



## Great Start Collaborative of Kent County

118 Commerce Ave SW

Grand Rapids MI 49503

[www.GreatStartkent.org](http://www.GreatStartkent.org)

January 15, 2026

Dear Kent County Community Members, Partners and Families,

We are deeply saddened to share difficult news regarding the future of the Great Start Collaborative of Kent County (GSC), which has served our community for the past 20 years. The State of Michigan eliminated section 32p from the fiscal year 2025-2026 budget, which supported the Great Start Collaboratives and Family Coalitions. Due to the loss of state funding, we will be unable to continue serving our community beyond January 30, 2026.

The GSC has served as the systems convenor for early childhood coordination in our community, bringing together parents, educators, leaders of public agencies, and local philanthropic organizations, who strive to address the needs of children in Kent County to help families access critical support programs and ensure that all children enter school ready to succeed.

With the GSC gone, we will lose:

- The Great Start Family Coalition, which ensures families have voice and influence in early childhood systems planning.
- Community events such as Books, Blocks & Balls, Oh Baby-Community Baby Shower, and Summer Learning Celebration.
- Funding to support the expansion of home visiting programs.
- Early literacy supports for families: Parent Powered Texts (Ready4K), One County One Book, free book distributions and early literacy trainings for providers.

This work has been made possible through strong partnerships and the deep commitment of families, educators, service providers, and community leaders. Together, we have built something meaningful, and we are incredibly proud of the impact our collaboration has had on our community.

We are committed to supporting those affected during this transition and will share additional information regarding next steps, available resources, and any opportunities for continued engagement where possible.

Thank you for being part of the Great Start Collaborative story over the last 20 years. Your involvement, trust, and support have made a lasting difference, and that legacy will remain an important part of our community.

With gratitude,

GSC Executive Team:

Paula Brown, Director  
Great Start Collaborative

Wendy Wheeler, Chair  
Kent County DHHS

Kristyn Bomberg  
WGVU Public Media

Chana Edmond  
Vibrant Futures

Kristin Geitzen  
Arbor Circle

MaDonna Princer  
Head Start for Kent County

Maureen Hale  
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Jennifer Headley-Nordman  
First Steps Kent

Renee Dunwell  
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Kelly Gerlinger  
Grand Rapids Public Schools

Tomarra Richardson  
Parent

Ashley Karsten  
Kent Intermediate School District