

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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## Local organizations offer learning opportunities for children aged five and younger

*First Steps Kent provides funding to help prepare young learners for kindergarten*

(Grand Rapids, Mich., Sept. 7, 2023) – Parents with children who are not yet school age have a variety of resources in Kent County to help ensure children build a strong foundation before starting kindergarten.

Multiple programs funded through the Kent County Early Childhood Millage help children build strong social, emotional and intellectual skills aged five and younger, which are critical years for creating brain development.

“Because of the Ready by Five millage, Kent County parents with children aged zero through five have access to resources that help them offer high-quality learning experiences at home,” said Jennifer Headley-Nordman, president of First Steps Kent. “We are proud to partner with GRCC and many other local organizations to improve the health, school readiness and well-being of children who are five and younger.”

A variety of organizations offer Play and Learn groups that are funded by the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which is administered by First Steps Kent. These programs develop children’s language and early literacy skills while helping caregivers boost their learning about early childhood development. The millage has led to an 800% increase in participation in play groups, from 750 children before the millage to more than 6,200 participants last year.

Ready by Five-funded Play and Learn providers include [Vibrant Futures](#), the [Comprehensive Therapy Center](#), [Grand Rapids Community College](#) and [Kent Intermediate School District](#).

“Our Play to Learn groups offer playful learning experiences that allow parents/caregivers to develop skills for supporting their child’s development and school readiness,” said Kathleen Neumann, Child Development Community Liaison at GRCC. “Thanks to Ready by Five, we have increased playgroups from 30 per month to 50-60 per month. We have been able to add late afternoon, early evening, and a monthly Saturday playgroup to accommodate working families’ schedules. Playgroups are offered throughout Kent County to allow families from all areas to participate.”

The millage also helps fund developmental screenings, which help parents monitor their child’s development. Developmental screenings help ensure children are developing on time and without issues and catch delays early to help parents get the resources they need.

A full listing of resources for parents is available on the [First Steps Kent website](#).

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**About** First Steps Kent: First Steps Kent is an independent nonprofit organization that works with parents, service providers, funders, advocates, and other stakeholders to build a comprehensive early childhood system in Kent County. Our community vision is that every young child in Kent County will enter kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed in school and life. First Steps Kent is working with our community partners to make that vision a reality. Learn more at [www.firststepskent.org](http://www.firststepskent.org).

The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage provides dedicated and sustainable funding for programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five in Kent County. First Steps Kent is the administrator of the Ready by Five millage funds. First Steps Kent is an independent non-profit that works to strengthen and coordinate the system of early childhood services through research and innovation. First Steps is leading a community-wide effort to develop a system of support for children ages 0-5 (and their families) that ensures every young child in Kent County will enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and in life.