



September, 2014

Dear Partners and Colleagues,

This past year has been one of change, challenge, and growth for the Early Childhood Investment Corporation. We welcomed new leadership on our staff with a new CEO and among our Executive Committee with the addition of new members. Our focus throughout these past months has been on becoming a stronger organization so that we can better serve Michigan's young children and their families. One product of that effort that we are incredibly proud of is our new five-year strategic plan. Our staff and board worked together with the assistance of a consultant, Policy Equity Group, LLC, to create the document that we are so pleased to be sharing with you. Our work was generously supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

We have updated our vision and mission statements as well as refined and clarified our values. The three pillars of the work we want to do over the next five years are research, policy, and practice. These concepts are the framework for our strategic goals. You will see as you read our plan that we remain committed to our state having a comprehensive, high quality, birth through third grade system of care and education. Our focus is on development of the whole child that is informed by a nuanced understanding of their social, economic, and familial contexts. It is our hope that it will be clear to you in our words how important partnership and collaboration is to us. Some of you helped us shape our ideas through interviews with our consultant and by sharing your opinions with us in formal and informal settings.

Thank you for your continued partnership with us as we work together to improve the lives of Michigan's young children and by extension our shared future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beverly Hall Burns".

Beverly Hall Burns, Chair
Executive Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Daniel-Echols".

Dr. Marijata C. Daniel-Echols, CEO

**Supporting Impactful Change for Michigan's Children and
Families**

**The Early Childhood Investment Corporation's Five-Year
Strategic Plan**

September 2014



Established in 2005, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation’s mission is to promote and implement innovative, high-quality, research-based early childhood practices and policies that support a comprehensive system in order to ensure every child’s future success and the future success of the state of Michigan.

©Early Childhood Investment Corporation, 2014

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Methodology.....	1
Environmental Scan	2
Assessment of Organizational Capacity	2
Stakeholder Perceptions of the Organization.....	2
Developing the Vision, Mission, and Values Statements.....	2
Determining the Goals and Initiatives	3
Our Foundation.....	4
Vision.....	4
Mission.....	4
Values.....	4
GOAL 1: Research.....	5
GOAL 2: Policy	6
GOAL 3: Practice	7
Endnotes	8

Introduction

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) has a strong record of successfully supporting Michigan's youngest children and their families. To build on this record of success, ECIC's mission, goals, and work must periodically change to remain responsive to the needs of the early childhood community. This type of organizational evolution is especially important in light of the recent advances in the science of early childhood development; new innovations in best practice; and the state's changing demographic, social, and political context. To ensure that ECIC is positioned for success and has clear plan for the future, the organization engaged in a rigorous and reflective strategic planning process to determine how best to advance its vital mission. The results of this process are presented here.

This document outlines ECIC's five-year strategic plan. The plan describes ECIC's revised vision, mission, and values, as well as the organization's goals for the next five years. The goals are grounded in a strong rationale and include specific, measureable, and achievable milestones. The plan will be used to chart a path for the future growth of the organization to maximize ECIC's role as a leading early childhood organization in Michigan and within the national early childhood community.

Methodology

Effective strategic planning requires a clear understanding of the external context in which an organization operates as well as an accurate assessment of internal capacity. To ensure that the strategic planning process resulted in relevant, impactful organizational change, ECIC engaged in a three-phase process that informed and supported the revision of its vision, mission, and values, as well as the development of new organizational goals and strategic initiatives. These phases were:

- ① An evaluation of the early childhood landscape both nationally and in Michigan to develop a clear understanding of the external opportunities and challenges that will inform ECIC's positioning within the early childhood space.
- ② An assessment of ECIC's current organizational capacity, including an analysis of ECIC's current goals and strategic initiatives.
- ③ The gathering of external stakeholder perceptions of ECIC, including ideas regarding the organization's strengths, key accomplishments, and areas for growth.

Each phase of the process is described in more detail below.

Environmental Scan

The environmental scan provides an overview of the major developments in the early childhood field and highlights the opportunities they present for ECIC. The scan was conducted using an ecological framework, examining factors that affect ECIC's work at multiple levels of impact (e.g., child, family, program, etc.). It included a review of the federal government's early childhood agenda, Michigan's Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (RTT–ELC) grant, the *Great Start, Great Investment, Great Future: The Plan for Early Learning and Development in Michigan* report,ⁱ a review of the latest early childhood research literature and best practices in the field, and an examination of the goals and current work of numerous philanthropic and advocacy organizations.

Assessment of Organizational Capacity

In light of the opportunities and challenges presented in the environmental scan, ECIC's organizational capacity was examined. The assessment of organizational capacity was designed to ensure that ECIC's goal setting was accomplished with a clear understanding of the current strengths of the organization and the areas in which it needs to improve. ECIC's organizational assessment focused on:

- Current staffing structure and capabilities
- Activities currently undertaken by ECIC
- ECIC's current focus areas and long-range goals as stated on the website and other documents.

In order to determine capacity, the strategic planning team reviewed internal documents including organizational charts, policy manuals, presentations and reports, résumés of key personnel, the inter-local agreement governing ECIC, and ECIC's website. The strategic planning team also conducted interviews with each member of ECIC's staff.

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Organization

The strategic planning team collected and analyzed stakeholder perceptions of ECIC and analyzed stakeholder opinions about the ways in which ECIC can help other early childhood stakeholders better fulfill their own missions. To achieve this goal, the strategic planning team conducted interviews with key partners including Board members; representatives from the philanthropic and business communities; key staff from the Governor's office and the Office of Great Start; intermediate school district administrators; and randomly selected Great Start Collaborative Directors, Great Start Parent Liaisons, and Great Start to Quality Resource Center Directors.

Developing the Vision, Mission, and Values Statements

With a solid understanding of the needs and opportunities within the field, ECIC's organizational capacity, and the primary concerns and desires of key early childhood

stakeholders, the next phase in the strategic planning process was aimed at developing foundational statements of ECIC’s vision, mission, and values as an organization. Draft statements were developed through an iterative process which included extensive feedback from ECIC staff, leadership, and the Board. The vision, mission, and values statements are presented in the next section of this strategic plan.

Determining the Goals and Initiatives

To determine the goals and strategic initiatives, ECIC’s capacity was analyzed in relation to the current needs and opportunities within the field. The strategic planning team reviewed the environmental scan, the *Great Start, Great Investment, Great Future* report, as well as needs and opportunities identified by ECIC staff and stakeholders. In addition, in order to ensure that ECIC’s goals are achievable, impactful, and relevant, a set of criteria for the goals was developed in consultation with ECIC leadership and Board. These criteria include:

- ① **Relevance:** Does the goal meet a specific need in the field?
- ② **Funding:** Is there potential funding available to support the activities to meet the goal?
- ③ **Staff capacity:** Do current staff members have the capacity or can staff be hired to achieve the goal?
- ④ **Value-add:** Can ECIC make a unique contribution or is it uniquely qualified to achieve the goal?
- ⑤ **Measurable:** Is the goal achievable and can progress toward the goal be measured?

Upon review of the multiple sources of data collected through the strategic planning process, a set of goals and strategic initiatives were developed and evaluated against these criteria. The strategic planning team engaged in an iterative process of feedback and review with ECIC leadership and the Board, resulting in the final goals and initiatives.

Our Foundation

Vision

All young children in Michigan have the greatest opportunity to reach their full potential in school and in life.

Mission

To promote and implement innovative, high-quality, research-based early childhood practices and policies that support a comprehensive system in order to ensure every child's future success and the future success of the state of Michigan.

Values

- **Collaboration**...within the organization and with families, practitioners, policymakers, and funders in building a fully aligned continuum of high-quality early childhood programs for children birth through age 8.
- **Innovation**...derived from early childhood research and best practice that supports substantive, lasting, and impactful changes for children.
- **Action**... by connecting research, policy, and practice, meaningful steps can be taken to make the latest advances in early childhood accessible and actionable; ensure that policies are logistically feasible and sufficiently funded to be implemented well; and that early childhood professionals and families have the resources, skills, and knowledge they need to successfully nurture children's development.
- **Family focus**...understanding that the success of young children is dependent upon the success of their families and that "family" can be defined in many ways.
- **Community focus**...acknowledging that children develop within multiple contexts—including families, schools, neighborhoods, and communities—and that each of these environments and the interactions between them have profound effects on children's development and learning.
- **Equity**...with the belief that there is intrinsic value in pursuing policies and initiatives that seek to eliminate persistent disparities between children that are the result of race/ethnicity, class, and gender differences.
- **Engagement**... knowing that the best results for children come when families, practitioners, policymakers, and funders are authentically engaged in policy creation and program implementation.
- **Professionalism**... achieving our goals for Michigan's children and families by creating and maintaining an organizational culture that values creativity, critical thinking, expertise, team work, clear and honest communication, respect, a commitment to ongoing learning and improvement, and the ability to grow from our successes and our failures.
- **Accountability**...knowing that to realize our vision for children, we must be an organization that is strategic in its allocation of resources, efficient and transparent in its processes, and results-driven.

GOAL 1: Research

Ensure that the latest research and science is the foundation of early childhood practice and policy in Michigan.

We will be a thought leader in the state, known for our deep knowledge and expertise in early childhood. We will be a neutral authority and reputable resource on early childhood issues and will be critical thinkers regarding the findings of early childhood research and their application to Michigan's children and families. We will help the Michigan early childhood community become more educated consumers of early childhood information and serve as the "go-to" organization for those who are seeking information about early childhood research, data on the specific needs of Michigan children and families, and current innovations in the field.

- 1.1 Communicate the latest advances in research and science to the field in ways that are accessible and actionable.**
- 1.2 Support data-driven decision-making to identify areas of need and evaluate the effectiveness of current policy and programming to promote program quality and positive child outcomes.**
- 1.3 Use the latest research and evidence-based best practices to identify innovative solutions tailored to the unique needs of Michigan's children and families.**

Examples of Current and Future Work:

- We will monitor the research literature about innovation and promising practices and disseminate relevant information to practitioners and policymakers
- In conjunction with our partners, we will provide policymakers, funders, and stakeholders with data regarding social disparities for young children in Michigan; the consequences of these inequalities for children, families, and the success of the state; and provide a strong argument for a greater commitment to culturally and linguistically responsive early childhood interventions
- We will leverage our existing resources to provide periodic statewide and community snapshots of the distribution of and access to high-quality education, health, and family support programs, identifying areas of need, potential resources and supports for these areas, and charting progress across time.
- We will research promising practices and innovations in racial equity and cultural competency such that we can serve as a leader in this area and effectively advocate for policies and programs that address the root causes of persistent disparities.

GOAL 2: Policy

Engage policymakers and stakeholders in developing and supporting comprehensive early childhood policy and funding.

We will apply what is known from the latest research, data about Michigan’s children and families, and best practices to inform and support a comprehensive early childhood policy agenda that supports a fully aligned continuum of high-quality early childhood programs for the “whole child.” We will be a source of objective, data-driven information for decision-makers, and will convene stakeholders to promote a collaborative agenda that is responsive to the diverse needs within the state. We will use our knowledge of, and ties to “on-the-ground” service providers to ensure that policies are logistically feasible and make certain that they are sufficiently funded in order to support positive outcomes. We will support and complement the work of the Office of Great Start in moving an early childhood policy agenda.

- 2.1 Support coordination and collaboration of early childhood programs, services, regulations, and funding streams at the state and local level.**
- 2.2 Act as a convener of a collaborative network of early childhood stakeholders.**
- 2.3 Increase government and philanthropic funding.**
- 2.4 Collaborate with partners to develop a policy agenda to improve the quality of services for children birth-to-three.**

Examples of Current and Future Work:

- We will leverage relationships with various state agencies (e.g., Office of Great Start, Department of Human Services, Department of Community Health) to ensure a coordinated, collaborative agenda that addresses the needs of the “whole child”.
- Working in partnership with the early childhood advocacy community, we will be responsive to community needs and write briefs and hold forums to stimulate dialogue related to emerging issues in early childhood.
- We will work in partnership with statewide stakeholders to define gaps in services for children 0–3 years-old and their families and provide resources, information, staffing, and support as appropriate to identify and support implementation of evidence-based approaches and initiatives that promote positive outcomes for infants and toddlers.
- In conjunction with our partners, we will work to ensure that the infant–toddler policy agenda aligns with efforts to build high-quality, comprehensive systems for children in preschool and early elementary school.

GOAL 3: Practice

Promote and implement effective practices in environments that strongly influence children's development and learning.

We will support the translation of research to practice in multiple contexts that influence children's learning and development, such as families, early childhood programs, and communities. We will work to ensure that early childhood professionals and families have the resources, skills, and knowledge they need to successfully nurture children's development and we will support communities in their efforts to coordinate services that address an array of child and family needs.

- 3.1 Support community and local efforts to connect and coordinate early childhood programs and services such as health, child care, home visiting, child welfare, education, and family supports.**
- 3.2 Promote programs and services at the state and local level that support the success of families.**
- 3.3 Lead efforts to improve early childhood care and education program quality and to ensure families have access to high-quality options.**

Examples of Current and Future Work:

- We will continue to build the capacity of the Great Start Collaboratives to further create efficiencies across programs through coordination efforts, include all community stakeholders (e.g., parents) in decision making, reduce access barriers, and work to shift and align program policies and practices.
- We will build the capacity of the Great Start Parent Coalitions in order to support the convening and leadership development of parents who want to help improve conditions for young children in their community.
- We will continue to be a leading partner in the development and implementation of Strengthening Families work across the state.
- We will build the capacity of the Great Start to Quality Resource Centers to increase the number of early childhood providers participating in the state's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) and the number of providers at the highest levels of quality.
- We will support system monitoring, validation, and evaluation efforts to ensure that the TQRIS system provides accurate, meaningful information about differentiated levels of quality of early childhood settings.

Endnotes

ⁱThe *Great Start, Great Investment, Great Future: The Plan for Early Learning and Development in Michigan* report is the result of a year-long process that involved an inventory of early childhood programs, fiscal analysis, key informant interviews, parent focus groups, a community survey, and the development of performance metrics for targeted early childhood outcomes.