



Getting our children Ready for School

a community report to Holland/Zeeland





Dear Holland/Zeeland Community Member,

Each fall approximately 2,000 children experience their first day of kindergarten in classrooms throughout the Holland/Zeeland area. In September 2009 over 1600 children were tested in nine Holland/Zeeland area school districts and over half, 57%, tested not ready for kindergarten.

Ready for School is a broad based initiative representing all sectors in the community to ensure that every child from birth enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. The immediate goal of Ready for School is to increase entering kindergartners testing ready to 75% by 2013.

Children born today are the workforce of 2030. These infants and toddlers are the joy of our lives, but also the future leaders of our community and the talented workforce that will fuel our local economy in 20 years. Ready for School is committed to their success.

Ready for School is founded on a unique, highly relational approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities of early education and programming. We are committed to aligning and expanding existing resources and creating a community culture embraced by all which values and invests in the success of every child.

In one year, over 140 community leaders have actively engaged in designing, supporting and overseeing the Ready for School initiative. The Community Foundation of Holland/Zeeland Area was the catalyst to this effort, but it is now clearly “owned” by all those who are participating. There is consensus that the model must be data driven, engage all sectors of the community, utilize sound business principles, and have measurable community impact.

We have a significant problem, we have significant community engagement and we have significant hope. Our community’s future success will be directly tied to the success of Ready for School.

Sincerely,

Bruce Los

*Ready for School, Chair
Readiness Council*

Pat VerDuin

Ready for School, Coordinator

75% The goal of Ready for School is to have 75% of kindergartners testing ready by 2013

What does it mean to be “ready for school”?

Being Ready for School begins at birth. Advances in neurological science clearly document the rapid and patterned brain development in young children. They are hardwired to learn from before birth and early learning provides the foundation for higher levels of learning down the road. 90% of the architecture of the brain is built before age 4 serving as the foundation for language, social behavior, problem solving and emotional health.

The test used by schools in the Holland/Zeeland area to assess school readiness is the DIBELS Assessment (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and is administered to all kindergarten students within the first four weeks of school. Parents often wonder what attributes determine kindergarten readiness. In cooperation with Ready for School, local school districts have embraced the following to determine whether a child is ready:

Socially and Emotionally Prepared

- Relates well with adults and caregivers
- Follows directions
- Communicates needs and wants
- Takes turns, shares and plays well with others

Healthy and Active

- Good general health and nutrition
- Uses crayons, buttons and zippers
- Can run, kick balls and climb on playground equipment
- Uses the toilet and washes hands

Enthusiastic and Curious

- Likes to try new activities
- Asks questions
- Can pay attention during activities
- Follows simple directions
- Can listen and sit still

Speaking and Listening

- Familiar with the letters of the alphabet
- Can spell and write their name
- Recognizes rhyming words
- Enjoys books and understands a story

Counting and Recognizing Shapes

- Counts up to 10 objects
- Recognizes primary colors like blue, yellow, red,
- Knows shapes like circle, triangle, square

“I am grateful to my father for inspiring me to get an education. He allowed me to dream and hope for things that were never within his grasp.”

– Pat Sosa-VerDuin, Ready for School Coordinator

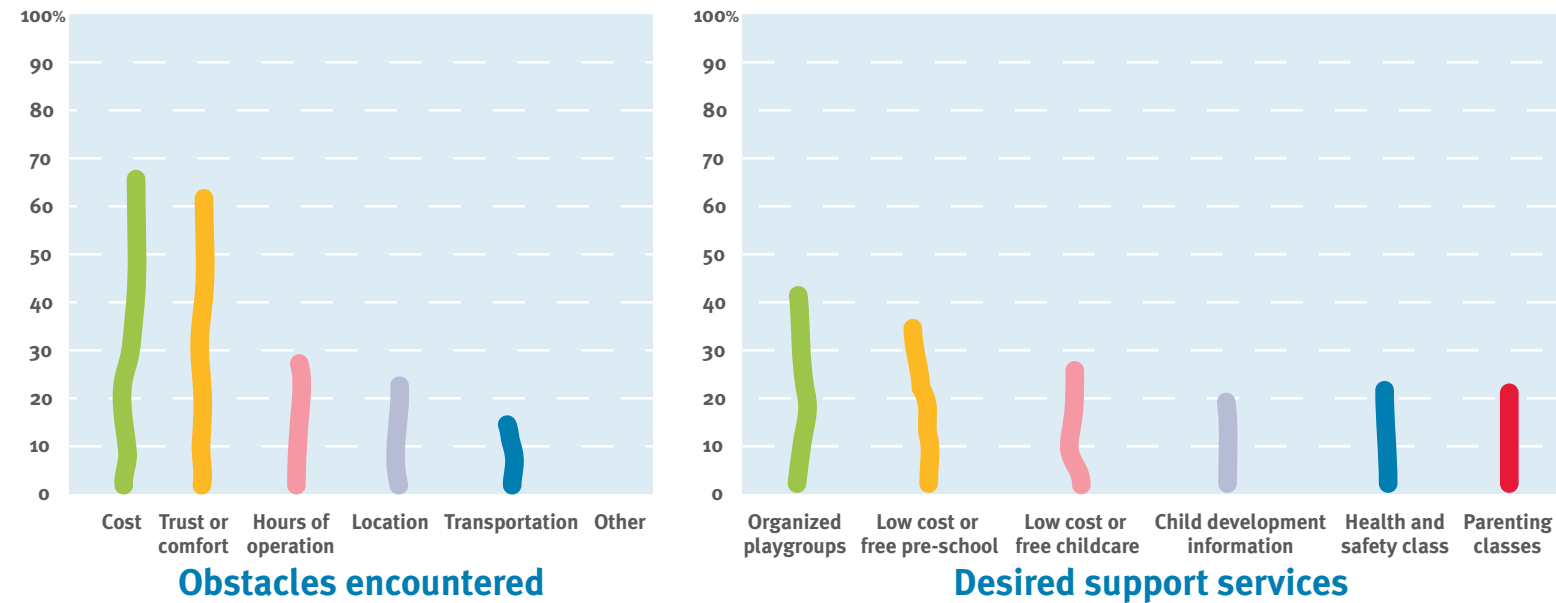
What do parents in our community want?

Parents of entering kindergartners also received a short survey to complete. The survey focused on questions related to their child's childcare history and early childhood programs. The parents were asked what they needed to improve childcare and early childhood programs and obstacles they encountered in finding and securing early childhood services.

Some parents were pleased with the childcare options they found but others reported difficulties. The most often

reported obstacles were cost, trust, hours of operation, location and transportation.

Many of the parents surveyed desired more play groups in their neighborhood, low-cost or free pre-school options, parenting classes and more information on child development, health and safety.



“The success of our community is dependent upon the relationship between the schools and the community.”

– Brian Davis, Superintendent of Holland Public Schools

“We found that we made too much to qualify for assistance but couldn't afford the cost without some assistance.” ”

– Holland/Zeeland parent

“Information about activities for younger kids and the preschool programs is not always made available easily. I knew about it because of older children. I have friends who knew nothing of the programs until I told them.” ”

– Holland/Zeeland parent

Many of the parents surveyed cited a need for more play groups in their neighborhood.





Participating organizations are working toward a common goal and each can link parents with the help and information they need.

How will Ready for School address the needs of the community?

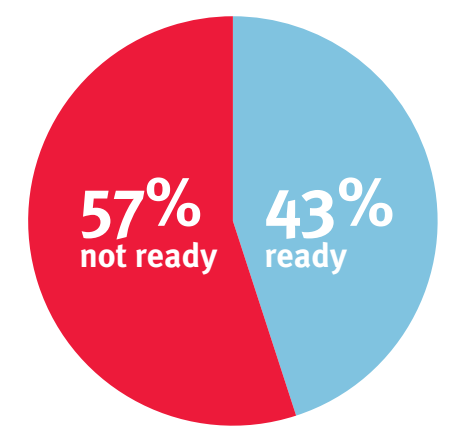
By engaging parents, friends, relatives and care providers through partnerships with trusted institutions like health care, employers, schools, churches, government agencies and non-profits. Ready for School seeks to pull together existing resources so that all participating organizations are working toward a common goal and each can link parents with the help and information they need. For instance, Ready for School wants to ensure that all medical professionals understand the community resources available for their patient families, that churches can provide parent educators for members and neighbors, and human resource departments can offer information to help employees provide for the needs of their children.

By enhancing existing early childcare and education programming with the establishment of local standards, the certification of quality preschools, center-based childcare programs, and by offering affordable credentialing, professional development and certification opportunities for caregivers.

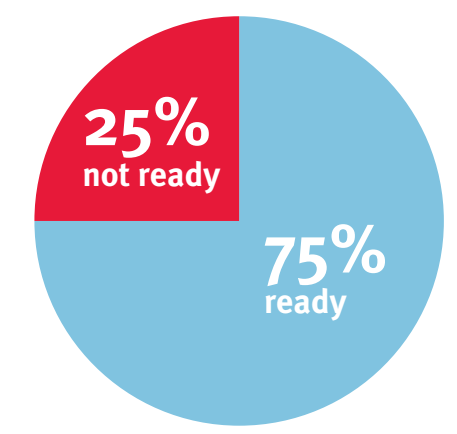
By expanding the quality, availability and affordability of early care and education reducing the obstacles to preferred services identified by the parent survey. This could include increasing quality care and education providers in neighborhoods that are under served, providing grant subsidies to centers that offer low-cost or sliding fee scales and working to expand hours of service for childcare.

“I believe that quality educational opportunities in both public and parochial settings provide the cornerstone for developing a community that offers a high quality of life for its residents and subsequently attracts and retains individuals and companies within these communities.”

– James Bishop, Sr. Vice President Bank of Holland



Fall 2009



Goal 2013

What progress has been made?

In little more than a year, Ready for School and its volunteers have taken significant steps in response to community needs.


- Four additional schools joined the initiative in 2009 for a total of 9 Holland/Zeeland school districts participating in DIBELS testing.
- Twelve companies impacting more than 7,000 employees are supporting Ready for School through participating on the Employer's Task Force.
- The Medical Task Force developed a referral process for parents of newborns to access Ready for School resources through the Ottawa County Health Department.
- The Faith Task Force in partnerships with area churches has trained 14 Parent Educators able to work side-by-side with parents helping them help their children develop the needed skills.
- Preschool Directors/Administrators Roundtable was developed to encourage collaboration and enhance the quality of the services. Professional development was provided to 170 preschool educators.
- Ready for School awarded grants based on the obstacles reported in the parent survey to eight local organizations to aid efforts to expand early learning opportunities.
- Volunteer partnerships have grown to hundreds of members representing the Holland/Zeeland community.

“I am convinced that the sustainability of our community depends on the success of our children. It is critical that developmental windows of opportunities be maximized through supports to parents and all those who care for young children.”

– Janet DeYoung, Executive Director of the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area

Participating School Districts

Black River Public School	Holland Christian Schools	West Ottawa Public Schools
Corpus Christi Catholic School	Holland Public Schools	Zeeland Christian School
Eagle Crest Charter Academy	Vanderbilt Charter Academy	Zeeland Public Schools



Ready for School and its volunteers have taken significant steps in response to community needs.



Many people wait until a child is 4 years old before they begin thinking about getting their child ready for school.

Ready for School thanks the following businesses for their sponsorship:



FAIRLY PAINLESS ADVERTISING



How do I get involved?

If you are interested in Ready for School and would like to be involved, please send an e-mail to info@readyforschool.org

“My children were raised in a home overflowing with reading materials, trips to the library and lots of lap-time for sharing books and reading. My dream is for all pre-schoolers to have that!”

– Nancy Miller, Professor Emerita of Education Hope College and volunteer

Will my child be ready?

Many people wait until a child is 4 years old before they begin thinking about getting that child ready for school. If you have a child 0-3 or know someone who could benefit from help, please use this contact information. The education and support offered is valuable regardless of age, socio-economic or educational status and church affiliation or attendance is not required.

Contact: Good Samaritan Ministries Program Coordinator
513 E. 8th Street, Suite 25, Holland, MI 49423
616-392-7159 • e-mail: goodsam2@goodsamministries.com

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Ready for School Coordinator



Ready for School donation form

If you are interested in donating to Ready for School please fill out the donor slip below or visit www.cfhz.org and click the “donate” tab for a credit card donation. Please specify the Ready for School Fund under “special instructions” or in the memo section of your check.

Make Checks Payable to: Community Foundation Holland/Zeeland, 70 W. 8th Street, Suite 100, Holland, MI 49423

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