



Strengthening Connections: State Approaches to Connecting Families to Services

Michigan's Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Practices



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

SUMMARY

The Michigan Department of Education, Office of Great Start (OGS) is using Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five funds to support three projects related to coordinated eligibility and enrollment: Trusted Advisor grants to Great Start Parent Coalitions, the First 10 initiative, and the Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Project.

Trusted Advisor Grants

Building on a statewide system of Great Start Collaboratives, which are local networks coordinating early childhood services, OGS began supporting [Trusted Advisor grants](#) in 2017. Trusted Advisor grants are awarded to Great Start Parent Coalitions to improve local connections with families and engage them in early learning opportunities and related community supports. To reach populations that are not well connected with the service system, each coalition recruits Trusted Advisors to create relationships with families and may conduct initiatives targeted to a particular population such as fathers, grandparents, or underserved racial/ethnic groups.

First 10

OGS is also piloting the [First 10](#) initiative developed by Education Development Center to bring together services for children from birth through

10 years old. Community hubs within elementary schools integrate comprehensive services for children birth through 5 and serve as access points for families to be connected to services and for children to be supported through educational transitions.

Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Project

In 2020, OGS contracted with School Readiness Consulting to support local communities in implementing coordinated eligibility and enrollment practices. School Readiness Consulting developed a [coordinated eligibility and enrollment landscape scan](#), which highlights current efforts and promising practices in Michigan and around the country. A webinar series, [guidebook](#), and community of practice are being rolled out to assist communities in strengthening their practices around eligibility and enrollment.



Michigan's Approach to Strengthening Connections

- coordination across multiple entry points
- community-designed approaches
- engagement of parent coalitions
- use of trusted advisors to reach populations not well connected to services
- support for communities in implementing coordinated eligibility and enrollment

GETTING STARTED

OGS began a visioning process to increase the availability of high-quality early learning opportunities through the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant (2014–2018) and continued work to better connect families to programs through the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) in 2019–2022.

As part of the PDG B-5 planning grant in 2019, OGS developed a comprehensive needs assessment and a strategic plan that identified priorities for the state to help create a more coordinated and equitable early learning system. These priorities included:

- more effectively including family voice and choice
- delivering child and family services that are highly contextualized
- strengthening partnerships and coordination locally across programs and services

ADMINISTRATION

[Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan](#), updated and approved in 2020, provides focused direction to Michigan's education community in support of all learners. It is designed to concentrate energy and resources, strengthen operations, and set success measures to ensure that all partners are working together toward

common education goals. The first goal is to expand early childhood learning opportunities.

OGS administers the PDG B-5 grant and is funding three projects related to coordinated eligibility and enrollment practices at the community level. Through coordinated eligibility and enrollment, Michigan aims to address the current fragmented nature of early learning and family support systems to ensure that all young children and their families can benefit from the full range of services and supports available to them.

In addition to projects that are directly funded, OGS collaborates with other state agencies and community partners working on connecting families to services by:

- aligning with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' Home Visiting Access Workgroup to explore strategic and systematic ways to connect Michigan families to home visiting services
- jointly funding, with the Head Start State Collaboration Office, a cross-sector task force to implement demonstration projects exploring innovative strategies to serve families who are homeless
- working with the Michigan League for Public Policy's Kids Count project to develop data sets and community snapshots for each Great Start Collaborative to inform their planning to strengthen early childhood services in their community



APPROACH

The three coordinated eligibility and enrollment projects funded by the PDG B-5 grant are: Trusted Advisor grants to Great Start Parent Coalitions, the First 10 initiative, and the Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Project.

Trusted Advisor Grants

State funding from OGS supports intermediate school districts as fiduciaries for local Great Start Collaboratives, which cover the state to coordinate early childhood services at the community level. Each Great Start Collaborative has a [Great Start Parent Coalition](#). These coalitions, composed of parent volunteers, lend their support and expertise to advance local activities and are key advocates for early childhood in their community.

Since 2017, Great Start Collaborative Parent Coalitions have been eligible to receive [Trusted Advisor grants](#) from OGS. To reach populations that are not well connected with the service system, each coalition recruits Trusted Advisors to create relationships with families and engage them in early learning opportunities and related community supports. Parent Coalitions may conduct initiatives targeted to a particular population such as fathers, grandparents, or underserved racial/ethnic groups. For example, projects may develop and distribute culturally and linguistically appropriate materials about the importance of early learning and supports available to families. Trusted Advisor grants build on Michigan's strong parent partnership work and aim to increase linkages to families with children birth through 5 who are most in need of supports.

Grants are open to all active Parent Coalitions, and all that apply are funded. Of the 61 Great Start Parent Coalitions, 59 are funded and receive a maximum of \$25,000 per year each. The grant program started with Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge dollars and is now funded through PDG B-5. OGS is working toward sustainability when current funding ends in late 2022.

First 10

OGS is also piloting the [First 10](#) initiative developed by Education Development Center to bring together services for children from birth through 10 years old. First 10 combines innovative, high-impact practices to address the effects of poverty on educational outcomes. Community hubs within elementary schools integrate comprehensive services for children birth through 5 and serve as access points for families to be connected to services and for children to be supported through educational transitions. OGS is planning to pilot the concept with several communities.

Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Project

The Michigan Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Project is a partnership between OGS and School Readiness Consulting to support local communities in implementing coordinated eligibility and enrollment practices. As a first step in the project, School Readiness Consulting developed the [Michigan Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Landscape](#), which highlights current efforts and promising practices in Michigan and around the country. The landscape scan was developed as a guide for the state and local communities to support the development and expansion of community-based coordinated eligibility and enrollment systems.

Michigan's landscape scan identified the following goals of coordinated eligibility and enrollment systems:

- better meet the needs of children and families
- help ensure equitable access to programs and services
- allocate limited resources more efficiently
- promote effective service delivery

Michigan's landscape scan sets forth a framework with three components of successful eligibility and enrollment systems:

- foundational principles:
 - family-centered
 - equitable
 - relationship-based
 - coordinated and aligned
- key elements of successful community approaches:
 - build family awareness of resources and services
 - help families select available resources and services
 - ensure families receive resources and services
 - keep families connected and supported
- areas where state policy can best support local efforts:
 - set a vision
 - leverage resources
 - advance data use
 - build local capacity

A webinar series, guidebook, and community of practice are being rolled out to assist communities in strengthening their practices around eligibility and enrollment. A four-part webinar series was held in October and November 2021 to provide an overview, highlight learnings from the landscape scan, and offer support for implementation. A digital [Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Planning and Implementation Guidebook](#) was released in February 2022 to assist communities in developing plans for implementing approaches to coordinated eligibility and enrollment. The toolkit walks communities through steps from getting started to assessing needs and gaps, gathering input and information from families and other partners, designing a set of strategies and solutions, and developing a coordinated eligibility and enrollment plan. Following the webinar series and release of the guidebook, a cohort of community



teams will be selected to participate in a community of practice to use the guidebook to strengthen their coordinated eligibility and enrollment practices. Community teams will participate in ten 2-hour virtual learning sessions during 2022. They will receive one-on-one support from a technical assistance provider as well as financial support to implement locally designed strategies aligned with one or more of the key components of coordinated eligibility and enrollment. Strategies, tools, and lessons learned from the communities will be disseminated through OGS to other communities across the state.

OGS is focused on building capacity at the local level and honoring the differences between communities. State-level support includes providing funding and resources to communities, offering technical assistance, and developing an early childhood integrated data system. Michigan's approach offers a variety of ways that communities can engage and serve families with young children. By coordinating across multiple entry points, all young children and their families can benefit from the full range of services and supports available to them.

Michigan's approach has evolved over time. As early childhood partners focused more on understanding families' needs and elevating their voices, they have been intentional about involving families in co-creating the systems they need. Addressing equity issues also became more important. Through grant funds, OGS has been able to provide systemic support to communities.

CHALLENGES AND IMPACT

Michigan faced several challenges as they implemented coordinated eligibility and enrollment practices:

- connecting and aligning with overlapping projects while keeping the big picture in mind
- navigating the tension between an inclusive state vision that allows for flexibility and the desire of communities to have concrete steps to follow
- getting past differing terminology to agree on the intended outcome—helping families find, access, and stay connected to needed services and supports
- dealing with survey and interview fatigue among parents and communities, especially during the COVID pandemic

In 2021, OGS contracted with the American Institutes for Research to evaluate the Trusted Advisor grant program. Findings included:

- Trusted Advisor grantees focused on building relationships with families, supporting families' needs, and connecting families from underrepresented groups to the mixed-delivery system.
- Trusted Advisor grantees used a variety of strategies to increase family knowledge and choice within the mixed-delivery system.
- Families often are not directly involved in local- or state-level policy or practice decisions, but Trusted Advisors document family needs and amplify family voice with policymakers.

The report recommended that grantees hire Trusted Advisors from their target communities and continue to use both virtual and in-person strategies. The evaluation also advised that state partners establish a space in which grantees can share best practices and ensure that grantees have sufficient funds to continue disseminating high-quality materials.



Lessons Learned from Michigan

- **Value the work happening on the ground and use the state's key levers to support communities.** Michigan is taking both grassroots and grass-tops approaches. State staff learn from communities and elevate their work.
- **Leverage work that has already been done but keep a pulse on what is happening currently.** OGS makes a point to circle back to partners at both community and state levels to check for understanding and to learn about work that is currently happening.
- **Center families' preferences in the planning process.** Systems must meet the needs of families where they are, and continual feedback from families is key.
- **Support communities in thinking about sustainability from the beginning.** Michigan focuses on building local capacity, including networking community collaboratives to support each other.
- **Take time to reflect to make sure systems are equitable.** It is important to think intentionally about how the work is being done as well as what is being done.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In thinking about the future, OGS staff are using these projects to develop community approaches that will not rely on state funding to continue once current funds are no longer available. Building local capacity and creating connections between communities in the final year of PDG B-5 funding will help ensure peer support. The advantage of a locally driven approach is that communities can learn from each other and adopt or adapt strategies that may work in their area. Ultimately, the goal is that there is no wrong door throughout the state and that families know where they can go to access services and supports.

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For other case studies in this series, see [here](#).