

VISION for KENT COUNTY'S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Vision Statement:

Every young child in Kent County will enter kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed in school and in life.

Mission Statement:

The mission is to create a coordinated, integrated early childhood system that supports all families in Kent County with high quality, culturally sensitive services that are voluntary and accessible to all.

Guiding Principles:

- Parents are their children's first and most important teachers.
- Families are supported in identifying their needs and accessing quality services to meet those needs.
- The early childhood system is based on methods proven to be effective, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.
- Data is used to measure the impact of services on children, families, and the community.
- Results are reported to the community and are used to drive decisions about the early childhood system.

Parent Education

Parents have the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to give their young children a great start in life.

- Parenting education is integrated into all aspects of the early childhood system
- All parents have access to information about parenting, child development, health, early education, and community resources
- All parents are educated about how to use the results of screenings and other information pertaining to the wellbeing of their young child or children

**Parents include mothers, fathers, guardians, and other caregivers responsible for raising the child or children*

Family Support

Families have the relationships and resources they need to raise their young children, and their basic needs are met.

- Public and private sector agencies work together to strengthen services to families
- All families of young children have access to resources to help meet their basic needs, including food, housing, clothing, transportation, and employment
- All families, starting prenatally and continuing through childhood, are offered a menu of support services
- All families of young children have access to enrichment opportunities and an environment that promotes their wellbeing, including park space, recreation activities, libraries, and cultural institutions

Early Care & Education

Young children have quality early learning experiences starting at birth.

- Early care and education programs and K-12 school systems work together to support the education of young children
- All families of young children have access to quality child care and early education
- All families of children ages 3 & 4 have access to quality preschool
- Early care and education providers have quality education, professional development, training, and other resources
- Children with developmental delays and disabilities are identified early and receive appropriate instruction and services
- Systems are in place to measure the readiness of children entering kindergarten

Physical & Behavioral Health

Young children and their families receive the quality, comprehensive services and education they need to maximize their health.

- All components of the healthcare system work together to meet the needs of children and families
- All young children receive comprehensive health services, including primary care in a quality medical home, dental care, developmental and other screenings, and, as needed, mental health services and specialist care
- All families of young children have access to comprehensive quality healthcare
- All women have access to quality preconception, prenatal, and postnatal care and other related support services
- All families of young children receive information and education about prevention, leading a healthy lifestyle, and eliminating environmental risks

Communications/Advocacy

The community understands the importance of early childhood and invests in the healthy development and early learning of young children.

- Early childhood communications and advocacy work is coordinated at the local level and with state and national efforts
- Community members receive information about the importance of early childhood services relative to a child's development and the long-term community impact
- Parents are actively involved in early childhood communications and advocacy efforts
- Policy makers at the local, state, and federal levels receive information related to public policy and its effect on families with young children
- Employers receive information related to family-friendly work settings and their effect on families and young children

**Access is an important concept in Kent County's Early Childhood System. Services that are accessible are affordable, culturally sensitive and are offered at flexible times, close to where families live and work.*

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INVITATION:

This is a shared vision that belongs to the community and outlines what it will take to have every young child in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to be successful. It is a long-term vision that presents the ideal picture of a comprehensive and integrated system of early childhood support services. Everyone in the community has a role to play in turning this vision into reality.

Clear and compelling research confirms that high quality early childhood development experiences have tremendous benefits for children and families as well as for the whole community. For every dollar invested, many more are returned to the public. Please join this collaborative effort to support our youngest children. A strong future for Kent County requires that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

This vision was created by a wide array of child advocates, including parents, educators, healthcare providers, private and public sector service providers, philanthropic leaders, and business leaders. It will guide the community's early childhood work moving forward and will be revisited, as needed, to respond to a changing environment and increasing knowledge of child development.

Next steps will include:

Identifying a series of indicators that will be used to measure progress toward the desired results.

Prioritizing needs, with a focus on those areas in which there are opportunities to achieve significant results.

Developing specific strategies to meet the prioritized needs.

*Approved by the Great Start Collaborative, March 2010
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