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A Great Start for Detroit's Midtown Children

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By Julie Osburn

During the 2013 State of the Union Address, President Obama specifically called for the availability of quality preschool experiences for every child in America. Early childhood education researchers have long studied the effects of Kindergarten readiness on academic achievement, employability and lifetime earnings capability. While the focus of the media remains on Detroit's recent bankruptcy protection filing, many others continue working to make the city more attractive to young professionals and families. The availability of quality early childhood education and care is a key element to vibrant, family friendly neighborhoods.

Early childhood experts from Wayne State University's College of Education (COE) and Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute (MPSI) initiated the *Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium* with a distinct goal to enhance the quality of early childhood education and care in Detroit's downtown, midtown, and north end neighborhoods. The consortium began in October 2011 and functions in collaboration with community partners: Midtown Detroit Inc., Vanguard Community Development Corporation, Great Start Collaborative –Wayne, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Detroit, Excellent Schools Detroit, and First Children's Finance.

The *Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium* is led by a three-person team: Sharon L. Elliott, Ed.D., chair, and Anna G. Miller, co-chair, from the College of Education, and John H. Hannigan, Ph.D., co-chair, from the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute (MPSI). Dr. Elliott is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood/Elementary Education and former Assistant Dean of the COE's Division of Teacher Education. As the Executive Director of early childhood centers on the WSU campus, Ms. Miller has trained early childhood teachers, mentored center directors, and worked with young children and their families in the Detroit area for over 30 years.



Dr. Hannigan serves as the Deputy Director of MPSI. He is also a professor in the WSU departments of obstetrics and psychology and has experience studying children at-risk and community engagement. The leadership team's combined scholarship, experience and connections to the Detroit community make them distinctly qualified and well prepared to direct this important initiative.

In January of 2013, The Kresge Foundation awarded a three-year grant to support a number of key consortium initiatives including an annual fall conference for center teachers and assistant teachers, annual spring colloquia for university faculty and center directors as well as overall coordination of consortium activities. A recent grant from the PNC Foundation will allow the consortium to hire a coach to train and mentor a small group of consortium center teachers and assistant teachers. This mentoring model is part of a larger professional development program that the consortium has planned, once necessary resources are secured, to

roll out to all participating centers.

Participating childcare centers employ approximately 200 preschool teachers and assistant teachers and, collectively, serve over 1,300 children from birth to five years of age. The COE and MPSI Early Childhood Centers participate in the consortium and serve as demonstration sites for center teachers to observe best practices in action. The timeliness of the consortium coincides with the upcoming launch of "Great Start to Quality," Michigan's first-ever Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which is aimed at measuring and disseminating information about the quality of all the state's early childhood centers.



The consortium is collaboratively implementing a number of support systems at participating centers as their directors and teachers learn to navigate the QRIS evaluation ratings process, address issues related to staffing, programs, facilities, and the enhancement of early childhood education and care.

For more information about the *Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium*, contact consortium chairperson, [Dr. Sharon Elliott](#).

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