



This time of year lends itself to anticipation and reflection. It is also a time to re-connect with friends and family.

As our Excel By 5 family continues to grow, we encourage and assist each other by exchanging ideas and celebrating milestones. The following document contains brief updates reflecting on the 2014 Excel By 5 efforts in our communities throughout the state. We are proud of all that our communities have achieved and anxiously anticipate what is yet to come.

Enjoy reading about the accomplishments that are improving the lives of Mississippi's youngest citizens. Please feel free to pass on the good news.



## Happy Holidays



2014

**Ripley** Excel By 5 has had an exciting 2014. Safety was the name of the game! We hosted a car safety seminar at the annual community Easter egg hunt, gave away bicycle helmets during our Summer Safety Seminar at the First Monday Music Festival in May and offered free screenings at our health fair last month. We have also focused on reading. Our "book fairy" has been collecting used books and distributing them at the health department and at our local food bank. We kicked off our series of free contact hours (training) for daycare workers in October with a lesson on the state of Mississippi's 4 year old curriculum and a simple assessment that measures 4 year old growth and readiness. We still have a long way to go, but we feel confident that we will become certified in 2015. The EB5 team in Ripley would like to wish all of you a Merry Christmas!

**Hattiesburg** Excel By 5 underwent a reorganization this year and is back stronger than ever with three lead partners: The City of Hattiesburg, the Hattiesburg Public School District, and United Way of Southeast Mississippi. Aisha Anderson is now the school district's interface for the Hattiesburg Excel By 5 coalition, a solid recognition of the importance of early childhood development. We held a luncheon in late-September to announce the re-energized coalition and partners and Mayor DuPree was one of the keynote speakers. At the first meeting of our new Coalition, we had a record-breaking crowd in attendance! We'll end 2014 in grand style by participating in Hattiesburg's Christmas parade through the downtown area and giving out books to young children along the parade route and we'll give out more books at the Hattiesburg Zoo's "Zoo Lights" festival a week after the parade. It's always a thrill to watch the faces of our young children "light up" when they get a new book of their own! We're looking forward to a busy and productive 2015!

Happy Holidays to everyone! The **Pascagoula** Excel by 5 Coalition members have been so busy this year! Debbie Anglin's Community\_Involvement group has been updating the Resource Guide and looking into an "application" that will chime when any changes are made to the Guide! Amy Brandenstein's Early Care and Education group has been busy with Pre-K Launch Pad, which meets three days a week! Children ride outfitted buses to the Launch Pad which gets them ready to be healthy, happy and excited to go to kindergarten! We're working with our preschool teachers through Educational Partners meetings and we're distributing Christmas appreciation gifts to all the centers in Pascagoula! Jennifer Williams/Keitha Thomas' Family and Parent Support group has been working with Teen Mothers and their babies! They are working on 100% graduation rates! Classes focus on budgeting, study skills, SIDS awareness, tobacco free environments and life after graduation! April Jordan and her Health group just finished the Health Fair! We served over 500 children! We had vendors focusing on vision, speech, bike safety, fire safety, motor skills, and healthy cooking! But there is one more thing! We will be having our third EXCELEBRATION on January 24, 2015 at the Family Interactive Center! The theme is "Winter Wonderland"! We have several activities for the young ones focusing on fine motor skills! We will give the children, "Melted Snowmen", a water bottle with melted snowmen! Happy Holidays and a wonderful New Year! Come and see what we are doing!

**Hernando** Coalition received a wonderful early gift for the holidays this year. We found out on November 7th that we are now a Certified Excel by 5 Community! We are thankful to all our coalition members and volunteers, the Excel by 5 staff, our child care centers, and the citizens of Hernando for helping us achieve this. Other activities this fall have included taking part in the Chamber of Commerce Trunk-or-Treat on the Square, where we gave away nearly 400 books as "treats" and updated the community on our progress towards certification. Car Seat Safety checks and Bike/Trike Safety Village programs were held by Hernando Fire and Police Departments at our child care centers. Also during October, we gave away books to child care teachers and goody bags of supplies to child care centers. We will be at Hernando Parks & Recreation's annual Cookies with Santa event in December to read to children who are



waiting to get their pictures made with the Jolly Old Elf. Ho Ho Ho! We are celebrating our certification and planning many new things. We are currently raising funds and hope to begin an Imagination Library program very soon! We plan to provide continued support and encouragement for our centers who are participating in or considering the QRIS program. We're also excited to welcome and lend a hand to our neighbors in Horn Lake and Olive Branch. A Happy and Healthy New Year to all from Hernando!



**Corinth-Alcorn County** became certified in June of 2014! At the beginning of the year, we were tired and thought we might not make it, but our Early Care and Education team came through. Alcorn County plus 2 other counties were awarded the state Early Learning Collaborative grant in the New Year. The Early Learning Collaborative was able to hire 2 people to coordinate and fund programs that fit right in to the Excel By 5 framework. We are also very fortunate to have Magnolia Regional Hospital as a Corinth/Alcorn County Excel By 5 partner. They have 3 employees that are on our Health team and they professionally organize the annual Health Fair, CPR classes for our childcare centers and they include Corinth/Alcorn County Excel By 5 in all of their outreach in the community to reach out to children ages 0-5. The Family team has an amazing partner, Crosswind, who ministers to the underprivileged communities via our Mobile Resource Center. They organized children ages 3-4 from 4 low-income housing projects into Early Learning Classes taught in the Mobile Resource Center. Mothers in the housing projects are excited and taking ownership; therefore, being trained to conduct some of these pre-school classes. Crosswind (our partner) had a "Back to School Block Party" in August for a low-income neighborhood and they had a graduation ceremony for the children that participated in the Early Learning classes at the Mobile Resource Center. The Community focus group anchors all of this great work with supportive business leaders, city & county government officials, and the Alliance - our economic development council.



We are so excited about the possibilities the **Lee County** Excel By 5 initiative presents for families of young children. Here are a few highlights of what we have accomplished: We have held 9 events, with approximately 1,400 parents and children in attendance. These events include community update meetings, family events, school readiness events, and health fairs. For most of these events we have partnered with other events. Examples of partner events include the Don't Be Cruel Bar-B-Q Duel (health fair/children's area), The United Way School Supply Giveaway, Splash into Kindergarten at Parkway Elementary, Park and Rec's Touch a Truck (family event), and the NMMC Live Well Health Fair. We have held 4 parent workshops, with a total attendance of 90 parents and caregivers. We have received a Carpenter Foundation grant to place additional books and resource materials for young children at the Family Resource Center and the Lee County Library, and to start an early childhood resource center at Verona Elementary School. We have also printed and distributed 2,500 family resource guides that were given out at events and in newborn packets. We are currently offering the Imagination Library program to 186 children. We have participated in the First Book program and have given away nearly 1,500 books. We have held 9 child care provider trainings for head start and child care workers. 3 of these trainings included pre-k and kindergarten public school teachers to ensure communication and discuss the transition into kindergarten.



The LOU (**Lafayette/Oxford/University**) Coalition has had a productive year! Last March, we had our second annual EXCELebration! More than 300 people attended, including almost 200 children. Other major projects of the Community Involvement group included a revision of our Resource Guide and a Community Playdate, a free morning of activities and developmentally appropriate fun held in late October. Also this year, the Family & Parent and Health/Safety groups worked in partnership with Baptist Memorial Hospital -- North MS to revamp our newborn packets. During 2014, the Family & Parent group also offered many different workshops. These workshops were held in locations throughout the community, and some were held in conjunction with major community events. Speaking of major community events at which we offered workshops... The Health/Safety group helped sponsor Baptist





Memorial Hospital -- North MS annual children's health fair. We helped coordinate developmental, hearing, and vision screenings, and provided nutrition education. The Early Care and Education group hosted our Early Care & Education Conference, at which almost 100 providers received 5 hours of professional development approved by the Health Department. The conference had four tracks and included a keynote address by Dr. Lynn Darling of the University of MS. Finally, we have developed an Outcome Measurement Plan for our work which is helping us understand our impact. We are administering a survey to all kindergarten parents in our community. This survey will allow us to better assess parent understanding of key issues in early childhood development and to tailor our programming to address any common misperceptions. We are excited to get the results!

In January 2014 the **Pontotoc County** Excel by 5 group finished reviewing the data from our parent surveys. We then began to make plans for needs that were observed from the results of our survey. In February our local news station came and interviewed three of our members concerning information about Excel by 5 and plans for our community. In April we were awarded money from the CREATE foundation to help with events planned for our preschool children. In May we had a town hall meeting which included showing a movie for all children of our county with emphasis placed upon invitations to the preschool children. We also took part in handing out information to the public during the Customer Appreciation Day for our town. We have held a Health Fair as well as taking part in Children's Day at our County Fair. Our county also provided free backpacks for students, an event in which we also provided information about Excel by 5 information to adults who received these school supplies. Some of our members have visited a resource center in Tate County in making plans for our center.

The BIG news for 2014 in **Petal** is that our "Backyard Bus" is wrapped and ready to roll into neighborhoods to bring fun learning activities to young children and their families. The bright flower and bug design will surely have heads turning and kids excited to see the bus coming! Petal's pre-k grant is giving more four-year-olds a chance to be "ready" learners when they start kindergarten next fall. We can't wait to see what our "Excel By 5" kids in Petal and across our state grow up to be!

**Central Clarke County** Excel By 5 continues to work to be visible in the community while advocating for our smallest citizens. We recently worked closely with a community-wide reading initiative begun by the Quitman School District. Community members and parents were encouraged to read [The Trumpet of the Swan](#) with the school. We sponsored an art activity each week for children under the age of 5 whose families were involved with the initiative. We sponsored a movie night to end the reading project which was an overwhelming success with hundreds of families in attendance for the culminating event. We have also worked to form a closer relationship with the local medical community through sponsorship of the annual health fair and work on implementing telemedicine technology into the school. This initiative presses forward the need for early health screenings for our youngest citizens and shores up general knowledge about our initiative with our community. To offer parents an opportunity to get acquainted with the Common Core Standards, we offered babysitting services at the school for parents to attend training offered by the school. As an on-going goal to educate parents about the importance of early learning in children, we are co-sponsoring an educational documentary about our preschool early learning collaborative. This documentary will air on an episode of In View on Fox Business Network, which will be hosted by Larry King. The opportunity to make a lasting impact in our community continues to press our collaborative forward.

2014 found **Hancock County** Excel By 5 Excelebrating our certification. Hancock County Chamber of Commerce serves as the sponsoring organization and fiscal agent through the Hancock Community Development Foundation. Participating partners include the Gulf Coast Health Educators, Hancock County Human Resources Agency, United Way of South MS, Bay-Waveland and Hancock County Schools, Holy Trinity School, private child care centers, Hancock Resource Center, Hancock County RSVP, Magnolia Health, Hancock Medical Center and Hope Haven. Hancock County libraries made it possible to complete many of the certification requirements and give access to family resources to a much greater population.



Since becoming certified, we have awarded \$5,000 in curriculum grants to child care centers and preschools through funding made possible by a grant. With another grant, we added resources to the library parent resource areas including board books and manipulatives for children and their families to learn and grow. Our second Teen Mom Workshop featured resources and information to encourage the young women. Current collaborative efforts are focused on providing pre-natal to 1 year parenting class. Summer workshops in collaboration with the library focused on STEM/STEAM. We continue to offer parenting classes throughout the community. We are working with our youth court and CASA to make resources available to our most vulnerable population. Our partners believe in the future of Hancock County and appreciate the significance of a child's early years. This has been a strengthening year for us as we have added new partners and focused on additional needs.

**Poplarville** became a Candidate Community in July. The first Coalition meeting was conducted in August. We set up a booth at The Pearl River County Fair in September. We co-partnered with Pearl River County Hospital for the Making Strides Breast Cancer Walk/Health Fair in October. Developmental, vision and hearing screenings were conducted for children at the Health Fair. We cosponsored a costume contest at the Health Fair with The Woman's Club of Poplarville. Excel by 5 information was shared with families at Merchant Trick or Treat. The second Coalition meeting was held in November. We will conduct our Town Meeting in December and will participate in the Christmas Parade.

The **Stone County** Excel by 5 Coalition had much to celebrate during the 2014 year. In the spring, we were overjoyed to become the 16<sup>th</sup> Certified Community in the state. In May, we held our Excelebration, which renewed our community's interest in the initiative. We now have partnerships with Stone County Hospital, Children's Clinic, Friends of the Library, United Way and EDP to promote fun learning activities for our 0-5 population in Stone County. Our coalition currently sponsors a weekly early childhood reading program at the Stone County Library where a coalition member, usually our wonderful Chairperson, Judy Bechtel, reads a story to children and the parents are able to see reading and various activities modeled. The head start, early head start, and two private child care centers are also visited and read to each week. We participated in the Stone County Fair in September as well as Baby Palooza at the Coast Coliseum. We conducted our Town Hall Meeting in conjunction with the local Merchants' Trick or Treat Event in October. In November, we partnered with the Stone County Hospital to participate in a health fair. Our final activity for the 2014 year will be to join Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College for their Festival of Lights in December. We will sponsor a "Write a Letter to Santa" station as part of this festive event for the community. Stone County has truly embraced the Excel by 5 initiative and is working hard to continue to provide opportunities that meet the needs of the birth to 5 population in our community.

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This has been a great year thus far in **Moss Point!** Our center are enjoying our new art room, they have been able to come over and create some fantastic projects to share with their parents and the entire community. We have new curb appeal thanks to a wonderful group of volunteers. The community has taken ownership of our family education center, they have painted, rearranged, provided funds and just about anything that has been requested. We are looking forward to our annual Christmas Gala on December 11, 2014. After that we are planning more excitement for our community and the children here.

The Excel By 5 of **New Albany/Union County** has completed several tasks over the past few months. The most recent event is a book donation. Students from five area schools were asked to bring in his or her most previously loved books to donate to Excel. The event lasted from November 3 to November 16. A total of 2,100 books were collected. Each daycare in the community received 100 books. The remainder of the books will be passed out during Excel By 5 events.

**Biloxi** Excel By Coalition is proud of the accomplishments, the growth of the program and support in community. The Community Events held in 2014 were: "Safety Fair", "Health Fair", "Hop the Trail to Bunny Land", "Count Down to Kindergarten Readiness Fair" and "Come Learn with Santa". Some event sponsors are the Beau Rivage Resort and Casino, Biloxi Public Schools, Biloxi Regional Medical Center,



City of Biloxi, and IP CASINO RESORT SPA. Special Events held at the Biloxi Family Resource Center during 2014 included "Halloween Fun Time" and "Turkey Day" and "Christmas Fun Day". During the Mississippi Gulf Classic, Golfer Fred Funk, visited the Biloxi Family Resource Center and read to approximately 15 children. Two educational workshops for parents and children and ten "Active Parenting" sessions were held. We also provide Educational Trainings and Art on Wheels for the Child Care Centers and Head Start partners. Biloxi Excel By 5 has been awarded two IP CASINO RESORT SPA grants. All the books distributed to children at community events, special events, and educational workshops are paid for by these grants.



**Olive Branch** was accepted as an Excel By 5 community in September. Our coalition has great support from the city of Olive Branch, local churches, and childcare providers. We just started our resource assessment and are currently planning a luncheon for our childcare providers.



**Horn Lake** started the Excel By 5 process in October. We are working on completing our resource assessment and surveys to gain valuable information about our community. We have a lunch scheduled for our childcare providers in December. Our next meeting is scheduled for Jan where we will begin planning our Town Hall and completing our Action Plan.



**Louisville-Winston County** is excited to begin the Excel By 5 process in our community. We began in March and very shortly thereafter our community was devastated by the tornado. Our coalition and our community as a whole were focused on rebuilding after the storm and we took a break from Excel By 5. We are now starting up again with our resource assessment in December.



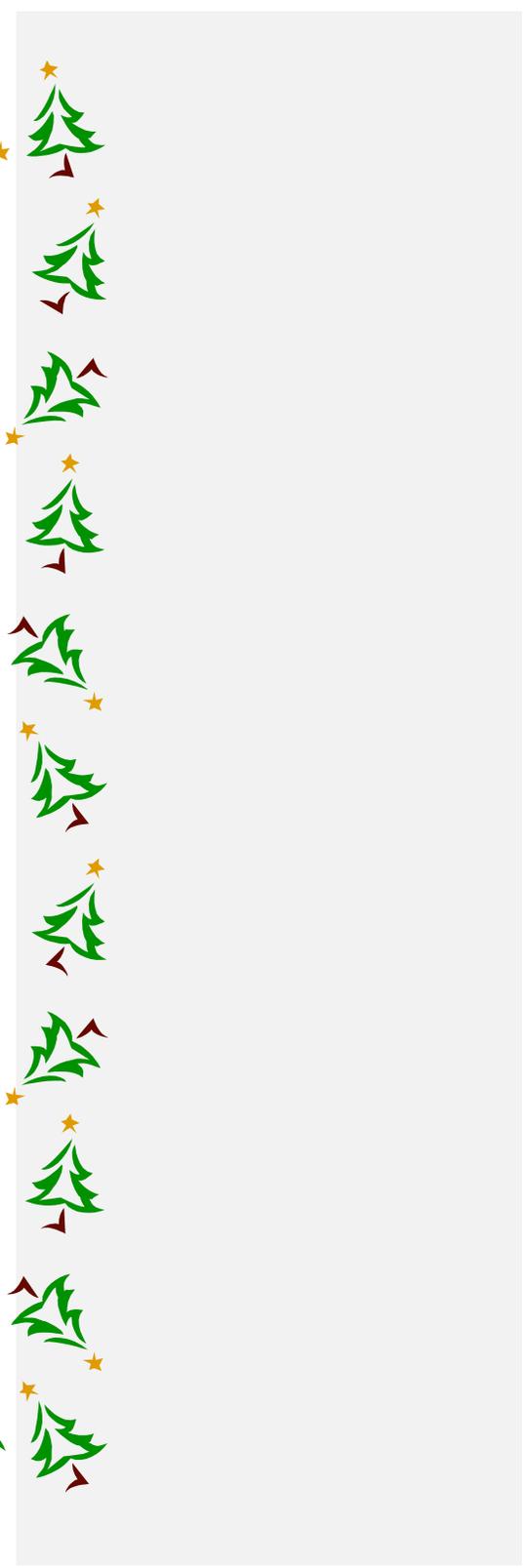
This year has been a busy one for the **Oktibbeha County** Excel By 5 Coalition. Here are some highlights for the year: The Emerson Family Resource Center held various parent support classes throughout the year to meet the special needs of our families in Oktibbeha County. We held quarterly Childbirth Classes Series that were well attended. We pampered our new mothers who had gone through our Childbirth Classes with our annual "Pamper Me Please!" event. The annual Back to School Bash and Health Fair had 788 in attendance. We participated in the first "Step Up for Kids" event. Our Family Literacy Day event had a Western theme and was held during Family Literacy Month. December will find us participating in the Family Christmas Extravaganza that is a fun event for families in our community.



We began the Excel By 5 certification process in **Durant** this spring and jumped right in! We kicked everything off at Durant's Back to School Party where we gave out school supplies and school readiness materials. The whole community came out to enjoy the fun (and hot) evening! In October we had a booth with games for little ones at our local Oktoberfest and spoke to our local PTA about our efforts. Recently we finished our resource guide so we are in the process of making them available and planning for our newborn packets. In December we have a safety day with Little Obie Children's Train and we are putting together a float for our Christmas parade. Durant Excel By 5 has a very strong and involved coalition that really cares about the children in our community and we can't wait to start organizing our events for the spring!

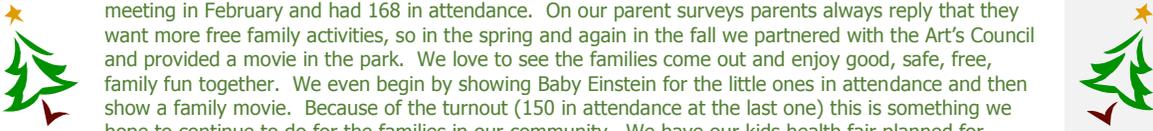


**Senatobia** Excel By 5 is proud of the eventful year we have had! We partnered with the Senatobia schools this spring to provide early education materials at Kindergarten Round-up. Then we joined in on Senatobia's Five Star Fest by providing a baby changing station and resources at the event. In June we had our Town Hall update at the library where families could hear all about Senatobia Excel By 5, visit our resource center, and have their photo taken with Dora. This fall we had our health fair where we offered hearing and vision screenings for the children. We also partnered with the library's Halloween Goosebumps party and provided materials and activities for motor development of young children. For next year, we plan to focus on parent workshops and our educational partners meetings.

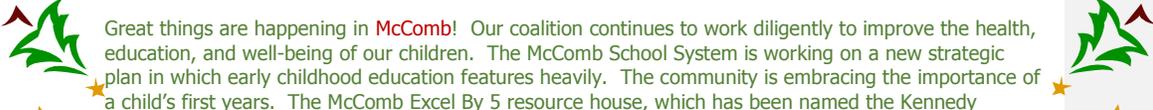




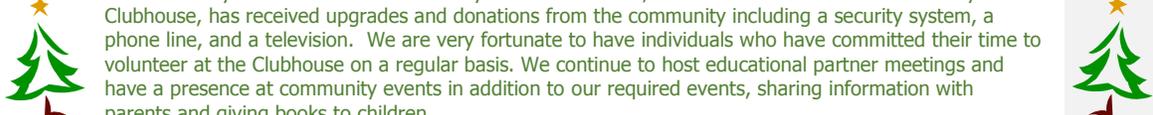
**West Point** Excel By 5 is celebrating their 10 year anniversary! This year held our annual Town Hall meeting in February and had 168 in attendance. On our parent surveys parents always reply that they want more free family activities, so in the spring and again in the fall we partnered with the Art's Council and provided a movie in the park. We love to see the families come out and enjoy good, safe, free, family fun together. We even begin by showing Baby Einstein for the little ones in attendance and then show a family movie. Because of the turnout (150 in attendance at the last one) this is something we hope to continue to do for the families in our community. We have our kids health fair planned for January and look forward to another great year.



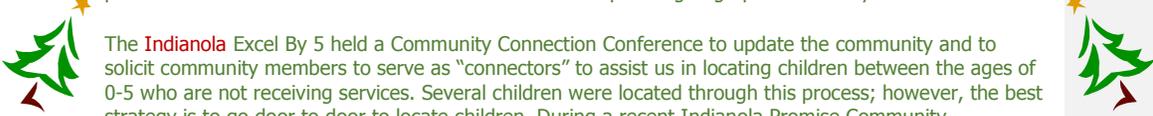
Great things are happening in **McComb**! Our coalition continues to work diligently to improve the health, education, and well-being of our children. The McComb School System is working on a new strategic plan in which early childhood education features heavily. The community is embracing the importance of a child's first years. The McComb Excel By 5 resource house, which has been named the Kennedy Clubhouse, has received upgrades and donations from the community including a security system, a phone line, and a television. We are very fortunate to have individuals who have committed their time to volunteer at the Clubhouse on a regular basis. We continue to host educational partner meetings and have a presence at community events in addition to our required events, sharing information with parents and giving books to children.



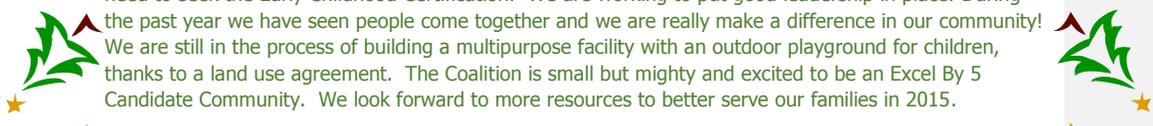
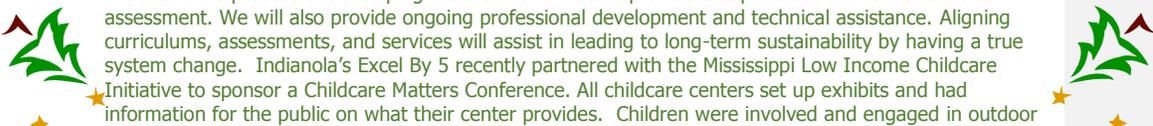
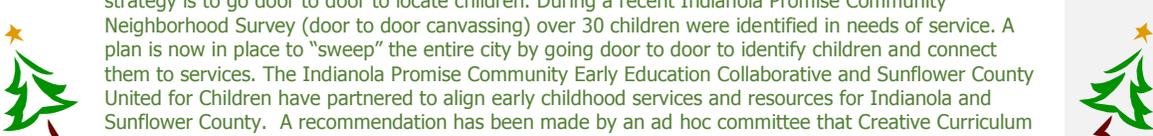
2014 was a memorable year for the **Gulfport** Excel By 5 coalition. Thanks to the hard work of our coalition members and the cooperation of our childcare centers and head start, we became a certified community in the spring. We held our Excelebration in conjunction with our health fair. Countless vendors supported this event along with the city of Gulfport and Garden Park Hospital. Community members were out in full force to avail themselves of the resources. We continue to be visible in the public with our annual Cruisin' the Coast event and the upcoming Sugarplum Saturday celebration.



The **Indianola** Excel By 5 held a Community Connection Conference to update the community and to solicit community members to serve as "connectors" to assist us in locating children between the ages of 0-5 who are not receiving services. Several children were located through this process; however, the best strategy is to go door to door to locate children. During a recent Indianola Promise Community Neighborhood Survey (door to door canvassing) over 30 children were identified in needs of service. A plan is now in place to "sweep" the entire city by going door to door to identify children and connect them to services. The Indianola Promise Community Early Education Collaborative and Sunflower County United for Children have partnered to align early childhood services and resources for Indianola and Sunflower County. A recommendation has been made by an ad hoc committee that Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies Gold (assessment) be used by all early childhood providers in Sunflower County. We are in the process of developing the MOA for childcare providers to purchase the curriculum and assessment. We will also provide ongoing professional development and technical assistance. Aligning curriculums, assessments, and services will assist in leading to long-term sustainability by having a true system change. Indianola's Excel By 5 recently partnered with the Mississippi Low Income Childcare Initiative to sponsor a Childcare Matters Conference. All childcare centers set up exhibits and had information for the public on what their center provides. Children were involved and engaged in outdoor activities while parents and teachers were involved in sessions that were appropriate for them. This conference was held in attempt to educate the public on the services childcare centers provide.



Before Excel By 5, the community did not realize why it is so important to reach children at a young age. Our **Beulah** Excel By 5 coalition is out and about informing families and community residents why we need to seek the Early Childhood Certification. We are working to put good leadership in place. During the past year we have seen people come together and we are really make a difference in our community! We are still in the process of building a multipurpose facility with an outdoor playground for children, thanks to a land use agreement. The Coalition is small but mighty and excited to be an Excel By 5 Candidate Community. We look forward to more resources to better serve our families in 2015.





The **Alligator** EB5 Coalition has been busy spreading the word about working towards becoming an Early Childhood Community in 2015. Both the Alligator Health & Wellness Council and Alligator EB5 Coalition are making a big difference in Alligator. Our Coalition consists of six volunteers. As we work together we see more that needs to be done to help families and their children living in the small rural community. We are proud to share that we received donated monies for books this year. As a result, two families are currently receiving books through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. Our hope in the upcoming year is to ensure all children living in Alligator are able to participate. The Town of Alligator's Motto states: "Passionately Pursuing a Healthier Community" we can only do this when we include our youngest residents. Working toward Excel By 5 Early certification gives us the framework to ensure parents and family members caring for young children connected to resources that may not be realized.



Throughout the year, the **Duncan** Excel By 5 Coalition has been busy with repairs to their Community Center facility. The Coalition put the finishing touches on the building and set up exercise equipment they received as part of their Blue Cross Blue Shield Funding. One of the concerns identified in the Resources Assessment was the lack of Health and Wellness activities in the community. The Coalition, in partnership with the Community Health Council is now able to offer exercise and dance classes to the community. The Coalition felt they could get the word out about Excel By 5 by going door to door targeting parents and caregivers of 0-5 year old children. The Coalition's Outreach included 12 families living in the community. Brooks Elementary School in Duncan opened the door for Pre-K in 2013 and has had yet another successful year. Duncan EB5 coalition members work closely with the Principal, who serves on the coalition. The Excel By 5 certification is very important because it has forced us to have activities in the community for young children.



The **Gunnison** Coalition has been getting the word out about Excel By 5 since January 2013 with hopes to recruit more volunteers. The Coalition has grown over time from four members to six dedicated community residents. During the past year, the Mayor of Gunnison along and the Coalition have been working on improving the built environment in Gunnison. The Mayor's Office received funding and technical support to establish a Health Council, opening the door for more healthy, child friendly activities. We plan to work toward Smoke Free Areas in our town as well as improving access to more fresh fruits and vegetables. Parents are excited about more activities for children being offered in the community. We have created a sense of hope in our community. Going through the Excel By 5 process is important to our community because "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child." We are a small community where everyone knows each other. Excel By 5 gives us an opportunity to work on making our community better.



The Town of **Isola** has over 20 young children between 0-5 years. Our Isola Excel By 5 Coalition has been eagerly finding ways to connect families and children to available resources. The coalition understands the importance for children to get an early start. They also see their role as coalition members will make a positive impact in the lives of child and parents living in the community. As the Mayor of this beautiful community, I hope to see a bigger impact and more community collaboration in 2015.



**Cleveland** Excel By 5 was Recertified in May 2014 and "Excelebrated" this achievement with a Back to School Rally in August 2014. The Coalition handed out over 300 backpacks filled with school supplies. The Cleveland EB5 coalition wraps its arms around its most vulnerable citizens- Children 0-5. We continue our partnerships to assure ready parents, children and schools which equals ready communities!



**Tallahatchie County** had a great 2014! In the past year we have formed our coalition with support from many community members and organizations. We also held our first event, a booth at the Gateway Festival to introduce ourselves to the community. Our coalition is proud of what we have accomplished in 2014, and even more excited about the promise that 2015 holds for our families and young children!

