

# *Great Parents, Great Start Evaluation Report*

2009-2010 Program Year

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**MICHIGAN STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY**

**SEPTEMBER 2010**

**Copies of this report are available from:**

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**Funding**

This report was supported by Michigan Department of Education *Great Parents, Great Start* Grantees' evaluation funds transferred to the Midland County Educational Services Agency and contracted with University Outreach and Engagement.

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# Summary and Highlights

## Purpose of the Evaluation

The 2009-2010 Great Parents, Great Start (GP, GS) evaluation focused on the question, “What is the value added by the Great Parents, Great Start Program in each local community?” To answer this question, we used a variety of methods to gain insight into the roles played by the GP,GS programs in the local service areas.

We looked at three ways in which GP,GS grantees can add value:

1. Through filling gaps in their local early care and education service delivery systems
2. By listening to what parents involved in parent-child play groups think
3. By using data to improve their programs

## Adding Value by Filling Service Gaps

In 2009-2010 the number of grantees using the approach of filling gaps in their local early care and education system with Great Parents, Great Start programs increased by 18% over 2008-2009, for a total of 41% of the grantees using this strategy as one criterion for targeting their services.

## Adding Value by Listening to Parents’ Perceptions of Parent-Child Play Groups

The purpose of the focus groups was to better understand how parents and their children benefited from participating. We use the term “parent” although other parenting adults also participated.

### *Participants*

- Five parent focus groups held in Southeast, Southwest, Central, and Northern Lower Michigan
- Fifty parents participated including 4 fathers, several grandmothers, and 1 great-grandmother

### *How Children Benefited*

Social and emotional development:

- Learned to interact appropriately with peers
- Developed emotional self-regulation skills
- Learned taking turns and sharing

School readiness and engagement:

- Learned to adapt to structure, routines, and other adult caregivers
- Promoted speech development and pre-literacy skills

- Engaged in positive, creative experiences that helped them anticipate school
- Provided the only preschool experiences in some areas
- Screening of development and referral where indicated

### ***How Parents Benefited***

Parent education and parenting skills:

- Ideas for developmentally appropriate activities to use at home
- Help with handling typical parenting issues, particularly discipline
- Resources and referrals to address children’s needs
- Information on how to promote literacy development

Parent support and affirmation:

- Social support in the parenting role
- Support and information for coping with life crises
- Exposure to other parent role models, especially for fathers

### ***What Parents Would Change and What was Best About Groups***

- Most wanted more frequent sessions or longer sessions
- Parents liked the caring atmosphere and informal learning environment of groups

## **Adding Value by Using Data to Improve Services**

We found that most of the program administrators who completed this survey:

- Used the information from parent surveys informally
- Gave it to the person running the program to use as they thought best

Among the administrators completing the home visitor survey:

- Most used the information from the parent surveys informally
- The largest group read over the surveys and worked with each parent educator individually to improve their efforts

The single play group administrator response was very creative:

- The program worked up a portfolio process for the parents to use with their children and to retain handouts from the play group

Each of these strategies for adding value to GP,GS programming is described in more detail in the following sections of this report.

# Adding Value by Filling Gaps in Service

## Introduction

The first way in which GP,GS grantees may be adding value is through filling gaps in early care and education systems in their local communities. We tested this notion by comparing the consumers of universal and targeted services provided by GP,GS grantees in the 2008-2009 program year with the consumers of targeted services provided in the 2009-2010 program year. We had anticipated coding both universal (i.e., open to any parent with a child of the appropriate age) and targeted (to specific populations) services in 2009-2010. However, many of the GP,GS grantees who had reported on interventions like play groups as a universal service in 2008-2009 used play groups as their targeted service in 2009-2010. The first round of coding identified both the desired consumers, such as teen parents, and the service provided, such as parent education services. The second round of coding assigned a comparison rating using a 1 to 5 rating scale. Table 1 shows the rating scale, its meaning, and an example of the types of programs that were rated at each level.

## Results

As we might expect, the largest group of GP,GS grantees used risk factors to identify potential consumers and target services for them in both years. Forty-seven percent, or 27 out of 57 grantees, used some combination of risk factors, such as low-income, Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) risk factors, limited English proficiency, limited parental educational achievement, and/or referrals from other agencies that had identified families at risk.

The next largest group was those grantees who reported using gap-filling strategies in 2008-2009 and were still using them in 2009-2010. Twenty-three percent, or 13 out of 57 grantees, reported using criteria such as targeting services to 3-, 4- and 5-year olds who were transitioning out of Early On and didn't qualify for special education, or were transitioning out of Even Start and not going to pre-school, or were on the Head Start waiting list.

More than three times as many grantees began to use their services for gap-filling in 2009-2010 as those who stopped using them for filling gaps. Ten grantees (18%) who did not include gap-filling as a criterion for service in 2008-2009 began to use it in 2009-2010. By comparison, three grantees (5%) who had previously used it as a criterion for service changed to risk criteria only in 2009-2010. Because of limited information, we were not able to assign four grantees to any of these groups.

## Summary

While we cannot say that the immediate programming will stay the same, it does appear that more GP,GS grantees are focusing their limited resources on targeted services to fill gaps in their community's early care and education system. When we include those who were using gap-filling as one criterion in 2008-2009 together with those who started using it in 2009-2010, 41% of the grantees currently use this strategy as one approach to targeting consumers.

**Table 1. Coding Rating Scale with Examples**

<i>Rating</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Example</i>
1	<i>Gap-filling to gap-filling</i> , meaning that in 2008-2009 the programs had been gap-filling and they continued to be in 2009-2010	One intermediate school district (ISD) continued to provide targeted services through intense, face to face interactions in the areas of child development, parent education, and school readiness. These services are available to families with children birth to 4 years who are on a wait list or who meet the criteria of three or more of the risk factors developed for the Great Start Readiness Program.
2	<i>Not gap-filling to gap-filling</i> , meaning that in 2008-2009 the programs had not been gap-filling and changed to gap-filling services in 2009-2010	In 2008-2009, one grantee provided home visiting services twice a month for 24-30 families with children birth to 5 years. In 2009-2010 they wrote, "As one of the few programs offering universal services increasing parent knowledge of child development and parenting skills, other programs routinely use GP,GS services to augment their own, and often refer parents not eligible for other services to GP,GS."
3	<i>Gap-filling to not gap-filling</i> , meaning that in 2008-2009 the programs had been gap-filling services but changed to not being gap-filling services in 2009-2010	One grantee said in 2008-2009 they were targeting teens, Early On-eligible families, and families who did not qualify for other programs with children birth to 3 years for weekly home visits. In their 2009-2010 proposal, they wrote, [we are focusing on] "English language learners, specifically Burmese and Hispanic/Latino parents with children birth to 5 years, for early learning and parent education groups with an intense focus on safety and service connection/referrals."
4	<i>Not gap-filling to not gap-filling</i> , meaning that the services did not fill gaps in either year	In both the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 program years one grantee focused on families with low literacy/school achievement or families with children three or younger referred by a community agency due to risk factors.
5	<i>Couldn't tell</i> , meaning that there was not enough information in the continuation proposal to tell what grantees were doing in 2008-2009	A rating of 5 was given to the following: a 2009-2010 proposal with the statement "no changes were made" where we did not have a matching 2008-2009 proposal; where the 2009-2010 proposal only had a budget; or where there was no answer in the 2008-2009 budget and the 2009-2010 said "no changes made in the proposal".

# Parents' Perceptions of the Value of Play Groups

## Background

For the past several years, some Great Parents, Great Start programs have been collecting survey data from participants in home visiting and parent-child play groups regarding their satisfaction with services. Generally, play groups are offered as a universal service, meaning that any parent with a child of the appropriate age can choose to participate. We believed it would be informative to find out in greater detail why parents chose to participate in parent-child play groups and what benefits they saw in participating.

## Participants

Five focus groups were held in the spring of 2010 with parents who had participated in play groups with their children during the 2009-2010 school year. The group locations were selected for geographic diversity and included the Southeastern, Southwestern, Central, and Northern Lower Peninsula regions of the state. Because of time and resource constraints we were unable to hold a group in the Upper Peninsula. The groups represented urban, rural, and suburban communities.

Fifty parents and other relatives (primarily grandparents) participated in the five groups. Group size ranged from 7 to 13 participants. We did not collect any demographic data on the participants so it is not possible to report on their socio-economic status or racial/ethnic identity. However, some of the participants volunteered that a family member was unemployed or that they were receiving food stamps. We did have good geographic diversity, and several participants voluntarily identified themselves as being from Spanish-speaking or other ethnic communities. The majority of participants were mothers. Four fathers, several grandmothers, one great-grandmother, and one nanny also participated. Three mothers from three different focus groups said they were home schooling their children, including older siblings.

Four of the five groups were made up of parents who were part of a single play group offered in the area and thus knew each other. All of these play groups served children from infancy through preschool age. The fifth focus group was made up of parents who had participated in several different play groups offered around the county and most did not know each other before coming to the focus group. Several groups included children referred from Early On.

All of these groups were held during daytime hours because we were unable to schedule a group during an evening or on a Saturday. Thus, most of the parents who participated were stay-at-home parents, retired grandparents, part-time workers, or currently unemployed. A few worked second (afternoon) shifts. Anecdotal evidence suggests the after-hours/weekend groups contained more fathers and more full-time workers. In addition, our focus groups did not include any parents who had dropped out of play groups.

## Findings

### *Why Parents Joined the Parent-Child Play Groups*

We first asked parents about why they joined the play group and what they hoped to get out of participating. The answers to these two questions were very similar so we have combined the answers into common themes. For the purpose of readability we use “parent” to refer to all participants, recognizing that this group includes other parenting adults, such as grandparents.

**Socialization for the child.** By far the most common reason for parents’ joining a play group was to provide their children with an opportunity for socialization with other young children; this was mentioned by about half of the parents. Parents cited various reasons why they believed their child needed socialization with other children: He/she was an only child or the youngest child, the parent had few friends or relatives with small children, the child had delayed speech development, or the child had a very shy or very active temperament. Along with socialization, a number of parents also brought their children to expose them to different experiences outside of the home and to participate in creative activities such as music and art.

**School readiness.** Parents also expected that the play group would help their children to learn skills they viewed as important to being ready for school. These skills included learning to adapt to structure and routines, responding appropriately to the authority of other adults, and developing social skills such as taking turns and learning to be independent from the parent.

**Developmental screening.** Some parents wanted their children to receive developmental screening and assessment, either because they had specific concerns or because they wanted to be sure their child’s development was on track. One parent who had developmental concerns expressed her satisfaction with the help she received:

*I think it’s a safe environment for parents to come [to], with staff that are specially trained in areas. It’s a safe environment for kids to be screened...and then they can hone in on you personally if you need it. And I needed it. I got what I needed.*

**Skills and resources for parents.** Parents also came to acquire skills and learn about resources to help them in their parenting roles. Many parents hoped to gain resources to help their children, especially those with children who had speech delays or other disabilities. In addition, some parents just wanted information about resources that could help them as parents or provide learning opportunities for their children. One parent commented that the play groups provided free resources to parents during hard economic times.

**Parent education.** The second most common parent-oriented reason for coming was to gain information and education to help them as parents. Some were merely looking for ideas for creative or developmentally appropriate activities they could share with their children. Others had more serious needs, such as help with discipline:

*I needed help in some areas...disciplining, learning how to discipline him. They have pointed me in the right direction. The conference just here at [name of center] last week and Early On/Head Start Building Strong Families is coming to the house once a week. They are helping me become a stronger parent. I love it!*

**Parent support.** Some of the parents came because they had a need for support and interaction with other parents. Among this group were stay-at-home mothers and other caregivers who did not have regular interaction with others parenting young children. One mother expressed this need for peer support:

*I have six kids at home. Sometimes I need to talk to an adult and not a child.*

Another said that because her friends don't have kids,

*It's nice to go somewhere where there are other parents, other adults who get what you are going through.*

However, some participants expressed a need for more serious support. One grandmother related that her daughter had just left a long-term abusive relationship and joined the group to get support in dealing with her anger, which was interfering with her parenting.

### ***Benefits to Children from Participating***

Parents thought their children benefited in their social development, school readiness and engagement in school, and from having access to developmental screening. They also thought the groups gave children access to a broader range of experiences.

**Social/emotional development.** The most frequently cited benefit (18 mentions) of participation for their children was the opportunity to develop social skills with other children. Several parents said that their children were at home all day with adults and did not have much opportunity to learn to play with other small children. Several parents said that they believed their children had more well-developed social skills than the children of friends who did not participate in any play groups.

Others said that participation had helped their children develop better self-control and reduced temper tantrums. Some mentioned that their children developed greater independence and self-confidence as a result of participation, so that they would be better prepared to leave the home to go to preschool. One parent talked of how her child had progressed in the group:

*When I first started coming with N, she did not participate, in fact it was hard to even get her to sit in that circle...but now...she really tries hard to sing along with the whole song. She's really learning to pay attention better, to be involved in the group.*

**School readiness skills.** Many parents thought that play groups helped their children to develop a range of skills they believed to be necessary for success in school. These skills included learning to follow directions and comply with school routines and structure, using common tools such as scissors, learning to respect the authority of adults other than parents, taking turns, and sharing with others. As one father commented:

*Being the only kid, she's used to "Hey! Anything goes—basically I don't need her doll"—so she hasn't learned to share...but here in play group I still see her once in a while try to grab something but it's an opportunity for me to come in and say, "No, we need to share that"...*

Help with speech difficulties and literacy development were also mentioned as important benefits of participation. Several mentioned the rhyming activities and other pre-literacy skills:

*I didn't know...They say that nursery rhymes are more important to learn than tying their shoe or saying your a-b-c's and 1-2-3's when you start school. And I didn't know that... I'm trying to push the a-b-c's and 1-2-3's....*

Many parents believed that schools now expect children to enter with higher skill levels than in the past, even in preschool. The play groups were viewed by some as “school readiness for preschool.” In one rural area, parents said that preschool experiences were limited, and unless they qualified as very low income or had a child considered at risk, they would not gain a slot in the public pre-K or Head Start programs. Thus, the play groups were their only low-cost preschool alternative. Parents in an urban area with high unemployment also talked of the importance of having a low-cost preschool experience through play groups. One mother said that it allowed her to offer her children cultural experiences in the community even though her husband was unemployed.

**School engagement.** Several parents said that being involved in the play groups had made the school seem like a friendly place where their children would want to go. One parent talked of how the groups had helped her child develop a positive view of school:

*I think it gave her a positive perspective on what school is...and so I think when she starts to attend school on a regular basis I think she'll still have that excitement for it. And so I'm grateful for that!*

**Developmental assessment.** Several parents, including two of the three who were home-schooling their children, said that they and their children benefited from developmental screening or assessment. Several parents said they liked using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) because along with interpreting the results, the staff offered anticipatory guidance based on the child's developmental level. As one parent said:

*It's been a useful gauge for my daughter's skill level, as far as where she is with other children her age. [It's] what I need to pick up on to get her ready for kindergarten.*

**Creative experiences.** Finally, a number of parents said their children benefited from the many creative and interesting activities that they participated in during the group. Most of the programs were structured to include whole group activities as well as activity centers where children could exercise choice. The activities parents mentioned were primarily cultural events, such as visiting a children's museum, and enrichment activities, such as music and art projects and learning foreign languages.

### ***Benefits to Parents from Participating***

Parents also thought that they, as well as their children, benefited from participating in the groups. They talked of receiving parenting education and information about resources and support and help with parenting issues.

**Parent education and parenting skills.** By far the major benefit parents said they received was parent education and/or parenting skills, mentioned 24 times in the focus groups. Many said they received ideas for new activities to do with their children at home (12 mentions)—creative activities (such as music and art), developmentally appropriate activities, or things that would help them prepare for school. Several commented that without the program they would not have known that their children were ready for many new activities. One parent expressed the view of others about how the program helped her to try new activities with her child:

*They encourage you to try. As a parent sometimes I think, with myself, some things just seem too scary. They're going to hate it or you're going to fail, and they encourage you to try...anything, whether it's discipline or reading or counting or colors...*

**Parenting issues.** Others said they received assistance in dealing with the typical issues of child rearing. In the words of one parent:

*Each class we have a different topic every week. And also, if you have any question—not necessarily about the topic—if you have a question to the people around the class...she [will] answer the question, she [will] help you. I have the problem with my kids about the sharing and she help[s] me...and also, when we have the time, 10 minutes with the parent discussion...the other parents can share with you their own experience and you can learn...that help[s] me a lot.*

Another parent described how interaction with other parents helped her with resources and child-rearing issues:

*I also like getting suggestions and feedback from other parents about things that I could be doing with my daughter. Even this morning [name] told me about [website], so I'll be going home to look up [website] about a music class...so I got other resources and feedback and suggestions from other parents...Even with the potty training...it was maybe six or seven parents—I got feedback about how to potty train.*

Discipline was problematic for several parents and they believed they learned more effective and positive strategies for dealing with discipline through their involvement in the play group. One parent expressed what she had learned about child management:

*I've learned to, instead of making it negative...they talk to them positive even when they are telling them "no." That's something I need, I struggle with. I have a low fuse, so it's easier for me to think of how they talk to them and then that's how I try to do it, too.*

Another parent commented that she had learned to think of discipline as broader than just punishment; it is also learning self-discipline. She commented that the program helps children learn social skills like sharing "that even many adults need to learn."

**Resources and referrals.** Five parents said that education about resources and getting referrals to address their children's needs were important benefits. Three others specifically mentioned getting help with addressing their child's speech delay. Other topics mentioned were nutrition education and learning about literacy development. For example,

*I learned to cook healthier and let my kids be involved in cooking, healthy cooking, trying new things foodwise. Safe preparation with food.*

**Language and literacy development.** Another parent described how she learned to promote language development:

*The main thing I learned is how to talk to my daughter. Rather than directing her to any certain direction... pay attention to what is she doing and then talk about what she's doing because that's what she's focusing on and that's what she learns best.*

**Parent support and affirmation.** The second most important benefit for parents was the support and affirmation they received from peers and professionals. This benefit was mentioned 18 times.

For some parents, the groups afforded an opportunity to socialize with people who were dealing with the same parenting issues and receive **social support** in dealing with the stresses of raising young children. Many were stay-at-home mothers or grandmothers who came, in part, to reduce social isolation. The fact that both peers and program staff were encouraging and nonjudgmental was an important factor in creating a supportive atmosphere. The following comment reflects how some parents felt about the support they received:

*I think every mom thinks, "I wonder if I'm doing this right." The ladies here say, "Wow, you've done a good job." It makes you feel good about yourself when somebody says you're a good parent.*

Others described how the staff and the other parents helped them cope with serious **life issues**. One mother began to cry when describing how the group had supported her and helped her cope with parenting after the death of her own mother. Another described how the staff also helped her with resources to deal with a family crisis:

*We've had big things happen in our family and to be able to come [and] say, "I need a paper on depression, I need a paper on a close family member dying." And to know that they can pull out that stuff and hand it to you. If they [children] are not in the school, they [staff] will be in touch with you right away. And then they follow up, "Are you ok? Do you need more information? Do we need to send you someplace else?"*

A grandmother who was assisting her daughter to leave a long-term abusive relationship described how the play group helped her daughter cope with her feelings and be a better parent:

*I've watched my daughter go through so much [abusive relationship] and...her daughter would be so angry and she was dealing with her own emotions and so many times she didn't want to hit her because...her daughter's seen enough of that, but just talking to her wasn't enough and...this group has helped her with learning how to communicate with her and picking up on some of those signs...It's given her somebody to turn to get guidance in how to deal with her daughter. To me that's so great!*

Several parents mentioned that the groups provided them or their partners with **role models** in how to be better parents. One mother described why she thought the family events were beneficial to fathers:

*I think the family nights where the men mostly attend if they can, I think that it's a great thing for them to see other men there, because women...have a decent amount of examples of how to interact with our family, but men don't really have that...For them to see other men interact with their children encourages them to come and interact with their children.*

### ***What Parents Would Change About Play Groups***

When parents were asked what they would change about the play groups, most of their responses involved increasing either the frequency, duration, or timing of the groups. Many parents wanted to increase the frequency of sessions—those whose groups met every other week wanted them to meet once a week; those whose groups met weekly wanted them to meet twice a week.

Many wanted longer sessions, increasing from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 hour or increasing from 1 to 1½ hours. Interest in longer sessions was related to the age of the child, as parents of younger children tended to say the

groups were long enough. Some attended play groups that ran for a certain number of weeks—usually six or eight—and they wanted to increase the number of weeks in each series. In one county, parents who had participated for one series were not able to enroll again in the next series because of waiting lists.

A few talked of scheduling challenges that resulted from school calendars; this was a particular problem where several school districts collaborated in one group. Differing school schedules, transportation and staffing issues, snow days, etc., resulted in what parents perceived to be long gaps when play groups did not meet.

In a few districts the parents did not view the facilities to be ideal. For example, some of the sites lacked a gym or other area where physical activities could take place during the winter. In one location the room was considered too small for the number of children who participated.

### ***Why Some Parents Chose not to Participate***

Since we did not have access to parents who refused to participate or dropped out, we did ask a few of the groups if they had any ideas of why other parents chose not to participate in parent-child play groups. Several reasons were mentioned, including time and scheduling constraints or wanting a group where they could drop off their child to play rather than being involved. Several said that because the groups were run by the Intermediate School District, some parents perceived them to be only for children with disabilities or low-income families.

A number of parents said that the groups are not well publicized and not easy to find. Several said that when doing an Internet search for preschool play groups, the Great Parent, Great Start groups do not come up unless you specifically type in “Great Start.” Several said the schools are not successfully reaching less engaged parents.

One mother said that she receives WIC but was not told about the groups until she specifically asked for resources to help her with child development. Parents suggested that information about the groups should be distributed anywhere that parents sign up for aid or go to get immunizations. As one parent said:

*The parents who are benefiting now, no matter what socioeconomic level, are parents who are already searching for something. I'd love to see some parents that don't even know, that are not looking.*

### ***What Parents Liked Best About Play Groups***

When we asked parents to describe what they liked best about parent-child play groups, we received a wide variety of responses. We received responses to this question from only three of the five groups because time ran out in the others.

**Caring atmosphere.** A number of parents liked the groups because they perceived them to be caring, welcoming, and supportive of parents. Several mentioned that fathers and other family members can come and feel included. The attitudes of staff were particularly important to parents, as one noted:

*The authenticity of the facilitators. [Others agreed.] People are people rather than customers or objects.*

**Informal learning environment.** Several mentioned that they liked the informal learning environment where children learned to make choices and parents could receive assistance in a nonjudgmental manner:

*I've heard a lot of people talk about getting kids ready for school. And the thing I like about the play groups and other events is, it's not such a "skill and drill," like, "OK, let's see what your child can do." They observe your child and can come beside you and help them with issues without really feeling like your child is being tested.*

**New experiences.** A few parents mentioned specific school readiness and literacy development opportunities offered by their groups. Parents also liked having the opportunity to expose their children to new experiences and creative activities that they wouldn't have thought of or couldn't necessarily offer them at home. Several parents noted the fact that low cost activities were important in difficult economic times:

*As a parent you feel like, "Oh I've done something for my kid, I've gotten to take them somewhere that gives them an experience"...you're still giving them some kind of culture without the expensive cost.*

On the other hand, one parent said she would be willing to pay something for the groups because she perceived them to be very beneficial:

*I would definitely pay a nominal fee, too, just because—it would be a stretch right now just because of financial things—but it's worth it and... it was just a great experience...*

**Engagement of children.** Finally, several parents mentioned being most satisfied with the positive effect that the group had on their children:

*The format of the class is like an abbreviated school day and that really gets kids excited and motivated for school.*

*The most important thing that happened to me in that six weeks was [the] profound joy... [felt by] my child. That to me was the million dollar, six-week bonus... I don't know that I could replicate that at home on a daily basis. I can't make that happen.*

# Adding Value by Using Data to Improve Services

Grantees can add value to their programs by using feedback from participants to improve future offerings of those services. All grantees who turned in surveys or reports from their home visiting and/or parent-child play groups in 2008-2009 and offered those services again in 2009-2010 were sent a link to a web-based survey asking a few questions about how they used the feedback they received to improve their 2009-2010 offerings. See the appendices for Word document versions of the email invitation message (same for both home visit survey and parent-child play group survey) as well as a copy of the survey questions (again, the same for both). We made the assumption—perhaps an erroneous one—that if a grantee did not send us a report or surveys, they had collected no data.

Because we had only the email addresses of the grant administrators, who may or may not have known the program specifics, we had to use a generic link that they could forward on to the appropriate person. If we had had more information about the person(s) coordinating the home visiting and parent-child play-group programs, we would have been able to send each person their own link. Thus, we do not know specifically which grantees responded and which did not. After one week we did a combined thank you/follow-up reminder that prompted a few more responses.

We do, however, know how many people completed surveys. Fifteen of the 17 home visitor coordinators completed their surveys for a response rate of 88%. Eleven of the 25 parent-child play-group coordinators returned their surveys, for a response rate of 44%. We don't know what accounts for the difference in the response rate. In this age of electronic communication, even if an ISD is not running its own parent-child play groups, its administrators would certainly have an email address to forward on the survey link.

We also know the primary jobs or roles of the respondents. Table 2 compares these for the home visitor (HV) program and the parent-child play-group (PG) program. For play groups, most of the people responding to the survey were the grant administrators. The home visiting respondents were relatively evenly split between program coordinators (47%) and grant administrators (40%). In the case of the HV program, those two positions were GP,GS grant administrators who also had a role in the ISD's special education program. The one person who checked "other" on the Play Group survey also had a combined special education-GP,GS position.

**Table 2. Job or Role of Respondent**

<i>Job or Role</i>	<i>Home Visitor</i>	<i>Play Group</i>
GP, GS grant administrator	40% (6)	73% (8)
GP, GS program coordinator	47% (7)	18% (2)
Other position	13% (2)	9% (1)

More people in both programs used the information informally, although Table 3 shows that a substantial percentage of people in the HV program also used the information formally.

**Table 3. Impact of the Information on the 2009-2010 Program**

	<i>Home Visitor</i>	<i>Play Group</i>
I don't know what happened		20% (2)
We used the information informally	60% (9)	70% (7)
We made formal use of the information	40% (6)	10% (1)

In each of the instances, people were taken to another set of questions. One of the two people who answered "I don't know" followed that up by checking the item "The information we collected was given back to the person responsible for that program, but I don't know what they did with it." They were told that Michigan State University had summarized the surveys and given the data back to the programs.

Both sets of respondents to the statement "We used the information informally" gave similar answers. Slightly over half checked off the response "The information was given to the person running the program and told to use it in the way they thought best." A few in each group checked "We had an informal discussion about the information but didn't require anyone to use the results." Only one in each group checked the response "We gave each [parent educator/group facilitator] back the surveys from their parents and let them decide how to use the information."

The people were also asked if they knew of any changes that individuals (parent educators or group facilitators) or the program had made. Two home visitor administrators made comments. One person said that they would focus on collecting the surveys as parents exit the program throughout the year. This person also said they had changed some of the survey wording where it was vague or did not match the program goals. The other person talked about how they had used the survey results. Because the results were all quite positive, the program leaders presented the data to principals, administrators, their Early Childhood work group, and others to show the parents' support of the home visiting program. One comment from a play group administrator was that they used the information to make structural changes in the play group as well as adding specific child development information.

The responses to "We made formal use of the information" were strikingly different between the home visiting and the play group program administrators. Three (50%) of the home visiting administrators selected the following response: "The person in charge of home visits looked through the results and made recommendations to each parent educator on how to improve their program." No play group administrator selected that response. Only one HV administrator selected the response "We held a staff meeting about the information where each parent educator committed to improving at least one thing about their home visits." Again, no play group administrator selected that response.

There was overlap between the two programs on the response "We held a staff meeting about the information where the group decided what to improve and how to do it." The HV administrator's description of what they did was very basic: "[We] increased the frequency of the visits where necessary." In contrast, the play group administrator described a very creative response:

*Results of the survey were shared and discussed with the play-group facilitators and we, as a team, looked at ways to improve our program based on what parents told us. After looking at the surveys, we determined that we wanted to improve our parent education. We gave each parent a 3-ring binder that was to be used as their child's portfolio. They were asked to keep medical and dental records in it as well as work samples from their child during play groups. We also provided...sections in the portfolio to place parent education handouts/materials related to the topics of discussion at each play group*

*session, and ideas/activities to do at home to promote school readiness. This way, parents had hard copies to refer back to as needed. Parents told us they appreciated this.*

The final question was “Is there anything else you’d like to tell us?” One person in both groups said they would like the surveys in Spanish. The play group administrator elaborated that their bilingual coordinator translated the surveys for her families, but it would have been much easier if it had already been available in Spanish. Another PG administrator said they found the survey easy to distribute to play group families and the information was very useful. One HV administrator commented that they did a similar local survey this year. Another person said that individual parent educators used feedback from families to make improvements in their programs. Finally, one HV administrator addressed the fiscal realities of their situation, saying:

*Since the numbers of this program are so limited by the resources allocated, the impact of the surveys is limited. We really can’t make too many changes without a change in allocation.*

## **Summary**

We found that most of the people who completed this survey—either the home visiting or the parent-child play group version—used the information informally, and most of those gave it to the person running the program to use as they thought best.

A much larger proportion of the administrators completing the home visitor survey used the information from the surveys formally, and among them the largest group read over the surveys and worked with each parent educator individually to improve their efforts.

The single play group administrator response was very creative: their program worked up a portfolio process for the parents to use with their child and to retain handouts from the play group.

# **APPENDIX A**

## **Great Parents, Great Start Parent Focus Groups: Introduction to Discussion**

### **Good morning**

- Laura Bates from Community Evaluation and Research Collaborative at Michigan State University
- Hired by Michigan Department of Education to evaluate the Great Parents, Great Start program

### **Purpose of discussion group**

- Learn about your experiences participating in the parent-child play groups run by \_\_\_\_\_

### **What you should know about the group**

- The discussion will be recorded to help us get an accurate account of what is said
- Whatever you say will be kept private. No one from the program or the Michigan Department of Education will know what you said. Only people on the evaluation team will know what took place in the group
- Your names will never be mentioned in any reports and we will report only on general themes summarized from the groups held around the state
- Your participation is voluntary, the services you receive from GP,GS will not change whether or not you decide to be a part of this group or answer any specific questions

### **Ground rules for the discussion**

Before we begin, I would like to set some ground rules for the discussion:

- Please feel free to tell us what you think. We know that people often have different experiences and want to learn about the whole range of experiences that people have.
- There are no right or wrong answers. People have different experiences and we want to hear as many different points of view as possible.
- To keep people's experiences private, please do not share what went on in the group with others outside the group.
- I know that you all know each other; however for the purposes of keeping your responses private when the discussion are transcribed, please use only first names when talking to one another.
- We want to hear any stories you want to share about your experiences in the play groups; however whether or not you want to respond to any particular question is up to you.

Does anyone have any questions?

### **Introductions**

Let me begin by introducing myself. [Insert who I am and what I do]. Before we start, I would like to learn a bit about each of you. Can you please tell me your name, how many children you have and their ages? If you would like to share, please tell me a bit about why you decided to attend the parent-child play groups and what you hoped to get out of participating in the groups.



## **APPENDIX C**

### **Cover Memo for HV\***

Dear GP,GS Grant Administrator,

We are contacting you to ask you to help us evaluate the Great Parent, Great Start (GP, GS) program by completing a short survey. The purpose of the survey is to better understand how GP,GS grantees use data they collect to improve their services.

You are receiving this survey because:

1. You collected data from parents in 2008-09 about home visits they received and how they or their child benefited;
2. In 2008-09 you sent us either surveys or a report on home visits;
3. In 2008-09 and again in 2009-10 your intermediate school district (ISD) provided home visits, either directly or through collaboration with partners.
4. If you also sent us surveys or a report on play groups and offered them again in 2009-10, you will receive a second survey from us that is very similar to this one.

Unfortunately, we have only your name and email address, and you may not be the person with the best information on the ISD's GP,GS home visiting program. Please feel free to forward this request on to the person who can answer these questions. If you do forward this to someone else, please give us that person's name and email address to add to our list.

This is a **very** brief survey; we estimate that it will take less than 5 minutes to complete. So please send it on to the appropriate person or do it yourself now. Your answers will be combined with those of others in any evaluation reports.

Here's the link to the survey: [link provided]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this for us. We appreciate your assistance with this.

Cordially,

**Celeste and Laura**

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\* The same basic text was used in the PG cover memo with "play groups" substituted for "home visits."

## APPENDIX D

### Web-Based Survey Questions

*Introduction:* You are receiving this survey because in 2008-09 and again in 2009-10 your intermediate school district provided [home visits, play groups, both home visits and play groups] and also collected data from parents about their satisfaction with the services they received and how they or their child benefited. We are asking these questions to better understand how GP,GS grantees use data they collect to improve their services.

Of course, your participation is completely your choice. You may choose to answer all, some or none of the questions in this survey. By answering any questions, you are indicating that you to agree to allow us to combine your answers with those of other people who are also answering these questions. Further, you are agreeing that we can include your answers (along with everyone else's answers) in our report. Nothing that you answer here will be used to identify you. No one from your program, school district, or the Michigan Department of Education will know that you took part in the survey. Your answers will be kept private; no one outside of the evaluators will know how you answered. What you say will have no impact on you or your job.

1. Please identify your primary job/role
  - a. GP,GS grant administrator
  - b. GP,GS program coordinator
  - c. Other; please describe:
2. Check off the **1** answer below that best describes how the information collected in **08-09** had an impact on your **09-10** program

I don't know what happened

- a. I did not know we collected any information in 08-09 so I can't answer this.
- b. I know we collected surveys from parents in 08-09 but I don't know how that information was used for our 09-10 program.
- c. The information we collected was given back to the person responsible for that program but I don't know what they did with it. (in 2008-09 all GP,GS programs were given an individual report if they provided surveys).

We made informal use of the data

- d. I gave the information to the person running the program and told them to use it in the way they thought best (this could include you, if you ran the program).
- e. We gave each parent educator back the surveys from their parents and let them decide how to use the information.
- f. We had an informal discussion about the information but didn't require anyone to use the results.

- g. If anyone made any changes, please briefly describe them here.

We made formal use of the information

- h. The person in charge of [home visits, play groups, both] looked through the results and made recommendations to each parent educator on how to improve their program.
- i. We had a staff meeting about the information where each person committed to improving at least one aspect of their home visits, play groups or both.
- j. We had a staff meeting about the information where the group decided what to improve and how to do it (this may or may not have meant that each person had to change what they were doing).
- k. If anyone made any changes, please briefly describe them here.

We did something else

- l. We used the information in this way (please write in):