



Early Childhood Millage Subcommittee Report and Recommendations to the Board of Commissioners

2024

**Prepared by the
Kent County Administrator's Office**

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Background

A. Subcommittee Membership and Charge

Board Chair Stan Stek established the Early Childhood Millage Subcommittee and appointed Commissioners Emily Brieve (Chair), Monica Sparks and Lindsey Thiel to the Subcommittee. It was charged with conducting “research on millage questions brought to the County of Kent and submit a report of findings to the appropriate Standing Committee for formal recommendation to the Board of Commissioners.”

The Subcommittee held meetings on September 5, September 28, October 17, and December 4, 2023. The meetings included the presentation and discussion of the request to place the millage on the ballot, and additional information requested by the Subcommittee. Ready by Five millage-funded services and the return on investment (ROI) of the services was discussed. Significant conversation was devoted to childcare service needs in Kent County and to the amount of millage to consider placing on the ballot. During the last meeting, the Subcommittee focused on crafting proposed ballot language and approving submission of the Subcommittee Report to the Board Chair and Commissioners. The Subcommittee’s meeting minutes and slide decks are provided in Attachment A.

B. Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee Application

Ms. Taniah Ingram and Mr. Win Irwin co-chaired the Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee that submitted the request for the Board of Commissioners to consider placing the millage on a ballot. The request, dated September 5, 2023, met the requirements of the Fiscal Policy on Millage Requests. The complete application is provided in Attachment B. It notes that the millage served 12,400 children in 2022. It has supported 20 community-based organizations and provided more than 40 different early childhood programs.

Background

The application explained that the programs served expecting parents and children five years old and younger, with an intentional focus on communities that have been historically under-resourced. Along with the proposed ballot language, key components of the request include:

- Levy 0.45 of one mill
- 6-year term from 2025 to 2031
- Intent to strengthen access to quality Early Care and Education (ECE) programming while sustaining effective, evidence-informed services currently funded by Ready by Five.
- Election date of August 6 or November 2, 2024
- Retain First Steps Kent as the fiduciary of the revenue generated

The application also includes letters of support from thirteen individuals and organizations. Kent County residents also submitted communication supporting the application directly to Commissioners. It is provided in Attachment F.

C. Kent County Operating and Special Millages

For context, information about current millage rates is provided for consideration of the Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee's request. According to the fiscal year 2024 adopted budget, the estimated operating millage rate to be levied for 2024 is 4.1310 mills. The 2024 budget also includes the following five special millages for a total estimated millage rate of 6.0971.

- Correctional Facility 0.7546 mills
- Senior Services 0.5000 mills
- Zoo/Museum 0.4206 mills
- Early Childhood (Ready by Five) 0.2409 mills
- Veterans 0.0500 mills

Background

The property tax revenue raised by the Ready by Five millage since its inception ranged from \$5.6 million in 2019 to \$6.6 million in 2023. In 2024, the millage is estimated to generate \$7,207,325.

Table 1. Revenue History

Year	Ready by Five Revenue
2019	\$5,591,619
2020	\$5,851,879
2021	\$6,094,252
2022	\$6,283,821
2023	\$6,632,885
2024	\$7,207,325 Estimate

Table 2 reflects potential revenue estimates at different millage rates. If in 2024 voters approve a Ready by Five millage rate of 0.25, revenue of approximately \$7,716,178 would be generated, in today's dollars, in the first year (2025). A millage rate of 0.35 mills or 0.45 mills, in today's dollars, would generate approximately \$10,802,649 and \$13,889,120, respectively. The revenue raised at 0.45 mills would represent approximately \$5.4 million more than has been spent in a single year since the millage began.

Table 2. Estimated Revenue at 0.25, 0.35 and 0.45 Mills

	Estimated First Year Revenue
0.25 mills	\$7,716,178
0.35 mills	\$10,802,649
0.45 mills	\$13,889,120

Background

These are conservative estimates based on the current taxable value of property. An increase of 4% in taxable value between now and 2025, for example, would generate approximately \$8,024,825 at a millage rate of 0.25 mills.

Table 3 summarizes what a voter-approved millage rate of 0.25 mills, 0.35 mills and 0.45 mills would mean to the taxpayer annually. These figures are based on today's dollars, so changes in market and taxable value of property in Kent County in future years would impact the actual annual tax collection at each of the millage rates presented here.

Table 3. Estimated Annual Tax by Taxable Value at 0.25, 0.35 and 0.45 Mills

True Cash Value	Taxable Value	Annual Tax at 0.25 mills	Annual Tax at 0.35 mills	Annual Tax at 0.45 mills
\$100,000	\$50,000	\$12.50	\$17.50	\$22.50
\$150,000	\$75,000	\$18.75	\$26.25	\$33.75
\$200,000	\$100,000	\$25.00	\$35.00	\$45.00
\$250,000	\$125,000	\$31.25	\$43.75	\$56.25
\$500,000	\$250,000	\$62.50	\$87.50	\$112.50

Ready by Five Millage Services and Accomplishments

A. History

In 2018, a Board of Commissioners Early Childhood Millage Subcommittee convened and met over several months to consider placing an early childhood millage on the ballot at a millage rate of 0.50 mills requested by First Steps Kent; ultimately, the subcommittee opted to move the request forward to the full Board of Commissioners with a 0.25 mills request.

First Steps Kent led the effort to secure dedicated and sustainable public funding for programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of expectant parents and children under age five across the community. In November 2018, Kent County voters approved the Ready by Five Early Childhood Proposal with 56.7% voting yes for the six-year millage at 0.25 mills. It was included in Kent County property tax bills beginning December 2018.

The millage was anticipated to generate approximately \$5.7 million each year; however, due to a 21% increase in property value in Kent County from 2017-2021, it generated \$6.6 million in 2023. The Ready by Five millage is the only millage in the state of Michigan solely dedicated to early childhood services that prepare children for kindergarten and is patterned in part on the success of similar millages or tax levys in other states.

Due to the timing of the tax collection of the first year (December 2018) and the time required to design and implement the new program, it was anticipated that funds collected in the first year would not be fully spent. The plan for funds not used in Year One was to carry them forward and incrementally spend the first year funds down through 2024. First Steps Kent implemented that strategy, while also in receipt of additional revenue through the taxable value increase.

Ready by Five Millage Services and Accomplishments

Ready by Five Millage funds (\$11.4 million available to spend in FY 2023) are allocated for programs and services that show evidence of effectiveness, and the impact of funded services is reported in annual reports to the community (www.firststepskent.org/millage). In FY 2024, Ready by Five will support 21 community-based organizations that provide 33 different early childhood programs.

Approximately 12,400 unique young children and parents engaged in millage-funded services in 2022. Families served represent every zip code in Kent County, with the largest concentration in the most densely populated communities of Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, and Wyoming. Since the millage inception, programming increased by 55% in the six zip codes, both urban and rural, that are most economically disadvantaged. Data on services provided by zip code is included in Attachment D.

B. Summary of Services Provided 2018 to 2023

Annual recommended programming, services and funding allocation levels are developed by a 9-member Resident Proposal Review Board comprised of two County Commissioners, an Early Childhood Expert, a County Administration staff member, a First Steps Kent (FSK) Commission member, and four parents of a child aged 0-5 years. The recommendation is approved annually by the Finance and Physical Resources Committee and the Board of Commissioners.

Ready by Five Millage Services and Accomplishments

Ready by Five Programming and Services are broken down into the following key service areas:

Healthy Development Series

Healthy Development programming focuses on improving outcomes related to healthy births, child health, and well-being, as well as ensuring children are developmentally on track. Programming will demonstrate success in supporting positive health behaviors that drive better outcomes for children from birth through five years, as well as expectant parents. Programs may work with specialized populations to provide specific support with accessing resources and information.

Specific service areas within the Healthy Development Series include:

- Developmental, Social-Emotional Screenings, and Referral Programs
- Healthy and Safe Home Environment Programs
- Specialized Support Programs (e.g., for New Americans/refugees, families engaged with child welfare, families experiencing housing insecurity)

Parent Education and Support Services

Parent Education and Support programming ensures parents have the knowledge and skills to support their children's health, development, and learning. Services provide in-home and/or community-based support and education. Programs offer parent education through home visiting as well as ancillary support that addresses the preventable causes of infant and child mortality.

As a result of services, expectant parents and families with young children will have access to the information, resources, and social support they need to be more confident and empowered to make informed choices for themselves, their children, and their families. This service area includes Child Safety Initiatives and Home Visiting.

Ready by Five Millage Services and Accomplishments

Early Learning Services

This includes programming that supports early learning and development and responds to the diverse families and children residing in Kent County. Providers offer any number of nationally recognized, evidence-informed models. This service area includes access to quality early learning programs such as Learn and Play Community Programming and Early Literacy and Learning Programming.

Outreach and Navigation Services-Coordinated Outreach, Screening and Navigation

An Outreach and Navigation network provides a multi-agency strategy to reach and engage families in a coordinated way. This network serves as the “right door” for families to find available resources, information, and programs. Outreach aims to increase the usage of early childhood programs and community resources by engaging future parents and families with young children who are not using or are unaware of services. As families are engaged, programs work to identify the needs of families through formal screening as well as conversation with the individuals served. As needs are identified, navigation addresses barriers to accessing services, information, and resources to ensure families are successfully connected to referrals and information.

Healthy Development Infant Health– Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network Lead

The Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) Network ensures that services address social, economic, and health factors that contribute to healthy births in Kent County. Through a rigorous review process of infant death records, the FIMR Network seeks to identify factors contributing to infant deaths and develop action-oriented recommendations to eliminate infant deaths in Kent County.

Ready by Five Millage Services and Accomplishments

Parent Education and Support - Language Services

Translation and Interpretation Supports offer the opportunity for agencies that specialize in and provide interpretation and translation services (in-person, telephone, and written) to apply for Ready by Five millage funding. Services are intended for families enrolled in all Ready by Five funded services. Language needs include, but are not limited to, Spanish, Nepali, Kinyarwanda, Serbo-Croatian, Swahili, Burmese, American Sign Language, Vietnamese, and Karen.

Healthy Development Training – Ready by Five Network Training & Education Leads

The goal of programming in this area is to increase knowledge in the Ready by Five professional network. Training is available for all direct professionals funded by Ready by Five and their supervisors. Topics include responding to family needs with a trauma-informed approach, addressing domestic violence and family safety, and learning how to respond to and support families with young children.

C. Successes and Challenges

Data reported by First Steps Kent reflect how children and expectant parents in Kent County receive support through millage-funded programs.

In terms of overall impact:

- Ready by Five supports 21 community-based organizations that provide 33 different early childhood programs, and
- In 2022, more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents in Kent County have benefitted from direct services funded by the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage.

Ready by Five Millage Services and Accomplishments

Select key data points on specific service areas include:

- In 2022, the eight Ready by Five Outreach and Navigation programs were successful in completing 10,566 screenings and in providing 3,900 referrals that resulted in families connected to needed service(s).
- More than 10,000 home visits funded by Ready by Five were completed in 2022, with nearly 1,700 children and expectant parents participating.
- 6,800 developmental screenings identified 428 children with a possible developmental concern in 2022 resulting in referrals to examine and address concerns.
- For lead safety in homes, Ready by Five-funded programs completed 378 risk screenings, comprehensive assessments, and follow-up screening in 2022.
- Of the parents who responded to satisfaction surveys for all Outreach and Navigation programs, 85 percent were satisfied with their services.
- Of the parents who responded to satisfaction surveys for all Healthy Development programs, 97 percent were satisfied with services.
- Of the parents who responded to satisfaction surveys for all Early Learning programs in 2022, 90 percent were satisfied with services.

Additional data, reports and responses to Subcommittee requests for information about Ready by Five services is provided in Attachment D.

In terms of challenges, beginning the Ready by Five programming at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges that no one could have predicted. The Ready by Five programs were designed to be provided in person. While some services could be provided virtually, others could not.

Ready by Five Millage Services and Accomplishments

Those that could pivot to a virtual environment were hampered by broadband access issues, families lacking devices for virtual services, and families with a dearth of data to use for virtual services. First Steps Kent reported that normal operations across the partner network could not resume until 2022.

Consistent with trends across many sectors of the workforce, hiring and turnover of program staff continues to be a significant challenge for Ready by Five service providers. With more vacancies than anticipated, total spending on personnel expenses since Ready by Five began was less than projected. This contributed to the underspending of funds in 2021 and 2022 and required flexible management of programs to meet as many needs as possible while positions were vacant.

D. Basis Policy Research Evaluation

According to research by Professor James Heckman, Nobel Prize-winning economist at the University of Chicago, every dollar invested in early childhood programs and services delivers a return on investment of 13%, compared to a 7-10% return with preschool alone. To examine and document the impact on Kent County children of the Ready by Five millage, First Steps Kent engaged an evaluation firm, Basis Policy Research, to provide an independent and neutral assessment of how millage investments are impacting contributors to kindergarten success. The evaluation work began in 2021 after selecting Basis Policy Research through an RFP process.

Ready by Five Millage Services and Accomplishments

The four contributing indicators being assessed are:

- Parents' access to resources and information,
- Mother's health and wellbeing,
- Children are developmentally on track,
- Children's health, and
- A cost-benefit analysis showing how Ready by Five funded programs contribute to future cost saving and/or social benefits for the youngest children in Kent County.

Year One and Two evaluation activities began on November 1, 2021 and ended on December 31, 2022. Years Three and Four activities commenced on January 1, 2023. The first report of evaluation findings will be available in 2024 and will inform future programming decisions and funding allocations, ensuring the most effective use of public dollars.

Basing success on the empirical measure of kindergarten readiness, the evaluation will begin to determine the impact for children who are school-aged and have engaged in Ready by Five funded services. Initial evaluation results showing the impact on kindergarten readiness will be available sometime in the winter of 2023, with additional results of the return on investment to follow in coming years, as children receiving services as infants and toddlers start kindergarten.

Subcommittee's Findings

A. Value of Early Childhood Services

The Subcommittee learned information from the submitted application and the presentations by the Millage Steering Committee, as well as public comments at their meetings, about the positive difference the millage is having in the community.

Highlights include:

- National research continues to emphasize the importance of services pre-birth through age five to the long-term health, wellness, and education success of youth.
- The Ready by Five services are popular in the community, with parents taking full advantage. First Steps Kent monitors demand and effectiveness and adjusts programming to invest the millage dollars to their fullest potential.
- Polling data provided by the Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee reported strong support for continuing the millage beyond 2024. A report of the EPIC MRA survey results is provided in Attachment E.
- The Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee provided information about the needs across Kent County for additional childcare service providers, enhanced quality of existing childcare services (particularly home-based providers), and the support parents require to find open childcare spaces that match their needs.

B. Ready By Five Evaluation

There is a robust evaluation plan underway to articulate the outcomes of the millage-funded services. The data currently available measures the quantity of services provided and user satisfaction.

Subcommittee's Findings

Since only one cohort of participating children has entered kindergarten (in Fall of 2023), it is premature to make conclusions about the primary desired outcome of the millage, which was to improve kindergarten readiness. More robust data about the effectiveness of the millage-funded services to prepare children for kindergarten will be available in Spring 2024 and ongoing as more participating children reach school age. That will provide an opportunity to communicate with taxpayers specific outcomes of the investments, the positive impacts on children and families and the potential opportunity to ask voters to consider a higher millage rate.

Basis Policy Research 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. Basis Policy Research completed a quantitative evaluation and return on investment analysis for the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation Learning Educators Initiative. Basis Policy Research 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-year-old children. At the state level, Basis evaluated the Michigan Department of Education's Statewide System of Support, which works with Intermediate School Districts.

C. State of Michigan's Role in Childcare

The Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee shared the significant needs in Kent County for quality childcare services. The Subcommittee concluded that the upcoming ballot language should provide for some investment in this service area and strongly recommends monitoring larger scale changes outside of Kent County's purview.

Subcommittee's Findings

Specifically, the Subcommittee concludes there is a role for the State of Michigan to address the childcare crisis statewide.

The Subcommittee recommends a focus in the coming years on encouraging state action and assessing the impact of recent legislative changes related to early childhood education and care. The Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce is advocating at the state level for funding to address the issues of quality, access, and navigation to childcare options. The Board of Commission may consider adding these concerns to the County's legislative priorities. The Subcommittee encourages ongoing monitoring and assessment of the adequacy of state investments in meeting Kent County's needs before taking on greater local investment in the childcare arena.

D. Effective Targeting of Additional Millage Revenue

The revenue generated by the millage has increased annually based on increases in property values. That trend is expected to continue into the next 6-year period, resulting in additional funds to invest in early childhood services. The Subcommittee concludes there is an opportunity to use the Basis Policy Research evaluation results that will be available beginning in Spring 2024, to strategically invest the increases in revenue each year in the most effective services to further enhance the impact of the Ready by Five millage. The evaluation results also provide experience and outcomes on which to base a potential future increase in the millage rate.

Subcommittee's Recommendation

A. Collaborative Examination of Next Steps

The Subcommittee recommends a structured community convening, prior to the 2031 expiration, for an ongoing discussion of needs across the continuum of early learning and childcare services. Kent County could serve as the convenor, bringing all sectors together, including but not limited to parents, business, education, faith, government, early learning and development service providers, and early care/childcare service providers. The collaborative would be tasked with examining the upcoming Ready by Five evaluation results, continued collection of data on service gaps and needs, educating the community, gathering additional community input and reporting to the Board of Commissioners on recommended steps to effectively support future needs across the continuum of early learning and childcare services.

B. Proposed Ballot Language

The Subcommittee recommends presenting ballot language for the August 6, 2024 election to the standing committees and full Board of Commissioners to ask voters whether to continue the Ready by Five millage for an additional 6 years at a millage rate of 0.25 of one mill. The Subcommittee does not recommend increasing to 0.45 or 0.35 of one mill at this time, based on the yet unfinished formal assessment of the outcomes and effectiveness of the millage. The Subcommittee concludes that the voters should have that data and confidence in the results of the Ready by Five investment before requesting a larger millage rate on a ballot.

The proposed ballot language adds text related to childcare services based on information shared by the Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee and other stakeholders.

Subcommittee's Recommendation

The Subcommittee supports asking voters to expand the allowable uses of the millage revenue to improve the quality of childcare and information for families about available childcare. The proposed ballot language is presented below.

SHALL KENT COUNTY LEVY 0.25 OF ONE MILL, WHICH EQUALS 25 CENTS PER \$1,000 OF THE TAXABLE VALUE ON ALL REAL AND PERSONAL PROPERTY SUBJECT TO TAXATION, FOR THE PERIOD 2024 THROUGH 2031, INCLUSIVE, FOR THE PURPOSE OF PLANNING, EVALUATING, AND PROVIDING SERVICES TO PERSONS THROUGH AGE 5 AND THEIR PARENTS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, AND SERVICES TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF CHILDCARE AND TO INCREASE PUBLIC INFORMATION REGARDING AVAILABLE CHILDCARE? THE AMOUNT RAISED BY THE LEVY IN THE FIRST CALENDAR YEAR IS ESTIMATED AT \$7,716,178.

In Kent County there are 31 local authorities that capture and use, for authorized purposes, tax increment revenues from property taxes levied by the County. Such capture could include a portion of this millage levy. The 31 tax increment authorities in Kent County, capturing a portion of this tax levy, include but are not limited to the following:

- Ada Township – Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Bowne Township – Downtown Development Authority
- Byron Township – Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Cascade Charter Township – Downtown Development Authority, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Cedar Springs, City of – Downtown Development Authority, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

Subcommittee's Recommendation

- Grand Rapids, City of – Downtown Development Authority, Monroe North-Tax Increment Finance Authority, Smart Zone Local Development Finance Authority, Corridor Improvement Finance Authority, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Grand Rapids Township – Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Grandville, City of – Downtown Development Authority, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Kent City, Village of – Downtown Development Authority
- Kentwood, City of – Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Lowell, City of – Downtown Development Authority
- Rockford, City of – Downtown Development Authority, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Sparta, Village of – Downtown Development Authority, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Walker, City of – Downtown Development Authority, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Wyoming, City of – Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

Attachments

Attachment A.....22-51

Early Childhood Millage Subcommittee Meeting Minutes and Early Childhood Millage Steering Committee Presentation Slides

- 1) September 5, 2023 minutes
- 2) September 5, 2023 slides
- 3) September 28, 2023 minutes
- 4) October 17, 2023 minutes
- 5) October 17, 2023 slides
- 6) December 4, 2023 minutes

Attachment B.....52-110

Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee Application

Attachment C.....111-119

Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee Secondary Millage Request

Attachment D.....120-132

Reports, Memos and Data on Ready by Five provided to the Subcommittee

- 1) Early Childhood Funding Sources and Leveraged Funds, September 2023
- 2) Participation in Ready by Five by Zip Code, September 2023
- 3) Societal Benefits and Return on Investment, July 2023
- 4) Evaluation of Kindergarten Readiness Impact, September 2023

Attachment E.....133-138

EPIC MRA Survey Data: Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, September 2023

Attachment F.....139-151

Communication submitted to Kent County

Attachment A

EARLY CHILDHOOD MILLAGE SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

Tuesday, September 5, 2023 - 9:30 am

Room 311, Kent County Administration Building, 300 Monroe Ave NW

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Emily Brieve; Commissioner Lindsey Thiel; Commissioner Monica Sparks

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHER ATTENDEES: Heather Boswell, First Steps Kent; Lew Chamberlin, First Steps Kent Commission; Sandra Ghoston Jones, Kent County; Jennifer Headley-Nordman, First Steps Kent; John Helmholdt, SeyferthPR; Taniah Ingram, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee; Win Irwin, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee; Jennifer James, Kent County; Megan Streng, First Steps Kent; Amy Turner-Thole, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee; Kate Wolters, First Steps Kent Commission

1. WELCOME

Chair Brieve called the meeting to order at 9:30 am, welcomed attendees and invited introductions.

2. BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS ROLE

Ms. James shared highlights of Kent County's Millage Requests Policy and the steps in the Board of Commissioners process of considering a request to place a millage on the ballot.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD MILLAGE AND PROGRAMMING

Ms. Headley-Nordman presented an overview of the millage and programming, including highlights from the Home Visiting, Play & Learn, and Outreach & Navigation services. She also described existing early childhood services gaps and the challenges experienced in the initial years of implementation.

Chair Brieve and Commissioner Thiel posed questions about services provided by zip code, services provided in the Outreach and Navigation category, the impact of staffing shortages at agencies, and childcare needs in the community. Ms. Boswell described Outreach and Navigation and workforce development needs in childcare. First Steps Kent will provide data on services provided by zip code in Kent County in advance of the next Subcommittee meeting. Ms. Boswell spoke about how attention is being paid to partner agency wages and benefits as well as to how other benefits are being provided, such as mental health support.

Chair Brieve also asked how, since the pandemic, First Steps Kent has been able to pivot and ramp-up to spend down reserves. Ms. Boswell detailed how more emphasis was placed on Outreach and Navigation and investments were made in child safety programs and services.

Ms. Ingram and Mr. Irwin discussed the importance of Ready by Five services and the need for investment in quality childcare. They addressed their personal experience with Ready by Five services, the workforce development challenges related to childcare, and the importance of a strong beginning for a child's development, which includes developmental screenings and home lead evaluations.

Ms. Boswell concluded the overview of Ready by Five by describing the other Ready by Five service areas, including Healthy Development, Service Partner Training, Parent Education and Support, Translation and Interpretation Supports, and Early Learning Programming. Ms. Turner-Thole noted that the millage application distributed to the Commissioners includes descriptions and data on the Ready by Five services. She also noted that the frequency of parents from neighboring counties seeking to use the services is a testament to the popularity.

Mr. Helmholdt described the polling data results available at this time. 74% of voters said they would "vote yes" and 18% said they would "vote no". 66% said they would "definitely vote yes".

Commissioner Sparks shared that many of her constituents struggle with the high cost of childcare. She also requested that information about Ready by Five clearly note that services are available for all Kent County parents and children ages 0 to five. Commissioner Sparks reinforced the need for the services by sharing data from the Centers for Disease Control that 25% of school-aged children are on antianxiety medications and 1 in 6 children in the United States aged 2 to 8 years (17.4%) have a diagnosis of mental, behavioral or emotional health disorder.

4. INFORMATION NEEDS AND NEXT STEPS

The Commissioners determined that the Subcommittee would convene again in approximately two weeks, and requested staff work with the Commissioners to set the date/time. Chair Brieve stated that the Subcommittee plans to have a recommendation to the Board Chair in November 2023.

Information requested for the next Subcommittee meeting included:

- Ready by Five services provided by Kent County zip code,
- Overview of how Ready by Five expands and enhances services beyond what is available from other funding sources and other providers working in early childhood services,
- Update to the gap analysis data that was used in the 2018 election,
- Timing of the kindergarten readiness data from Kent ISD; and
- Results of the full polling data analysis.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

6. MISCELLANEOUS

There was no miscellaneous.

7. ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business for discussion, Chair Brieve declared the meeting adjourned at 10:40 am.

Ready by Five Millage Subcommittee

September 5, 2023





2018 Ready by Five Millage

- Approved 57%-43%
- Bipartisan support
- Addressing gaps in programs and services

Investing Early Costs Less

- Earliest years are critical for brain development
- ROI from savings in child welfare, health, education, law enforcement + stronger workforce



Ready by Five is Working!

- 12,400 served in 2022
- Every zip code in Kent County
- Reaching families with greatest needs and opportunity for impact
- Evidence-informed programs
- Countywide data collection



Ready by Five Highlights

- Home Visiting –
50% more families served
- Play and Learn –
800% participation increase
- Outreach and Navigation –
2,239 served



Outcomes & Impact

- Healthier births
- Parents with more knowledge and support
- Earlier intervention
- Safer and healthier homes
- Stronger family relationships

KINDERGARTEN
READINESS



Gaps & Challenges

- Coming back from pandemic
- Children and families have greater needs
- Staffing shortages
- Child care crisis



EARLY CHILDHOOD MILLAGE SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

Tuesday, September 28, 2023, 9:30 am

Room 311, Kent County Administration Building, 300 Monroe Ave NW

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Emily Brieve; Commissioner Lindsey Thiel;
Commissioner Monica Sparks

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHER ATTENDEES: Heather Boswell, First Steps Kent; Sandra Ghoston Jones, Kent County; Commissioner Ben Greene; Jennifer Headley-Nordman, First Steps Kent; John Helmholdt, SeyferthPR; Taniah Ingram, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee; Win Irwin, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee; Jennifer James, Kent County; Megan Streng, First Steps Kent; Amy Turner-Thole, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee; Commissioner Stephen Wooden

1. Welcome

Chair Brieve called the meeting to order at 11:08 am.

2. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the Subcommittee's September 5, 2023 meeting were approved with the correction of spelling of Commissioner Thiel's name.

3. Discussion of the Steering Committee Application

Jennifer Headley-Nordman shared a brief overview of the information provided in response to questions and requests during the first Subcommittee meeting.

The Subcommittee discussed the scope and eligibility for proposed childcare services outlined in the application. First Steps Kent staff and Millage Advisory Committee members explained that the funds will not pay for childcare services for families. The funds would increase the number and quality of childcare providers, increase the talent pipeline, connect families to financial supports, help parents navigate to childcare providers and ultimately set kids up for long-term success. They highlighted a Michigan Chamber of Commerce report showing the need to grow the supply of childcare providers.

First Steps Kent staff and Millage Advisory Committee members noted the behavioral health concerns among youth five years and younger that make early care and education challenging. Childcare providers request assistance with behavioral health needs due to the impact it has on the classroom. Commissioner Brieve requested data on children under five with behavioral health challenges.

Mission Statement

Through responsible budgeting and thoughtful planning, Kent County government is committed to providing resources

and services that promote a high quality of life for the entire community.

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Based on the extent of the needs that the millage is attempting to address, Commissioners Thiel and Brieve commented on refocusing the millage funds on a smaller number of specific needs to do those specific things really well. Commissioner Sparks noted that the model for allocating Ready by Five millage funds is the same as the model used to allocate Senior Millage funds.

Millage Advisory Committee members explained that First Steps Kent looks at the community needs and evidence-based solutions, then identifies the gaps that can be filled with the millage. Getting a child ready for kindergarten success require not one thing but a spectrum of services and supports.

Commissioner Thiel indicated she is not sure that she can support an increase in the millage at this time and asked if some of the current resources can be shifted from a current service to childcare-related services. The Millage Advisory Committee reported that adding services in the childcare area would mean stopping something else that is shown to be a need.

Commissioner Thiel noted that Ready by Five funds served 12,400 children in 2022. The Millage Advisory Committee clarified that the 20,000 children proposed to be served when the millage began was the expectation under the proposed 0.50 mill. With the reduced 0.25 mill included on the ballot, fewer children could be served.

Commissioner Sparks explained the importance of marketing the services and ensuring that organizations serving young children know of the opportunity to engage with the Ready by Five network.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Brieve declared the meeting adjourned at 11:39 am.

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EARLY CHILDHOOD MILLAGE SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

Tuesday, October 17, 2023 - 9:30 am

Board Room, Kent County Administration Building, 300 Monroe Ave NW

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Emily Brieve; Commissioner Lindsey Thiel; Commissioner Monica Sparks

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHER ATTENDEES: Heather Boswell, First Steps Kent; Chana Edmond-Verley, Vibrant Futures; Sandra Ghoston Jones, Kent County; Jennifer Headley-Nordman, First Steps Kent; John Helmholdt, Taniah Ingram, Win Irwin, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee; Jennifer James, Kent County; Tara Kenser, Parent; Maureen Kirkwood, HealthNet West Michigan; Megan Streng, First Steps Kent; Amy Turner-Thole, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee

1. WELCOME

Chair Brieve called the meeting to order at 10:34 am.

2. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the Subcommittee's September 28, 2023 meeting were approved.

3. Public Comment

Mike Jandernoa – Commented on the business community's need for youth who are educated and prepared for employment, and the importance of investing in future talent needs. He supports the millage.

Kevin Clay – Commented on his experience in business and as an owner of childcare centers. Noted that businesses struggle with absenteeism due to inadequate childcare options and the importance of preparing kids for school. He supports the requested increase in the millage.

Dr. Bob Conners – Spoke personally and on behalf of Together West Michigan. He noted that concerns about childcare needs keep residents up at night. Together West Michigan supports the renewal and expansion, especially to address childcare needs.

4. Millage Steering Committee Presentation of Information Requested by the Subcommittee

Win Irwin, Co-Chair of the Millage Steering Committee introduced the presentation by sharing that childcare access and quality was always an issue when he served on the workforce development board. He acknowledged that COVID impacted programming at the start of Ready by Five.

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The Millage Steering Committee shared highlights of the Ready by Five millage experience to date:

- It was the first of its kind in West Michigan.
- It plays a substantial role in services for youth age 1 to 4 years where the state and federal government invest fewer resources.
- A data collection system is in place now for tracking the use and impact of the funds, including on kindergarten readiness.
- First Steps Kent uses data to prioritize and target annual investment of the millage dollars.

The Millage Steering Committee introduced four guests with specific involvement with the millage.

Maureen Kirkwood (HealthNet West Michigan) described the early childhood Navigation Services they provide. HealthNet offered quick screening to over 2,200 kids since January 2023 and 404 were connected to services and assistance with basic needs. She advocated for increasing the mills because they are not reaching everyone who needs assistance.

Teneah Ingram (Co-Chair of the Millage Steering Committee and Parent) explained that she uses the Ready by Five services. She appreciates the support in early identification of developmental delays and the focus on parent voice in developing services.

Tara Kenser (Parent) shared that she has been a user of Play & Learns. Her son gained social, emotional and knowledge skills from the experience. She had a place to bring questions, which lessened her anxiety as a parent and gave her a chance to connect with other parents.

Chana Edmond-Verley (Vibrant Futures) spoke of the value of leveraging the state investment in TriShare because childcare struggles disrupt families and impact our shared prosperity.

The Millage Steering Committee shared highlights on the future need for the millage, including:

- Demand for services is increasing and inflation has raised the cost to provide the services.
- A modest investment in childcare can begin to address the need and allow Kent County to be a leader in the state.
- First Steps Kent has been spending down unspent dollars from the years that COVID impacted service delivery. The services more recently funded with those previously unspent funds will need to be scaled back in the future.

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5. Discussion of Proposed Millage Increase

The Commissioners inquired and discussed with the Steering Committee how unmet needs are defined and whether youth are turned away from services. In terms of unmet needs, the Steering Committee is focused on childcare quality and increasing the pipeline of childcare workers. The Steering Committee indicated that additional funds are required to address that need and they support changing the ballot language to allow investment in childcare.

Commissioners emphasized the need for the data from the evaluation that's underway to make the case for the impact of the millage on Kindergarten readiness. They shared there is millage fatigue in the community and concern that the future of the economy is uncertain.

Commissioners appreciated the accomplishments of the Ready by Five millage so far and would like to see the State of Michigan put efforts into addressing childcare needs statewide.

The Subcommittee discussed draft ballot language that reflects:

- A 6-year millage
- No increase in mills
- Opportunity to provide childcare-related programming with the revenue

The Commissioners discussed the alternative of a four-year millage. Commissioner Thiel made a motion for staff to draft ballot language with no increase in mills, a 6-year millage and opportunity to provide childcare-related programming. Commissioner Sparks seconded the motion.

Chair Brieve indicated the Subcommittee will meet again in approximately three weeks to review final draft ballot language and a draft Subcommittee report.

6. MISCELLANEOUS

There was no miscellaneous.

7. ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business for discussion, Chair Brieve declared the meeting adjourned at 11:30 am.

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Ready by Five Millage Subcommittee

October 17, 2023



The Early Childhood Millage

Systemic approach to improve:

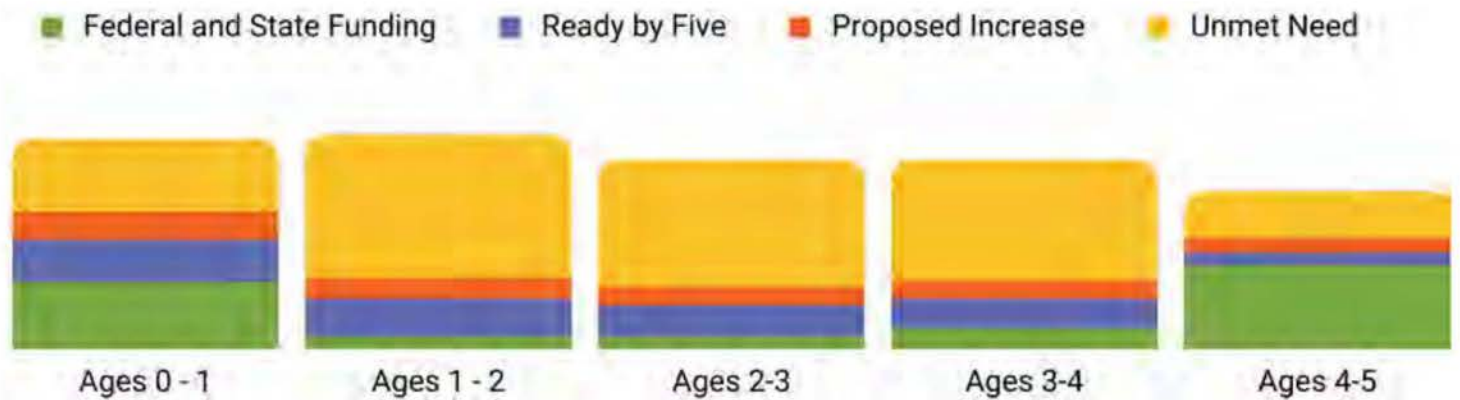
- Academic outcomes
- Graduation rates
- Adult productivity

Investments based on:

- Best practice
- Local data
- Proven impact



Meeting Community Needs



*This approximates relative investment and unmet need.
The services needed decrease slightly as young children age.*



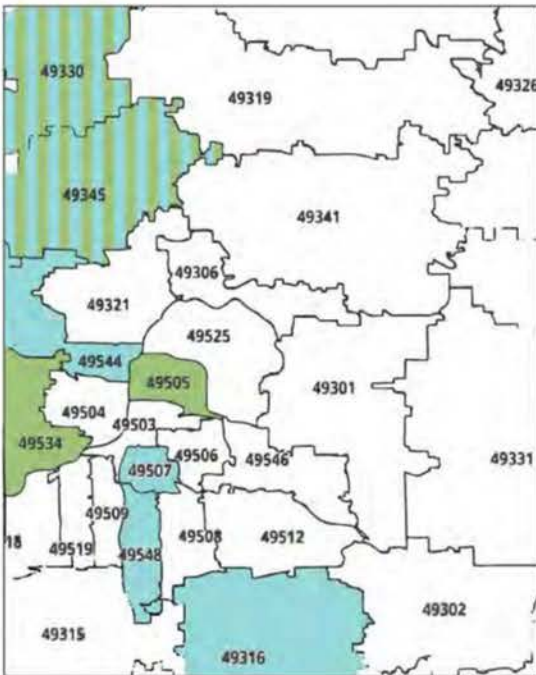
Promised and Delivered



- Increased participation in evidence-based programs
- Established countywide data collection
- Developed outreach and navigation network



Countywide Data Collection



Opportunity Zip Codes

Underserved communities with high economic disadvantage

Blue: Priority focus in 2021-23

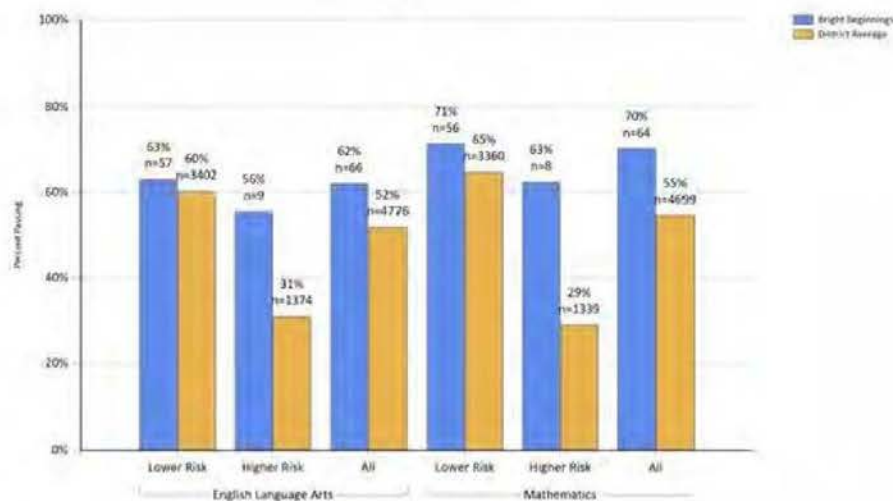
Green: Priority focus in 2023-25



Program Outcomes

Bright Beginnings M-STEP

Kent ISD
Spring 2021 - 3rd Grade
Students with 9+ Home Visits



This data represents the 20 LEAs in Kent ISD and does not include charter or parochial schools.
Higher risk districts are districts that are more than 50% economically disadvantaged. These districts include Comstock Park, Grand Rapids, Kenosha, Godfrey Lee, Godwin Heights, Kelloggville, Kent City, and Wyoming.
Lower risk districts Byron Center, Caledonia, Cedar Springs, East Grand Rapids, Forest Hills, Grandville, Kenowa Hills, Lowell, Northview, Rockford, Sparta, and Thornapple Kellogg.

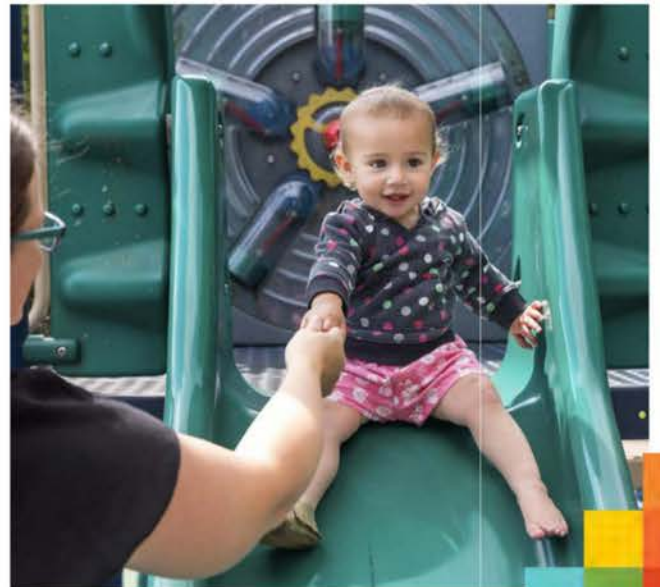
Program Outcomes

Developmental Screenings

- Concern identified in 730 children; connected to early intervention

Strong Beginnings

- "Reduction in preterm, very preterm, and very low birthweight babies, especially for Black women" (JAMA, July 2023)



Expand Impact and Outcomes



Sustain and grow effective programs

- Demand, need, and costs increasing

Priority areas

- Home visiting
- Early learning
- Outreach & navigation
- Healthy development



Expand Impact and Outcomes

Urgent need to improve access to quality child care!

- Kent County has 3 child care slots for every 10 children ages 0-2
- Child care crisis costs Michigan \$2.88 billion/year
- Child care is most limited in urban core and rural communities



Child Care Investments

ECE business and workforce development strategy

- Localized approach that leverages Tri-Share
- Shared services for centers and providers
- Talent pipeline
- Navigation for families
- More quality care for children



Ready by Five Proposal

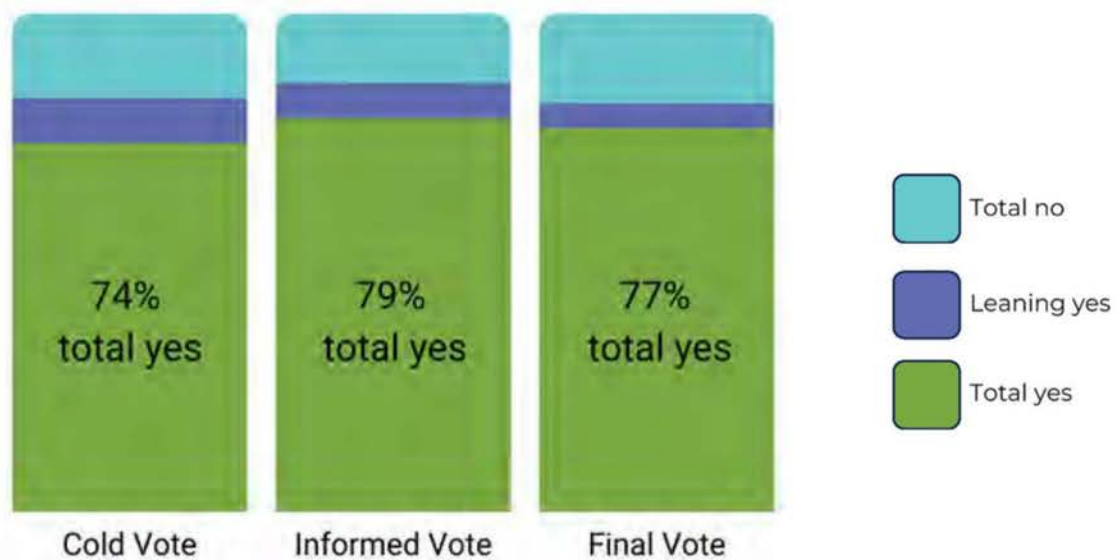
.45 mill = approx. \$12.5 million in FY 2024-2025	
Sustain existing effective services	\$7-\$8M
Expand existing effective services	\$1.5-\$2M
Child care workforce & quality investments	\$2.5-\$3M
Admin/data/evaluation	\$800,000-\$1M
Total	\$12.5M

Allocation for services delivered in FY 2023-2024 is \$8.9M

- Using unspent funds from halt in services during pandemic
- Continuing at .25 mill will require reduction in reach



Let Voters Decide



EARLY CHILDHOOD MILLAGE SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

Monday, December 4, 2023 – 10:00 am

Room 311, Kent County Administration Building, 300 Monroe Ave NW

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Emily Brieve; Commissioner Lindsey Thiel; Commissioner Monica Sparks

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHER ATTENDEES: Heather Boswell, First Steps Kent; Sandra Ghoston Jones, Kent County; Jennifer Headley-Nordman, First Steps Kent; John Helmholdt, Taniah Ingram, Win Irwin, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee; Jennifer James, Kent County; Megan Streng, First Steps Kent; Amy Turner-Thole, Ready By Five Millage Steering Committee.

1. Welcome

Chair Brieve called the meeting to order at 10:04 am

2. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the Subcommittee's October 17, 2023 meeting were approved.

3. New Information from the Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee

The Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee described the recent process of entertaining a 0.35 millage rate in order to better sustain existing services, since a 0.25 millage rate could lead to a reduction in services. The Millage Steering Committee explained that spending down funds that weren't spent during the pandemic resulted in additional needed services that would not be maintained after the spend down is complete and with revenues from a 0.25 millage rate. The end of the pandemic spend down translates to a \$1 million to \$2 million reduction in annual revenue available.

The Subcommittee and Millage Steering Committee members discussed the material provided on a millage rate of 0.35. The Millage Steering Committee proposed using the additional revenue raised from 0.35 mills on existing services and holding off on the expansion of services to address childcare needs.

Commissioner Sparks noted the Chamber of Commerce's data on the childcare crisis and thanked the Millage Steering Committee for the additional information provided.

4. Draft Ballot Language and Subcommittee Report

Subcommittee Chair Brieve noted that the draft Subcommittee Report recommends ballot language with a 0.25 millage rate and her conclusion that it is premature to ask voters to

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consider a 0.35 or 0.45 millage rate at this point. She reinforced her goal to obtain support from the Board of Commissioners to continue the early childhood millage by placing it on the ballot in August.

Commissioner Sparks suggested having the full Board consider a 0.35 millage rate in order to get feedback from more Commissioners.

Commissioner Thiel expressed interest in focusing Ready by Five millage programming where the investment is most effective. She appreciates that Kent County is already doing more than any other county in Michigan. She noted that the Board has changed since the millage was first approved.

Subcommittee Chair Brieve believes that the recommendation to convene community organizations on a collaborative examination of next steps for the early childhood millage is a good approach. She noted that the work could result in a request to the Board of Commissioners to bring an increase in the millage rate before the voters again before the proposed 6-year term is over.

Commissioner Sparks moved to recommend ballot language with a millage rate of .35 mills. There was no second to the motion. The motion failed.

Commissioner Thiel moved to accept the Subcommittee Report and forward it to the Board Chair and standing committees. The motion was supported by Subcommittee Chair Brieve. The Motion carried 3-0.

5. Next Steps

The Subcommittee discussed taking the Report up with the Subcommittees and full Board in the new year. Miscellaneous

6. Public Comment

There was no Public Comment.

7. Miscellaneous

There was no miscellaneous.

8. Adjournment

There being no other business for discussion, Chair Brieve declared the meeting adjourned at 11:00 am.

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Attachment B

Stan Stek, Chair, Kent County Commission
Al Vanderberg, Kent County Administrator
Kent County Administration Building
300 Monroe Avenue NW
Grand Rapids MI 49503

September 5, 2023

Dear Chair Stek and Mr. Vanderberg,

Please find the attached application for the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the Kent County Board of Commissioner's consideration. We request a 0.45 proposal be placed before voters to sustain the evidence-informed programs currently funded by Ready by Five and expand services to address Kent County's child care crisis. First Steps Kent is pleased to share the following successes of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage:

- 12,400 expectant parents and young children from every zip code in Kent County participated in Ready by Five funded programs in 2022. These early childhood programs are proven to improve the health, school readiness, and wellbeing of children aged five and younger.
- First Steps Kent administers the millage and has thus far distributed funds to more than 20 organizations providing more than 40 different programs.
- Voters overwhelmingly approved the millage in 2018 with bipartisan support – 57 percent to 43 – recognizing the importance of investing in our youngest children and our community's future. Kent became the first county in Michigan to have dedicated and sustainable public funding for quality early childhood programs.

The Ready by Five Steering Committee strongly supports the renewal and increase of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. On behalf of children aged 0-5, their parents, and early childhood professionals, we respectfully request that the Kent County Board of Commissioners consider and approve this proposal that allows voters to ultimately make the decision. The critical need for quality programming and services for the healthy development and school readiness of Kent County's children is clear and well documented. The community supports the renewal and growth of this early childhood millage, as Kent County business leaders and parents are urging the inclusion of child care remedies in the Ready by Five millage.

Please contact us through Win Irwin, co-chair, Ready by Five Steering Committee, if you have questions or need additional information. His contact information is win.irwin@irwinseating.com or 616.813.0517.

Thank you for your consideration.

Warm regards,



Win Irwin
Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee
Co-Chair & Business Leader



Taniah Ingram
Ready by Five Millage Steering Committee
Co-Chair & Parent

Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, Kent County

Current:	0.25 mill	2018-2024
Request:	0.45 mill	2025-2031

1. Name of organization requesting millage:

The Ready by Five Steering Committee is submitting this proposal on behalf of Kent County children aged 0-5 and their families. The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage is currently in its fifth year of a six-year millage for 0.25 mill that generates approximately \$6.7 million annually. The cost for the owner of a home valued at \$200,000 is \$25 each year, or \$2.08 a month. Increasing the millage to 0.45 mill would add \$1.67 a month for the homeowner and is estimated to generate an additional \$5.5 million annually.

2. Early childhood programs and services:

Programs funded through the Ready by Five millage served 12,400 children in 2022. Parents are receiving one-on-one, ongoing support to better understand what their baby needs and how to provide it. They're monitoring their child's development, looking for signs of potential delays or disabilities. Families are joining play and learn groups, where children build the skills needed for school success and adults learn how to nurture those skills at home. Expectant parents are engaging in prenatal programs that lead to healthier births. Lead and other environmental hazards are being removed from homes. Families are connecting to resources that help with housing, food, and other essential needs. On top of that, thousands of families are getting critical information about child development and books to read with their young children.

Ready by Five supports 20 community-based organizations that provide more than 40 different early childhood programs. Programs are available to all expecting parents and children five-years-old and younger in Kent County, with an intentional focus on communities that have been historically under-resourced.

3. Proposal millage requested:

This request is for 0.45 mill for 6 years (2025-2031). This would strengthen access to quality Early Care and Education (ECE) programming while sustaining effective, evidence-informed services currently funded by Ready by Five. *Note: Early Education and Care, also known as Child Care, means the care, education, protection, supervision, or guidance of children beginning at birth by a parent, family member, or early childhood professional.*

In August 2023, the Ready by Five Steering Committee commissioned EPIC-MRA to conduct a poll of 600 likely voters. It found broad bipartisan support for the proposed increase to the early childhood millage. During the initial vote, 74% of voters said they would, "vote yes", with only 18% saying they would vote no. Strikingly, 66% said they would, "definitely vote yes". At the end of the survey, which contained a balanced back and forth, the proposal received 77% support.

4. Proposed election date:

The proposed election date is August 6, 2024, or November 5, 2024.

5. Proposed fiduciary of revenue generated from millage:

First Steps Kent will serve as the fiduciary of revenue generated by the millage. First Steps Kent has administered the Ready by Five millage since 2019. Ready by Five has received positive feedback from the Kent County Administration regarding the Resident Proposal Review board process, contract, and fiscal management.

6. Proposed ballot language:

SHALL KENT COUNTY LEVY 0.45 OF ONE MILL WHICH IS EQUAL TO 45 CENTS PER \$1,000 OF THE TAXABLE VALUE ON ALL REAL AND PERSONAL PROPERTY SUBJECT TO TAXATION FOR THE PERIOD 2025 THROUGH 2031 INCLUSIVE FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES TO PERSONS UP THROUGH AGE 5 AND THEIR PARENTS; PLANNING AND EVALUATING THOSE SERVICES; AND PROVIDING INVESTMENTS TO ENHANCE THEIR ACCESSIBILITY, CAPACITY, AND QUALITY? THE AMOUNT RAISED BY THE LEVY IN THE FIRST CALENDAR YEAR IS ESTIMATED AT \$12,568,000.

7. Proposed duration of the millage:

The proposed duration is six years from 2025-2031.

8. Amount of tax dollars it is anticipated the millage will generate each year it is in effect:

The request is for a total of 0.45 mill. In 2025 that is estimated to generate \$12.5 million.

9. Description of all permissible uses of funds from a proposed countywide millage, planned annual expenditures from the millage, other available sources of funding, and why this option was selected and others were rejected:

The Ready by Five Steering Committee is proposing funds will be used to provide quality programs and services that have evidence of increasing a child's likelihood of success in school and beyond to the following groups residing or providing services within Kent County:

- Expecting parents.

- Young children aged 0-5 and their families.
- Caregivers of young children including relative caregivers and child care providers.

First Steps Kent is requesting that funding would continue to sustain programs and services in the following four areas:

- **Outreach and Navigation:** Services include a multi-agency strategy to reach and engage families in a coordinated way. This network serves as the “right door” for families to find available resources, information, and programs. Outreach aims to increase the usage of early childhood programs and community resources by engaging future parents and families with young children who are not currently engaged in services or are unaware of services. As families are engaged, programs work to identify the needs of families through formal screening as well as conversation with the individuals served. As needs are identified, navigation will address barriers to accessing services, information, and resources to ensure families are successfully connected to referrals and information. Services may include broad navigation support as well as services that specialize in one or more specific areas to meet the specific needs within Kent County.
- **Healthy Development:** Healthy Development programming focuses on improving outcomes related to healthy births, child health, and well-being as well as ensuring children are developmentally on track. Programming will demonstrate success in supporting positive health behaviors that drive better outcomes for children from birth through five years, as well as expectant parents. Services include programming that serves expecting parents and families who would benefit from 1:1 support, providing developmental screening, promotion of social emotional development as well as child parent bonding through supporting family and child well-being, and programs that ensure safe home environments for young children. Services may also include training professionals funded by Ready by Five.
- **Parent Education and Support:** Parent Education and Support programming ensures parents have the knowledge and skills to support their children's health, development, and learning. Services provide in-home and/or community-based support and education. As a result of services, expectant parents and families with young children will have access to the information, resources, and social support they need to be more confident and empowered to make informed choices for themselves, their children, and their families. Services include home visiting programming and translation, individual ancillary parental or child support, and interpretation or translation supports (in-person, telephone, and written).
- **Early Learning:** Early childhood research substantiates the rapid development of emergent literacy and language skills that occur in a child's first three years of life. In combination with key skills in the socio-emotional, physical, and cognitive

domains, these skills are the foundation for lifelong learning beginning in kindergarten and continuing into subsequent school years. Programming in this area will ensure all children have access to quality early learning programming that complements classroom-based programming.

The services described above are nationally recognized strategies and programs that have evidence of effectiveness. Numerous research publications have established how young children who participate in high-quality early childhood programming require less special education throughout school, are less likely to repeat a grade, have fewer behavioral concerns, and graduate at a higher rate than those who do not. National research about the long-term public benefit of investing early shows fewer individuals enter the criminal justice system (juvenile and adult) and more adults are successful in the workforce. Many of the models currently funded by the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage have well documented evidence of effectiveness or returns on investment based on long-term studies. For more information, see Attachment E.

In 2017, First Steps Kent produced the report *Refocus: Analyzing Gaps in Early Childhood Services and Funding in Kent County*, which assessed needs within the countywide early childhood system. This report was an update to an original system-level gap analysis completed in 2012. The findings of the gap analysis offer guidance for how Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage investments could support key programming and types of services that will significantly “move the needle” where no other source of funding is available currently. As of mid-2023, a reevaluation of the need for sustainable funding for these services is underway. The updated gap analysis findings continue to identify needs in the four service areas Ready by Five funds. (The fully updated report will be released in fall 2023).

Since the passage of the original ballot initiative in 2018, the community has strongly requested additional local financial investments for child care. Finding and paying for quality child care is routinely cited by families as one of their biggest stressors, and employers recognize it is a major challenge in maintaining their workforce. There are growing calls from parents, business leaders, and other community stakeholders to address child care access and quality as part of Ready by Five.

In addition to the need to sustain current funding and service levels of evidence-informed programs, there is a need for funding concentrated on supporting quality Early Education and Care initiatives in Kent County. First Steps Kent and partners have reviewed best practices and promising strategies from around the country and recommend the following:

- Invest in the talent pipeline to sustain and strengthen the local child care workforce, which will increase the options for quality services for families and improve outcomes for children.

- Help families navigate child care so they can find what works for them and maximize any programs and support for which they are eligible.
- Work with all types of providers – including informal caregivers – to improve the quality of care provided, particularly in diverse and rural communities where data show quality can be most inconsistent.
- Support child care business owners so they can maintain and potentially grow their businesses and focus their resources on providing quality care.
- Invest in innovative initiatives that respond to the needs of young children and their families to ensure services are accessible and high quality.

Programs funded by the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage would not be redundant nor would the millage funding supplant existing state and federal sources.

10. Information on how any projects to be funded by the millage will be paid for once the millage no longer is in effect, if applicable:

The millage should be considered for renewal in 2030 to continue provision of critical programs and services for children aged 0-5 and their parents. Current trends indicate a growing number of families needing access to child care, child health, safety, behavioral, and school readiness initiatives.

11. Letter, petitions, or resolutions supporting the proposed millage:

Appendix F contains letters of support representing the following individuals and entities who can attest to the importance of millage-funded programs and support the proposal to continue the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage in Kent County.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Arbor Circle | • Mike Jandernoa |
| • Cherry Health | • KConnect |
| • Family Futures | • Kent ISD |
| • Grand Rapids Community College | • John Kennedy |
| • Heart of West Michigan United Way | • Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young |
| • Hispanic Center of Western Michigan | • MomsBloom |
| | • WGVU |

Appendices

Appendix A	Ready by Five Funding by Agency – FY 2022
Appendix B	2023 Ready by Five Millage Funded Programs & Services
Appendix C	2022 Ready by Five Millage Annual Report
Appendix D	Ready by Five Evaluation Overview
Appendix E	Societal Benefits and Return on Investment
Appendix F	Letters of Support

Appendix A – Ready by Five Funding by Agency – FY 2022

Agency Name	Outreach and Navigation	Healthy Development	Parenting Education and Support	Early Learning	Interpretation and Translation	Additional Services	Performance Payment	Total
Advancing Communities for Equity						47,240		47,240
Arbor Circle		551,526						551,526
Basis Policy Research						146,000		146,000
Bethany Christian Services	87,394		100,211		9,885			197,490
Cherry Street			355,861					355,861
Comprehensive Therapy Center				16,959				16,959
Corewell Health			737,558				13,874	751,432
DA Blodgett St Johns			64,954				620	65,574
Easterseals MORC		125,596	120,193					245,789
ELNC				115,854				115,854
Family Futures	1,294,784	37,300	258,270				830	1,591,184
GRCC				430,471				430,471
Health Net of West Michigan	679,476							679,476
Healthy Homes Coalition		240,710					160	240,870
Hispanic Center of West Michigan	34,536				59,000			93,536
Kent County Health Department		650,659				54,113		704,772
Kent ISD	296,844		255,963	81,828			3,130	637,765
Liaison Linguistics					23,762			23,762
Momsbloom			176,094				1,680	177,774
Ready for School				378,766				378,766
Vibrant Futures			141,797	157,411			1,000	300,208
West Michigan Partnership for Children	305,601							305,601
Totals	2,698,635	1,605,791	2,210,901	1,181,288	92,647	247,353	21,294	8,057,909

Appendix B - 2023 Ready by Five Millage Funded Programs & Services

The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage funds new and expanded programming that improves the healthy development and school readiness of all children ages zero through age five. Funds are being strategically invested in programs that contribute to what has been identified in key objectives to support kindergarten. In order to receive funding, agencies must meet specific specifications and report on distinct result indicators for the service and program type they apply under.

Funding is awarded under the following service and program types:

Healthy Development Services

Healthy Development programming focuses on improving outcomes related to healthy births, child health and well-being, as well as ensuring children are developmentally on track. Programming will demonstrate success in supporting positive health behaviors that drive better outcomes for children from birth through five years, as well as expectant parents. Programs may work with specialized populations to provide specific support with accessing resources and information.

Developmental, Social Emotional Screenings, and Referral Programming: Ensures that children have regular developmental screenings to identify concerns as early as possible and as needed, follow-up referrals to services and information. Services will support children and their families in one or more of the following ways:

- Promote positive social and emotional development of children served.
- Ensuring children and their caregivers will have access to clinical interventions that specifically support a healthy parent-infant attachment.
- In addition, agencies may provide facilitated groups to support the acquisition of new coping skills and resources to strengthen the parent and child's overall well-being.

Results: Agencies under this program type will impact one or more of the following result indicators:

- Increase in the number of children screened by programs for developmental concerns.
- Increase in the number of children screened by programs for social emotional concerns.
- Increase in the number of children successfully connected to support when a developmental or social emotional concern is identified.

Current programs include:

- Arbor Circle's Keep Early Education Positive (KEEP) program partners with parents, teachers, and child care providers to provide intervention and support that promote

positive social emotional development of children and ensures a successful early learning experience.

- Arbor Circle's Infant Toddler Developmental Services is a clinical intervention that works with families with young children to build strength and skills, increase bonding between the parent and child, and create a sense of emotional security within the family.
- Easterseals MORC's Healthy Development program includes treatment for behaviors such as trauma specific infant mental health, intergenerational trauma-treatment, and child-parent psychotherapy.
- Cherry Health's Heart of the City has added a position to their pediatric healthcare team that ensures all children who have a possible developmental concern identified are successfully referred and connected to early intervention services.
- The Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (ELNC) increases program capacity to ensure children with a developmental concern or identified disability are successfully connected with resources and early intervention services.
- Family Futures' Learning Kits provide age-appropriate learning materials to over 1,500 three- and four-year-old children throughout Kent County.

Healthy and Safe Home Environment Programming: Families have access to support that addresses environmental home health in Kent County. Services could include, but are not limited to, environmental home health screening (to reduce home-based environmental health hazards regarding lead, asthma, accidental injury, etc.), child blood lead screening, and case management for addressing lead and environmental hazards, including referrals to lead remediation resources. (Note: funds may not be used to cover costs related to home repairs or lead remediation services.)

Results: Programs under this program type will impact one or more of the following result indicators:

- Increase in the number of children receiving blood screening to test for elevated levels of lead.
- Increase in the number of children's homes screened or assessed for environmental hazards and lead by a trained professional.
- Increase the number of families successfully referred to resources and services when one or more environmental concerns in the home have been identified.

Current programs in this area include:

- Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan provides in-home services with a trained Healthy Homes Specialist completing a home screening for lead, asthma, and accidental injury risk. Families are also served by a navigator who connects the family to resources based on the family's identified additional needs.
- Kent County Health Department offers comprehensive Lead Inspection Risk Assessments (LIRA) that identify the source of lead hazards in a home. Funding

also supports community education and increasing awareness around the dangers of lead paint in Kent County.

Niche Family Supports: This program type includes agencies who have experience reaching, supporting, and connecting families who benefit from specific services and support. This area may include specialized services for families with varying circumstances such as being a New American/refugees, families engaged within an intervention-type service such as child welfare, those experiencing housing insecurity, or otherwise engaged in any program serving adults with young children who would benefit from supports. These programs will ensure families with the most specialized needs, who may not otherwise be reached by programming, receive early childhood information and support to ensure the healthy development of their young children.

Results: All programs will increase access to information that imparts knowledge and skills to parents and other adult caregivers about their child's development thus impacting one or more of the following result Indicators:

- Increased referral completion and follow-through.
- Increase in the number of children and expecting parents engaged in support.
- Increase in the number of families receiving referrals to additional ongoing support.

Current programs include:

- Bethany Christian Services provides programming within the Hands Connected Program. This program connects children and families to a Refugee Navigator, who provides comprehensive support in navigating available community resources.
- Family Promise provides Family Service Coordinators that support families with young children who are experiencing homelessness using a trauma-informed approach.
- The Hispanic Center of Western Michigan ensures families have access to resources and programs that enhance the development of their young children. They focus on the whole family and assist with their basic needs to help them reach self-sufficiency.
- West Michigan Partnership for Children provides peer-support to parents navigating the child welfare system, working to equip, engage, and support parents to prevent re-entry into the foster care system and support timely reunification.

Parent Education and Support Services

Parent Education and Support programming ensures parents have the knowledge and skills to support their children's health, development, and learning. Services provide in-home and/or community-based support and education. Programs offer parent education through home visiting as well as ancillary support that addresses the preventable causes of infant and child mortality. As a result of services, expectant parents and families with young children will have access to the information, resources, and social support they need to be more confident and empowered to make informed choices for themselves, their children, and their families. Services may occur under one of the following two types of programming:

Home Visiting Programming includes programs that support a two-generation, preventative approach that matches expectant parents as well as parents with young children with a trained early childhood or maternal infant professional. Programming is holistic and designed to meet the specific needs of each family being served and ensures parents are equipped with timely information about their child's development as well as connection to community resources and support. Services are provided in the home environment and include ongoing parent education, developmental screenings, health (including behavioral health) support, and referral to community resources.

Results: Programs are asked to submit data on additional program features (as applicable to each model) through the monthly data submission process that relates to the result indicators listed below. Programs must track impact with one or more of the following result Indicators:

- Decrease in mothers smoking during pregnancy.
- Decrease in mothers using non-prescribed substances during pregnancy.
- Ensure expectant mothers and primary caregivers are screened for wellbeing.
- Ensure mothers receive adequate prenatal care. (Defined by the Kotelchuck Index)
- Increase in healthy births. (Defined as Babies Born at Healthy Weight at 2500 Grams)
- Increase in mothers breastfeeding.
- Increase in the number of children screened by programs for developmental concerns.
- Increase in the number of children screened by programs for social emotional concerns.
- Increase in the number of children successfully connected to support when a developmental or social emotional concerns is identified.

Current programs include:

- Cherry Health's Maternal Infant Health program offers additional support for new and expecting parents including nutrition and lactate consultation to improve maternal health outcomes and new parent wellbeing.
- Corewell Health's Baby Scholars programming strengthens the bond between parent and child and provides parent coaching on methods to stimulate early language, cognitive, and increase social emotional development.

- Corewell Health's Strong Beginnings program provides culturally responsive support and local implementation of initiatives that aim to eliminate the disparities in maternal health outcomes for parents of color in Kent County.
- D.A. Blodgett-St Johns specializes with working with families engaged in the foster care system. They provide services to caretakers and their young children to increase attachment and strengthen a child's social emotional skills.
- Easterseals MORC's Incredible Years provides home-based services to families with young children that supports parental skills that in turn strengthens children's social emotional skills.
- Family Futures' Healthy Families program provides higher intensity programming that supports maternal health and well-being as well as prevents the abuse and neglect of children through family-focused support.
- Kent ISD's Bright Beginnings Home Visiting program provides proven methods that help caregivers understand their child's early development, identify possible developmental concerns, and build a foundation for later academic success.
- Momsbloom Hands-on Postpartum Support is provided by trained, community volunteers who offer support with a new parent's emotional wellbeing as well as connections to long term support as they transition to life with a newborn.
- Vibrant Futures' Little Scholar's program provides a preventive intervention program that strengthens the bond between parent and child and stimulates early language, cognitive, and social emotional development.

Child Safety Initiatives includes ancillary services to specifically support child safety – specifically safe sleep and automobile safety. Services will ensure there is increased availability of cribs for families who are unable to afford a safe sleep environment. Professionals will provide education to parents so they can learn the ABCs of Safe Sleep (1. Baby is sleeping Alone, 2. on their Back, and 3) in a Crib) in an effort to reduce the number of infant deaths due to unsafe sleeping environments. Services will also ensure babies, infants, and children (through age five) are secure in the appropriate car seat when being transported by automobile. In addition to providing families who are unable to afford a car seat, a professional will be available to train parents on proper installation of the car seat.

Results: Programs are required to track demographics and services received for everyone served. This information will be submitted through the monthly data submission process. Programs under this program type will increase in the number of qualifying children and expecting parents engaged in child safety supports.

Current programs are provided by:

- Bethany Christian Services
- Cherry Health Services
- Family Futures

Early Learning Services

This includes programming that supports early learning and development and responds to the diverse families and children residing in Kent County. Providers will offer any number of nationally recognized, evidence-informed models. Services may occur under one of the following two program types:

Learn and Play Community Programming offers children ages birth through five an avenue to community-based early learning programming. These services reach and connect with all types of caretakers to strengthen their understanding of how age-appropriate activities enrich holistic development of a child's social, emotional, and cognitive skills while demonstrating age-appropriate activities for the children in their care. In addition to play-based sessions, programs may offer workshops and training for families and caretakers. Topics may include child development, health, and social emotional well-being.

Result: All programs will increase access to information that imparts knowledge and skills to parents and other adult caregivers about their child's development thus impacting the following result Indicator: Increase in the number of new children with access to developmentally appropriate activities that have evidence of promoting early learning and literacy.

Current programs are provided by:

- Comprehensive Therapy Center
- Grand Rapids Community College
- Kent ISD Bright Beginnings program
- Vibrant Futures Little Learners program

Early Literacy and Learning Programming is a broad area that encompasses programming that supports areas including improved language ability, listening, and communication skills in young children.

Result: All programs will increase access to information that imparts knowledge and skills to parents and other adult caregivers about their child's development thus increasing in the number of new children with access to developmentally appropriate activities that have evidence of promoting early learning and literacy.

Current programs include:

- Ready for School Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based initiative that is proven to promotes early literacy through partnering with pediatric care practices.

Outreach and Navigation Services – Coordinated Outreach, Screening, and Navigation

Ready by Five millage funding has allowed for the creation of an Outreach and Navigation network by developing a multi-agency strategy to reach and engage families in a coordinated way. This network serves as the “right door” for families to find available resources, information, and programs.

Outreach aims to increase the usage of early childhood programs and community resources by engaging future parents and families with young children who are not currently engaged in services or are unaware of services. As families are engaged, programs work to identify the needs of families through formal screening as well as conversation with the individuals served. As needs are identified, navigation will address barriers to accessing services, information, and resources to ensure families are successfully connected to referrals and information.

Results: All programs will increase access to information that imparts knowledge to parents and other adult caregivers thus impacting one or more of the following result indicators:

- Increase in the number of children and expecting parents engaged in navigation support.
- Increased referral completion and follow-through.
- Increase in the number of families receiving referrals to additional ongoing support.

Current programs in this area include:

- Family Futures, Connections Program – In addition to providing outreach and navigation services, works to promote ASQ screenings throughout Kent County.
- Health Net of West Michigan, Continuation and Expansion of Early Childhood Outreach and Navigation at Clinical Delivery Sites – specializes in navigation within the health care system.
- Kent ISD, Help Me Grow – partnership with Kent ISD and Great Start Collaborative ensures children engaged in early education programs have access to information and resources to support a child’s healthy development and well-being.

Healthy Development Infant Health– Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network Lead

The Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network ensures that services are addressing the social, equity, economic, and health factors that contribute to healthy births in Kent County. Through a rigorous review process of infant death records, the FIMR Network seeks to identify factors contributing to infant deaths and develop action-oriented recommendations to eliminate infant deaths in Kent County.

Result: Investment in the Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network will provide insight and understanding of the factors that contribute to infant mortality, as well as

understanding the factors that contribute to the disparities with mortality rates among babies of different race and ethnicities. This knowledge will further inform Kent County's early childhood network on what key programs and initiatives are necessary to support the healthy development of all babies and infants.

Current program: The Kent County Health Department currently serves as the lead for this network.

Parent Education and Support - Language Services

Translation and Interpretation Supports offer the opportunity for agencies that specialize and provide interpretation and translation services (in-person, telephone, and written) to apply for Ready by Five millage funding. Services are intended for families enrolled in all Ready by Five funded services. Language needs include, but are not limited to Spanish, Nepali, Kinyarwanda, Serbo-Croatian, Swahili, Burmese, American Sign Language, Vietnamese, and Karen.

Current programs are provided by:

- Bethany Christian Services
- Hispanic Center of Western Michigan
- Liaison Linguistics

Healthy Development Training – Ready by Five Network Training & Education Leads

The goal of programming in this area is to increase knowledge in the Ready by Five professional network. Training will be available for all direct professionals funded by Ready by Five and their supervisors. Topics will address the following areas:

- Responding to family needs with a trauma-informed approach
- Understanding implicit bias
- Domestic violence and family safety –how to respond and support families with young children
- Quality program practices to improve services to families with young children

Current trainings are provided by:

- Family Promise
- Health Net of West Michigan

Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage

Annual Update for January 1 – December 31, 2022



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OVERVIEW OF 2022

"I am glad to have gone to Baby Scholars. I am a first-time mom and did not know that my baby could learn so much and that it is easy to teach my baby and I didn't have to be a teacher. I learned that I can sit down with my child on her level and just be present to help her learn and give her my time and energy. My coach was the best!" Z.G. (Baby Scholars Participant – Corewell Health)

In 2022, more than **12,400 young children and expectant parents** in Kent County have benefitted from direct services funded by the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. Parents are receiving one-on-one, ongoing support to better understand what their baby needs and how to provide it. They're monitoring their child's development, looking for signs of potential delays or disabilities. Families are joining play and learn groups, where children build the skills needed for school success and adults learn how to nurture those skills at home. Expectant parents are engaging in prenatal programs that lead to healthier births. Lead and other environmental hazards are being removed from homes. Families are connecting to resources that help with housing, food, and other essential needs. On top of that, tens of thousands of families are getting critical information about child development and books to read with their young children. Ready by Five supports **21 community-based organizations** that provide **33 different early childhood programs**.

The families served in 2022 represent every zip code in Kent County, with the largest concentration in the most densely populated communities: the core cities of Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, and Wyoming. Services are available to all expectant parents and families with children five years of age and younger, with an intentional focus on serving those with the greatest needs and in communities that are most under-resourced and/or geographically isolated. More information about who was served in Kent County can be found in Attachment 2 of this report.

The year 2022 proved to be a "return to more typical" year for the Ready by Five partner network. Throughout the year, programs funded by the Ready by Five Millage re-established partnerships within healthcare and early education, two key sectors that provide necessary connections and referrals to early childhood program and resources in Kent County.

Aftershocks from the pandemic continued in the first half of 2022. Consistent with trends across many sectors of the workforce, hiring and turnover of program staff continued to be a significant challenge for Ready by Five service providers, especially for the first six months of the year. As programs operated with fewer employees, the overall cost of staffing programs was less than projected. Although less significant than in 2021, this was the primary reason programs continued to underspend in early 2022.

There was a significant upward trajectory in spending as the year progressed, and open positions were filled among programs. By the end of 2022, \$8,057,909 (88%) of the \$9,172,646 Ready by Five Millage funds allocated for the year had been spent. Programs collected \$4,895 for cost sharing and donation funds.



In 2022, First Steps Kent raised \$85,419 in additional philanthropic funding to underwrite the costs of administering the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. The administrative work costs more than the allotted 5.7 percent of annual millage revenue that First Steps Kent receives. The additional costs are used for necessary staff time to support the development and implementation of all millage components including data collection, procurement, allocation, evaluation, technical assistance, and contract oversight.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

EARLY OUTCOMES

Early childhood development and how the experiences and relationships they have as babies impact their later success. Brains are built from the bottom up, with basic circuits and skills providing the foundation for more advanced circuits and skills. Scientists know that a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes, while a weak foundation does the opposite. Prolonged and persistent stress in early childhood weakens the developing brain, which can lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

The most significant benefits of early childhood investments are realized as children get older, first with improved school performance and reduced need for remediation, later as they are more likely to graduate from high school and contribute to the local economy.

HIGHER RETURNS THAN PRESCHOOL ALONE Every dollar invested in high-quality birth-to-five early childhood education for disadvantaged children delivers a 13% annual return on investment, significantly higher than the 7-10% return delivered by preschool alone. (www.heckmanequation.com)

GOALS

Ready by Five programs are available to all children five-years-old and younger in Kent County, with an intentional focus on communities that have been historically under-resourced.

The goals of the Ready by Five Early Childhood millage are to:

- Support parents so they can ensure their children are healthy and ready for kindergarten,
- Increase access to high-quality early learning experiences that build a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation, and
- Support early identification of delays and disabilities so children get the treatment they need.

First Steps Kent is improving the system of early childhood services funded by the Ready by Five Millage. Programs are better aligned and coordinated, which reduces unnecessary duplication and increases efficiency. There is now a uniform method for collecting and analyzing data, which provides a clear picture of community-level progress toward goals. We are building the skills and capacity of the system of services, with learning opportunities – such as training in trauma-informed care – for all Ready by Five providers.

OVERVIEW BY SERVICE TYPE

OUTREACH AND NAVIGATION services are available to all families with young children in Kent County and can range from a series of phone calls to more intensive support that helps families engage with the programs and resources that will best serve them. Through the Outreach and Navigation network, partners have successfully navigated 3,900 children and families by connecting them to at least one resource. The most frequent requests during 2022 included assistance with home visiting services, housing support, and food access.

Summary of Outreach and Navigation Outcomes

Prior to Ready by Five, there was no coordinated system to reach families and connect them to services that support the healthy development and early learning of their young children. Ready by Five funding allowed for the creation of an Outreach and Navigation network that serves as the “front door” to the early childhood system of services and community resources.

Outreach and Navigation is crucial to connecting families to resources within the five domains of the Social Determinants of Health: healthcare access, economic stability, education access, safety, and social support. These “Social Determinants” can be a primary source of family stress; research shows stress early in life can have adverse consequences on educational outcomes as well as long-term health and wellbeing.

In 2022, the eight Ready by Five Outreach and Navigation programs were successful in reaching families more than 49,000 times and completing 10,566 screenings. Programs were successful in providing 3,900¹ referrals in which a family had a confirmed outcome. In many cases, without Outreach and Navigation, the family likely would not have engaged with those community services. Outreach and Navigation services spent \$2,698,635 last year.

The top five types of support families most often requested in 2022 included:

- Home visiting services: 1,013 referrals
- Housing support: 558 referrals
- Food access support: 483 referrals
- Dental services: 460 referrals
- Baby supplies: 416 referrals

The Outreach and Navigation network is structured to include two types of providers: those with a broad outreach focus in the community and those with a specialty in engaging a specific group or community that has historically been underserved.

¹ Beginning in 2022, First Steps Kent updated the definition of how individual served is counted. In 2021 we reported that 4,195 individuals were reached with no additional specifications. In 2022 we request service counts based on the number of individuals who engaged with Navigation and had a known outcome of one or more referrals. This number may not include informational contacts with families where no referral was made.

Broadly focused providers concentrate on establishing conditions, communications, and touchpoints for information and awareness of services. These providers included:

- Outreach and Navigation Connections (Family Futures)
- Continuation and Expansion of Early Childhood Outreach and Navigation at Clinical Delivery Sites (Health Net of West Michigan)
- Help Me Grow Kent (Kent ISD)

Niche services focus on engaging and supporting families with specialized support related to their needs. Examples include families who are experiencing homelessness, parents of young children who are engaged in the child foster care system, parents and families from the Latinx community, as well as families who are refugees. Providers supporting niche services included:

- Outreach and Navigation Services (Hispanic Center of Western Michigan)
- Hands Connected Early Childhood Navigation Services (Bethany Christian Services)
- Outreach and Navigation Services for Families Experiencing Homelessness (Family Promise)
- Fostering Connections: Connecting Foster Children and Families to Early Childhood Service (Health Net of West Michigan)
- Parent Engagement: Engaging, Involving and Equipping Parents Involved with the Child Welfare System (West Michigan Partnership for Children)

Outreach and Navigation services were most focused on families with babies and toddlers, with 72 percent of those served having a 3-year-old or younger. Of parents who responded to satisfaction surveys for all Outreach and Navigation programs, 85 percent were satisfied with their services. Of the families whose income was known, 60 percent had household income below \$80,000 per year. The most-reached zip codes were 49507 (10% of those served) and 49508 (8%).

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS ensure expectant parents and those with young children have access to comprehensive, coordinated care that maximizes the child's physical and emotional health. Healthy Development programming follows evidence-based or evidence-informed practices that demonstrate success in supporting positive health behaviors and that drive better health outcomes for children from birth through five years, as well as expectant parents. Programming in this area focuses on improving outcomes related to healthy births, child health and well-being, as well as ensuring children are developmentally on track. In 2022, Healthy Development programs spent \$1,605,951.

Summary of Healthy Development Outcomes

In 2022, Healthy Development programming continued to scale services to reach more families throughout Kent County. Programs in this category are varied and include behavioral health services, organizations that work to eliminate home safety and health hazards, and much more.

A few highlighted outcomes from Healthy Development programs include:

Lead Identification and Remediation – Lead in the home is a silent and prevalent danger in Kent County, as four out of five homes in the city of Grand Rapids and nearly three out of five countywide were built before 1978, the year lead was banned from paint. Exposure to even low amounts of lead can cause irreversible neurological, developmental, and health issues. Early identification of lead in the home followed by remediation are critical to eliminating exposure. In 2022, Ready by Five-funded programs completed 378 risk screenings, comprehensive assessments, and follow-up screening. Of homes screened for environmental risks, lead was the most identified risk (115 screenings). The screening also identified other environmental risks to be addressed, including those that contribute to asthma, injuries, and pests. Many of these additional risks were mitigated through educating and problem solving with the family.

Millage funds also support additional sanitarian staff who have training and expertise with using specialized equipment that identifies the specific source of lead in a home. This team completed 73 comprehensive Lead Inspection and Risk Assessments (LIRAs) and were successful in fully remediating 12 homes this year, leveraging federal, state, and private funds. This program continues to support remediation of additional homes in Kent County.

Children Screened and Connected to Early Intervention – Developmental screening is a standardized tool that offers a comparison of a young child's development to milestones that are typical at specific ages. It does not diagnose a developmental delay or concern but rather offers an early indication that additional investigation may be warranted. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates one in six children have one or more developmental or behavioral disabilities; identifying them early leads to better outcomes for children and less costly treatment or remediation.

Approximately 6,800 screenings were completed in 2022, with the goal of having families do the screenings at the recommended intervals of every six or 12 months, depending on the age of the child. Results are reviewed to assess a child's developmental progress and discuss milestones with families. In 2022, 428 children had screenings that identified a possible developmental concern. When there is an identified concern, programs work with families to provide information and referrals that ensure a child receives the level of support that is needed.

Fetal Infant Mortality Review Network - The Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) Network lead is focused on improving birth outcomes, health outcomes, and reducing disparities. The FIMR Network provides understanding of the factors that contribute to infant mortality, including consideration of disparate outcomes among babies of different races and ethnicities. This knowledge will further inform Kent County's early childhood network on what key programs and initiatives are necessary to support the healthy development of all babies. The report also identifies numerous factors that contribute to infant mortality, many of which programs in the

Ready by Five partner network address. The [2022 Kent County FIMR report](#) highlighted key disparities that jeopardize healthy pregnancies and births:²

- Prenatal care is necessary to address health concerns and provide education and resources to families. Asian mothers were most likely (50%) to have a late entry into prenatal care, Black mothers (25.5%) had higher percentages of missed prenatal appointments, and Black mothers (23.4 %) and other race mothers (27.3%) were most likely to inappropriately use the Emergency Department.
- Having inadequate or unreliable transportation can prevent a mother from attending prenatal appointments, pediatric appointments, and can limit employment opportunities. 8.9 percent of families found that transportation was inadequate or unreliable, with Black mothers (14.9%), Hispanic mothers (16%) and Asian mothers (16.7%) the most likely to experience these barriers.
- Maternal anxiety and depression are risk factors for preterm delivery and low birth weight infants. Mental health factors that may be present before, during or after pregnancy. 40 percent of mothers had a history of mental illness while 24.4 percent had a mental illness during pregnancy. Black mothers were more likely to have multiple stressors (42.6%) and social chaos (19.1%) while Asian mothers (50%) had the highest percentages of concerns about money.

Seven Healthy Development programs provided 2,421³ services in all areas of Kent County. Programs include:

- Keep Early Education Positive (KEEP) (Arbor Circle)
- Infant Toddler Developmental Services (ITDS) (Arbor Circle)
- Healthy Development Connections Enhancement Program (Family Futures)
- Health Development (Easterseals MORC)
- NIDO Home Screening Project (Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan)
- Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) Network (Kent County Health Department)
- Home Lead Assessment Program Expansion (Kent County Health Department)

These programs served an “older” demographic of children, with 60 percent being 3- to 5- year-olds. Of parents who responded to satisfaction surveys for all Healthy Development programs, 97 percent were satisfied with services. Healthy Development programs reached many families with lower income. Of those known, four out of five had a household income of \$80,000 or less. Programs geographic reach was 38 percent of families living in zip codes 49503, 49504, and 49507.

² Full FIMR report for Kent County is available here: <https://www.accesskent.com/Health/Families/pdf/FIMR-Report-2022.pdf>

³ Beginning in 2022, First Steps Kent updated definitions with how services are accounted for. We also updated the specifications for service categories which resulted in some program counts were moved to other categories FY 2022. In 2021 we reported that 2,486 individuals were reached by Healthy Development. In 2022 First Steps Kent began to define counts using the unit of service that was defined in each service provide agreement.

PARENTING EDUCATION AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS ensure parents have the knowledge and skills to support their children's health, development, and learning. Services provide in-home and/or community-based support and education. The parenting education programs spent \$2,324,682 last year.

Summary of Parent Education and Support Outcomes

Home Visiting – Home visiting services provide access to the information, resources, and social support parents need to feel more confident and empowered to make informed choices for their families. More than 10,000 home visits funded by Ready by Five were completed in 2022 alone, with nearly 1,700 children and expectant parents participating.

Rigorous evaluation of high-quality home visiting programs has shown positive impact on reducing child abuse and neglect, increasing healthy births, and improving the school readiness of young children. Long-term benefits can include lower special education and grade retention costs, higher high school graduation rates, reduced reliance on public assistance, increased workforce participation, and lower criminal justice expenses. Research shows the return-on-investment ranges from \$1.75 to \$5.70 for every dollar spent.¹

Recognizing not all families want or need a service as intimate or intensive as home visiting, Ready by Five also funds a variety of programs using models identified as “promising practices.” Research shows those services lead to increased parent engagement and exposure to books and language, earlier identification of delays and disabilities, and improved social and emotional health.

Child Safety Initiatives - Newly funded in 2022 are services that support child safety, specifically addressing safe sleep and automobile safety. The 2022 Fetal Infant Mortality Review report found that 12.8 percent of infant deaths in Kent County were due to an unsafe sleep environment -- the most preventable cause of death for babies. Prevention includes educating all parents and caregivers on how to place an infant safely to sleep, while also examining indirect factors such as a lack of partner or family support, lack of supportive services and resources, or mental illness that may increase the likelihood of placing an infant in an unsafe sleeping environment.

The Michigan State Police's data for 2020⁴ reported there are close to 6,000 children through the age of three that are involved in an automobile crash, 35 percent of which resulted in a child injury. More than 15,000 children ages four to ten involved in crashes, and those leading to child injury, was similar at 37 percent. The Centers for Disease Control reports⁵ that it is more common for Black children, Hispanic children, and American Indian children to travel

⁴ Source: https://www.michigan.gov/msp/-/media/Project/Websites/msp/ciic/pdfs9/2020_year_end_traffic_crash_statistics.pdf

⁵ Source: https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/child_passenger_safety/cps-factsheet.html

unrestrained or improperly restrained when compared with all children. Studies also indicate that children in rural areas are more likely to be incorrectly restrained than children in urban areas. A multistate study using data from car seat check events found that child restraint misuse was more common in rural locations (91%) than in urban locations (83%).

The Ready by Five millage has made it possible for organizations to address preventable deaths and injury of young children by providing education to parents about the importance of safe sleep following guidelines approved by the American Academy of Pediatrics as well as providing a portable crib for families that meet income requirements. Programs are also trained by the National Passenger Safety Board to teach parents to correctly install car seats. Families who meet income requirements are provided a car seat by the agency.

Translation and Interpretation - Any program funded by the Ready by Five millage can request translation or interpretation services to serve families who speak a variety of languages. Programs utilized translation services 97 times for purposes such as translating program or marketing materials. Interpretation services were used more than 1,900 times within all types of services, the most common languages requested were Spanish, Kinyarwanda, and Swahili.

Service Type	Number of fulfilled requests – Translation	Number of fulfilled requests – Interpretation
Early Learning	0	29
Healthy Development	34	353
Outreach & Navigation	29	1,060
Parent Education & Support	34	464
Total	97	1,906

Fifteen Parent Education and Support programs provided 13,100⁶ services in all areas of Kent County.

- Hands Connected Child Safety Services (Bethany Christian Services)
- Child Safety Passenger Program (Cherry Health)
- Child Safety Initiative (Family Futures)
- Maternal Infant Health Program Enhancement (Cherry Health)
- Early Childhood Attachment Services – (D.A. Blodgett - St. John's)
- The Incredible Years Home Coaching (Easterseals MORC)
- Kent County Healthy Families (Family Futures)
- Bright Beginnings (Kent ISD)
- Hands-On Post-Partum Support (Momsbloom)

⁶ Beginning in 2022, First Steps Kent updated definitions with how services are accounted for. In 2021 we reported that 875 individuals were reached by Parent Education and Support programs. In 2022 First Steps Kent began to define counts using the unit of service that was defined in each service provide agreement.

- Baby Scholars (Corewell Health)
- Strong Beginnings (Corewell Health)
- Little Scholars (Vibrant Futures)
- Translation & Interpretation (Bethany Christian Services, Hispanic Center of West Michigan, and Liaison Linguistics)

Parenting Education and Support programs reached many families facing economic disadvantages, with 99 percent of those for whom income was reported in households earning less than \$80,000 per year. These programs served every zip code in Kent County, with the most encounters in 49507 and 49508. Four out of five children who participated were two years old or younger. Of parents who responded to satisfaction surveys for all Parent Education and Support programs, 99 percent were satisfied with services.

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS nurture a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Examples of services include play and learn groups, support for caregivers, and linkages to early intervention services.

Early childhood research substantiates the rapid development of emergent literacy and language skills that occur in a child's first three years of life. In combination with key skills in the socio-emotional, physical, and cognitive domains, these skills are the foundation for lifelong learning beginning in kindergarten and continuing into subsequent school years. The amount spent in 2022 on Early Learning programs was \$1,181,288.

Summary of Early Learning Outcomes

Ready by Five funded programs included under the Early Learning service category increase early learning opportunities by offering children high-quality early learning experiences that nurture their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Programs will ensure caretakers have the knowledge to best support early learning as well as provide linkages to developmental screenings for all children in Kent County.

Early Literacy and Learning -Funds the Reach Out and Read (ROR) program in about 20 pediatric practices throughout Kent County. ROR equips providers with training to help them educate parents on the importance of reading aloud and to help model strategies for parents to promote language development and early literacy. In addition to this support, each family receives a book during their well-child visit, ensuring they have access to age-appropriate, high-quality books to engage their child with words and intellectual exploration from an early age. In 2022, Reach out and Read distributed 24,000 books to 14,158 children.

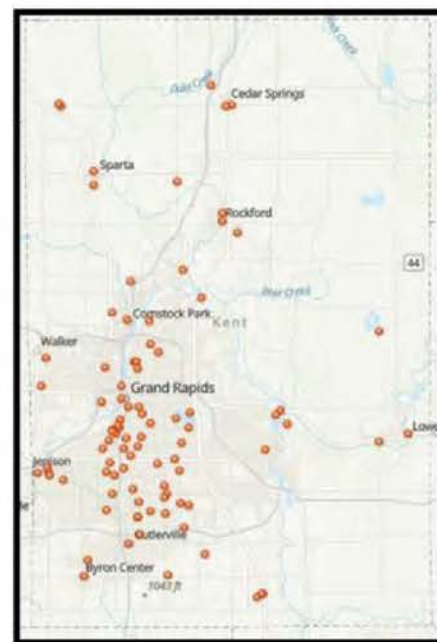
Six Early Learning programs provided just over 25,000⁷ services in all areas of Kent County.

- Therapeutic Play and Learn Groups (Comprehensive Therapy Center)
- Play to Learn (Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative)
- Play and Learn (Grand Rapids Community College)
- Bright Beginnings Playgroups (Kent ISD)
- Reach Out and Read West Michigan (Reach Out and Read)
- Little Learners (Vibrant Futures)

Play and Learn Communities - Programs are designed for the purpose of reaching and connecting with all types of caretakers to strengthen their understanding of child development and increase opportunities for all children to receive age-appropriate activities that enrich holistic development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Programs follow the evidence-informed Kaleidoscope Play and Learn model with each session offering information to support understanding of how they can help their child's early learning development.

In 2022, There were 974 Play and Learn groups held at 94 locations across Kent County.

More than half of families providing income information had a household income of \$80,000 or less. The ages of the children were distributed evenly amongst ages zero to 5. Of the known zip codes, 25 percent of participants were from either 49503, 49504, or 49508 zip codes. Of parents who responded to satisfaction surveys for all Early Learning programs, 90 percent were satisfied with services.



Play and Learn Locations

⁷ Beginning in 2022, First Steps Kent updated definitions with how services are accounted for. We also updated the specifications for service categories which resulted in the Reach Out and Read program counts included in this category FY 2022. In 2021 we reported that 461 children were reached by Early Learning programs. In 2022 First Steps Kent began to define counts using the unit of service that was defined in each service provide agreement.

READY BY FIVE MILLAGE EVALUATION

In addition to expanding services and increasing participation, another significant focus of 2022 was implementing the process to evaluate the impact of Ready by Five. External evaluation firm Basis Policy Research began an independent and neutral assessment for how millage investments are impacting contributors to kindergarten success including:

- Parents' access to resources and information.
- Programming that supports the health of expectant and new parents increases mother's health & well-being.
- Children developmentally on track.
- Children living in a healthy and safe home environment.

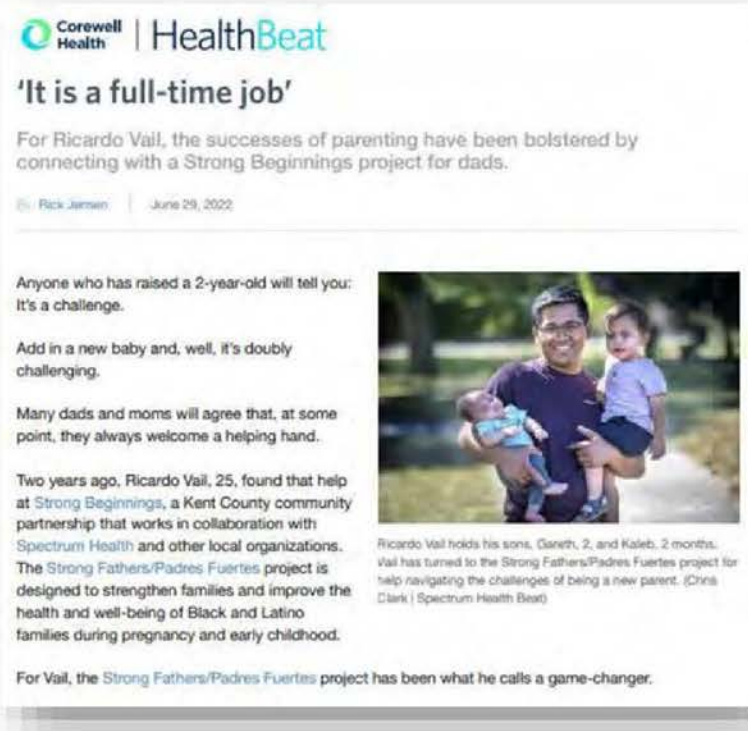
The evaluation uses a mixed-methodology approach to provide First Steps Kent with evidence of impact across the lifecycle of the millage. The Ready by Five evaluation will address the following questions:

- To what extent did Ready by Five service providers implement services with fidelity?
- What types of Ready by Five services are related to improved health and academic outcomes?
- What is the impact of Ready by Five services on participants' health and academic outcomes?
- How do the benefits of Ready by Five services compare to the financial investment of the Ready by Five millage?

Additionally, the evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the funding administrator agency, First Steps Kent. This includes examination of whether there is successful reach of Ready by Five funded services in gaining new participants, ensuring programs are operating at near or full capacity, and reaching county-wide geography and diverse racial/ethnic and economic groups. The final year one report will be released in May 2023. In 2022, First Steps Kent spent \$247,353 on the third-party evaluation.

ATTACHMENT 1: MEDIA FEATURING THE READY BY FIVE MILLAGE

- FOX 17, January 6, 2022 - [GRCC receives \\$1M grant to support 'Play and Learn' groups](#)
- PRWeb, February 16, 2022 - [West Michigan Partnership for Children celebrates "Reunification Month" and new Parent Engagement Program](#)
- School News Network, February 2, 2022 - [More funding means more playgroups, home visits, help for county families of young children](#)
- The WGVU Morning Show, May 26, 2022 - [School Talk](#)
- Corewell Health HealthBeat, June 29, 2022 - ['It is a full-time job'](#)
- FOX 17, September 21, 2022 - [Ready By Five Program prepares "COVID Generation" kids for school](#)
- The Rapidian, September 29, 2022 - [Family Futures provides Pack n' Plays and car seats to families in need](#)
- Early Learning Nation, December 21, 2022 - [The Next Steps for First Steps Kent](#)



ATTACHMENT 2: READY BY FIVE MILLAGE DEMOGRAPHIC REACH

The tables below show overall reach by geographic areas, family income, race, and the ethnicity of individuals served in 2022. Numbers represent a count of unique individuals who consented to sharing demographic information.

TYPE OF INDIVIDUAL SERVED

Type of Individual	Total Jan – Dec 2022
Child*	10,672
Expecting Parent	1,443
Not Specified	518
Total	12,416

**The Reach Out and Read program reported serving 14,150 children in Kent County. Due to limitations with the deidentified healthcare data submitted by this specific program, First Steps Kent is unable to determine a total estimate of unique children served that includes Reach Out and Read. The number of children is likely higher than the 10,672 children represented in the chart above.*

DEMOGRAPHICS - RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race **	Jan – Dec 2022
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%
Asian	4%
Black / African American	24%
Multi-Racial	10%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%
White	62%

Ethnicity **	Jan – Dec 2022
Hispanic or Latinx	22%
Not Hispanic or Latinx	78%

AGE OF CHILD

Age**	Jan – Dec 2022
0	43%
1	21%
2	15%
3	14%
4	13%
5	6%

GEOGRAPHY

Community Type **	Jan – Dec 2022	Communities Including:
Urban Communities	70%	Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and Wyoming
Eastern Kent County	4%	Forest Hills, Alto, Freeport, and Lowell
Northern Kent County	12%	Belmont, Greenville, Cedar Springs, Kent City, Rockford, Sand Lake, and Sparta
Southern Kent County	4%	Byron Center and Caledonia
Suburban Communities	10%	Comstock Park, Grandville, Northview, and Walker

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household Income Range**	Jan – Dec 2022
Less than \$20,000	34%
\$20,000-\$39,999	20%
\$40,000-\$59,999	13%
\$60,000-\$79,999	7%
\$80,000-\$99,999	8%
More than \$100,000	18%

According to the [2022 Kids Count in Kent County Data Profile](#), the average median household income sits at \$65,012. Just over 65 percent of individuals served by Ready by Five programming (who reported income) had a household income less than this average median household income.

**** Race, ethnicity, geography, household income, and age of child tables above include the percentages of known participants. Some participants have chosen not to disclose their information.**

Note: All demographic information included in this report represents only individuals who consented to sharing personal demographic information.



These programs and services were made possible because of the generosity of Kent County taxpayers and the voter-approved Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage

For more information about the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, please visit:
<https://www.firststepskent.org/millage>

Ready by Five Evaluation Overview

As of 6/15/23

About the Ready by Five Evaluation

Beginning in 2021, First Steps Kent contracted with Basis Policy Research (Basis), a research and evaluation firm focused on education and human services, to evaluate the implementation and impact of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. The evaluation researchers are using a mixed-methodology approach to provide evidence of how Ready by Five impacts young children and their families across the lifecycle of the millage.

The Ready by Five evaluation will address the following questions:

1. To what extent did Ready by Five providers implement services with fidelity?
2. What types of Ready by Five services are related to improved health and academic outcomes?
3. What is the impact of Ready by Five services on participants' health and academic outcomes?
4. How do the benefits of Ready by Five services compare to the financial investment of the Ready by Five Millage?

Phase One of the Evaluation (January 2022- December 2022)

The evaluation will support improvements with service delivery.

In phase one, results will inform the support First Steps Kent offers Ready by Five providers in the shared pursuit of becoming more inclusive and equitable, giving key insights into how different stakeholder groups benefit from the millage. This includes understanding of the services provided and enhanced recruitment efforts in communities that have hesitated to use services in the past.

- First Steps Kent is committed to ensuring access to services for expecting parents and children 0-5, particularly for those from historically marginalized and underserved communities in the urban core and rural areas. The evaluation's findings will be used to continually refine program delivery models to provide more equitable services to children and families.
- First Steps Kent will be able to leverage findings from the analyses to refine the RFP process to ensure service providers address the barriers to engagement in services.

Parent voice is being included through a series of in-person, phone, and/or virtual interviews with families selected from a stratified random sample of those served. The interviews explore how families learned about the services, how accessible services were, how well the services were delivered, and how services could be improved to better meet individual needs.

Phase Two of the Evaluation (January 2023 – December 2023)

This part of the evaluation will support the future case for early childhood investments.

Beginning in phase two, additional data analysis will explore the relationship between Ready by Five programming and related health, wellbeing, and early academic outcomes of children and expecting parents served¹.

- The evaluation will provide information about the impact of Ready by Five services on health and academic outcomes, including what types of services work, for whom, and under what conditions. The results will provide local early childhood leaders with information about the types of services that need to be retained or expanded in Kent County.
- Results will provide evidence of impact on health and early academic outcomes that contribute to the cost-effectiveness of early childhood services, as well as the overall community value of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage.

Researchers will conduct a cost benefit analysis that will begin to measure the benefits of services funded by the Ready by Five Millage. This part of the evaluation will include analysis of the children who have enrolled in Ready by Five- funded services that are of the age of kindergarten entry, recognizing that will be a relatively small sample of children by the end of 2023. Early childhood research has consistently established that many of these programs contribute social and financial benefits over the course of a child's lifetime. While the evaluation is not a longitudinal research project, this analysis will include estimates of the potential long-term value through three main indicators: kindergarten literacy, the likelihood of proficiency in third grade reading, and outcomes such as the likelihood of the participant enrolling in Algebra I in middle school.

2022 Evaluation Findings

Key findings for the first year of the evaluation include²:

- Ready by Five service providers exceeded reach expectations in 2022. The providers reached 12,184 young children and families, compared to the 12,039 that was expected.
- Fifty-seven percent of young children and families served were from populations that historically have been marginalized.
- Forty-five percent of participants' household incomes are less than \$40,000 annually.

¹ Data sources for the second phase of the evaluation include a) data that is collected and submitted by agencies serving expectant mothers and children in programs funded by the Ready by Five Millage; b) child birth weight including quantitative data from the Kent County Health Department that is an indicator of healthy births; and c) Kindergarten and available early academic assessment data collected by from all school districts in Kent County. Beginning in Year 2 of the evaluation, Basis will partner with all districts and the KISD to establish a baseline of kindergarten readiness using the various available school-based assessments.

² Note: For evaluation purposes researchers limited the final sample to 30 contracts with 18 unique providers who (a) have an active contract with First Steps Kent and (b) submit monthly service data to KCHD. The reduction in number of contracts included in the final sample is the result of dropping one service contract ("Ready for School") and additional select programs in contracts that do not share monthly data with KCHD, including translation services and fetal infant mortality review network programming.

- Approximately seventeen percent of young children and families speak a primary language other than English.
- In the twelve-month period of 2022, programs were successful with expanding services into additional areas of Kent County identified with the greatest per-capita needs based on household income. This included ZIP codes 49316 (Caledonia), 49330 (Kent City), 49544 (Alpine Township), 49345 (Sparta), 49507 (Grand Rapids), 49548 (Gaines Township).
- Ready by Five service providers completed 14,521 encounters with young children and families, which is 94 percent of what was projected.
- The 2022 evaluation findings identified three key focus areas for program-related quality improvement efforts: 1) identifying additional opportunities for providers to collaborate around improved participant engagement – especially in areas and with groups that are less served, 2) investigate why referrals are not completed more often or issued when concerns are identified, and 3) reconsider approaches for surveying families to understand their satisfaction with services received.

Year One Successes

- Data sharing agreements with First Steps Kent, Kent County Health Department, Kent ISD, and all 20 local school districts were executed.
- Researchers completed a series of interviews with a random sample of service providers and semi-structured interviews with a random sample of families that participated in Ready by Five-funded programs.
- Researchers developed an implementation dashboard that visualizes service provider reach, implementation by service area and provider, and outcomes (where possible) by service area and provider.
- Basis, ACE (the equity specialist on the evaluation team), and First Steps Kent hosted two Discover Day events for partners and stakeholders to discuss early findings and insights. Events offered attendees the opportunity to engage with findings, ask questions, and collaborate with peers on addressing potential next steps.
- To support quality with data collection and learning from findings, First Steps Kent hosted quarterly Quality Improvement Consortium meetings for all Ready by Five service providers. Topics included regular updates about the Ready by Five evaluation findings, technical assistance on data collection and contract requirements, and peer-learning opportunities.
- Researchers delivered a Year One Evaluation Report that analyzes who is participating in Ready by Five services and how effectively programs have been implemented. Forthcoming annual reports will focus on the remaining three research questions.

Agencies Selected for Evaluation

Agencies selected to support the Ready by Five evaluation include:

Basis Policy Research 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-year-old children. At the state level, Basis evaluated the Michigan Department of Education's Statewide System of Support, which works with Intermediate School Districts.

Advancing Communities for Equity is supporting equitable evaluation practices of all aspects of funding allocations; program content, methodology, and outcomes; power dynamics; decision making; and communications. Principal 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.

Dr. Christina Weiland, associate professor at the School of Education at the University of Michigan and the Ford School of Public Policy, will serve as a technical advisor on the project, providing guidance on proposed methodologies, including measure development and analytic strategy, and reviewing all major deliverables. Dr. Weiland's research focuses on the effects of early child interventions and public policies on children's development, especially on children from families with low household incomes. She is an expert in quantitative research methods, educational measurement, and developmental process research. Currently, she is the principal investigator and co-director of a study of the implementation of Boston Universal Pre-kindergarten funded by the Heising-Simons Foundation and the Foundation for Child Development.

Ready by Five Evaluation Advisory Team

This team advises and makes recommendations on the Ready by Five Millage Evaluation. This includes the methodology, needed resources, procurement process, and selection of evaluators. Members include:

- Mark Maynard and Davie Store (Kent ISD)
- Dr. Neil Carlson (Datawise)
- Kelsey Perdue (First Steps Kent Commission)
- Teresa Branson, Sandra Ghoston Jones, and Jennifer Headrick (Kent County)
- Sunil Joy (Kentwood Public Schools)
- Mark Woltman (KConnect)
- Jennifer Headley-Nordman and Heather Boswell (First Steps Kent)





Supported by the Kent County Ready by Five Millage

Societal Benefits and Return on Investment

Impact of Ready by Five Millage Funded Programs

July 2023

In 2022, more than 12,000 children and expectant parents in every zip code of Kent County participated in quality early childhood services that would not have been available without the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. While many of these services are universally accessible to all families, our intentional focus on children with the greatest needs and, thus, the potential for greatest impact is proving successful.

- 57% of families served in 2022 are from historically marginalized groups.
- 45% are in households with incomes below \$40,000 a year.
- Participation in programming increased 55% in the six zip codes that are most economically disadvantaged, both urban and rural.

The scale and reach of Ready by Five benefits not only the individual children served, but also their parents and the greater community. National research shows quality early childhood programming has immediate and long-term benefits, including:

- Healthier babies.
- Prevention of child abuse and neglect.
- Better family relationships.
- Less grade repetition and need for special education.
- Improved high school graduation rates.
- Reduced criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults who are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

To be awarded Ready by Five funding, programs must provide evidence of their effectiveness. Many of the models currently funded by the millage have been researched for decades with well documented evidence of the impact and long-term return on investment. These are highlights from some of those programs.



Effective Programs that Work

Home Visiting is among the most researched and effective social programs, providing a **two-generation approach** that addresses **multiple factors related to child success**. Ready by Five funding has increased the capacity of evidence-based parenting education that improves outcomes beginning in infancy, with benefits that grow as children grow.

Healthy Families America (HFA) is an evidence-based home visiting model designed to work with overburdened families who are at-risk for adverse childhood experiences, including child maltreatment. This program supports the parent-child relationship, promotes healthy childhood growth and development, and enhances family functioning. *The ROI is estimated to be \$1.46 for each dollar invested, with greater benefits (\$3.16) for families involved with child welfare services.*¹

Strong Beginnings Healthy Start home visiting supports participants from pregnancy until their toddler is 18 months old. Individuals enter the program with multiple risk factors related to their physical and psychosocial health and within the social determinants of health. The most recent evaluation shows a:

- 40% reduced risk for very preterm births.
- 15% reduced risk for preterm births.
- 87% rate of completion for postpartum exams 60 days after giving birth.

Collectively HFA and Strong Beginnings served an **additional 220 babies, toddlers, and young children** with Ready by Five funding last year.

Endnotes 1 Healthy Families America ROI information is available at www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HFA-ROI-Brief.pdf 2 Flax JF, Realpe-Bonilla T, Roesler C, Choudhury N, Benasich A. Using early standardized language measures to predict later language and early reading outcomes in children at high risk for language-learning impairments. *J Learn Disabil*. 2009 Jan-Feb;42(1):61-75. 3 Think Babies, *The State of Babies Yearbook*, accessible online at <https://www.thinkbabies.org/state-of-babies/> 4 Parents as Teachers ROI info available at: <https://www.pat-mitellernlernen.org/wp-content/uploads/PATNC-fact-sheet-Return-on-Invest-1.pdf> 5 Reach Out and Read, *The Evidence*, available at <https://reachoutandread.org/why-we-matter/the-evidence/> 6 Cogswell ME, Coil E, Tian LH, Tinker SC, Ryerson AB, Maenner MJ, Rice CE, Peacock G. Health Needs and Use of Services Among Children with Developmental Disabilities—United States, 2014–2018. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 2022; 71(12):453–458. 7 Center for Disease Control, *Developmental Screening and Monitoring*, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html> 8 Kent ISD. Note: The costs per student included are for illustrative purposes. The actual cost per student can vary depending on the individual diagnosis and circumstances 9 James Heckman, information available at <https://heckmanequation.org/>



Early Learning is Crucial to Later Success

Language comprehension at age three – largely developed by being in an environment rich with words, conversation, and books – is the best predictor of future language-learning status². Data shows that the percentage of all Michigan parents who read to their children daily is 37.8, compared to 26.8 percent for families in low-income households.³ Ready by Five funds programs that have evidence of success improving early literacy.

The **Parents as Teachers (PAT)** model (Bright Beginnings) enhances child development and school readiness by providing parents with knowledge and resources to prepare their kids for a stronger start in life and greater school success. The model includes:

- Personal home visits by parent educators,
- Group meetings for parents,
- Developmental screenings for children, and
- A resource network for families.

Ready by Five funding increased PAT programming to reach an **additional 130 expectant parents and young children** in 2022. *Research estimates the ROI is \$1.23 for each dollar invested.*⁴

Reach Out and Read partners with pediatricians to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud and provide developmentally appropriate books during regular pediatric check-ups. National results from this model show that **parents are 2 1/2 times more likely to read with their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers**; and children show **improved language development** by 3-6 months and continue to improve with consistent exposure to Reach Out and Read.⁵ More than **10,000 young children** were served across Kent County in 2022.

Successfully Connecting Families

Ready by Five funding allowed for the creation of an **Outreach and Navigation** network, which is critical to connecting families to evidenced-based programs and other community resources. Outreach and Navigation providers help families assess their needs and then access health services; support for housing, food, and other essential needs; and evidenced-based early childhood programs. Outreach and Navigation providers navigated more than 3,500 families in 2022, helping them find a wide range of programming, including 1,000 referrals to home visiting programs. Research is beginning to emerge on the impact of such screening and referral networks for people with social needs. While many families can benefit from these initiatives, **cost savings are most significant when those with the greatest needs are served.**

First Steps Kent and partners recognize an opportunity to **expand the Outreach and Navigation network to help families navigate the child care system**, ensuring they maximize all assistance for which they are eligible and helping them find affordable quality care. That will require additional Ready by Five funding and would bring **significant benefit to local families** struggling amidst the national child care crisis and to local business owners losing employees who don't have child care.

"While reaching women with more complex risk factors, Strong Beginnings has achieved statistically significant reductions in preterm, very preterm, and very low birthweight births, especially for Black women, and increased rates of adequate prenatal care and postpartum visit completion compared to women on Medicaid not in the program."

Published in JAMA Peds, a peer-reviewed Journal (Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics). July 25, 2023.

Addressing Developmental Concerns

Early developmental screening is a national best practice that is recommended by both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Center for Health Care Strategy as **earlier intervention is more effective** and has been proven to **reduce special education needs** in the long-term.

Ready by Five funds **Connections**, which offers **developmental screenings throughout early childhood** and helps families access **early intervention services** if a delay or disability is confirmed. According to the CDC, about one in six children aged 3-17 have one or more developmental or behavioral disabilities, such as autism, a learning disorder, or a language delay.⁶ The agency adds, **"Many children with developmental disabilities are not identified until they are in school, by which time significant delays might have occurred and opportunities for treatment might have been missed."**⁷ The Connections program was successful in completing 3,207 screenings for 1,701 children in 2022, **identifying 730 children with a potential concern.**

In addition to better outcomes for the child, early identification saves money. In the 2021-22 school year, 2,269 young children in Kent County were enrolled in Early On (IDEA Part C funding) or Early Childhood Special Education (IDEA Part B). The total cost for a child to receive five years of those services before kindergarten is \$34,148. If developmental delays and concerns are identified in later grades, the overall average cost is higher, standing at \$12,996 per student for just one year.⁸

Investing Earlier is Better

The famed Nobel Laureate economist Dr. James Heckman advises communities take the approach of the Ready by Five Millage: **invest early, starting before birth whenever possible, and stack a variety of comprehensive programming and interventions for children and families facing the biggest disadvantages. "Providing health, early learning and care from birth produces a 13% return on investment per child, per annum, significantly higher than just preschool alone,"** Heckman explains.

The exact numbers associated with the ROI vary based on which interventions were included in the analysis, but numerous studies demonstrate quality early childhood programs provide one of our greatest opportunities to address longstanding disparities in health, education, and employment, ultimately saving communities far more money than they have spent.⁹

While we are not going to know the full ROI for Ready by Five for years to come, we are gaining some early indication of its impact through the evaluation process. Basing success on the empirical measure of kindergarten readiness, the evaluation will begin to determine the impact for children who are school aged and have engaged in Ready by Five funded services. Initial evaluation results showing impact on k-readiness will be available sometime in fall of 2023, with additional results of ROI to follow in coming years, as children receiving services as infants and toddlers start kindergarten.



Appendix F - Letters of Support



August 23, 2023

Kent County Board of Commissioners

County Administration Building
300 Monroe Avenue NW
Grand Rapids MI 49503

To the Kent County Board of Commissioners,

On behalf of Arbor Circle, I am writing to express my support for the renewal and expansion of the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. This millage has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed since it was first passed by voters in 2018.

In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents from every zip code in Kent County access programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five. As a recipient of these funds, Arbor Circle has been a grateful and proud partner in providing services to young children and their parents, caregivers, and teachers, services that would not be possible without this important initiative.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent, which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children.

Reinvesting in these services will positively benefit children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

- Children who have a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation are more likely to graduate and contribute to the local economy.
- A dollar invested in early childhood development saves at least \$6 down the road in reduced costs for health care, education, and prisons.
- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

The primary focus of this fiscally responsible millage proposal is expanding much needed access to child care for working families. Using data to measure progress and identify our community's most pressing needs, First Steps Kent has documented the urgent need for more affordable child care services in Kent County. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local child care workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so child care business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate child care resources.

Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community, now and long into the future.

In gratitude,

Kristin Gietzen
President & CEO

Mr. Stan Stek, Board Chairperson
Board of Commissioners
County Administration Building
300 Monroe Avenue NW
Grand Rapids MI 49503

Dear Mr. Stek,

I am writing to express Cherry Health's support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. Since 2018, the Early Childhood Millage has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.

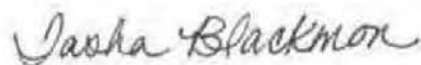
In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents across all of Kent County access to programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five, including three important programs offered by Cherry Health. In 2024, our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage. By reinvesting in these services, we will continue to positively impact children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

- Children who have a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation are more likely to graduate and contribute to the local community.
- A dollar invested in early childhood development saves at least \$6 down the road in reduced costs for health care, education, and prisons.
- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults who have benefited from strong early childhood developmental services are more likely to be better parents to their children and more likely to be contributing members of the community's workforce.

A primary focus of this fiscally responsible millage proposal is expanding much needed access to childcare for working families. Using data to measure progress and identify our community's most pressing needs, First Steps Kent has documented the urgent need for more affordable childcare services in Kent County. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local childcare workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so childcare business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate childcare resources.

Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage and First Steps Kent, who successfully administers this funding, for the benefit of our entire community, now and long into the future.

Thank you,



Tasha Blackmon
Chief Executive Officer



Kent County Board of Commissioners
300 Monroe Avenue NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Dear Kent County Board of Commissioners,

I'm writing to express my support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed.

Specifically at Family Futures, the millage has provided support to 16,121 families in Kent County through our programs since it was first passed by voters in 2018.

Family Futures has a mission of shaping a community where all children are supported to reach their fullest potential. Renewing the millage helps us continue our mission, which couldn't be more critical. With 90 percent of a child's brain developed by age five, providing early childhood resources in Kent County like ours directly impacts our community's future success. Thanks to the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, we've been able to support:

- The single mom who is juggling parenting, a full-time job and part-time school to create a better life for her children.
- The overwhelmed parents who took an Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) with their child and discovered a potential speech delay.
- The anxious dad who is struggling to find affordable housing for his family.
- The first-time parent who shares her bed with her infant daughter because she can't afford a crib.

The millage has allowed us to walk alongside families like these in our Connections and Healthy Families Kent County programs. In 2022 alone, our Healthy Families Kent County program completed 3,933 home visits with parents speaking more than 14 different languages. Our Connections program saw 3,719 ASQs completed and 2,560 parents working with our Family Support Navigators to find additional resources in Kent County.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting Family Futures, which strives to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. I also urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent, which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children.

Families are stronger when they have the support of our entire community. Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community, now and long into the future.

Thank you,

Candace Cowling, MSW
Executive Director, Family Futures

August 28, 2023

Kent County Board of Commissioners
300 Monroe NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Re: Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage

Dear Kent County Commissioners:

I'm writing to express my support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed since it was first passed by voters in 2018. In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents from every zip code in Kent County access programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent, which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children. We can help ensure more young children are given the resources they need to thrive.

Reinvesting in these services will positively benefit children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. At Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC), our millage-funded Play and Learn GRCC program enriches the early learning experiences of young children by strengthening the skills of their caregivers and educators. This program and other millage-funded early childhood resources impact future success of children and their families. Moreover, research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

- Children who have a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation are more likely to graduate and contribute to the local economy.
- A dollar invested in early childhood development saves at least \$6 down the road in reduced costs for health care, education, and prisons.

GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

143 Bostwick Ave. NE • Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503-3295 • ph: (616) 234-3901 • fax: (616) 234-2262 • grcc.edu

VISION • GRCC provides relevant educational opportunities that are responsive to the needs of the community and inspires students to meet economic, social, and environmental challenges to become active participants in shaping the world of the future.
MISSION • GRCC is an open access college that prepares individuals to attain their goals and contribute to the community.

Re: Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage
August 28, 2023
Page 2

- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement
- **Adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.**

The primary focus of this fiscally-responsible millage proposal is expanding much needed access to child care for working families. Using data to measure progress and identify our community's most pressing needs, First Steps Kent has documented the urgent need for more affordable child care services in Kent County. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local child care workforce and streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so that child care business owners can spend their time on quality care and help families navigate child care resources.

Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community, now and long into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles W. Lepper Ph.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles Lepper, Ph.D.
President

I'm writing to express my support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed since it was first passed by voters in 2018.

In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents from every zip code in Kent County access to programs that improve the health, school readiness, and the well-being of children under age five.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent (FSK), which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children. We can help ensure more young children are given the resources they need to thrive.

Reinvesting in these services will positively benefit children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

- Children who have a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation are more likely to graduate and contribute to the local economy.
- A dollar invested in early childhood development saves at least \$6 down the road in reduced costs for health care, education, and prisons.
- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

The primary focus of this millage proposal is expanding much needed access to childcare for working families. Using data to measure progress and identify our community's most pressing needs, FSK has documented the urgent need for more affordable childcare services in Kent County. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local childcare workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so childcare business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate childcare resources.

Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community, now and long into the future. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Michelle Van Dyke
President & CEO



HISPANIC CENTER

of western michigan

August 23, 2023

I'm writing to express my support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed since it was first passed by voters in 2018.

In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents from every zip code in Kent County access programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent, which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children. We can help ensure more young children are given the resources they need to thrive.

Reinvesting in these services will positively benefit children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

- Children who have a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation are more likely to graduate and contribute to the local economy.
- A dollar invested in early childhood development saves at least \$6 down the road in reduced costs for health care, education, and prisons.
- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

The primary focus of this fiscally responsible millage proposal is expanding much needed access to childcare for working families. Using data to measure progress and identify our community's most pressing needs, First Steps Kent has documented the urgent need for more affordable childcare services in Kent County. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local childcare workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so childcare business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate childcare resources.

Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community, now and long into the future.

Thank you,

Evelyn Esparza-Gonzalez
Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

August 18, 2023

Mr. Stan Stek, Chair
Kent County Board of Commissioners

Dear Stan,

I'm writing to express my support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed since it was first passed by voters in 2018.

In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents from every zip code in Kent County access programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent, which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children.

Reinvesting in these services will positively benefit children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

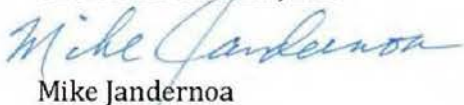
- a dollar invested in early childhood development saves at least \$6 down the road in reduced costs for health care, education, and prisons;
- quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement; and
- adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

The primary focus of expanding this millage is child care. As you may know, finding quality care that is affordable is one of the biggest challenges for families. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local child care workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so child care business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate child care resources.

Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community.

Sincerely,

42 NORTH PARTNERS, LLC



Mike Jandernoa

/jd

171 Monroe Avenue N.W., Suite 410
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503
(616) 325-2100

Jennifer Headley-Nordman, President
First Steps Kent
401 Hall St SW #385
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Dear Jennifer,

On behalf of KConnect, I am writing to express our enthusiastic support for First Steps Kent's Ready by Five millage proposal, which aims to provide dedicated and sustainable funding for essential programs that enhance the health, school readiness, and overall well-being of children under the age of five in Kent County. At KConnect, we recognize the profound impact that early childhood experiences have on the trajectory of a child's life, and we believe that the Ready by Five initiative aligns perfectly with our shared commitment to ensuring every child has an equitable path to prosperity in Kent County.

First Steps Kent's dedication to building a community that supports the optimal development of young children is commendable. We have had the privilege of collaborating closely with your organization to strengthen the early childhood landscape in Kent County. Through our partnership, we have been able to identify and address the unique needs of our community's children and families, working together to implement evidence-based practices, pool resources, and advocate for policies that promote the well-being of all residents.

Kent County voters took a groundbreaking step in November 2018 by overwhelmingly approving the Ready by Five Early Childhood Proposal, marking a pivotal moment in Michigan's history as the first county to collect tax dollars expressly designated for the support of early childhood programming. This milestone achievement is a testament to the community's recognition of the critical importance of early childhood development in shaping the future success of our children. It is of utmost importance that the Ready by Five millage is renewed in 2024. This funding ensures that families can access programs that have been proven to enhance school readiness, improve health outcomes, and set children on a path toward a brighter future.

As partners of First Steps Kent, KConnect proudly stands behind the Ready by Five millage proposal. We are dedicated to working with your organization to support the success of this initiative, not only by advocating for its passage but also by continuing to collaborate on innovative initiatives that uplift the youngest members of our community. With the next ballot on the horizon, we urge the community to rally behind this crucial endeavor once again. By supporting the Ready by Five millage, we are collectively investing in a future where every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Lopez'.

Salvador Lopez, President
KConnect

August 31, 2023

Kent County Board of Commissioners
County Administration Building
300 Monroe Avenue NW
Grand Rapids MI 49503

Dear Commissioners,

Please accept this letter of support to renew and expand the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed since it was first passed by voters in 2018.

The Kent Intermediate School District stands ready to partner with First Steps Kent and funded community agencies to continue to build a network of services, designed to reach populations most in need of support. In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents from every zip code in Kent County access programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent, which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children. We can help ensure more young children are given the resources they need to thrive.

Reinvesting in these services will positively benefit children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

- Children who have a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation are more likely to graduate and contribute to the local economy.
- A dollar invested in early childhood development saves at least \$6 down the road in reduced costs for health care, education, and prisons.
- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

The primary focus of this fiscally responsible millage proposal is expanding much needed access to child care for working families. Using data to measure progress and identify our community's most pressing needs, First Steps Kent has documented the urgent need for more affordable child care services in Kent County. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local child care workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-

end services so child care business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate child care resources.

Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community, now and long into the future.

Thank you,



Ron Koehler

Superintendent, Kent ISD

August 22, 2023

Stan Stek
County Administration Building
300 Monroe Ave NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Dear Stan,

I'm writing to express my support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed since it was first passed by voters in 2018.

In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents from every zip code in Kent County access programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent, which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children.

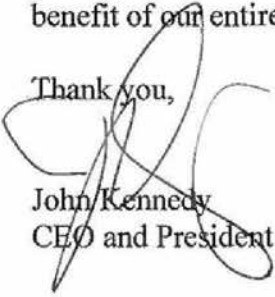
Reinvesting in these services will positively benefit children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

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- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

The primary focus of expanding this millage is childcare. As you may know, finding quality care that is affordable is one of the biggest challenges for families. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local childcare workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so childcare business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate child care resources.

Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community.

Thank you,



John Kennedy

CEO and President of Autocam Medical



July 31, 2023

Michelle LaJoye-Young
SHERIFF

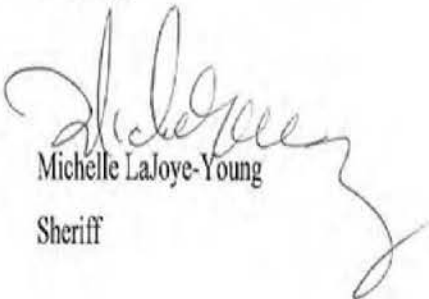
Subject: Letter of Support for Early Childhood Programming

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to express my support for early childhood programming. As an advocate for the well-being and development of our youngest community members, I believe that investing in early childhood programs and care is crucial for the future success of our society.

Early childhood is a critical period in a child's life, as it lays the foundation for their cognitive, emotional, and social development. Quality early childhood programs have been shown to yield substantial benefits not only for the children, but also for families, schools, and society.

Sincerely,


Michelle LaJoye-Young
Sheriff

MomsBloom Inc.
233 Fulton Street E STE 226
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm writing to express my support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed since it was first passed by voters in 2018.

In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents from every zip code in Kent County access programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent, which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children. We can help ensure more young children are given the resources they need to thrive.

Reinvesting in these services will positively benefit children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

- Children who have a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation are more likely to graduate and contribute to the local economy.
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- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

The primary focus of this fiscally responsible millage proposal is expanding much needed access to child care for working families. Using data to measure progress and identify our community's most pressing needs, First Steps Kent has documented the urgent need for more affordable child care services in Kent County. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local child care workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so child care business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate child care resources.

Please join me in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community, now and long into the future.

Thank you,

Carrie Kolehous
Executive Director

September 1, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, which has helped ensure thousands of children in Kent County enter Kindergarten healthy and ready to learn and succeed since it was first passed by voters in 2018.

WGVU Public Media proudly partners with First Steps Kent and other organizations in support of Ready by 5 Early Childhood Millage work. In 2022 alone, the millage provided more than 12,400 young children and expectant parents from every zip code in Kent County access programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five.

Our community has an opportunity to support and expand this important millage in 2024. I urge you to continue supporting First Steps Kent, which administers the millage and its associated programs, because we know that early childhood services, including prenatal support, parenting education, and health services, are essential to building a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation for children. We can help ensure more young children are given the resources they need to thrive.

Reinvesting in these services will positively benefit children, parents, and our entire community for generations to come. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

- Children who have a strong social, emotional, and intellectual foundation are more likely to graduate and contribute to the local economy.
- A dollar invested in early childhood development saves at least \$6 down the road in reduced costs for health care, education, and prisons.
- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

The primary focus of this fiscally responsible millage proposal is expanding much needed access to childcare for working families. Using data to measure progress and identify our community's most pressing needs, First Steps Kent has documented the urgent need for more affordable childcare services in Kent County. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local childcare workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so child care business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate child care resources.

Please join WGVU Public Media in supporting the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community, now and long into the future.

Thank you,



Kristyn Bomberg
Educational Services Manager
WGVU Public Media
616-331-6793
bombergk@gvsu.edu

Attachment C

**Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage
Expansion to .35 Mill
November 2, 2023**

The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage is aimed at making sure children across Kent County are ready to learn and succeed when they start school. That begins with babies being born healthy and families having the skills and resources to provide a strong foundation. Over the next five years, young children must have experiences and relationships that develop the traits of a “kindergarten-ready” child:

- Enthusiasm for learning
- Ability to play well with others
- Ability to listen and communicate
- Desire to be independent
- Strong fine-motor skills, and
- Basic letter and number recognition.

Research clearly demonstrates children who are ready for kindergarten have better outcomes throughout school and beyond.

Ready by Five Track Record

First Steps Kent and partners have delivered on the promises made in 2018.

- 1) ***Increase participation in evidence-based programs.*** Programs funded through the Ready by Five Millage served 12,400 children and expectant parents last year. To receive millage funding, all programs must provide evidence they improve child outcomes. *(See graph on page 3 and accompanying Return on Investment document).*
- 2) ***Establish countywide data collection.*** For the first time, there is countywide data about the demographics and geography of the children and families served, which is used to direct resources where they are needed most. As children who’ve participated in millage-funded programs enter kindergarten, Ready by Five evaluators will be able to track their readiness compared to similarly situated children who did not participate. *(See map on page 4)*
- 3) ***Establish Outreach & Navigation Network.*** This network connects families to evidence-based programs and other community resources. Outreach & Navigation providers navigated more than 3,500 families in 2022, meaning they connected them to programs and services that best meet their needs. The network is being extended in 2024 to include child care navigation.

Rationale for Expansion to .35 Mill

The 6-year millage approved by voters in 2018 expires at the end of 2024. At .25 mill, it captures \$6.5-\$7 million. At .35 mill, it would generate an **additional \$2.5-\$3 million** in the first year, or approximately **\$9.5-\$10 million total**.

The additional .1 mill would be used to sustain and grow existing programs, so more children benefit from effective, evidence-based early childhood programming.

- First Steps Kent projects it will cost \$7-\$8 million annually to sustain *most* current Ready by Five programming, with some anticipated cuts.
- For the 2023-24 budget year, \$8.9 million was allocated to Ready by Five service providers, using the remaining unspent funds from the halt in services during the pandemic.
- The cost of providing services is increasing, as is the demand for services.
- **Staying at .25 mill will likely lead to a reduction in families served.**

.35 mill = approx. \$9.5-\$10M	
Sustain existing effective services	\$7-\$8M
Expand existing effective services	\$2M
Admin/data/evaluation	\$800-\$1M
Total Costs	\$9.8-\$11M

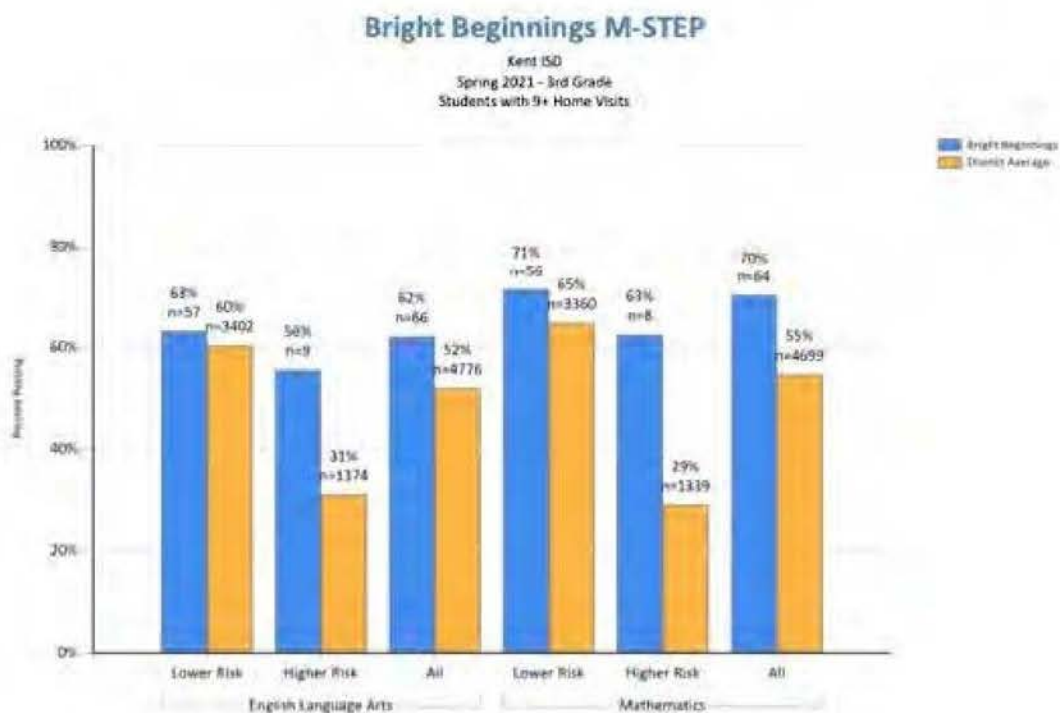
With an additional .1 mill, First Steps Kent projects Ready by Five could **increase reach by an estimated 20 percent**, serving another **2,000-2,500 children and expectant parents**.

The expansion of services would focus on: Home Visiting, Early Learning, Outreach & Navigation (including child care navigation), and Healthy Development programs. Funding allocations would prioritize “Opportunity Zip Codes” – underserved communities with a high percentage of families who are economically disadvantaged. *(See map on page 4)*

The Ready by Five Steering Committee’s original request to the KCBOC Millage Subcommittee was for .45 mill, or approximately \$12.5 million a year. That request included a plan to bolster the network of child care providers in Kent County, addressing the critical need to make quality early care and education more accessible to families. An increase of only .1 mill will NOT provide the funding necessary to do that.

Example of Program Outcome

While kindergarten readiness data will not be available for a few more years, until children who have participated in Ready by Five programs are school age, program-level data demonstrates the effectiveness of those services in which the millage invests. This graph depicts Bright Beginnings, an evidenced-based early learning program that provides home visits and play and learn groups. The graph shows the 3rd grade reading scores of children who participated in Bright Beginnings are higher than those who did not, and the gains are largest among children who are economically disadvantaged. This is the type of data that drove the decision to provide funding for Bright Beginnings, so it could serve more children. *(This is just one example; see the accompanying Return on Investment document for data on other Ready by Five-funded programs).*



This data represents the 20 LEAs in Kent ISD and does not include charter or parochial schools.
Higher risk districts are districts that are more than 50% economically disadvantaged. These districts include Comstock Park, Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Godfrey-Lee, Godwin Heights, Kalamazoo, Kent City, and Wyoming.
Lower risk districts include Byron Center, Caledonia, Cedar Springs, East Grand Rapids, Forest Hills, Grandville, Kenowa Hills, Lowell, Northview, Rockford, Saugatuck, and Thornapple-Kellogg.

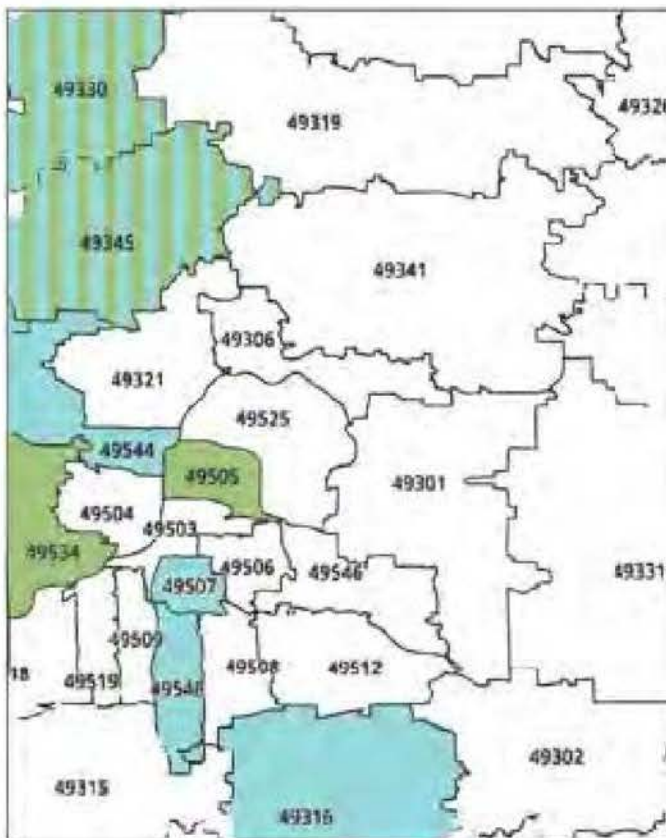
Using Data to Drive Decisions

Countywide data collection for all programs that are part of Ready by Five is guiding how and where tax dollars are spent. This map identifies the zip codes in Kent County where children have the greatest need for early childhood programs – “Opportunity Zip Codes”, as these are the areas in which there is the greatest opportunity for impact.

The zip codes in blue are those that were identified in a 2020-21 analysis. Participation in those six zip codes increased a collective 55 percent in 2022. Those in green were identified in the 2023 evaluation as having the highest remaining unmet need. There is some overlap in the striped zip codes, meaning the millage has led to progress in those communities, but there is significant need still unmet.

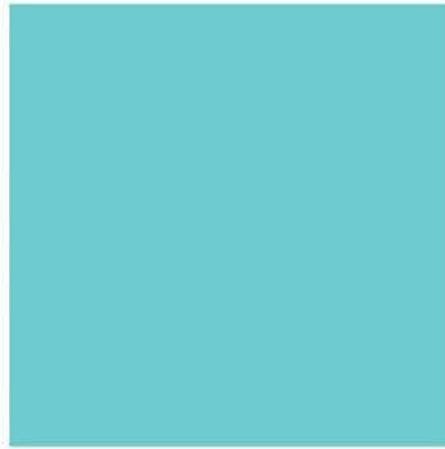
An additional .1 mill would provide resources to maintain the priority focus in blue zip codes, while intensifying the focus in green zip codes.

It is important to note, families in every zip code in Kent County are participating in Ready by Five programs, and outreach extends across the county. However, this data helps ensure effective allocation of resources.



Blue: Priority focus in 2021-2023

Green: Priority focus in 2023-25



Societal Benefits and Return on Investment

Impact of Ready by Five Millage Funded Programs

November 2023

In 2022, more than 12,000 children and expectant parents in every zip code of Kent County participated in quality early childhood services that would not have been available without the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. While many of these services are universal to all families, an intentional focus on children with the greatest needs and, thus, the potential for greatest impact, is proving successful.

- 57% of families served in 2022 are from historically marginalized groups.
- 45% are in households with incomes below \$40,000 a year.
- Participation in programming increased 55% in the six zip codes that are most economically disadvantaged, both urban and rural.

To be awarded Ready by Five funding, programs must provide evidence of their effectiveness. Many of the models currently funded by the millage have been researched for decades with well documented evidence of the impact and long-term return on investment. These are highlights from some of those programs.



Effective Programs that Work

Home Visiting Home Visiting is among the most researched and effective social programs, providing a **two-generation approach** that addresses **multiple factors related to child success**. Ready by Five funding has increased the capacity of these evidence-based parenting education programs.

Healthy Families America (HFA) works with overburdened families who are at-risk for adverse childhood experiences, including child maltreatment. This program supports the parent-child relationship, promotes healthy childhood growth and development, and enhances family functioning. *The ROI is estimated to be \$1.46 for each dollar invested, with greater benefits (\$3.16) for families involved with child welfare services.*¹

Strong Beginnings Healthy Start home visiting supports participants from pregnancy until their toddler is 18 months old. Individuals enter the program with multiple risk factors. The most recent evaluation shows a:

- 40% reduced risk for very preterm births.
- 15% reduced risk for preterm births.
- 87% rate of completion for postpartum exams 60 days after giving birth.

Collectively HFA and Strong Beginnings served an **additional 220 babies, toddlers, and young children** with Ready by Five funding last year.



Early Learning is Crucial to Later Success

Language comprehension at age three – largely developed by being in an environment rich with words, conversation, and books – is the best predictor of future language-learning status.² Ready by Five funds programs that have evidence of improving early literacy.

The **Parents as Teachers** (PAT) model (Bright Beginnings) enhances child development and school readiness. The model includes:

- Personal home visits by parent educators,
- Group meetings for parents,
- Developmental screenings for children, and
- A resource network for families.

Ready by Five funding increased PAT programming to reach an **additional 130 expectant parents and young children** in 2022. *Research estimates the ROI is \$1.23 for each dollar invested.*³

Successfully Connecting Families

Ready by Five funding allowed for the creation of an **Outreach and Navigation** network, which is critical to connecting families to evidenced-based programs and other community resources. Outreach and Navigation providers help families assess their needs for evidenced-based early childhood programs and then access health services; support for housing, food, and other essential needs.

Outreach and Navigation providers navigated more than 3,500 families in 2022, helping them find a wide range of programming, including 1,000 referrals to home visiting programs. Research is beginning to emerge on the impact of such screening and referral networks. While many families can benefit from these initiatives, **cost savings are most significant when those with the greatest needs are served.**



"While reaching women with more complex risk factors, Strong Beginnings has achieved statistically significant reductions in preterm, very preterm, and very low birthweight births, especially for Black women, and increased rates of adequate prenatal care and postpartum visit completion compared to women on Medicaid not in the program."

Published in JAMA Peds, a peer-reviewed Journal (Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics). July 25, 2023.

Addressing Developmental Concerns

Early developmental screening is a national best practice that is recommended by both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Center for Health Care Strategy as **earlier intervention is more effective** and has been proven to **reduce special education needs** in the long-term.

Ready by Five funds **Connections** which offers **developmental screenings throughout early childhood** and helps families access **early intervention services**. According to the CDC, about one in six children aged 3-17 have one or more developmental or behavioral disabilities, such as autism, a learning disorder, or a language delay.⁴ The agency adds, **"Many children with developmental disabilities are not identified until they are in school, by which time significant delays might have occurred and opportunities for treatment might have been missed."**⁵ The Connections program was successful in completing 3,207 screenings for 1,701 children in 2022, **identifying 730 children with a potential concern.**

Investing Earlier is Better

The famed Nobel Laureate economist Dr. James Heckman advises communities take the approach of the Ready by Five Millage: **invest early, starting before birth whenever possible, and stack a variety of comprehensive programming and interventions** for children and families facing the biggest disadvantages. "Providing health, early learning and care from birth produces a 13% return on investment per child, per annum, significantly higher than just preschool alone," Heckman explains.

The exact numbers associated with the ROI vary based on which interventions were included in the analysis, but numerous studies demonstrate quality early childhood programs provide one of our greatest opportunities to address longstanding disparities in health, education, and employment, ultimately saving communities far more money than they have spent.⁶



Endnotes 1 Healthy Families America ROI information is available at www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HFA-ROI-Brief.pdf 2 Flax JF, Realpe-Bonilla T, Roesler C, Choudhury N, Benasich A. Using early standardized language measures to predict later language and early reading outcomes in children at high risk for language-learning impairments. *J Learn Disabil*. 2009 Jan-Feb;42(1):61-75. 3 Parents as Teachers ROI info available at: <https://www.pat-mitellernlernen.org/wp-content/uploads/PATNC-fact-sheet-Return-on-Invest-1.pdf> 4 Cogswell ME, Coil E, Tian LH, Tinker SC, Ryerson AB, Maenner MJ, Rice CE, Peacock G. Health Needs and Use of Services Among Children with Developmental Disabilities—United States, 2014–2018. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 2022; 71(12):453–458. 5 Center for Disease Control, Developmental Screening and Monitoring, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html> 6 James Heckman, information available at <https://heckmanequation.org/>

Attachment D

To: KCBOC Millage Subcommittee
From: First Steps Kent and Ready by Five Steering Committee
Date: September 21, 2023

Subject: Early childhood funding sources and leveraged funds

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your questions about funding sources for early childhood programming and additional resources that are being leveraged by Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage funds.

For this summary, we have categorized funding in three areas:

- Federal and State – public funding from sources such as Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau, and Medicaid.
- Private – foundation and charitable donations. This area of funding is the least stable as funders' priorities often change every few years.
- Ready by Five – the portion of programming funded by the Ready by Five Millage

This is not comprehensive of all programs and services funded by Ready by Five, but it includes the largest categories of programming. All funding information is for the calendar year 2022.

Home Visiting is one of the most well-researched and effective social programs with long-term benefits and return on investment. Here are the funding sources for the six evidenced-based or evidence-informed home visiting programs that received millage funds in 2022:

- Federal and state – \$3.9 million
- Private – \$869,500
- Ready by Five – \$1.57 million

The Ready by Five funding enabled those six home visiting programs to serve nearly 50 percent more children and parents than they would have without millage dollars.

- 1,417 participants through state/federal/philanthropic funding sources
- 663 participants through Ready by Five funding

These numbers do not include Nurse Family Partnership or the Maternal Infant Health Program, which are only funded by federal, state, county, and health system resources.

Play & Learn groups help children develop critical early language, pre-numeracy, and social-emotional skills, while also modeling for caregivers how to nurture their children's learning at home. Three Play & Learn providers funded by Ready by Five have seen an 800 percent increase in participation — from 750 children before the millage to more than 6,200 last year.

Kent ISD offers the Bright Beginnings program, which is unique as it includes both Home Visiting and Play and Learn. A portion of Bright Beginnings state and federal funding goes to the group component of that program. Historically, there has not been a dedicated source of public funding for this type of programming. For this reason, the other Play & Learn providers do not receive significant funding outside of Ready by Five.

Outreach & Navigation is often the key first step in reaching and engaging families. Programs provide information about early childhood development, help families assess their needs, and connect them to the right programs and services. Last year 2,239 parents and children received confirmed connections to resources and support. Before the millage, there were only privately

funded pilot projects with limited reach and consistency. Ready by Five funds have been leveraged to increase additional federal and state funding sources. The 2022 funding sources for Outreach & Navigation were:

- Federal and state – \$1.25 million (largely from leveraging Ready by Five funds; see below)
- Private – \$100,000
- Ready by Five – \$2.3 million

Behavioral Health services for infants and toddlers focus on the mental and emotional wellness of the family, particularly the primary caregiver(s), who is critical to the child's behavior health. As children get older, services focus more on directly supporting the child's mental and emotional well-being and prevention of behavioral concerns in early education settings. Ready by Five provides funding to two providers of Infant Mental Health programs and fully funds KEEP (Keep Early Education Positive), which had been available in the community more than 15 years ago but lapsed due to lack of funding. Funding last year came from:

- Federal and state – \$800,000 (This is an estimate for Infant Mental Health only and is Medicaid-earned revenue that flows through Community Mental Health)
- Private – \$10,000
- Ready by Five – \$752,000

Note: State and federal funding for infant and toddler services is restricted to families enrolled in Medicaid. Ready by Five funding allows those programs to serve families who are not Medicaid eligible or have an unexpected lapse in their Medicaid coverage.

Environmental Health services identify lead and other hazards in the home that may jeopardize a child's development, health, or safety. Lead is a threat to children in urban, suburban, and rural areas of Kent County as nearly 70 percent of homes countywide were built before lead paint was banned in 1978. Millage funding has increased the reach of organizations working to identify and eliminate lead, mold, and other dangers in young children's homes.

The Kent County Health Department reported last year that Ready by Five funding allowed it to go from three to six sanitarians. If a potential for lead is found, a sanitarian goes into the home to do a full, intensive investigation. Prior to the millage, the department also had limited capacity to conduct risk identification and was only responding to cases referred by WIC, in which children were already extremely lead poisoned. Thanks to millage funding, the program is serving more families with preventive services.

Healthy Homes Coalition coordinates with the Kent County Health Department to screen homes for environmental hazards and provides case management services if a household has been identified as high risk. Funding to cover the cost of services for this work includes:

- City of Grand Rapids – \$55,000
- Private – \$105,000
- Ready by Five – \$241,000

Federal and state resources leveraged by Ready by Five

Local organizations leverage the funds they receive from Ready by Five to bring in additional state and federal money to Kent County.

The Connections program operated by Family Futures has used \$504,000 in Ready by Five funding as a match (more than dollar-to-dollar) to get **\$698,000** in Promise Neighborhood funds, all of which is used for Early Childhood.

Health Net of West Michigan is has used Ready by Five funding for its Outreach & Navigation services to draw **\$422,000** in federal Medicaid Outreach dollars. \$123,000 of that will be used for early childhood, with the remainder supporting Health Net's other services.

The average payment from Medicaid for an expecting parent and baby to receive Maternal Infant Health Services (MIHP) hovers around \$1,000 per mother/child. Cherry Health receives Ready by Five funds to increase program support not otherwise offered by MIHP. Cherry Health leveraged about **\$400,000** of Medicaid funds to provide key support to expecting mothers and their babies through 18 months.

Services not currently funded by Ready by Five

There are several other critical early childhood services that are not currently funded by Ready by Five. Preschool for 4-year-olds receives significant state funding through the Great Start Readiness Program. GSRP is expanding so more children will be eligible to participate. We do not see a need at this point to supplement pre-K for 4-year-olds.

Head Start provides funding for preschool for 3- and 4-year-old children whose family incomes are below the federal poverty level. There is a need to serve more 3-year-olds as eligibility and funding are heavily restricted. However, that is not part of the Ready by Five proposal, in part due to the high cost associated with it. We and our partners continue to advocate for state and federal investments to make quality early education available to more children.

The lack of affordable, quality child care is well documented in Kent County and across the country. To date, Ready by Five has not provided funding specific to child care, however the current proposal recommends investments that would strengthen and sustain the network of child care providers, which is critical to increasing availability and reversing the trend of professionals leaving the industry. The proposal also includes funding to help families and small providers navigate the system, so children are matched with programs that best meet their needs. Finally, it would improve quality among Family, Friend, and Neighbor care providers, which is the type of care preferred by many families for reasons including comfort and familiarity, cost, and ability to work evenings and weekends. We respect that families make a range of decisions about child care based on what is most appropriate for them. We want to ensure that all choices families make provide a quality care environment for the child(ren).

Why not simply provide scholarships to families to pay for child care? That is outside the scope of what we could reasonably impact with the millage. A conservative estimate is that half of the roughly 34,000 children ages 0-4 (those not yet eligible for the Great Start Readiness Program) need some assistance paying for child care. Providing \$3,000 scholarships – which would cover less than one-third of the average cost of full-time care for a baby – to 17,000 children would total \$51,000,000 annually. There are a variety of ways we could configure eligibility and size of scholarships, but the bottom line is there is no way scholarships can make a meaningful impact without increasing the millage rate by at least eight-fold.

First Steps Kent is preparing a follow-up report to the Gap Analysis that preceded the approval of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage in 2018. We will share that when it is complete later this fall.

To: KCBOC Millage Subcommittee
From: First Steps Kent and Ready by Five Steering Committee
Date: September 21, 2023

Subject: Number and percent of children served by zip code

Programs funded by the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage help all families find answers and support, with a focus on those who have the greatest needs. Some services, such as developmental screenings and navigation, are universally available to all families with young children. Early intervention and prevention programs intentionally focus on engaging families in historically underserved communities and children with identified needs. The research of Nobel Laureate economist Dr. James Heckman shows the greatest impact on health, learning, and wellbeing and the largest ROI (return on investment) are associated with scaffolding quality programs for disadvantaged children, which is what is occurring through Ready by Five.

Historically -- before Ready by Five millage funding existed -- service providers focused their programming on large population centers with high concentrations of children facing economic or other disadvantages. As data collection standards were not aligned across the multiple funding sources, the distribution and concentration of services throughout all Kent County communities had been unclear.

Today, service partners who receive Ready by Five Millage funding are required to submit demographic and program data in a standardized data set. Data submitted by Ready by Five funded programs allows us to now see how they collectively serve individuals by geography and various demographic groups throughout Kent County.

Leveraging the data now available, First Steps Kent and service partners are working collaboratively to expand the reach of programming to serve more children and families in rural and suburban communities, particularly in areas where a significant share of the population has a household income of 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level or below. In the most recent Request for Proposal funding opportunity, First Steps Kent sought proposals that specifically add or expand services in the zip codes with the most opportunity for increasing services to these communities. In 2023-2024, First Steps Kent anticipates there will be an increase in the percentage of young children reached in outlying areas and specific demographic groups that would benefit from increased access to services.

Below you will find a breakdown of participation in Ready by Five-funded programs and services by zip code. The information in the tables is for the calendar year 2022 and was compiled by Basis Policy Research. As zip codes and city/township boundaries are not aligned, it can be difficult to categorize zip codes. We have attempted to do so in the way people who live in Kent County are inclined to think of communities, while recognizing it is not a perfect breakdown.

**This memo is on multiple pages so complete tables can be read on one page.*

Zip codes that make up the urban core are those that are primarily in the cities of Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Wyoming, Walker, Grandville, and East Grand Rapids – often known as the “six cities.”

Table 1: Urban core

Zip Code	Children <5	Children <5 Below 200% FPL	Children <5 Served by Rb5	Percent <5 Served by Rb5
49418 Grandville and Walker	1,904	473	276	14%
49503 Central GR	2,216	1,411	962	43%
49504 GR and Walker	2,180	1,120	701	32%
49505 NE GR	2,792	1,692	483	17%
49506 SE GR, EGR, part of GR Twp	1,964	340	356	18%
49507 SW GR and Wyoming	3,611	2,687	1,361	38%
49508 Kentwood	3,502	1,718	942	27%
49509 Wyoming	1,916	1,242	678	35%
49512 Kentwood and part of Cascade	1,038	367	332	32%
49519 Wyoming	1,822	877	408	22%
49534 GR, Walker, Grandville	1,353	473	132	10%
49548 Kentwood	2,264	1,312	817	36%

**The 49418 and 49534 zip codes include small portions of Ottawa County. The table includes all children in the zip code, even though only those in Kent County participate in Rb5 services.*

Zip codes outside of the urban core consist of suburban and/or rural communities.

Table 2: Rural and suburban communities

Zip Code	Children <5	Children <5 Below 200% FPL	Children <5 Served by Rb5	Percent <5 Served by Rb5
49301 Ada and Forest Hills	1,509	52	72	5%
49302 Alto, Lowell, Caledonia	763	110	45	6%
49306 Belmont and Plainfield	679	58	67	10%
49315 Byron Center, Cutlerville, Gaines	1,533	84	127	8%
49316 Caledonia	1,221	326	152	12%
49319 Cedar Springs	762	313	128	17%
49321 Comstock Park, Northview, Plainfield	678	312	212	31%
49330 Kent City	512	339	59	12%
49331 Lowell and Forest Hills	1,125	160	86	8%
49341 Rockford	2,783	242	237	9%
49345 Sparta	1,049	382	129	12%
49525 GR Twp, Plainfield, Northview	1,401	394	228	16%
49546 Forest Hills and SE GR	1,881	504	254	14%
49544 Walker and Comstock Park	701	187	112	16%

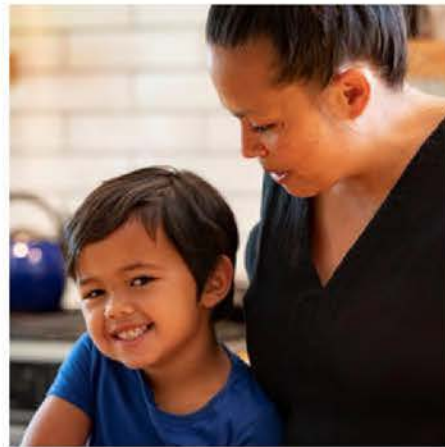
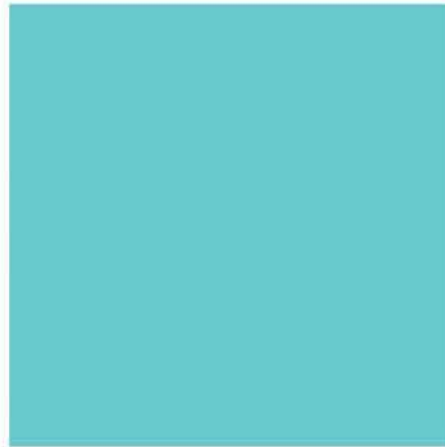
**The 49315, 49316, and 49331 zip codes include small portions of Ottawa, Allegan, Barry, and/or Ionia counties. The table includes all children in the zip code, even though only those in Kent County participate in Rb5 services.*

There are two rural north zip codes that are majority Kent County residents but also have significant populations in other counties. They are:

Zip Code	Children <5	Children <5 Below 200% FPL	Children <5 Served by Rb5	Percent <5 Served by Rb5
49326 Spencer Twp and Montcalm	273	74	17	6%
49343 NE townships and Newaygo & Montcalm	322	72	20	6%

**The table includes all children in the zip code, even though only those in Kent County participate in Rb5 services.*

Note: There are 11 zip codes that include a portion of Kent County but are primarily in adjacent counties. They are: 48809, 48815, 48838, 49318, 49325, 49327, 49333, 49347, 49348, 49403, 49435. Most young children and families living there are ineligible for services funded by Ready by Five, therefore we are not including them in this summary.



Supported by the Kent County Ready by Five Millage

Societal Benefits and Return on Investment

Impact of Ready by Five Millage Funded Programs

July 2023

In 2022, more than 12,000 children and expectant parents in Kent County participated in quality early childhood services that would not have been available without the Ready by Five Millage. While many of these services are universally accessible to all families across the community, our intentional focus on children with the greatest needs and, thus, the potential for greatest impact is proving successful. Fifty-seven percent of young children and families served last year were from historically marginalized groups, and 45 percent live in households with incomes below \$40,000 a year. Millage-funded services made the most significant inroads in zip codes that are most economically disadvantaged, both urban and rural.

The scale and reach of Ready by Five benefits not only the individual children served, but also their parents and the greater community.

Young children who participate in high-quality early childhood programming:

- Require less special education throughout school
- Are less likely to repeat a grade.
- Have fewer behavioral concerns.
- Graduate at a higher rate.

National research about the long-term public benefit of investing early shows fewer individuals enter the criminal justice system (juvenile and adult) and more adults are successful in the workforce. Many of the models currently funded by the Ready by Five Millage have well documented evidence of effectiveness or returns on investment based on long-term studies. In this document we highlight some of the programs that have been researched and those that have demonstrated a measurable Return on Investment (ROI).



Effective Programs that Work

Home Visiting programs are among the most researched and effective social programs as they provide a two-generation approach that addresses multiple factors related to child success. Ready by Five funding has increased the capacity of evidence-based parenting education that improves outcomes beginning in infancy, with benefits that grow as children continue with quality programming throughout their early years. Ready by Five funding has allowed **Healthy Families America (HFA)** and **Strong Beginnings Healthy Start** to expand their services above and beyond their previous reach; between both programs an additional 220 infants, toddlers, and young children were served in 2022.

HFA is an evidence-based home visiting model designed to work with overburdened families who are at-risk for adverse childhood experiences, including child maltreatment. This program supports the parent-child relationship, promotes healthy childhood growth and development, and enhances family functioning. *The ROI is estimated to be \$1.46 for each dollar invested, with greater benefits (\$3.16) for families involved with child welfare services.*¹

Strong Beginnings Healthy Start home visiting program supports participants from pregnancy until their toddler turns 18 months old. The most recent evaluation shows individuals enter the program with multiple risk factors related to their physical health, psychosocial health, and within the social determinants of health. **Participants in 2022 and thus far in 2023 had a 40 percent reduced risk of very preterm birth, 15 percent reduction for preterm births, and higher rates of participants completing postpartum exams 60 days after giving birth** (87% of all participants). Corewell Health estimates an ROI with the decrease of preterm births at \$1.18 for each dollar invested. Additional program components are not considered in this estimate so the actual ROI could be higher.



Early Learning is Crucial to Later Success

Language comprehension at three years of age – largely developed by being in an environment rich with words, conversation, and books – is the best predictor of future language-learning status.² Data shows that the percentage of all Michigan parents who read to their children daily is 37.8, compared to 26.8 percent for families in low-income households.³ Ready by Five funds programs that have evidence of success with improving early literacy.

The **Parents as Teachers (PAT)** model (Bright Beginnings) enhances child development and school readiness by providing parents with knowledge and resources to prepare their kids for a stronger start in life and greater school success. The model includes personal home visits by parent educators, group meetings for parents, developmental screenings for children, and a resource network for families. Ready by Five funding increased PAT programming to reach an additional 130 expectant parents and young children in 2022. Research estimates the ROI is \$1.23 for each dollar invested.⁴

Reach Out and Read partners with pediatricians to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud and provide developmentally appropriate books during regular pediatric check-ups. National results from this model show that parents are two-and-a-half times more likely to read with their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; and children show improved language development by 3-6 months and continue to improve with consistent exposure to Reach Out and Read.⁵ More than 10,000 young children were served across Kent County in 2022.

² Flax JF, Realpe-Bonilla T, Roesler C, Choudhury N, Benasich A. Using early standardized language measures to predict later language and early reading outcomes in children at high risk for language-learning impairments.

³ Think Babies, *The State of Babies Yearbook*, accessible online at <https://www.thinkbabies.org/state-of-babies/>

⁴ Parents as Teachers ROI info available at: <https://www.pat-mitelternlernen.org/wp-content/uploads/PATNC-fact-sheet-Return-on-Invest-1.pdf>

⁵ Reach Out and Read, *The Evidence*, available at <https://reachoutandread.org/why-we-matter/the-evidence/>

Successfully Connecting Families

Ready by Five funding allowed for the creation of an **Outreach and Navigation** network, which is critical to connecting families to evidenced-based programs and other community resources. Outreach and Navigation providers help families assess their needs and then access health services; support for housing, food, and other essential needs; and evidenced-based early childhood programs, while also strengthening the overall connectivity of the early childhood system. **Outreach and Navigation providers navigated more than 3,500 families in 2022**, helping them access a wide range of programming, including 1,000 referrals to home visiting programs. Research is beginning to emerge on the impact of such screening and referral networks for people with social needs. While many families can benefit from these initiatives, cost savings are most significant when those with the greatest needs are served.

First Steps Kent and partners recognize an opportunity to expand the Outreach and Navigation network to help families navigate the child care system, ensuring they maximize all assistance for which they are eligible and helping them find affordable quality care. That will require additional Ready by Five funding and would bring significant benefit to local families struggling amidst the national child care crisis.

“While reaching women with more complex risk factors, Strong Beginnings has achieved statistically significant reductions in preterm, very preterm, and very low birthweight births, especially for Black women, and increased rates of adequate prenatal care and postpartum visit completion compared to women on Medicaid not in the program.”

Addressing Developmental Concerns

Early developmental screening is a national best practice that is recommended by both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Center for Health Care Strategy as *earlier intervention is more effective and has been proven to reduce special education costs in the long-term.*

During the 2021-2022 school year, for the 1,084 infants and toddlers enrolled in Early On services (IDEA Part C funding); the overall average cost was \$7,428 per infant/toddler. Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) (IDEA Part B funding that serves ages 3-5) for the 1,185 students served showed an average cost of \$5,932 per student. In Kent County the average cost for a child to receive three years of Early On and two years of ECSE totals \$34,148. As developmental delays and concerns are identified in later grades, the overall average cost is higher, standing at \$12,996 per student per year.⁶ Ready by Five programs increase access to developmental screening to better identify concerns earlier as well as ensure barriers families may experience when enrolling in early intervention clinical services are reduced.

Ready by Five funds the **Connections** program that offers developmental screenings throughout early childhood and helps families access early intervention services if a delay or disability is confirmed. According to the CDC, about one in six children aged 3-17 have one or more developmental or behavioral disabilities, such as autism, a learning disorder, or a language delay.⁷ The agency adds, "Many children with developmental disabilities are not identified until they are in school, by which time significant delays might have occurred and opportunities for treatment might have been missed."⁸ The Connections program was successful in completing 3,207 screenings reaching 1,701 children in 2022, and identifying 730 children having a possible concern.

The famed Nobel Laureate economist Dr. James Heckman advises communities take the approach of the Ready by Five Millage – invest early, starting before birth whenever possible, and stack a variety of comprehensive programming and interventions for children and families facing the biggest disadvantages. **"Providing health, early learning and care from birth produces a 13% return on investment per child, per annum, significantly higher than just preschool alone,"** Heckman explains.

The exact numbers associated with the ROI vary based on which interventions were included in the analysis, but numerous studies demonstrate quality early childhood programs provide one of our greatest opportunities to address longstanding disparities in health, education, and employment, ultimately saving communities far more money than they have spent.⁹

While we are not going to know the full ROI for Ready by Five for years to come, we are gaining some early indication of its impact through the Ready by Five evaluation process. Basing success on the empirical measure of kindergarten readiness, the evaluation process will begin to determine the initial impacts for children who are school aged and have engaged in Ready by Five funded services. Initial evaluation results showing impact on k-readiness will be available sometime in fall of 2023, with additional results of ROI to follow in coming years, as children receiving services now as infants and toddlers start kindergarten.

⁹ James Heckman, information available at <https://heckmanequation.org/>

⁶ Source: Kent ISD. Note: The costs per student included are for illustrative purposes. The actual cost per student can vary depending on the individual diagnosis and circumstances

⁷ Cogswell ME, Coil E, Tian LH, Tinker SC, Ryerson AB, Maenner MJ, Rice CE, Peacock G. Health Needs and Use of Services Among Children with Developmental Disabilities—United States, 2014–2018. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. 2022;

⁸ Center for Disease Control, Developmental Screening and Monitoring, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html>



To: KCBOC Millage Subcommittee
From: First Steps Kent and Ready by Five Steering Committee
Date: September 21, 2023

Subject: Evaluation of Kindergarten Readiness Impact

An evaluation of Ready by Five Millage-funded programs is under way. The research method is matching child data collected by Ready by Five service providers with school district assessment data to understand how services impact early K-12 school readiness.

School districts across Kent County are in the process of completing their initial kindergarten assessments for children who entered school this August. Kent ISD will have complete assessment data by early November that will be sent to the team at Basis Policy Research, the external evaluator for the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage. Basis anticipates that a report with the full analysis will be complete by early January. Per the data sharing agreements between Basis and all local school districts, superintendents have an opportunity to review the finding and the report before it is shared publicly. We anticipate being able to communicate the findings with the Kent County Board of Commissioners and county staff by March of 2024.

The report will be shared with the following considerations:

- The first complete year of available data is for children who began participating in Ready by Five funded services in 2021. For this reason, the number of children included in the evaluation analysis to date will be small, as it includes only children who both started school in 2022 or 2023 *and* had participated in one or more programs funded by Ready by Five prior to that.
- During 2021, early childhood services were still being modified to avoid close physical contact, such as receiving “play and learn kits” to use at home, rather than attending play and learn groups in person. While it was a necessary modification, children likely received far less than the full benefit of the program as they did not have the peer interactions that help build language and social-emotional skills, nor were high-quality early learning experiences modeled for their caregivers. Additionally, most home visits during much of the pandemic were virtual. While that may have been the best option at the time, it was far less impactful than in-person home visits with the child, parent(s), and provider.
- As the children included in the assessment are at least Kindergarten aged today, they could have been no younger than 3- or 4-years-old when they first participated in millage-funded programs. Research clearly demonstrates the most significant benefits – particularly for children in vulnerable communities – come from early engagement in prevention and intervention programs, starting prenatally and/or in the earliest months of a baby’s life. The benefits multiply as children get older and participate in the continuum of early childhood services.
- Babies who were born in 2022 will be the first group of children to have access to the full continuum of programming and resources, as this was the first full year of agencies returning to regular programming, with no physical distancing limitations, following the pandemic. These children will enter kindergarten in 2027 or 2028.

We look forward to sharing a more complete picture of the impact of Ready by Five as more participants reach kindergarten. More information about the Ready by Five Evaluation is available at: <https://www.firststepskent.org/ready-by-five-evaluation>.

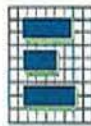
Attachment E



Early Investment. Lifelong Success.

Survey Data: Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage September 2023

Presented by:



EPIC MRA
Measuring public opinion since 1985

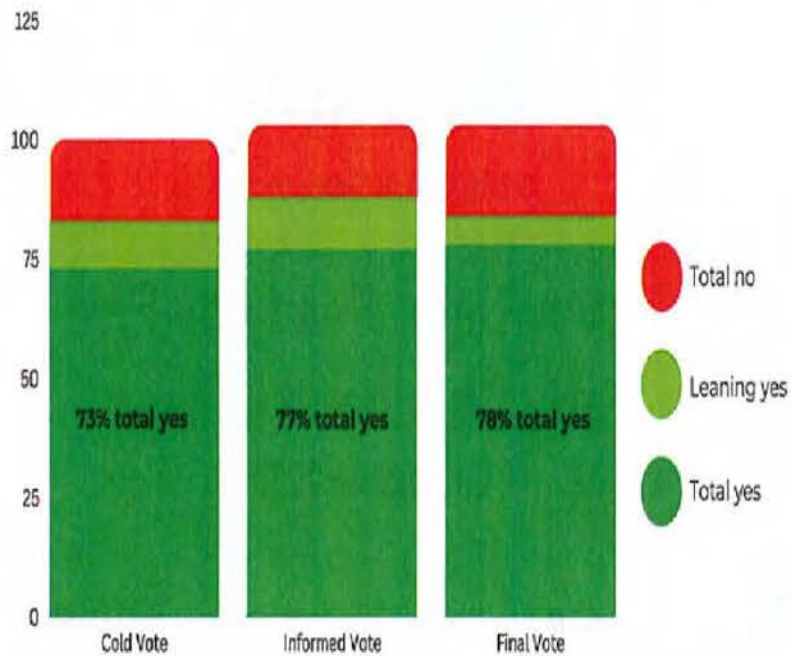
BYRUM & FISK
ADVOCACY COMMUNICATIONS

1

Methodology

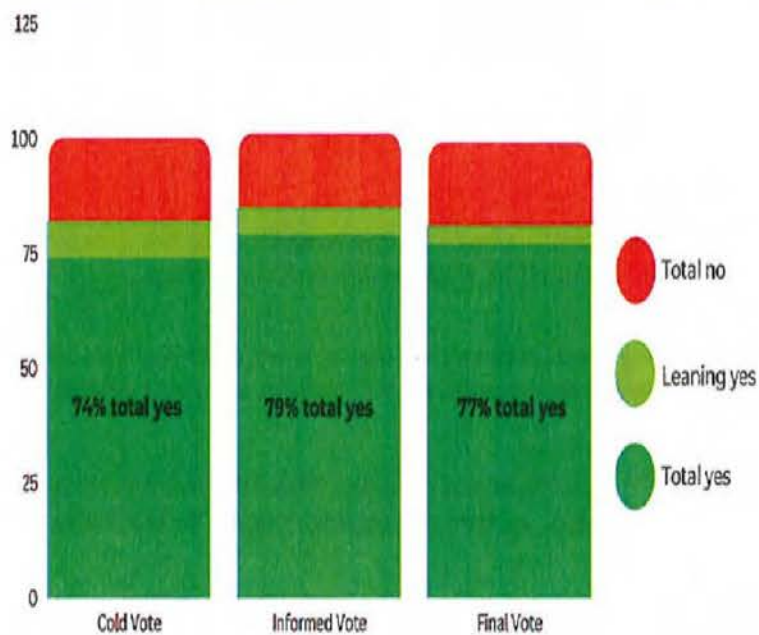
- Two 300 sample live operator telephone interviews were conducted from Aug. 19-Aug. 28, 2023.
 - One survey screened for active and likely voters that would be at least "likely" to vote in the August 2024 election. (margin of error +/- 6.2 points, 60% cell phone-only completes)
 - One survey screened for active and likely voters that would be at least "likely" to vote in the November 2024 election. (margin of error +/- 6.2 points, 70% cell phone-only completes)
- The sampling frame was designed to represent anticipated voter turnout, and was further stratified by geography, age and gender, respective to each of the election tests.

Vote Progression – November 2024



3

Vote Progression – August 2024



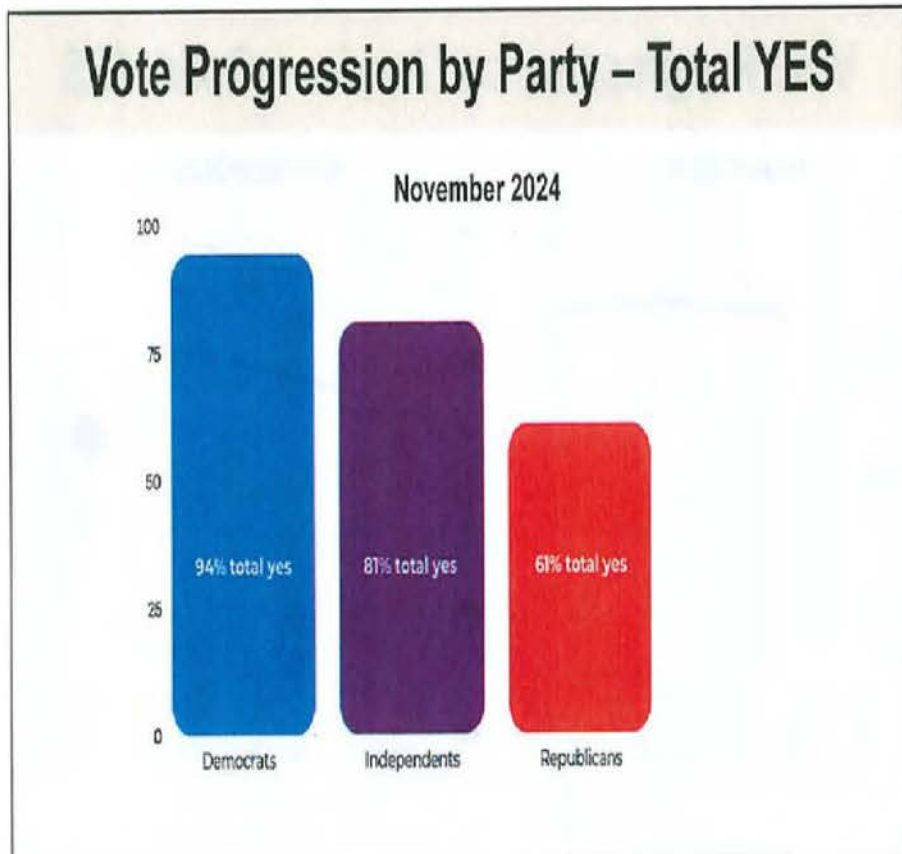
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Vote Progression Overview – Solid YES

	Cold Vote	Informed Vote	Final Vote
August	66%	73%	73%
November	63%	66%	72%

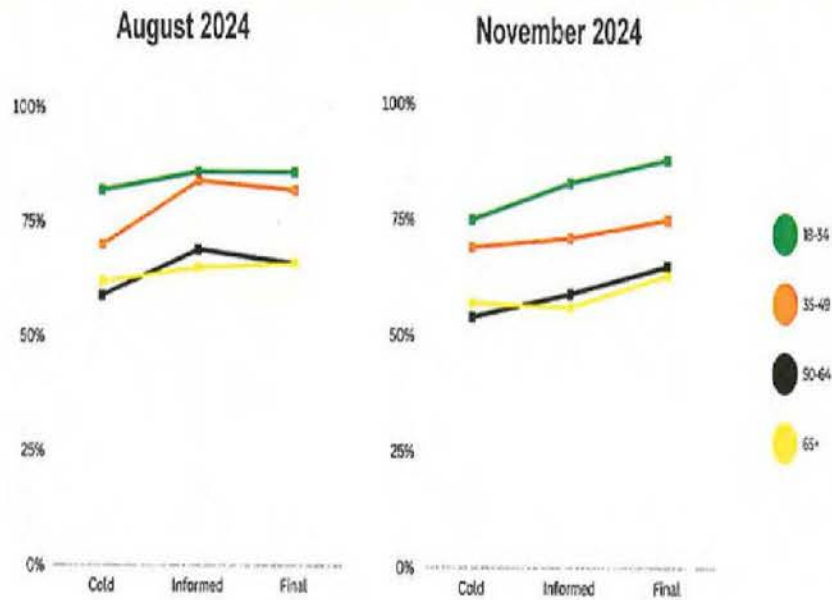
5

Vote Progression by Party – Total YES



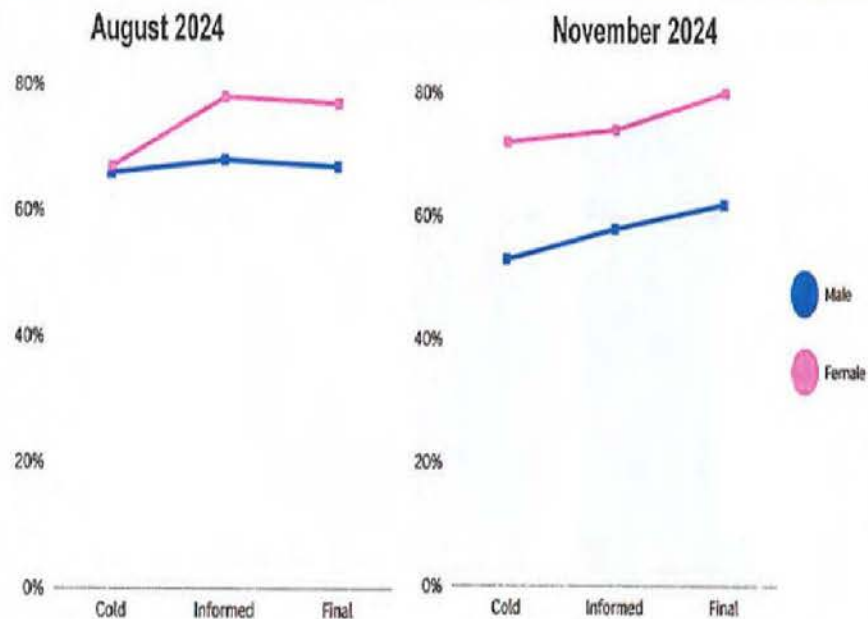
6

Vote Progression by Age – Solid YES



7

Vote Progression by Gender – Solid YES



8

Vote Progression Geography – Solid YES

August	Cold Vote	Informed Vote	Final Vote
City of Grand Rapids	68%	77%	74%
Outer Grand Rapids	73%	77%	76%
Out County	59%	68%	68%

November	Cold Vote	Informed Vote	Final Vote
City of Grand Rapids	70%	73%	80%
Outer Grand Rapids	61%	66%	72%
Out County	60%	63%	65%

Attachment F

From: Kathryn Carpenter <kathryne.carpenter95@gmail.com>
Subject: Support Ready by 5 Expansion
Date: September 20, 2023 at 11:44:47 AM EDT
To: Kristofer.pachla@kentcountymi.gov

CAUTION: This email was sent from an external source. Please do not open suspicious links or attachments.

Dear Commissioner Pachla,

I am a resident of your district and I am very concerned about the lack of affordable, quality child care in our county.

I urge you to **allow Kent County voters the opportunity to vote on an expanded Ready by Five Millage**, specifically to support Early Care and Education (ECE) providers through:

- 1.
2. **Investing in the talent pipeline**
3. to sustain and strengthen the local child care workforce, which will increase the options for quality services for families and improve outcomes for children
- 4.
- 5.
6. **Help families navigate child care**
7. so they can find what works for them and maximize any programs and support for which they are
8. eligible.
- 9.
- 10.
11. **Support child care business owners**
12. so they can maintain and potentially grow their businesses and focus their resources on providing quality care.
- 13.
- 14.
15. **Work with all types of providers**
16. – including informal caregivers – to improve the quality of care provided, particularly in diverse
17. and rural communities where data show quality can be most inconsistent.
- 18.
- 19.
20. **Invest in innovative initiatives**
21. that respond to the needs of young children and their families to ensure services are accessible
22. and high quality.
- 23.

I am proud to live in a community that takes action to solve its own problems. The creation of our Ready by 5 Millage, the first of its kind in Michigan, is an example and model for our state. Innovative, successful local models that implement the kinds of proposed programming above, like the [Hands Connected program](#), have been built and supported with the help of this millage. These things are proof that our community has the imagination and commitment to take action for the well-being of our residents.

I urge you to give voters the opportunity in 2024 to expand the Kent County Ready by Five millage for these purposes and so support the flourishing of our children, families, educators, businesses, and community.

Sincerely,

Katie Carpenter, LLMSW
Community Engagement & Co-Sponsor Developer, Refugee Resettlement
Bethany Christian Services of Michigan
Pronouns: she, her, hers

From: Carla Fortuna <carla@thegredc.org>
Subject: Support Ready by 5 Expansion
Date: October 2, 2023 at 9:05:08 PM EDT
To: Kristofer.pachla@kentcountymi.gov

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Dear Mr. Pachla,

Good evening! My name is Carla Fortuna and I am a resident of your district, a parent of three sons ages 3, 6, and 8, and an early childhood educator. I am writing in support of expanding the Ready by 5 millage to reach additional programming, including the childcare (school) in which I work for.

As an early childhood educator and professional and mom to three young children, I have both managed a waitlist in the hundreds and waited 2+ years for my own child to be enrolled in a high quality care setting. Access and affordability make finding quality care an issue for many families. The struggle is real.

I urge you to **allow Kent County voters the opportunity to vote on an expanded Ready by Five Millage**, specifically to support Early Care and Education (ECE) providers through:

- 1.
2. **Investing in the talent pipeline**
3. to sustain and strengthen the local child care workforce, which will increase the options for quality services for families and improve outcomes for children
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I urge you to give voters the opportunity in 2024 to expand the Kent County Ready by Five millage for these purposes and so support the flourishing of our children, families, educators, businesses, and community.

Sincerely,

--

Carla Fortuna
Director of Programs
Grand Rapids Early Discovery Center
carla@thegredc.org
(616) 459-0110
thegredc.org



From: Bob Sadowski <bsadow26@gmail.com>
Subject: Child Care Crisis
Date: September 15, 2023 at 10:15:52 AM EDT
To: Kristofer.pachla@kentcountymi.gov

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Dear Commissioner Pachla,

I am an organizational leader at the Cathedral of Saint Andrew in Grand Rapids, and live in your district. I know many younger couples across the area who have a hard time locating or affording child care. Furthermore, I just finished reading about a study released by the U.S. chamber of commerce finding that Michigan is losing almost \$2.9 billion in economic activity due to the problems of inadequate childcare. If you have not already read the study, you can find a report on it here: <https://www.craigslist.com/news/workforce/report-finds-michigans-child-care-shortage-costs-economy-2-9b-annually/>

I write today to urge you to **propose ballot language that expands the Kent County Ready by Five Millage**, specifically to support early childhood education (ECE) providers through:

1. **Navigation services for child care professionals**, center directors and home providers, helping them access local, state and federal funding and navigate the grant application process.
2. **Convenient and affordable training and certification** of an age, race and culturally diverse pool of early childhood providers
3. **Programs that recruit and support home providers** of all backgrounds, with help to set up and maintain their business, as well as mentoring from experienced providers on how to be successful.

I am proud to live in a community that takes action to solve its own problems. The creation of our Ready by 5 Millage, the first of its kind in Michigan, is an example and model for our state. Innovative local models that implement the kinds of proposed programming above, like the [Hands Connected program](#), already exist here. These things are proof that our community has the imagination and commitment to take action for the well-being of our residents.

Providers focused on 0-3 years old are a critical part of our ECE structure and must be the focus of a millage expansion. Finding quality ECE that is affordable is one of the biggest challenges for families and a key to quality early childhood development. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local ECE workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so child care business owners can spend their time on quality care and education, and help families navigate child care resources.

I urge you to propose ballot language that expands the Kent County Ready by Five millage for these purposes and so supports the flourishing of our children, families, educators, businesses, and community.

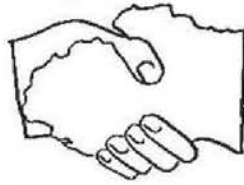
Sincerely,

Bob Sadowski

1511 Sylvan Ave. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Together



West Michigan

1224 Davis Ave. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
616-710-1431
www.organizewmi.com

August 30th, 2023

Dear Mr. Vanderberg,

On behalf of Together West Michigan (TWM), we write today to express our organization's strong support for renewing and expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage.

The primary focus of expanding this millage must be child care. Finding quality care that is affordable is one of the biggest challenges for families and a key to quality early childhood development. With an expansion of the millage, we can help grow the local child care workforce, streamline and reduce costs of back-end services so child care business owners can spend their time on quality care, and help families navigate child care resources.

Together West Michigan's childcare team convened as a result of the stories we heard during our three month listening campaign in spring of 2022. In our small-group conversations with over 1300 people from across Kent County, we heard many parents talk about the shortage of childcare options for their young children, and those that existed were unaffordable. As a result, parents were sharing childcare duties in addition to full time employment, leaving the workplace and putting children in situations they knew were unsafe in order to continue supporting their families. These heartbreaking stories motivated our 18-institution coalition to pursue the issue of childcare in Grand Rapids and investigate what could be done to create better opportunities for young children and families in our area.

We have conducted more than 30 research action meetings, convening with stakeholders from all levels of the childcare system - parents, teachers, center directors, home providers, community advocates, nonprofit leaders and more - in order to better understand the childcare ecosystem and what challenges exist. Although each person we met with was unique and had

their own story to tell, we distilled these 30 meetings into [a gap analysis with five themes](#) that we believe are most relevant and actionable. These are highly aligned with the proposed use of expanded Ready By 5 Millage Funds.

We especially support funding for:

1. **Navigation services for child care professionals**, center directors and home providers, helping them access local, state and federal funding and navigate the grant application process.
2. **Convenient and affordable training and certification** of an age, race and culturally diverse pool of early childhood providers
3. **Programs that recruit and support home providers** of all backgrounds, with help to set up and maintain their business, as well as mentoring from experienced providers on how to be successful.

Renewal of the current millage is key as well. Early childhood development resources impact future success, and research shows us how a strong foundation increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for Kent County children and families. Studies have shown:

- A dollar invested in early childhood development saves at least \$6 down the road in reduced costs for health care, education, and prisons.
- Quality early childhood programs improve high school graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior and interactions with law enforcement.
- Adults with strong early childhood development are more likely to be in the workforce and be better parents to their own children.

Please join us in expanding the Kent County Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage for the benefit of our entire community.

Sincerely,

Meghan Vandermale and Wendy Wenner

Co-chairs, Together West Michigan Child Care Team

From: Matthew Watrous <mattwatrous@gmail.com>
Subject: Support Ready by 5 Expansion
Date: September 17, 2023 at 2:53:47 PM EDT
To: Kristofer.pachla@kentcountymi.gov

CAUTION: This email was sent from an external source. Please do not open suspicious links or attachments.

Dear Commissioner Pachla,

I am a resident of your district (1512 Fisk Rd), and like so many others, I am concerned about the lack of affordable, quality child care in our county. I hear from communities across the midwest that this is one of the most urgent issues facing families as members of our workforce, as well as our employers who need these workers. The good news is that we can do something about the issue here, now!

I urge you to **allow Kent County voters the opportunity to vote on an expanded Ready by Five Millage**, specifically to support Early Care and Education (ECE) providers through:

- 1.
2. **Investing in the talent pipeline**
3. to sustain and strengthen the local child care workforce, which will increase the options for quality services for families and improve outcomes for children
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6. **Help families navigate child care**
7. so they can find what works for them and maximize any programs and support for
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11. **Support child care business owners**
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15. **Work with all types of providers**
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- 18.
- 19.
20. **Invest in innovative initiatives**
21. that respond to the needs of young children and their families to ensure services
22. are accessible and high quality.
- 23.

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I urge you to give voters the opportunity in 2024 to expand the Kent County Ready by Five millage for these purposes and so support the flourishing of our children, families, educators, businesses, and community.

Sincerely,

Matt Watrous

From: Andrew Young <andrwyng@gmail.com>
Subject: Support Ready by 5 Expansion
Date: October 1, 2023 at 8:17:04 PM EDT
To: Kristofer.pachla@kentcountymi.gov

CAUTION: This email was sent from an external source. Please do not open suspicious links or attachments.

Dear Kris -

I am a resident of your district, and I am very concerned about the lack of affordable, quality child care in our county.

My daughter, Lucy, was well over 1 yr old before she was accepted into a local daycare, and thus allowing my wife and I to return to work.

I urge you to **allow Kent County voters the opportunity to vote on an expanded Ready by Five Millage**, specifically to support Early Care and Education (ECE) providers through:

- 1.
2. **Investing**
3. **in the talent pipeline**
4. to sustain and strengthen the local child care workforce, which will increase the options for quality services for families and improve outcomes for children
- 5.
- 6.
7. **Help**
8. **families navigate child care so**
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- 11.
12. **Support**
13. **child care business owners**
14. so they can maintain and potentially grow their businesses and focus their resources on providing quality care.
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- 20.
- 21.
22. **Invest**

23. **in innovative initiatives** that

24. respond to the needs of young children and their families to ensure services are accessible and high quality.

25.

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I urge you to give voters the opportunity in 2024 to expand the Kent County Ready by Five millage for these purposes and so support the flourishing of our children, families, educators, businesses, and community.

Sincerely,

Andrew Young, Eastown Resident



Office of the Administrator
County Administration Bldg.
300 Monroe Ave N.W.
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-2206

accesskent.com