

BUILDING CONSENSUS BY DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

*Analysis of Community, Parent, and Stakeholder Attitudes on
Early Childhood Education and Care*

and

Economic Analysis

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Cross-Cutting Findings

A number of findings cut across the Eaton County Early Childhood Connections (ECC) community survey, parent survey, focus groups, and economic analysis. These converging findings are discussed below.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

- Overall, recall of the “Be their Hero from age Zero” advertising campaign is excellent, with 42 percent of parents in the community survey recalling some advertising about early childhood education over the past six months. Even more significant is that when parent clients of Early Childhood Connections of Eaton County (ECC) are surveyed, 80 percent complete the “Be their Hero” phrase exactly. The “Eaton County Values Every Child” advertising campaign has also been successful, although recall is less than for the statewide campaign. Fifty-five percent of parents answering the survey are able to complete the phrase.
- Focus group findings confirm the success of the statewide campaign and provide insight into future efforts to increase awareness:
 - There was some concern raised during the focus groups that while everyone had heard the “Be their Hero” ad campaign, little information regarding early childhood education and care services (ECEC) was delivered. The focus group of frequent voters felt that the phrase, while memorable, does not immediately bring to mind early childhood education and care or any follow-up source of information.
 - The general feeling of the focus groups is supported by survey results, which show that only 31 percent of parent clients are familiar with the In-Touch with Community Resources service, only 24 percent of parent clients had been referred to a ECEC program agency or organization in Eaton county over the last year, and only 2 percent would turn to Early Childhood Connections if they had a question or concern about their child. Further marketing efforts could address this finding by increasing community knowledge about the services provided by ECC and the agency partners.

PUBLIC FUNDS

- The community survey revealed that 52 percent of the public believes that elementary school is the most important period for investing public funds. Only 14 percent believe that age 0–3 is the most important period for investing funds. Through the community survey, respondents failed to see ECEC expenditures and improved quality of K–12 schools as complementary actions.
- This result contrasts with the result of the voter focus group, which unanimously believed that 0–3 is the most important time to invest in education. The parent focus group felt that investing money in ECEC is important, but that this money should not come out of existing school budgets. Overall, most focus group and survey respondents failed to see the connection between higher school-age performance and a high-quality ECEC system.

- The community survey shows that citizens support the government playing a *supportive* role in ECEC but not necessarily providing ECEC to all children. Citizens were willing to have tax dollars allocated to fund this supportive role. Furthermore, 83 percent of citizens believe that the government should help ensure the availability of high-quality childcare for parents at a price they can afford to pay. Nevertheless, over 60 percent of respondents *strongly* agree that early childhood education is primarily the role of the parent.
- Ninety-two percent of public survey respondents view ECEC as an investment because “kids with better early childhood learning experiences do better in school and become more productive adults.” Many of the focus group participants echoed this sentiment. The economic analysis shows that spending money on ECEC now can actually save the government money in the future by reducing a host of social problems. These results also demonstrate the contradictory beliefs held by the public, as revealed in the community survey: while they think that ECEC is a good investment to improve academic achievement and leads to productive adulthood, they also believe that ECEC funding takes away from the K–12 experience.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

- The community ranked improving K–12 education as the top issue for state and local government to address. Of all six issues ranked, cutting taxes was the lowest priority. Improving the quality of learning for children under the age of five was ranked fifth, above cutting taxes.
- The idea of helping at-risk children was prevalent in all of the focus groups and received the second highest priority score in the community survey ranking of public policy issues. In general, the focus group participants felt that greater attention should be paid towards educating at-risk parents about both the need for ECEC and the services available in Eaton County.
- A clear connection exists between the primary concerns of Eaton County citizens and the economic and societal benefits of a high-quality ECEC system, but this connection is not readily apparent to Eaton County residents. It is clear that the next steps must focus on helping the larger community recognize these links in order to increase investment in ECEC.

Community Survey Findings

INTRODUCTION

To assess progress toward the goal of increasing community and parent awareness of the importance of early childhood, a community survey was conducted in May 2002. The survey was intended to establish a baseline near the close of the first year of Early Childhood Connections (ECC) activities. It was designed to measure the current level of community and parent awareness and understanding, which Early Childhood Connections is striving to enhance. Some questions were drawn from surveys conducted in other states to determine the level of public awareness and the public's attitudes regarding early childhood education (available at www.earlycare.org). Adopting questions from other surveys provided comparisons for benchmarking purposes in addition to strengthening the reliability and validity of the instrument designed specifically for the ECC initiative in Eaton County. The 2002 survey also included questions on recall of the statewide media campaign, "Be their Hero from age Zero," and local public awareness efforts. This information is being used to develop the message of ECC's continuing local public awareness and education effort. The evaluation design calls for a second survey near the close of year two to assess changes in community and parent understanding and awareness.

METHODOLOGY

A random sample of 800 adults in Eaton County was surveyed. The sample was drawn by Survey Sampling, Inc., using a single stage, equal probability design. This means that the probability of being included in the sample was equal for all telephone numbers in Eaton County. Non-working numbers were deleted from the list; working numbers where a person could not be contacted remained on the list. The resulting sample yields a margin of error of ± 3.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence interval. This means that for this sample, we are 95 percent confident that any of our sample estimates, such as for demographics, are within ± 3.5 percent of the true value, had we been able to survey the entire population of Eaton County.

The composition of the sample is generally representative of Eaton County residents (see Exhibit 1 for detailed frequencies for all demographics for the general sample and the parent sub-sample). Forty-five percent of respondents (approximately 350) reported having at least one dependent child in their home. This is higher than the proportion for the general population of Eaton County (34 percent). However, less than 16 percent of these parents report having a child under age five in their home (approximately 130 respondents out of 800). This low number makes it difficult to render a statistically reliable analysis of parents with very young children. Nevertheless, the high number of parents overall makes comparisons of parents, nonparents, and the general population possible. The parents who comprise the subsample are more likely to be married, slightly younger, and have slightly higher incomes than the general sample. With few exceptions, parents did not differ significantly from nonparents in the ways that they perceive early childhood education and issues. These exceptions are discussed in the analysis below.

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, the public in Eaton County values early childhood programs, quality childcare, and other key elements such as access to health care. However, a majority (69 percent) values investment in schools (K–12) more than new or expanded funding for early childhood programs.
- Almost half (48 percent) of respondents indicate awareness that the first three years of a child’s life is key to brain development, yet respondents do not see the connection between the importance of this period and investing public dollars. Public education ranks highly in the minds of respondents as a priority issue (39 percent rank it as the most important issue), yet again, they do not see the long-term connections between high-quality early childhood education and school performance (5 percent rank improving early childhood education as the most important issue).
- A significant majority believes that state and local government should do more for families with young children. Over three-fourths of respondents agree (34 percent strongly agree and 43 somewhat agree) that Eaton County should play a stronger role in providing supports and resources for families with children under age five.
- Overall, the public believes that the county should play a *supportive* role and that tax dollars should support learning programs for all children from birth to age five. Most respondents agree that the county should play a stronger role, yet most also see early childhood education as the responsibility of the child’s parents. Over 60 percent of respondents strongly agree that early childhood education is primarily the role of the parent.
- Most agree that tax dollars should support learning programs for children aged 0–5 so all have an equal opportunity to start school ready to succeed. Seventy-eight percent of respondents agree with this statement (44 percent strongly agree).
- Seventy-eight percent are very *unfamiliar* with “Early Childhood Connections of Eaton County,” while only 6 percent are very familiar. However, parents are slightly more likely to be familiar with ECC. Twenty-nine percent are very or somewhat familiar (10 percent are very familiar).
- Thirty-one percent indicate that they have heard or seen something about early childhood education in the past six months. In contrast, 42 percent of parents indicate hearing or seeing something about early childhood education in the past six months. Parents are significantly more likely to have seen or heard something than nonparents.
- Twenty-five percent are able to complete the phrase “Be their Hero from age Zero,” while 36 percent of parents are able to complete this phrase.

OVERALL RESULTS

1. Parent and community awareness of the value of children is heightened (Q 25–30).

Asking the public direct questions about the value of children tends to generate highly positive responses. To elicit attitudes that can be used to gain an understanding of the community’s awareness of the value of children, the public was asked to respond to several statements that might be heard in policy debates. Respondents could “strongly

agree,” “somewhat agree,” “somewhat disagree,” or “strongly disagree” with each statement.

Overall, the public in Eaton County values early childhood programs, high-quality childcare, and other key elements such as access to health care. However, a majority values investment in schools (K–12) more than new or expanded funding for early childhood programs.

- **Access to health care:** The public in Eaton County overwhelmingly agrees with the statement that no child should be denied health care based on the inability of parents to pay for health insurance or care: 95 percent agree (81 percent strongly agree and 14 percent somewhat agree). This statement was drawn from the 1998 Colorado Children’s Campaign Poll of registered voters, which also found 95 percent agreeing with this statement.
- **Spanking as a regular form of punishment:** 45 percent agree (14 percent strongly agree; 31 percent agree) with the statement, “Using spanking as a regular form of punishment helps children develop a better sense of control.” Of the 55 percent who disagree with the statement, 35 percent strongly disagree and 20 percent somewhat disagree. Most child development experts believe that young children learn self-control when parents set limits and encourage desired behavior, rather than as a result of physical punishment.
- **Government should help ensure the availability of high-quality child care:** A significant majority of the public in Eaton County (83 percent, with 51 percent strongly agreeing) agrees that government should help ensure the availability of high-quality child care for parents at a price they can afford to pay. Only 8 percent strongly disagree. This statement was drawn from the 1998 Colorado Children’s Campaign Poll, which found that 75 percent agreed with this statement (45 percent strongly). The Eaton County public’s response demonstrates a high awareness of the value of high-quality childcare and perception of a clear role for government.
- **The market will take care of it:** 47 percent agree that “the market can be counted on to take care of parents’ childcare needs without the government getting involved. While this response seems to contradict the previous statement about government’s role, the level of support for each statement suggests that about half of the public values the marketplace approach but also supports the role of the government in assuring access, quality, and affordability. Also drawn from the Colorado Children’s Campaign Poll, the statement drew a similar response in that survey, with about equal proportions agreeing and disagreeing with the statement.
- **Spending on early childhood programs is an investment:** There is strong agreement in Eaton County with the statement, “Spending on early childhood programs is an investment because kids with better early childhood learning experiences do better in school and become more productive adults.” Ninety-two percent agree, with only 4 percent strongly disagreeing. This question was drawn from the 2000 Illinois Early Childhood Statewide Survey, which found 82 percent agreeing with the statement.
- **The public schools are already struggling with budgetary problems:** 69 percent agree with the statement, “Public schools are already struggling with budgetary

problems as is. The government should care take of the schools before spending money on new or expanded early childhood programs.” While the public agrees that spending on early childhood programs is an investment (92 percent), a large proportion (69 percent) think that more money should be directed to existing school programs before funds are used for new or expanded early childhood programs. These findings show that while the public sees early childhood spending as an investment, they think it competes with the need to fund K–12 education, which comes first in the eyes of a majority of the public.

2. Parent and community understanding of issues that impact the lives of children is increased (Q 1–8); (Q 14–18).

Respondents were asked a series of questions designed to ascertain their understanding of early childhood issues and how important they consider these issues.

Overall, respondents indicate awareness that the first three years of a child’s life are key to brain development, yet respondents do not see a connection between the importance of this period and investing public dollars. Public education ranks high in the minds of respondents as a priority issue, yet again, they do not see long-term connections between high-quality early childhood education and school performance.

- **Overall perceptions of Michigan:** Respondents were asked how satisfied they are with things in Michigan and specifically, how satisfied they are with things for children in Michigan. Overall, respondents have a very positive outlook. Seventy-eight percent of respondents overall are either very satisfied (18 percent) or somewhat satisfied (60 percent) with the way things are going in Michigan, and 70 percent are also very satisfied (12 percent) or somewhat satisfied (58 percent) with the way things are going for children in Michigan. Parents in Eaton County are significantly more likely to hold a positive view than nonparents. This is one of the few areas where there is a statistically significant difference between parents and nonparents. Eighty-five percent of parents are very satisfied (21 percent) or somewhat satisfied (64 percent) with Michigan compared to 72 percent of nonparents (16 percent very satisfied and 56 percent somewhat satisfied). Seventy-seven percent of parents are very satisfied (17 percent) or somewhat satisfied (60 percent) with how things are for children in Michigan, compared to 65 percent of nonparents (9 percent very satisfied and 56 percent somewhat satisfied).
- **Most important age for developing capacity to learn:** Almost half (48 percent) of the public believes that the most important age for developing a child’s abilities to learn is from age one to three.
 - Up to age one (6 percent)
 - One to three (48 percent)
 - Four and five (26 percent)
 - Six to ten (17 percent)
 - Eleven to fourteen (4 percent)

This question was drawn from the 2000 Illinois Early Childhood Statewide Survey, which found 7 percent saying up to age one is the most important age, 44 percent saying

age one to three, 27 percent age four and five, and 13 percent saying it is from age six to ten.

- **Most important period for investing public funds:** Fifty-two percent of the public believes that elementary school is the most important period for investing public funds to improve the learning experiences of children in Eaton County, compared to only 14 percent for the period birth to age three. The public does not seem to see a connection between investing in the period from birth to age three and improved learning experiences.
 - From birth to age three (14 percent)
 - Four and five (19 percent)
 - Elementary school (52 percent)
 - Middle school (10 percent)
 - High school (5 percent)

The findings in Eaton County are very consistent with those found in Illinois, where 46 percent say the most important period for investing public funds is elementary school, followed by 17 percent who believe that age four to five is the most important. Birth to age three is seen as most important by only 15 percent.

- **Issue Priorities:** Of the following six issues, which were all ranked above six (on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not a priority at all and 10 is the highest priority), the public ranks improving K–12 education as the highest priority and cutting taxes the lowest.
 - Improving K–12 education (8.5)
 - Helping at-risk children (8.4)
 - Fighting juvenile crime (8.3)
 - Improving access to health care (8.2)
 - Improving quality of learning for children under age five (7.2)
 - Cutting taxes (6.6)

Improving the quality of learning for young children is ranked only above cutting taxes. This may reflect the need for more public awareness of the impact of early learning on reducing risks for children, on student performance at the K–12 level, and on juvenile crime. The ranking for improving the quality of early learning and cutting taxes is consistent with the findings from the Illinois survey, from which the list of issues was adapted.

- **Most important issues for state and local government to address:** From among the issues listed, the largest percentage of respondents (39 percent) rank improving K–12 education as the most important issue for state and local government to address. In contrast, only 5 percent rank improving early childhood education as most important.
 - Improving K–12 education (39 percent)
 - Fighting juvenile crime (16 percent)
 - Improving access to healthcare (16 percent)
 - Helping at risk children (11 percent)
 - Cutting taxes (7 percent)
 - Improving quality of learning for children under age five (5 percent)

Again, respondents in Eaton County demonstrate the lack of connection between improving early childhood education and K–12 education. These findings are consistent with those found in Illinois.

- **Children’s abilities are set from birth:** Ninety-one percent disagree—80 percent strongly disagree—with the statement “children’s abilities are pretty much set from birth and cannot be affected by how their parents interact with them.” Almost everyone is aware of the important effect of parental interaction on children’s abilities.
- **Children’s experiences in the first three years of life affect their brain and learning over the long term:** Ninety-six percent agree—72 percent strongly agree—with this statement. Again, the public is well informed about the impact of a child’s experiences early in life.
- **Concern about issues:** Respondents were asked to describe their level of concern (very concerned, somewhat concerned, somewhat unconcerned, not at all concerned) about issues that affect children’s lives. Child abuse and neglect is of greatest concern to respondents, with 74 percent indicating that they are very concerned about this issue, compared to 42 percent who indicate that they are very concerned about school readiness.
 - Abuse and neglect of children (74 percent)
 - Children growing up without both parents (57 percent)
 - Access to affordable, high-quality childcare for all families (52 percent)
 - Children who aren’t prepared to start school (42 percent)
 - Creating more family-friendly workplaces (39 percent)

3. The role the community plays in supporting all children is highlighted.

Role of the Community in Early Childhood Education (Q9–13)

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements related to early childhood education. These questions are used to understand the level of support respondents have for a community-wide effort at improving early childhood education. They also uncover the extent to which respondents see early childhood education as the purview of parents alone, or if they see the wider community playing a role.

Overall, the public believes that the county should play a *supportive* role and that tax dollars should support learning programs for all children from birth to age five. Most respondents agree that the county should play a stronger role, yet most also see early childhood education as the responsibility of the child’s parents. Over 60 percent of respondents *strongly* agree that early childhood education is primarily the role of the parent. These findings suggest that efforts to increase public investment in early childhood programs should emphasize the primacy of the parent’s role and the community supports that should be available to them.

- **Eaton County should play a stronger role in providing supports and resources for families with children under age five.** Over three-fourths of respondents agree with this statement (34 percent strongly agree and 43 somewhat agree).
- **Eaton County should play a stronger role in providing supports and resources for all families.** More respondents agree with this statement than the previous one about supports for families with young children, but not by a large percentage. Eighty-four percent of respondents agree with the statement (46 percent strongly agree).
- **Tax dollars should support learning programs for children aged 0–5 so all have an equal opportunity to start school ready to succeed.** Seventy-eight percent of respondents agree with this statement (44 percent strongly agree).
- **The county should make sure young children are safe. It should not take over the job of educating them.** Seventy percent agree with this statement (37 percent strongly agree). In the Illinois survey, which used the term “state” rather than “county,” 55 percent agreed (29 percent strongly agreed).
- **Educating children under age five is primarily the responsibility of the parents.** Eighty-five percent agree with this statement (62 percent strongly agree).

Support for Early Childhood Services (Q19–23)

As another way of determining the public’s view of the role of the community, residents were asked to prioritize early childhood services in Eaton County. They were read a list of services and then asked to indicate whether they thought each service should be a high, medium, or low priority. More respondents rate health screenings and providing parenting information to new parents as high priorities, while the lowest percentage of respondents rate home visits as a high priority. Making voluntary, professionally organized early learning experiences available to all children under age five was rated as a high priority by less than 40 percent. These findings are consistent with the opinions described above, with the public viewing the community in a supportive role. A more active community role, such as home visits, is viewed more cautiously.

- Provide low- or no-cost health screenings (70 percent rated as a high priority)
 - Provide all new parents with information on early brain development (63 percent)
 - Make early learning experiences available to all children (37 percent)
 - Provide parenting classes or groups (33 percent)
 - Provide home visits to parents (22 percent)
4. Community knowledge of the available services and supports for families with young children is promoted (Q 24).

The survey asked respondents if they are aware of a program in the community called “Early Childhood Connections of Eaton County.” Seventy-eight percent are not at all familiar with the program, while only 6 percent are very familiar with it. Parents are slightly more likely to be familiar with ECC. Twenty-nine percent are very or somewhat familiar (10 percent are very familiar), while 71 percent of parents are still not at all familiar with ECC. This relationship is statistically significant, indicating that we can be

confident that parents in the general population are more likely to be aware of ECC, if only slightly.

Early Childhood Connections has promoted the many agencies and organizations that are part of the network providing programs and services for families with young children. It is possible that because of this focus on promoting the agency partners, the public is less aware of ECC as an entity. While promoting the agencies that make up the network may help to build a partnership among the agencies, it may be less effective in creating an identity for the network overall, potentially making it more difficult for parents to access services. This may negatively influence progress toward an integrated service delivery system characterized by “one-stop referral” (if not one-stop services) for families seeking services.

Recall of the State and Local Public Awareness Media Campaigns (Q 31-32).

In order to assess the extent to which the “Be their Hero from age Zero” campaign has permeated the county, residents were asked if they recalled seeing or hearing anything about early childhood education in the past six months. Thirty-one percent of the entire sample indicated that they had. Forty-two percent of parents indicated hearing or seeing something about early childhood education in the past six months, compared to 24 percent of nonparents. Parents are significantly more likely to recall seeing or hearing something related to early childhood education than are nonparents.

A follow-up question was asked of respondents who indicated that they had heard or seen something. Of the 251 responses, 73 percent mentioned some general type of information they had heard or seen on television, billboards or in printed media. Within this 73 percent, 4 percent did not specifically mention a program or source of information, but they did use the phrase “zero to five” when discussing early childhood programs or information. This we interpret as a partial absorption of the early childhood message. Five percent mentioned or described Eaton County Early Childhood Connections, 3 percent mentioned a similar program in Ingham County, ACTS. Twelve percent specifically mentioned the “Be their Hero from age Zero” campaign by name.

Finally, respondents were asked to complete the “Be their Hero...” phrase. Twenty-five percent of the entire sample was able to complete this phrase. In contrast, 36 percent of parents and 16 percent of nonparents were able to complete this phrase. Parents are significantly more likely than nonparents to be able to complete the phrase when prompted. Eaton County residents have much higher recall (25 percent) of the “Be their Hero...” campaign compared to the state, which has a recall of 15 percent.

EXHIBIT 1
Selected Demographics for Eaton County

Age			
	Sample	Parents	Eaton County
Under 25	8%	6%	12%
25–34	17	26	13
35–44	22	39	16
45–54	24	25	15
55–64	15	3	9
65 and over	15	1	11

Education			
	Sample	Parents	Eaton County*
Less than high school	4%	4%	11%
High school or GED	27	24	30
Some college or AA degree	37	40	38
4-year college degree or beyond	33	32	22

Race			
	Sample	Parents	Eaton County
White/Caucasian	93%	91%	92%
Black/African American	2	3	6
Hispanic or Latino	1	2	3
Native American	1	2	1
Asian/Asian American	0	1	1
Other	2	2	2

Household Income			
	Sample	Parents	Eaton County*
Less than \$25,000	16%	12%	20%
\$25,000–\$49,999	32	31	30
\$50,000–\$74,999	27	30	25
\$75,000 and over	25	27	25

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

Parent Survey Findings

INTRODUCTION

To assess the progress toward the goal of expanding services for early childhood education and care, a parent survey was conducted in June 2002. This survey was designed to gather information about parent participation in and knowledge of early childhood education and care services provided by Early Childhood Connections of Eaton County (ECC). This survey also included questions on recall of the statewide media campaign, “Be their Hero from age Zero,” and ECC’s campaign, “Eaton County Values Every Child.” The findings can be used to establish baselines and targets for expanding the use of early childhood education and care services.

METHODOLOGY

A mail survey was sent to the 1,838 parents currently in the ECC service database. This mail survey contained a cover letter from Ronda Rucker, grant administrator and coordinator of ECC, and a business reply envelope. PSC received 355 surveys, a response rate of 19 percent with a margin of error of ± 4.7 percent.

KEY FINDINGS

- **ECC is reaching parents.** Eighty-seven percent of parents report that they requested and are receiving the *Valuing Every Child Newsletter*.
- **ECC’s message is being received.** Eighty percent of parents completed the “Be their Hero from age Zero” advertising slogan and 55 percent of parents completed the “Eaton County Values Every Child” slogan.
- **Parents are well informed.** Parents were consistently correct when asked to evaluate statements regarding the education and development of young children. On average, ECC parent clients scored 6.75 out of 9 on an index of questions concerning child development issues.
- **Health services are the most utilized service.** Over 60 percent of parents have had their child screened for health, vision, hearing and/or development, compared to 25 percent or less who have had a home visit, attended a playgroup, or attended a parenting meeting or class.
- **Satisfaction with services is high.** Those who use core services, consistently rank their experience as either very or somewhat satisfactory.
- **A small percentage of parents report using the In-Touch with Community Resources service.** While 31 percent of parents surveyed had heard of the service, only 2 percent has accessed the service through the Internet, and only 6 percent had accessed the service through the 1-800 number.

OVERALL RESULTS

■ **Contact with Early Childhood Connections (ECC) of Eaton County (Q1-2)**

ECC has been very successful at establishing contact with parents in the community. Seventy-five percent of parents report that they have filled out an information card and 75 percent of parents report receiving the *Valuing Every Child* newsletter. Of those who filled out an information card, 87 percent report receiving a newsletter.

■ **Services for Families in Eaton County (Q 3-5)**

Thirty-one percent of parents are familiar with the In-Touch with Community Resources service. However, only 2 percent of parents have utilized this service through the Internet and only 6 percent have accessed the service through the 1-800 number.

■ **Home Visits for Parents with Young Children (Q 6-8)**

Twenty-one percent of parents report receiving a home visit from an organization in Eaton County, those who did receive home visits are satisfied with the service. Ninety-six percent of parents are either very or somewhat satisfied with their home visit experience. Of those parents who have not had a home visit, 46 percent feel they do not need the service at this time. The second most reported reason for not having had a home visit is that parents did not know the service is available (37 percent). Only 4 percent of parents did not have a home visit because they do not like the idea of having a stranger in their home.

■ **Parent Group Meetings or Classes (Q 9-11)**

Eleven percent of parents have attended a parent meeting or parenting class, as in the case of home visits, those who did attend are satisfied with the experience. Ninety-seven percent of parents attending these meeting are either very or somewhat satisfied with the experience. Of those not attending a group meeting or class, 42 percent did not know that the service is available in Eaton County and 37 percent do not feel they needed the service at this time Only 1 percent of parents report that the groups are not easy to get to.

■ **Parent-Child Playgroups (Q 12-14)**

Eighteen percent of parents report attending a parent-child playgroup in Eaton County. Continuing a trend of high rating for ECC services, 97 percent of parents report being either very or somewhat satisfied with their playgroup experience. Of those who did not attend a playgroup, 47 percent report that they did not know about the service, 27 percent feel that that they do not need the service, and 15 percent report a conflict with the times that the groups are held

■ **Periodic Development and Health Screenings (Q 15-17)**

Sixty-one percent of parents have had their child screened for health, vision, hearing and/or development in Eaton County. Of these parents, 96 percent are either somewhat or very satisfied with their experience. Thirty-nine percent of parents who did not get a health screening in Eaton County got one outside of the county. A quarter of the parents do not feel they needed this service and 21 percent did not know that the service was available in Eaton County.

A clear majority of parents in the ECC network have had developmental screenings for their child, compared to 25 percent or less who have had a home visit, attended a playgroup, or attended a parenting meeting or class.

■ Early Childhood Information (Q 18)

Overall, ECC parent clients score very well when asked a series of questions related to early childhood development and education. PSC asked parents nine questions covering a wide variety of both child education and care issues. PSC then scored the parents' answers and created an index measuring a parent's knowledge of child development issues. On a scale of 0 to 9, with 9 being the highest, ECC parent clients have an average score of 6.75. PSC considers an index score of 5 to represent a satisfactory level of knowledge concerning child development.

On individual questions, parents demonstrate a great deal of knowledge of age-appropriate child development information. These findings, along with the composite measure, provide baseline measures on levels of knowledge about brain development. Future surveys will allow for an assessment of change in levels of knowledge about brain development.

- A vast majority (83 percent) say that the belief that reading to an infant has little impact on his or her development is definitely false.
- Only 9 percent of parents think that it is either “definitely” or “probably” true that a young child needs about the same amount of sleep as an adult.
- Ninety-one percent of parents disagree with the statement that spanking children as a regular form of punishment helps them develop a better sense of control.
- A slight majority (53 percent) disagrees with the statement that a child should be ready to move out of diapers and begin to learn how to use a toilet by the age of two.
- Almost all parents (99 percent) disagree with the statement that a child's abilities are pretty much set from birth and cannot be affected by how their parents interact with them.
- Almost all parents (97 percent) agree that a parents' emotional closeness with a child can strongly influence the child's intellectual development.
- Almost all parents (99 percent) agree that it is just as important for a ten-month old to spend time playing as it is for a five year old.
- Ninety-two percent of parents agree that the first year of a child's life has a major impact later on performance in school.

It does not appear that having attended a parent class, receiving a home visit or having a health screening for their child results in a greater understanding of issues related to child development. There is, however, a significant relationship between attending a playgroup and a higher score on these child development questions.

■ Contact with Agencies

While ECC has done a good job contacting parents, two percent of parents would turn to or call ECC for assistance in they had a question or concern about their child that they could not figure out on their own. Since most parents responding to this survey have

already been connected to ECC, and ECC's role is to connect them to community resources, it may be that parents are reflecting this structure. Twenty-four percent of parents, have been referred to a program, agency or organization in Eaton County over the last year.

■ **Advertising Effect**

Eighty percent of parents recall seeing or hearing a recent advertisement about early childhood nurturing and development in the past six months. Furthermore, 80 percent of parents answering can correctly complete the "Be their Hero from age Zero" advertising slogan, and 55 percent of parents answering can complete the "Eaton County Values Every Child" slogan. This is an excellent retention rate.

■ **Demographics**

The median length of residence in Eaton County was eight years. Most (83 percent) parents were married, and the average age was 32. Parents had an average number of two children, with the average age of the older child six years and the second child two years. A majority (79 percent) had received some level of college education with 36 percent have a four-year college degree or higher. Parents were overwhelmingly white (94 percent) and the majority (61 percent) earned over \$44,000 a year.

Focus Group Findings

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

The following pages summarize the results of three early childhood education and care focus groups conducted by Public Sector Consultants on behalf of Eaton County Early Childhood Connections. The sessions were held between April 7 and April 14, 2002, according to the following schedule:

- April 7, 2002: Focus Group of Frequent Voters
- April 9, 2002: Focus Group of Parents
- April 14, 2002: Focus Group of Community Stakeholders

Participants were selected and recruited by Public Sector Consultants. (A list of participants is provided at the end of this section.) The groups themselves were identified because each brought an important perspective to the challenge of devising a campaign to better inform the Eaton County public about the critical importance of early childhood education and care. Frequent voters are generally an active and influential group in any community, and a group whose support is vital to any effort to effect positive change. Parents are presumed to have a strong and personal attachment to early childhood issues because of their direct involvement. Stakeholders are the community and opinion leaders who wield considerable influence in the community and have a capacity to “get things done.”

Each of the three focus groups lasted approximately 1.5 hours and followed the same general format. After an initial “welcome” and explanation of the project, those present were asked to complete a brief participant survey and then led through a series of questions from a formal protocol that varied slightly in length and format from group to group.

In the remainder of this section, we analyze the survey results and the high points of the discussion for all three focus groups, and offer, by way of conclusion, an analysis of the key findings and common themes we identified.

FOCUS GROUP OF FREQUENT VOTERS

This group met at the Eaton County Early Childhood Connections building in Pottersville at 7:00 PM on April 7, 2002. There were ten participants— eight women and two men. Most of the participants came from Charlotte, Eaton Rapids and Grand Ledge. With the exception of two participants, all were long-term (i.e., more than ten years) residents of Eaton County. Most had a definite connection with the area schools. However, this was an older group. Only two participants reported having young children now. In most cases, the children of these participants were high-school or college students or finished with schooling altogether.

Overall this was a savvy group—interested, informed, and involved in their communities. It was clear that several were professionals at local schools. Although we did not ask specifically about education levels, it seems clear that a good many in the room were, at a minimum, college graduates.

Participant Survey

The participant survey administered at the beginning of the session produced the results summarized in Exhibit 2 below. It should be noted that only one participant filled out the form correctly—that is, all but one indicated their own awareness but not that of others. The reasons for the problem are not clear; the parent and stakeholder groups did not similarly misread the survey instrument.

EXHIBIT 2

Participant Response: Voter Focus Group*				
	You		Others	
	Aware	Not Aware	Aware	Not Aware
1. Eighty-five percent of brain development occurs between birth and age five.	9	1		1
2. Ninety-five percent of public investment in education occurs after age five.	6	4		1
3. From birth to age five, a child's IQ may be raised up to 40 points as a direct result of consistent, positive interaction. This interaction between parent and child could include maintaining healthy nutrition and environment, or interactive playtime and learning activities, such as reading at least 30 minutes per night.	10			1
4. Research shows that what children experience during the first three years of life actually changes the physical development of their brain and their ability to learn over the long term.	7	3		1
5. Quality early childhood education and care result in a reduction in any or all of the following: school absenteeism, grade retention, special education, school dropouts, juvenile and adult crime, and teen and unwanted pregnancy.	8	2		1
6. In the United States, only a few occupations have lower average wages than early childhood education and care staff. (Those paying more include fast-food employees and parking lot attendants.)	4	5		1
7. Only 25 percent of the adult population has a child in the public school system.	1	8		1

*Not all participants answered all questions.

The participant survey confirms the impression that the voter focus group was generally well educated and well informed. Two conclusions are clear:

- The group was very well informed on the basic facts related to brain science and child development and the resulting importance of early childhood education and care. All ten of the participants knew that a child's IQ can be significantly raised by positive

parent-child interaction from birth to age five. All but one participant knew that that same timeframe is critical to brain development. Significant majorities of participants realized that early development affects long-term learning and that quality early childhood education and care is essential to development and the heading off of significant social problems.

- The group was clearly less informed about demographic issues and about the broader social context in which care is offered. Six participants, a bare majority, knew what percentage of public investment in education is focused upon age five and above. A majority (five participants) did not know that early childhood education and care professions offer comparatively low wages. Only one participant knew that only 25 percent of the adult population has a child in school.

As indicated above, only one participant completed the portion of the survey dealing with what others know. That person believed that the general population is not nearly as well informed as she/he was—a belief that was confirmed by the group discussion.

Additional information from the surveys indicates that six out of the ten participants were aware of advertisements focused on early childhood nurturing and developments. Five of the six could successfully complete the phrase: “Be their Hero from age Zero.” None of the participants could complete the phrase: “Eaton County Values Every Child.”

Group Discussion

Question 1: *Are people in the community aware of the information about the most important age for developing a child’s capacity to learn?*

The group expressed the pronounced belief that, in general, information on the most important age for developing a child’s capacity to learn is not “out there” in the community, especially among parents who most need the information. Most felt, however, that the information is better known and more available than previously. “The information is starting to get around,” one participant noted. Others commented that school parenting classes offer valuable information, but are not always well attended.

It was also suggested that information on the subject would be well received because it is inherently believable. “You intuitively know this,” one person said, “even if you don’t have the data.” Several participants noted that ideas about child raising were probably passed from one generation to another at a time when families lived closer to one another. But now with so many instances of both parents working, and with families widely separated geographically, it is more important to have broader community sources of information.

Question 2: *From what sources, e.g., newspapers, television, radio, and billboards, do you get most of the information you obtain on the education of children?*

Three sources of information—weekly community newspapers, television, and radio—were mentioned most often. At least one person, though, said that involvement in the schools had been an important source of information for her.

Newspapers were a big favorite with a number of members of the group. Their virtue is that in rural and semi-rural communities they are an important, recognized source of information; if you're hooked into the community at all you read them. Participants noted that they do watch TV and listen to the radio and both media can play a role, but with this caveat: According to the group, most public service announcements are not helpful because they are on at times, or on stations, where most people are not watching or listening.

As in the previous discussion, participants readily distinguished between themselves—as persons who are well informed—and the larger community that is not. There was a real concern that persons who most need the information either do not know that they need it or lack the skills to get it. “I did a lot of research on my own when the kids were little,” one participant said. “But lots of people punching in on the line don't have the same time or flexibility.” Another participant concurred, noting that she used to go to the library to research things.

Beyond sources of information, motivation was an important consideration. “When something matters to you, you find things out,” one person said.

Question 3: What do you think is the most effective means of communicating information about early childhood education and care to voters?

The discussion of this topic picked up themes that had been developing in the previous discussion. Newspaper and television ads were mentioned, as was information distributed in the schools. Indeed, from this point forth schools were seen as increasingly important because young women, often very young women, are having babies. They need information on early childhood education and care, and school counselors and health personnel are a good way to provide it.

One person mentioned, and several agreed, that for many voters the Internet could be a wonderful, comprehensive source of information.

Again, however, the participants returned to their concern that ads have to reach the right people—those who have children but are not as hooked into mainstream sources of information. “Are we targeting at-risk families?” one participant asked. In a similar vein, another participant noted: “You can run ads, but people don't see themselves in them.” (This participant noted that *MiChild*—a state/federal medical insurance program—gives out packages and uses music to get attention and drive home important points).

Another salient suggestion emerged: try a “grassroots” campaign like Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

The discussion then began to anticipate the next question—who the proper spokesperson for any message should be.

Question 4: Who do you think most Eaton County voters listen to and trust the most about education and childcare issues?

There was, first of all, considerable agreement about who a good spokesperson would *not* be. The idea of using politicians or appointed department heads was panned. “They just want a paycheck” is how one person put it.

Medical authorities were certainly perceived to have credibility. “I think it really helps when institutions and authorities, like health professionals focus on this,” one person said. “Ads by themselves don’t work so well. The information should come from nurses and doctors. Ads should be part of this.”

Two types of people were identified as effective spokespersons for a purely media campaign: (a) celebrities like Michael Jordan—someone who catches your attention because of who they are; and (b) people who are local or particularly credible for some reason—parents are always credible in a way that others are not. “If the health director did an ad on the drug Ecstasy, that would be okay,” one participant said. “But I remember an ad with a woman whose child had died. That’s so much more compelling.”

Several people mentioned that the best of all possible spokespersons would be someone who is both a celebrity and has personal credibility. One participant mentioned, and all agreed, that professional football quarterback Doug Flutie is a wonderful spokesperson for autism. People know who Doug Flutie is, and he is an effective spokesperson because his own son has the disorder. Tom Izzo was mentioned as someone who would have a lot of credibility in Eaton County. He is well known, credible, and, most of all, a parent of young kids.

Several people also mentioned that within individual communities, certain local people have a great deal of credibility. Retired teachers or school officials with many years of experience were mentioned as one possibility, as was a popular D.A.R.E. police officer.

Question 5: Have you heard or seen the message on TV, radio, on billboards, or in the newspapers: “Be their Hero from age Zero”

Six out of 10 participants recognized the phrase. Most seemed to have either seen a billboard or seen or heard electronic media (television and radio). In reality, however, the participants who were familiar with the phrase reported seeing or hearing it in more than one place. Although we did not specifically query the participants, it seemed that those who had been in the Eaton community the least number of years were least likely to have seen or heard the campaign theme.

So the “Be their Hero” campaign received relatively good marks for catching the attention of the public and being memorable. As the subsequent discussion showed, the campaign did not do as good a job communicating what the theme meant.

Question 6: *If parents see or hear “Be their Hero...” will they know where to go for more information?*

The strong sense of the group was that parents will not know where to go and that this is, in fact, a shortcoming. They felt that an awareness-generating campaign has to be firmly linked to sources of more detailed information.

“I picked up on the theme,” one person said. “But I didn’t see anyplace to go.” Another observed: “I haven’t seen it yet and I still don’t get it.” Still another said, “I liked the jingle but didn’t know who, what, or where.” Their point was that the phrase, while memorable, does not immediately bring to mind early childhood education and care or any follow-up sources of information.

Several participants expressed a concern for where pregnant teens would go for help.

Question 7: *Do participants recall seeing or hearing the phrase “Eaton County Values Every Child”?*

This phrase was not nearly so recognizable. Only one person was confident that he/she had seen or heard it. A few others thought they might have seen/heard it. After materials on this campaign were shown to the group, a few more thought they recalled seeing or hearing it.

Question 8: *Would voters who see or hear “Eaton County Values Every Child” know where to go for more information?*

The response to this question was fairly negative. People who thought they might have heard or seen it did not connect it with a source of information. Moreover, the phrase itself was perceived as weak—a general statement of values rather than something that conveys useful information.

Question 9: *What’s the best way to reach Eaton County voters with a message about the value of early education?*

This was basically an *intensity-seeking* question, in which participants were asked to identify the single best avenue of communication. The following sources were mentioned most often:

- Doctor’s offices and the offices of other health professionals, often in cooperation with school health personnel
- Schools, as part of various activities
- Weekly community newspapers

Doctor’s offices were seen as an excellent place to reach people because medical personnel have credibility and authority and because patients typically have time to spare while waiting at appointments. Having pamphlets available was one suggested mode of communication. One person suggested that volunteers could be available in these settings—particularly if new moms or pregnant teens are involved.

School health personnel were certainly understood to be key. But it was also suggested that a number of school events and venues could be used, including kindergarten roundup, high school health curricula, and even other occasions like pancake supper nights. Again, weekly newspapers were mentioned several times as being a particularly good way of reaching the population in rural areas and small towns.

Several other ideas also garnered interest and support, including:

- An outreach to pastors and churches
- Linking early childhood information to other public assistance programs such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and cash assistance. The idea was that applicants for assistance would be targeted to receive information—either through required classes or printed materials.
- Using grandparents and the elderly to disseminate information as volunteers, perhaps with special volunteer training. It was felt that these groups would have both the time and the credibility needed to do the job well.

More generally, the voter group expressed genuine concern for reaching at-risk populations and for reaching teenagers who either are or are soon to be parents.

Question 10: *At what age do you think public funds are best used to improve learning experiences: birth to three, age four or five, elementary school, or high school?*

The group unanimously agreed that 0–3 is the most important target for education funding.

FOCUS GROUP OF PARENTS

The focus group of parents met in Pottersville at 5:30 PM on May 9 for about an hour and a half. There were only four participants, all of whom had children with special needs. The combination of these factors makes it unlikely that these were typical Eaton County parents. Because of the special needs of their children, they had become much more attuned to child development and education issues and were seemingly quite adept at conducting research for themselves.

This said, the parents who participated in the focus group were engaged, thoughtful, and produced a number of very useful ideas.

Participant Survey

The participant survey administered at the beginning of the session produced the following results shown in Exhibit 3.

EXHIBIT 3

Participant Response: Parent Focus Group				
	<i>You</i>		<i>Others</i>	
	Aware	Not Aware	Aware	Not Aware
1. Eighty-five percent of brain development occurs between birth and age five.	4	0	2	2
2. Ninety-five percent of public investment in education occurs after age five.	4	0	4	0
3. From birth to age five, a child's IQ may be raised up to 40 points as a direct result of consistent, positive interaction. This interaction between parent and child could include maintaining healthy nutrition and environment, or interactive playtime and learning activities, such as reading at least 30 minutes per night.	3	1	2	2
4. Research shows that what children experience during the first three years of life actually changes the physical development of their brain and their ability to learn over the long term.	3	1	0	4
5. Quality early childhood education and care result in a reduction in any or all of the following: school absenteeism, grade retention, special education, school drop-outs, juvenile and adult crime, and teen and unwanted pregnancy.	3	1	1	3
6. In the United States, only a few occupations have lower average wages than early childhood education and care staff. (Those paying more include fast-food employees and parking lot attendants.)	2	2	1	3
7. Only 25 percent of the adult population has a child in the public school system.	3	1	1	3

The responses to the survey confirmed the impression that this was a well-informed group. In all but one case, at least three of the participants were aware of the basic facts contained in the questions. The exception was question #6, where two participants said that they were not aware that childhood education is a relatively low-wage occupation.

As was the case with the voter focus group, this group of parents thought of themselves as distinctly better informed than others in the county. The group thought the public is generally quite aware that education investment focuses on ages five and above. Participants were divided on the questions related to brain and IQ development, with two believing the public is aware of these facts and two believing it is not. The group believed that the public is largely unaware of the long-term effects of poor care—both social effects and effects on individual learning—and also unaware of basic economic and demographic issues surrounding early childhood education and care.

The impression that the four participants were well connected and “plugged in” to community childcare issues was reinforced by their responses to questions regarding ongoing communication campaigns. All members of the group recalled having seen or heard information on childhood nurturing and development in the past nine months. School was mentioned twice as the source of the information; Chamber of Commerce meetings, doctor’s offices, and mailings were also mentioned. All four participants could complete the phrase “Be their Hero from age Zero.” Two of the four could complete the phrase “Eaton County Values Every Child.”

Question 1: *Do you believe that people who live in this community are aware of the information about the most important age for developing a child’s capacity to learn?*

As survey results suggest, this group did not think that the general public is aware of early childhood education and care issues. “It depends on the circumstances,” one member said. “I work for the school system and so I know, but others don’t have access to the same information.” Another agreed. “It’s not well known. People in the school system know but not those on the outside.”

One participant noted, and others agreed, that most parents think the primary focus on children’s education should begin in school. In other words, people believe that education is a school district issue—not something that needs to be of great concern in the years before a child reaches school age.

Question 2: *From what sources, e.g., newspapers, television, radio, billboards, do **you** get most of the information you obtain on the education of children?*

The responses here showed that the group was adept at research, but did not always seek or receive information in the same way. One person mentioned the schools, another mentioned the Internet, and a third mentioned reading—both books and specialty magazines. Still another said that she became much more familiar with early childhood development issues once her special needs child was exposed to the Early On program and its professional staff.

A theme that would recur several times surfaced during the discussion: There is a difference between in-depth information (the most desirable form, ultimately) and “awareness-building” information that sparks interest. Their point was that both are important and that there must be a link between the two. Information that only sparks interest, but does not point the way to more in-depth information, is of very limited value. As part of this idea, the group made another important point: *motivation is very important*. Once a parent recognizes that information on early childhood development is valuable, he/she will be quite resourceful about seeking it out.

Question 3: *From what sources, e.g., newspapers, television, radio, billboards, do you think parents of young children (birth to age five) get most of the information they obtain on the education of children?*

One person remembered getting an effective flyer from the ISD. Presumably the ISD is still sending out material. “If you want to check your child’s development, go to the ISD,” the parent said.

Interestingly, the discussion revealed that most participants assumed that many parents of very young children would be hard to reach. Therefore they made some innovative suggestions as to how to reach them—most essentially by putting information in places they would be likely to go with their kids. Among the suggestions:

- Placemats at restaurants such as at McDonald's or Burger King
- Materials made available at grocery stores
- Materials made available at pediatrician's offices
- Quick advertisements shown before popular movies
- Frontier Days parade billboard

Repetition is also key according to this group. As one put it, "flyers have to go out often, not just once a year." She noted that the ISD had been known to send out 30 notices and get only one or two responses. Another parent observed that "a lot depends on if the parents care."

Question 4: Who do you think most Eaton County parents of children in school (kindergarten through 12th grade) listen to and trust the most about education and care issues?

The group believed there is no one answer to the question. Parents in different circumstances would listen to different persons. "You need multiple strategies to adapt to all levels," is the way the parent put it.

Someone with more education may pay attention to a school superintendent or the governor. Elementary school teachers influence parents whose kids are just beginning school. One person mentioned Rich Michaels, a local morning radio personality. Mr. Michaels may have some rough edges, but average workers do listen to him.

Michigan's First Lady, Michelle Engler, was mentioned as a natural spokesperson. She comes across well in the media and is a credible figure because of her triplets. Her efforts on behalf of child immunization were apparently successful. Like the voters group, the parents also mentioned MSU basketball coach Tom Izzo.

On the other hand the group was clear that elected and other public officials are not usually effective spokespersons. "Most people won't know who they are," one person observed. "They're not a good draw."

Question 5: Who do you think most Eaton County parents of young children (birth to age five) listen to and trust the most about education and care issues?

The group did not think that the age of the children matters greatly and indicated that their answers here would be the same as in question # 4.

"The spokesperson could be the same as for the older children," one person said. Another agreed, saying, "Good communication is good communication."

Question 6: *Do you think kiosks located in stores and shopping areas, schools, libraries, and other public places in Eaton County would be used by parents to get information about their children aged birth to five years?*

Kiosks did not appeal to the parent group. “No. I don't want to deal with that,” one parent said. Another said, “I’m not going to use it.” Still another added: “A busy mom is not going to sit there and use something like that.”

One person indicated that she might be intrigued if the kiosk had an interesting running display or “running sign” as she called it. (It should be noted that the question of using kiosks came up a second time and the group noted that there might be one place where it could be very appropriately used—doctor’s offices or clinics.)

One participant made a particularly interesting point that others found compelling: kiosks are an older technology. If the idea is to use sophisticated information technology to relay information on early childhood care and development, the Internet is a much more powerful and flexible technology. The school website could carry valuable information he suggested, and it could carry lots of valuable links to other informative sites. He noted that the Internet could be an important backup to other communication efforts. If one were to include a web address on posters, pamphlets, billboards, etc., then anyone inspired to learn more would have a relatively easy way of doing so.

Question 7: *What do you think is the most effective means of communicating information about the importance of early childhood education and care to parents of young children?*

People answered the question in different ways. Some focused on the message, some on the messenger or the place where the message is received, and some on the approach to communication.

One person noted that the message is urgent. All children need early childhood education. It’s about lifetime opportunity. It’s a wise public investment in children’s futures. The point: basic facts from brain science are very important but not well-enough known.

Although there were only four participants, they offered a number of ideas:

- Informational packages could be handed out in the maternity ward.
- “Shock” TV ads that make important points about brain science. As a variation of this idea, another participant suggested more entertaining ads with “trivia” style questions.
- Schools were also mentioned repeatedly, including ideas such as school billboards, announcements by the principal, and high-school parenting classes, perhaps with “automated” babies.
- Traditional media efforts, including billboards, drive-time radio, and PBS public service ads.
- Less conventional media like placemats with questions and interesting facts.

The group stressed again that the communication effort has to be committed to repetition and the segmentation of audience. There was a strong feeling that no one strategy will work for everyone.

Question 8: *Have you heard or seen the message on TV, radio, on billboards, or in the newspaper: “Be their Hero from age Zero.”*

All members of the group recalled seeing or hearing the information. Their comments:

- “I have had it preached to me for the last few months.”
- “I saw it at my child’s preschool. We gave out kites with the ad on it at kindergarten roundup.”
- “I haven’t seen it on TV, but I did see it on billboards.”
- “I was introduced to it at chamber meetings, the school, and billboards.”

Question 9: *If parents of children aged birth to five hear or see this message, do you think they know where to go for information on programs and services in the community?*

The group indicated that the answer to the question depends upon where people hear or see the “Be their Hero...” message. Flyers and/or information passed out at Chamber of Commerce meetings did apparently have information on where to seek programs and services. The billboards, however, did not.

Moreover, the group indicated that the message itself, while catchy, is not completely clear as to its meaning. “I didn’t know it was a directive,” one person said. Others agreed, noting that while they now know what the message means, it may not be obvious to most people. The message can be interpreted as an exhortation to treat young children well—not as something intended to direct parents to specific services.

Question 10: *Have you heard or seen the message on radio or in newspapers: “Eaton County Values Every Child”?*

Three of the four parents reported having seen or heard this message on the participant survey. It was clear that the awareness of this message was not as high as for “Be their Hero...” The following are what the group recalled as being the sources of the Eaton message:

- Preschool programs
- A school board meeting
- School

The person who recalled having seen or heard the message at school indicated that this was a good place to target. “If you have a child in school, chances are you have a younger child at home,” she said.

Question 11: If parents of children aged birth to five hear or see this message, do you think they know where to go for information on programs and services in the community?

Generally, the group felt that since the message references “Eaton County” specifically, those who hear it could find out more information if they are determined to do so. “Yes,” one person said, “they could find things out even if they went to the phone book.” Another participant said that persons interested in learning more might have to do a little research since it was not clear who in the county should be contacted.

Once again the group indicated that a website would be a wonderfully flexible way of spreading information. Once a person has a website address, he/she can be connected to a world of information. When asked what would happen in the case of persons who do not have a computer, the group conceded that this could be a problem in some cases. However, they thought that more people are going online all the time and computers are available through school and libraries.

Question 12: In a few words, summarize what you believe to be the best method to reach Eaton County residents with a message about the value of early childhood education?

Again, while there were only four participants, they had a wealth of ideas. They stressed that highly motivated parents can benefit greatly from information on Internet sites but that it is also important to recall that working parents need to be contacted in settings they visit regularly. Some of the comments include:

- “I would either do restaurant placemats, billboards, or have a website. On the website you can cover things that may not be able to be covered in other settings. Get the website *out there*. If you get the website out, you can link to many other sites.”
- “Doctor’s offices and health departments are important. Kids are going to get shots at one of those places. A doctor’s office would be a good place for a kiosk while you’re waiting for an appointment. It needs to be a quick draw like ‘you can raise you child’s IQ by 40 points.’ These are the sorts of facts that draw you in.”
- “Tie this in with immunizations. You can offer a small packet or coloring books with a fact on each page. It will help the parents interact with the child. When kids are immunized, have the parents fill out a postcard to put them into a database and mail age-appropriate information periodically. Repeating the message is important.”
- “Information for teens provided by the schools would help. A health class taught my nephew that he definitely didn’t want to be a parent.”

The group also suggested “trivia” games on placemats or on the radio, passing out pens and pencils at local stores, passing out information at library story times, and using mass mailings. Urgency should breed creativity. Get the message out that kids need education earlier.

FOCUS GROUP OF STAKEHOLDERS

As the term “stakeholder” implies, the 11 persons who participated in this discussion were on the whole a very knowledgeable group whose numbers included, among others, a school superintendent, a probate judge, a pediatrician, and a director of the local United Way.

The participant survey administered at the beginning of the session produced the g results shown in Exhibit 4 below.

EXHIBIT 4

Participant Response: Parent Focus Group*				
	You		Others	
	Aware	Not Aware	Aware	Not Aware
1. Eighty-five percent of brain development occurs between birth and age five.	9	2	3	8
2. Ninety-five percent of public investment in education occurs after age five.	10	1	7	4
3. From birth to age five, a child's IQ may be raised up to 40 points as a direct result of consistent, positive interaction This interaction between parent and child could include maintaining healthy nutrition and environment, or interactive playtime and learning activities, such as reading at least 30 minutes per night.	6	4	0	8
4. Research shows that what children experience during the first three years of life actually changes the physical development of their brain and their ability to learn over the long term.	9	2	5	6
5. Quality early childhood education and care result in a reduction in any or all of the following: school absenteeism, grade retention, special education, school drop-outs, juvenile and adult crime, and teen and unwanted pregnancy.	9	2	1	10
6. In the United States, only a few occupations have lower average wages than early childhood education and care staff. (Those paying more include fast-food employees and parking lot attendants.)	6	5	3	8
7. Only 25 percent of the adult population has a child in the public school system.	2	9	0	11

*Not all participants answered all questions

The pattern of this group’s responses does not differ significantly from that found in the voter and parent groups. The group was generally highly aware of the importance of early childhood education and care and certain that in most cases the public at large would not be as aware as they are.

Somewhat surprisingly, only a bare majority of six respondents was aware of basic facts related to child development and IQ. A similar number were aware of basic economic facts regarding childcare workers. In other respects, however, the group was very well informed, including the important question of the social consequences of neglecting early childhood care. As a group, they did not know that only 25 percent of the adult population has a child in school—but they believed that very few people know this fact.

The group indicated that both they and the public at large are aware that 95 percent of public education dollars go to children age five and above. Five of the 11 stakeholders believed that other people are also aware that early experiences affect the physical development of the brain and a child's long-term ability to learn.

Nine of the 11 participants recalled hearing or seeing early childhood advertisements during the previous nine months. Four mentioned specifically where they had heard or seen the message. Of these, two said the ISD was the source, one said the schools, and one mentioned a billboard.

Eight participants could correctly complete the phrase “Be their Hero...” Two could not complete the phrase, and one gave a clearly incorrect answer. The responses regarding the phrase “Eaton County Values Every Child” were harder to interpret. Three could complete the phrase unambiguously; two made no attempt to answer. The remaining six, however, used words like “children” and “kids” instead of “every child.” Whether these are cases of partial recall or logical guessing is impossible to say.

Question 1: *Do you believe that people who live in this community are aware of the information about the most important age for developing a child's ability to learn?*

The consensus of the group was that there are pockets within the county where the information is well known, but for the most part people are not aware of it.

A local superintendent of schools with experience and knowledge of developmental issues put it this way: “I don't think it's well known. The importance of age 0–5 is not well known regardless of income or education. I wasn't fully aware until I read *Ghost from the Nursery*, which really opened my eyes.”

A local probate judge said that the importance of early childhood experiences is well known in the probate courts and that presumably some parents who interact with the court system get information that way. “I see neglect and abuse cases,” he said. “Word gets out to this population through the court system. If parents get the message, and I see success, then okay. If not, I take their kids away. We try to be proactive and help these mothers with their next pregnancy.”

Question 2: *Who do you think Eaton County residents listen to and trust the most about education and childcare issues?*

The question elicited a broad range of responses and some suggestions as to who an effective spokesperson would be.

Several respondents felt that a minister or priest would be a very effective spokesperson. When a respondent suggested that a researcher familiar with childhood

development data would be effective, another respondent disagreed, saying, “I think you’re better off with the Syrup Queen or an athlete.” This exchange exposed the same dilemma mentioned previously—i.e., persons with the most information are not necessarily the best at getting attention.

One participant thought that the best conveyors of information are peers. “The biggest group of people that doesn’t know this message are high school kids, many of whom will soon become parents,” she said. “These kids might listen to their peers”. Another respondent agreed that personal credibility is important. He noted that he was impressed by some recent ads from Hayes Green Beech Hospital, which featured a young mother talking about how she would be a better mother because of what she learned. “The best spokesperson is someone also affected by the message,” he said.

Other credible sources of information include:

- Articles and ads in weekly newspapers, which are widely read and passed around
- Ads or other testimony featuring well respected physicians
- Passing out information at maternity wards in hospitals

The group was then asked what sorts of information are inherently most interesting or “arresting.” The group quite clearly believed that scientific facts are the sort of thing that compels immediate attention. One participant said, “For me it’s the brain science, the physical changes of the brain and the fact that external stimuli have a physical affect. Several others agreed. “The gain in IQ points jumped out at me,” another participant said. Another said, “I was struck by the idea that you have an opportunity and if you miss it, it’s lost.”

Question 3: What do you think is the most effective means of communicating information about the importance of early childhood education and care to the voters of Eaton County?

Since using schools and doctor’s offices had been discussed, the group was asked to focus more on other locations and media. Members felt that traditional mass media such as billboards and radio and TV ads can be effective—especially in getting the attention of average working people. But there are challenges. With electronic media, the ads have to be placed in slots where they will be effective—radio ads during the commuting hours, for example. And both billboards and electronic media create the same challenge: follow-up. Once you capture people’s attention, you still need to get in-depth information to them.

Further, as several participants noted, the “Be their Hero” campaign has it’s own set of challenges because it is not always obvious what the campaign is about. “The ‘Pregnant and Scared’ ad works well,” one participant said. “But it’s more complex to explain the ‘Be their Hero’ idea. You need to both get their attention and convince them to seek information and make changes.”

As in the other focus groups, the idea of using kiosks was held in light regard. “That won’t work in Vermontville,” two participants from that village said. The representative of the local United Way said, “We investigated using them for another

program and found that when they're located outside, they're vandalized, but when they're inside nobody uses them."

The point was made again: kiosks are old technology. Websites and the Internet are the way of the future. The judge noted that rather than invest in kiosks, it would be better to buy "pop-up" ads on appropriate websites. Others agreed, saying that the younger generation, which ought to be a marketing target, is much more computer literate than its predecessors. "MSN Messenger is popular with young people," one participant said. "If you put "Be their Hero" information there, people in our town will see it." Others mentioned that churches and libraries have websites that could be used to disseminate information.

Finally, one participant urged that some of the most effective communication comes from projects and volunteer services. She noted that the local high school requires community service credits to graduate. A number of students fulfill the requirement by working in childcare centers. This not only helps the centers but could, if properly done, expose students to child development issues as well. Senior citizens could also serve as volunteers in some settings. Her point: if you want to have a culture that values early childhood education and care, you have to be creative about getting the whole community involved.

Question 4: *Have you heard or seen the message on TV, radio, on billboards, or in the newspaper: "Be their Hero from age Zero"?*

The group as a whole was abundantly familiar with the "Be their Hero" campaign and most members had become aware of it from multiple sources. Four respondents mentioned billboards and TV ads. Two mentioned material from the ISD and two mentioned local newspaper or shopping guide ads. Others mentioned material from the schools and radio ads (87.7 FM).

Question 5: *If parents of children aged birth to five years hear or see this message, do you think they know where to go for more information on programs and services in the community?*

The group was strongly and instinctively focused on the question of follow-up throughout the session. The general consensus was that no, people do not know where to go. This was viewed as a major challenge. The message is "out there" but lacks instrumentality because large portions of the public do not know what it means or where to go.

Question 6: *Have you heard or seen the message on radio or in the newspapers: Eaton County Values Every Child?*

Three members of the group clearly had seen the message. Two or three more seemed to recall it after having been prompted. However, no one mentioned radio or newspapers as the source of the message. Rather, they reported seeing the posters, which were perceived to be "all over."

Question # 7: *If parents of children aged birth to five hear or see this message, do you think they know where to go for more information on programs and services in the community?*

Here as in the case of the “Be their Hero” message, participants strongly believed that parents do not know where to go for information on programs and services. Further, the “Eaton County Values Every Child” message was not viewed as clearly related to early childhood education and care.

“I didn’t know what the message was,” one participant said. Another observed, “People called our office wanting to know what it was.” Two other participants thought the phrase was the general mission statement of the school district—not something that was supposed to alert them to the existence of specific programs.

Question 8: *In a few words, summarize what you believe to be the best method to reach Eaton County residents with a message about the value of early childhood education?*

Five of the participants felt that weekly newspapers or shopping guides are the best method for communicating the value of early childhood education. This mode of communication is particularly valuable in communities that do not receive in-depth coverage from a daily newspaper.

The group also made clear their collective belief that it is unwise to rely too extensively on one means of communication. One participant noted that: “As a fundraiser my message may be consistent but my media vary. Not everyone reads the newspaper—you need to get out there. You can’t say let’s do one thing. You won’t reach everyone with one media source.”

Beyond this, the group felt strongly that a communication effort requires imagination and an effort to connect with the daily life of the target communities. The superintendent noted that he always felt that school communication efforts were helped when the whole school community including the bus drivers and janitors was involved in getting messages out. Another person suggested that it would be possible to throw a big community event with food, displays, interesting handouts, etc.

Others also expressed interest in using informal community networks and existing events. One person suggested that a display at the Syrup Festival would be useful. Another suggested getting older, more popular high school kids interested and involved—on the theory that other kids would then follow their lead and take up an interest. Still others suggested speaker’s bureaus, presentations at service clubs, and even Easter egg hunts as a way of getting the information out.

Other suggestions as to the best means of communicating include:

- Birthing centers and maternity wards—thus catching parents at a time when they are particularly focused on their child
- Libraries—a natural place to put together displays and lists of resources
- Kindergarten teachers

Question 9: *At what age do you think public funds are best used to improve learning experiences: age zero to three, age four to five, elementary school or high school?*

The group definitely believed that more money should be focused on the early years, but this was not a blanket endorsement, nor did it come without caveats. “We may be putting the cart before the horse,” one person said. “We need to work on the product. You can’t ask for money to support a general idea.” Another observed that she had home-schooled her kids and felt that money should be focused on educating parents and community members—not so much on public education.

Several group members liked the idea of increased investment in early childhood education, but felt that the money could not come out of existing school budgets. “I think more money should be available,” she said. “But we can’t deploy existing money from the school district, because it doesn’t have enough as it is. Unfortunately, money for early childhood is one of the first things the legislature cuts.”

One of the strongest endorsements for focusing investment on early childhood came from the superintendent. He conceded that the adequacy of school budgets is always a problem. But public educators also need to show leadership in helping those most at risk. In his professional opinion, two groups stand out as needing more attention: those age 10 to 14 who are preparing for high school and the very youngest kids—i.e., those just beginning school. He felt that many districts could find some money to help and that if the school community made younger kids a priority the legislature would probably help too. He did, however, caution that the funding source has to be steady if you want to accomplish anything substantive.

FINDINGS AND COMMON THEMES

As was mentioned several times in the previous discussion, the participants in the three focus groups were generally quite knowledgeable, thoughtful, and well connected in their respective communities. Each of the three focus groups offered important insights and valuable suggestions that will strengthen the ability of Eaton County Early Childhood Connections to effectively communicate the importance of early childhood education and care to county residents.

Most importantly, the view of the communication challenge did not vary greatly across groups. That is to say, the individual groups did not have a unique or readily identifiable “point of view” that differed from that of the other groups.

For this reason we feel quite confident in offering the following findings and identifying the common themes that are most relevant to the early childhood communication strategy for Eaton County.

- Members of all of the groups think that they are much better informed about early childhood education and care issues than the general public. There is a persistent concern that the young parents who most needed this sort of information are not aware of it. The need to focus on the “at risk” population is a constant theme. Targeting teenagers is deemed especially important.

- Group members seem most aware of some of the basic facts of child development; they are less informed about economic and demographic issues (childcare wages, the percentage of population with children in school, etc.).
- Participants think that the public at large is aware of the fact that 95 percent of public investment in education occurs after age five. However, they think that the public is unaware of the other facts regarding child development listed on the participant survey.
- Group members believe that the emerging communication strategy must be multi-faceted and use different means of communicating with different target groups. The urgency of the message was repeatedly stressed. Scientific facts relating to brain science are viewed as an excellent way to get attention and establish the importance of the subject.
- The group members distinguish strongly between types of information—that is, between information designed to “get attention” and in-depth information about research or services. Further, they insist that there has to be a strong link between the two. In-depth information that nobody knows about is not useful. Information that gets your attention but does not lead anywhere is not useful either.
- Most focus group members have seen or heard the phrase “Be their Hero from age Zero.” Billboards were the most frequently mentioned source, but in reality the campaign has clearly succeeded in drawing attention to itself through a number of media sources.
- At best, 20–25 percent of the participants could accurately recall the phrase “Eaton County Values Every Child.” Posters seem to be the most effective communication means, but, of course, the number saying this was small.
- Both the “Be their Hero” and the “Eaton County” campaign are perceived to have two weaknesses: (1) it is not immediately obvious what the two phrases mean; and (2) for the most part, neither campaign did a particularly good job of directing the public to additional sources of information.
- Articles and advertisements in local (weekly) newspapers, billboards, pamphlets, posters, and radio and TV spots are seen as good ways of attracting interest. In the case of radio and TV, however, particular care must be taken to ensure that ads run at times and on stations where they will be seen or heard.
- Kiosks are not viewed as a good source of information; the Internet is much more promising. There was a strong feeling in several groups that kiosks are of limited value and, in any case, “old technology.” The Internet, by contrast, is a powerful and highly flexible tool. One need only communicate a single Web address in order to open up a world of information.
- Schools (including kindergarten roundups and high school health classes) and doctor’s offices and hospitals (especially maternity wards) are seen as good places to convey information to the population of interest. The two librarians who were part of the stakeholder group also made it clear that these institutions are poised to help.
- Doctors, medical workers, teachers and other school personnel are seen as natural and reliable sources of information. A number of participants also think that ministers and

- priests can also be effective and persuasive communicators. Conversely, politicians and state department heads are not seen as particularly good spokespersons.
- Group members strongly believe that the best spokesperson for a media campaign should either: 1) be a recognizable celebrity or 2) have instant credibility because of who they are (e.g., a young mother). The best spokesperson, of course, would combine these traits. In two groups, Michigan State University basketball coach Tom Izzo was mentioned as an ideal figure because he is recognizable, respected, and, most importantly, known to be the parent of young children.
 - Members in all of the groups think that it is important to find effective ways of hooking into the informal connections that make up a community. Such venues as church groups, service organizations, high school classes and clubs, grocery stores and restaurants, special events and regular festivals (e.g., the Syrup Festival and Frontier Days) were all suggested as possibilities. They also suggested that campaign coordinators enlist the aid of elderly volunteers or well-respected persons in individual communities (e.g., retired teachers). To make progress, it is ultimately necessary to change culture, and exploiting informal networks is a good way to do just that.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Frequent Voters

Mary E. Crowe
 Katherine J. DeGrow
 Carol Freer
 Toni Hartig
 Julie Kenyon
 Cathryn Mulholland
 Adrien Nicholas, Jr.
 Kathleen M. Pruden
 F. Marie Vealey
 Timothy L. Wright

Parents

Steve Cates
 Julie Kimmer
 Christie Lehman
 Wanda Darrow

Stakeholders

Dr. Mike Callton
 Judy Class, *Eaton County United Way*
 Carl Ellinger, *Superintendent, Charlotte Public Schools*
 Sarah Gurd, *Vermontville Bible Church*
 Tammy Merritt, *HGB Charlotte Women's Health*
 Sheryl Norton, *Little Friends Child Development Center*
 Brenda Shoup, *Nashville Public Library*
 Hon. Michael Skinner, *Probate Judge*
 Phyllis Smith
 Andy Wright, *Peckham, Inc.*

Economic Analysis

SUMMARY OF APPROACH AND FINDINGS

Determining the existing gap between an ideal early childhood education and care (ECEC) system and the current services available in Eaton County required Public Sector Consultants (PSC) to explicitly define the characteristics of an ideal system. PSC applied previous work from ECEC experts participating in the Michigan Ready to Succeed Partnership to define four characteristics of an ideal system for Eaton County. These are as follows:

- Paid parent leave
- A single business tax credit for family-friendly business practices
- High-quality early childhood education and care
- Parent education/home visits

PSC then examined the current level of service in Eaton County to determine the gap between a universal system of ECEC and the current level of service. PSC estimates that closing this gap in services will cost \$52,200,064.

Unlike many government programs, highly effective ECEC efforts have been shown to have a noticeable net benefit on society. This benefit is generated by changes in the behavior of both the children and parents who receive services. While it is difficult to precisely quantify the societal benefits of a universal ECEC system, PSC estimates a range of net benefits between \$321,552,394 and \$9,918,012.

ANALYSIS

For *The First Generation of the New Century: Ready to Learn, Ready for Life* (June 1999), a report prepared for The Michigan Ready to Learn Leadership Summit, Public Sector Consultants (PSC) analyzed the major categories and the current levels of expenditures on early childhood education and care (ECEC) in our state. Completing this expenditure analysis, which analyzed both public and private investment, allowed PSC to categorize both the current state of investment in Michigan as well as the gap between reality and the ideal ECEC system.

Following the 1999 report, PSC also completed *Children Ready to Succeed: Kent County Summit*, a detailed analysis of the ECEC system in Kent County. This report included the state's first countywide economic investment gap analysis in ECEC. The present analysis utilizes a similar methodology to describe the public and private investment gap as it pertains to ECEC in Eaton County.

The criteria for an ideal ECEC system listed above were initially described in the June 1999 Ready to Succeed report. An adaptation of the original description is used in this analysis. The gap between current capacity and an ideal ECEC system is described for each of these components in the following sections.

PAID PARENT LEAVE

The majority of ECEC research suggests that the first six months of a child's life is the critical time for a child to develop an attachment to the parents. While great debate exists regarding the different forms that paid parent leave can take, it is clear that any credible effort at paid parent leave must allow parents to spend significant amounts of time with an infant during this critical period. Based on this recognition, PSC makes the following assumptions about an ideal paid parent leave system in Eaton County:

- Leave will be available to both parents but not at the same time.
- Of those taking leave, two-thirds will be women and one-third will be men.
- Among women, 65 percent are employed full time and 35 percent part time.
- Paid parent leave will total 26 weeks.

PSC assumes that there is currently no extensive paid parent leave program in Eaton County. Based on these assumptions, PSC estimates the investment gap for paid parent leave in Eaton County to be **\$5,974,507**.

SINGLE BUSINESS TAX CREDIT

Studies show that there are a number of workplace policies that can benefit employees and employers alike, by reducing stress and anxiety, turnover, and training costs while improving morale and productivity. Examples of these policies are

- Job sharing, time off when children are ill, or other time-adjustment policies;
- On-site child care and/or subsidies for high-quality off-site care; and
- Employer-provided information on child care.

While studies show that these sometimes-costly policies can prove beneficial to employers, adoption of the policies has been slow. Financial incentives will increase the acceptance of these policies. These incentives must legitimately lower the cost of these options and cannot simply be seen as a token payment. PSC believes that one possible incentive strategy is a single business tax (SBT) credit.

PSC estimates the cost of this program based on the following assumptions:

- A credit of 8.5 percent of a company's SBT liability.
- Companies adopting these policies would lose an average of 10 workdays per year per employee.
- The strategy would be designed to compensate companies for 25 percent of their anticipated loss.
- Approximately half of Michigan (Eaton County) employers would participate.

Based on these assumptions, PSC estimates the investment gap to be **\$537,856**.

PARENT EDUCATION/HOME VISITS

Universal parent education is a critical component of high-quality ECEC. Regardless of income or level of education, all new parents and their children can benefit from high-quality parent education. This education can occur during home visits and is intended to offer parenting information and assistance. Ideally, visits would begin before the birth of a child and would continue until the child enters kindergarten. According to PSC estimates, Eaton County currently has 7,042 families with children five years old or younger. The analysis of the investment gap for educating the parents in these families assumes the following:

- Approximately 60 percent of parents of preschoolers will participate (NOTE: This percentage is based on data from pilot project).
- The number of home visits will vary from 12–48 per year, based on family assessment.
- Educators could make 1,040 visits a year.
- The current cost of the program statewide is \$37,440 per educator, including overhead and administration.

Home visits are provided in Eaton County through a network of agency partners called Early Childhood Connections (ECC), which provides 444 home visits to 163 children a year¹. This initiative is funded through the ASAP-PIE grant from the Michigan Department of Education. Home visits are also provided by other community-based organizations. In 1999, these organizations provided a maximum of 1,130 home visits². In total, there are currently 1,574 home visits a year in Eaton County. Based on this starting point, the investment gap for home visits in Eaton County equals **\$6,332,539**.

HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Past studies of Michigan's ECEC system have found many flaws that would cause Michigan's system to fail to meet the definition of a high-quality early education and care service system, defined for this component of the gap analysis as those services provided by caregivers other than parents. Specifically, these studies have found: high child-to-caregiver ratios, substandard staff qualifications, high staff turnover, and low wages for caregivers. PSC utilizes the following assumption in this analysis of a high-quality service system:

- Seventy percent of preschoolers will participate.
- Average participation will be 40 hours a week.
- Low child-to-caregiver ratios (most child-development experts consider a ratio of 3:1 appropriate for children under the age of 3 and a ratio of 8:1 appropriate for children aged 3–6).
- Caregivers will receive adequate compensation. The model assumes two caregiver levels: teachers and teacher aides. Teachers will comprise one-third of the caregivers, be highly trained (holding at least a bachelor's degree) and paid an average of \$12/hour plus benefits equal to 25 percent of their pay. Teacher aides will comprise

¹ Information obtained from ECC database.

² Information obtained from 1999 ASAP-PIE grant application.

two-thirds of the caregivers, also be trained, and paid \$10/hour plus benefits equal to 25 percent of their pay.

- All caregivers will receive 45 hours of training annually at a cost of \$15/hour.
- There will be overcapacity of 10 percent.

Based on these assumptions, PSC estimates the investment gap for universal high-quality education and care programs to be **\$39,355,162**.

PARENT AND CHILD PLAYGROUPS

In addition to the four components of an ideal system discussed above, children in Eaton County aged five and younger participate in playgroups. Playgroups can be an important socializing activity for those students whose parents do not participate in the high-quality ECEC component of the ideal system. These playgroups allow the children to develop social skills and have been shown to increase cognitive performance. Playgroups are often provided through informal networks among parents, and therefore PSC does not include them in the investment gap.

OVERALL ECONOMIC GAP

PSC estimates the overall existing gap between the current level of service and an ideal ECEC system to be **\$52,200,064**.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Unlike many other government programs and expenditures, numerous studies show that providing high-quality ECEC generates net benefits for the child, the family, government and society as a whole. These benefits come from such positive outcomes as higher literacy, lower overall crime rates resulting in lower incarceration costs and fewer crime victims, less dependence on welfare as a result of higher wages, and increased tax revenues. Clearly, universal ECEC provides a benefit that is enjoyed by all of society and not simply those families involved in the program. Due to this fact, every dollar invested in providing ECEC to citizens in Michigan can actually be viewed as an investment in the economic future of Michigan, and the failure to invest in these options (by choosing to spend government dollars in another manner) must consider these future benefits as an opportunity cost of these spending decisions.

The best-known evaluation of ECEC is the High Scope/Perry Preschool program. The structure of the program allowed the evaluation to include random assignment to treatment and control groups with a sample of 123 children from 100 families. Follow-up interviews were scheduled with these children to the age of 27. This allowed a complete picture of the benefits to be generated. Barnett's 1993 cost-benefit analysis of the program calculates the benefit to the individual, family, government, and society to be \$7.16 for every dollar invested. For the purposes of this analysis, Barnett's estimate will serve as the high end of the range of possible benefits from a high-quality ECEC system.³

³ Estimates from the Perry Preschool program represent the high end because of the program's original concentration of at risk youths. When ECEC is universally available, the benefits could be lower.

Another well-known ECEC program was the Elmira PEIP program. This program provided a more limited form of ECEC with a focus on home visits and parent education regarding child development, education and nutrition. A cost-benefit analysis of this program by the RAND Corporation shows a benefit to all of society of \$1.19 per dollar spent.⁴ The Elmira PEIP number will serve as the low end of the range of possible benefits.

If Eaton County were to close the gap between its current state and the ideal ECEC system, it could expect to receive a range of net benefits between \$321,552,394 and \$9,918,012. These benefits are depicted in Exhibit 5. The benefits of the high range of this gap would be distributed as shown in Exhibit 6:

EXHIBIT 5. Economic Benefits of Early Childhood Education in Care in the Eaton County

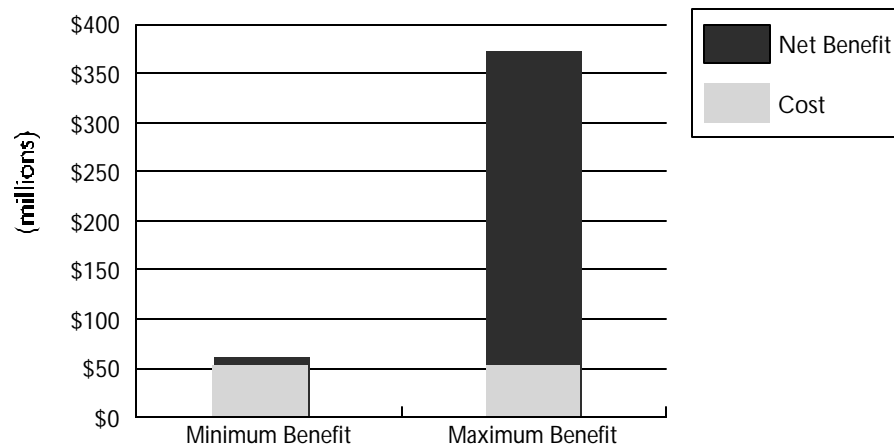
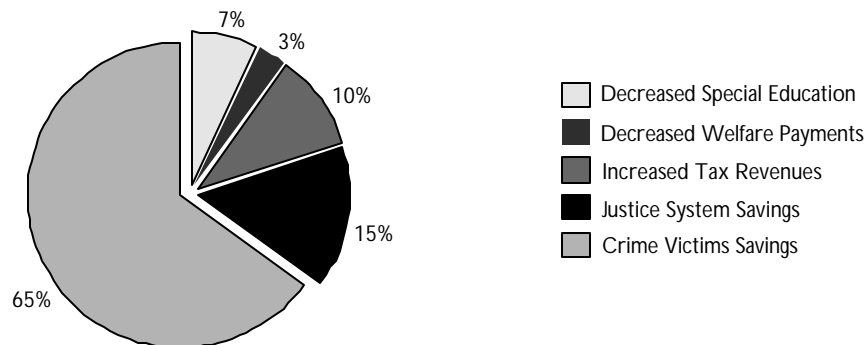


EXHIBIT 6. Percentage Breakdown of Benefits from the Perry Preschool Program



⁴ The RAND analysis breaks out the benefit to “high risk” and “low risk” families. PSC developed the \$1,161 benefit by using an estimate of 15 percent at risk and 85 percent not at risk.

Clearly, the majority of benefits to society are a result of the savings by crime victims. These savings include the costs for both the tangible and intangible effects of crime. These benefits will not be enjoyed by society until years after the introduction of a universal ECEC system. There are, however, several benefits that are realized immediately after the first group of children moves from ECEC to K–12 education. The first of these is the decrease in students requiring special education instruction. By reducing the number of students that are placed in special education, the school district will be able to reduce the financial demand necessitated by this costly intervention and redirect valuable resources for school improvement. This will result in both a monetary benefit and an overall increase in the quality of education at all schools. Another immediate benefit results from changes in the behavior of the child's parents. Some studies have shown that parents with children in high-quality ECEC systems are more likely to leave welfare.

Results from the Elmira PEIP program suggest that the home visit portion of a high-quality ECEC system can also affect the behavior of parents. A portion of the savings attributed to the Elmira program resulted from mothers of children participating in programs being able to remove themselves from the welfare rolls, saving the government money and increasing the overall well-being of society. These gains were realized within two years of the end of program participation.

ADDITIONAL ECONOMIC BENEFITS

In addition to the benefits derived as a direct result of the education received by children, there is an indirect economic benefit that results from closing the investment gap in childcare services. This investment would result in \$18,883,397 in increased economic activity and 244 new jobs (in addition to the educators and other aides hired in the schools). These increased benefits do not even include the benefits resulting from the possible construction of new childcare facilities in Eaton County.

EATON INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

PSC also calculated the gap for the Eaton Intermediate School District (EISD). This number was generated using demographic information for the EISD supplemented by county data where necessary. Due to its smaller size, EISD has a smaller gap in ECEC spending. According to PSC estimates, the investment gap for EISD is \$29,478,623. This translates into a range of benefits from \$181,588,317 to \$9,357,660.

