



first steps

growing every child's potential

The Great Start Parent Coalition is an alliance of parents and caregivers that provides a parent voice for early childhood planning and decision-making for Kent County. The Coalition educates and builds support for early childhood investment at the local and state level. Parents can participate in professional and personal development in the areas of leadership, advocacy, and parenting.

First Steps leads a community wide collaboration of early childhood advocates— including parents, agency and business leaders, healthcare providers, educators, and foundation leaders—who are investing in our youngest children to ensure a better future for all.

Our vision is that every young child in Kent County will be ready to succeed in school and in life.

Early Investment Pays the Greatest Return

- **Too many children are not ready for Kindergarten.**
- **The most rapid brain development occurs by age three.**
- **Child development is economic development.**
 - ◆ A study by the RAND Corporation found that quality early childhood programs lead to a return of anywhere from \$1.26 to \$17.07 for every \$1 invested.
 - ◆ Quality early childhood programs can lead to lower special education costs, lower crime and incarceration rates, reduced welfare dependency, higher graduation rates, and a better trained workforce.
 - ◆ The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Business Roundtable, Council on Economic Development, military leaders, and law enforcement all advocate for an increased investment in early education.

Michigan's Young Children

- **Poverty affects one of every five children ages 0-4 in Michigan.**
- **45% of all the births in Michigan are to single women well below poverty level. One of every 10 births in Michigan was to a teenager.**
- **Michigan has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the nation, ranking 43rd.**
- **More than 10,000 young children in Michigan suffered from neglect in 2006.**
- **Nearly half of the estimated 37,000 hospitalizations of Michigan children 5 and younger could have been prevented by timely and effective primary care.**

www.firststepskent.org



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What You Can Do

One of the goals of Great Start and First Steps is to make young children and their families an urgent community priority. To achieve that goal, we're asking YOU to make young children one of YOUR priorities. **Here are 5 things you can do to be an effective advocate for our children.**

1. STAY INFORMED.

Sign up to receive Stepping Ahead, the newsletter of First Steps. To sign up, go to www.firststepskent.org. Sign up for the Great Start Parent Coalition email list at one of our meetings, or request to be added at gsparents@firststepskent.org. Join our Great Start Parent Coalition of Kent County fan page on Facebook.

2. SPREAD THE WORD.

Invite Great Start to speak to your school, community group, or congregation about advocating for the importance of early childhood development and the benefits to investing in our youngest children.

3. MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD.

Write a letter to the editor. As a parent, your words carry a lot of weight. You can find examples of letters to the editor at www.firststepskent.org. You can also post comments on news articles related to early childhood at sites such as mlive.com.

4. ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE.

Urge your federal and state lawmakers, county and city commissioners, school board members, and other elected officials to advance public policies that support the health, early learning, and security of our youngest children. Attend community meetings, write a letter or email, or call your legislators.

5. TELL 5 FRIENDS.

Tell them why the earliest years of a child's life are so important. Discuss your involvement in supporting young children and their families in Kent County. The importance of early childhood must be on the community agenda, and that means we all have to keep talking about it.

First Steps, along with Great Start, is working to make sure every young child in Kent County is ready to succeed in school and in life. Please join us! Our children need your time, your resources, and your support.

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