

# PRESS & GUIDE

## County group to boost child services

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### DEARBORN HEIGHTS

Almost 85 percent of a child's intellectual development takes place between birth and age 5, but nearly one in four children in Wayne County are born to mothers who lack a high school education, according to recent data gathered by the Great Start Collaborative-Wayne (GSC-W).

The GSC-W, an organization created in 2005 by Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm dedicated to the well being of Wayne County's children and their families, presented the data Monday morning at the Henry Ford Centennial Library in Dearborn.

"We want to make sure that all the children of Wayne County are healthy, happy and ready to succeed," said Virginia Burns Saleem, manager of Detroit Head Start, who also represented the office of Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick at the forum on Monday.

According to the data, the number of births in Wayne County has decreased by nearly 33 percent in the last 15 years, and three out of every 10 children born lives in poverty.

"The children of Wayne County are not doing well," said Colin Newlin, president of Braintree Consulting Solutions. "There is a great deal of work that needs to be done. We need to do more than just talk — we need to do."

Wayne County has lost nearly 89,000 residents since 2000, according to Kurt Metzger, director of research for the United Way for Southeastern Michigan, due primarily to job loss and other economic factors affecting the state.

Median household income also declined between 1999 and 2005 — from \$47,800 to \$40,881 when adjusted for inflation, which has resulted in an increase of almost 50,000 Wayne County residents whose income fell below federal poverty guidelines. During that same time, the poverty rate for children under age five increased by nearly 6 percent in all areas.

"As a member of the Michigan House of Representatives, I know that there are challenges we must overcome," said Rep. Hoon-Yung Hopgood (D-Taylor), who also

serves on the GSC-W committee. "First and foremost, we must make sure that we are able to provide essential services and support for the youngest among us."

According to the data, approximately 29 out of every 100 babies are born to mothers who have not received adequate prenatal care. Nearly one in 10 babies are born with a dangerously low birth weight, and 11 out of 1,000 infants die before their first birthday.

"We see so many tragic stories each and every day," said Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, who also represented the office of Gov. Granholm at the forum. "We must fight against the trend to cut preventative programs."

While childhood education begins at home, nearly 6 percent of children under age five spend part of the day outside the care of their parents — a fact that makes providing essential services and support that much more important, according to Edith Killins, director of Wayne County Health and Human Services.

"Children are our best resource," said Killins, who also served as a representative for the office of Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano at Monday's meeting. "It's because of the services and support provided by organizations like (Great Start) that we see the success we do as parents."

Thanks to programs like Great Start, the number of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect for children under age 5 has been significantly reduced over the last five years. Also, the number of children found to have lead poisoning has decreased to about 5.2 percent due to an overall increase in the amount of children being tested.

"Regardless of how the numbers are sliced and diced, we're talking about real children," said Veronica Rosa, a parent and member of the GSC-W.

"If this system doesn't work for them, it doesn't work. We must start making our children an important part of our lives and our decisions — they deserve nothing less."

To learn more about the Great Start-Collaborative-Wayne, including the full results of the study, visit <http://www.greatstartcollaborativewayne.org/>.

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