Adjourn**

Upcoming Meetings:

GSC Executive Team: July 8th, 2:30pm-4pm (zoom)

GSC General Membership Meeting: August 28th, 1:30–3:00pm
MSU Extension - 775 Ball Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Nurturing Parent Power Workgroup: July 22nd, 12:30am – 2:00pm
MSU Extension - 775 Ball Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Social Emotional Health Workgroup: August 13th, 10:30am – 11:30am (Zoom)