

## Early Childhood, Great Start & the Early Childhood Investment Corporation: A Quick Reference Guide

### What does the term “early childhood” mean, and what are early childhood services?

Early childhood means prenatal to school entry. Early childhood services encompass an array of supports designed to address children’s health, development and learning prior to school entry. Early childhood services include child care, preschool, parenting education, and regular visits to a pediatrician and family practitioner. For children with developmental delays or at risk due to family circumstance, services can include special education, mental health treatment, home-based parenting education, and developmental therapies like physical, occupational and speech therapy.

### Why are the years before kindergarten entry so crucial?

[Research](#) tells us that 90 percent of a child’s brain architecture is built between birth and age 4. Children who get the right supports in those early years are more likely to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

### What’s the status of Michigan kindergarteners now?

In a [recent survey](#), Michigan kindergarten teachers said that a third of incoming students aren’t able to keep up, owing to physical, emotional or educational shortcomings.

### Why is all of this important to Michigan’s economy right now?

Because tomorrow’s workforce is in today’s kindergarten classroom. Many of the best business minds – including Nobel Prize-winning University of Chicago economics Professor [James Heckman](#) – tell us that America is falling behind the rest of the world because workforce quality is dropping. That’s a concern even to America’s military leaders. In 2009, a [military study](#) found that 75 percent of young people 17 to 24 didn’t qualify to serve because they lacked a high school diploma, overall physical fitness or had police and/or drug records. Based on those national statistics, an estimated 850,000 of Michigan’s 1.1 million young adults 17 and 24 likely couldn’t serve. While private sector standards aren’t as high as the military’s, those statistics still suggest that many of Michigan’s young adults simply don’t qualify for many of today’s best jobs.

### **How do our current early childhood investments impact the state's budget?**

A [2009 study](#) by economists at the renowned Wilder Institute found that Michigan's preschool system saves the state \$1.13 billion per year by lowering special education, welfare and prison system costs. More could be saved, however. An estimated 40,000 Michigan 4-year-olds qualify for – but do not receive – publicly-subsidized preschool.

### **What is Great Start?**

Great Start is Michigan's nationally-recognized statewide initiative to foster school readiness and life success for young children. Great Start is guided by a vision that every child in Michigan deserves to be healthy, safe, eager and ready for school success on the first day of kindergarten.

To achieve that goal, families need support from doctors, libraries, parent education organizations and more. But even when essential services are available, families face challenges connecting to them. That's because health, learning and care services, programs and organizations have different funding streams (over 84 in Michigan), standards, eligibility and reporting requirements. The result: Families often struggle to learn about, apply for and take advantage of services that could help them and their children.

Great Start brings together many partners – from the public and private sectors at the state and local levels – in an effort to increase the accountability, effectiveness, coordination and integration of services and build a system that works in concert to help keep children healthy and ready to learn and is easy for parents to understand and navigate.

### **What is the Early Childhood Investment Corporation?**

ECIC is a unique public nonprofit created in 2005 to serve as a catalyst for change. Bridging the public and the private sectors, ECIC is devoted to the well-being and school readiness of children. ECIC funds and works closely with the Great Start Collaboratives and Great Start Parent Coalitions. ECIC administers Michigan's child care quality resources through the Great Start Child Care Quality Program.

### **What are Great Start Collaboratives and Great Start Parent Coalitions?**

Michigan's 54 Great Start Collaboratives serve all counties in the state and are the local infrastructure for the Great Start initiative, bringing together parent leaders and community decision-makers from diverse sectors – education, business, clergy, law enforcement etc. – to create and implement a plan to foster school readiness. Each collaborative has a partner organization called a Great Start Parent Coalition, comprised of passionate local volunteers who educate community and state leaders about the importance of investing in young children and

provide the “parent voice” about what early childhood efforts work (or don’t work) for local parents and kids. Nine thousand parents statewide are involved in the Great Start Parent Coalitions.

### **What is the Great Start Child Care Quality Program?**

The Great Start Child Care Quality Program, implemented in 2009, is already one of the most comprehensive child care quality initiatives in the nation. It helps parents find quality early-learning environments for their children and helps early childhood professionals provide top-notch experiences. The Quality Program includes:

- Nine Great Start Regional Child Care Resource Centers, which coordinate supports and services for home and center-based child care providers and for families who use child care;
- Great Start CONNECT, a 24/7 searchable data base connecting families with licensed and regulated child care centers and homes;
- The Great Start [CONNECT](#) Resource Center, which maintains Great Start CONNECT
- T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps), which provides scholarships and financial support to child care and early learning providers continuing their education.

ECIC administers all of these efforts with the state’s federal child care quality dollars under a contract with the Department of Human Services.

### **Where can I get more information?**

For more information about Great Start, ECIC and/or the Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions, visit <http://greatstartforkids.org/>