

Assuring a Sturdy Foundation

Branch County Report to the Community



The Status of Young Children in Branch County

A small investment for a lifetime of returns!

Early Childhood Investment Corporation
Great Start Collaborative of Branch County

www.branchcountygreatstart.com





January 1, 2008

Dear Branch County Community Members:

For the past year the Branch County Great Start Collaborative has participated in a comprehensive assessment of early childhood education, services and supports in our county. We collected statistics, talked to community members (from parent to teens to social workers) and reviewed the findings with a broad representation of community members at a Strategic Review Retreat in September. This group studied both the facts and the stories shared in focus groups that gave meaning to the numbers. Branch County programs and services for young children and families were reviewed to gain an accurate picture of current resources and needs. With this information, retreat participants created a focused plan to develop a comprehensive early childhood system in Branch County.

Research tells us there is a 7-17% return on community investment in the establishment of voluntary, universal preschool; quality child care; and support for parents. This means that when Branch County invests \$1 in early childhood services, we gain a minimum of \$7 in economic growth. During this assessment process we learned of the economic and social impact of early childhood education and its necessity as a foundation for a strong and prosperous community. Early childhood education is an important issue for families with children but equally important for those who do not have children. Poverty, employment rates, crime, community recreation are all impacted by the quality of early education.

The Branch County Great Start Collaborative and Strategic Review participants, as a team, support this strategic plan to develop a comprehensive early childhood system in Branch County. Each of us has participated in developing this plan through either membership on the Great Start Collaborative committee, participation in the Parent Coalition, participation in a focus group, or through problem solving and decision-making at the Strategic Review retreat.

At the Strategic Review retreat, September 18, 2007, we each signed a Pledge of Collaboration documenting our financial, professional and personal support to carry out the strategies and objectives outlined in this plan document. We are committed to achieving our goals and ultimate vision that all children in Branch County are successful in school and in life. You can support this initiative by participating in Great Start Collaborative community events, providing your feedback on early childhood issues and services, offering support and encouragement to families and children in Branch County and donating to the Early Childhood Community Investment Fund at the Branch County Community Foundation. Branch County will prosper if we all support our most important natural resource, our community's children.

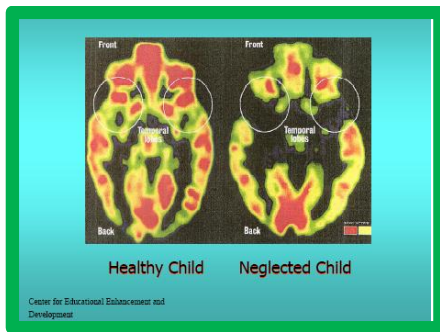
With deep commitment,

Branch County Great Start Collaborative Board Members

A Sturdy Foundation for Branch County's Economic Future

Quality Early Childhood Education is Future Workforce Development

The first five years of a child's life are a time of great opportunity. The young child's early experiences and environments directly impact the developing architecture of his or her brain. Everything children see, every word they hear, everything they do...from their first breath, shapes the rapidly developing architecture of their brains.



We now know that by age four, 90 percent of this architecture will be built and the foundation for language, social behavior, problem solving ability and emotional health will be mostly created...or not...by the time they enter kindergarten.

To be successful in school and in life, Michigan's young children must grow up in an environment that develops self-confidence, positive social and emotional skills, and a love for learning. There is much that communities can do to make sure that every young child has this foundation. Leaders in communities across our state are working together in new ways so that every infant, toddler and preschooler has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential.

Community leaders in Branch County who understand the vital importance of investing in young children have come together to form our Great Start Collaborative. The Branch County Great Start Collaborative is funded by, and working in partnership with, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation to prepare, and then implement, the *Branch County Early Childhood Action Agenda*. Our *Early Childhood Action Agenda* will lay out the actions we need to take going forward to ensure that every child enters kindergarten healthy and eager to learn.

For our community to make wise decisions about the future of our young children, we need to know what the current status of young children is in Branch County. This report presents current community data in six areas, each of which makes a critical contribution to the optimal brain development, health and early learning of young children.

Children attending quality early childhood development programs are more likely to become adults who participate in the workforce with higher rates of productivity.

*Lessons Learned: A Review of Early Childhood Development Studies,
Jean Burr, Ph.D. and Rob Grunewald*

Pediatric and Family Health Care

Healthy children are more able to engage in the full range of life experiences that promote early learning. A lack of health care or delays in treating children's health problems can negatively affect their development, sometimes with lifelong consequences.

Young children and families with health insurance are more likely to go to the doctor and get help for health conditions before they become emergencies. Young children, who have a regular health care provider, or medical home, are more likely to get the high quality preventative care they need to identify and address the common health needs and concerns of early childhood, like immunizations and screenings for developmental, hearing and vision problems.

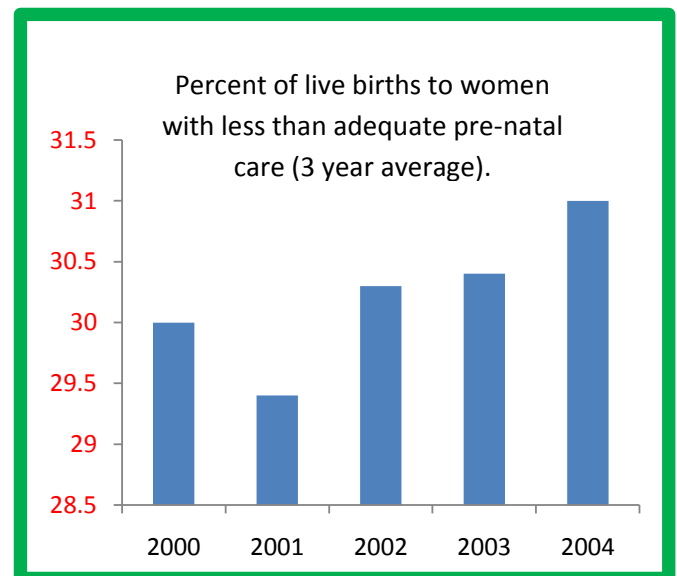


Nearly one out of every three births in Branch County, the mother has not received adequate health care. Lack of providers accepting Medicaid as a form of payment is a key issue.

Adequate prenatal care may be affected by the access to efficient transportation, affordable health care (availability of doctors accepting Medicaid), and a delay in Medicaid services.

Branch County currently has one OB/GYN physician accepting Medicaid as a form of payment. Lack of prenatal services and support can greatly affect fetal development.

Although this availability of adequate pre-natal care is of concern, a larger concern in Branch County is the availability to services.



Goal: Develop a “No Wrong Door” system of service delivery.

Strategy: Create a social service flow that allows for multiple points of entry by people utilizing programs and services.

Please view the Great Start Strategic Plan online at www.branchcountygreatstart.com.

Social and Emotional Health Care

Every infant needs a warm, nurturing and stable relationship with his or her parents and other caregivers to grow into a trusting, curious and confident toddler. Young children who are socially and emotionally healthy are self-confident and enjoy exploring their worlds. Healthy young children can more easily cope with their emotions, control their impulses and form friendships. They have learned through nurturing relationships that they can trust adults and look to them for guidance. Success in school requires that children get along well with their classmates, listen and respond to their teachers, and demonstrate an eagerness for learning. All of these are social-emotional skills.

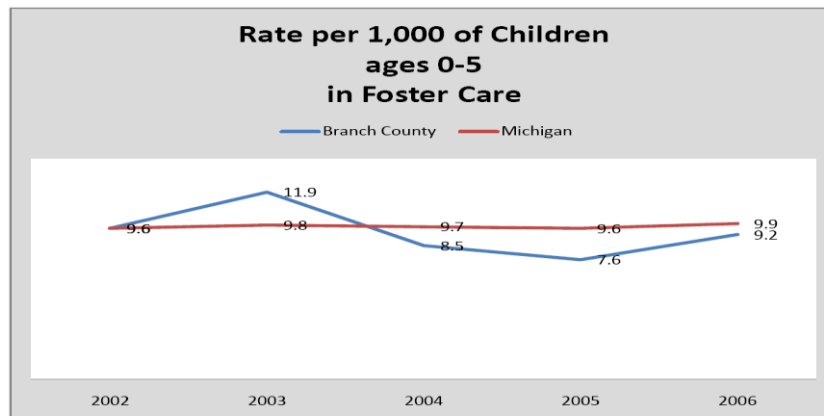
Infants, toddlers and young children, like adults, can develop mental health problems, like depression or traumatic stress disorder, which hurt their healthy social and emotional development. Early diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems is vital.



Number of children under 5 years of age

Branch County – 2005

2914 Total Children



Through the strategic planning process, the Great Start Collaborative revealed the prominent need for support systems offered to foster families, foster parents and foster children. This need is addressed in the GSC strategic plan as follows:

Goal: Provide support for foster children and families.

Strategy: Form a support group for fostered children and families.

Please view the Great Start Strategic Plan online at www.branchcountygreatstart.com.

Early Care and Education



Parents are their children’s primary caregivers and foremost teachers. With the demands of today’s work world, most young children are cared for by someone other than one of their parents prior to entering kindergarten. The quality of early care and education – whether it is provided by grandma, a neighbor, the church or a childcare center – matters. High quality early care and education provides a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for infants and young children. Children who receive high quality early care and education have stronger learning, language and social skills when they enter school.

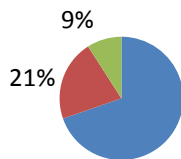
Children who attend a high quality preschool program in the year or two before kindergarten are better prepared – academically, socially and emotionally. High quality preschool programs have well-trained staff, small group sizes, and language rich environments and actively engage parents in their children’s learning.

Parents who are involved in their children’s early care and education programs benefit not only their own child, but the others who attend as well. Parents who get involved meet other parents, learn about how their children spend their days, and can build on these relationships and activities at home.

Young children with developmental delays or disabilities usually have special health, developmental and learning needs which are most effectively addressed when they are identified early. Individualized early intervention services and special educational supports provide crucial developmental guidance for parents and are designed to help every child reach his or her full potential.

Total of 23 Child Care Center in Branch County

- Number Allowing Half-Days (less than 5 hours)
- Number of Child Care Centers Accepting Infants



Number of children under 5 years of age

Branch County – 2005

2914 Total Children

The need for quality childcare in Branch County is evident. This too was identified through the strategic planning process and was address as follows:

Goal: Provide available quality daycare for all families regardless of income.

Strategy: Create funding sources to allow universal access to quality daycare.

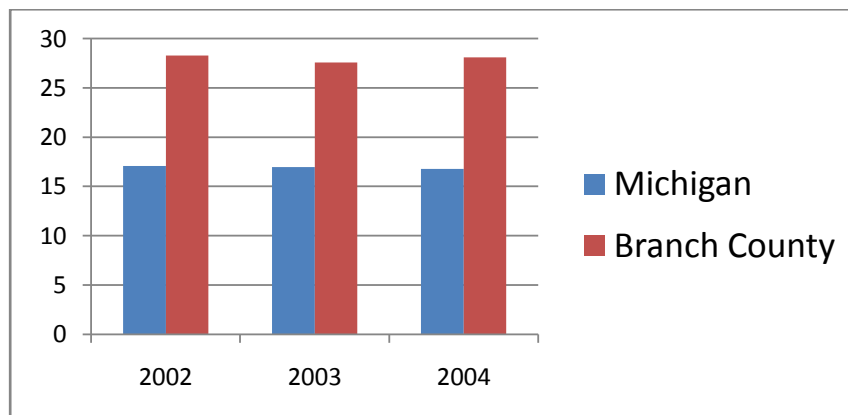
Please view the Great Start Strategic Plan online at www.branchcountygreatstart.com.

Family Support and Parenting Education

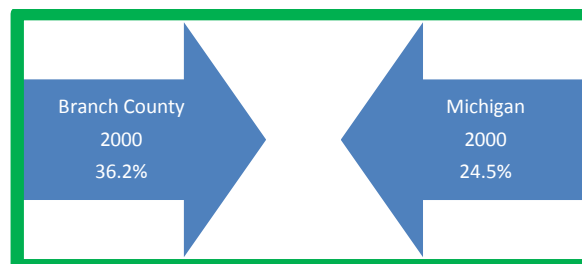


Raising young children is challenging for every family, regardless of education or income. Parents have so many roles that they are called on to play in the lives of their young children. Parents must be caregivers, educators, playmates, role models, providers and protectors. Knowing what to do in each role can be a difficult and stressful task. Parents greatly benefit from easily accessible parenting information, community resources and supports.

Percentage of Mothers without a High School Diploma



Percent of Children under 18 in Single Parent Families



Goal: Build community will and support for young families and children.

Strategy: Creating a public awareness campaign to educate on the importance of early childhood education and issues.

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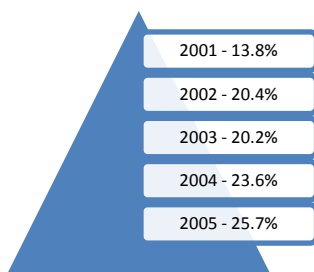
Basic Needs, Economic Security, and Child Safety

The inability to meet basic needs is one of the most significant barriers to providing effective parenting and caring for children. Parents cannot effectively parent when there is not adequate food on the table, or when they have to worry about shelter. Young children need a stable, safe environment in order to flourish. A lack of sufficient family economic resources can place young children's health and development at risk.

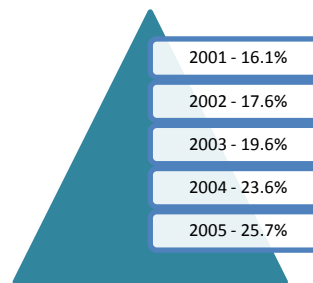


Percent of Children 0-5 Receiving Food Assistance

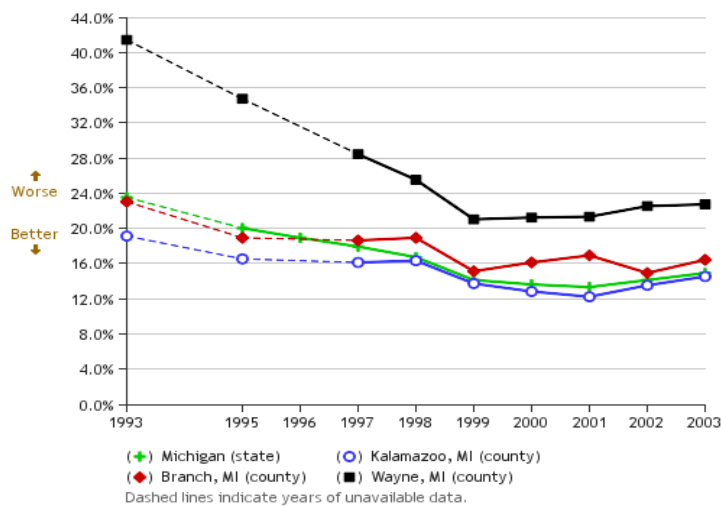
Branch County



Michigan



Percent of Children Ages 0-17 Living in Poverty



Goal: Position mentors and volunteers to “coach” families to make better choice and to become independent and responsible parents.

Strategy: Facilitate buy-in and participation from all Family Services Network agencies.

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You're Opinion and Participation Matters

Community and business leaders in Branch County are working together to build a coordinated system of care. Resources and support will help all Branch County families provide a "Great Start" for their children from birth to age five.

Research has shown that early childhood education increases lifelong earning potential, achieves better academic outcomes, lowers rates of teen pregnancy and incarceration, and improves the community's ability to recruit and retain parents who work -- all of which provide long term positive results and cost savings to the community. The Branch County Great Start Collaborative is an economic investment in our community and our future.

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) is a statewide initiative that recognizes education begins at birth (not when a child enters school) and works to effectively focus early childhood efforts and leverage public and private support to expand the availability of high-quality early education and child care, including parent education.

The Branch County Community Foundation (BCCF) believes that early childhood education can improve children's chances for success in later life, thereby providing benefits to children, their families, and society as a whole. BCCF recently created a new fund, the Early Childhood Investment Fund, to create locally-controlled funding to and provide a further giving opportunity for those with similar values.

For more information on this fund through the Branch County Community Foundation, contact them at 517.278.4517 or www.brcofoundation.org

This Community Report Card was brought to you by the Great Start Collaborative of Branch County under a grant awarded by the Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corporation. For more information, please contact the Great Start Coordinator, Amy Galliers at 517.278.5600 or visit our web site at www.branchcountygreatstart.com

Members of the Branch County Great Start Collaborative

Branch Area Chamber of Commerce	Coldwater Board of Public Utilities
Parents of Children 12 and Under	Branch Community Foundation
Branch Department of Human Services	Munchkin Land Licensed Daycare
Branch Health Department	Branch Family Services Network
Branch Intermediate School District	Faith-Based Organizations
Coldwater Daily Reporter	Michigan School Readiness Program
Child Care Resources	Head Start

