

ENGAGE
ENEXINF
HANCEO
PANDRM

a better beginning



GREETINGS TO OUR COMMUNITY

In 2015 Ready for School continued to build momentum to prepare children for success by equipping parents through the integrated support of our community partners.

Holding community kindergarten readiness gains at 62%, Ready for School was asked by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to share its community model with other early childhood programs in Michigan. Such interest in the community initiative has resulted in Ready for School being awarded its third WKKF grant. This \$1.1 million 3-year grant in combination with our community's individuals, businesses, and foundations - enabled us to continue to expand our early childhood impact and to evaluate the community's early childhood endeavors.

One of the critical focuses of this third WKKF grant is to support the evaluation of Ready for School efforts to increase the number of children entering school ready to learn. In 2015, Ready for School took on into a strategic review to reflect on the past five years and to give tactical direction to the years to come.

Playing a significant role in the past five plus years of the initiative was founding director, Pat Sosa VerDuin who, in July of 2015, transitioned her work from our future leaders to developing current community leaders. The Board of Directors commended Pat on her excellent leadership and welcomed Donna Lowry, MD as Pres/CEO at mid-year. Pat ended her time stating, "Donna and the Board of Directors will confidently create conditions that will assure an equitable and promising future where all children will thrive."

Going into its fifth year as a nonprofit, the community's early childhood commitment has built amazing momentum for Ready for School. This momentum enabled it to continue ENGAGING the community in the importance of the early years, ENHANCING existing early childhood programming, and EXPANDING opportunities for early learning. Let's keep building momentum together!




Bruce Los
Chair, Board of Directors




Donna LB Lowry
President/CEO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Click the boxes below to learn more!

**WHO
WE ARE**

OUR STORY

**WHAT
WE DO**

ENGAGE AND INFORM
ENHANCE
EXPAND

**WHY WE
DO IT**

THE EVIDENCE

**HOW WE
DO IT**

COMMUNITY
LEADERSHIP
DONORS



WHO WE ARE

...less than half of our community's children were ready for school when they entered kindergarten at age five. In response to the critical need to address this challenge, the Ready for School initiative was launched.

MISSION

To **PREPARE CHILDREN** for success by **EQUIPPING PARENTS** through the **INTEGRATED SUPPORT** of the Holland, Zeeland, and Hamilton communities.



THE VISION

To create communities of readiness where all children thrive and reach their full unique potential.

GOAL

To have at least 75% of our community's children ready to enter school.

THE STORY

In late 2007, in a meeting hosted by the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area involving approximately 100 community stakeholders, early childhood education was recognized as the single-most important challenge facing our present and future development. At that time, less than half of our community's children were ready for school when they entered kindergarten at age five. In response to the critical need to address this challenge, the Ready for School initiative was launched.



SCAN WITH LAYAR



WHAT WE DO

The work of Ready for School and its partners is strategically divided into three concentrations, each with working groups that lead action in the space. The three focus areas are: **ENGAGE AND INFORM, ENHANCE AND EXPAND.**

ENGAGE & INFORM

Utilizing data, we target where need is greatest in our community through grassroots community outreach and broad-based, targeted marketing to ENGAGE the community and INFORM them on what it means to be ready for school and to support with resources to assist with readiness.

PARENTS FIRST

Why: Parents are a child's first and most important teachers.

60% OF PARENTS SAID THAT FAMILY, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS ARE THEIR LEADING SOURCE FOR INFORMATION ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND PARENTING.

-Ready for School 2015 parent survey.

What: Ready for School comes along side parents, sharing valuable information on child development and available resources.

How: Ready for School uses broad based, targeted marketing along with grass roots efforts to connect directly with families.

Confianza- In Spanish, Confinaza refers to a mutual trust and reciprocity. Ready for School works to establish confianza with parents, empowering and supporting their roles in their child's development.

Impact: The 2015 strategic evaluative review sited Ready for School's impact in being a hub for parents of diverse backgrounds looking for early education information.

The Ready for School brand is recognized by parents as a trusted resource to support their exploration of early childhood in the Holland, Zeeland and Hamilton communities.

AWARENESS OF THE READY FOR SCHOOL LOGO HAS INCREASED FROM 16% IN 2010 TO 70% IN 2015.

-Ready for School 2015 parent survey.

SUMMER LUNCH PROGRAM

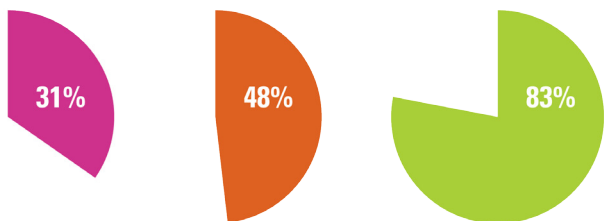
Why: Nutrition plays a great role in the health and development of our children. Well-fed kids have fewer developmental problems and are healthier overall, allowing them to have the focus and energy necessary to learn (National Institute of Health [NIH]).

What: The free USDA Summer Lunch Program is a community partnership that ensures our community's children who receive free or reduced lunch throughout the school year still receive needed nourishment and learning opportunities throughout the summer months.

How: In June of 2015, Leisure Estates hosted Ready for School and other community partners to provide a safe, welcoming, and educational space for children 18 and younger to receive a free lunch Monday–Friday. Ready for School ambassadors, volunteers, and community partners distributed lunches, provided educational activities, and connected with caregivers about the opportunities and resources available to them. To further ensure children received the nourishment they needed, Kids Food Basket provided sack suppers for children to take with them each day.

Impact: From early June to mid August, over 5,300 meals were provided in addition to educational activities and family support. The success of this partnership will continue again at Leisure Estates in 2016, and has inspired expansion of this model with other community partners throughout the Holland/Zeeland communities.

COMMUNITY GAINS: HOLDING WHEN IT COUNTS



The number of children in our community who qualify for free or reduced lunch (FRL) continues to increase. In 2015, just shy of half of the children entering kindergarten in the Holland, Zeeland and Hamilton community qualified for FRL, with some schools in our community reaching up to 83% of kindergarteners who qualified.

Free and Reduced Lunch is one indicator of a child's socioeconomic status and many reports show an association between low SES and school readiness.

ENHANCE

By partnering with early childhood professionals, we work to ENHANCE EXISTING PROGRAMMING through opportunities for professional development, open communication channels, and access to effective research-based teaching methods and learning tools.

ROUNDTABLES

Why: Early childhood educators and care providers play a critical role in preparing our future leaders.

What: Ready for School hosts monthly roundtables for home-based childcare providers and center directors, offering opportunities for networking, professional development, and a space to share best practices.

How: Monthly meetings are lead from within the groups themselves with support from Ready for School. The providers and directors discuss updates and changes in the education landscape, host training opportunities to support quality educational offerings, and share best practices.

Impact: Highlights of the 2015 roundtables included learning how to administer the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to better work with parents to pinpoint developmental progress and catch delays paving the way for meaningful next steps. Directors also toured each other's facilities to share best practices and valuable curriculum, taking their peer-to-peer learning to the next level.

“48% OF PARENTS IDENTIFY TRUST AS ONE OF THE LEADING OBSTACLES TO OBTAINING CHILDCARE,”

-Ready for School 2015 parent survey.

In addition, both groups discussed self-assessment through Michigan Great Start to Quality. These ratings provide a comprehensive way for parents to find a quality early education experience that they can trust.

“[READY FOR SCHOOL] HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROFESSIONALIZATION AND INCREASED QUALITY OF CARE FOR HOME- AND CENTER-BASED CHILDCARE WORKERS THROUGH ITS EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS, ITS ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS, AND ITS PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN CARE PROVIDERS, PRESCHOOL TEACHERS, AND KINDERGARTNER TEACHERS.”

-Mullins Consulting, In Ready for School Strategic Review

PARTNERSHIPS

Ready for School has been made possible through the integrated support of the community, and that collaborative spirit was only made stronger in 2015. As new partners lend their expertise to creating a community of readiness every day, the future for our youngest leaders grows brighter.

Good Samaritan Ministries



Good Samaritan Ministries and Ready for School partnered in 2015 to provide an educational opportunity for the children of parents who were participating in Circles, a national program that brings together people of diverse incomes in an effort to help low-income individuals and families achieve their financial goals. In Circles, volunteers, organizations, and businesses come together to create an environment that educates, empowers, and equips families to work their way out of poverty. Weekly evidence based lessons for the children were inspired by the topics the parents were discussing so that the families could learn together.

Health Care Providers



Reach Out and Read (ROR) is an international program promoting early literacy and school readiness by partnering with health care providers to prescribe books and encourage reading together. In the fall of 2012, Ready for School introduced ROR to the lakeshore funding nine sites at the full cost of the program. In 2015, healthcare practices received funding from Ready for School at 50% of the cost, taking on the remaining cost themselves and providing a statement to their commitment to the program. Thank you to over 50 providers in these practices: Lakeshore Health Partners, Internal Medicine and Pediatrics; Lakeshore Health Partners, South Washington Family Medicine, Lakeshore Health Partners, Zeeland; Lakewood Family Medicine, Holland Pediatrics, Holland Community Health Center; Spectrum Health Medical Group, Zeeland Physicians; Spectrum Health Medical Group, Lakewood Pediatrics.

The children of the Holland/Zeeland/Hamilton communities would not be as ready for kindergarten without all of the hard work from our many partners in the community including but not limited to the Herrick District Library, Pillar Church, St. Francis de Sales, Intersection Ministries, Hand2Hand, Neighbors Plus, Holland Museum, Department of Health and Human Services, Great Start Collaborative, Hope College, and thirteen partnership schools.

EXPAND

We evaluate the early childhood landscape to gain strategic direction, working to eliminate obstacles and fill gaps that make it difficult for children to be school ready by EXPANDING opportunities for early learning.

START SCHOOL READY

Why: For many children, the summer months are typically not rich with educational experiences and if they have had a preschool experience, a portion of what they gained is lost during the summer.

What: Start School Ready is a pre-kindergarten summer intensive learning experience for children who will benefit from additional opportunities to socialize in a classroom environment while receiving a solid foundation of early literacy skills.

How: Start School Ready ran in the summer of 2015 as a six-week, half-day program in partnership with local Great Start Readiness Programs (GSRP), local Head Start Programs, and local school districts. The program took place in two Holland opportunity zones, Maplewood ECC in Midtown and Rose Park School to the north.

Start School utilized a literacy rich curriculum that integrated play and parent involvement in the child's learning experience. Additionally, a speech enhancement, Ready Set Talk, was part of the student experience where there was extra need. With the support of Mead Johnson, students received sturdy kindergarten sized backpacks with an outfit and school supplies customized to each child's needs.

Impact: Start School Ready 2015 was able to serve over 50 soon-to-be kindergarteners who had been identified as being not quite ready. By the end of the summer, these children were not only more ready for school, but their caregivers were more confident about kindergarten readiness and together they were excited for their next big experience.

LONGITUDINAL STUDIES INDICATE THAT THE EFFECTS OF SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS ENDURE FOR AT LEAST TWO YEARS AFTER PARTICIPATION.

- "Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning," RAND Corporation 2011.

PRESCHOOL ACCESS

Why: Universal high-quality pre-K has some of the most rigorous evidence for any educational investment of having a high bang for the buck in providing benefits not only for the former participants, but broader benefits for national, state, and local economies. (Bartik, Timothy J. 2015. "From Preschool to Prosperity: The Economic Payoff to Early Childhood Education.")

What: Ready for School addresses the leading obstacles that families face in obtaining a high-quality preschool experience for their children.

67% OF PARENTS SAID COST WAS THEIR LEADING OBSTACLE TO FINDING CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS. -Ready for School 2015 parent survey.

How: Ready for School partners with local, state, and federally funded preschool programs to help families find the best preschool experience based on their individual needs. Side-by-side with Ready for School, parents are supported as they explore preschool opportunities. With a unified community application, Ready for School and other preschool champions can help our community's families navigate the dynamic landscape of early childhood education.

Impact: In 2015, 416 children received community-based Ready for School tuition assistance, with another 163 being referred to Head Start and Great Start Readiness Programs. Additionally, a new sliding scale approach to scholarships made community dollars go further.

TO DATE, READY FOR SCHOOL HAS INVESTED OVER

1 MILLION DOLLARS

IN PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN WHO OTHERWISE MAY NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY.



SCAN WITH LAYAR



WHY WE DO IT

When community stakeholders decided that it was not OK that less than half of our children were entering kindergarten ready to succeed and that something had to be done, they were making that decision based on their heads and hearts. Supporting early education not only gives our youngest children a chance to reach their full potential, but it gives our future leaders and economy a significant boost. Supporting early education is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing.

“Ready for School is a model for how **COMMUNITIES CAN COME TOGETHER** to ensure every child is **READY TO SUCCEED** when they enter kindergarten. It is a **CATALYST FOR CHANGE** thanks to its data-driven approach that brings together education, community and business leaders to help kids”

-Kevin Stotts, President, Talent 2025

EARLY EXPERIENCES SHAPE THE BRAIN

THE EVIDENCE



Science: The architecture of the brain is built in the first 2000 days of a child's life.



ROI: Return of Investment is \$7 for every \$1 invested in pre-k education. Michigan one-child readiness dividend of \$47,000.



Education: An early education helps to provide improved k-12 performance, increased graduation rates, and students who are more likely to pursue post-high school education.



Workforce: A higher education creates a more prepared workforce with improved soft skills.



Health: Education improves overall health outcomes.



Crime: A better educated population has reduced crime rates.



Economy: Higher educated individuals receive increased earning as adults and increased tax revenues, helping to decrease the demand on social services.

SINCE 2010 **494** MORE OF OUR COMMUNITY'S CHILDREN HAVE ENTERED KINDERGARTEN READY.

\$23 MILLION EARLY CHILDHOOD DIVIDEND

To learn more about the ROI of early childhood, visit www.readyforschool.org.



HOW WE DO



READY FOR SCHOOL PREPARES CHILDREN FOR SUCCESS BY EQUIPPING PARENTS THROUGH INTEGRATED SUPPORT OF THE HOLLAND, ZEELAND, AND HAMILTON COMMUNITIES.

The work of preparing our youngest children for success in school and life requires the full support of the community. This initiative benefits from the collaboration of many amazing community partners who believe in the mission of Ready for School. Critical to this work is the leadership of devoted board members who give their time (lots of their

LEADERSHIP



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CAL DEKUIPER
Zeeland Public Schools

BARB FERGUSON*
Hamilton Community Schools

**not pictured*

In 2015, the Ready for School board devoted substantial time to the leadership of the organization. Some key focuses of the year:

Strategic Review: After working toward our goal of 75% readiness for the past five years, we've been able to increase from 55% to 62% and hold steady, warranting celebration and review. To ensure the work we are doing has the greatest ability to help more children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed, Ready for School underwent a strategic review. Two expert teams in evaluation, Mulling Consulting out of Munsee, Indiana, and FSG out of Seattle, Washington, led the review focusing on three key questions:

1. What outcomes have we achieved that indicate movement toward the 75% readiness goal?
2. How should we best collaborate in the community?
3. What can best support us in moving toward the goal of 75%?

Internal and external stakeholder review helped to inform the process, and the outcomes provide direction for how we work.

Inclusion and Diversity: Diversity and inclusion are at the heart of Ready for School's work to ensure the community is meeting the needs of all of its youngest members. This year the board and staff developed a plan that ensures ongoing diversity and inclusion efforts and continuous learning to support and reflect the diverse fabric of our community.



THANK YOU FOR INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY

The readiness gains made in our community could not be achieved without the generous contributions of the individuals, families, corporations and foundations that support the work of Ready for School. Your dollars are working hard to prepare our youngest community members for success.

INDIVIDUAL & FAMILY SUPPORT

Thomas and Sharon Arendshorst
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The Bank of Holland
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan
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Charter House Innovations
CHS, Inc.
City Flats Hotel
Classis Holland Christian Reformed Church
Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area
Consumers Energy Co.
Cranes In The City
Crown Motors
Elzinga & Volkers
Enviro-Clean Services, Inc.
Forerunner Freight Systems, Inc.
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Landscape Design Services
Lemonjello's Coffee
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Metal Flow Corporation
Midwest Construction Group
Orange Leaf
ODL, Inc.

PADNOS
Peachwave of Holland
Perrigo Company Charitable Foundation
Plascore, Inc.
Primera Plastics
Robert DeNooyer Chevrolet, Inc.
Ronald McDonald House Charities of Outstate MI
Shoreline Container, Inc.
Slikkers Foundation
SoundOff Signal
Techno-Coat, Inc.
Teddy's Transport
The 8th Street Grille
The City Delicatessen
Trans-Matic
Uniform Color Company
Worksighted
Zeeland Lumber Supply



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FINANCIALS



2015 SOURCES OF FUNDING

\$1,001,437*

70% Foundations

11% Individuals

19% Corporations

* This total does not include the full amount of the multi-year WKKF grant that was awarded within the 2015 fiscal year, that has funds restricted for use in subsequent fiscal reporting periods (through March 2018).



2015 EXPENDITURES

\$957,791

79% Programs & Services

17% Management & General

4% Fundraising

**“AN INVESTMENT IN
KNOWLEDGE PAYS THE
BEST DIVIDENDS.”**

-Benjamin Franklin



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