

Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage Frequently Asked Questions about the Evaluation

Why does the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage need to be evaluated?

The evaluation will provide an independent and neutral assessment of what is and is not working effectively with Ready by Five, which will inform future decisions about which services will be funded. The evaluation will help Kent County taxpayers understand the return on their investment in young children and their families. The Kent County Board of Commissioners requested that a system be put in place to measure the impact of Ready by Five.

What will we learn from an external evaluation that we could not learn from simply analyzing Ready by Five program data?

Independent evaluators are objective in their review of an initiative and its outcomes. They bring a breadth of experience and best practices in not only evaluating individual programs and services but also how multiple programs work together to impact young children and the community. The evaluators selected for Ready by Five have experience analyzing early childhood initiatives in Kent County.

What is the equity focus in the evaluation?

The Ready by Five initiative can have a transformative effect on Kent County by improving outcomes for marginalized populations, especially communities of color; families with incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level; and geographically isolated and/or under-resourced communities – rural, suburban, and urban. All aspects of Ready by Five must be evaluated through a lens of promoting equity, including funding allocations; program content, methodology, and outcomes; power dynamics; decision making; and communications. This aligns with the work of Kent County government to rid its systems of inequity, discrimination, and racial injustice.

How will the voice of the community and perspective of families receiving Ready by Five services be reflected in the evaluation?

Parent perspective will be included through survey data collected at the program level as well as stakeholder interviews and/or focus groups. This complements the broader work of First Steps Kent to directly engage parents in decision making about the early childhood system.

Who was involved in selecting the evaluators?

The Ready by Five Evaluation Advisory Team developed the Request for Proposal and selected the winning bid. That group consists of:

- Mark Maynard and Davie Store (Kent ISD)
- Dr. Neil Carlson (Datawise)
- Kelsey Perdue (First Steps Kent Commission)
- Teresa Branson, Sandra Ghoston Jones, and Jennifer Headrick (Kent County)
- Sunil Joy (Kentwood Public Schools)
- Mark Woltman (KConnect)
- Jennifer Headley-Nordman and Heather Boswell (First Steps Kent)

How is First Steps Kent monitoring the cost and effectiveness of the evaluation?

The evaluators were selected through a competitive bid process. The winning proposal was neither the least nor most expensive and provided the best plan to meet the needs of the community at a fair price. The evaluation cost is 2.5% of the annual Ready by Five budget and is in line with the cost of similar projects. The evaluator is required to develop a complete evaluation plan with timeline and deadlines for deliverables. First Steps Kent and the Evaluation Advisor Team will regularly monitor progress against the plan.

What will be the final product/deliverable of the evaluation?

A final written evaluation report will include an executive summary, summary of key findings from Ready by Five implementation and outcomes analyses, discussion of findings and recommendations, and appendix comprising methods and instruments. As part of the evaluation process, the evaluators will collaborate with First Steps Kent stakeholders and the Evaluation Advisory Team to develop a logic model that lays out the relationship between service providers' activities, outputs, and short- and long-term outcomes.

What is the timeline for the evaluation?

The contract runs through Dec 31, 2023, with an opportunity to extend it if the work is meeting the needs of our community.

How is data being collected?

All organizations providing direct services funded by Ready by Five are required to submit client-level data to the Kent County Health Department via a secure process each month.

How will the evaluation account for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Ready by Five?

The evaluation will provide context for how Covid-19 impacted the implementation and ramp-up of Ready by Five services, some of which had just received initial funding when the pandemic started. The evaluators can adjust for any programmatic differences related to the pandemic. For example, if half of the partner agencies used in-person parent training and the other half used virtual parent visits, the evaluators would incorporate into the analysis a dummy variable to measure any differential impact caused by this variation.

Which agencies are supporting the Ready by Five evaluation?

- [Basis Policy Research](#) was selected as it has extensive experience evaluating publicly and privately funded education and human services initiatives in numerous states and more than 50 local communities, including Kent County. Locally, Basis has completed a quantitative evaluation and return on investment analysis for the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation Learning Educators Initiative. Basis has also evaluated the impact of the Believe 2 Become Baby Scholars program in Kent County and Ottawa County's Great Start Readiness Program, a state-funded preschool for four-year-old children. At the state level, Basis evaluated the Michigan Department of Education's Statewide System of Support, which works with Intermediate School Districts.
- [Advancing Communities for Equity](#) has been selected to support equitable evaluation practices of all aspects of funding allocations; program content, methodology, and outcomes; power dynamics; decision making; and communications. Principal Emmy O'Dwyer is nationally recognized for her expertise in early childhood education, organizational development, and strategic planning. Her work is focused on advancing equity and access for children, youth, and their families.

- [Dr. Christina Weiland](#), associate professor at the School of Education at the University of Michigan and the Ford School of Public Policy, will serve as a technical advisor on the project, providing guidance on proposed methodologies, including measure development and analytic strategy, and reviewing all major deliverables. Dr. Weiland's research focuses on the effects of early child interventions and public policies on children's development, especially on children from families with low household incomes. She is an expert in quantitative research methods, educational measurement, and developmental process research. Currently, she is the principal investigator and co-director of a study of the implementation of Boston Universal Pre-kindergarten funded by the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Foundation for Child Development.



Supported by the Kent County Ready by Five Millage.