

# Early Childhood Development & Connections



## *A Working Vision for Greater Battle Creek*



## INTRODUCTION

From birth, many young children in Calhoun County and throughout Michigan are at risk of failure before they have had the opportunity to begin reaching toward their potential. These vulnerable children are often the victims of high infant mortality rates or severe developmental delays, sub-standard early care settings and a lack of basic socialization skills. To lessen the negative impact of these developmental shortcomings and create an environment for all children to enjoy maximum educational opportunities, a three-pronged intervention is being proposed.

## FAMILY CONNECTIONS

The Family Connections program will provide a Welcome to Greater Battle Creek's newest citizens. The families of every newborn infant will receive an initial home visit by a family and early childhood specialist, along with a home visitor support specialist. The family and early childhood specialist will be trained to evaluate and assess the infant and his/her home surroundings, and provide an important link to the wider community. In many cases, only one home visit will be needed to start the infant and family on the road to a successful future. In the event that potential problems are identified, the early childhood specialist will be able to link the family to appropriate community services as well as connect them to a virtual family resource center. Subsequent follow-up visits will be managed by the visitor support specialist, along with any appropriate referred agency staff representatives. Additionally, the Home Visitor, in conjunction with the local school district, will provide the family with an introduction to the local school community. This "Crib to Kindergarten" focus will help build a family-school relationship, ensuring initial school success, while paving the way for ongoing success in school.

## EARLY LEARNING PLAY GROUPS

Targeting one-to-four-year-olds, Early Learning Play Groups will be located within area schools, thus making the schools accessible to families at a time when early learning and socialization are of paramount importance for a child's later development and success. These play groups will provide parents the opportunity to interact with their young children in a structured, intentional early learning environment. Parents will be developing the skills they need as their child's first teacher, through the modeling of appropriated developmental skills by trained early childhood professionals. Additionally, parents will have the opportunity to develop leadership skills and be provided networking opportunities with other parents or care-providing adults. Within this play group framework potential development delays can be identified and referral opportunities provided. The Parents as Teachers (PAT) early learning group model will be used, led by someone trained in the PAT model with parent leaders assisting. Each play group session will include an extended activity for parents to take home as a reinforcement of that session's topic. Finally, the play group structure will strive to meet the needs of a diverse community, through such efforts as providing language translators, transportation services and the utilization of neighborhood schools as play group centers, making access to the program much easier and comfortable for families.

## PRE-SCHOOL STAFF TRAINING

The purpose of the pre-school staff training program is to provide quality pre-school opportunities for four-year-olds in the Greater Battle Creek area, in order to create continuity in quality pre-school programming as children approach kindergarten. This will incorporate data driven planning using the High Scope Model to ensure appropriate developmental activities and inspire collaboration among area school districts, with the goal of aligning curriculum with state quality benchmarks. Bridging the gap between pre-kindergarten and K-12 systems will create a seamless transition for children, which includes linking both data and assessment information. Another important aspect is the designed mentoring and coaching of pre-school teachers by an early childhood specialist to further ensure that desired continuity of learning experiences.

## CONCLUSION

Through this three-pronged intervention the Greater Battle Creek area will experience a ruthlessly strategic and highly intentional effort to improve the lives of our youngest citizens. Infant mortality will significantly decline, more young children will achieve the socialization skills so necessary in their ongoing development and the quality and continuity of pre-school programming will greatly improve. All of these factors will enhance our young children's early learning opportunities and better prepare them to become successful in school and valuable members of our community.

# Family Connections



The Home Visitor program will provide a Welcome to greater Battle Creek's newest citizens and create a framework for a health and safety evaluation and follow-up referrals as may be needed

The Home Visitor program includes the following components:

- an initial home visit for every family with a newborn, by a family and early childhood specialist and home visitor support specialist
- a link to community services that may assist families at any stage of child development
- identification of potential health and safety issues that may result in referrals to community service agencies
- a link to a virtual family resource center
- an introduction to the local school community in order to build family-school relationships early in the child's life to foster initial success that will continue through his/her educational career
- a transition to Early Learning Play Groups

## RESEARCH

“The Infant Health and Development Project, which provided home visits ... yielded better mother-child interactions at 30 months for participants than for families in a control group. At 36 months, the treatment [visited] children had higher IQ scores than control children, higher receptive vocabulary and fewer maternal-reported behavior problems.”

*-Karoly, et al., 1998*

“The following positive effects are documented by reports from parents enrolled in home visitation programs

*(Daro 2006):*

- Fewer acts of abuse or neglect toward their children over time
- More positive health outcomes for the infant and mother
- More positive and satisfying interactions with their infants

- A greater number of life choices that create more stable and nurturing environments for children than experienced either by participants in a control group or by comparison groups

## YEAR I

- 1.5 Family & Early Childhood Specialist
- 3 Visit & Support Specialists
- Home packets (Books for parents and child(ren) + resource materials)
- 5 Ages & Stages Questionnaire - training and kits
- 5 “Parents as Teachers” Training

# Early Learning Play Groups

Targeting one-to-four-year-olds, Early Learning Play Groups will be located within area schools, thus making the schools accessible to families at a time when early learning and socialization are of paramount importance for a child's later development and success.

These Early Learning Play Groups will include the following components:

- the opportunity for parents to interact with their young children in a structured, intentional early learning environment
- parenting skill development to assist them as their child's first teacher
- modeling of appropriate developmental activities with extended activities available for home use
- networking and leadership skill opportunities for parents
- identification of potential developmental delays and referral opportunities
- use of the Parents as Teachers (PAT) early learning group model
- skill building opportunities for parents, utilizing a wide variety of community resources to assist parents in such areas as food selection and meal preparation, family budgeting, home maintenance, etc.
- daily snacks and twice-monthly lunches consisting of foods that are nutritionally appropriate for the age levels served
- a focus on the needs of a diverse community, through such initiatives as language translations, transportation services, utilization of neighborhood schools as play group sites for convenience and building school-family relationships
- transition to pre-school program opportunities with appropriately trained staff



## RESEARCH

“Child-parent/caregiver relationships are the most important component of supportive social and cognitive environments.”

*National Research Council, 2000*

“Cognitive stimulation within the home appears to be particularly important for children's cognitive development.”

*Duncan and Magnuson, 2003*

“Secure, stable, supportive relationships with caring adults in the family and community contribute significantly to children's healthy brain development.”

*Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2006*

## YEAR I

- 1 Early Childhood Development Professional
  - 2 Para-Educators
  - 3 Ages & Stages Questionnaire Materials  
(8 groups per week x 48 weeks - includes parent hand-outs + a book each week for each child)
- Start-Up Equipment  
(Includes manipulatives, games, large motor activities, arts and crafts supplies, dramatic play supplies, books, storage tubs)
- Parent Skill Building Opportunities  
Snacks / Lunches
- Parent Transportation as Needed
- 3 “Parents as Teachers” Training

# Pre-School Staff Training



The purpose of the Pre-School Staff Training program is to provide quality pre-school opportunities for four-year-olds in the Greater Battle Creek area, in order to create continuity in quality pre-school programming as children approach Kindergarten.

The Pre-School Training program consists of the following components:

- data driven planning to ensure appropriate developmental activities utilizing the High Scope Model
- collaboration among area school districts concerning pre-school opportunities
- alignment of pre-school curriculum with state quality benchmarks
- a bridging of the gap between pre-K and K-12 systems to create a seamless transition, that includes linking data and assessment information
- mentoring and coaching of pre-school teachers by an early childhood specialist
- transition to Kindergarten and the K-12 school community

## RESEARCH

Participation in high-quality early childhood programs can help low- and middle-income children prepare for school and is associated with better performance in the early years of school

*(National research Council, 2000; Reynolds, 1994; Sheehan, et. al., 1991; Warash & Markstrom-Adams, 1995; Kagan & Neuman, 1997).*

Investment in universal [high quality] preschool would increase the gross domestic product by \$988 billion within 60 years, according to an estimate by Isabel Sawhill, director of economic studies at the Brookings Institution.

## YEAR I

- 5 days “High Scope” Training for 25 GSRP teachers in county  
*(Training & travel / lodging for expenses and trainers)*
- 4 Staff Training Meetings
- New GSRP Materials
- Books and Materials for 25 Teachers
- 4 Mentor/Coaches for 25 Teachers
- “Train the Trainer”
- 2 Training for Mentor  
*(7 weeks at High Scope, Ypsilanti, MI. Includes travel /lodging expenses)*

# Connections

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT & CONNECTIONS WRAP-UP

*The cultural diversity within the population of Calhoun County provides an enriching and challenging environment for our county's residents, and the initiatives designed to help meet their needs. The uniqueness of those cultural differences helps create a foundation for success in all aspects of community service. These same cultural differences also often create disconnects between people needing services and the organizations charged with meeting those needs. Language, economics, education and social status have traditionally provided obstacles to effectively reaching those most in need. An important goal of Early Childhood Development and Connections is to help provide a community environment that meets the developmental needs of all of Calhoun County's young children, eliminates the obstacles to their social, emotional and intellectual growth and celebrates the diversity within the Calhoun County community.*

*Early Childhood Development and Connections includes the following overriding components throughout all aspects of the initiative:*

- *A staff committed to recognizing the diversity of our community and able to culturally and linguistically relate to that diversity*
- *A director who will oversee the operations of all three program components and reinforce the connections among all three, in order to create smooth and seamless transitions for young children and their families from birth to school age*
- *A recognition of the collaborative efforts of the Early Childhood Task Force in uniting Calhoun County early childhood stakeholders and coordinating their respective roles in early childhood development, on behalf of all of our county's young children*
- *An acknowledgement of the in-kind contributions of time, space, equipment and materials by Calhoun County's individual school districts and the Calhoun Intermediate School District*

### YEAR I

1 Office Support

1 Director

Finger Printing /  
Background Checks

Harwood Lab Training for  
Director

6 Laptops  
- 1, Director (\$1000)  
- 4, Mentor/Coaches (4 x \$1000)  
- 1 Laptop with Printer (\$1500)

6 iPads  
- Family Connections (3)  
- Play Groups (1)

12 Cell Phones  
- Family Connections (5)  
- Play Group (2)  
- Director (1)  
- Mentor/Coaches (4)

Mileage (per month)  
- Family Connections (5 x \$150)  
- Play Group (3 x \$150)  
- Director (\$150)  
- Mentor/Coaches (4 x \$150)

Office Needs  
- Postage & Paper

Contracted Support for  
Language Assistance (will  
support complete program)

Evaluation/Data Facilitator

Office Space

Marketing

Communication