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Budget Agreement Will Help Early Childhood Education

LANSING- The Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) today announced that the budget agreement reached by the Governor and the Legislature early Wednesday includes important increases in funding to help Michigan's youngest learners get off to a great start in learning and life.

Under the 2007-08 budget agreement, \$1.75 million was approved for local Great Start communities, an increase of \$750,000. The appropriation ensures the continuation of 21 existing Great Start Collaboratives (GSC) across the state and the opportunity to bring in additional communities. Great Start communities are funded by ECIC through a competitive grant process.

"The need for focus on and investment in early childhood is great," said ECIC CEO Judy Y. Samelson. "Twenty-one collaboratives doing this important work is indeed a 'great start,' but there are additional Michigan counties equally deserving of support and asking to be part of the important work of building a comprehensive early childhood system in Michigan.

"The increase in funding means we will come closer to having state-wide infrastructure in place to serve young children and their families, but it will not be complete until *all* Michigan communities are at the table."

The ECIC provides funds for community leaders to work together, as members of a Great Start Collaborative. The GSCs are composed of community leaders representing business, philanthropy, physical and mental health, early education, child welfare, child care, as well as parents. The mission of each GSC is to oversee the planning, implementation and ongoing improvement of a network of early childhood resources, programs and supports that are easily accessible to families of young children.

The ECIC and the GSCs provide training and consultation to community leaders about what works to improve health, development and early learning of young children. They seek to bring together information about child, family and community needs, to educate and advocate for policy changes that assure the most efficient and effective use of all financial resources.

ECIC was formed in 2005 after Governor Granholm called for the creation of a comprehensive early childhood system for Michigan in her 2004 State of the State address. That comprehensive system

was envisioned as including Great Start Collaboratives in every Michigan county. Since 2006, ECIC has initiated and funded 21 Great Start Collaboratives in partnership with Michigan's 57 Intermediate School Districts, through a combination of public and private funds totaling \$3.1 million.

The 21 existing counties with Great Start Collaboratives are: Branch, Charlevoix-Emmett, Dickinson-Iron, Eastern Upper Peninsula (Luce, Chippewa, Mackinac), Eaton, Genesee, Ingham, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Kent, Mecosta/Osceola, Monroe, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oakland/Pontiac, Ottawa, Saginaw, Shiawassee, St. Clair, St. Joseph and Wayne (Southwest Detroit and Downriver). New counties will be invited to join in 2008.

In addition to Great Start funding, Michigan's 0-3 Secondary Prevention Early Childhood grants will also receive a funding increase by \$375,000. 0-3 Secondary Prevention is a state-sponsored, collaborative, community-based initiative aimed at developing an integrated system of services for Michigan families with children ages zero to three who are at risk of child abuse and neglect.

Rounding out early childhood funding in the new budget, the Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP) will expand by \$2.8 million to provide pre-kindergarten opportunities for four-year-old children who may be at risk for school failure. Of the total, \$400,000 will be aimed at competitive grants.

For more information about the ECIC and the Great Start Collaboratives, visit www.ecic4kids.org.

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