

Michigan's Early Childhood Development System: The *Great Start* Initiative

The *Great Start* initiative was launched in 2004 as a movement to create public understanding that learning begins at birth and that investment in early childhood health, development and learning is crucial to the state's economic future.

The purpose of the *Great Start* system is to ensure that Michigan children are safe, healthy and ready to learn when they start school.

Great Start has two primary units: the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) and the *Great Start* Collaboratives (GSCs).

Early Childhood Investment Corporation

In 2005, ECIC was founded to lead *Great Start*. It is a public-private partnership that leverages and invests both public and private dollars to accomplish strategic objectives. Its mission is to oversee and assure the development and implementation of a coordinated statewide early childhood system of community resources and supports for children zero to five and their families.

At the heart of the *Great Start* system are our local communities. And to help communities develop, implement and evaluate local, comprehensive early childhood systems, ECIC offers grants to build community capacity and fund *Great Start* Collaboratives.

Great Start Collaboratives

Established in 2006, GSCs are the local planning and decision-making bodies for the *Great Start* system. How does this work? First, the GSCs conduct a community assessment to determine the needs of children ages zero to five. Second, a long-term strategic plan is developed based on the findings of the assessment. Finally, as the plan is implemented, programs are developed and, over time, every child in that community – and his/her family – will have access to all of the *Great Start* system benefits prior to entering kindergarten.

Currently, there are thirty-two (32) GSCs across Michigan. This is more than halfway to the goal of fifty-seven (57), or one for each Intermediate School District (ISD). Anything short of this number fails to establish a comprehensive and statewide early childhood system in Michigan and leaves thousands of children without access to the development programs they deserve.