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JACKSON CITIZEN PATRIOT

GREAT START CONNECT

Web site launched for child-care data

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Parents and guardians looking for quality, licensed child care in the Jackson area can now turn to the Web for help.

Great Start CONNECT, announced Tuesday, allows families to search a database of local providers. Searches can be tailored based on age of the children and days and times of week child care is needed.

Great Start-CONNECT on the Web

To search for a licensed child-care provider, visit www.greatstartforkids.org/greatStartConnect.cfm and click on "early learning." The site requires Adobe Flash.

The site is part of a state-wide effort to streamline early childhood learning resources and improve access to and quality of services.

"It's nice to have a comprehensive plan in place," said Pam Smith, executive director of the Child Care Network.

The site also gives child-care providers a place to find training opportunities in their communities.

Also announced Tuesday was the creation of the Southeast Great Start Regional Resource Center, which will serve parents and early

learning professionals in six counties: Jackson, Hillsdale, Lenoire, Livingston, Wash-tenaw and Monroe.

It is one of 10 centers state-wide that are funded with \$10 million in federal money for improving the quality of child care.

The center will operate out of the Child Care Network office in Ann Arbor.

Research has shown there are long- and short-term benefits of high-quality preschool programs, including greater

academic and economic success and savings to taxpayers in the welfare and criminal justice systems.

Local businesses, including Consumers Energy, are also investing in early childhood learning because children who have a late start are often behind all the way to the work world, said Mike Kanser, manager of energy-efficiency programs.

"It really helps parents focus on what they need to do during the day," Mike Kanser

said of finding good child care.

Advocates say they are working on making sure people who might not have access the Web site at other locations, such as local libraries, Head Start centers and 211.

A parent coalition is also working to spread the information by word-of-mouth, said Sheri Butters, director of the Jackson County Great Start Collaborative.