

Memorandum of Understanding
between
First Steps, the Great Start Collaborative of Kent County,
and the Kent County Family & Children’s Coordinating Council

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) sets forth the terms and understanding among First Steps (FS), the Great Start Collaborative of Kent County (GSC), and the Kent County Family and Children’s Coordinating Council (KCFCCC) regarding activities related to the development, implementation, and evaluation of a comprehensive early childhood system. The Great Start Parent Coalition (Parent Coalition) is an affiliate of the GSC and is referred to repeatedly in this document.

I. Background

FS, the GSC, the Parent Coalition, and the KCFCCC share common priorities and interests in the development of a comprehensive and integrated early childhood system, including but not limited to:

- Coordinate and align services through the implementation of a community plan for services to children and families;
- Improve systems by allocating and expanding resources and implementing public policies to improve the quality of life for children and families in Kent County;
- Make the system accountable by evaluating all activities, including short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes.

These organizations realize that by forming a strategic partnership they can avoid duplication of efforts and capitalize on the individual strengths of each.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this MOU is to maximize resources and investments to promote a coordinated system of quality support services for young children and their families in Kent County. It establishes a mechanism whereby all parties can work together to achieve improved communication, coordination, and collaboration. The goal of this partnership is to catalyze progress to:

- *Develop a coordinated, integrated system of early childhood services that supports all families in Kent County. High quality, culturally sensitive services are voluntary and accessible to all.*
- *Actualize the community vision that every young child in Kent County will enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and in life.*

III. Cross Representation and Communication

Every attempt will be made to ensure FS, the GSC, the Parent Coalition, and the KCFCCC are represented on the boards of, or are otherwise involved with, the other parties.

- A representative of the GSC, a representative of the Parent Coalition, and a representative of the KCFCCC will be recognized as full voting members of the FS Commission.
- A representative of FS and a representative of the KCFCCC will be recognized as members of the GSC. Parent representatives who serve on the GSC also are encouraged to be members of the Parent Coalition.
- Understanding the membership of KCFCCC is dictated by statute, representatives of FS, the GSC, and the Parent Coalition will be welcome to participate in KCFCCC meetings.
- FS, the GSC, and the KCFCCC will make representatives available to report to the Parent Coalition when called upon.
- Every attempt will be made to have ongoing communication and dialogue between FS, the GSC, the KCFCCC, and the Parent Coalition so each entity understands the work of the others.

IV. Roles and Responsibilities

This section outlines the primary roles and responsibilities of FS, the GSC, the KCFCCC and the Parent Coalition in the development of a coordinated and integrated system of quality early childhood services in Kent County. Some roles and responsibilities, such as advocacy and convening stakeholders, are shared by all four entities; others are unique to each one.

- A. First Steps was created to serve as an independent, influential and neutral entity that leads the efforts to develop and sustain a coordinated system of quality early childhood services in Kent County. FS uses its influence to set and advance the agenda and priorities for the community's early childhood work, in collaboration with other community stakeholders. Guided by data and research, FS helps the community make targeted decisions about where to focus resources, strengthening the quality and accountability of the system of early childhood services.

First Steps will:

- Refine and advance the community plan for Kent County's early childhood system, based on recommendations and advice from the GSC, the Parent Coalition, and other community stakeholders.
- Facilitate the implementation of the plan:
 - Prioritize and implement strategies to maximize existing funding and, as needed, increase funding for early childhood services.
 - Incubate demonstration projects, when appropriate. In most instances, projects will be time limited and, if successful, integrated into the community. FS does not intend to be a service provider and will work to place demonstration projects in another community organization or change systems to sustain their impact. Occasionally, however, FS may operate a program itself.

- Create a public mandate to support services for children ages 0-5 and their families.
 - Convene stakeholders and community leadership to address issues such as gaps, capacity and quality.
- Advocate for needed policy change and sustainable funding for an early childhood system in Kent County. FS, the GSC, and the Parent Coalition will work cooperatively to align their advocacy agendas; however, each group also has the autonomy to advocate on its own for a particular issue.
- Receive and review data and information to assess the effectiveness of the system and its impact; report results to the community; and make recommendations to improve services for young children and their families.
- Advise the GSC as to whether it should pursue funding opportunities for which it is eligible. Funding should be pursued only if it would advance the community vision and plan.
- Serve as the fiduciary and legal entity for the GSC and the employer for all staff members funded through the GSC. The fiduciary relationship between FS, the GSC, and the Kent Intermediate School District is outlined in a separate Memorandum of Understanding.
- Report to the full KCFCCC twice a year (or more often if requested), incorporating the work of the GSC and Parent Coalition.
- Report once annually (or more often if requested) to the Kent County Board of Commissioners.

B. The Great Start Collaborative is comprised of local professionals and parents who are working with other community stakeholders to develop and sustain a coordinated, integrated early childhood system in Kent County. The GSC convenes the best experts in the community to study issues related to young children and their families and to recommend strategies to address those issues. The GSC is funded by the Early Childhood Investment Corporation and provides a critical link to early childhood work around the state. The Great Start Parent Coalition is affiliated with the GSC. It brings together parents of diverse backgrounds and communities in Kent County, providing them with a vehicle to inform, shape, and support the county's early childhood system.

The Great Start Collaborative will:

- Convene a diverse group of service providers, educators, parents, child advocates, and private funding organizations and provide a place for them to talk openly, build trust, and work together toward a shared vision for young children.
- Research and develop strategies to address issues such as quality standards, gaps, capacity, delivery, and coordination of services for children, ages 0-5, and their families. When appropriate, recommend the most promising strategies to FS.
 - Research and analyze best-practice systems and programs.
- Educate the community about early childhood issues and build public will for increased investment in services and programs for young children and their families.
- Inform public policy by educating and engaging local and state leaders. FS, the GSC, and the Parent Coalition will work cooperatively to align their advocacy agendas;

however, each group also has the autonomy to advocate on its own for a particular issue.

- Establish an annual work plan (Early Childhood Action Agenda) that aligns with the community plan for Kent County’s early childhood system.
- Decide how to allocate the GSC budget and, to the extent possible, align resources to advance the early childhood plan.
- In consultation with FS, pursue funding opportunities for which the GSC is eligible. Funding should be pursued only if it would advance the community vision and plan.
- Provide parent representatives to serve on all working committees.

The Great Start Parent Coalition is affiliated with the GSC. The Parent Coalition will:

- Build public support for early childhood investment through education and advocacy with other parents, community members, and policy makers. FS, the GSC, and the Great Start Parent Coalition will work cooperatively to align their advocacy agendas; however, each group also has the autonomy to advocate on its own for a particular issue.
- Provide a “customer” perspective to the community’s early childhood work, ensuring that the system works effectively for parents and families.
- Raise awareness among Kent County families about the services that are available in the community.
- Support the work of the GSC and provide assistance, where appropriate, with GSC activities and events.
- Serve as a sounding board for parent members (Parent Representatives) of the GSC.
- Conduct service projects to benefit families in the community.

C. The Kent County Family & Children’s Coordinating Council works to coordinate and improve services for children, youth, and families in Kent County. The Council is made up of the directors of the County and State departments that provide services to families and representatives from education, business, private agencies, private funding organizations, consumers, and advocates. The KCFCCC works to ensure systems are coordinated and provides oversight and accountability of services for children and families. The KCFCCC recognizes FS as the leader of the community’s efforts to develop and sustain a coordinated, integrated system of early childhood services in Kent County.

Kent County Family & Children’s Coordinating Council will:

- Provide a forum (KCFCCC full Council meetings) for sharing information related to the development, implementation and evaluation of the early childhood system.
- Facilitate the development and implementation of a coordinated system of services for children of all ages in Kent County and ensure the community’s early childhood work is well integrated into that system.
- Promote and support prevention-based services for children and families in Kent County.
- Report to FS twice a year (or more often if requested).
- Report to the GSC twice a year (or more often if requested).

V. Joint Review

The chair or co-chairs of FS, one or more staff from FS, the chair of the GSC, one or more staff from GSC, one or more members of the Great Start Parent Coalition, the chair of the KCFCCC, and one or more staff from Kent County Administration will meet to review and evaluate the effectiveness of this relationship. The meeting will occur no less than once a year and more often if needed.

VI. Funding

Nothing in this MOU shall be deemed a financial obligation of the KCFCCC, Kent County, FS or the GSC.

VII. Duration

This MOU is at-will and may be modified by mutual consent of authorized representatives of each of the signing organizations. In the absence of a mutual agreement to continue this strategic partnership, this MOU shall end on December 31, 2011.

VIII. Signatures / Date

Rebekah Fennell, President
First Steps

Date

Lynne Ferrell, Chair
Great Start Collaborative of Kent County

Date

Susan Broman, Chair
Kent County Family & Children's Coordinating Council

Date

September 21, 2010