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Southeast Great Start Regional Resource Center aims to improve child care quality

*Part of statewide initiative offering free, convenient tools
for parents, child care and early education providers*

JACKSON – Starting today, parents and child care providers can contact the Southeast Great Start Regional Resource Center to find the information they need to ensure local children get top-quality child care and early education experiences.

Part of Michigan's Great Start Child Care Quality Project, the resource center is one of 10 being launched across the state. The Southeast Resource Center can be contacted at www.childcarenetwork.org or by calling 1-800-777-2861. It serves parents and early-learning professionals in the Livingston, Washtenaw, Jackson, Hillsdale, Lenawee and Monroe county area.

Also available is an online resource of early learning information, including a searchable database of quality, licensed child care providers, called Great Start CONNECT. (See www.greatstartforkids.org and click on Great Start CONNECT.)

"Great Start CONNECT gives the families of Michigan a new opportunity to access quality care in Michigan," said Pam Smith, project leader of the local resource center. "And the new Southeast Great Start Regional Resource Center gives child care providers and families new resources to enhance the quality of care children receive, so they to get off to a great start. With both new ventures, the children of Michigan win.

Statewide, the Great Start Child Care Quality Project is being funded with \$10 million in federal funds. The Southeast Regional Resource Center received \$808,330.

“The Southeast Great Start Regional Resource Center will reach six counties (Livingston, Jackson, Washtenaw, Hillsdale, Lenawee and Monroe) and coordinate resources to help the state’s most vulnerable children,” Smith said. “Early childhood education creates lifelong learners. Lifelong learners have a long-term, quantifiable impact on the economic and workforce development in Michigan.”

The Quality Project involves three major components:

- Great Start CONNECT, an online system of early learning resources, including an easy-to-use, searchable database parents can access 24/7 to find licensed/registered local child care and early education providers. Providers can find professional development, training and other resources.
- Great Start Regional Resource Centers, operating in 10 locations across the state, which coordinate supports and services for both providers and families. The Regional Resource Centers will help develop regional child care quality improvement plans that reflect the needs of local families.
- Great Start Michigan Child Care Resource Center, housed at Central Michigan University, which maintains Great Start CONNECT and aligns regional quality improvements and statewide efforts. It will work with the Early Childhood Investment Corp. (ECIC) to create a Curriculum Review Advisory Council, considered key to building a professional development system for early childhood professionals.

The new system is spearheaded by ECIC, a nonprofit public corporation established in 2005 to improve Michigan’s early childhood services and programs. ECIC’s focus is on creating a seamless system of locally directed programs and services through the state’s 55 Great Start Collaboratives. The collaboratives individually meet the specific needs of local young children and collectively help ensure that Michigan’s youngest learners are ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

For parents, the Great Start Child Care Quality Project offers “one-stop shopping” when looking for quality child care and early-learning environments through Great Start CONNECT. Parents can also find local supports and services through their Great Start Regional Child Care Resource Center.

For early childhood professionals, Great Start CONNECT creates a statewide Professional Development Registry, where training can be accessed and tracked.

The Quality Project is the result of two years of study – involving focus groups, surveys and meetings – to assess how Michigan’s child care dollars have been used over the last two decades. The goal is to reform, streamline and improve Michigan’s child care programs through a comprehensive system that maximizes funds while addressing the needs of children, parents and providers.

The research illustrated the overwhelmingly desire for more local involvement in how child care providers and families are supported. While the Great Start Child Care Quality Project sets up statewide standards, it requires local input to identify the community’s early childhood assets, determine needs and make decisions about service delivery.

“With this quality initiative in place, Michigan can confidently move forward on fostering a seamless system of early childhood supports and programs,” said Judy Y. Samelson, CEO of ECIC. “We’re working to ensure that every young child in Michigan gets what he or she needs to thrive in school and in life.”

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