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Supported by the Kent County Ready by Five Millage

FIRST STEPS KENT ANNOUNCES NEW PRESIDENT

Jennifer Headley-Nordman to join nationally-recognized early childhood system builder

(Grand Rapids, Mich., September 29, 2022)—A West Michigan school administrator with extensive experience in early childhood education and child psychology will be the new president of First Steps Kent. **Jennifer Headley-Nordman** will lead the organization's work to strengthen and coordinate the system of early childhood services in Kent County so that all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and life.

Headley-Nordman comes to First Steps Kent from Holland Public Schools, where she served as Associate Superintendent of Student Services. She leads through a lens of equity, inclusion, and collaboration and focuses her work on early intervention strategies that meet children's social-emotional, physical, and educational needs. She has worked in a variety of non-profit and educational leadership positions over the last 25 years. Additionally, she has served as the President of the Michigan Association of School Psychologists, and the Executive Chair of the Michigan Department of Education's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).



Headley-Nordman is joining a committed staff of 10 professionals who work in partnership with the First Steps Kent Board of Commissioners and early childhood stakeholders across the community. Part of that work will include administration of the Ready by Five Early Childhood millage, which was approved by voters in 2018 and generates approximately \$5.7 million a year for community-based early childhood service providers. Headley-Nordman will also work with early childhood advocates and thought leaders around the state and country to advance policies that support the learning and development of young children and the wellbeing of their families.

Following the planned departure of Annemarie Valdez, First Steps Kent conducted a robust national search to select the organization's next president. The search committee was led by **Dr. Juan Olivarez**, member of the First Steps Kent Board of Commissioners and interim president of Grand Rapids Community College.

"Jennifer is deeply committed to helping every child start school ready to learn and thrive and looks holistically at how to make that happen," Dr. Olivarez shared. "She is a systems thinker

who also works directly with children and families, which guides her focus on equity and inclusion. Her experience, knowledge, and passion make her an ideal leader to build on the foundation that has been laid by community partners and stakeholders."

Thanks to the leadership of First Steps Kent Interim President, Cati Cortes, Headley-Nordman will be able to transition smoothly into her new role and begin to nurture collaborations across the county.

"Thank you to the First Steps Kent Commission for this opportunity to serve the families, young children, and early childhood champions of Kent County," said Headley-Nordman. "I am excited to connect with parents and other partners to continue the critical work of making sure the community has the right programs and policies to support each individual experience of guiding children toward kindergarten readiness."

Photo credit: Jamie May Photography

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About First Steps Kent

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. First Steps Kent is responsible for the distribution, monitoring and evaluation of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which generates approximately \$5.7 million annually.