



Capitol Corner
An ECIC Legislative Update
April 25, 2008

In the News

CMS Energy Makes \$175,000 Contribution to Local GSC

On Friday April 25th, the *Jackson Citizen Patriot* reported that CMS Energy will be stepping up to the plate and making a commitment to furthering early childhood education through the Jackson Great Start Collaborative. CMS President and CEO David Joos said the company will be investing \$175,000 in three key areas: child-care payment assistance, a program to provide free books to preschoolers and four site-based mentoring programs.

Great Start coordinator Sheri Butters certainly thought Joos and CMS hit a homerun. “Consumers is really taking a leap of faith with us. It’s amazing,” said Butters.

Butters went on to say that since being awarded grant funding in 2006, CMS Energy is the first big private supporter of the Jackson Collaborative but expects other businesses, service groups and individuals to follow its lead. This public private partnership is what makes the entire Great Start Initiative a truly community approach to ensuring Michigan’s children between the ages of zero and five are in safe, healthy environments where they can learn and grow.

According to the *Patriot*, the literacy program will be seeded with \$70,000 to launch an Imagination Library, which will provide one free book a month to every Jackson County child under the age of 5. Consumers will also donate another \$60,000 to allow parents attending local college or university up to \$5,000 to pay for child care while they are taking classes. The remaining \$45,000 will go towards a partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Jackson County to establish four site-based mentoring programs at locations near the CMS offices making it easier for employees to participate in the program.

Under the Dome

House Committee Hears from ECIC

Last week, ECIC Vice President for Public Affairs Chris Kolb, Joan Blough, Director of Great Start Collaboratives and Technical Assistance, and Christina Pavlak, Parent Coordinator for the Great Start Collaborative – Kent Parent Coalition made a presentation to members of the House School Aid and Education Committee about the importance of funding early childhood development, care and education. The ECIC representatives presented the six-member panel with a comprehensive summary of the Governor's expanded investment for early childhood programs in her Executive Budget.

The proposal calls for an additional \$31.5 million in spending. This initiative, if approved by the legislature, will expand the local Great Start network so all 650,000 children under five and their families are connected to a local Great Start Collaborative; develop evidence-based practices that provide quality learning environments for our children; and, will allow more than 7,000 children have high quality pre-school opportunities.

The group fielded questions but left the committee confident it had provided the committee with the necessary information to make an informed decision on the Governor's proposal. After committee, the group met one-on-one with Representative Bruce Caswell, a key republican on the committee, to answer questions he had and talk more specifically about the proven benefits of this type of investment. Pavlak, a parent coordinator, was able to provide the Representative with first hand insight about the accomplishments occurring on the local level and how important parents were to the Great Start initiative and to the success of their children.

Around the Capitol

Day Care Sees Increase in DHS Budget

The House of Representatives have sent the \$4.65 billion Department of Human Services budget on to the State Senate. The House version is approximately \$39 million less than Governor Granholm's recommended budget but does boost the day care services program, bringing it up to \$20 million. The bill gives licensed day care providers a 4% rate increase. It also provides \$700,000 in general funds to finance one-time incentive payments for day care relative providers and aides participating in a 10-hour child care training program. And also includes funding to support child care home readiness and other training for day care activities.

Child Welfare Task Force Launched

The Michigan Child Welfare Improvement Task Force will drive radical reform of Michigan's child welfare system supporters announced. Nearly 70 members from a

variety of professional disciplines have the goal of setting outcomes to drive the reform effort. Co-chairing the task force will be former DHS director C. Patrick Babcock and Carol Goss, president and CEO of the Skillman foundation.

The group's four principal priorities include:

- Developing the guiding principals underlying the child welfare system;
- Reviewing and assessing current federal and state standards on outcomes;
- Recommending measurable outcomes for all child caring agencies, both public and private; and
- Recommending action steps for state government to achieve these outcomes.

The task force will meet monthly with five smaller work groups meeting more frequently over the summer. A final report of its findings and recommendations will be delivered in March of 2009.

All-Day Kindergarten?

State Senator Irma Clark-Coleman is encouraging parents and educators to speak out in support of SB 162, a proposal for mandatory all-day kindergarten. Detroit Public School Deputy Superintendent Sue Carnell and Detroit Federation of Teachers President Virginia Cantrell support Clark-Coleman's proposal. Governor Granholm endorsed the concept in her 2008 State of the State Address.

Booster Seat Requirement Becomes Law

Beginning July 1, children between the ages of four and eight, and those shorter than four feet-nine, will be required to sit in a car booster seat. During a ceremonial bill signing Governor Granholm told the crowd of lawmakers, department officials and children that with motor vehicle accidents being the leading cause of child deaths, this new law was sure to save lives.