Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative

Strategic Plan 2026-2029



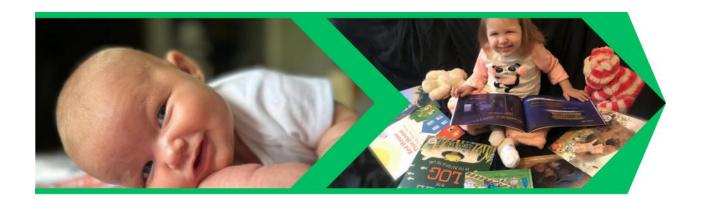


Mission: To develop a seamless system of care that utilizes community resources and supports to help our families access the tools needed to provide a healthy start for all children birth to kindergarten entry.

Vision: All children in Montcalm County have the opportunity to be healthy, eager, and prepared to succeed in school and life.

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"The simplest act of how we PRAISE our children has a SIGNIFICANT IMPACT on their SUCCESS and FULFILLMENT in life" "Unknown

Letter to the Community

Montcalm County Community Members,

Early Childhood continues to grow and evolve, especially in Montcalm County. From higher quality preschool opportunities to changes in organizational policy, young children must continue to remain at the forefront of our community's priorities.

We know that research shows us that early childhood; birth through age five is a critical time in the development of a child's brain. Early experiences matter. We know high quality programming is essential in building children's brains to be successful in school and life. We also know that this is why investment in early childhood has such a high rate of return. For every dollar we invest in a young child, we see at least a seven-dollar return. Simply stated, early childhood is a smart investment.

The Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative (MCGSC) has been working for the last ten years to build a seamless system for all our young children and their families. The MCGSC continues to build access and advocate for affordable high quality early care, education and other services in Montcalm County. The MCGSC and Family Coalition continue to advocate for these efforts to ensure we are supporting all our young children and families in Montcalm County.

Deliberate efforts to support parents as leaders in our community will always be a priority in our work. This updated strategic plan is our commitment to Montcalm County. As leaders in Montcalm County, MCGSC members continue to use the strategic planning process to develop an Action Agenda that will support our community work for the next three years.

We hope that this Strategic Plan helps to show our road map for our future efforts as we work toward our goal that every child in Montcalm County has the opportunity to be healthy, eager and ready to succeed in school and life! We always welcome others to join our efforts. Visit our website www.GreatStartMontcalm.org to be connected!

Sincerely,

Cari O'Connor MCGSC Director

ari O'Connor

MCGSC Executive Summary

Mission: To develop a seamless system of care that utilizes community resources and supports to help our families access the tools needed to provide a healthy start for all children birth to kindergarten entry.

Vision: All children in Montcalm County have the opportunity to be healthy, eager, and prepared to succeed in school and life.

In 2008, Montcalm Area Intermediate School District was awarded a grant opportunity through the Early Childhood Investment Corporation to begin work ensuring that every child is healthy, ready, and eager to succeed in kindergarten and life. Parent voice has always been a vital component in our Early Childhood system to achieve our community's full potential. From birth, a child's brain developed at an alarming rate. We know that early experiences matter. Therefore, Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative is working to create a community that ensures a great start for every child.

The Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative is a partnership of community leaders, business owners, charitable and faith-based organizations, health and human service agencies, educators, and parents that come together to promote awareness and advocate for Early Childhood issue MCGSC addresses factors that influence school readiness; and planning and coordinating community services.

Great Start, in Michigan's statewide system, continues to work in a coordinated and integrated manner. In 2011, Governor Rick Snyder created the Office of Great Start within the Michigan Department of Education. This office was charged with coordination and collaboration of Michigan's investments in children from birth to age eight. Governor Snyder set four outcomes to guide the Early Childhood work in Michigan and its local communities:

- Children are born healthy.
- Children are healthy, thriving, and developmentally on track from birth to third grade.
- Children developmentally ready to succeed in school at the time of school entry; and
- Children prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

The Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative and Family Coalition were established to bring local insight to assure a coordinated service delivery system and high-quality programming for young children and their families. Parent leadership is a strong component of the work, to better understand the needs in our community for children and families. Parent voice is a great asset in our efforts to create a seamless system of care for all children. Parents are their child's first and best teacher!

Since 2014-15 over three years, the MCGSC assessed local strengths and areas for improvement needed to support Montcalm County families. This assessment process reviewed data from multiple sources at

the community, county and state level. This strategic, data-based process resulted in the development of an updated long-term plan that drives our annual work and will continue to guide our local work for the next three years. This work is directly aligned with the State of Michigan Early Childhood Outcomes and is intended to bring results that address Montcalm County's needs and gaps.

The first five years of a child's life are some of the most critical brain-building years and essential for healthy development. The programs and systems that serve young children in Montcalm County often face persistence under investment. In the State of Michigan work has started to gain positive results around the complexity of Early Childhood funding as well as addressing barriers in an uncoordinated state system. MiLEAP's intentions are to support equity and address challenges that are most acutely felt by children and families that are lacking opportunity.

The MCGSC is committed to developing a seamless system that utilizes community resources and supports families to have access to tools needed to provide a healthy start for all children. Our system will ultimately achieve better outcomes for children and their families if we all work together to support young children. The Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative and Family Coalition will lead the local effort to ensure that every child has the opportunity to be healthy, eager, and prepared to succeed in school and in life.

Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative 2026-2029 Action Agenda Summary

Goal 1: Advance health equities for young children.

Objective 1: Build a strong local system that supports families and children through quality programs and initiatives.

Action Strategies:

- Local community activities to promote weekly developmental resources for families (gross motor, communications, sensory, etc.).
- Create tools to increase awareness, access, and availability to develop resources for children, parents, providers, and community stakeholders.
- Identify, facilitate, and coordinate access to Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) developmental screening resource for children and families.
- Promotion of local health resources through websites and social media.
- Host annual Community Baby Shower.
- Promote dental homes and dental resources at local community events.
- Conduct quarterly WIC clinic connection activities (resources and barrier reduction).
- Partner with local organizations to promote access to healthy lifestyle choice:

Goal 2: Coordinate community resources to ensure equable access.

Objective 1: Build community resource sharing opportunities.

Action Strategies:

- Continue Play, Learn, and Read activities in four local communities (year-round).
- Publish Family Coalition newsletter with Strengthening Families Protective Factors focus.
- Promote GSTQ with parents and providers to support quality childcare opportunities.
- Partner with Montcalm County service providers in building social emotional skills and practices (Conscious Discipline).
- Facilitate Conscious Discipline project in partnership with Western Regional Resource Center (childcare target).
- Convene childcare summit in partnership with two community partners.
- Regional Childcare action team partnership.
- Facilitate with community partners to provide professional learning around trauma and selfcare.

Goal 3: Children prenatal to age five and their families thrive.

Objective 1: Collaborate with local, state, and federal partners to address the needs of Montcalm County families and children.

Action Strategies:

- Continue Preschool Matters Campaign to promote the universal preschool implementation.
- Support childcare sustainability and capacity building through Regional Childcare Hub and Western Region Resource Center partnerships.
- Lead Early Childhood data driven discission and discussions in Montcalm County.
- Partner with (Montcalm Prevention Collaborative) medication take back
- Promote inclusion opportunities within preschool settings.
- Support data driven decision making in:
 - Publish Dolly Parton
 Imagination Library annual report.
 - Publish annual Status of Young Child report.

- resources on gardening, canning, and food storage education activities.
- West Michigan Perinatal Alliance participation and promotion.
- Maintain Welcome Baby (universal access) new parent supports.
- Coordinate kindergarten readiness tools: Math in The Mail and Talking is Teaching calendar project, target age 0-3.
- Strengthen We Care for Kids partnership with parent voice.
- Continue to build social media platforms and technology-based opportunities to increase access to literacy: website and social media.

Objective 2: Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative will play a vital role in building local Early Childhood capacity.

Action Strategies:

- Build, maintain, and promote Family Coalition to support capacity building efforts.
- Maintain and distribute community resource tool in coordination with 211 promotions.
- Recruit parents to participate in local community events (7 districts) to distribute resource and referral information at summer community events.
- Facilitate parent leadership support activities to increase opportunities that support Montcalm County parents as leaders.
- Promote maternal depression materials with families of newborns through partnerships in the community.
- Maintain leadership role at Montcalm Human Service Coalition.
- Continue Montcalm Prevention Collaborative partnership.

Objective 2: Identify, facilitate, and coordinate access to address barriers.

Action Strategies:

- Provide education and information about community resources available to Montcalm County families in partnership with all 7 local school districts and food pantry networks.
- Promote Joint Recruitment to ensure three- and four-year-olds have free preschool access.
- Facilitate Welcome Baby project partnership with Corewell Health
- Promote 211 resources
- Facilitate monthly legislative update for Montcalm County community members (local, state, and federal representatives).
- Maintain and support Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

Objective 3: Build Talking is Teaching into everyday activities for families, caregivers, and service providers.

Action Strategies:

- Promote resource development of appropriate emergent literacy experiences: create new Talking is Teaching tool (one per quarter).
- Continue Talking is Teaching County wide campaign: social media, websites, and resource development.
- Continue Talking is Teaching presentations to service providers (1 per quarter).
- Support Great Start Readiness Program, EightCAP Early Head Start, Head Start, and Early On programming with Talking is Teaching implementation needs.
- Continue to build social media platforms and technology-based opportunities to increase access to literacy: website and social media.

Objective 2: Maintain an effective Great Start Collaborative that engages constituents as early childhood leaders in Montcalm County.

Action Strategies:

- Conduct parent engagement & recruitment activities in all local communities.
- Engage MCGSC members to advocate for access and equality for Montcalm County families at state networks.
- Immerse early childhood messaging (every child is healthy, safe, and eager to learn) into Montcalm County community activities.
- Maintain GSC website to support as the early childhood resource tool in Montcalm County.
- Publish annual Community Preschool Report.
- Publish annual Kindergarten Readiness report.
- Convene School Advisory Council quarterly with parent voice to support ongoing program quality implementation.

Objective 3: Increase equitable access to high quality literacy programs and resources for 0-5 population.

Action Strategies:

- Maintain the fiscal health of DPIL for Montcalm County Families.
- DPIL will continue to serve a minimum of 1200 children, ages 0-5 children.
- Conduct DPIL promotion and enrollment activities throughout Montcalm County.

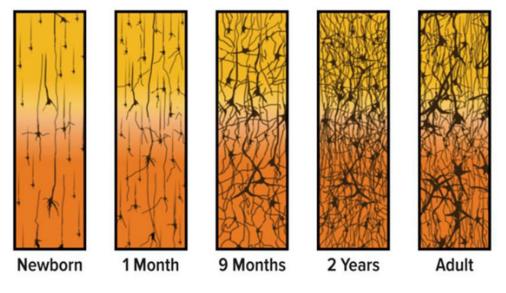


Why Great Start Matters

The Human Brain

We know more than ever before of the importance of early childhood experiences. The early years of a child's life are very important for later health and development. One of the main reasons is how fast the brain grows starting before birth and continuing into early childhood. The Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University confirms that there is significant development happening in the first five years of life. Those first years of life are the period in which there is the most rapid proliferation of new neural connections with more than one million new connections every second (it was previously estimated at 700-1,000). The multitude of connections forms the foundation for all the learning, behavior, and physical and mental health that will follow. Knowing this, we must intentionally put effort into early learning well before children enter school. Early experiences in all areas of a child's life establish intellectual and social skills that will profoundly influence their success in school and later in adult life.





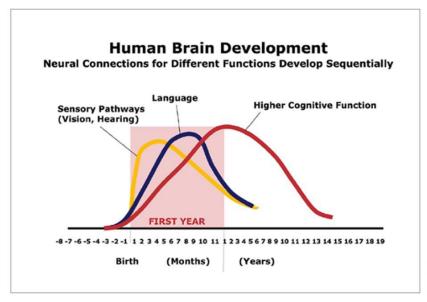
Neuron Growth & Connections Over Time

Source: Corel, JL. The postnatal development of the human cerebal cortex. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1975

Research has also shown us when important skill sets are optimally developed. Studies show that a great start begins before birth. Brain research demonstrates that the synapse formation for language and higher cognitive functioning is highly impacted during the first two years of life, before most families even consider formal education for their child. According to the CDC, how well a brain develops depends on many factors in addition to genes, such as:

- Proper nutrition starting in pregnancy
- Exposure to toxins or infections
- The child's experiences with other people and the world

Skill Set	Optimal Learning Period	Next Best
Emotional Intelligence	0-24 months	2-5 years
Motor Development	0-24 months	2-5 years
Visual Recognition	0-24 months	2-5 years
Early Sound Recognition	4-8 months	8 months – 5 years
Music	0-36 months	8 months – 5 years



Source: C.A. Nelson (2000). Credit: Center on the Developing Child

Nurturing and responsive care for the child's body and mind is the key to supporting healthy brain development. Positive or negative experiences can shape a child's development and can have lifelong effects. To nurture their child's body and mind, parents and caregivers need support and the right resources. The right care for children, starting before birth and continuing through childhood, ensures that the child's brain grows well and reaches its full potential.

The Effects of Neglect

According to the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, young children who experience significantly limited caregiver responsiveness may sustain a range of adverse physical and mental health consequences. It disrupts the ways in which children's brains develop and process information, thereby increasing the risk for attentional, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral disorders, stunting of physical growth, and significant risk for learning difficulties and poor school achievement.

Healthy Child

Front

Taggeral

Jobs

Back

Neglected At Risk Child

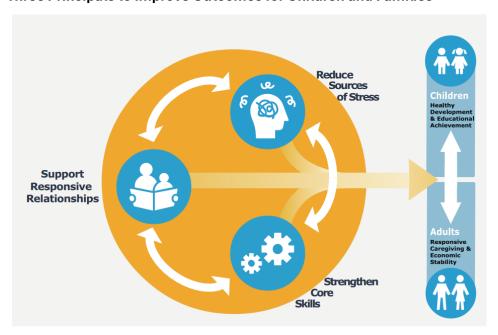
Front

Temporal

Back

Source: H.T. Chugani, Wayne State University: Newsweek Special Edition, 1997

Three Principals to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families



Source: Center on the Developing Child at Havard University (2021). Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families, 2021 Update.

Profile and History

The success of the Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative (MCGSC) is the direct result of years of effort, commitment, and interagency collaboration. A history of Early Childhood cooperation and involvement continues to generate a solid and lasting foundation for the MCGSC. This foundation has ensured that all children in Montcalm County have committed support to help them become healthy, eager, and prepared to succeed in school and in life.

Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative members include parents, public health, human services, community mental health administrators, k-12 system representatives, preschool representatives, childcare providers, charitable organizations, business leaders, faith-based leaders, elected and public officials, and other community leaders. These partners are all dedicated to ensuring and maintaining a quality Early Childhood system for the county.

Highlights and Accomplishments:

April 2007 – Montcalm County Human Services Coalition votes to apply for GSC grant.

April 2008 – Montcalm County was awarded the Great Start Collaborative Start up Grant.

May 2008 - Formal interagency agreements were signed.

June 2008 – Formation of the MCGSC Executive Committee with Operating Guidelines.

June 2008 – The Great Start Collaborative staffing needs identified.

September 2008 – The Montcalm Family Network successfully blended with the MCGSC.

October 2008 – MCGSC Communications Committee formed, public relations/outreach of the importance of Early Childhood supports and systems planning implemented.

October 2008 - The Parent Coalition of Montcalm County developed.

October 2008 - First Formal MCGSC meeting held.

December 2008 – The first Parent Coalition meeting was held.

January 2009 – The Parent Coalition forms two groups: East Side and West Side.

January - July 2009 - Three Strategic Planning process for MCGSC occurred. Plan approved.

July 2009 - First Early Childhood Celebration event held in Montcalm County.

January 2010 - Winter Wear Drive initiative to help support children's basic needs.

July 2010 – Parent Coalitions participate in summer celebrations throughout Montcalm County.

January 2011 – Great Start Parenting Video Supports launched.

March 2011 – Welcome Baby Program Launched in partnership with Spectrum United Lifestyles.

May 2011 - Star Power Day celebrated with Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley visit!

July 2011 - Backpack drive coordinated in partnership with faith-based community.

October 2011 - The MCGSC Director position merged with the Ionia County GSC.

May - October 2012 - Three-year Strategic Planning process for MCGSC. Plan approved.

June 2012- Early Childhood Learning County Wide Opportunities developed.

July 2012 - First Kindergarten Round Up surveys completed, and report distributed.

August 2012 - Early Childhood Celebration hosts elected officials with a large turnout.

September 2012 – MCGSC organized the Early Childhood Conference Planting the seeds for our future with 130 participants.

October 2012 - Countywide preschool waiting list and joint recruitment application implemented.

February 2013 – Partnership with Family Futures to launch the Connections Program in Montcalm County.

March 2013 – Dolly Parton Imagination Library program launched in Montcalm County with support of MCGSC and its Parent Coalition membership.

July 2013 - Love and Logic Parenting Classes launched.

October 2013 – MCGSC Launches 0-5 parent-child playgroups in partnership with EightCAP and Early On.

October 2013 – MCGSC takes on additional role of GSRP Advisory Board.

February 2014 – Parenthood Welcome Packet highlighting local resources distributed to all Labor and delivery contacts in Montcalm County.

March 2014 - Fatherhood Program Launched in Partnership with EightCAP.

February 2015 – Kindergarten transition guide launched.

June 2015 – Parent Coalition membership reaches 40 active members.

August 2015 – Kindergarten Round-Up Report and Great Start Readiness Report completed annually and distributed to the community.

January - July 2015 - Three-year Strategic Planning process for MCGSC occurred. Plan approved.

December 2015 – Joint Professional Development agreement implanted (as an annual event) with Early on and 0-5 Head Start Partners.

July 2016 - MAISD website updated to include Early Childhood information.

August 2016 - SNAP ED launched in 23 preschool classrooms.

September 2016 - Hair on Fire curriculum work with preschool teachers completed.

October 2016 – Funding cuts end Nurturing Fathers Program in Montcalm County.

January 2017 – Established formal partnership with Montcalm Prevention Collaborative.

February 2017 – Sustainability plan completed for Connections.

April 2017 – Collaborated to bring Melanie Potock, eating, and feeding disorder national speaker and author to support over 130 Early Childhood professional leaders and 25 families.

July 2017 – Connections family outreach for ASQ promotion: two YouTube videos produced and distributed.

August 2017 – Parent coalition strengthening family's assessment completed.

August 2017 – Community lending library supports available.

August 2017 – Playgroup opportunities increased from two to three locations throughout Montcalm County.

September 2017 – Connections family outreach increased to support over 120 children.

October 2017 – MY Town services initiative opens for services.

December 2017 – Trusted Advisory Grant, Parent University implemented.

January - July 2018 - Three-year Strategic Planning process for MCGSC occurred. Plan approved.

August 2018 – Trauma ACES data added to annual Kindergarten Round Up report.

March 2018 - Cosponsored Kindness Matters seminar 93 adults and children participated.

May 2018 – Hosted kindergarten and pre-kindergarten partnerships Essentials in Literacy training.

September 2018 - Early Childhood conference vendor fair with all time high (19 vendors).

September 2018 – Opened GSRP classroom with a blended focus model to support inclusion opportunities.

October 2018 – Music and Literacy trainings launched with emphasis on importance of brain building.

November 2018 - Smiles dental support for our GSRP and elementary schools implemented.

December 2018 – Updated Welcome Baby packets, implemented with our local hospital partners.

January 2019 – Begin PELI implementation and data integration for 21 classrooms.

January 2019 – Established MTSS system for PreK focus on literacy and social emotional development.

February 2019- Facilitated annual partnership with Alpha Family Services to host Tooth Fairy Dental Drive through Event.

April 2019 – Conducted annual Community Baby Shower via delivery and drop

April 2019 – Establish Greenville Area Community Foundation, Dolly Parton Imagination Library

Endowment Fund to sustain community literacy gift efforts

August 2019 – Increased playgroup opportunities from three to four locations.

November 2019 – Trusted Advisor Grant, Talking is Teaching implemented.

January 2020 – Evidence-based curriculum for Welcome Baby is established.

January 2020 – Collaborated with 0-5 Early Childhood service providers, to provide support to GSRP families.

February 2020 – Playgroup and Welcome Baby Evidence based curriculum review.

March 2020 - Trusted Advisor Grant, Talking is Teaching Community implemented.

May 2020- Conducted annual Community Drive through Baby Shower in Partnership with We Care for Kids Council

September 2020 - Annual Early Childhood Conference was held virtually for the first time! Ninety participants from 11 different counties.

March 2021 - Partner with United Way to raise over \$50,000 for local COVID relief, which results in the coordination of 51 Feeding America Food Trucks and 344,507 pounds of food provided to Montcalm County Families.

May 2021 - Conducted annual Community Baby Shower in Partnership with We Care for Kids Council

June 2021 – GACF childcare fund partnership established.

July 2021 – MCGSC website revamp for more family-friendly access.

November 2021 - State of Michigan Childcare Grant

December 2021 - Trusted Advisor Grant, Talking is Teaching Continued

January 2022 - Facilitated Greenville Area Community Foundation childcare grant funds

January – July 2022 - Three-year Strategic Planning process for MCGSC. Plan approved

February 2022 - Facilitated annual partnership with Alpha Family Services to host Tooth Fairy Dental Event.

April 2022 – Conducted annual Community Baby Shower in partnership with We Care for Kids Council

September 2022 – Hosted annual Early Childhood conference vendor fair

October 2022 – Partner with Alpha Family Services and United Way Montcalm-Ionia Counties and hosted a drive-through diaper drive

January 2023 – Created Talking is Teaching calendars and distributed 600 throughout Montcalm County

February 2023 - Facilitated annual partnership with Alpha Family Services to host Tooth Fairy Dental Event.

April 2023 - Conducted annual Community Baby Shower in partnership with We Care for Kids Council

June 2023 – Partner with Greenbriar Apartments and United Way Montcalm-Ionia Counties and hosted a drive-through diaper drive

August 2023 – First Ten Grant Implemented

September 2023 - Hosted annual Early Childhood conference vendor fair

September 2023 – Led Montcalm County Preschool Matters Campaign

October 2023 - Implemented First Ten, The Basics in Central Montcalm School District

October 2023 – Parent Coalition name changed to Family Coalition

November 2023 - Implemented Conscious Discipline Social Emotional Development tool

November 2024 - August 2025 - Hosted a four-part series Parent Café throughout Montcalm County

February 2024 – Facilitated annual partnership with Alpha Family Services to host Tooth Fairy Dental Event.

February 2024 – Facilitated 32p6 Talking is Teaching Campaign

April 2024 – Conducted annual Community Baby Shower in partnership with We Care for Kids Council

June 2024 – Family Coalition members participated in Goose Chase, that allowed families to be participate in a virtual scavenger hunt around the community.

August 2024 - Planned Early Childhood Summit for State of Michigan through MAISA membership

September 2024 – Facilitated a 0-3 trauma training with Dr. Stephanie Grant

November 2023 - May 2024 - Hosted a three-part series Parent Café at Greenbriar Apartments

October 2024 - October 2025 - Supported Western Regional Childcare Hub

January - July 2025 - Three-year Strategic Planning process for MCGSC. Plan approved

March 2025 - August 2025 - Facilitated three community breastfeeding support events.

February 2025 – Partner with Flat River Community Library to provide 600 new mom bags to Greenville Corewell Health Hospital.

April 2025 – Facilitated annual Community Baby Shower in partnership with We Care for Kids Council that included Tooth Fairy Dental component.

August 2025 - Supported Central Montcalm Learning Center childcare expansion efforts

The Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative continues to work hard at communicating the Early Childhood message to local and state government leaders. Our active participation with monthly state, federal and local legislative updates has provided an opportunity to further the understanding of our message. Parents attend the Legislative Lunches with our State Representative, State Senator, County Commissioners, and Federal Congressman. This has fostered positive relationships with local, state, and federal officials. Being receptive to the parent voice is an expected way of doing business in Montcalm County Early Childhood system.

The Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative keeps working relationships with both print and online media within the county. We maintain a website full of information for county residents interested in Early Childhood issues, events, and announcements. Social media specifically, Facebook, Instagram and

Remind 101, has also been an asset in connecting with community members to communicate our message. Our community calendar on our website is vital in supporting Early Childhood activities targeting parents.

The past three years have been an exciting time of growth for Early Childhood. MCGSC continues to work toward our mission through the priorities identified in three previous strategic plans. The MCGSC continuously supports community events, partner organizations and participates in communicating the importance of systematic Early Childhood changes that impact on our children in Montcalm County. Some of the events that the MCGSC engages regularly include local library events, community festivals, Family Fun Day, Montcalm County 4H Fair and all 7 Kindergarten Registration Events annually. Partners in this work include We Care for Kids Council, Montcalm Prevention Collaborative, Alpha Family Services, United Way Montcalm-Ionia County, Mid-Michigan District Health Department, Montcalm Human Service Coalition, Head Start Policy Council, and Advisory Council. This exposure continues to recruit new parent members and establishes new relationships with our ever-changing service providers.

In addition to local events, one of our latest accomplishments has been community baby shower activity annually. The focus on social-emotional health, play based learning, and trauma supports the MCGSC and MAISD initiatives of having a trauma informed community. We are proud to support and partner in meaningful ways to build a trauma informed community.

The Great Start Family Coalition members prepare and implement an annual plan for Family Coalition activities. Funding provided through the Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative offers resources to support the efforts of the Family Coalition. The Great Start Family Coalition collaborates with local businesses, foundations, and MCGSC board members to conduct community support identified by parents. Over 60% of our state collaborative grant is used to support parent leadership and engagement.

The Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative and Family Coalition continue to be full partners in furthering this Strategic Plan for Montcalm County, despite funding instability. This collaborative approach has helped to achieve great success in Montcalm County's Early Childhood system. With constant funding constraints, we have relied heavily on our community partners and parents to further the Early Childhood efforts in Montcalm County.



Community Needs and Strengths Assessment

After careful review of several Montcalm County specific data sets, Community Stakeholders identified the following critical community conditions affecting Great Start Goals and Objectives.

Process

In 2014-15, 2018, 2021 and again in 2025, the MCGSC utilized the ABLe Change Framework when gathering and evaluating data from our community. This framework was developed by Drs. Pennie Foster-Fishman and Erin Watson at Michigan State University. The ABLe Change Framework is a model designed to help communities more effectively address the significant social issues affecting children, youth, and families. The model is based upon the premise that communities can achieve transformative results when they make local system and community conditions the intentional targets of their change initiatives. Efforts also occur when they pursue the effective implementation of their efforts and when they build a community engagement infrastructure that supports real-time learning and action across diverse stakeholders and sectors. The work identified continues to be relevant and we recognize they are long-term priorities. We also recognized our capacity and funding limitations when choosing strategies to pursue.

Once data was collected, it was organized into manageable groups to begin evaluating. We used the ABLe Change System Condition Characteristics (listed below) to better look at what information we were getting from the community. This also helped us to determine what concerns were actionable and those that were not. This process took several virtual meetings, community surveys, and included many community members, organizations, and agencies inside and outside the MCGSC membership. In our 2025 update process, we continue to build upon the ongoing work through the ABLe Change Framework Lens. Parents and community members, including but not limited to the MCGSC board and Family Coalition members, were engaged around the data to try, and determine further root cause analysis findings. This process involved diving into parent surveys as well as Early Childhood service provider experiences with families. Using virtual platforms to have conversations, gather feedback, and compile results was more timeconsuming than initially thought. The process still resulted in valued information to move the MCGSC action agenda forward. Using a systems-level approach, virtual conversations included root causes, limitations around organization capacity, and funding barriers. We continue to build on lessons learned from previous strategic planning processes. We know that we must use our resources and leverage in a manner that will make a positive impact, toward realistic, obtainable actionable strategies. Transportation continues to be an issue that is relevant to Montcalm County; however, it has already been proven to be an issue that we do not have the capacity to address head-on. We have also continued to use advocacy and outside of the box strategies to address other high level identified issues such as funding for evidenced based programming, and livable wage jobs. We recognize that these community issues may be out of

scope; however, we will continue to advocate for capacity building at the local, state, and national levels. We chose not to identify these issues in our action agenda simply because we lack the capacity, capital, and funding to address these specific issues. We hope that this strategic plan will move us one step closer to having every child in Montcalm County healthy, eager, and prepared to succeed in school and life! Our process allowed us to create an updated strategic plan to continue to build upon our successes. We will move into the future with the 2026-2029 MCGSC Strategic Plan.

ABLe Change System Characteristics	Definition
Mindsets	Attitudes, values, and beliefs that shape behavior.
Components	Range, quality, effectiveness, and location of services, support and
Components	opportunities.
	Relationships and connections across people, organizations, settings,
Connections	and programs. Includes information referrals, data sharing, and
	learning and resource exchanges.
Regulations	Policies, practices, procedures, and daily routines that shape system
negulations	behavior.
Resources	Human, financial, and social resources that are being used or available
nesources	within the system.
Power	How decisions are made, who participates in decision-making, and the
LOMEI	structures in place to support inclusive voice.

System Scan Findings

Survey data collected from parents and providers in Montcalm County was consistent in identifying the lack of sufficient quality components to address Early Childhood development. Resources, particularly the lack of license quality of childcare was raised. We knew that most of Montcalm County is identified as a childcare desert. Parent reports aligned with the State of MI data sets. Access to preschool in some of our most rural communities continues to be sited. Access issues, primarily related to Montcalm's rural setting, were cited as well. Lack of home visiting opportunities for vulnerable families continues to be brought forward despite the financial limitations that were previously identified as barriers to building this component. Mindsets appear to be an area that we continue to make positive gains in as parent respondents report more so than ever an understanding of how important Early Childhood/early intervention are. Parents more than ever want and need preschool opportunities for their children. We will continue to advocate and support the explanation of free high-quality preschool opportunities as parents identified that as an ongoing desire. We are aware that we need to continue to address mindsets to continue this positive trend.

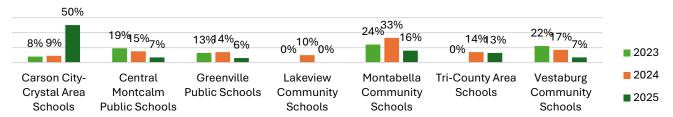
Consistent themes and priority identified (Continued from previous strategic plan and updated process) Parents continue to struggle financially.

- Montcalm County's high percentage of household poverty impacts parent involvement in child development and family stability.
- The number of ALICE families continues to rise.
- The stress families are under, lack of livable wage work, along with work schedules and struggling
 to meet basic needs, undermines their ability to have the time or capacity to have children thriving
 in school or school ready.
- Social-emotional needs within families have increased, and families do not believe they have access.
- Related in part to the stresses on families, abuse and neglect cases in our community continue to be too high.
- Quality Child Care and preschool opportunities are needed by more families than there are programs available:
 - o Too few licensed childcare providers are rated as quality, and
 - o Many childcare options were forced to close during COVID, and
 - Parents cannot find the childcare or preschool located where they need it are identified as a preschool/childcare desert in most areas within the MAISD.
 - o School districts are primary preschool providers and are at capacity.
- Rural Composition of Montcalm Communities results in:
 - Fewer support services and other components are equitably available across our county,
 and
- The low wage jobs, which are predominant in Montcalm County, cause the lack of financial resources and increased stress on the family and decrease parents' ability to provide or participate in Early Childhood development enrichment opportunities.
- Opportunities for parent leadership and engagement continue to need MCGSC support in our system. While this is a priority across our system, MCGSC is the leader of this initiative.

Updated Quantitative Data and Comparison Information Alignment and Coordination of Preschool and Kindergarten

According to the 2023 The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center estimates of the 4,296 children under age 5 in Montcalm County. MISchool Data reported for the 2023-24 school year 1,255 were enrolled in preschool. For the 2025-26 school year, the percentage of incoming Kindergarteners who did not have preschool experience ranged from 0% in Lakeview Community Schools to 16% in Montabella Community Schools; this range has decreased. What this means is that in many of our local districts, preschool opportunities are becoming more accessible. Progress in this area has been specific to each community. Six of seven local districts have made progress in this area overall.

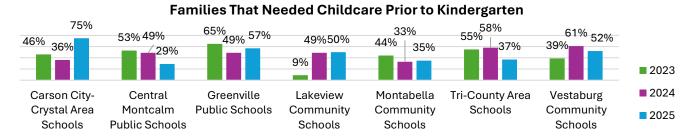
Children that had No Preschool Before Kindergarten



Data Source: 203-2025 Kindergarten Round Up Report, MCGSC

More than half of parents with incoming kindergarteners in almost every school district Central Montcalm Public Schools, Montabella Community Schools, and Tri County Area Schools were the exception identified that they would need childcare for their child. According to Great Start to Quality data, in Montcalm County, we continue to lose childcare options. Growth in this area is slow. Preschool opportunities continue to grow within Montcalm Area Intermediate School District to make some accommodation in this area. Several of our Local School Districts have also opened wrap around care to help support working families in childcare desert areas.

Most of our preschool opportunities that are state and federally funded are extended day and full day programming to support working parents.



Data Source: 2023-2025 Kindergarten Round Up Report, MCGSC

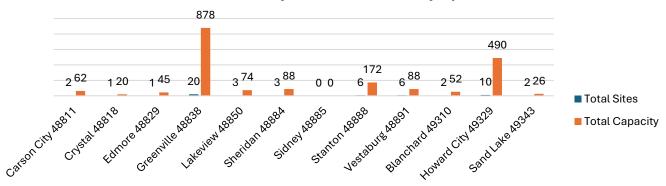
Montcalm County is a childcare desert, meaning that an area having three or more children completing for one slot is considered to be a "childcare desert."

Number of children competing for one slot by age group for Montcalm County

- Infant Care (ages 0-2.9) 9.08:1
- Preschool (ages 3-5) 2.2:1
- School (ages 6-11) 8.53:1

County	Staff Shortage	Capacity (number of children competing for 1 slot	Child Poverty Rate	Number of Children Under 5	Number of Children Under 12
Montcalm	6%	1.6	19%	2,045	5,485
Ionia	10%	2.45	11%	3.843	9.648
				Data Source: 202	24-2025 MAISD EC Report



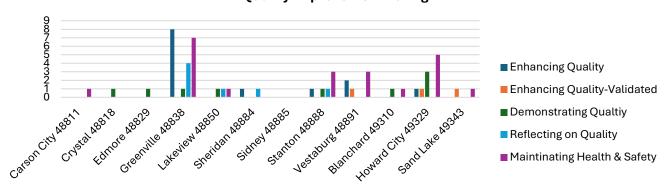


Data Source: www.GreatStarttoQuality.org

Access to childcare and preschool are needed in rural communities. Progress has been made, however there is still a need according to our kindergarten round-up annual survey results. See the data on the locations of licensed childcare availability within Montcalm County (refer to the chart below). According to the 2025 Western Regional Resource Center, Central Registry childcare licensing records, there are only 11 communities (down from 17 in 2013) in Montcalm County (by zip code) that offer any licensed childcare (including licensed preschool), and of these 11 communities, two of them only have one site. Greenville has both the most licensed childcare sites (20) and slots with 878 (increased from 2022 with 759 slots). Children are served in a licensed center, licensed family home, or licensed group home. Great Start to Quality improvement system through the State of Michigan. Programs are encouraged and supported (with resources, guidance, and coaching) to continue to reflect on their practices.

- Enhancing Quality Set goals and receive coaching and consultation for validation.
- Enhancing Quality-Validated Complete validation and prepare for on-site observation.
- Reflection On Quality Use quality indicators to reflect on program quality.
- Demonstrating Quality Meet threshold scores during on-site observation.
- Maintaining Health and Safety Quality- Licensed childcare in Michigan, who has not started the quality improvement process or has an expired quality level.

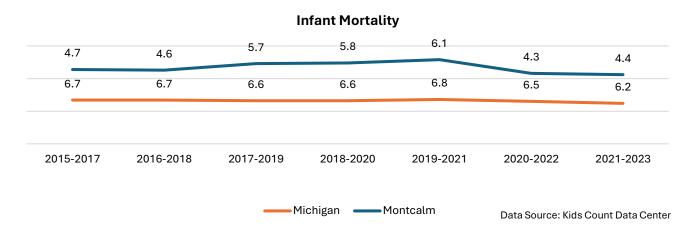
Quality Improvement Rating



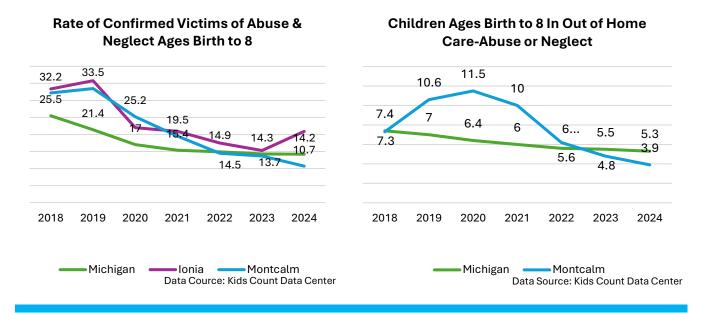
Data Source: www.GreatStarttoQuality.org

Healthy Start and Healthy Family Behaviors

Reviewing the infant mortality rate per 1,000 births for Montcalm shows a disturbing trend. Further insights on the data revealed our low population density rates make unfortunate circumstances affect our data significantly. This data may support parent feedback on the continuing need to address rural isolation and availability of access to Early Childhood programming, like home visiting. Recent data released by the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Epidemiology Section of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) shows an Infant Mortality Rate for 2023 of 4.9 per 1,000 live births and a reduction of the White Non-Hispanic rate of 4.4, Hispanic rate of 4.8, and Black Non-Hispanic rate of 11.2 in 2019-2023.

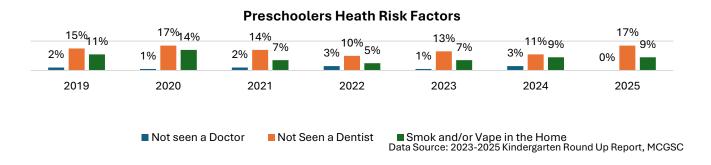


Over the last four years, the rate of substantiated abuse or neglect for children age 0-8 has decreased in the state. While Montcalm's rate is below the state average. In this Kids Count data, the number is calculated by an unduplicated count of children aged 0-8 who were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect. The rate is per 1,000 children aged 0-8. We continue to connect this to the rural isolation per parent report and population density issues.

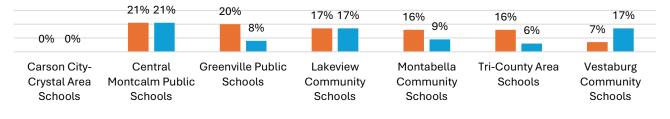


Closely related to the increasing rate of confirmed abuse and neglect cases in Montcalm is the increase in out-of-home-footer care placements. This data raised stakeholders concerns about the alignment of service components locally. We continue to advocate for more evidence-based home visiting support based on this data as well as community support for foster families supporting these families. We are trending in the right direction, with confirmed abuse and neglect cases moving in a downward direction.

Other Early Childhood health risk factors quantified through the community surveys of incoming kindergarteners are the percentages of children in homes with a smoker and those who have not seen a dentist. Trends for these data points are also helpful in showing a need for continued priority areas around substance abuse prevention and dental home connections. These points were chosen during MCGSC's original strategic plan process and have continued to be a touchpoint.



Preschoolers Health Risk Factors by District 2025



■ Not seen a Dentist ■ Someone in home smokes/vapes
Data Source: 2025 Kindergarten Round Up Data, MCGSC



Trauma Informed Community: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events, including abuse and neglect. They may also include household dysfunction such as witnessing domestic violence or growing up with family members who have substance use disorders. ACEs are strongly related to the development and prevalence of a wide range of health problems throughout a person's lifespan, including those associated with substance misuse.

Household Dysfunction

- •Intimate partner violence
- Mother treated violently
- •Substance misuse within household
- •Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- •Incarcerated houeshold member

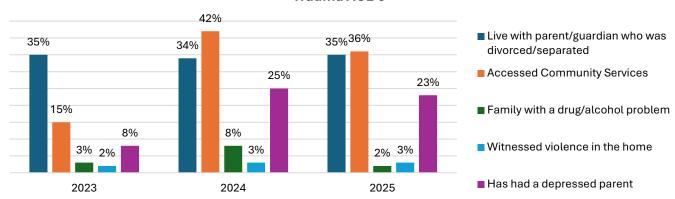
Neglect

- Physical
- •Emotional

Abuse

- Physical
- Sexual
- •Emotional

Trauma ACE's



Data Source: 2023-2025 Kindergarten Round Up Report, MCGSC



2022 Community Health Needs Assessment in Montcalm County

Access to Care and Social Services is vital to promoting overall health and wellbeing, by ensuring that individuals can receive the care, resources, and support they need to maintain good health and address challenges. Strong systems of care and social services contribute to healthier, more resilient communities.

Connected Services

There is coordination between Early Childhood services across sectors such as healthcare and education. Montcalm County is a small community; good coordination may be attributed to a single person whom families know to contact for each service area and a strong GSC with participation from parents of all backgrounds. There is a collaboration between the Maternal Infant Health Program and mental health to provide wrap around services.

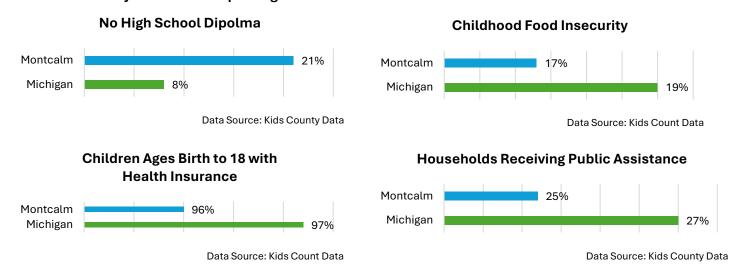
Meeting Needs of Clients

Despite its geographic isolation and scarce resources, Montcalm County can meet the needs of families in creative ways. Families know about resources available to them.

Quality of Service Provided

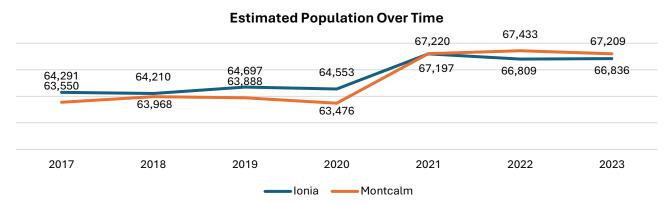
Montcalm County provides high quality services to families with young children founded on successful collaboration between programs. The ingenuity of partners is evident in their success with reaching the local Amish population, starting up the informal Baby Clubs that offer play groups, and collaborating to provide Welcome Baby services to families who may not otherwise be eligible for this assistance.

Montcalm County Conditions Impacting Families



Economic Conditions and Access to Available Services

The rural nature of Montcalm has a significant influence on access to services. According to Kids Count, there are an estimated 4,296 children under age 5 in Montcalm County. Greenville continues to be the only community with a critical mass to provide efficient services.



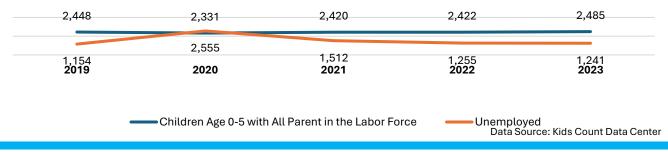
The 2023 Household median income in Montcalm (at \$64,912) is still below the Michigan household median income. This trend has remained unchanged over the last decade. The buying power for Montcalm households continues to drop (over the past 5 years), creating a more significant greater economic hardship in families who are not in poverty.

Median Household Income

\$54,840	\$56,640	\$59,522	\$61,352	\$63,444	\$66,926	\$69,097
\$46,664	\$50,396	\$52,089	\$52,589	\$55,735	\$61,590	\$64,912
2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
		Mi	ichigan ——M	ontcalm	Data Sou	rce: Kids County D

The lack of living wage jobs to support families and their ability to afford needed services was the challenge most often cited by stakeholders. According to the 2019 ALICE data Montcalm County is at 29% (state average 25%). ALICE data shows that conditions for some households have improved however, rates have failed to keep pace with the cost of household essentials.

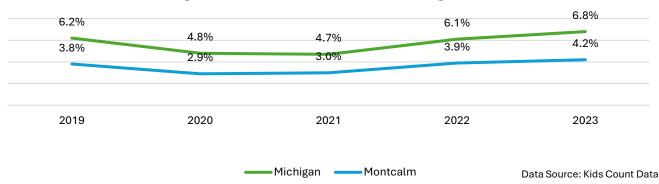
Montcalm County Employment Status



In 2023, 57% of employed Montcalm residents worked outside of Montcalm County, according to ACS Census estimates. The mean travel time to work for Montcalm residents was 30.5 minutes compared to 24.5 minutes statewide. This longer commute was cited by both parents and providers as influencing their ability to access family support services or locate accessible childcare.

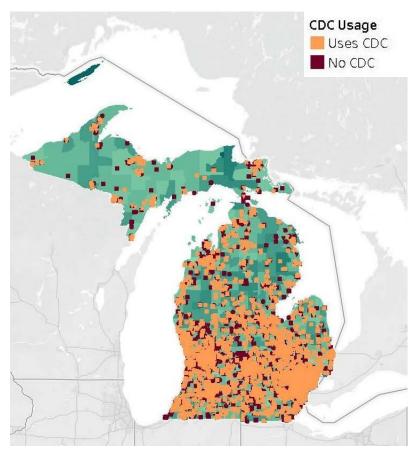
The percentage eligible for subsidized childcare has been increasing in both Montcalm and Michigan. The percentage of families eligible in Montcalm is below the statewide percentage. Families continue to report if they are not income eligible for Head Start or Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) preschool and not able to afford private preschool, children do not attend. This was identified many times by both providers and parents as an access challenge. GSRP full day programming has been increased since 2015 to support working parent needs. Childcare deserts are prominent, and the number of childcare providers continue to decrease.





Transportation was cited throughout this process as a barrier for Montcalm residents. Eight years ago, Montcalm County residents tried and failed to implement public transportation through a ballot proposal. Voters rejected that proposal. As a follow up to that process, feedback was that public transportation would not meet the unmet need. Families reported that they need assistance in getting and maintaining long-term transportation for their households. This includes mechanical repairs, insurance coverage, and fuel assistance. Currently, the Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative (MCGSC) has determined that countywide transportation is still outside of our capabilities to properly address and fund this issue. It is the intention of MCGSC to reduce this barrier, when possible, for our families through providing financial support within the scope of our work. The MCGSC continues to provide transportation assistance to parents that attend MCGSC meetings and activities. It is also the intention of the MCGSC to promote and support, in any way possible, local community efforts to reduce the transportation barrier of families to access services. Early Childhood support and services continue to be intentionally planned in local communities to assist with overcoming the transportation barrier. Leaders in Montcalm County continue to advocate addressing transportation needs. It is not our responsibility alone to create a plan of action; we continue to make it a financial priority through our collaborative work in Montcalm County. We have been strong advocates for transportation solutions and financial support needed to address this barrier.

Child Development and Care (CDC) Scholarship Program Utilization 2024



- In Montcalm County, there are 263 children eligible to receive the scholarship with only 245 children utilizing the benefit (93% utilization rate).
- 65 childcare providers eligible to receive the scholarship with only 35 utilizing the benefit (54% utilization rate).

Underutilization is impacted by provider acceptance of the scholarship. Reasons for non-acceptance include:

- Other families will pay full price.
- There is additional work to do for attendance and billing.
- It takes too long for families to get approved. If the provider accepts the child and the scholarship does not get approved, the family may leave without paying for the services provided.

Not all Families apply for the scholarship for the following reasons:

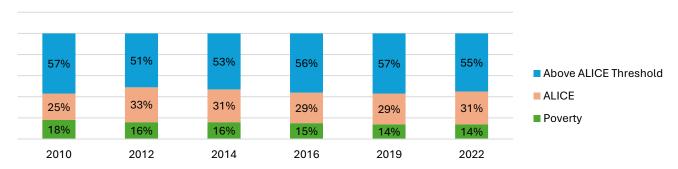
- They don't realize they qualify, especially if they were denied in the past.
- Previously, families were required to work with the office of child support.
- The paperwork takes time to gather and may have costs associated with it.
- There may be struggles with getting support from the CDC office.
- Some families are too proud or feel like others deserve the benefit more than they do.

ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited Income Constrained employed households that earn more than the Federal Poverty level but less than basic cost of living for a county. While conditions may have improved for some families may continue to fall into this range and struggle within Montcalm County. Wages earned, the cost of basic needs like housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, and communication costs (smartphone) are all factors that are connected to ALICE calculations. In 2021, 23% of our families in Montcalm County fell at or below this ALICE threshold and Federal Poverty levels.

Montcalm County Subdivision data for ALICE families (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data (top 4 areas have over 50% of households below the ALICE threshold).

Montcalm County Town	Total Households	% ALICE and Poverty
Carson City-City (City)	463	62%
Stanton (City)	539	59%
Greenville (City)	3,681	53%
Edmore (Home Township)	1,059	53%
Vestaburg (Richland township)	956	47%
Lakeview (Cato Township)	1,073	46%
Crystal (Crystal Township)	1,034	46%

ALICE and Poverty in Montcalm County Over Time



Data Source: ALICE Data

MCGSC continues to discuss all our community needs. Limited capacity and funding restrictions due to population density continue to be at the forefront of our root cause analysis conversations. For example, licensed childcare continues to be an issue that we will look for opportunities to support. Our capacity limits the amount of progress we can achieve in this area due to policies and regulations out of our control, however raising awareness around this issue will continue to be a priority. Home visiting options and

transportation are also issues that we will continue to raise up to support our local communities for our rural needs. We have seen success through helping raise parents' voices on Early Childhood needs in rural communities. MCGSC continues to partner with our regional neighbors and local assets to work on solutions to this root cause.

MCGSC Databased Priorities:

Child Development & School Readiness

The percentage of children in special education and the high school dropout rate were both at least as high as the State of Michigan as a whole. Further, when looking at high school dropouts at the school district level, four of seven districts have a higher percentage than the state average.

Family Economic Self-Sufficiency

Eight of the fifteen indicators related to Family Economic Self-Sufficiency for Montcalm County are higher than the state average. Further, essential partners report a lack of middle-income households. ALICE family numbers appear to be declining; however, this can be identified as an ACE in trauma identification.



2025 MCGSC Family Coalition



Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative Strengthening Families

Montcalm County Family Coalition participated in the Strengthening Families survey. From the survey, the group was given results with a list of things the families stated the GSCFC were doing well, and the things to improve on. Based on the list, the families picked the top 5 initiatives the GSCFC could improve on ("grows"), and the initiatives their family thought the GSCFC were doing well ("glows").

Initiatives the Great Start Collaborative Family Coalition can "grow" on and ideas on how that could happen:

- 1.4.1 Taking time to get to know family members individually, by name.
- 1.13 The GSFC helps to support the continued development of parent leaders by supporting attendance at conferences, leadership development trainings or special events.
- 2.2.4 Making efforts to connect families who share similar interests
- 3.3 The GSFC members provide support in the creation of resources on parenting and child development, to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and easily understood by parents.
- 2.9 The GSFC encourages families to participate in community improvement or advocacy projects.

Initivites the Great Start Collaborative Family Coalition are "glowing" in and why:

- The GSFC strives to reinforce that parents are the first teachers and key decision makers in their children's lives, through <u>every</u> interaction and communication.
- 1.3 All family members are made to feel welcome at GSFC events. Families are greeted when they come to GSFC activities and events.
- 3.2.2 The GSFC works to reduce barriers to participation by offering support such as: childcare, transportation or food when possible.
- 4.2.2 Keeping family issues confidential unless given explicit permission to share information (except when potential abuse or neglect is an issue).
- 5.4 The GSFC events and activities nurture children and model nurturing for parents by: Demonstrating mutual respect between children and adults.



Action Agenda Goals, Objectives, and Strategies Narrative

Michigan's statewide Great Start system continues to work in a coordinated and integrated manner. In 2011, Governor Rick Snyder created the Office of Great Start within the Michigan Department of Education. This office was charged with coordination and collaboration of Michigan's investments in children from birth to age eight. MiLEAP prioritizes education from preschool through postsecondary with a focus on preparing children for kindergarten and helping more people earn a skill certificate or degree to help them get a good paying job. To accomplish this goal, MiLEAP will mobilize all our resources, both inside and outside the classroom, collaborate with leaders at the local, regional, and state level, and develop a plan that will put every Michigander on a path to prosperity. MI LEAP prioritizes education from preschool through postsecondary with a focus on preparing children for kindergarten and helping more people earn a skill certificate or degree to help them get a good paying job. MI LEAP focuses on building and sustaining partnerships that enhance educational opportunities and outcomes throughout the state from preschool through postsecondary education. The State of Michigan identified four outcomes to guide the Early Childhood work in Michigan and its local communities. In 2020, the State of Michigan received a Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) to improve and expand the services that lead to positive child outcomes for all children to reach their greatest potential. The following Michigan needs assessment key findings align with Montcalm County's needs assessment key findings:

- ✓ Availability: There are significant gaps in the availability of programs and services for children birth through age five and their families, specifically, home visiting and Early Childhood care and education opportunities.
- ✓ Affordably: A lack of affordable childcare is a pressing issue for nearly all working families in Montcalm County. Montcalm County's childcare desert has a determinantal effect on workforce development and needs.
- ✓ Family Choice (Access) is limited due to the lack of available options for Early Childhood programming in many of our Montcalm County communities. Childcare deserts, lack of free/affordable preschool options are still prevalent in many of Montcalm County's communities and contribute to rural isolation among families with young children.

Locally, the Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative is committed to the success of all children prenatal to third grade with a priority of birth to age five. Our local Early Childhood work is directly linked to the State of Michigan's four outcomes below:

- Children are born healthy.
- Children are healthy, thriving, and developmentally on track from birth to third grade.
- Children developmentally ready to succeed in school at the time of school entry; and
- Children prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

MCGSC's strategic plan is informed by many stakeholders, including but not limited to families of young children, Early Childhood providers, community leaders (faith & business leaders), and social service organization leaders. Our latest plan builds on past successes while continuing to evolve to address our challenges in a timely manner. We continue to prioritize supporting our children's first and best teachers, their primary caregivers.

The MCGSC is dedicated to creating a plan that is actionable, powerful and mission aligned. Upon completion of the updated data analysis, updated root cause analysis our MCGSC committees created our action agenda components. MCGSC committees, including parent leaders compiled the prioritized information for our updated Strategic Plan that will carry our work forward.

We recognize that our success will come through embedding our Early Childhood messaging and supports in home communities. Parents continue to be essential partners in our work. We will continue to build resources to drive the trajectory of our priorities in the areas of literacy, parent leadership and access to high quality Early Childhood services and supports.

We recognize that Montcalm County has a lack of 0-3 years of age evidence-based home visiting and preschool programming. We know more is needed in this area for positive family outcomes. We will continue to advocate for strong, high-quality, evidence-based programs to address rural access, and isolation issues brought forward during this strategic planning process

The rationale used to determine the information of goals and strategies identified during the updated Strategic Plan process:

- The community identified that it is essential that parents can be involved in a child's development and school learning. Parents are their child's first and best teacher. Our work needs to support this.
- MCGSC must continue to support parent leadership presence in Montcalm County. We have seen the greatest successes when parent leadership was a priority.
- Continue to recognize the value of the parent voice and importance of parent leadership in all Great Start arenas. MCGSC will continue to model for our community partners and financially support them as our budget allows.
- Parent leadership is the key to Great Start success; constant recruitment of new parent leaders is essential in our ever-evolving Early Childhood system.
- Recognize the community assessment indicators showing a continued need for access to quality childcare and evidence based on high quality programming, specifically universal home visiting.
- Recognize community assessment indicators that still show higher than Michigan average of children living in poverty. According to ALICE 2021 data, poverty households in Montcalm County 12% (state average 13%).
- Recognize community assessment indicators that access to quality preschool is improving but not
 at the level that is needed to serve all children, especially the vulnerable children in rural isolated
 poverty and those families that cannot access any private day preschool opportunities.

- Recognizing community assessment indicators show that we need to continue our work to support
 families as poor physical health conditions exist. We want to continue a positive trend and work in
 partnership to support the newly awarded Drug Free Communities grant activities.
- Continue to advocate for equity in opportunities in rural communities for high quality evidencebased home visiting programs.

Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative 2026-2029 Action Agenda Summary

Goal 1: Advance health equities for young children.

Objective 1: Build a strong local system that supports families and children through quality programs and initiatives.

Action Strategies:

- Local community activities to promote weekly developmental resources for families (gross motor, communications, sensory, etc.).
- Create tools to increase awareness, access, and availability to develop resources for children, parents, providers, and community stakeholders.
- Identify, facilitate, and coordinate access to Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) developmental screening resource for children and families.
- Promotion of local health resources through website and social media.
- Host annual Community Baby Shower.
- Promote dental homes and dental resources at local community events.
- Conduct quarterly WIC clinic connection activities (resources and barrier reduction).
- Partner with local organizations to promote access to healthy lifestyle choice: resources on gardening, canning, and food storage education activities.
- West Michigan Perinatal Alliance participation and promotion.
- Maintain Welcome Baby (universal access) new parent supports.
- Coordinate kindergarten readiness tools: Math in The Mail and Talking is Teaching calendar project, target age 0-3.
- Strengthen We Care for Kids partnership with parent voice.
- Continue to build social media platforms and technology-based opportunities to increase access to literacy: website and social media.

Goal 2: Coordinate community resources to ensure equable access.

Objective 1: Build community resource sharing opportunities.

Action Strategies:

- Continue Play, Learn, and Read activities in four local communities (year-round).
- Publish Family Coalition newsletter with Strengthening Families Protective Factors
- Promote GSTQ with parents and providers to support quality childcare opportunities.
- Partner with Montcalm County service providers in building social emotional skills and practices (Conscious Discipline).
- Facilitate Conscious Discipline project in partnership with Western Regional Resource Center (childcare target).
- Convene childcare summit in partnership with two community partners.
- Regional Childcare action team partnership.
- Facilitate with community partners to provide professional learning around trauma and selfcare.

Objective 2: Identify, facilitate, and coordinate access to address barriers.

Action Strategies:

- Provide education and information about community resources available to Montcalm County families in partnership with all 7 local school districts and food pantry networks.
- Promote Joint Recruitment to ensure three- and four-year-olds have free preschool access.
- Facilitate Welcome Baby project partnership with Corewell Health
- Promote 211 resources
- Facilitate monthly legislative update for Montcalm County community members (local, state, and federal representatives).

Goal 3: Children prenatal to age five and their families thrive.

Objective 1: Collaborate with local, state, and federal partners to address the needs of Montcalm County families and children.

Action Strategies:

- Continue Preschool Matters Campaign to promote the universal preschool implementation.
- Support childcare sustainability and capacity building through Regional Childcare Hub and Western Region Resource Center partnerships.
- Lead Early Childhood data driven discission and discussions in Montcalm County.
- Partner with (Montcalm Prevention Collaborative) medication take back activities
- Promote inclusion opportunities within preschool settings.
- Support data driven decision making in:
 - Publish Dolly Parton Imagination Library annual report.
 - Publish annual Status of Young Child report.

Objective 2: Maintain an effective Great Start Collaborative that engages constituents as early childhood leaders in Montcalm County.

Action Strategies:

- Conduct parent engagement & recruitment activities in all local communities.
- Engage MCGSC members to advocate for access and equality for Montcalm County families at state networks.
- Immerse early childhood messaging (every child is healthy, safe, and eager to learn) into Montcalm County community activities.

Objective 2: Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative will play a vital role in building local Early Childhood capacity.

Action Strategies:

- Build, maintain, and promote Family Coalition to support capacity building efforts
- Maintain and distribute community resource tool in coordination with 211 promotion.
- Recruit parents to participate in local community events (7 districts) to distribute resource and referral information at summer community events.
- Facilitate parent leadership support activities to increase opportunities that support Montcalm County parents as leaders.
- Promote maternal depression materials with families of newborns through partnerships in the community.
- Maintain leadership role at Montcalm Human Service Coalition.
- Continue Montcalm Prevention Collaborative partnership.

 Maintain and support Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

Objective 3: Build Talking is Teaching into everyday activities for families, caregivers, and service providers.

Action Strategies:

- Promote resource development of appropriate emergent literacy experiences: create new Talking is Teaching tool (one per quarter).
- Continue Talking is Teaching County wide campaign: social media, websites, and resource development.
- Continue Talking is Teaching presentations to service providers (1 per quarter).
- Support Great Start Readiness Program, EightCAP Early Head Start, Head Start, and Early On programming with Talking is Teaching implementation needs.
- Continue to build social media platforms and technology-based opportunities to increase access to literacy: website and social media.

- Maintain GSC website to support as the early childhood resource tool in Montcalm County.
- Publish annual Community Preschool Report.
- Publish annual Kindergarten Readiness report.
- Convene School Advisory Council quarterly with parent voice to support ongoing program quality implementation.

Objective 3: Increase equitable access to high quality literacy programs and resources for 0-5 population.

Action Strategies:

- Maintain the fiscal health of DPIL for Montcalm County Families.
- DPIL will continue to serve a minimum of 1200 children, ages 0-5 children.
- Conduct DPIL promotion and enrollment activities throughout Montcalm County.

The following pages include the Action Agenda. For each goal, we have identified how it is aligned with the Great Start System Components, ABLE Change System Characteristics, root cause and the Michigan Early Childhood Outcomes. Each goal is broken down into a goal, objective, and action strategies. For each action strategy, the MCGSC has identified the responsible entities, time frames, resources needed and progress measures that will be used. We recognize that Montcalm County has a lack of 0-3 years of age evidence-based home visiting programs. We know more is needed in this area for positive family outcomes. We will continue to advocate for strong, high-quality evidence-based programs to address rural access and isolation issues brought forward during this strategic planning process by our community!







Michigan's Early Childhood Outcomes:

- ✓ Born Health
- Health, Thriving, and Developmentally on Track

Advance health equities for young children.

Great Start System Component(s):

- Physical Health
 Social & Emotional Health
 Early Care & Education
 Parenting Leadership
 Family Support
 - ABLe Change Characteristics:
- MindsetsComponentsConnectionsRegulationsResourcesPower

	Resources	Root Cause: Access Support		them in being their child's first and best teacher.	knowledge of their children's developmental progress and services available to support	Performance Measure: Families will have an increased		Cojective 1: Dalid a strong loc
Strengthen We Care for Kids partnership with parent voice.	Promote dental homes and dental resources at local community events.	Host annual Community Baby Shower.	Promotion of local health resources through website and social media.	Identify, facilitate, and coordinate access to Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) developmental screening resource for children and families.	Create tools to increase awareness, access, and availability to develop resources for children, parents, providers, and community stakeholders.	Local community activities to promote weekly developmental resources for families (gross motor, communications, sensory, etc.).	Action Strategies	Cujecuve 1. Dalid a strong local system tranship to latinities and children model quality programs and timenwes
Family Liaisons	Family Liaisons MCGSC Board Wellness	Wellness	Wellness	MCGSC Director Family Liaisons	Early Care & Learning Wellness	Wellness	Responsible Entities	Ilougii quality brogran
All three years	All three years	All three years	All three years	All three years	Year two	All three years	Target Dates	
Staff Funds	Funds Staff Supplies	Funds Staff Supplies	Staff	Staff	Staff	Funds Staff Supplies	Resources Needed	Ģ
 Number of participants Survey data 	 Number of connections Kindergarten Round Up Data Total amount of funds obtained 	 Number of participants Survey responses Number of partnerships 	Website data Kindergarten Round Up Data	 Number of connections Number of activities 	 Social media data Number of partnerships 	 Number of partners Number of parent/ caregiver connections 	Progress Measures for Activities	



Michigan's Early Childhood Outcomes:

- ✓ Born Health
- ✓ Health, Thriving, and Developmentally on Track

Advance health equities for young children.

Great Start System Component(s):

Physical Health Social & Emotional Health Early Care & Education Parenting Leadership Family Support ABLe Change Characteristics: Mindsets Components Connections Regulations Resources Power

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knowledge of their children's developmental progress and services available to support them in being their child's first and best teacher. Root Cause: Access Support Resources	Performance Measure: Families will have an increased knowledge of their children's						
Continue to build social media platforms and technology-based opportunities to increase access to literacy: website and social media.	Conduct quarterly WIC clinic connection activities (resources and barrier reduction).	Facilitate kindergarten back to school resource activities.	Coordinate kindergarten readiness tools: Math in The Mail and Talking is Teaching calendar project, target age 0-3.	Maintain Welcome Baby (universal access) new parent supports.	West Michigan Perinatal Alliance participation and promotion.	Partner with local organization to promote access to healthy lifestyle choice: resources on gardening, canning, and food storage education activities.	Action Strategies
Early Care & Learning Wellness MCGSC Board	Wellness MCGSC Board	Early Care & Learning MCGSC Director	Early Care & Learning MCGSC Director	Wellness MCGSC Director	MCGSC Director Family Liaisons	MCGSC Director Family Liaisons	Responsible Entities
All three years	All three years	All three years	All three years	All three years	All three years	Year one	Target Dates
Funds Staff	Staff	Staff Funds	Staff Funds	Staff Funds	Staff	Staff	Resources Needed
 Number of partnerships established Social media and website data 	 Number of connections Number of activities 	 Number distributed Number of partners 	 Number distributed Number of partners 	 Number of participants Welcome Baby program data 	 Number of connections Number of activities 	 Number of connections Number of activities 	Progress Measures for Activities



Michigan's Early Childhood Outcomes:

- ✓ Born Health
- Health, Thriving, and Developmentally on Track

Advance health equities for young children.

Great Start System Component(s):

- Physical Health
 Social & Emotional Health
 Early Care & Education
 Parenting Leadership
 Family Support
- ABLe Change Characteristics:

 Mindsets
 Components
 Connections
 Regulations
 Resources
 Power

Objective 2

Objective 2: Montcalm County	Objective 2: Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative will play a vital role in building local Early Childhood capacity.	n building local Early (Childhood capac	ity.	
	Action Strategies	Responsible Entities	Target Dates	Resources Needed	Progress Measures for Activities
Performance Measure: Families will have an increased	Build, maintain, and promote Family Coalition to support capacity building efforts.	Family Liaisons MCGSC Director MCGSC Board Family Coalition	All three years	Staff	Number of participants Survey responses, parent data reflects strong parent participation in MCGSC network
developmental progress and services available to support	Maintain and distribute community resource tool in coordination with 211 promotion.	Wellness Family Coalition	All three years	Staff	Number of connections Kindergarten Round Up Data
and best teacher.	Recruit parents to participate in local community events (7 districts) to distribute resource and referral information at summer community events.	Early Care & Learning Wellness	All three years	Staff	Number of connections Number of events with MCGSC parent representation
	Facilitate in parent leadership support activities to increase opportunities that support Montcalm County parents as leaders.	School Readiness Advisory Council MCGSC Board	All three years	Staff	Number of parent leaderships Survey responses
Root Cause: Access Support	Promote maternal depression materials with families of newborns through partnerships in the community.	Wellness MCGSC Board West MI Prenatal Alliance	All three years	Staff	Number of partnerships developed
Resources	Maintain leadership role at Montcalm Human Service Coalition.	MCGSC Director	All three years	Staff	 Number of connections Number of activities
	Continue Montcalm Prevention Collaborative partnership.	MCGSC Director	All three years	Staff	 Number of connections Number of activities



- Ready to Succeed in School at School Entry
- ✓ Reading Proficiently by the end of 3rd Grade

Coordinate community resources to ensure equable access.

☐ Physical Health☐ Social & Emotional Health Great Start System Component(s): ABLe Change Characteristics: ✓ Mindsets Components

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	Resources	ř.		and best teacher.	services available to support them in being their child's first	۵	Performance Measure:		Objective 1: Build community resource sharing opportunities	
Facilitate with community partners to provide professional learning around trauma and selfcare.	Regional Childcare action team partnership.	Convene childcare summit in partnership with two community partners.	Facilitate Conscious Discipline project in partnership with Western Regional Resource Center (childcare target).	Partner with Montcalm County service providers in building social emotional skills and practices (Conscious Discipline).	Promote GSTQ with parents and providers to support quality childcare opportunities.	Publish Family Coalition newsletter with Strengthening Families Protective Factors focus.	Continue Play, Learn, and Read activities in four local communities (year-round).	Action Strategies	resource sharing opportunities.	☐ Social & Emotional Health☑ Early Care & Education☑ Parenting Leadership☑ Family Support
Family Liaisons MCGSC Director MCGSC Board Family Coalition	Family Liaisons MCGSC Director		Early Care & Learning Family Liaisons Wester Regional Resource Center	Early Care & Learning Family Liaisons	Family Liaisons MCGSC Director	Family Liaisons	Family Liaisons MCGSC Board	Responsible Entities		Components Connections Regulations Resources Power
Year two	All three years	Year one	All three years	All three years	All three years	All three years	All three years	Target Dates		
Staff	Staff	Funds Staff Supplies	Grant Funds Staff	Grant Funds Staff	Staff	Staff	Funds Staff Supplies	Resources Needed		
 Number of participants Survey responses Number of partnerships 	 Number of connections Number of activities 	 Number of participants Survey responses Number of partnerships 	 Number of partnerships established Survey responses 	 Number of partnerships established Survey responses 	Number of parent participation Social Media data	1. Number of connections	 Parent survey responses Number of partnerships 	Progress Measures for Activities		



- Ready to Succeed in School at School Entry
 Reading Proficiently by the end of 3rd Grade

Obje

GOAL	Coordinate community resources to ensure equable access	ensure equable a	ccess.		
2	Great Start System Component(s): Physical Health Social & Emotional Health Early Care & Education Parenting Leadership Family Support	ABLe Change Characteristics: Mindsets Components Connections Regulations Resources Power	acteristics:		
Objective 2: Identify, facilitate	Objective 2: Identify, facilitate, and coordinate access to address barriers.				
	Action Strategies	Responsible Entities	Target Dates	Resources Needed	Progress Measures for Activities
Performance Measure: Families will have an increased	Provide education and information about community resources available to Montcalm County families in partnership with all 7 local school districts and food pantry networks.	MCGSC Director Family Liaisons	All three years	Funds Staff Supplies	 Parent survey responses Number of referrals
knowledge of their children's developmental progress and services available to support them in being their child's first	Promote Joint Recruitment to ensure three- and four-year-olds have free preschool access.	MCGSC Director Family Liaisons EightCAP	All three years	Staff	Number of connections Number of activities
and best teacher.	Facilitate Welcome Baby project partnership with Corewell Health.	MCGSC Director Family Liaisons Corewell Health	All three years	Funds Staff Supplies	 Parent survey responses Number of partners
	Promote 211 resources.	Family Liaisons MCGSC Director	All three years	Staff	1. Number of partners
Root Cause: Access Support Resources	Facilitate monthly legislative update for Montcalm County community members (local, state, and federal representatives).	Family Liaisons MCGSC Director	All three years	Staff	1. Number of elected officials
	Maintain and support Dolly Parton Imagination Library.	MCGSC Director Family Liaisons	All three years	Staff Funds Supplies	 Number of enrolled children Family Survey responses DPIL report data



- Ready to Succeed in School at School Entry
 Reading Proficiently by the end of 3rd Grade

Coordinate community resources to ensure equable access.

Great Start System Component(s): ABLe Change Characteristics:

Objec

	Great Start System Component(s): Physical Health Social & Emotional Health Early Care & Education Parenting Leadership Family Support	ABLe Change Characteristics: Mindsets Components Connections Regulations Resources Power	cteristics:		
Objective 3: Build Talking is T	Objective 3: Build Talking is Teaching into everyday activities for families, caregivers, and service providers	iregivers, and service p	roviders.		
	Action Strategies	Responsible Entities	Target Dates	Resources Needed	Progress Measures for Activities
Performance Measure:	Promote resource development of appropriate emergent literacy experiences: create new Talking is Teaching tool (one per quarter).	MCGSC Director Family Liaisons	All three years	Staff Funds Supplies	 Number of connections Number of activities DPIL report data
knowledge of their children's developmental progress and services available to support	Continue to build social media platforms and technology-based opportunities to increase access to literacy: website and social media.	Early Care & Learning Wellness MCGSC Board	All three years	Funds Staff	 Number of partnerships established Social media and website data
them in being their child's first and best teacher.	Continue Talking is Teaching County wide campaign: social media, website, and resource development.	Family Liaisons MCGSC Director	All three years	Staff Funds Supplies	 Number of connections Number of activities Social media data
Root Cause:	Continue Talking is Teaching presentations to service providers (1 per quarter).	Family Liaisons	All three years	Staff	Evaluation data Number of participants
Support Resources	Support Great Start Readiness Program, EightCAP Early Head Start, Head Start, and Early On programming with Talking is Teaching implementation needs.	Family Liaisons	All three years	Staff Supplies	 Number of connections Number of children impacted



- Born Health
- Health, Thriving, and Developmentally on Track
 - Ready to Succeed in School at School Entry

Reading Proficiently by the end of 3rd Grade

3

Children from prenatal to age five and their families thrive

Great Start System Component(s):

- Physical Health
- Social & Emotional Health
- Early Care & EducationParenting LeadershipFamily Support
- Components Mindsets

ABLe Change Characteristics:

Regulations

Connections

Power Resources

Objective 1: Collaborate with local, state, and federal partners to address the needs of Montcalm County families and children Families will have an increased them in being their child's first services available to support knowledge of their children's developmental progress and Performance Measure: and best teacher. Root Cause: Support Access Partner with (Montcalm Prevention Collaborative) promote the universal preschool implementation Promote inclusion opportunities within preschool Lead Early Childhood data driven discission and Western Region Resource Center partnerships. Support childcare sustainability and capacity building through Regional Childcare Hub and Continue Preschool Matters Campaign to discussions in Montcalm County. medication take back activities. **Action Strategies** Early Care & Education Responsible Entities Special Education MCGSC Director MCGSC Director MCGSC Director Family Liaisons Family Liaisons Family Liaisons MICHAL BOARD MCGSC Direct MCGSC Board All three years All three years All three years All three years Year three Target Dates Resources eadership Funds Needed Funds Staff Staff Staff Staff Preschool data report Number of GSRP slots Number of activities 3. Number of children 2. Number of participants Evaluation data 3. Total dollars brought in to support 2. Evaluation data Number of partnerships programming Number of kids in ECSE Number of pounds collected Number of participants Progress Measures for Activities

Resources

- Publish Dolly Parton Imagination Library report

- Publish Status of Young Child report

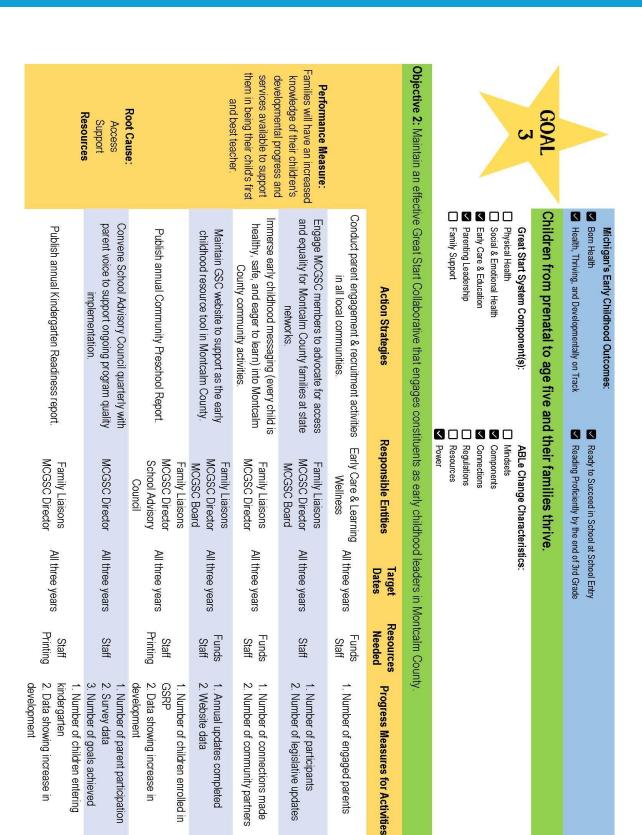
Family Liaisons MCGSC Board

Year three

Staff

Evaluation data

Support data driven decision making in:



	Michigan Fast Oblish and Otherwood			
	 Brown Health Heath, Thriving, and Developmentally on Track 	Ready to Succeed in School at School Entry Reading Proficiently by the end of 3rd Grade	ol Entry d Grade	
GOAL	Children from prenatal to age five and their families thrive	nd their families thrive.		
C	Great Start System Component(s): Physical Health Social & Emotional Health Early Care & Education Parenting Leadership Family Support	ABLe Change Characteristics: Mindsets Components Connections Regulations Resources Power		
Objective 3: Increase equitable	Objective 3: Increase equitable access to high quality literacy programs and resources for 0-5 population	d resources for 0-5 population.		
	Action Strategies	Responsible Entities D	Target Resources Dates Needed	Progress Measures for Activities
Performance Measure: Families will have an increased	Maintain the fiscal health of DPIL for Montcalm County Families.	Family Liaisons MCGSC Director	Year 1 Funds Staff	 Number of children served Amount of funding support
knowledge of their children's developmental progress and services available to support	DPIL will continue to serve a minimum of 1200 childre, ages 0-5.	Family Liaisons MCGSC Director	Year 1 Funds Staff	Number of children served Amount of funding support
them in being their child's first and best teacher.	Conduct DPIL promotion and enrollment activities throughout Montcalm County.	Family Liaisons MCGSC Director	Year 1 Funds Staff	 Number of children served Amount of funding support
Root Cause: Access Support Resources				

Financing and Fund Development

Building a powerful seamless system of care for families with young children requires funding support (linked and direct) for program services and coordination between organizations. Montcalm County has always thought outside of the box regarding resources from partners that support a robust integrated service delivery system. The MCGSC continues to support, advocate, and build opportunities for braided and blended funding to maximize the benefits of local, state, and federal funding sources. This continues to be increasingly difficult as the flux of Early Childhood funding sources at State and Federal levels often have negative consequences for our local system. We continue to advocate for funding equity for our birth to five programs and services at the local and state level. We are also proud of the work our parents engage in locally and lift the idea around parents being an untapped resource. MCGSC has been the most successful when parents are committed to our work. We will continue to advocate and build meaningful ways for parents to engage.

The MCGSC fund development focus is simply to sustain projects as well as advocate for identified gaps and unmet needs to be addressed. The activities will continue to include leveraging resources from all available partners, applying for grants to address gaps and root causes, and participating in funds seeking to support Early Childhood initiatives. In-kind support is critical to the MCGSC strategic plan's success.

See <u>2024-2025 Montcalm Area ISD Early Childhood report</u> for data in ways MCGSC has encouraged exciting funds to support your children.

State and Public Funding

This 2026-2029 strategic plan is aligned with state and federal priorities to assist in potential funding sources to support identified programming resources to help address the gaps in our system. The MCGSC will continue to support our community partners' efforts in applying for grants and other identified funding opportunities that support improvements to Montcalm County's birth to age eight system of care.

Community Partnerships

- Greenville Area Community Foundation (GACF) continues to support our Dolly Parton Imagination
 Library. Montcalm County's Community Foundations are financial contributors as well.
 Endowment fund efforts to build long-term sustainability have been established for DPIL through
 GACF.
- The MCGSC has seen great success in obtaining community partners, support (both in-kind and funding) to achieve our identified strategies. For example, our partnership with Montcalm Prevention Collaborative, 0-5 Head Start and Early On, continues to provide evidenced-based practices such as Literacy Essentials, and Social Emotional Learning trainings to our childcare and preschool Early Childhood providers. We have also continued to work together to increase the shared opportunities between all programs for professional development and joint recruitment efforts.
- Preschool Matters campaign, supports PreK for all efforts.

- Our Great Start Readiness Program expansion efforts continue. We support PreK for all initiatives to increase our local four years old access to full day preschool opportunities. This expansion has resulted in as many as 27 GSRP classrooms operating. Local district providers are also contributing financially to the GSRP program to ensure the highest quality standards success. in Montcalm County. Teaching teams are receiving livable wage/union contract participation to support GSRP sustainability. Growth is evident as we continue to work in partnership with Community Based Organization (CBO). In 2025-26 school year, 3 CBOs participated in GSRP programming. This high-quality programming will be maintained in Montcalm County. We will continue to work on informing community leaders and parents to support and maintain GSRP programming.
- Dolly Parton Imagination Library Community members/business and local community foundations:
 - Bowen Insulation
 - Builders Glass of Greenville, INC.
 - Bush Rental LLC
 - Carson City-Crystal Area Schools
 - Carson City Correction Facility Boyer Club
 - Central Montcalm Community Foundation
 - Central Montcalm Public Schools
 - Crystal Lions Club
 - Danish Sisterhood Society
 - Department of Health Human Services Montcalm County
 - Edmore Lions Club
 - Edmore Women's Club
 - EightCAP, INC.
 - Entrican Gleaners
 - First United Methodist Church of Greenville
 - Greenville Area Community Foundation
 - Greenville Area Youth Advisory Club
 - Greenville Family Dental
 - Grenville Lions Club
 - Greenville Public Schools
 - Greenville Rotary Club
 - Heart of West Michigan United Way
 - Isabella Bank
 - Lakeview Area Community Fund
 - Lakeview Community Schools

- Lakeview Family Chiropractors
- L'Image Salon
- Martin Eye Care
- McDonalds of Greenville
- Mersen USA GS Corp- Greenville
- Montabella Community Schools
- Michigan One Community Credit Union
- Montcalm Area Intermediate School District
- Montcalm Care Network
- Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative
- Montcalm County Mom Prom
- Montcalm County Republicans
- Montcalm Wind
- Ninety Degree Nutrition
- Panhandle Area Community Fund
- Our Saviors Lutheran Church of Edmore
- Sidney State Bank
- Stanton Lions Club
- Our Saviors Lutheran Church of Edmore
- Sidney State Bank
- Stanton Lions Club
- Stanton Women's Club
- Target Foundation
- Tri County Area Schools
- Tri County Electric People Fund
- Turk Lake Restaurant and Bar

- United Way of Montcalm and Ionia County
- Vestaburg Community Schools

- We Care for Kids Council
- Wells Photography
- Many Individual Sponsors
- Our local GSRP programs are supported through many sources: in connection with MCGSC WRRC, GSTQ, Greenville Area Community Foundation, seven Local School Districts, Head Start and Early Head Start, MAISD General Education and Special Education departments, many local businesses donations of materials, Delta Dental, and West Michigan Community Dental Foundation.
- Great Start Playgroup Partnerships Montabella Community Schools, Tri County Area Schools, Mt Calvary Baptist Church, Montcalm Area Career Center, Montcalm Community College, Early Head Start, and Early On (3-5 Special Education).
- Joint Recruitment Preschool Promotion Variety of businesses, social services, and organizations
- Early Childhood Training for Parents and Childcare Providers Community members, Seven local school districts, MAISD, Early On (3-5 Special Education), EightCAP, Inc. (Head Start and Early Head Start), and Montcalm Community College
- Connections Family Futures
- Great Start Readiness Program Seven local School Districts, Western Region Resource Center, Great Start to Quality, EightCAP, Head Start, Natural Wonders, and Huntey's Clubhouse
- Our local Talking Is Teaching Campaign is supported through many sources: WRRC, GSTQ,
 Greenville Area Community Foundation, seven Local School Districts, EightCAP, Inc.:, Head Start
 and Early Head Start, WIC, MAISD General Education and Special Education departments, MidMichigan District Health Department WIC, Department of Health and Human Services, Early On,
 Alpha Family Services, many local businesses donations of materials, and Department of Health
 and Human Services.

Organizational Partnerships Within MCGSC Include:

- Montcalm Area Intermediate School District
- Corewell Health Greenville Hospital Healthier Communities (Welcome Baby)
- EightCAP, Inc. Head Start/ Early Head Start
- Connections Family Futures
- Montcalm Human Service Collation
- Montcalm Prevention Collaborative
- Montcalm Care Network
- Mid-Michigan District Health Department
- Greenville Area Community Foundation
- Lakeview Area Community Foundation
- Central Montcalm Community Foundation

Grant Opportunities

The MCGSC has been actively applying for grant funds to support programs and projects identified as needs in our community. We have also been supportive of our community partners when they are applying for grant funds to support additional unmet needs.

In the past, local community, foundations and businesses supported Early Childhood and programs that we have identified. Over \$495,000 has been raised in grant funds over the past 16 years to support MCGSC initiatives such as Planting the Seeds for the Future Early Childhood Conference, preschool classroom quality initiatives, universal access to parent education activities, community baby shower, community dental events and other Early Childhood events for further recruitment efforts, and Dolly Parton Imagination Library. Since 2021, MCGSC has handed out over 34,500 books at community events.

Donations

Community donations for events and activities have totaled over 100,000 items such as informational brochures, toys, books, writing supplies, toothbrushes, toothpaste, medicine spoons, shirts, cups, helmets, GSRP classroom materials, and more for distribution to families with young children and classrooms.

Summary

Over the last sixteen years, the Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative has initiated and maintained several successfully expanded partnerships and shared funding opportunities. We will continue supporting these partnerships and advocating for strategic use of public and private funding within Montcalm County. Ongoing financial resources that promote the vision of the MCGSC will continue to be sought out. Despite 32p funding highs and lows, services continue to be a priority for 0-5 families. The MCGSC will continue to make advocating for funding resources a priority to ensure that our Early Childhood system is efficient, effective, evidence based, and collaborative. The MAISD and our seven local school districts continue to support Early Childhood financially because it is a priority in our community!



Appendix A: Acronyms

AC - Advisory Council

ACEs – Adverse Childhood Experiences

ACS - American Community Survey

ALICE - Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed

AS – Area School(s)

ASQ - Ages and Stages Questionnaires

CBO - Community Based Organization

CDC - Child Development Center

CLASS - Classroom Assessment Scoring System

CS - Community School(s)

DHHS - Department of Health and Human Services

DPIL - Dolly Parton Imagination Library

ECC - Early Childhood Contact

ECIC - Early Childhood Investment Corporation

ECS - Early Childhood Specialist

EHS- Early Head Start

ECSE - Early Childhood Special Education

FC - Family Coalition

GACF – Greenville Area Community Foundation

GSC - Great Start Collaborative

GSRP - Great Start Readiness Program

GSTQ- Great Start to Quality

HoF - Hair on Fire

HS- Head Start

KEA – Kindergarten Entry Assessment

MAISD - Montcalm Area Intermediate School District

MCGSC - Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative

MCN- Montcalm Care Network

MDE - Michigan Department of Education

MHSC - Montcalm Human Service Coalition

MiLEAP - Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential

MMDHD - Mid-Michigan District Health Department

MPC - Montcalm Prevention Collaborative

MTSS - Multi Tier Systems of Support

PCP - Primary Care Physician

PS - Public School(s)

PQA – Preschool Quality Assessment

PQA-R - Preschool Quality Assessment - Revised (now Classroom Coach)

SAC – School Readiness Advisory Council

TAG-Trusted Advisors Grant

WIC - Women Infant Child

WCFK - We Care for Kids Council

WRRC- Western Regional Resource Center

Appendix B: Reference Materials

2025 Kindergarten Round-Up Survey Results Report, Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative www.GreatStartMontcalm.org

2024-2025 MAISD Early Childhood Report

www.GreatStartMontcalm.org

2022 Montcalm County ALICE Report

www.GreatStartMontcalm.org

2025 Montcalm County Status of the Young Child Report

www.GreatStartMontcalm.org

American Community Survey (ACS) Report, 2023 by the US Census Bureau.

www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs

Child Development and Care (CDC) Scholarship Usage

https://cep.msu.edu/projects/child-care-mapping-project/maps-and-charts/CDC

Great Start to Quality

https://greatstarttoquality.org/

LARA Child Care Licensing Search

https://childcaresearch.apps.lara.state.mi.us/

MAISD Preschool Annual Report

www.GreatStartMontcalm.org

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Infant Mortality Statistics

https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/

MI School Data

https://www.mischooldata.org/

Neuron Growth & Connections Over Time

Corel, JL. The postnatal development of the human cerebal cortex. Cambridge, MA: Harvard

University Press: 1975

The Effects of Neglect

H.T. Chugani, Wayne State University: Newsweek Special Edition, 1997

Three Principals to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families Center on the Developing Child at Havard University (2021). Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families, 2021 Update

C.A. Nelson (2000). Credit: Center on the Developing Child

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/



Appendix C: Program Descriptions

The Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) is a major initiative of the Center for Evidence-Based Practices at the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute. CELL is used in MCGSC parent child playgroups. CELL is a research-to-practice technical assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and Research to Practice Division. Partners include The American Institutes for Research, Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights Center and A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. CELL utilizes a resource bank of experts and an advisory board with the major aims of:

- Review and synthesize available evidence on effective early literacy learning practices,
- Identify and develop evidence-based literacy learning practices from this research,
- Implement and evaluate the use of the practices with young children with developmental delays or diagnosed disabilities, and
- Provide general and specialized technical assistance promoting the adoption and use of evidence-based practices. With these goals in mind, CELL partners reviewed hundreds of research articles regarding Early Childhood literacy and education. Based on this research, the following five principles/practices were identified as "evidence-based practices" for Early Childhood literacy learning.

The relationship between a child's interest and early literacy and language learning was examined in a review of 31 research studies including 4,190 toddlers and preschoolers. The results from these studies indicating the positive relationship between using a child's interest to guide learning was the basis for the CELL materials/practices. Additionally, the practice of following a child's interest meets the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Infant and Toddler Programs in the goal areas of one. Infants and Toddlers experience environments where they know that they belong and are valued; they are comfortable with the routines, schedules, and activities; they increasingly understand the nature and boundaries of acceptable behavior; and positive connections among families, the program, and the children are affirmed; 2. Infants and toddlers experience environments where the importance of spontaneous play is recognized and play is valued as meaningful learning; they gain confidence in and greater control of their bodies; they learn strategies for active exploration, thinking, and reasoning; they develop a growing sense of social relationships, the natural environment, and the physical world. This curriculum is used in the Great Start Playgroups.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) to help measure and improve the quality of interactions between educators and children. The CLASS framework is based on decades of early childhood education research and is used in a variety of educational settings, including Head Start programs, family childcare, and K–12 schools. The CLASS framework:

• The CLASS tool measures the quality of teacher-child interactions across several domains, which vary slightly by age level. At the pre-K level, the CLASS framework measures three main domains:

- Emotional Support: The extent to which teachers create a positive and supportive classroom environment where children feel safe to learn and grow. This includes behaviors like being responsive, providing comfort, and encouraging positive peer interactions.
- Classroom Organization: The effectiveness of a teacher's management of children's behavior, time, and attention. High scores are associated with clear routines, well-designed learning centers, and consistent guidance strategies.

Instructional Support: The ways in which teachers implement the curriculum to support children's cognitive and language development. This involves asking thought-provoking questions, encouraging creative thinking, and facilitating conversations.

The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool, Sixth Edition is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum that features hands-on, project-based investigations as a pathway to learning. It includes the most up-to-date Early Childhood development research and offers the embedded support and guidance to effectively bring a content-rich, developmentally appropriate curriculum to life. Seven foundation volumes deepen your understanding of best practices and support creating a high-quality learning environment. Daily Resources help plan and manage every moment children immerse in dynamic and engaging learning experiences throughout the school day. Inspire a love of learning in children, helping them develop confidence, creativity, and critical thinking skills - all while promoting positive outcomes. Used in Montcalm County GSRP Classrooms. (Montcalm connection: Great Start Readiness Program)

Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL), Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a book-gifting program that mails free, high-quality, age-appropriate books to children from birth until age five. The program was founded by Dolly Parton in 1995 to foster a love of reading in children. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library will help you read with your child. Each month a new, carefully selected, book will be mailed in your child's name directly to your home. Best of all it is a FREE GIFT! There is no cost or obligation to your family.

Ounce of Prevention, the Ounce of Prevention toolkit was introduced in 2007, updated and expanded to include birth to 18 years in 2010, to address the growing epidemic of childhood obesity. This preventive approach was designed to provide simple tools to educate parents about good nutrition and physical activity for their children. This toolkit includes evidence-based messages as recommended by the Expert Committee within the National Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality (NICHQ) and the American Academy of Pediatrics. The Montcalm County Great Start Collaborative adapted this program from the Ohio Department of Health and the Nationwide Children's Hospital. (Montcalm connection: Welcome Baby)

Partners for A Healthy Baby curriculum is a five-volume series for home visitors (Before Baby Arrives, Baby's First Six Months, Baby's Months 7-12, Baby's Months 13-18, Toddler's Months 19-36). Each book in the series provides home visitors a planned sequence of critical topics to cover during pregnancy through the child's third birthday that are essential in achieving both family and program outcomes. A multidisciplinary faculty team at Florida State University developed research-informed content targeting

topics associated with program outcomes including improved prenatal health, positive parenting, enhanced child health and development, infant mental health, economic self-sufficiency, family stability, and healthy lifestyles and well-being. The Partners for a Healthy Baby series is unique in that it comprehensively addresses issues of child health and development within the context of the multifaceted needs of expectant and parenting families. The content supports the home visitor's ability to systematically plan and address key topics at critical times. For each topic, there are specific purposes that define the home visit, as well as follow-up activities and additional resources. The full-color handouts for families in English and Spanish summarize critical information and help the home visitor introduce subjects that may otherwise be awkward to broach. Also included are the well-researched Learning Games activities, used in the Carolina Abecedarian Project to achieve positive developmental outcomes. This curriculum is used in the Montcalm County Welcome Baby Program.

Talking is Teaching, is a public awareness campaign that helps parents recognize their power to boost their children's early brain and vocabulary development through simple, everyday actions - like describing things while walking outside, or singing songs together during bath time. Using books, parent videos, text messaging, social media, and information from expert partners, Talking is Teaching empowers parents and caregivers with fun and easy ways to improve their babies' learning.



"Great Start Collaborative offers value on multiple levels. As a woman and mother, I get to connect with others and learn new ways to aid in raising my children. As a family we get to socialize at meetings and find ways to implement the tools we learn and as a community people in need are connected with resources."

~Montcalm County Family of 4

"We value the Family Coalition and Great Start
Collaborative because it's been an incredibly
helpful resource to our family. We moved to the
area just before school started last year and didn't
know much about activities or what resources were
available. Since starting to come to the meetings
we feel more a part of the community and in the
know of events and resources. My daughter and I
love meeting other families too. We appreciate the
efforts of the program including the incentives like
dinner, childcare, gas card. The meetings turned
out to be much more than I originally thought and
very glad we decided to check it out."

~Montcalm County Family of 3

