



Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Coalition | 14 Impactful Solutions

Regional Child Care Plan

“If the region wants to be desirable to young families there has to be a change.”—LEELANAU COUNTY PARENT

Solution 2

[DOWNLOAD THE FULL PLAN HERE](#)

Introduction to the 14 Solutions

The following 14 Solutions arise from more than 100 distinct ideas generated by the Regional Child Care Planning Coalition

The following Child Care Solution module is one of 14 Solutions that comprise the Regional Child Care Plan of the Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Planning Coalition. The 49-member Coalition represents regional and community partners in the northwest-lower Michigan counties of Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee and Wexford.

The work of the Coalition is funded by a Regional Child Care Planning grant awarded and supported by Michigan's Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) Child Care Innovation Fund in order to understand and address the child care crisis and to expand equitable access to high-quality, affordable child care for working families. Grants were issued to 16 regional coalitions covering every part of Michigan.

Regional Child Care Planning grants were issued to ECIC by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP), utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Each Solution Module:

Meets several criteria:

- **Impactful** – in the opinion of the Coalition, directly addresses one or more of the Root Causes impacting the regional child care system and will improve access, affordability and/or quality.
- **Vetted** – have proven to be successful regionally or elsewhere
- **Sponsored** – one or more regional entities or groups is presently committed to or leading implementation

Consists of five components::

- **Primary Root Cause** addressed
- **An introductory paragraph** summarizing the solution, why it can be beneficial and how it can be implemented
- **Background and Context** – relates why the solution may be needed or beneficial, along with some historical context where applicable
- **Examples and Priorities** – showcases examples of comparable approaches implemented within the region or elsewhere and then highlights implied priorities for implementation
- **Potential Near-Term Actions** – calls out near term actions that different groups of stakeholders can take in order to move toward implementation

The 14 Solutions are:

1. State Investment
2. Local Public Funding 
3. Policy Changes
4. Local Planning & Zoning
5. Provider Incubation
6. Community Facility Investments
7. Micro-Centers
8. Credential Pathways
9. Substitute Pools
10. Universal Preschool
11. Home-Based Universal Preschool Option
12. Employer Policies & Actions
13. Enhanced Family Navigation
14. Peer-to-peer & Community Collaboration

Local Public Funding

Build support for local public funding of early childhood

SOLUTION

2

Gaining public support to use taxpayer dollars for early learning and care programs can create dramatic new opportunities for children and families. Community groups within the region have successfully advocated for local millages and bonding requests to fund both school-based programs and community-based programs intended to support children and families. Community engagement is crucial to building the widespread support needed to develop and gain endorsement for programs related to local tax dollars.

Background & Context

Federal and state governments have often led the way in supporting early learning and care programs implementing new policies and funding opportunities.

In the 1990s, research showcasing the benefits of early education drove an interest in state-level funding for pre-kindergarten programs. Between that time and 2016, the number of states providing funding and operating early learning and care programs had risen from 7 to 43 states and the District of Columbia. In addition to funding, states set policies on quality and access to early learning and care programs.¹

Despite this increase in state-level funding, there still exists a huge gap to achieving adequate funding of programs in Michigan's mixed-delivery child care system (*see Solution 1: State Investment*).

As the unmet needs expressed by families have grown, there has been increased public support at the local level to reduce persistent gaps.

Local taxpayer support for the mixed-delivery child care system or for early childhood in general brings several distinct benefits:

- Locally generated funds may be more appropriately matched to local needs
- Engaging residents in support of child care and early childhood helps them to understand the shared responsibility we all have for our region's children and families
- The coalition building needed to pass local ballot initiatives can have enduring impact and strength beyond the specific ballot question (*see Solution 14: Peer-to-peer and Community Collaboration*)

Historically, building support for local public funding for early childhood education programs has been complex and challenging. However, many communities within the region have recently achieved success.

PRIMARY ROOT CAUSE
ADDRESSED:

**Broken
Business
Model**

¹ Transforming the Financing of Early care and Education: Landscape of Early Care and Education financing. [Ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

“Two Michigan counties, Kent and Leelanau, successfully passed county millage proposals levying property taxes to support community-based early childhood programs.”

Examples & Priorities

County and local governmental financial support to expand capacity, improve affordability and enhance quality of early learning and care can take the form of grants, contracts, public-private partnerships, and millage or bond proposals:

- A bond proposal is a request to approve borrowing money for large capital projects
- A millage proposal is a request to approve a property tax levy for a specific purpose and duration

Both of these involve assessment of property taxes on owners of homestead and non-homestead properties.

School-Based Programs

Michigan’s school financing rules allow public school districts to use bond proposals to fund capital projects and other expenditures on physical assets such as transportation and technology.

In the last several years, several school districts within the region have emphasized early childhood programming and the infrastructure to support it in their proposals to the community.

In May 2021 Kalkaska Public Schools (KPS) area voters approved a \$16.85 million school bond proposal that included creation of a new Early Childhood Education Center significantly enhancing the early

childhood education programs in that district. The KPS proposal also included renovations to other existing elementary schools to improve and expand their programs.²

Both Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS) and Allendale Public Schools Districts had bond proposals on the August 2024 ballot seeking public funds to enhance early care and learning programs through equipping additions to existing school facilities, as is the case with TCAPS, or expanding their child care center, as Allendale intends to do.³

Other Programs

Two Michigan counties, Kent and Leelanau, successfully passed county millage proposals levying property taxes to support community-based early childhood programs.

Successful passage of a new millage is complicated. It requires knowledge of:

- The State statute, code or charter that governmental units operate under
- Associated constraints stemming from regulations
- The impact that the millage may have on taxpayers at all levels

Leelanau County’s first attempt at passing a millage began in April of 2012 with the establishment of the

² Traverse City Record Eagle, April 25, 2021

³ 2024 Capital Bond Millage, TCAPS, tcaps.net



Leelanau Early Childhood Development Commission (LECDC), a private non-profit corporation.

The Commission’s initial goal was to pass a county millage that would fund 33 percent of a \$4,013,800 comprehensive program covering tuition scholarship assistance, preschool quality assessment, family parenting support and accountability, research, project administrative and coordination, all related to the early learning and care system. LECDC requested approval from the Leelanau County Board of Commissioners (BOC) to place a referendum on the ballot allowing Leelanau residents to decide whether

“The Leelanau County early childhood program renewal millage passed in August 2024 with 64% of voters in favor.”

to publicly fund early childhood development programs for Leelanau families.

Despite considerable support from residents and the business community, this effort failed. The Leelanau County attorneys opined that “the proposed program appears to be essentially a comprehensive pre-school education program. Therefore the County does not have the authority to run such an educational program and thus would not be authorized to levy a tax for that purpose or spend county tax dollars.”⁴

In Michigan, the processes for funding schools and related educational programs are tightly prescribed. The LECDC had asked the BOC to take an action that the Leelanau County attorneys believed fell outside their governmental statute.

Discouraged but not defeated, the LECDC pivoted and began private philanthropic fundraising efforts to support the award-winning Parenting Communities program (described below) as a vehicle to provide early learning and care support programs for Leelanau families.

Kent County became the first county in Michigan to successfully pass a millage to support community-based early childhood programs in 2018. The Kent County millage is funded by a .25 mill property tax rate that generates about \$7.7 million dollars annually supporting community-based early childhood

development and health services for expectant parents and children up to age five. The “Ready by Five” renewal millage proposal passed in the August, 2024 election with 59 percent voting in favor.

The millage will provide funding to support 18 community-based organizations that offer 32 different early childhood programs.

Leelanau County’s second attempt to pass a millage began in January of 2019. At that time the BOC voted to appoint an early childhood study committee.⁵ The 42-member Early Childhood County Committee (ECCC) was charged with exploring options on how the county could invest in quality early childhood programs and services, creating a continuum of support to help build a strong foundation for children. The ECCC members included stakeholders from early childhood programs, government, organizations, businesses, and parents and grandparents. The committee divided into three focus work groups around the topics of Health, Strong Families and Positive Early Learning Experiences, each exploring considerations within their focus and conducting SPOT analyses⁶ which formed the basis for their recommendations.

The ECCC believed a millage was needed to fund the development, implementation, coordination, and monitoring of programs supporting Leelanau County young children and their families, including support for physical health, vision, dental health, mental and emotional health and related parenting support.

In July of 2019 they recommended to the BOC that an expanded Parenting Communities program be created under the auspices of the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department (BLDH). The BLDH would be in a position to integrate Parenting Communities services with other health programs offered for families, and this request fell within the purview of the BLDH as a jointly administered department of Leelanau County.

The 0.253 millage request on the August 2019 ballot was approved by Leelanau County voters generating \$700,000 annually to support funding for early childhood programs and services for children ages birth to six. The expanded Parenting Communities program has been incredibly successful, and the renewal millage supporting these services passed in August 2024 with 64 percent of voters in favor.

⁴ July 10, 2012 Letter from Cohl, Stoker, and Toskey, P.C. to Leelanau County Administrator re County Millage for a County Early Childhood Development Program.

⁵ Special Session Minutes, Leelanau County Board of Commissioner, August 6, 2019

⁶ SPOT analysis (Strengths, Problems, Opportunities and Threats) is a strategic planning evaluation tool used by organizations to assess internal positive attributes, challenges and issues and external factors and risks.

“Public funding plays a crucial role in expanding access to high-quality education programs and in filling critical gaps in the current mixed-delivery child care system.”

Conclusion

The importance, benefit and impact of using public financing to expand quality early child care services for families can be summed up from a comment made by Lillian Katz, Professor Emeriti of Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign:

“Each of us must come to care about everyone else’s children... After all, when one of our children needs life saving surgery, someone else’s child will perform it. If one of our children is threatened or harmed by violence someone else’s child will be responsible for the violent act. The good life for our own children can be secured only if a good life is secured for all other people’s children.”

Public funding plays a crucial role in expanding access to high-quality education programs and in filling critical gaps in the current mixed-delivery child care system.

Building support for effective local taxpayer-funded proposals depends on the following:

- Clearly identifying the issues and gaining understanding through listening to ideas, differing opinions, insights and potential solutions
- Developing a clear message that emphasizes the pros and cons of taking action
- Using communications tools that cover all the ways in which local residents access information

- Welcoming everyone’s participation at the level each person wants to be involved to create a sense of community ownership
- Keeping all participating groups/individuals informed, motivated and moving forward as a unit

Potential Near-Term Actions

To lay the groundwork for local funding to support the early learning and care system, community advocates should engage in activities designed to highlight and engender support. This should include:

Documenting and publicizing how public funds have improved community services and outcomes

Highlighting success stories of community programs supported by public funding

Engaging in relationship-building with diverse stakeholders from across the social and political spectrum

Attending township Planning and Board meetings, and providing constructive feedback



Engaging local media to increase awareness of funding needs and impacts

Coordinating activities with community leaders and organizations

Conducting letter-writing campaigns or petition drives

Local legislators should rethink policies around grants and other funding mechanisms to be more sensitive to the realities of community organizations

Networks Northwest Coalition

Regional Child Care Plan 2024