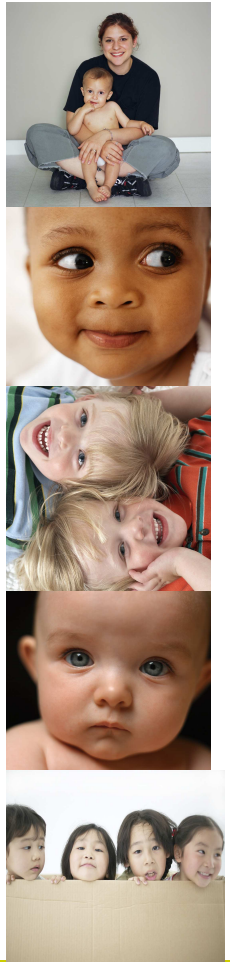




**What you can do.....**

- Become an advocate for young children! Contact your legislators to educate them regarding the importance of a solid early childhood foundation.
- Visit [www.ecic4kids.org](http://www.ecic4kids.org) for information on the Great Start Initiative and ideas for early childhood advocacy.
- Join your local parent coalition by calling or emailing Stephanie Wagner, Great Start Collaborative Director for Mason Lake and Oceana Counties.
- Help us develop our local strategic plan by completing our online survey or contacting a Great Start Collaborative Partner.



- Our partners....**
- Mason, Lake, and Oceana County Dept. of Human Services
  - Dr. Jennifer Branning
  - Kid's House/Andre Bosse Center
  - Shelby Early Childhood Center
  - Catholic Charities West MI
  - Victory Early Childhood Center
  - Baldwin Public Schools
  - Mason Lake ISD
  - Mason County Central Schools
  - Ludington & Scottville Chamber of Commerce
  - Lake County Leadership Council
  - West MI Child & Family Leadership Council
  - Pathways of West MI
  - Hart Public Schools
  - Mason County Eastern Schools
  - United Way of Mason County
  - Oceana ISD
  - Baldwin Family Health Care
  - Mason County Reformed Church
  - West MI Community Mental Health
  - Mason County Growth Alliance
  - District 10 Health Department
  - Ludington Daily News
  - Pentwater Preschool

**Did you know.....?**

- Over 85 % of brain development occurs before the age of 5
- Every \$1 invested in quality early childhood programming shows a return on \$7-17 over the child's lifetime
- Children who received high quality early education scored higher on IQ tests, had higher achievement at age 14, and higher general literacy rates at age 19.
- Those children are also more likely to marry and stay married longer than children in the control group. Females were much less likely to have children out of wedlock.

*The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project; High/Scope Educational Research Foundation*

*A Great Start for Every Child....*

Young children need your help. Even today, with resources available from both government and private organizations, almost half enter Kindergarten without any prior school experience. A survey of Kindergarten teachers in Mason and Lake Counties found that those children are more likely to enter school without the skills needed to be successful. Research tells us that children who start behind, stay behind.

The Great Start Collaborative aims to address these issues. We want to make sure that every child in Mason, Lake, and Oceana Counties—and their parents—have access to the services that they need to

address health, social emotional, developmental, and learning needs. While many services and supports currently exist, quality and access are inconsistent.

The Mason-Lake-Oceana Great Start Collaborative includes leaders in human services, business, education, child care, health, charitable and faith based organizations, and parents. Members are working together to ensure a healthy start for ALL children in our local community by identifying barriers and gaps in services, then developing and implementing a comprehensive local early childhood system.



*"The fact is that children receiving high quality early education are more likely to become better citizens. Our children must grow up to attend college, become employed, pay taxes and give back to our community."*

*Julie VanDyke, Director  
Mason County Growth Alliance*

**Mason-Lake-Oceana GSC**

2130 W US 10  
Ludington, MI 49431

Phone: 231-757-3716  
E-mail: [swagner@mlisd.k12.mi.us](mailto:swagner@mlisd.k12.mi.us)

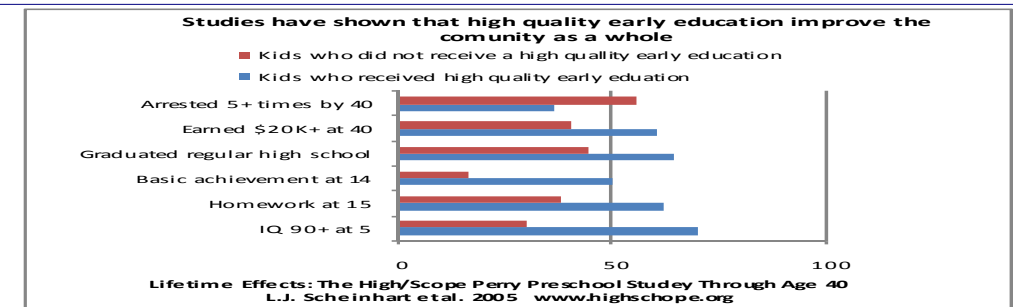
**Visit our website!**

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



*Why Early Childhood Matters To You....*

As a taxpayer and community member, an investment in quality early childhood programming has a significant impact. It reduces crime, creates a more cost efficient school system, and increases our tax base by creating a stable workforce with higher earning potential.



# Pediatric and Family Health



**Facts:**

- More than 1 in 4 babies in Mason, Lake, and Oceana Counties are born to mothers who lacked adequate prenatal care.
- Approximately half of all local children are insured by either Medicaid or Mi-Child, both publically funded programs.
- Another 5% have no medical insurance.

**Reality:**

A lack of prenatal care or delays in treating children’s health problems can have lifelong implications, negatively impacting a child’s development and future quality of life.

Few, if any, physicians accept unlimited numbers of Medicaid patients. Families may be required to travel for specialized health care. This may delay

**Impact:**

Healthy children are more likely to be born to mothers who receive good prenatal care and information. These children are less likely to have costly complications at birth. Timely preventative care reduces the need for emergency room visits . Good health habits in childhood have life-long implications.

# Social Emotional Health

**Facts:**

- Kindergarten teachers from Mason and Lake counties report that 30% or more of their students did not have the social skills necessary to be successful in Kindergarten.
- National studies indicate that approximately 10% of young children suffer emotional and behavioral challenges that impair their ability to learn.

**Reality:**

Children with behavioral and emotional disorders are much more likely to drop out of school, leading to higher rates of criminal activity and limited income.

Secure attachments in infancy lay the foundation for healthy later development. Without secure attachment, children are a greater risk for poor outcomes, including antisocial behavior and lack of confidence , persistence, and enthusiasm that precipitates success

**Impact:**

A lack of social and behavioral skills affect a child’s school performance, regardless of intellect or family income.



*“At West Michigan Community Mental Health System, our mission is to promote the rights and abilities of people we serve to be full and participating members of their communities. Brain research has shown that the first 3 years of life are the most dynamic and critical period of human development. Investing in our youngest children is the best investment we can make in helping them to be full and participating members of our community”*

*Rich VandenHeuvel, Executive Director, WCMCHS*

# Economic Security

**Facts:**

- Local unemployment rates are currently above the state average in Lake and Oceana Counties.
- 1 in 4 children in Mason, Lake, and Oceana Counties lives under the federal poverty line of \$21,027 for a two parent family.

**Reality:**

Our communities rank higher in both unemployment and poverty rates than the state average. A lack of financial resources causes strain on the family, which adversely affects the health and development of a young child. When families must focus on meeting basic needs, stress is added to the lives of all involved.

**Impact:**

In order for our economy to thrive, we must be assured of a strong highly skilled workforce. By investing in our children now, our community will be guaranteed a strong workforce later.

# Early Care & Education

*“The greatest potential return on dollars invested in education is with early childhood programs. We either pay now or pay much more later...or lose them forever.”*

*Dr. Randall Howes,  
Superintendent  
Baldwin Community Schools*

**Facts:**

- Approximately 40% of local children enter Kindergarten with no prior school experience.
- An average of 65% of young children in Mason, Lake, and Oceana Counties spend time in a child care setting while their parents work, some up to 10 hours per day.

**Reality:**

Most children age birth to five are cared for someone other than their parents prior to entering Kindergarten. The quality of that care—whether it is provided by a center, family daycare home, or relative—matters. Access to high quality and affordable child care and preschool are vital to a successful early childhood system.

**Impact:**

90% of a child’s language, social behavior, problem solving ability, and emotional health will be ....or not.....developed by the time the child enters Kindergarten. Stable nurturing relationships with caregivers as well as early learning opportunities provide a child with the tools they need to be successful throughout their lives.

# Family Support

**Facts:**

- The rates of births to teens in the three county area are higher than the state average, as are the number of births to mothers with less than a high school education.
- Mother’s education level is an accurate predictor of healthy development, school readiness, and child achievement in school.

**Reality:**

Raising a child is challenging in the best of circumstances. Repeated family stress impacts child development and can lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and poor physical and mental health. Parents are the child’s first and most important teacher. Parents of all ages need access to a variety of educational and supportive services that encourage their vital role in their child’s development.

**Impact:**

By creating a community where families are supported through a network of support and educational resources, we ensure that our children have safe and healthy environments in which to thrive. Where parents are empowered with knowledge and their basic needs are met, they have more energy to direct into nurturing their young child.



**Our children deserve a community that helps them grow up safe, healthy, and eager to succeed. What does that look like to you?**



**Tell us what you think by completing our online survey. Go to [www.greatstartmlo.org](http://www.greatstartmlo.org) and click on “community survey”.**