



Our Earliest Promise

A Status Report Concerning the Welfare of Muskegon County's
Youngest Children Ages Birth to Five

JANUARY 2007

Great Start, Great Expectations!

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Muskegon County Great Start Collaborative*

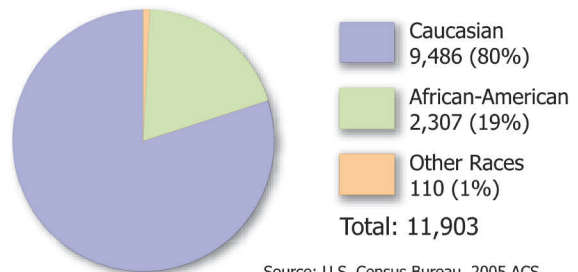
Muskegon County is on the move. An important part of our county's promising future lies with our youngest children – those yet to enter their school years.

Muskegon County's Great Start Collaborative was initiated in 2006 as part of a statewide effort to promote the formation of community-based comprehensive early childhood development systems. Issues regarding a child's healthy birth and upbringing, quality and affordable child care and pre-school, economic security, parent and family supports, special needs, and safety all contribute to the welfare of our youngest residents. Building a strong foundation for our youngest children is a noble promise, one which benefits all who call Muskegon County home.

Data presented in this publication is meant to spur a discussion concerning the current well-being of Muskegon County's children. Most importantly, this report can serve as a genesis for future action. The numbers highlight both accomplishments and needs. One thing statistics cannot portray is Muskegon County's excellent reputation for collaborating to better our community. By having all community members working together under a common mission – parents, extended family, youth, business, schools, faith-based organizations, government, political leadership, philanthropy, human service agencies, and many others – Muskegon County can accomplish much for its children.

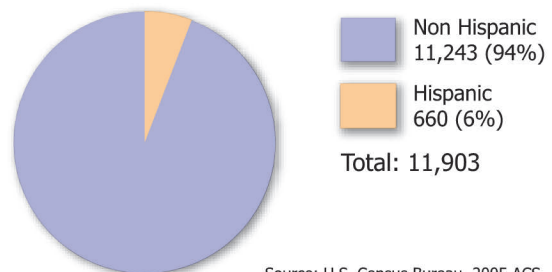
Focusing on children from birth to five is to recognize the promise of our future. All children are born to learn; what happens in a child's earliest years is a significant determinant of achievement later in life. We encourage you to join us in striving toward the goal of ensuring that all Muskegon County children will enter kindergarten safe, healthy, and eager to succeed in school and in life!

Total Population Under 5 Years by Race



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 ACS

Total Population Under 5 Years by Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 ACS

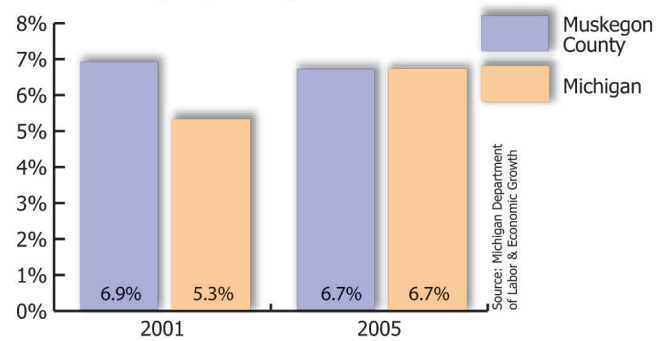
Economic Security

Economic security is essential for families of young children. Gaps in child development start young, and economics play a significant role. The promise of Muskegon County's youngest generation ultimately rests in a healthy and vibrant economy.

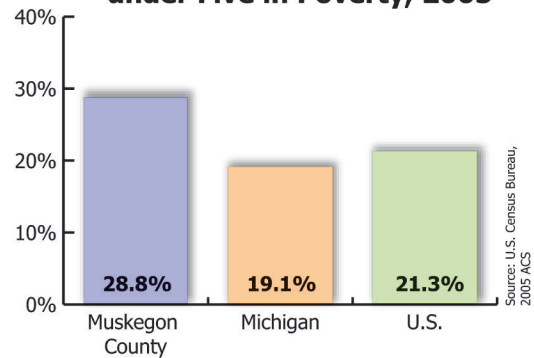
Research demonstrates that economic standing in our society profoundly influences the development of young children. The Child Trends Data Bank analyzed a wide range of research, including data from the National Center for Education Statistics, and concluded the following: "Very young children living in poverty are much less likely to be able to recognize the letters of the alphabet, count to 20 or higher, write their name, read or pretend to read." Research also shows that once a child falls behind in these fundamental skills he or she often fails to catch up.

There exists little doubt that early childhood issues and the economy are inextricably connected. The emergence of a new economy in Muskegon County and the growth that results from economic development efforts will directly impact the lives of Muskegon County families and young children.

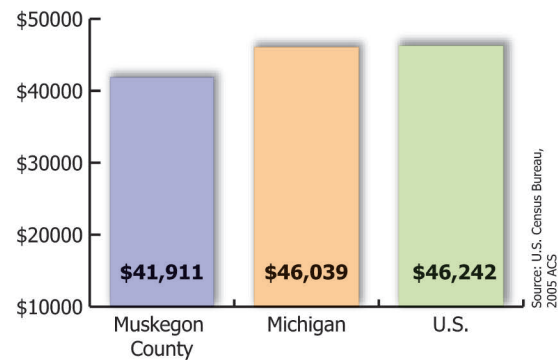
Unemployment, 2001-2005



Percent of Children under Five in Poverty, 2005



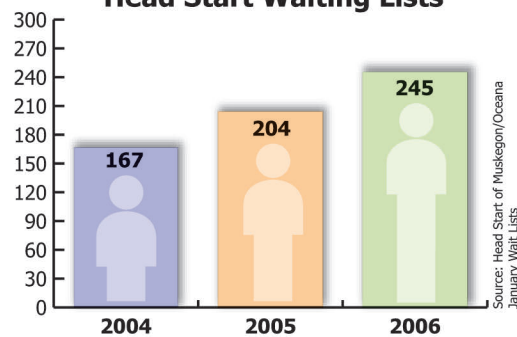
Median Household Income, 2005



Early Care & Education

Quality, affordable, and accessible child care and pre-school are vital early childhood development services. Several national studies, including research by Nobel-laureate and economist Dr. James Heckman, conclude that investing in early education and care pays great dividends throughout a child's life. In fact, these studies show that society's economic return on investing in high-quality early education ranges from \$4 - \$17 for every \$1 invested. In the highly-competitive economy of the 21st century, establishing a solid foundation in early education for all our children will be a key for communities seeking to develop a successful workforce.

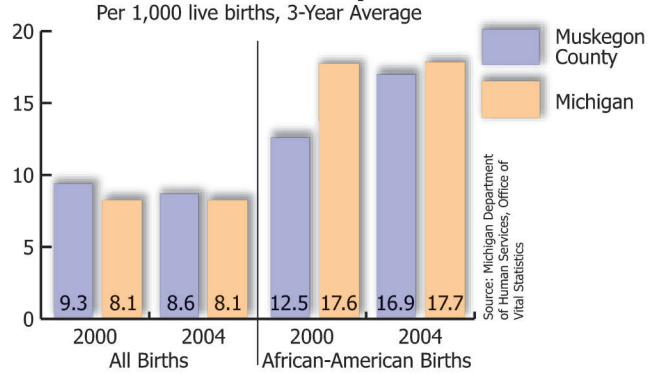
Head Start Waiting Lists



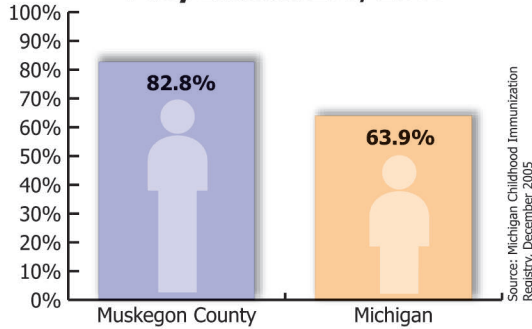
Health Care

A healthy beginning in life for all children is an essential part of a healthy community. Learning begins at birth. Studies show that nearly 25 percent of a baby's brain connections are formed at birth and nearly 90 percent by age three. Nurturing the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development of children in the earliest of years is critical to a child's growth. Investing in health care for infants and toddlers prevents later health problems and supports optimal learning outcomes for children. In Muskegon County, significant investment has occurred in the community's health care infrastructure. This is particularly true for services dedicated to lower-income children. The promise of our youngest generation can be realized only if our children receive a healthy start in life.

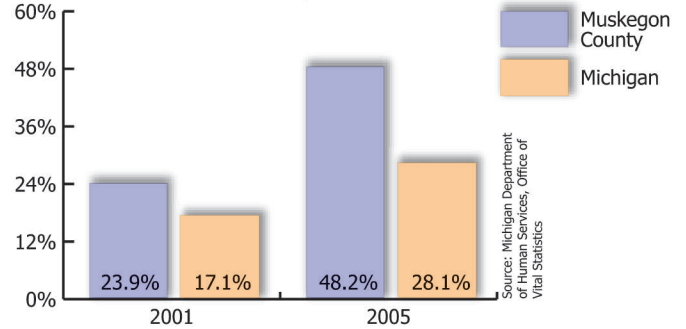
Infant Mortality



Percent of Children 19-36 Months Fully Immunized, 2005



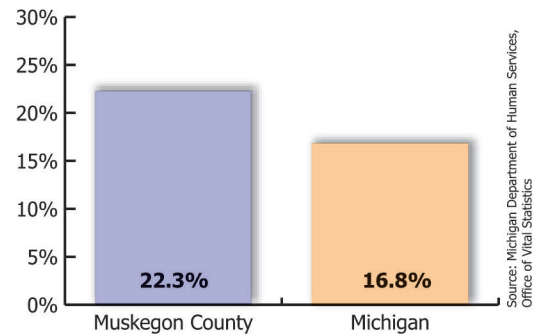
Number of Children Aged 1-2 Years Tested for Lead, 2001-2005



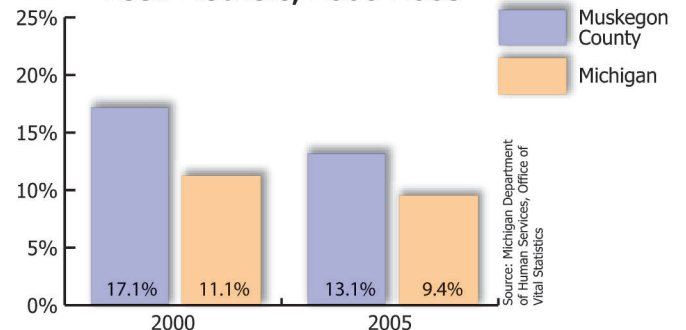
Parenting, Family Support

Families are the core of the promise of Muskegon County's youngest children. Parents and other family members provide the enriched environment necessary to support the critical early learning of infants and toddlers. A safe, nurturing, and stable home environment impacts the development of young children long before most children ever set foot in a school building, making parents a child's ultimate "teacher." Learning truly begins at home, as does the success of Muskegon County's youngest generation.

Percent of Mothers with New Babies and Lacking a High School Diploma, 2004



Percent of all Births to Teen Mothers, 2000-2005





Muskegon County's Great Start Collaborative

Governor Granholm's *Great Start* initiative was announced in the 2004 State of the State speech to encourage early literacy efforts and parenting education. The underlying premise of the effort is that children learn more from birth to age three than any other time in life.

To ensure all children in Michigan have the opportunity for a Great Start and a Great Life, the Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) was established in February 2005. The ECIC is a public non-profit corporation focused on coordinating and expanding programs, services, and supports for all children from birth to age five. The goals of the ECIC include providing a focal point in state government for developing Michigan's Great Start system, serving as a clearinghouse for information, resources and technical assistance for early childhood system-building efforts, and partnering with local communities through Great Start Collaboratives.

In January 2006, the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District was awarded one of the three largest and inaugural "Great Start Collaborative" planning grants by the ECIC. More than forty community members began work in May 2006 on the collaborative's planning efforts regarding early childhood issues in Muskegon County. A strategic plan will be developed by the Collaborative and released to the public in the fall of 2007.



Muskegon County Great Start Collaborative Member Agencies

- Catholic Social Services
- Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County
- Christians for Health
- Community Coordinating Council of Muskegon County
- Community Foundation for Muskegon County
- Community Mental Health of Muskegon County
- Early On Muskegon
- Every Woman's Place/Webster House
- Fruitport Community Schools
- The Gerber Foundation
- Hackley Community Care Center
- Hackley Hospital
- Hackley Life Counseling
- Head Start of Muskegon / Oceana
- Holton Public Schools
- Mona Shores Public Schools
- Montague Area Public Schools
- Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce
- Muskegon Area Intermediate School District
- Muskegon Community College
- Muskegon Community Health Project
- Muskegon County Department of Human Services
- Muskegon County Health Department
- Muskegon Family Care
- Muskegon Heights Public Schools
- Muskegon Public Schools
- North Muskegon Public Schools
- Oakridge Public Schools
- Orchard View Schools
- Parent Representatives Pathways
- Ravenna Public Schools
- Reeths-Puffer Schools
- United Way of the Lakeshore
- White Lake Area Community Education
- Whitehall District Schools