



2011

Report to the Community



ission

Ready for School is a broadly based Holland/Zeeland/Hamilton initiative ensuring that every child enters kindergarten prepared to succeed.

We do this by:

- Engaging and Informing Parents about the role they play as teachers in the first years of their child's development.
- Enhancing Existing Programming by partnering with preschool and day care providers through opportunities for professional development and access to effective research-based teaching methods and learning tools.
- Expanding Early Learning Opportunities by removing barriers that may discourage participation.

Greetings to Our Community

Since inception in 2008, the Ready for School initiative has marked each year with significant growth. This past year was no exception. In 2011, we established ourselves as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, expanded our service area to include the neighboring community of Hamilton, and secured a \$398,894 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. This grant in combination with a successful match from our community's individuals, businesses and foundations enabled us to expand our early education initiative, furthering our goal to ensure that all children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.

In 2011, **more than 200 volunteers contributed 8,423 hours, impacting 9,683 children** through direct or indirect services. The impact we are having in our community is due in no small part to all sectors working together to mobilize our community toward a better future through the improved education of our youngest members.

When the initiative began, less than half of our children were coming to school prepared. To hold ourselves accountable for measurable results, our community goal is to have 75% of our children ready by 2015. This past fall, **62% of our children were ready – up from 55%** the previous year. A recent report by the Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation finds that every child in Michigan who enters kindergarten prepared yields a savings of more than \$39,000. Based on this research, the 7% uptick in our community represents approximately \$4.5 million in savings.

We are honored to be the stewards of the community's gifts and passions for early education. We'd like to thank our community for creating a culture that enables an initiative like Ready for School to succeed. We'd like to thank the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area for their vision in being a catalyst for this initiative and for their continued support as we transitioned to an independent agency. Finally, we'd like to thank our board, donors and community volunteers for their many combined contributions.

It will take the entire community to get our kids ready for school. We are encouraged by the progress we have made and trust you feel the same.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Los".

Bruce Los
President, Board of Directors

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia Sosa VerDuin".

Patricia Sosa VerDuin
Executive Director, Ready for School

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Sonja Trent-Brown
Hope College

Vonnie VanderZwaag
Ottawa Area Intermediate
School District

Glenn Vos
Holland Christian Schools

Amy Ziel
Macatawa Bank



Engaging and
Informing Parents

Healthy Beginnings

In April of 2011, Ready for School launched Healthy Beginnings as an initiative of the Health Care Task Force. This program is an access-to-health partnership with Intercare Community Health Network and Holland Community Health Center. Providing care for an estimated 2,000 children ages 0–5, these clinics were chosen because the demographics of the families they serve match those of children who are entering kindergarten not ready for school. Assuring that parents and healthcare providers are working together will contribute to improved health, wellness and school readiness.

The goals for this project are to:

- Ensure that at-risk children have a medical home
- Improve the healthcare for children 0–5 years old



“The Ready For School Healthy Beginnings program has impacted over 1600 children and families in the Holland/Zeeland area and the program continues to grow. With a 12% increase in up-to-date immunization rates, a 2.7% increase in well child appointment rates, and a 2.3% decrease in no-show rates, the Healthy Beginnings program represents a remarkable investment in our community and the future of our children.”

Dr. Sonja Trent-Brown
Assistant Professor of Psychology, Hope College



“Data from the Ottawa County 2012 Community Health Assessment clearly demonstrates that there is a relationship between health outcomes and income and education. The County supports programs like Healthy Beginnings that are focused on prevention understanding that if we intervene in the early years we will preserve the health and well-being of our community later on.”

Lisa Stefanovsky
Health Officer of Ottawa County Health Department
and Co-chair of Ready for School Health Care Task Force



Kinder Camp

Last fall, Ready for School hosted Kinder Camp within four kindergarten classrooms located in opportunity zones. This four-day kindergarten orientation is designed to familiarize children and parents with teachers and school routines prior to the first day of kindergarten, thereby easing the transition to school. Ready for School contracts with the Outdoor Discovery Center to develop the curriculum and run the program in the schools. This past year, 90 children participated in this program, up from 30 in 2010.



"This is a wonderful opportunity for my son to meet the other kids in his class and understand the basic expectations and rules of the teachers."

Parent of Kinder Camper

"Oh my goodness! This was a wonderful experience for working through nervous jitters, the class getting to know me a little as well as learning the layout of our school without having other children around"

Kindergarten Teacher

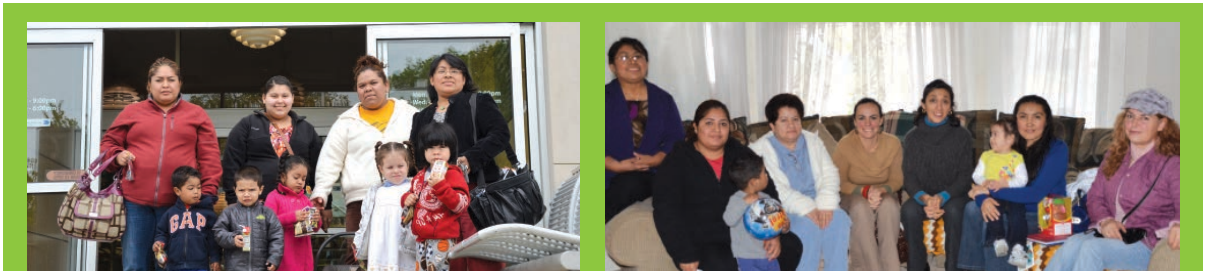
"Children entering a school setting for the first time can be totally overwhelmed with the physical structures, the social encounters with other students and the expectations of adults and peers alike. The Outdoor Discovery Center staff engages students in outdoor nature related activities freeing up the classroom teachers to make observations as well as do some assessing."

Ruth Cronk, Educator, Outdoor Discover Center
and Co-chair of the Preschool and Child Care Task Force



Community Outreach and Education

The biggest challenge facing Ready for School is connecting with the most at-risk families. We know we must meet them where they are and build trust within their neighborhood. Ready for School staff and volunteers participated in nine community events in 2011 and spent time in “opportunity zones,” neighborhoods where the greatest numbers of children coming to school not ready reside. Within these neighborhoods we have established Ambassadors of Education, a network of parents who are willing to share information on readiness with their families, friends and neighbors. Through the connections of ambassadors, we host monthly parent meetings in opportunity zones where we share information on the parent’s role as their child’s first and most important teacher, readiness expectations and available resources. Out of these connections two new community playgroups sprouted and three mothers enrolled in classes to receive their CDA (Child Development Associate).



“I’ve had a great response from the community and have realized how diverse our city really is! I have met people who have settled here from all over the world, and the dream is always the same for everyone: a great education for their children. I’ve met people from India, Burma, Mexico, Central America, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Laos, Korea, and Russia. I am glad when I meet parents with a great interest in our program and the activities we promote. I can see their enthusiasm to get their children ready for school.”

Febe Gomez, Community Outreach Coordinator, Ready for School





Playgroups

In our annual parent survey, parents requested playgroups as the most desired service for their neighborhood. In partnership with the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District, we added four new Play 'n Learn Literacy Playgroups.

Raising Awareness

MARKETING

In order to communicate the importance of early education and the role of parents as their child's first and most important teachers, we implemented a broad-based communication plan which included the development and distribution of:

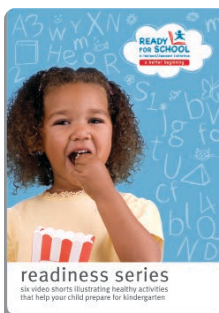
- A video series on play, literacy, sleep, nutrition and family time
- Bookmarks outlining kindergarten readiness criteria
- Calendars highlighting area events and activities for families and communicating early education information
- Informational posters
- Informational billboards

According to a parent survey, awareness of the Ready for School brand by parents of incoming kindergartners has increased from 18% in 2010 to 30% in 2011. Additionally, logo recognition has increased from 16% to 35%.

VIDEO PRODUCTION

Ready for School, in partnership with Hope College, has created a series of videos on play, literacy, sleep, nutrition and family time. The videos were distributed to community service agencies, preschool and child care providers and physicians, and are available to parents and community members on our website.

To celebrate the release of the series, we hosted a premiere at the Knickerbocker Theater on October 18, 2011. Over 100 area community members gathered for the viewing and to celebrate the progress of the Ready for School initiative. Produced and directed by Professor Choonghee Han of Hope College with the assistance of his students, the series of short videos was filmed at various Holland and Zeeland landmarks.



Employers

The Employer Task Force is made up of a network of 20+ employers working to promote the Ready for School initiative, the local school readiness data, and the importance of supporting early childhood development through their professional networks. At our annual breakfast on December 6, 2011, Ready for School announced the new “Employer of the Year” award which was presented to two area businesses. The award recognizes organizations that exemplify how a company can advance the work and awareness of Ready for School by promoting early education to their employees and connecting new parents to information.

THE 2011 EMPLOYERS OF THE YEAR ARE:

500 EMPLOYEES OR LESS



“PADNOS has always been a strong supporter of education from early childhood to higher learning. By partnering with Ready for School to connect employees with early childhood information and resources we feel we are providing a benefit to both our current and future employees.”

Mitch Padnos, PADNOS

500 EMPLOYEES OR MORE



“Johnson Controls – Meadowbrook is honored to receive the Ready for School Employer of the Year award. We were excited to partner with Maplewood ECC with the thought that it would be a great opportunity for us to give back to the community and help the students. We have since learned that each of our volunteers has personally benefited from working with these children. We look forward to continuing this important relationship.”

Rick Osmun, Johnson Controls, Inc



Enhancing Existing Programming

Professional Development

One of the key objectives of Ready for School is to enhance existing programming. We do this by offering preschool and child care providers opportunities for professional development and access to effective research-based teaching methods and learning tools. In 2011, Ready for School provided nine training opportunities for 352 professionals. Additionally, 10 early childhood professional scholarships were granted.



“We know that in order to improve school readiness it is critical that we engage both center-based and home-based caregivers, and provide them with information and support. If we are to enhance the quality of the experiences children receive, we must work to continually expand the knowledge and skills of the individuals who teach and nurture them.”

Barb DePree, Co-chair of Preschool and Child Care Task Force



Building Bridges

Building Bridges is a series of professional development workshops connecting kindergarten teachers with preschool and child care professionals to deliver applicable lesson plans and resources that will help prepare our children for kindergarten.

The Building Bridges workshops are designed and instructed by a Kindergarten Cadre of hand-selected, outstanding kindergarten teachers. This collaboration helps build relationships between the preschool and kindergarten professionals, thereby raising the professional knowledge and expectations of the preschool teachers. The overarching goal of the program is to build a successful transitional bridge between the preschools and the kindergartens that ensures every child enters kindergarten ready to succeed.



Expanding Early Learning Opportunities

Tuition Assistance

A quality preschool experience is beneficial for the future of our children and our society. However, the average cost of preschool tuition in our community is \$500 per semester or \$1,000 per year. This is more than many families can afford. Ready for School has been offering preschool tuition assistance to deserving families since 2008. In 2011, 81 children benefited from a preschool experience in 15 area preschools through this program.

“We feel very fortunate that our son has been able to attend preschool, which is due largely in part to the tuition assistance from Ready for School. We see so much growth in our son since starting school. His academic and social skills have improved greatly. He absolutely loves going to school and as parents, we love seeing his enthusiasm and excitement for learning. We feel very confident that by the time he goes to kindergarten he will be prepared and ready to excel in the classroom.”

Parents of Preschooler

Revenue and Expenses

2011 SOURCES OF FUNDING (\$749,885)



2011 EXPENDITURES (\$583,422)



2011 Support

INDIVIDUAL & FAMILY SUPPORT

Anonymous
 Thomas and Sharon Arendshorst
 Jud and Kirby Bradford
 The Brooks Family
 Jim and Martie Bultman
 Tom and Susan Bylsma
 Brian Davis
 Tom and Susan Den Herder Family
 Bob and Collette DeNooyer
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 Joseph and Susan Strazanac
 Jim and Carol Stroop
 Tamsin Troff
 Laurie Van Ark
 Ken and Pat VerDuin
 C. Lynn and Mary Vincent
 Brian and Colleen Walker
 Jack and Mary Westrate
 Ellen Westveer
 Boyd and Sara Wilson
 Marcus and Amy Ziel
 Richard and Jill Zuker
 Women Who Care

CORPORATE & FOUNDATION SUPPORT

Baird Foundation Inc.
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 Edify North
 Fairly Painless Advertising*
 Frey Foundation

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 ODL, Inc.
 Ottawa Area Intermediate School District
 PADNOS
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*Contributed 2011 Report to the Community design services

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