

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED FROM PARENTS IN KENT COUNTY

First Steps Kent is an independent nonprofit leading a community-wide effort to build a comprehensive early childhood system in Kent County, Michigan.

The RAPID Survey Project and First Steps Kent have partnered to listen to Kent County's families with young children about their experiences, the support they need, and what's going well. First Steps Kent will use these data to inform its annual investments and community partner initiatives.

About the RAPID-Kent County Community Voices Survey: First Steps Kent worked with local partners to recruit parents with young children. The parents who completed the survey were paid for their time. The findings represent 1,822 parents with young children in Kent County who shared their experiences with material hardship, healthcare visits, child care options, and adult and child well-being between April 2022 and May 2023.

Material hardship is on the rise

The percentage of households that reported experiences of material hardship has continuously increased. Parents reported an increase in hardship across housing, healthcare, child care, and utilities.

Material hardship rates varied by race and ethnicity. Specifically, 97% of Latinx, 92% of Black, and 67% of White Kent County households experienced at least one form of material hardship in May 2023.

Note: Material hardship is defined as experiencing difficulty paying for basic needs like food, housing, healthcare, and/or utilities.

FIRST STEPS KENT



First Steps Kent brings together parents, providers, and other stakeholders to research, advocate, and innovate so that we can achieve our community vision: every young child in Kent County will enter kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed in school and in life.

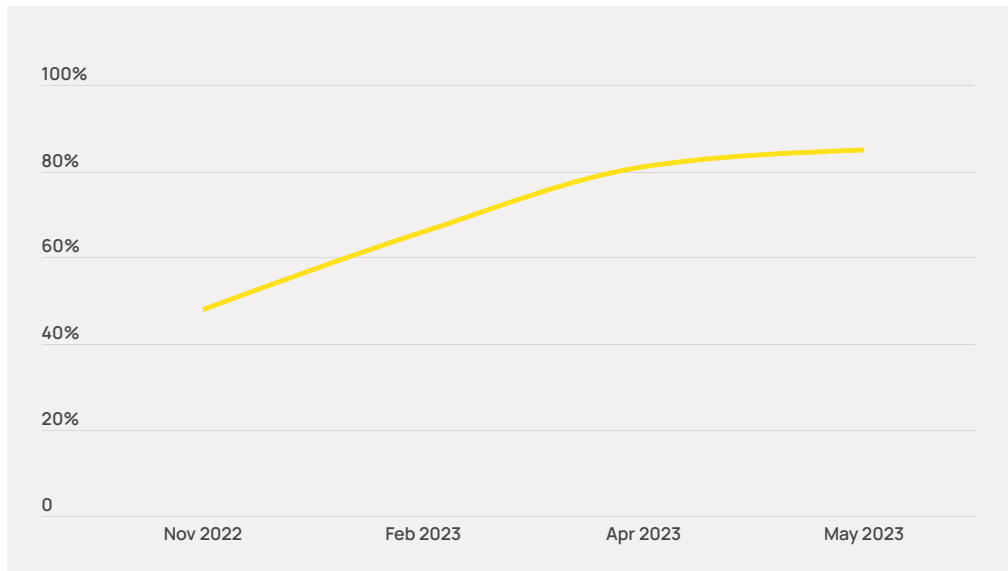
Children served
45,000 kids under age six in Kent County

Community partners

- El Vocero
- Family Futures
- Head Start of Kent County
- Hispanic Center of West Michigan
- Healthy Homes Coalition
- KConnect
- Kent District Library
- Kent ISD
- Corewell Health
- Together West Michigan
- Vibrant Futures

Between November 2022 and May 2023, the percentage of households that reported experiences of material hardship increased from 48% to 85%.

Trend of material hardship over time, all participants

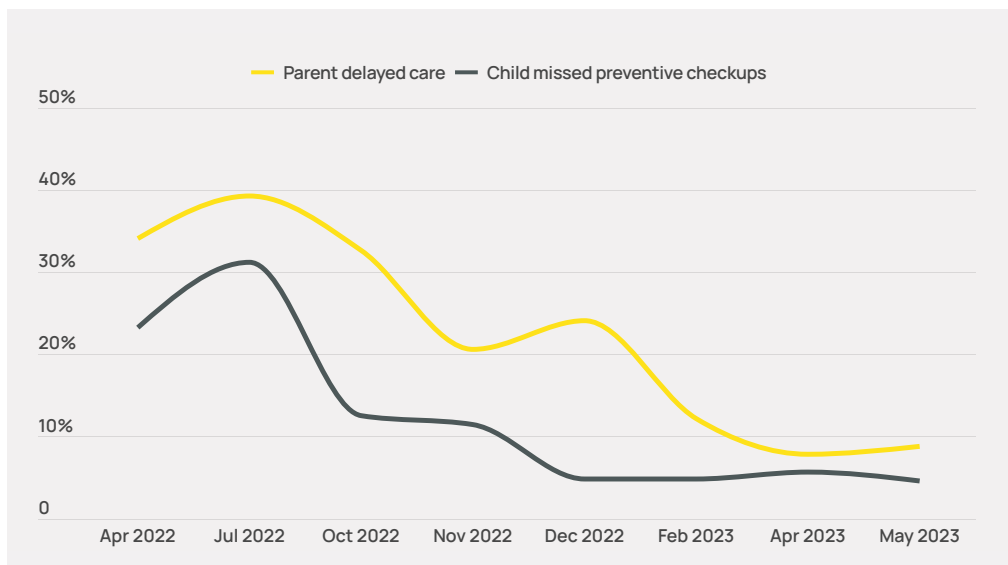


“It is basically impossible to find a fully staffed or adequately staffed daycare center that can provide appropriate, individualized care for infants and toddlers now that doesn’t have a 1-2 YEAR waiting list”
Parent in Forest Hills

Healthcare visits are back on track

The percentage of households surveyed that reported delayed healthcare and missed well-baby checkups decreased from late 2022 to early 2023.

Parent’s and children’s delayed care/missed visits, all participants



“Working from home, our child’s preschool, and Ages and Stages Questionnaires [are helping the most right now].”
Parent in Grandville

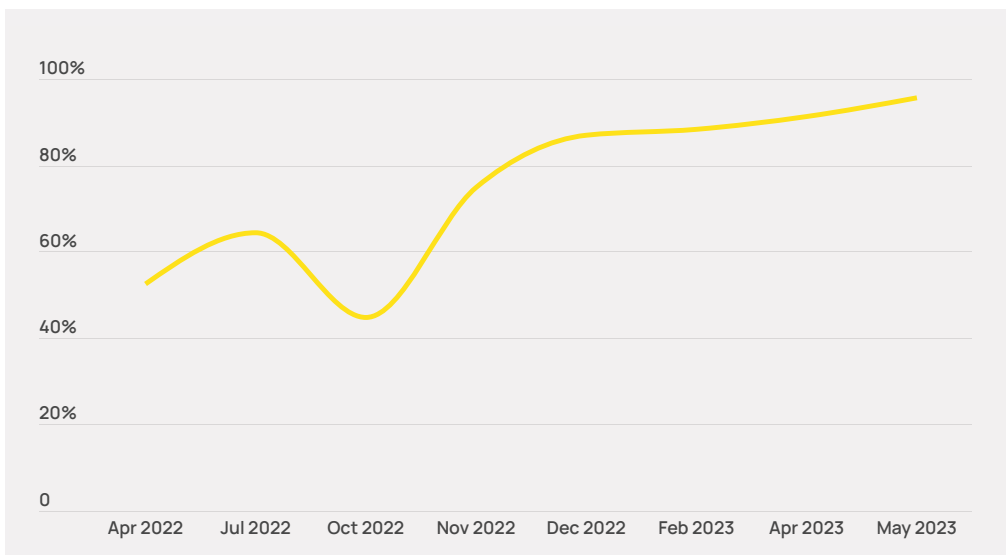
Increased use of various forms of child care

The number of households using non-parental child care has increased by 43 percentage points since May 2022.

This increase in the use of non-parental child care was consistent across racial groups.

Between late 2022 and early 2023, there were changes in the types of non-parental child care that families were using. The use of center-based and home-based care decreased, while both paid and unpaid Family, Friend, or Neighbor (FFN) care increased.

Use of non-parental care, all participants



“I’d say parenting and play groups [are helping the most right now]. Connection is so valuable to us.”

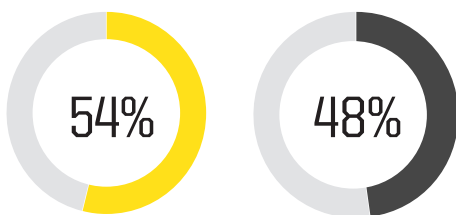
Parent in Grand Rapids

“Two people working full time with degrees in their field should not be struggling to put a meal on the table.”

Parent in Walker

High concern about child emotional well-being

Overall, parents reported high levels of concern about child emotional well-being:



of parents reported their child(ren) were showing emotional distress like fear or anxiety

of parents reported their child(ren) were acting fussy or defiant

of parents reported concerns about their child(ren)’s learning and development

■ Kent ■ National

“We need high quality, affordable child care. This should not take the form of increasing ratios - it’s a joke that a caregiver could take care of 4 newborns as it is. It could take the form of subsidies when people have to use high-cost options like nannies since there are no available centers.”

Parent in Northview

■ Kent ■ National



On average, Kent County parents experiencing material hardship had higher levels of concern about their child(ren)'s emotional well-being than parents who reported no material hardship.

of parents reported concerns about their child(ren)'s behavior

Note: We ask caregivers to report how much the phrase "fussy or defiant" and "too fearful or anxious" fits their child's behavior.

"[Our biggest challenges are] maternal health following high risk birth; adjusting to [a] new baby."

Parent in Grand Rapids

Summary and next steps

Although it's a positive sign that missed and delayed healthcare visits are decreasing, the high rate of material hardship among Kent County families is an ongoing concern. Parents who were experiencing material hardship were also more likely to have a higher level of concern about their children's emotional well-being, meaning there is a need to ensure families receive early and necessary support.

The community's continued support of the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage is one way to ensure the youngest residents are healthy and ready to learn when they enter school.

The disparities within the data also emphasized the importance of reaching families with the most needs through initiatives that promote inclusive outreach and programming that is welcoming to all families. The documented needs of Kent County families predicate the importance of continued investment in early childhood programming that supports early social-emotional health, family well-being, and quality learning opportunities for children.

"The programs for early childhood in Kent County have been extremely helpful as first-time parents."

Parent in Grandville

RAPID partners with cities, counties, and states to gather essential and ongoing information and caregiver voices, provide timely and relevant data to inform local policies and programs, and develop the capacity of local organizations to employ rapid-cycle survey methods and enhance the impact of their work on behalf of child, families and the child care workforce.