

## **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 and funding allocations. The evaluation will provide Kent County taxpayers with an understanding of the return on their investment in young children and their families. The evaluation is aligned with a request of the Millage Subcommittee of the Kent County Board of Commissioners that a system be established 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 view 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 influence 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 equity 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 and ensure parent voice in the early childhood system. While that work is funded separately and is not part of the evaluation, the information gathered helps guide and inform Ready by Five.

### ***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:

- Calvin University; Neil Carlson, PhD
- K-Connect: Mark Woltman
- Kent ISD: Mark Maynard, Sunil Joy
- Kent County Administrator's Office: Sandra Ghoston-Jones, Michael Fortman, Paul Petr, and Jen Headrick
- First Steps Kent: Annemarie Valdez and Heather Boswell

### ***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 projects similar in scope. 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 articulates 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, 2022, 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.

***Meet the evaluators:***

Program Evaluation – Basis Policy Research (Basis) 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 years old. At the state level, Basis evaluated the Michigan Department of Education's Statewide System of Support, which works with Intermediate School Districts.

Focus on Equity – 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. She has served as an advisory to First Steps Kent on its work to promote equity and inclusion within both the organization and the community's collaborative early childhood system building work.