CHANGING GEARs
Reallocating Resources to Early Childhood
When it Comes to People, Math is Weird

They say that love defies the laws of mathematics. As groups grow to encompass more and more members, the love doesn't get divided among them—but multiplied.

As the youngest of eight children, I'm sure I could have been read to more, played with more, and nurtured more. My parents love might have been an infinite wellspring—but their energy and time were finite resources. I attribute my growth into a [more or less :-)] responsible adult to not just my parents but the many caregivers and mentors in my extended family: my grandparents, my friends’ parents, my adult neighbors.

Times have changed.

As we learned in the last issue of Better Manchester Magazine [see naf.townofmanchester.org for our complete archives], only 29% of youth in Manchester feel they have non-parent adult role models. The attachments that knit us together in the past—intergenerational ties, lifelong neighborhood bonds—have unraveled as family structures change and communities become more and more transient. As traditional supports have fallen away, the burden on parents and caregivers has increased.

This issue of Better Manchester Magazine takes a look at some more funny math: the Heckman Curve, the analysis of the Perry Preschool Study, research from Harvard’s Center on the Developing Child. All these show that investments in the first years of life reap exponential rewards for both families and, economically speaking, society at large.

I invite you to explore the Town of Manchester's own plan for pulling together, coordinating, and evaluating Manchester’s investment in our youngest citizens. We introduce research behind Manchester’s Early Childhood Community Plan in our cover story [page 2]. Each of the following stories is headed with a “tear out” of the major strategies and objectives of each section of the plan: Family Support, Education, and Health. Parents and caregivers will find targeted resource briefs sprinkled throughout the issue.

Change is hard. It’s tempting to cling to the systems of the past out of habit, but the time has come to admit when our current systems are no longer a good match for our needs. Manchester’s Early Childhood Community Plan is an invitation to build together the new structures that will ensure all Manchester children from birth through eight develop fully and are successful in school.

These adjustments will require an initial investment, yes. But when it comes to people, math is weird—and if we extend our sense of responsibility to, not just our family members and neighbors, but our entire community—and if we are patient and think long term—we will reap the rewards of a society that benefits us all.
The Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood
Ensuring that all Manchester Children Birth Through Eight Develop Fully and Are Successful in School
by Rosaleen Torrey

Let’s pretend, for a second, that you are a policy maker charged with these main goals:

- Reducing crime
- Fostering workplace productivity
- Increasing high school (and college) graduation rates
- Reducing teenage pregnancy

Where would you invest?

In policing services? In convict rehabilitation to decrease the odds of repeat offenders? In public job training programs? Programs that foster adult literacy in language arts and mathematics? In tuition subsidies to ensure low-income young people get the same education as anyone else? In policies that ensure middle and high school students get greater attention by decreasing student-teacher ratios?

According to University of Chicago Professor James J. Heckman, who won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics in 2000, if you want the biggest bang for your buck, you’d be well advised to start earlier—way earlier.

Drawing on research from as far back as the sixties, Heckman has come to the conclusion that investment in early childhood produces substantially larger dividends for the public, in the form of decreased prison sentences and welfare rolls, than investment in public sector sponsored job training programs or any of the above mentioned solutions.

Consider this:

From 1967-1968, at ages three and four, 123 children born into poverty were randomly assigned either to a program group that received a high-quality preschool education or to a control group that did not attend preschool. Forty years later, in 2005, researchers from the HighScope Educational Research Foundation found that children who participated in the program group were more likely to have graduated high school, were more likely to own their own homes, and were less likely to be arrested [see figure 1].

But at an investment cost of $15,166 per child (adjusted for inflation), the program hardly seems sustainable. Unless, that is, you start thinking long term.

Again adjusted for inflation, the return to society was $244,812 per participant—or $16.14 per dollar invested. Of that return, $49,190 went to the participant in the form of increased earnings. $195,621 went the public in the form of increased revenue, such as increased tax payments, and decreased usage of public benefits, such as welfare. 88% of the public’s return came in the form of crime savings [see fig. 5, p. 3].

The findings of the HighScope Perry Preschool Study, as it was termed, have been reinforced by the results of longitudinal studies performed in the seventies and eighties. Other longitudinal studies have shown that high quality early childhood programs aimed at children from birth to aged five resulted in participants who were:

- More likely to graduate from a four year college;
- Less likely to have used public assistance;
- Less likely to engage in costly, high-risk behavior such as smoking, drinking, and drug abuse;
- More likely to have health insurance;
- More likely to have a stable employment history;

and, again, more likely to save the public money long-term.

In contrast:

When investigating the Job Training Partnership Act, a jobs training program for disadvantaged youth which received bipartisan support as a welfare alternative in 1982, Heckman found (to his surprise) that the $2 billion the federal government had invested in the program resulted in zero wage increases for the enrolled participants. In fact, one study found African American men who participated in the training ended up making less than those who didn’t.

Heckman’s research (which spanned adult literacy programs to prisoner rehabilitation programs to high school equivalency programs) found many programs to not provide enough return to the public to justify, on purely financial terms, the cost. In a 2006 article in Science, he concluded that most skills remediation programs in the young adult and adolescent years were “economically inefficient.” [See The Heckman Curve, Fig. 2.]

The point for Heckman is not that youth and adult programs are not worth funding—but that they ought to be viewed as part of an overall strategy which allocates more resources to early childhood development and then supplements that development with effective education through adulthood. His thesis is that this investment will result in the betterment of society as a whole through the development of a more cognitively and socially skilled work force.

Or, as he puts it, in the form of the Heckman Equation [see Fig. 3]:

INVEST + DEVELOP + SUSTAIN = GAIN.

The Heckman Equation is a great argument for early childhood investment for those who are concerned with population level change. But what if your concern is personal—not political?

Is there evidence that investment in the early years is good for children—and not just for the bottom line?

In a February 2013 interview on PBS NewsHour, Heckman expressed concern that his policy prescriptions could be interpreted as a form of social control:

“I hate the word ‘improve’ because that suggests a kind of social planning, a kind of normative action. What I’m thinking of is a sense of capabilities. It’s basically saying, give a child more possibilities to do whatever he or she wants to do with their life. So you give them more capacities: more capacities to solve math problems, more capacities to do music, more capacities to control their anger or maybe not control it, but they could willfully be angry rather than just be angry impulsively.”

These increased capacities that Heckman speaks of are not just cognitive capacities but also the non-cognitive capacities—socio-emotional skills, physical and mental health, perseverance, attention, motivation, and self-confidence—which allow children to grow into thriving adults.
Benefits of Investing (continued)

But how exactly do typical early childhood investments in initiatives like home visiting programs and preschool produce lasting effects in these children? And why are they so much more effective than interventions later in life?

The answer, according to Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child, can be found in the brain.

Consider this:

- During the first few years of life, over 700 neural connections are formed every second. Experiences in early childhood determine which of those connections are pruned and which are left to become part of the brain’s architecture.
- The “serve and return” interaction between infant and caregiver—that is, the responsiveness (or lack thereof) to a baby’s babbles and facial expressions—becomes part of the child’s brain architecture, shaping his or her social and learning experiences throughout life.
- “Toxic” stress in Early Childhood—that is, chronic stress due to poverty, neglect, abuse, or severe maternal depression—can lead to underdevelopment of the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, the areas of the brain most responsible for success in school and work related tasks.
- The brain’s plasticity declines with age, requiring substantially more physiological “effort” to build new neural connections or break existing ones [see fig. 4].

Programs that help families provide enriching and responsive caretaking have lasting, long-term effects on children’s neural development. Young children raised with a strong attachment to at least one responsive caregiver, a sense of security, and support in building healthy habits have a head start in life.

The Center on the Developing Child puts it more strongly:

“In other words, we can ‘pay now’ by ensuring positive conditions for healthy development, or pay more later in the form of costly remediation, health care, mental health services, and increased rates of incarceration.”

The implications of this research have not been lost on advocates and policy makers. In 1990, social activist Geoffrey Canada founded his block-by-block approach to eliminating poverty in Harlem on a “conveyor belt” theory of childhood development. His thesis: Investing in early childhood, beginning with parent education—and continuing to support that investment through the elementary and young adult years—could change the trajectory for even the most disadvan-

taged children.

Now, Harlem Children’s Zone has attracted national attention and can boast gains in program participants such as 100% school readiness rates among preschool aged children and a 95% college acceptance rate among high school seniors.

In 2013, inspired in part by Canada’s efforts, President Obama rolled out a comprehensive early learning agenda that includes parent education and support and increased access to high quality early childhood programs.

On February 4, 2013, Governor Dannel P. Malloy announced the establishment of a new state agency dedicated to coordinating a system for delivering programs and services to children from birth to age five and their parents. The Office of Early Childhood marks Connecticut as one among a few pioneering states to establish state level coordination efforts to what has been a fractured, disjointed system of delivering early childhood services.

Closer to home, in the fall of last year, the Manchester School Readiness Council (M SRC) published Manchester’s Early Childhood Community Plan to provide a coordinated approach to serving and supporting the Town’s youngest residents. This responsive, data-driven plan draws on the research on the importance of early childhood development to prescribe coordinated efforts in three main areas: Family Support, Early Childhood Education, and Early Childhood Health.

In this issue of Better Manchester Magazine, we invite the community to engage with the key concepts of our town’s plan to “Ensure that all Manchester children birth through eight develop fully and are successful in school.” To read the complete 38-page strategic plan—which includes action steps, performance measures for each strategy, as well as an implementation plan—visit http://schoolreadiness.townofmanchester.org/.

Figure 4: According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, the brain’s plasticity—or ability to change—decreases over time.

Figure 5: Public costs and benefits of investment in high quality preschool programming according to the Perry Preschool Study.
1 Strategic Statement:
In partnership with school systems, health, and social services, community organizations, and state agencies, we will ensure that Manchester parents/guardians have awareness of and access to available family support services.

Parents Aren’t the Only Ones Who Need Support
Are you an aunt, uncle, grandparent, close friend, or neighbor who provides informal (maybe even free) childcare for a family member, friend, or relative? First of all, you aren’t alone. Unlicensed Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers provide the majority of care for Connecticut children under age five whose parents work. Second, support is available. Although FFN care is lawful and provides some advantages to center-based childcare (including caregiver stability), many FFN caregivers struggle with low revenue, social isolation, and a lack of professional development opportunities. To begin to address some of these obstacles, the Office of Neighborhoods and Families has partnered with Manchester’s Office of Early Childhood to create the Family and Friends Learn and Play Workshop—a free, 10-week workshop and playgroup series for FFN caregivers and children slated to begin Fall 2014. The curriculum will cover child development, discipline, parent engagement, school readiness, and health and safety. For a full course description, including registration information, see the enclosed Neighborhood Academy Course Catalogue, page 9 or contact Sharon Kozy at 860-647-5269.

Nurturing the Nurturers
In 2007, 9,875 abuse and neglect cases were substantiated in Connecticut and four children died. The Early Childhood Plan’s Family Support section outlines Manchester’s strategy for decreasing the percentage of Manchester’s children from birth to age eight that have substantiated cases of abuse and/or neglect.

The strip turns blue, and you find out you and your partner are expecting. You are, of course, overjoyed. You check out stacks of child development books from the library. You go to every prenatal visit with a smile on your face. Because you have prepared so thoroughly, your child sleeps through the night from day one and you greet each day of parenting well-rested and eager to face the day. He meets every baby milestone a month early and never cries. Because you are a good parent, your child bypasses the “Terrific Twos” entirely and never has a single tantrum. For your part, you play with your child every day, read to your child every night, and never, ever raise your voice. It’s all as you dreamed it would be—perfect!

And now, back in reality...

“There is no such thing as a perfect parent... It’s so important I’m going to say it again if that’s okay. There is no such thing as a perfect parent.” I am sitting in a child-sized chair, across a child-sized table, from Latasha Turnquest at Eastern Connecticut Health Network’s Family Resource Center (FRC) in Manchester’s Washington Elementary School. The cheerful space is child-scale, packed with books and toys; Turnquest’s desk, from which she has served as director for the past seven years, is tucked in the corner.

One of the key duties of the FRC, according to Turnquest, is reassuring parents and caregivers that their experiences—if not perfect—are perfectly normal. “It’s normal for a one or two year old to have a tantrum. A child being oppositional is very, very normal.”

On July 1st 2014, Turnquest joined the Manchester Public School system to spearhead the establishment of Family Resource Centers at four Manchester elementary schools: Bowser, Waddell, Verplanck, and Robertson. The goal of Family Resource Centers is just what it sounds like: “providing resources to families.” Each FRC will provide families with children from birth through elementary school with a network of services to help them learn about child development, build parenting skills, form relationships with other families, and discover and access community resources. Some of the specific programs/services planned are:

- outreach (including home visits)
- positive youth development for fourth and fifth graders (including activities that promote self-esteem and goal setting)
- resource and referral services (including child development assessments for children from birth to age five)
- parenting workshops
- playgroups (providing socialization for both young children and their parents)

Continued on page 7.

BrightStart Workshop
See Neighborhood Academy Catalog, page 9.

ECHN Family Development Center
Administers a variety of programs dedicated to helping families develop their strengths, parenting skills, and confidence. Early Head Start provides low-income families with children under age three—or those who are expecting—with educational home visits, child development assessments, health services, and links to community resources. The Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) provides home visiting, assessments, parent education, and life skills support to families, and includes support for community partner families with children aged 0-17. The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) provides home visiting, parenting child social activities, parent education groups, and a fatherhood initiative. ECHN Nurturing Families Network and Family Resource Centers also provide home visits. For more information and a full list of services, visit www.echn.org/efc or call the main office at 860-432-5278, Ext. 125.

FAMILY SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Provide neighborhood-based parent leadership development opportunities consistent with the Children, Youth, and Family Master Plan.

Provide neighborhood-based, culturally responsive outreach and education on available family support services in Manchester to parents/guardians, consistent with the Children, Youth, and Family Master Plan.

Train parent volunteers to become peer mentors to create stronger support systems for families within their neighborhoods, and implement a peer mentor program.

Develop a mechanism to identify family needs across disciplines and to ensure that such needs are addressed in a coordinated manner so that each family has access to optimal support.

Support and increase family support services and nurturing home/personal visits to ensure safe and nurturing home environments.

From Manchester’s Early Childhood Community Plan (http://schoolreadiness.townofmanchester.org)
An Overview of Manchester’s School Readiness Initiatives...

ARE WE READY?

by Christin Fowler

The first five years of a child’s life have a tremendous impact on their long-term development. Now more than ever before, conclusive evidence proves that early childhood experiences influence a person’s likelihood for success throughout the course of their entire life. Critical social skills, overall emotional health, and the capacity for reasoning and problem solving are all formulated in the years prior to kindergarten entry. A child who is already falling behind at the beginning of their elementary education is substantially more likely to continue struggling for the remainder of their school years. In fact, research shows that at least half of the educational achievement gaps that exist between low-income and higher-income children begin prior to the start of kindergarten. Moreover, once this gap is already established, it can be extremely difficult to overcome.

To set children out onto a path for success, exposure to quality early learning opportunities are critical. Communities nationwide, for this reason, are realizing the need for increased emphasis on the idea of “school readiness”. The term “school readiness” is used to refer to a child’s ability and level of preparedness to succeed in kindergarten and all of the subsequent years beyond. According to Sharon Kozey, Manchester’s Early Childhood Education Coordinator, the importance of school readiness can hardly be overstated.

“School readiness plays a huge role in ensuring both short term and long term success”, said Kozey. “We need to make sure that when kids enter school, they are ready to learn—socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively.” Longer term, children who enter school without being prepared are much less likely to read and write proficiently by grade three—a risk factor linked to lower high school graduation rates. In addition, lack of school readiness is correlated with an increased likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse, criminal activity and imprisonment, and failure to secure stable employment in adulthood. Reducing this vicious cycle requires an active commitment to supporting school readiness from families, schools, and communities together.

A child’s school readiness is measured by a number of indicators, including the child’s ability to interact and communicate effectively with peers and adults, their interest in literacy and mathematics, and their level of general and fine motor development. Additionally, a child should possess the capability to follow basic but specific directions, which is a key component of early school success.

School readiness also applies to parents, schools, and communities. It requires that schools are properly ready for their incoming children, and that families and communities have the capacity to provide developmental opportunities for their young students. A “ready community” offers sufficient resources and supports to families. Ready schools have the critical elements needed to influence child development and success. And ready families create a home environment which is conducive to the child’s health, wellbeing, and educational achievement.

Continued on page 8.
**Strategic Statement - Prenatal Care:**
Implement a systemic approach that incorporates quality with affordable prenatal care, thereby ensuring that awareness, availability, and access to initiatives and services are made accessible to pregnant women.

**Strategic Statement - Childhood Obesity:**
Support and enhance initiatives and services to reduce childhood obesity.

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By Rosaleen Torrey

Here are some scary stats: In just one generation, US rates of obesity have approximately tripled among preschoolers and adolescents, and quadrupled among children 6 to 11 years of age. Here in Connecticut nearly one-third of students in kindergarten and the third grade are overweight or obese.

In the U.S., childhood obesity surpasses drug abuse and smoking as the number one health concern that keeps parents tossing and turning at night. Obese kids are more likely to have high blood pressure and high cholesterol. They have a greater risk of developing diabetes, bone and joint problems, and sleep apnea. They are more likely to have low self-esteem. If they become obese adults—which they are more likely to than non-obese children—they will live six to seven years less than their peers and are more likely to get cancer. The health risks of obesity are greater than those of drinking, of smoking, and of poverty. Obesity is the second leading preventable cause of death in the United States—right after cancer.

Everyone knows childhood obesity is bad, bad news. And everyone wants to stop it.

On their website under the heading “A Growing Problem,” the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) write this: “What causes childhood obesity?”

Childhood obesity is the result of getting too many calories and not getting enough physical activity.”

If that’s the problem, the solution seems simple. Everyone concerned—and everyone is concerned: parents; schools; national, state, and local governments; the CDC; the World Health Organization; the First Lady—has a clear blueprint for success. Sing it from the rooftops: “Eat right. Exercise.” Encourage and promote what the CDC terms “healthy choices”—and all will be well.

Right?

Except, consider this:

- Nationally, there have been no significant changes in obesity prevalence among 2-19 year olds or adults in the United States between 2003-2004 and 2011-2012.
- MSRC’s Health Work group, in partnership with the University of Connecticut’s Masters in Public Health program, has been collecting annual data on childhood obesity from each of Manchester’s ten public elementary schools. In 2011, 33% of students were found to be overweight or obese. Since then, the numbers haven’t budged—with roughly 1/3 of students falling into the overweight/obese categories.

That’s discouraging.

Continued on page 7.
Changing Minds

(Continued)

But it’s not to say that there haven’t been meaningful changes for at least some populations:

- The latest CDC data shows a large—43%—decline in obesity among children between two and five years of age.
- A February 2014 CDC report showed a decline in obesity rates among low-income preschool aged children in 18 states.
- Four states and six local communities that made broad, sweeping policy changes did show significant, community-wide declines in child obesity rates.

The question is:

What separates these communities—and populations—where interventions seem to be working from those where they aren’t?

The authors of the CDC report speculate that the decrease in obesity among preschoolers could be due to policy changes such as: greater investment in breastfeeding support—breastfeeding is protective against obesity—; changes to the food package low income children receive from the Special Supplementary Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children; and new standards for physical education and nutrition in early childhood programs.

According to an analysis by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the “common thread” among the states and communities that reported a community-wide decline in obesity rates is the implementation of “broad, sweeping changes to make healthy foods available in schools and communities and integrate physical activity into daily life.” Some examples of these changes include:

- Prioritizing biking and walking in community development and transportation plans.
- Passing legislation that promotes healthy schools and childcare facilities.
- Incentivizing supermarkets to build locations in underserved areas.
- Increasing opportunities for physical activity through increasing the public’s access to existing public spaces (such as school gyms) and the development of new ones.

Clearly, the CDC is right. Changing habits of nutrition and physical activity—especially if we start with the very young, when the brain is forming “the wiring” that will serve children into adulthood—is the key to combatting both childhood and adult obesity.

And, yet, it’s not that simple.

Changing habits on a population scale requires more than education in healthy choices. It requires community-wide efforts to make the healthy choice the default choice.

In Manchester, the School Readiness Council’s 95210 initiative [see resource briefs on pg. 6] is aimed at creating and reinforcing a community-wide culture of the healthy habits that have been shown to combat childhood obesity.

Manchester 2020, the town’s recently adopted plan of conservation and development, calls for efforts to increase Manchester’s walkability—not only through providing safe streets and greenways—but also through providing places to walk by and to including parks, shops, restaurants, and workplaces. According to the Director of Planning and Economic Development Mark Pellegrini, Manchester’s other initiatives to support biking and walking include: an effort to close the gaps in Manchester’s portion of the East Coast Greenway trail; a safe-routes-to-school program which facilitates non-car transportation to and from school; and an investment in bike racks throughout the city.

The Director of Parks and Recreation Scott Sprague noted that the “Lighted Schoolhouse” programs—a nationwide trend in the seventies and eighties which facilitated drop-in use of school gyms during non-school hours—“faded away” due to a combination of factors. In the light of current trends, he thinks these programs could be worth another look—particularly with an eye toward providing more structured activities through school and agency partnerships.

Too often the advice to “eat right” and “exercise” becomes a moral mandate. Let’s acknowledge that it’s the responsibility of the entire community to create a culture where healthy food and habits are just part of life. If we do that, we can really put Manchester on the map [see Fig. 6].

Progress in the Fight Against Childhood Obesity

Figure 6: From 2008 to 2011, childhood obesity rates dropped in 18 states. Communities that implemented broad policy changes—from Alaska to North Carolina—saw community-wide declines in obesity.

Nurturing the Nurturers

(Continued from page 4)

From a policy perspective, Manchester’s investment of a portion of its Alliance Grant funding in the establishment of FRCs at each Title I school represents an effort to close the achievement gap. Shelly Mattess, Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Personnel Services, says that the burden on parents to prepare their children for kindergarten is increasing. “School readiness is not just about academics—it’s social development; it’s emotional; it’s cognitive; it’s physical. It’s a lot.” One of the functions of the FRCs will be assisting parents and caregivers in gaining the necessary resources and skills to prepare their children for kindergarten, as well as welcoming parents with children 0-5 to the school community.

From the perspective of the Early Childhood Plan, investment in FRCs is part of an overall strategy to decrease incidences of abuse and neglect in Manchester. Risk factors for child abuse include social isolation, lack of access to or knowledge of support services, and unrealistic expectations. FRCs provide what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls “protective factors” which buffer children from being abused or neglected.

From a parent’s or caregiver’s perspective, it looks more like this: You maybe were a little unsure how you felt when the strip turned blue; maybe you were even a little scared. Maybe your baby DOESN’T sleep through the night from day 1, or day 30, or even day 90—and you are feeling sleep deprived and kind of overwhelmed. Maybe your child has missed a milestone or two, but your pediatrician has brushed off your concerns—and you aren’t sure where to turn. Maybe you have started to dread trips to the grocery store, feeling all eyes upon you, as your child throws a tantrum in the checkout aisle—and you wish you knew someone who could commiserate. You love your child, of course—but maybe you don’t get in as much play time or reading time as you would like. Maybe you feel overwhelmed sometimes or frustrated and struggle not to raise your voice.

Welcome to parenthood in real life.

There is no perfect parent, and every family struggles at least some of the time. Manchester has chosen to invest in supporting its families in the most important work they’ll ever do—raising their children.

For more information on Manchester Public Schools FRCs, contact Latasha Turnquest at lturnq@manchesterct.gov or get in touch with the FRC closest to you by calling the school’s main office.
So, how is Manchester doing on the overall scale of “school readiness”? Recently collected data shows that approximately one-third of all Manchester students begin kindergarten without ever having attended preschool—a concerning figure. This is most likely the result of a number of factors that are commonly seen nationwide, including financial barriers, difficulties coordinating work obligations with preschool schedules, and a general lack of understanding about the importance of preschool education. High rates of transience also play a role.

Fortunately, a growing number of efforts are underway to enhance school readiness for all children in the community, regardless of economic barriers. The town is the recent recipient of a State Department of Education grant, which is supplying funding for forty additional students to take part in high quality preschool experiences. Parents who participate in the program are able to send their child to a full-day, year-long preschool for only a nominal fee.

Additionally, significant strides have been made to ensure that all children in Manchester have access to structured opportunities for learning and social development prior to kindergarten entry. A recently established program known as “Jump Start Kindergarten” is available in the summer for kids entering kindergarten who have never had a preschool experience. The half-day program runs Monday-Thursday for a full six weeks and is entirely free of charge. Transportation and daily snacks are also provided. Children who participate learn to develop school routines, build relationships with classmates, and learn skills to help them prepare for the upcoming school year.

It’s also important for parents to realize that they, themselves, can facilitate very valuable educational opportunities on a daily basis from home. Moms and dads can benefit greatly by connecting with their local library, which offers a variety of free, ongoing programs and activities for young children. In addition, parents can support critical cognitive and language skills by talking to their child continuously, teaching them new words, and pointing out simple color and number patterns. Last but certainly not least, parents can help their child tremendously simply by reading to them early and often. “Just reading to your child has such a huge impact on development starting from infancy,” advised Kozey.

For more information and resources, visit the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood at ct.gov/oecc.
Fall 2014 Courses
For those who live, work or attend school in Manchester

MANCHESTER Neighborhood Academy
Engaging Citizens for a Better Community

School of Youth Development

Mother/Daughter Circle
The Mother/Daughter Circle is a structured support group. The purpose of the Circle is to promote a healthy and sustaining bond between mothers and daughters during the transitional years from girlhood to young womanhood. The Mother/Daughter Circle provides a safe, consistent, strength-based approach to supporting mothers and daughters on their relationship journey. (Also open to other female guardians or caretakers and the girls they care for.)

Meetings: Mid-September–December
Location: Manchester Youth Service Bureau, 63 Linden Street
Academy Sponsor: Youth Service Bureau
Registration: Call Heather Wlochowski, (860) 647-5213

Manchester Youth Commission
The Manchester Youth Commission is a diverse group of youth (incoming 9th-12th graders), collaborating with local government in effort to create open communication in the decision making process, making it possible to strengthen the community through the voice of youth. The application process is on-going with interviews for appointment consideration conducted in the spring. Commissioners meet during the school year on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month.

Meetings: September through June 2014/15
Academy Sponsor: Youth Service Bureau
Registration: Call Heather Wlochowski, (860) 647-5213

School of Civic Engagement

Government 101
This ten-week course is an exciting series of classes taught by Manchester City Leaders. The course participants will get an inside look at the municipal operations covering everything from public safety to public libraries. Come away with an understanding of how to navigate municipal services and how to become involved in local affairs.

Meetings: Thurs., 6-9 p.m., 9/11-11/12
Location: Eastside Neighborhood Resource Center, 153 Spruce Street (1st Class)
Academy Sponsor: Town of Manchester
Registration: Call Tricia Catania, (860) 647-3102

Manchester Citizens’ Police Academy
The Manchester Citizens’ Police Academy is a “hands-on” sixteen week program designed to build relationships between the community and the Police Department. Participants gain valuable insight into how their Police Department works and provides services to the community. Must be 18+

Meetings: Thurs., 6-9 p.m., 9/11-11/12
Locations: Manchester Police Department, 239 East Middle Turnpike
Academy Sponsor: Police Department
Registration: Call Berni Hallums, (860) 645-5599 X 13532

Community Emergency Response Team Training Program
Train to become a member of C.E.R.T. to help the Town in case of emergency when all other responders are either tied up or unable to respond. The team is comprised of 5 major sub teams: the Communications Teams, the Shelter Management Team, the Emergency Operations Center Support Team, the Search and Rescue Team, and the Fire/Police Team. The team also learns how to take care of their family and neighbors during a weather related emergency.

Meetings: TBD (Call below for dates and times.)
Locations: Public Works, Botticello Building, 321Olcott Street
Academy Sponsor: Manchester Emergency Management
Registration: Call Don Jannelle, (860) 647-5259

School of Creative Development

All Seasons Gardening
Growing food is a delicious and healthy pastime for you and the whole family! Anyone can learn to grow their own food all year round. In this class we will talk about selecting a site to grow, the type of soil to grow in, and the varieties of vegetable to grow at various times of year. This class is for all levels of experience. All of this information, with hands-on demonstrations will be completed in two classes.

Meetings: Tues. & Thurs., 6-9 p.m., 9/9, 9/11
Academy Sponsor: Office of Neighborhoods and Families
Registration: Call Melissa Stewart, (860) 647-3089

Starting Your Own Landscaping or Gardening Business
There are many forms of gardening and landscaping businesses to choose from. These sessions will overview different gardening types and the benefits of starting your own landscaping or gardening business.

Meetings: Wed., 6:30-8:30 PM, 11/12, 11/19
Academy Sponsor: Office of Neighborhoods and Families
Registration: Call Melissa Stewart, (860) 647-3089

Writers Support Group
The Writers Support Group welcomes writers and would-be writers of all genres and levels of experience. We’ll spend six weeks discussing (and learning to overcome) obstacles to creativity. Along the way we’ll learn how to spot the writers arch-nemesis perfectionism, why first drafts are supposed to stink, and how the hardest part of all is getting started. Each meeting will consist of a group discussion, followed by time to work on independent projects.

Meetings: Mon., 6:30-8 p.m., 10/20-12/8
Location: Eastside Neighborhood Resource Center, 153 Spruce Street
Academy Sponsor: Office of Neighborhoods and Families
Registration: Call Melissa Stewart, (860) 647-3089

The Young Writers and Illustrators for Literacy Project
Over the course of two semesters (October-May), high school aged writers and illustrators will brainstorm, storyboard, write, edit, and illustrate a children’s book with the goal of promoting early childhood literacy. This arts-based service project emphasizes the importance of reading by grade three.

Meetings: Wednesday, 6:30-8 p.m., 10/15-3/25/15
Location: Eastside Neighborhood Resource Center, 153 Spruce Street
Academy Sponsor: Office of Neighborhoods and Families
Contact: Melissa Stewart, (860) 647-3089

School of Early Childhood Development

BrightStart™ Workshop
This 10-week workshop is specifically for FFN Caregivers. FFN Caregivers are non-parental child-care providers who are a family member, friend, or neighbor. Caregivers will formally learn developmentally appropriate activities for young children to promote wellness and school readiness in a collaborative and supportive environment. Weekly workshops include: Communicating with Families; Discipline and Guidance; Hands-on Developmentally Appropriate Activities; Routines, Scheduling and Nutrition; Effective Environments and Pediatric Dental Associates; Fire and Car Seat Safety; Intro to CPR and First Aid. Program includes a playgroup for children 36 months to 5 years old, being cared for by the FFN Caregiver. Playgroup weekly topics include: Open and Creative Play; Husky Reads Nutrition; Physical Fitness; Outdoor Play; Book and Boogie; Community Helpers; and Yoga.

Meetings: Wed., 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.
Location: Nathan Hale Building, 160 Spruce Street
Academy Sponsor: Office of Early Childhood Development
Registration: Call Sharon Kozey, (860) 647-3089

Neighborhood Kids’ Fair
This will be fun and games, crafts and food, a bounce house, and the imagination playground! Just drop by and learn about the BrightStart™ Workshops and apply. No registration required.

Meetings: Saturday, 10 a.m. -1 p.m., 9/20
Location: Neighborhood Resource Center, 153 Spruce Street
Academy Sponsor: Building Healthy Families, Inc.
Contact: Peter Tullson, (860) 357-0121 or ptullson@bhftc.org

Family and Friends and Neighbors (FFN) Learn and Play Workshop
This 10-week workshop is specifically for FFN Caregivers. FFN Caregivers are non-parental child-care providers who are a family member, friend, or neighbor. Caregivers will formally learn developmentally appropriate activities for young children to promote wellness and school readiness in a collaborative and supportive environment. Weekly workshops include: Communicating with Families; Discipline and Guidance; Hands-on Developmentally Appropriate Activities; Routines, Scheduling and Nutrition; Effective Environments and Pediatric Dental Associates; Fire and Car Seat Safety; Intro to CPR and First Aid. Program includes a playgroup for children 36 months to 5 years old, being cared for by the FFN Caregiver. Playgroup weekly topics include: Open and Creative Play; Husky Reads Nutrition; Physical Fitness; Outdoor Play; Book and Boogie; Community Helpers; and Yoga.

Meetings: Wed., 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.
Location: Nathan Hale Building, 160 Spruce Street
Academy Sponsor: Office of Early Childhood Development
Registration: Call Sharon Kozey, (860) 647-3089