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## Letter to the Community:

It was once said “What affects everyone can be best solved by everyone.” It is with this spirit the Great Start Collaborative for the counties of Crawford, Oscoda, Ogemaw, Roscommon and Iosco has approached the work of analyzing the local early childhood system and developing and updating to ensure our youngest citizens are: 1) Born healthy, 2) Healthy, thriving and developmentally on track from birth to third grade, 3) Developmentally ready to succeed in school at time of school entry, and 4) Prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

The work of the C.O.O.R/Iosco Great Start Collaborative is accomplished by the efforts and dedication of parents of young children, professionals in early childhood from public agencies, non-profits, businesses, schools, healthcare, and the faith community, as well as community leaders. Their collective passion for the welfare of our regions’ youngest children and to their success in life is unparalleled.

The Collaborative is a dedicated group of members who have a common goal of helping parents and families raise young children who are healthy, happy and ready to succeed. When raising our youngest citizens, families must have the support and the access to make informed parenting choices. The hope of our Collaborative is that we can work together to support community strengths, such as the safety of our small communities, and to improve the availability and access to quality childcare, preschool, health services, and parenting education and support. Our youngest children need all of these opportunities to be able to grow and succeed in our changing world.

We know the first five years of a child’s life set the stage for later success in school and life. Each child is born with billions of nerve cells that are just waiting to connect with other nerve cells to make important linkages in a child’s brain so the child can learn and develop. What happens to children even before the time of birth determines how effectively they will learn new knowledge, behaviors and skills. Research shows that the first three years of a child’s life are when the brain develops the most. By then, 85% of a child’s intellectual and social development has occurred.

Because of the Importance of these early years, it is the mission of our Multi-County Collaborative to continue to educate the entire community about the importance of early childhood development and continue to increase access to a coordinated system of services and resources parents need, which will result in their children beginning school ready and eager to learn. After months of researching community data and individual feedback from communities throughout Crawford, Oscoda, Ogemaw, Roscommon and Iosco Counties, as well as feedback from the state level, the Great Start Collaborative has indicated, updated and developed several new target goals for improvement and support. Please share our mission of helping all children prenatal through age 8 in our five county region.

In the words of John F. Kennedy, “Children are the world’s most valuable resource and its best hope for the future.” It is our dream that our communities continue to become place where all young children are valued, parents feel supported and investing in early childhood and family supports is the norm. We invite all of you to become involved in making this dream a reality.

Sincerely,

Great Start Collaborative  
Crawford, Oscoda, Ogemaw, Roscommon and Iosco Counties

## **II. Executive Summary**

### **Vision**

All children in Crawford, Oscoda, Ogemaw, Roscommon, and Iosco Counties will begin kindergarten safe, healthy, and ready to succeed in school and in life.

### **Mission**

The mission of the Multi-County Collaborative is to engage the entire community to assure a coordinated system of services and resources to assist families in providing a great start for their children from prenatal through age eight.

This is a time of unprecedented resources being channeled towards early childhood issues in the State of Michigan. A large part of this is the result of Great Start Collaboratives throughout the state working together to raise awareness and advocacy for funding and legislation that supports the education of young children and support for their families. Since 2007, Collaboratives have been “spreading the word” on the need for more resources to support improved quality measures in child care and education programming; two years of educational preparation pre-Kindergarten; and case management services to support children and their families as they transition from preschool to Kindergarten.

James M. Zimmerman, retired CEO, Macy’s, Inc. recently said “Currently more than 90 percent of our education dollars are spent after age five, yet 85 percent of a child’s core brain structure is developed before age five. Scientific brain research fully supports this comment and it is the importance of these early years that develops our mission and work. The COOR-Iosco Great Start Collaborative is excited at the future of early childhood care and education and will continue to provide programs, services, support, and advocacy to support children and their families.

This document will address progress on our goals as outlined within our original strategic plan; identify new goals and measurable objectives for the coming three years; and describe projected activities our Collaborative will focus upon through 2016.

The Kids Great Start Collaborative region is unique in size and economic conditions, covering the largest land area, 2757 square miles, of any collaborative, while 28- 40% of our children suffer in poverty. The percentage of children in our region under the age of six with all parents in the workforce ranges from 53 – 70%. This indicates approximately 3,000 children are in need of early care and education yet only 1,150 full day and 500 part-day slots are available. It is a concern of the collaborative and greater community to assure the remaining 1,350 children receive quality care.

The Kids Great Start Collaborative operates under the belief that all children should have access to the care and education they need, regardless of their economic, family, or health status. The system assessment revealed key findings utilized to develop the Great Start action agenda. One key finding of our early childhood system assessment shows that our communities are comprised of many families who struggle with economic issues, although both parents work outside the home. Between 2005-2011, children in poverty 0-17 worsened from 27.5% to 34.2% in our region. Confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect went up 132.4% in our area. Additionally parents are returning to school for employment training and require both high quality and flexible child care options to further their family's future.. Increasing the availability of quality child care for families is a key priority of the local Great Start initiative.

The Kids Great Start Collaborative believes parents are the child's first teacher and recognize parenting is challenging work and all parents benefit from support and educational opportunities. Our mission is to assure all children enter kindergarten happy, healthy, and ready to succeed. The collaborative has prioritized parent education and support, as well as social & emotional development, as additional key findings in our system assessment. Cross sector involvement of private and public businesses and agencies is critical for a successful system of parenting supports. Each collaborative member is dedicated to educate the public about the importance of early childhood investment and the long and short term impact of such an investment across the community.

## Great Start Collaborative Profile and History

### 2010

- GSC members, parents and community members gathered for the Appreciative Inquiry process to develop the Great Start Strategic Plan and Action Agenda for 2010-2013.
- Groundbreaking Ceremony for Kirtland Community College's "The Warbler's Nest" Early Learning and Child Care Center. The GSPC organized and hosted the ground breaking ceremony with kids activities, prizes, games and free food and beverages. The event was attended by two dozen children, Kirtland Community College Officials, Parents, Business Members, Police Officers, and staff from The Early Childhood Investment Corporation.

### 2011

- First Annual Great Start Early Childhood Conference at Kirtland Community College.
- GSC was awarded the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-Health Resources Service Administration (HRSA) grant in the amount of \$247,755 over a 5 year period to implement Reach Out and Read in 4 of our counties. Cash and in-kind match required, adding \$396,408 to this program over the life of the federal grant.
- The Great Start Early Childhood Fund was established to provide Preschool and Childcare Scholarships to low and moderate income families and to support other projects of the GSC. Monies that were awarded from various foundations as well as The Early Childhood Investment Corporation and the George Johnson Scholarship fund totaled \$195,720. 88 scholarships were awarded for the 2011/2012 school year.
- Grand Opening of The Warbler's Nest Early Learning and Care Center. GSC and GSPC members hosted and organized the grand opening event with children's activities, prizes and food. "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids" State Director, K.P. Pelleran, State Police Officers, Elected Officials, Parents and several children all attended the event. GSRP grant for \$124,000 for 3 years was secured with assistance from the GSC.

### 2012

- Second Annual Great Start Early Childhood Conference at Kirtland Community College. Community Foundations donated \$1895 to make this event possible.
- The first Reach Out and Read site was Implemented at Mercy Family Care in Prudenville.
- The first of 6 Reading Nooks was established at Mercy Care in Prudenville to support Reach Out and Read.
- The GSPC partnered with Kirtland Community College and The Warbler's Nest to organize a series of low cost week long Summer Camps at The Warblers Nest. Themed weeks included "Sports Week", "Fantasy Week", and "Ooey Gooley Week". Approximately 40 school aged children attended these day camps.

- The Great Start Parent Coalition collected over 7500 gently used children's books to support the Reading Nooks so that EVERY child that visits the Doctor's office gets to take home a book of their choice.
- Bill Millet spoke with community members and business leaders about investing in young children for the future of our economic security and competing in a global economy.
- The Great Start Scholarship program generated \$46,000. 48 preschool and childcare scholarships were awarded.

## 2013

- Third Annual Great Start Early Childhood Conference at Kirtland Community College.
- Appreciative Inquiry Process to update the Strategic Plan and Action Agenda for 2013-2016
- Joint Recruitment and Enrollment Process implemented-Collaborative members, parents and early childhood partners went through a six week process to coordinate a seamless joint recruitment process through Guided Dialogue. This joint recruitment process will include ALL area preschool (Head Start, Great Start Readiness Program and Private Providers) to be fully implemented for the 2013/2014 school year. During the process, the GSC was awarded a \$20,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Great Start to support these efforts.
- In the first quarter of the year, the GSC was awarded \$78,000 to support the Great Start Early Childhood Fund. Funds awarded came from the Consumers Energy Foundation (\$20,000), Herbert/Grace Dow Foundation (\$20,000), The Kirtland Foundation (\$3,000), and The George Johnson Scholarship Fund (\$35,000). Additional monies in the amount of \$90,000 was awarded by The Early Childhood Investment Corporation that will go to support scholarships for 3 year olds.
- January-Central Michigan District Health Department awarded GSC an \$18,635 grant titled "Together We Can Transform Central Michigan Communities". This grant is to be used to implement programs that aim to reduce childhood obesity through physical activity in Childcare settings and Preschools in Roscommon County.
- March-The Pediatric and Family Health Work Group met with the American Academy of Pediatrics for a Federal Technical Assistance Meeting regarding the HRSA (Reach Out and Read Visit) grant.
- Secured and Implemented the remaining Reach Out and Read Sites. Sites that have implemented Reach Out and Read are Mercy Family Care Prudenville (2012), Mercy Family Care in Roscommon and Grayling, Rose City Primary Care, Fairview Primary Care and Mid Michigan Health Park in Houghton Lake.
- The GSPC has ongoing book drives, partnering with local businesses. In the first half of the year, the GSPC collected approximately 1200 books to support the Reach Out and Read reading nook areas in local doctor's offices.

#### **IV. Strategic Analysis Findings**

On June 29, 2011 Governor Rick Snyder signed an Executive Order for the creation of the Office Of Great Start within the Michigan Department of Education. The Office of Great Start has been charged with ensuring that all children birth to age eight, especially those in highest need, have access to high-quality early learning and development programs and enter kindergarten prepared for success. The Governor outlined a single set of early childhood outcomes against which all public investments will be assessed:

- Children born healthy;
- Children healthy, thriving, and developmentally on track from birth to third grade;
- Children developmentally ready to succeed in school at the time of school entry;
- Children prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

Keeping this in mind, along with the 5 Key component areas, The COOR/Iosco Great Start Collaborative conducted a two-part Local Early Childhood System Assessment as part of the year-long process which resulted in a Strategic Plan and Early Childhood Action Agenda designed to meet the needs of children age prenatal-8 and their families residing in Crawford, Oscoda, Ogemaw, Roscommon, and Iosco Counties.

**Part 1:** Data Analysis was conducted primarily from January 2011 to March 2013. The Collaborative body reviewed Kids Count data and additional local data on children and families in each of the Great Start component areas, as well as analyzing MSU Evaluation Results that were provided for 2010 and 2012.

The Data Review Team, composed of professionals, parent representatives, and Great Start staff, met to provide additional analysis and recommendations for prioritizations. The team established a process for systematic review, identified gaps in data and additional sources of data needed. They then ranked and prioritized the various indicators to arrive at the most important ones to carry forward to the Collaborative, in public documents and strategic planning processes.

The Great Start Administrator and Parent Liaison then sifted through hundreds of indicators of child and family status provided by ECIC and from many other sources, including the U.S. Census, Michigan Departments of Community Health, Education, and other State sources, and locally developed data from agency record and reporting systems. In each case, local data were compared for

each county to state and/or national statistics giving a clearer understanding of trend and comparison data.

The purpose of this process was to inform the full Collaborative both on community assessment in general and on the findings of the Data Committee regarding the status of young children and families in our five-county region.

The key findings were presented again to the full Collaborative during the Appreciative Inquiry process in February 2013. Several indicators were selected from each point of the star to guide our action agenda to improve the lives of families and young children.

## **Part 2: Strategic Review**

The Strategic Review for Great Start COOR/Iosco began in early 2011 and continued throughout March of 2013, when the latest MSU Evaluation Results were presented and analyzed. Overall, the GSC/GSPC did very well in the 2-year evaluation, showing improvements in ALL areas of “Improved Outcomes for Children and Families”. The GSC/GSPC performed equally well in all “Levers For Change”, with improvements in: Engaged Constituents, Authentic Leadership & Voice, Readiness for Change, and Systems Change Climate. These “Levers” contain eight factors critical to promoting Great Start Accomplishments. The report shows the strongest areas to be: Readiness for Change, Intentional Systems Change Actions and Active Constituents. However, the MSU Evaluation Report identifies the following as areas to target for improvement: Local Champions, Strong Relational Networks and Parent Leadership & Voice. These three target areas are reflected in this Strategic Plan as new goals with corresponding action steps. In examining the areas for improvement, MSU definition for each target for improvement and subsequent data is provided for clarity. Respondent data from the GSC where less than 50% feel we are performing at levels of either “quite a bit” or “a great deal”. NOTE: The same respondent data may apply to more than one area for improvement.

- Local Champions-Extent to which GSC/GSPC members has promoted Community Priority; Built a sense of urgency for the work within the community and recognizing local champions for the work. Organizations align their strategic plan with the action agenda. There are committed businesses and government sectors involved with the work.

- Local providers are more responsive to parent concerns (37.5%)
- Sustain/expand public and private investment in early childhood (40%)
- Increased community support for early childhood issues (47.5%)
- Strong Relational Networks-Strong Relational Networks easily exchange referrals, coordinate services and resources across various agencies in the community.
  - Participation benefits for organizations in the GSC (35.7%)
  - More supportive local leaders & elected candidates (37.5%)
  - Increased access to early childhood services (40%)
  - Local providers are more responsive to parent concerns (37.5%)
  - Sustain/expand public and private investment in early childhood (40%)
  - Increased community support for early childhood issues (47.5%)
- Parent Leadership & Voice-Parents are effective leaders and competent champions for early childhood and represent a knowledgeable, diverse and visible parent constituency.
  - Informed parents (25%)
  - Empowered families as change agents (30%)
  - Easier access to services for parents (33.3%)
  - Increased community support for early childhood issues (47.5%)

At the Appreciative Inquiry Strategic Planning session, held February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013, a diverse group of community members from all five counties, and representing all sectors of the community, including parents, faith-based, business, non-profit, government, and education, came together to prioritize the goals and give input on strategies and action items to support the goals. This rich foundation based both on data and community knowledge, and experience will enhance the implementation of the action agenda activities by unique and creative means in order to reach the broadest audience.

The Appreciative Inquiry process led members to identify life-giving statements and core values of the collaborative. From these conversations lists of collaborative wishes were developed:

- Every day we richly educate and raise our children by passionately advocating for diversity and resources.
- There is always open communication with parents to assess current resources and help develop new resources, based on families needs.
- With patience, passion and empathy, we foster new experiences that build strong, successful families.
- Empathy training to all agency workers and service providers is provided.
- All parents actively advocate for high quality services to meet their unique and diverse needs.
- We collaboratively work to empower our community, families and children to grow to greatness.
- We consistently provide creative and diverse opportunities and support to children and families that enhance their quality of life.

### **Part 3: Infrastructure Review**

The Infrastructure Review was completed by our Collaborative members through the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory. Our review focused on research tested success factors of collaboration. The inventory produced a summary report and identified areas of strength and areas that can be further developed in order to increase the capacity of the Collaborative. The summary can be found in the appendices.

The process that was used in completing the assessment included:

- A review of documents, policies, procedures, reports and print materials.
- Completion of the Wilder Collaborative Factors Inventory.
- Face to face meetings with staff and collaborative members.

The collaborative body concluded that the majority of infrastructure elements are in place or under development for the Great Start Collaborative. The initiative is making great progress in the

areas of communication, needs assessment and planning, and parent volunteer development and leadership.

**The areas of development include:**

- Increased participation by current members and participation by organizations/ constituents who are not involved was identified.
- An orientation for every new Collaborative member.
- A Collaborative member manual that expands upon the operating guidelines and includes the role descriptions, strategic plan, committees, policies and procedures and organizational chart. The manual can be an electronic document that is located at the Collaborative website.
- Recruitment of additional Collaborative members including faith-based and business representatives.
- Refinement of the Collaborative committee structures and role descriptions to reflect the needs of the strategic plan.
- Increased involvement of Collaborative members in implementing the strategic plan and communications plan.

Several recommendations emerged through the review process including greater resource sharing, common data systems, clearer process and protocols, and greater capacity to build local support and sustainable funding.

## Vi. Goals & Strategies

### Components

## Goals & Strategies

### Component One: Child Care and Early Education

#### Goals:

- All Families and children have access to high quality child care and early education.
- Children are ready to succeed in school and life.

*Parents are their children's primary caregivers and foremost teachers. With the demands of today's work world, most young children are cared for by someone other than their parents prior to entering kindergarten. Over 65% of children under 6 years of age in our 5 county region have all parents working outside the home.*

*High quality child care and early education provides a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for infants and children. Young children receiving high quality early care and education have stronger language, social, and academic skills upon entering school.*

#### Strategies Prioritized:

1. Increase access to affordable, high quality childcare for all parents including those who are attending school or work retraining.
2. Ensure universal access to affordable, high quality preschool for all.
3. Increase access to quality information about early childhood development and learning, and opportunities for continuing and post secondary education, for all caregivers, including parents and guardians.
4. Children with developmental delays or disabilities receive the interventions and continuous support they need to develop to their highest potential.
5. Increase agency and community support for early education services.

## Goals & Strategies

### Component Two: Social & Emotional

#### Goals:

- Infants, young children, and their families are socially and emotionally healthy.
- Public awareness of the importance of social and emotional health is prioritized.

*Young children who are socially and emotionally healthy are self-confident and can more easily cope with their emotions, control their impulses, and form friendships. Healthy young children have learned through nurturing relationships that they can trust adults and look to them for guidance. Research tells us that social and emotional skills are the foundation for success in school.*

*Across our region in 2010, the rate of children in investigated homes for abuse and neglect has risen by 67% since 2005, while confirmed victims rose by 220% across our 5 counties. Our children are the greatest victims of the economic stresses placed on our families. Prolonged exposure to these stressors can damage a child's rapidly developing brain connections. The lack of safe, secure adult relationships impedes children's social and emotional development.*

#### Strategies Prioritized:

1. Increase social/emotional training opportunities and support services for parents and providers.
2. Complete a gap analysis of early childhood services and develop a plan to help educate and increase agency collaboration to fully utilize existing services.
3. Develop a system to assist in the reduction of child abuse and neglect
4. Improve the referral system for concerns identified by early educators and childcare providers.

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## Goals & Strategies

### Component Three: Parenting Leadership

#### Goals:

- Parents have the opportunity to gain skills in advocacy for children prenatal – 8 years old.
- Families support and guide the early learning of their children.

*Family members are the first “teachers” a child encounters and their learning begins within the context of the family. Children thrive in loving, supportive relationships with family members and parents provide the foundation for a child’s earliest growth and development.*

*Raising young children is challenging for every parent, regardless of income or education. Parents function best when they have a dependable network of people they can turn to for advice and support. All families benefit from access to a community system of services that strengthen and support their parenting and nurturing roles.*

#### Strategies Prioritized:

1. The region adopts a commitment to the Strengthening Families, 5 Protective Factors utilizing a model of community awareness, education and action.
2. Parents have access to skills and tools needed to be effective advocates for the needs of young children and families.
3. Increase opportunities for public policy advocacy training for parents.

## Goals & Strategies

### Component Four: Family Support

#### Goals:

- Families have access to community resources to assist them in meeting the needs of their family and children.
- Families of infants and young children are provided access to supports to assist in gaining economic stability.

*Michigan has been experiencing extremely difficult economic times. Our region suffers some of the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in the state, with over 34% of our children living at or below the poverty line. This translates to economic stress for many families; young children need a stable, safe, and secure family environment in order to flourish.*

*The inability to meet basic needs is one of the most significant barriers to providing effective parenting and caring for children. Poverty is a strong predictor of challenges for young children.*

*Unemployment in our 5 county region is at 13%, while UNDERemployment across the state of Michigan is at 18.8%. There is significant increased demand for local assistance programs such as food and baby pantries and a significant increase in the need for charity care from our medical institutions.*

#### Family Support Strategies Prioritized:

1. All children have basic needs met – food, clothing and supplies, shelter and safety.
2. Increase education and training emphasizing the parent as the expert to community service providers and educators.
3. Employers and agencies have access to standards based information about family-friendly best practices that benefit employees and employers. .

## Goals & Strategies

### Component Five: Pediatric & Family Health

#### Goals:

- Infants, young children & their families are physically healthy.
- The public recognizes a healthy beginning in life for all children is an essential part of a healthy community.

*Healthy children are more able to engage in the full range of life experiences that promote early learning. A lack of health care or delays in the treatment of health problems, including dental care, can negatively affect a child's development, with lifelong consequences.*

*A quality start in life begins with consistent and competent prenatal care and continues with access to regular healthcare providers who provide preventive care such as immunizations, screenings for developmental, hearing and vision problems.*

#### Pediatric and Family Health Strategies Prioritized:

1. All parents have access to information about “best practices” that promote long term health; including prenatal practices.
2. Increase access to quality medical and dental homes.
3. All children have access to a public or private health plan.
4. Enhance the availability of health screenings for all children attending preschool and child care.

## Vi. Goals & Strategies

### Infrastructure

## **Infrastructure: Collaborative**

### **Collaborative Infrastructure**

#### **Goal:**

- The region understands and accepts the impact that the first five years of life have on the individual, the family, the community and the economy.

*An infrastructure review of this Collaborative was conducted in 2009. Four important GSC infrastructure goals emerged from the strategic planning/appreciative inquiry sessions in September 2009 and May 2010. These goals were discussed and prioritized and reflect the needs and aspirations of this collaborative.*

*Additionally, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) provides a list of infrastructure goals all Collaboratives work toward, and which quarterly progress reports are submitted. The activities and action agenda to meet these goals were also developed by our Collaborative. The Collaborative goals are achievable within the plan laid out by the ECIC.*

#### **Collaborative Infrastructure Strategies Prioritized:**

1. Parents and Community are educated about the Great Start Initiative.
2. The GSC is made up of diverse engagement. Membership reflects socio-economic, gender, academic, ethnic, racial, familial structure, religious, political, geographic and community size, groups experiencing disparities and other diverse characteristics.
3. Increase parent involvement from each of our 5 counties on the GSC Board, GSPC and workgroups.
4. Seek stable and diversified funding for identified early childhood priorities.

## **Infrastructure: ECIC**

### **Collaborative Governance Goal:**

1. Sustain an effective, inclusive and collaborative governance structure for the Great Start Collaborative.

### **Accountability, Results and Standards Goal:**

2. Provide leadership and oversight for the updating, implementation and evaluation of the Great Start Collaborative, Early Childhood Action Agenda, including all infrastructure elements.

### **Professional Development and Technical Assistance Goal:**

3. Great Start Collaborative staff will have information, resources and training needed to function effectively in their respective roles for this initiative.

### **Parent and Community Engagement Goals:**

4. Sustain an effective, volunteer-driven structure to coordinate and provide oversight to the work of the Great Start Parent Coalition (GSPC).
5. Assure the meaningful engagement of parents, of children under age 12, in leadership roles on all levels of the Great Start system.

### **Communication and Public Will Building Goal:**

6. Build and give voice to a public that is informed about early childhood issues and the importance of increased investment.

### **Local and State Leader Education Goal:**

7. Provide education to local and state leaders regarding how they can help to assure all children enter kindergarten healthy, safe and eager to succeed in school and in life.

### **Service System Integration Goal:**

8. Establish and sustain the infrastructure needed to effectively operate the local Great Start system.

### **Financing and Fund Development Goal:**

9. The Great Start Collaborative increases investment in early childhood services and initiatives through a variety of funding sources (e.g. ECIC, public, and private).

**Staffing Goal:**

10. The GSC maintains highly skilled staffing for assistance in coordinating and completing the contract scope of work and implementation of the Early Childhood Action Agenda.