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**studY of grand rapids early childhood education FINDS**

**significant lack of subsidized services for lower-income families**

**Calls for Increased Services, Focused Investments, and Neighborhood-Specific Planning**

**GRAND RAPIDS, MI —** A new study by nonprofit researcher IFF found that only 30 percent of the need for subsidized and Head Start early childhood education programs is being met in Grand Rapids, putting an undue burden on low-income children and families. [*A System for All Children: An Early Childhood Education Needs Assessment in Grand Rapids*](http://www.iff.org/SystemForAllChildren)estimates that about 4,000 additional licensed and registered early childhood education slots are needed to meet the needs of all children in Grand Rapids – and that two-thirds of that need is concentrated in just one-third of the city’s neighborhoods.

The study also found there is a dramatic lack of access to early childhood education slots for infants and toddlers, with just 16 percent of children ages 0-2 having access to licensed and registered providers. That number drops to just 8 percent for children ages 0-2 in the highest-need neighborhoods, which have been identified as: West Garfield Park; Black Hills-Grandville; West Grand (East); West Grand (West); Baxter and Ottawa Hills; East Garfield Park; and Southeast Community. Five of these seven neighborhoods have the highest levels of children in poverty (children in families below 125 percent Federal Poverty Level).

“This reportis not just an academic exercise; it provides a clear path forward for where to target investments to reach the greatest number of children and families in Grand Rapids,” said IFF Executive Director for Detroit Chris Uhl. “The early childhood education world includes a patchwork of different subsidy programs for different age groups and income levels. We need to pay close attention to what the data tells us, as well as what the community tells us, to ensure that every child in Grand Rapids has access to comprehensive, high-quality, and equitable early childhood services.”

The study includes some bright spots: About 80 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds have access to slots through market-rate care and the state’s Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), and 88 percent of providers participating in Great Start to Quality (GSQ) – the state’s quality rating and improvement system –received at least three stars.

“The availability and accessibility of quality early childhood education is an issue of equity,” said Yazeed Moore, a program officer with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which supported the study. “All children deserve to have the best start possible. In partnership with community, early learning providers and leaders in Grand Rapids will be able to use this study to target and fine-tune efforts to provide quality care.  Many partners are coming together to build an early childhood system that covers the whole continuum of care from birth to age five, in all neighborhoods, and for families of all income levels.”

The report’s recommendations include:

1. **Increase services available for children ages 0-2.** More than 84 percent of infants and toddlers were without ECE services in 2016. All programs need greater availability of care, but the absence of Early Head Start services should be a priority.
2. **Focus investments in the highest-need neighborhoods.** The unequal distribution of services is apparent through the spatial assessment in the study – nearly 72 percent of the need is in just seven neighborhoods. Five of those seven neighborhoods have the highest levels of children in poverty (children in families below 125 percent Federal Poverty Level). Investments in these neighborhoods would reach the greatest number of children with the most need.
3. **Create neighborhood-specific plans.** Cultural competency is key to providing high-quality and appropriate programs to diverse communities throughout the city. The neighborhood-specific profiles in the report aim to illuminate the specific needs of different areas.
4. **Help providers with professional development and business management.** One solution for creating greater access to high-quality and full-day, full-year early care for low-income families is for stakeholders to support providers in navigating the complex process of “blending and braiding” various sources of funding for subsidy programs that differ based on the child’s age and income level.

To help implement these recommendations and encourage increased collaboration, *A System for All Children* is accompanied by an online tool that allows users to visualize provider supply and community demographic data alongside the results of the needs assessment at the city, programmatic, and neighborhood levels. The report and online tool are available at: [www.iff.org/SystemForAllChildren](http://www.iff.org/SystemForAllChildren).

**A release event is scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 23, from 8:30-10:30 a.m. in Grand Rapids, Mich. For details and to register, please visit** [www.iff.org/GrandRapidsECE](http://www.iff.org/GrandRapidsECE)**.**

*A System for All Children* was guided by an advisory committee that included representatives from Camp Fire West Michigan 4C, Early Learning Neighborhood Collective, Family Futures, First Steps Kent County’s Great Start Collaborative, Frey Foundation, Grand Rapids African American Health Institute, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Head Start of Kent County, KConnect, Laboratory Pre-School at Grand Rapids Community College, Spectrum Health, Urban Core Collective, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and West Michigan Partnership for Children. It was completed with support from The W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

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**About IFF:** [IFF](http://www.iff.org/) is a mission-driven lender, real estate consultant, and developer that helps communities thrive by creating opportunities for low-income populations and individuals with disabilities. From child care to senior housing, IFF works closely with clients from every sector, offering affordable, flexible financing; full-scale real estate consulting; and community development services. Since 1988, we have made more than $700 million in loans, leveraged $2.3 billion in community investments, and renovated or constructed more than 3.1 million square feet of nonprofit and affordable housing spaces.