

Ready by Five Evaluation Overview

As of 6/15/23

About the Ready by Five Evaluation

Beginning in 2021, First Steps Kent contracted with Basis Policy Research (Basis), a research and evaluation firm focused on education and human services, to evaluate the implementation and impact of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. The evaluation researchers are using a mixed-methodology approach to provide evidence of how Ready by Five impacts young children and their families across the lifecycle of the millage.

The Ready by Five evaluation will address the following questions:

1. To what extent did Ready by Five providers implement services with fidelity?
2. What types of Ready by Five services are related to improved health and academic outcomes?
3. What is the impact of Ready by Five services on participants' health and academic outcomes?
4. How do the benefits of Ready by Five services compare to the financial investment of the Ready by Five Millage?

Phase One of the Evaluation (January 2022- December 2022)

The evaluation will support improvements with service delivery.

In phase one, results will inform the support First Steps Kent offers Ready by Five providers in the shared pursuit of becoming more inclusive and equitable, giving key insights into how different stakeholder groups benefit from the millage. This includes understanding of the services provided and enhanced recruitment efforts in communities that have hesitated to use services in the past.

- First Steps Kent is committed to ensuring access to services for expecting parents and children 0-5, particularly for those from historically marginalized and underserved communities in the urban core and rural areas. The evaluation's findings will be used to continually refine program delivery models to provide more equitable services to children and families.
- First Steps Kent will be able to leverage findings from the analyses to refine the RFP process to ensure service providers address the barriers to engagement in services.

Parent voice is being included through a series of in-person, phone, and/or virtual interviews with families selected from a stratified random sample of those served. The interviews explore how families learned about the services, how accessible services were, how well the services were delivered, and how services could be improved to better meet individual needs.

Phase Two of the Evaluation (January 2023 – December 2023)

This part of the evaluation will support the future case for early childhood investments.

Beginning in phase two, additional data analysis will explore the relationship between Ready by Five programming and related health, wellbeing, and early academic outcomes of children and expecting parents served¹.

- The evaluation will provide information about the impact of Ready by Five services on health and academic outcomes, including what types of services work, for whom, and under what conditions. The results will provide local early childhood leaders with information about the types of services that need to be retained or expanded in Kent County.
- Results will provide evidence of impact on health and early academic outcomes that contribute to the cost-effectiveness of early childhood services, as well as the overall community value of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage.

Researchers will conduct a cost benefit analysis that will begin to measure the benefits of services funded by the Ready by Five Millage. This part of the evaluation will include analysis of the children who have enrolled in Ready by Five- funded services that are of the age of kindergarten entry. recognizing that will be a relatively small sample of children by the end of 2023. Early childhood research has consistently established that many of these programs contribute social and financial benefits over the course of a child's lifetime. While the evaluation is not a longitudinal research project, this analysis will include estimates of the potential long-term value through three main indicators: kindergarten literacy, the likelihood of proficiency in third grade reading, and outcomes such as the likelihood of the participant enrolling in Algebra I in middle school.

2022 Evaluation Findings

Key findings for the first year of the evaluation include²:

- Ready by Five service providers exceeded reach expectations in 2022. The providers reached 12,184 young children and families, compared to the 12,039 that was expected.
- Fifty-seven percent of young children and families served were from populations that historically have been marginalized.
- Forty-five percent of participants' household incomes are less than \$40,000 annually.

¹ Data sources for the second phase of the evaluation include a) data that is collected and submitted by agencies serving expectant mothers and children in programs funded by the Ready by Five Millage; b) child birth weight including quantitative data from the Kent County Health Department that is an indicator of healthy births; and c) Kindergarten and available early academic assessment data collected by from all school districts in Kent County. Beginning in Year 2 of the evaluation, Basis will partner with all districts and the KISD to establish a baseline of kindergarten readiness using the various available school-based assessments.

² Note: For evaluation purposes researchers limited the final sample to 30 contracts with 18 unique providers who (a) have an active contract with First Steps Kent and (b) submit monthly service data to KCHD. The reduction in number of contracts included in the final sample is the result of dropping one service contract ("Ready for School") and additional select programs in contracts that do not share monthly data with KCHD, including translation services and fetal infant mortality review network programming.

- Approximately seventeen percent of young children and families speak a primary language other than English.
- In the twelve-month period of 2022, programs were successful with expanding services into additional areas of Kent County identified with the greatest per-capita needs based on household income. This included ZIP codes 49316 (Caledonia), 49330 (Kent City), 49544 (Alpine Township), 49345 (Sparta), 49507 (Grand Rapids), 49548 (Gaines Township).
- Ready by Five service providers completed 14,521 encounters with young children and families, which is 94 percent of what was projected.
- The 2022 evaluation findings identified three key focus areas for program-related quality improvement efforts: 1) identifying additional opportunities for providers to collaborate around improved participant engagement – especially in areas and with groups that are less served, 2) investigate why referrals are not completed more often or issued when concerns are identified, and 3) reconsider approaches for surveying families to understand their satisfaction with services received.

Year One Successes

- Data sharing agreements with First Steps Kent, Kent County Health Department, Kent ISD, and all 20 local school districts were executed.
- Researchers completed a series of interviews with a random sample of service providers and semi-structured interviews with a random sample of families that participated in Ready by Five-funded programs.
- Researchers developed an implementation dashboard that visualizes service provider reach, implementation by service area and provider, and outcomes (where possible) by service area and provider.
- Basis, ACE (the equity specialist on the evaluation team), and First Steps Kent hosted two Discover Day events for partners and stakeholders to discuss early findings and insights. Events offered attendees the opportunity to engage with findings, ask questions, and collaborate with peers on addressing potential next steps.
- To support quality with data collection and learning from findings, First Steps Kent hosted quarterly Quality Improvement Consortium meetings for all Ready by Five service providers. Topics included regular updates about the Ready by Five evaluation findings, technical assistance on data collection and contract requirements, and peer-learning opportunities.
- Researchers delivered a Year One Evaluation Report that analyzes who is participating in Ready by Five services and how effectively programs have been implemented. Forthcoming annual reports will focus on the remaining three research questions.

Agencies Selected for Evaluation

Agencies selected to support the Ready by Five evaluation include:

Basis Policy Research 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 is supporting 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.

Ready by Five Evaluation Advisory Team

This team advises and makes recommendations on the Ready by Five Millage Evaluation. This includes the methodology, needed resources, procurement process, and selection of evaluators. Members include:

- 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)



Supported by the Kent County Ready by Five Millage