

Michigan Statistics:

State Population.....9,895,622
(2013 estimate)

0-5 population.....5.8%
(2012 estimate)

Poverty level.....16.3%
(2012 estimate)

of local collaboratives.....54

State/Local Collaborative

Total Funding:.....^s13.3 million
(FY 2014)

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Michigan's Great Start Initiative

The Michigan Department of Education leads the Great Start Initiative through its Office of Great Start. Created in 2011, the Office of Great Start is charged by the governor to lead the state's efforts to coordinate and integrate Michigan's early childhood investments in children—prenatally through age eight. The Governor set four early childhood outcomes for the Office and the state's early childhood system:

1. Children are born healthy;
2. Children are healthy, thriving and developmentally on track from birth to third grade;
3. Children are developmentally ready to succeed at the time of school entry; and
4. Children are prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

The Office of Great Start works with the governor's office, the legislature, the Michigan Departments of Community Health and Human Services, other state agencies and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation in the achievement of these outcomes. Additionally, the Office of Great Start funds Michigan's state-wide network of Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions, the purpose of which is to ensure the coordination and expansion of local early childhood infrastructure and programs that allow every child to achieve the early childhood outcomes set forth by the governor. The Early Childhood Investment Corporation is funded by the Office of Great Start to provide technical assistance and support to the local Great Start Collaboratives.

State-Level Governance

In 2005, prior to the development of the Office of Great Start, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation was created by then Governor Jennifer Granholm and charged with leading the implementation of a comprehensive early childhood system at the state level as well as the development of local collaboratives focused on early childhood system-building. Modeled after the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Investment Corporation was created through an Inter-local Agreement between the Michigan Department of Human Services and Branch County Intermediate School District. As a non-profit public corporation, the Investment Corporation is governed by a



governor-appointed executive committee, with day-to-day operations being led by the chief executive officer. In addition to the executive committee, the Investment Corporation also has a corporate board that includes the executive committee, as well as members appointed by local signatories to the inter-local agreement. Between 2005 and 2011, the Investment Corporation led public education and public will-building efforts for Great Start. It stressed the importance of both investing early and implementation of the state-wide network of Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions, which set the stage for the creation of the Office of Great Start in 2011.



In 2011, Governor Rick Snyder shared his vision that Michigan should be one of the best states in the country to raise a child. In order to realize that vision, he issued Executive Order 2011-8, creating the Office of Great Start within the Michigan Department of Education. The Office of Great Start was charged with refocusing the state's early childhood investment, policy, and administrative structure by adopting a single set of early childhood outcomes and measuring performance against those outcomes. Executive Order 2011-8 consolidated responsibility for critical early learning and care programs into the Office of Great Start and also directed the Director of the Michigan Department of Community Health and Human Services to coordinate with the Superintendent of Public Instruction concerning the administration of programs and services it provides for young children.

” The Office of Great Start was charged with refocusing the state's early childhood investment, policy, and administrative structure by adopting a single set of early childhood outcomes.

Corporation to clarify the role of the Investment Corporation in the leadership and development of the early childhood system going forward. In its new role, the Investment Corporation creates state-local and public-private partnerships to better serve and advance the interests of young children. It uses those partnerships to focus on early childhood innovation, research and evaluation, and information dissemination, with the goal of promoting high quality, accountable early childhood programs and infrastructure. Under a contract with the Office of Great Start, the Investment Corporation provides technical assistance and training to the Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions, and oversees the day-to-day operations of Great Start to Quality, Michigan's quality rating and improvement system.

The Office of Great Start administers Michigan's public early childhood programs and:

- aligns, consolidates, and/or integrates early childhood funding and related programs around Michigan's early childhood outcomes;
- coordinates the governor's policy, budget, and programs for early childhood issues; and
- acts as the governor's spokesperson for early childhood issues.¹

A memorandum of agreement was developed in 2012 among the Governor's Office, Department of Education, Office of Great Start and the Early Childhood Investment

State-Level Staffing

At the Office of Great Start, one staff member is paid to oversee the administration of the Early Childhood Block grant. Additional staff members at the Office of Great Start support the block grant as a part of the coordination across programs within the Office. The Office of Great Start has a contract with the Early Childhood Investment Corporation to provide technical assistance and training to the 54 Great Start Collaboratives and 70 Parent Coalitions. The Investment Corporation has 34 full-time employees (18 regular employees, 16 contract employees). Of that total number, 49% work on Great Start to Quality (the state's quality rating and improvement system); 32% work on technical assistance and training in support of the local Great Start collaborative; and 19% is administrative

¹ Memo from the Governor's Office, MDE, and ECIC, Early Childhood Partners (Lansing, Mich.: November 26, 2012)

staff, including the chief executive officer and staff focused on communications, community outreach, finance and contracting.

State-Level Funding

Funding for the Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions is provided by the Early Childhood Block grant in the amount of \$10.9 million and by the state's CCDF quality set-aside in the amount of \$1.4 million. The contract the Office of Great Start has with the Early Childhood Investment Corporation for training and technical assistance services for the collaboratives and parent coalitions is for \$1.0 million and is also supported by the state's CCDF quality set-aside.

Public Education and Advocacy

The local Great Start collaboratives and their parent coalitions are a key part of the public education and advocacy strategy for Michigan's early childhood efforts. Parent leaders and other volunteers are in contact with elected officials on a monthly basis, sharing the exciting work occurring at the local level and how it is making a difference for young children and families. There is also a state listserv that keeps volunteers informed and engaged. Through the state-level efforts, various events are organized that remind the public of why investment in early childhood is important. One local collaborative, for example, passed out candy at Halloween that included a reminder to vote and to educate elected leaders on the need to support early childhood investments.

From 2005 – 2011, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation was the lead for public education and public will-building for early childhood issues and investment in Michigan. During that time period, the Great Start Parent Coalitions, in particular, were highly involved in both local and state education activities with legislators

and other policy-makers. Beginning in 2012, the Office of Great Start became the voice of early childhood in Michigan.



Local Collaborative Overview

There are currently 54 local Great Start collaboratives and 70 parent coalitions. As noted in the funding section (see below), local collaboratives receive funding via the Michigan Department of Education – Office of Great Start. The Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) throughout Michigan serve as the fiduciary for these funds which are provided through an early childhood block grant. ISDs complete an annual application for funds to support the Great Start Collaborative, the Parent Coalition and early childhood programming, as determined through a multi-year strategic plan, prepared by the Collaborative.

Most local collaboratives are components of their local Intermediate School District (ISD). A few ISDs contract with other entities in the community to convene and facilitate the work of the collaborative. In one community, the funding goes to the local chamber of commerce, which employs the local collaborative director and the parent coalition director. In another, it goes to a local nonprofit.

As a part of the important information provided in the block grant application, potential members for the collaborative are listed. Each collaborative makes its own decisions about membership, except for the requirement that at least 20% of the total membership has to be parents of young children.

Local Collaborative Staffing

The block grant requires that the ISD demonstrate that the collaborative work is staffed by at least .75 FTE. In some communities this is one individual, while in others, the duties are divided across individuals. Additionally, the parent coalition must be staffed at least .50 FTE. Again, in some communities one person fills this role while, in others, it is divided across individuals. Some collaboratives choose to use their block grant funds to pay for a 1.0 FTE staff and others devote additional funds for parent coalition staffing. The collaboratives in the largest counties have additional staff.

Local Collaborative Funding

When the local Great Start collaboratives were first funded, beginning in 2005, it was via a competitive application process that gradually phased in local collaboratives for funding on a statewide basis over a period of four years. In developing that initial application,

community leaders were engaged in local conversations to define what a successful collaborative would look like and be able to do and what “readiness” for funding would look like. The entire application was built around the concept of readiness for systems work. There was a rubric that ranked communities. They were then funded in phases, with those in the “ready” category receiving the initial funding.

In the early days of Great Start, the local collaboratives were funded through CCDF quality funds. These funds flowed through the Investment Corporation with \$2.3 million set aside to fund the first Great Start collaboratives. These funds were blended with grant funds from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to support the local work. When the school aid funds were later received from the state, the collaboratives were funded with a mix of federal, state and private dollars.

In 2011, the legislature approved a block grant approach through the state’s School Aid Act (Section 32P), whereby local collaboratives would be funded through state school aid money allocated directly to the Intermediate School Districts and designated to support early childhood efforts. In order to supplement the school aid funds, the Office of Great Start is still directing a portion of its CCDF funding to some of the local collaboratives.

Funding to the local collaboratives varies by population and is calculated through a formula process. Each local collaborative applies annually for funding from the Office of Great Start. In looking at the range of funding across the local collaboratives, the smallest receives an Early Childhood Block Grant of \$123,000 while the largest receives approximately \$1 million. In addition, many collaboratives and parent coalitions either seek grants or solicit donations to support projects of either body as identified in the local strategic plan.

Local Collaborative Snapshot - Montcalm County and Ionia County Great Start Collaboratives

The Montcalm County and Ionia County Great Start Collaboratives are two separate local collaboratives that have combined their resources to share one full-time director and three parent liaisons per county for a

total of six parent liaison positions for Montcalm and Ionia Counties. Both collaboratives have offices in each Intermediate School District as they are maintained as two separate boards - one for Montcalm County and one for Ionia County. These are rural counties although they are within a half hour’s drive of the more urban communities of Grand Rapids and Lansing.



Each local collaborative applies annually for funding from the Office of Great Start.

Montcalm County was funded in phase two of the initial Great Start roll-out and Ionia County came in during phase three. When Montcalm County had a change in staff, the two boards agreed to work together and combine their resources to support a coordinated staff approach across the two counties. There had been budget cuts at the state level and both boards felt it was strategic to merge their resources and to emphasize an approach that prioritized parent leadership and supported strong systems change efforts in their communities.

When the local collaboratives were first established, leaders in certain roles from the public and private sector were required to participate. To add value to this requirement, Montcalm and Ionia counties decided to interview people to determine if they were the “right” people to lead the work of the collaborative. If prospective members did not think they could fulfill the required role in a productive and meaningful way based on the specifics they were given, then they were asked for recommendations and the organizers then met with other prospective members. The goal of this process was a shared understanding of where members wanted to go with their communities. They conducted the same process with prospective parent members. Some parents said they wanted to be a part of it and others said they didn’t have time or interest. This was how the original board was created. Today, the two local collaboratives have a membership application process. This was established because there was





so much interest that the board was becoming too big to be productive. Existing board members now sponsor new board members. Prospective members are invited to a board meeting, receive an orientation and get the history of the organization and goals. They are assigned a board member to mentor them. They then make a final decision as to whether they will commit or not. They must commit to attending six board meetings per year, as well as to attending or sending a staff member to be part of the committee work. Board membership is now capped at forty members. There is not a formal “term” process for members. Some members have been involved since the beginning and others are newer. The Executive Committee holds the board members to task and there are annual reviews to assure that everyone is in agreement as to the direction the work of the collaborative is going and that the collaborative is meeting all funding requirements.

The director of the Montcalm County and Ionia County Great Start Collaboratives is Cari O’Connor. She has found her previous experience in the mental health field to be helpful in running the collaboratives, stating that, “When you work with people, you meet them where they are. Working in mental health taught me the important lessons of that.” She brings a unique perspective to this work. Coming from mental health, she often saw children being removed from the home and the limited ways in which the mental health system could support families. She has found it extremely fulfilling to have this opportunity to empower parents and to build their leadership skills. She said, “Supporting them in building their leadership skills is an amazing process to be a part of.”

Ms. O’Connor was the first director for Ionia County’s Great Start Collaborative, which was funded in phase three. The initial grant was a 6-month start-up grant. The first full-year grant was for \$120,000 plus a 10% match. For 2013, the collaborative has an operational grant of \$131,000. Those funds pay the director’s salary and 3 part-time parent liaison staff and support the Parent Coalition and parent support programs. The budget also funds expenses for parent involvement, such as food for parent meetings, stipends for parent board members, gas/mileage, child care expenses, and the cost for parents to attend state level meetings and conferences. In allocating funds under the budget, one of the major priorities was to assure they were using the funds to remove all barriers to parent participation. The funds also support parent-led community activities, as well as a [website](#) and community calendar that keep parents and community partners

informed. As Ms. O’Connor stated, “All our funds are directed towards systems change. That’s how we differentiate ourselves from our program partners. It has made all the difference in perspective. We are empowering parents to be the experts.”



Numerous regional councils have also chosen to fund a position called “Parent Awareness and Community Outreach Coordinator.”

Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative has the same budget and staff structure as Ionia County. They also have prioritized parent support and leadership within their budget decisions.

Although both collaboratives have a strong parent focus, each community puts this into action differently to produce systems change based on the unique needs of each community. The mission of both local collaboratives is to help children be ready to succeed in school and in life. They each have a three-year strategic plan. Every three years, they go through a community-based process and involve parents heavily, with a focus on assuring that they are helping children be ready for school. In the most recent strategic planning process, over 300 parents were involved.

From Ms. O’Connor’s perspective, the technical assistance from the state has been extremely helpful. She likes the quarterly meetings hosted by the state that allow her to regularly meet with her local collaborative peers. (When they first started, these meetings were held monthly, then bi-monthly.) She also has frequent informal meetings with other local directors to share work they are doing and has found these informal peer networks to be most



beneficial. Particular trainings like the “Parents Partnering for Change” training and the “Adaptive Skills” training have been outstanding. She also has found the professional learning communities to be helpful, including one she is active in, the Strong Parent Leadership and Voice Learning Community. An annual technical assistance conference, hosted by the Investment Corporation until 2013, has also allowed her to share what they have learned in their local collaborative around incorporating parent voice and commitment into the work of the collaborative. As part of that session, she shared budgeting priorities that emphasize the involvement and leadership of parents and also talked about skills she has used to draw out their voices and assure that they are heard at the board and committee table.

For these two local Great Start collaboratives, parents are the top priority in their systems change efforts and it comes through in their budgeting, their board/committee activities, and the activities they fund. They have particularly emphasized programs that are designed to help parents be prepared to come to board and committee meetings and to have a meaningful experience in which they feel empowered to participate and provide input. To that end, one of the programs they have supported is a *Parent Partnering for Change* training. Parents have found it to be very impactful and instrumental in their understanding of their role on the board as experts, which has empowered them in board meetings.

The Ionia County local collaborative board has 14 parents. Of those parents, 60% have used some sort of social service. They are full participants on the board. Supports are provided to help get them to meetings and they are described as being “at different places along the continuum.” As Ms. O’Connor noted, “The parent

leadership piece has been a big priority in meeting parents where they are and where they want to go, in terms of leadership. They go back to their communities and their families and see their success. When I talk about the impact we’ve had on our system, I think of the parent that, through the process of her own leadership goals, has achieved personal and professional success. Owning a home, finding meaningful employment, that helps our system as a whole, builds our community through building families.”

Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative has 40 board members, with 12 parents of which 100% report using services. Montcalm County’s Parent Coalition membership is at an all time high of 34 parents. The Parent Coalition is often referred to as the PTA for the county’s birth to five children.

Much of this parent-focused perspective is reflected in each local collaborative’s strategic plan. Ionia County’s [3-year strategic plan](#) includes the following goals:

Goal 1: Maintain the infrastructure of the Ionia County Great Start Collaborative (ICGSC).

- **Objective 1:** Maintain engagement and effectiveness of the ICGSC Board.
- **Objective 2.** Educate Ionia County Communities about Early Childhood Investment.
- **Objective 3.** Create blended funding opportunities in Early Childhood system in Ionia County.
- **Objective 4.** Maintain a coordinated early childhood advocacy message in Ionia County.

Goal 2: Improved wellness for children prenatally through age eight.

- **Objective 1:** Develop wellness supports for birth to eight families in Ionia County.
- **Objective 2.** Improve wellness supports access for birth to eight families.
- **Objective 3.** Build partnerships to create family support opportunities.

Goal 3: Children in Ionia County are prepared to succeed in school.

- **Objective 1:** Create affordable opportunities for families to support their needs.
- **Objective 2.** Promote affordable, quality preschool experiences in Ionia County.
- **Objective 3.** Build partnerships to promote educational opportunities for caregivers.

Goal 4: Families support and guide the learning of birth to eight children.

- **Objective 1:** Build parent supports into the Ionia County Early Childhood System.
- **Objective 2:** Strengthen collaboration among referral sources.

In thinking back on how far they have come, Ms. O'Connor noted, "The collaboratives have their own footing in the community now. They look very different than they did originally because they have the unique voice of the locals. We all look a little different. I know I can call the Investment Corporation if I have a question but we have moved out on our own now. That's a good thing. Now our local system can own the work that it does. The Investment Corporation was there to carry us in the beginning and hold our hand. Now we are running with it at the local level."

” The collaboratives have their own footing in the community now. They look very different than they did originally because they have the unique voice of the locals.

focuses on connecting efforts in the community around assuring that all children who are eligible can take advantage of pre-K. Technical assistance is targeted to these committees to increase their effectiveness.

- **Parent Liaison Leadership Training:** Training is provided to parent liaisons (who convene the local Great Start Parent Coalitions) on leadership through a special curriculum called *Parents Partnering for Change*.

- **Effective Group Training:** Local collaborative directors receive training on running effective groups - a curriculum designed to assist with the local collaboration process.

- **Systems Change Training:** Local leaders participate in a four-day training curriculum that focuses on how to lead systems change from a local perspective. The training teaches systems thinking including specific techniques, such as doing a systems scan, doing root cause analysis, how to use data to make decisions, etc.

- **Learning Communities:** Local leaders are also invited to participate in learning communities on a variety of topics.

Other support includes:

- Individual technical assistance plan for each local collaborative (a system tracks every single contact that any staff member makes with a local collaborative to assure quality).
- Quarterly meetings with all collaborative directors and parent liaisons. These meetings generally include several hours in the morning of information sharing by the Office of Great Start and the Investment Corporation. Afternoons are spent in a peer to peer learning community. The goal of these sessions is to learn from each other with the infusion of expertise from others. Resource materials are often generated from these conversations.
- Monthly calls for all the parent liaisons, along with a monthly webinar on different topics that emerge during the course of the year.

Often, the trainings offered to local collaboratives use a process that includes coaching and personal consultation in between training sessions, with a goal of helping participants put the learning into actual practice. Trainings often follow a cycle that includes learning interaction, follow-up, infusions of learning that are related to things

Technical Assistance and Support to Local Collaboratives

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation has a contract with the Office of Great Start to provide technical assistance and support to the Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions. The areas of support they provide include:

- **Help Line/Tip Line:** This operates during working hours to quickly respond to any questions from a local collaborative or parent coalition.
- **Strategic Planning:** Every year there is a cohort of local collaboratives that needs to update their 3-year strategic plan. During this period, there is a year-long planned technical assistance program to support the collaboratives in developing their plans.
- **Orientations:** New collaborative directors and parent coalition liaisons participate in a six-month orientation process.
- **Targeted Technical Assistance:** Investment Corporation staff annually analyzes local collaborative plans and applications and, based on what they are working on, create additional technical assistance programs to support the local efforts.
- **School Readiness Committees:** Each local collaborative has a School Readiness Committee that

there were questions about, coaching/consultation in between training sessions, more training, and then more coaching/consultation.

To manage this ambitious technical assistance approach, the Investment Corporation employs four full-time technical assistance consultants. Another individual also maintains the reporting/tracking system. There is also a full-time person that is focused on parent leadership project management and supports all work related to the parent coalitions. Joan Blough, Senior Vice President for Great Start System Strategy and Evaluation for the Investment Corporation, targets 60% of her time to technical assistance and support to the local collaboratives as well.

Pros and Cons of the Model

Pros

- **Parents** - Parents have an authentic seat at the table at the local level in the planning and systems-building approach.
- **Public/Private** - There is an emphasis on building a public/private approach to all aspects of the work.
- **All Children** - The vision of what they are creating is about ALL children though the public portion of the system is focused on serving children with the highest needs.
- **Data** - From the beginning, there was a real emphasis on making decisions based on data and getting community leaders to think that way.
- **Building Success** - Training and technical assistance was built into the model from the very beginning with an approach that was about meeting the local leaders where they were and helping them to be successful.
- **Systems Change** - Michigan leaders were very deliberate from the beginning about emphasizing a systems change approach in the work of the local collaboratives.



Cons

- **Funding for Parent Coalition** – Current funding for the Parent Coalitions does not allow for a full-time staff. The staff support for the coalitions is required to be .50 FTE, which has led to about a 40% annual turn-over rate for this position. Not surprisingly, many Parent Liaisons actually leave their role to take other positions in the community, which are offered to them because of their community connections, skills and knowledge regarding young children and families.
- **Connection to Child Outcomes** – While the work of the collaboratives and coalitions is connected to Michigan's early childhood outcomes, there is no objective data that demonstrates that the work of these bodies contributes to improved child outcomes.
- **Parent Engagement**– [The Great Start, Great Investment, Great Futures report](#) identified the need for more parents to be engaged in the collaborative and coalition work.

Evaluation and Performance Measures

At the state level, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation has been evaluating the effectiveness of the local systems building work since the inception of the Great Start Collaboratives. In the most recent [evaluation](#), released in 2013, it was noted that parents now have a greater say in early childhood public will-building, and also find increased access to early childhood services, collaboration among agencies and support for early childhood issues. “On every outcome area examined in this evaluation, Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions are accomplishing far more than in 2010,” noted Pennie Foster-Fishman, the report’s author. “In ways big and small across the state, young children and their needs are becoming more and more of a priority.” Among the report’s specific findings:

- Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents think the Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions have expanded the array of early childhood services available in their communities, compared to thirty-eight percent who thought so in 2010.
- Fifty-five percent think the two groups have increased access to early childhood services, compared to thirty-six percent who thought so two years ago.
- Fifty-three percent think the two groups have increased community support for early childhood issues, compared to thirty-five percent who thought so two years ago.



- Sixty-four percent see parents benefiting from participating in one of the two groups, compared to fifty-two percent who saw that in 2010.

Of greater importance, the evaluation was helpful in understanding the key levers for change that have been most effective in promoting growth in accomplishments. The levers that appeared to play the most important role were:

- Readiness for Change;
- Intentional Systems Change Actions; and
- Authentic Parent Leadership and Voice.

Other key levers for change included:

- Equitable system pursuits; and
- Engaged constituency.

Also of particular note, the evaluation reflected that the local collaboratives had moved from “collaboration/coalition building” to “movement building.”

In addition to the state-level evaluation that is conducted, local collaboratives must also focus on specific performance goals. The Office of Great Start now has specific outcomes that local collaboratives must target in their ongoing activities. These outcomes are:

- Children born healthy;
- Children healthy, thriving, and developmentally on track from birth to third grade;
- Children developmentally ready to succeed in school at the time of school entry; and
- Children prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.



The Office of Great Start now has specific outcomes that local collaboratives must target in their ongoing activities.

Each local collaborative must pick which outcomes it will work on and build its strategic plan around those outcomes. It then identifies which activities it will do that target the overall outcomes, as well as a specific performance measure for which it will be held accountable. Each collaborative reports its progress twice a year via an online system through the Department of Education. This performance measurement system is a new one for the local collaboratives.

Lessons Learned and Key Components to Success

- Emphasize systems change in your approach from the very beginning and establish a framework that emphasizes this approach.
- Create a learning community amongst the entities that is inclusive of both the state and local leaders. Make everyone part of the learning community.
 - Theory of change is needed - a shared framework of what you are trying to accomplish collectively.
 - Funding is essential. This type of systems change cannot occur on a purely volunteer basis.
 - It’s not who the local collaborative is, but what it does. People get focused on who is at the table but they need the capacity to understand what the real problems are, to learn what might solve them and to bring the resources to bear to make the systems change and innovations to oversee implementation.
- Focus on equity from the beginning and how your system is going to address equity. Be mindful of the diverse stakeholders and how they are authentically involved in the process.
- Emphasize continuous quality improvement as a fundamental aspect of successful systems change.
- This is a developmental process. There is no one right answer. Continually be positioning yourself for the next right thing. Try some things, learn some things and then determine where you go from there.
- Have the courage to do what you think is right, even if it’s not popular. Establish your principles and your values and then have the courage to live by them.



Resources

- [Great Start website](#)
- [Office of Great Start website](#)
- [Early Childhood Investment Corporation website](#)
- [Executive Order establishing the Office of Great Start](#)
- [Section 32p Michigan School Aid Act \(Great Start block grant funding\)](#)
- [2012 Great Start Evaluation Report](#)
- [Ionia County Local Collaborative 3-year strategic plan](#)
- [Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative website](#)
- [Ionia County Great Start Collaborative website](#)
- [Great Start, Great Investment, Great Futures report](#)

- This work takes time and community readiness for change absolutely matters.
- The voice of the parent is essential to building an effective partnership at the local level. You must make parents a part of the process and support their success.
- Start somewhere and set yourself up for success. Small successes at the beginning are the most important and will define whether you make it or not.
- Celebrate each action step. When we start systems level work, we focus on the big goals and forget all the little action steps that it requires. Celebrate each step forward. That will bring more people on board. Success breeds success.
- Relationships, relationships, relationships.
- Don't make changes in the system without the voice of the people who are using it and being impacted the most.

Final Words of Advice

“The work is hard and it’s a long term mission, long term vision, long term goal. The work and success along the way is the most meaningful. Don’t lose sight of the successes.”

Interviews

Joan Blough, *Senior Vice President*
Early Childhood Investment Corporation

Cari O’Connor, *Director*
Montcalm and Ionia County Great Start Collaboratives