



May 12, 2010

To: Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee for School Aid and the Department of Education

From: Jack Kresnak, President and CEO

RE: FY 2011 Dropout Prevention and Recovery Spending

On behalf of Michigan's Children and its Board of Directors, I am pleased to continue to share with you our education priorities as you consider the Fiscal Year 2011 budgets for K-12 School Aid and the Department of Education. Michigan's Children is a statewide child advocacy organization that provides a voice for vulnerable children. Michigan's Children is independent; it does not receive any government funding or represent professionals who receive government contracts.

Let me reiterate that we applaud the Governor's recognition that revenue options must be part of the FY2011 budget deliberation. There's no way around it: more cuts continue to erode the foundation of our future economy. As members of this committee well know, without additional state tax revenues and more federal dollars, Michigan will be facing an even deeper round of cuts to programs and services on top of huge cuts made in recent years, including unacceptable cuts to education.

Michigan's Children places a high priority on ensuring that children are raised by parents or caregivers that have the supports they need to be their children's first and best teachers, and are guaranteed the opportunity to participate in high quality early learning programs. We thank you for the opportunity we had before this committee on April 28th to outline our FY2011 recommendations to focus investments in young children. Without investments in young children, the state's attempt to improve schools will not succeed.

Without investments in these same children once they enter the school doors, the state's attempts to improve schools and increase educational achievement, will fail AND without investments in these same young people who struggle to stay engaged with school or have already become disengaged, the state's attempts to expand access to higher education and modernize its economy will not work.

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President and CEO



Michigan's Children also places a high priority on ensuring that children are educated in high quality schools engaging parents and the community in preparing students for post-secondary education, work and life. All community resources must work together to provide services to children and families in the most impactful way. Following significant reductions in the FY 2010 budget in per pupil grants to all local school districts, reductions for Intermediate School Districts, and cuts in programs improving adolescent health, high school completion and college and career access, Michigan's Children urges you to support the following in the fiscal year 2011 budget:

Initiatives to address high dropout rates and low academic achievement.

The flurry of education reform activity at the end of 2009 was focused to improve Michigan's national competitiveness. These and other education reforms must be funded, and they will not be successful if they take place within the context of disinvestment in other programs that support educational success. Michigan's Children is asking lawmakers to commit resources to dropout prevention and recovery, and remove policy barriers that prevent young people from obtaining educational success.

Before-and After School Programs: The Governor and the Senate recognize continued federal funding for 21st Century Community Learning Center after-school programs. After-school programs have been shown to improve school attendance and academic achievement, as well as reduce violence and other risky behaviors by youths. While after-school programs have been available for elementary students whose parents can afford them, once children enter middle school, they are increasingly less likely to be in structured after-school activities. Michigan's Children encourages you to provide incentives and technical assistance to districts to develop innovative after-school programs in middle and high schools that might help adolescents stay in school and graduate, including, for example credit recovery programs and apprenticeships. We also encourage you to put language back into the budget allowing the use of some of the federal funding to be used to support the Michigan After-School Partnership (MASP). Michigan's Children works in partnership with others through MASP helping communities maximize their resources from multiple Departments and sources. As this committee continues to explore efficiencies, we urge you to prioritize support for existing partnerships in those efforts.

Child and Adolescent Health Centers. The Governor and the Senate fail to restore the 25 percent cut to adolescent health centers effective in the current budget year. These centers are critical health service providers to young people and others in the communities where they are located. They integrate a variety of medical, mental health, social and counseling services that would not otherwise be accessed. Michigan's Children urges you to at least hold harmless funding for these critical services and restore funding at FY2009 levels if possible.

Dropout Prevention and Recovery. There is strong research that allows us to predict which students are at-risk of dropping out. Young people who fall behind in credits are much more likely to not complete school, yet there are very limited options for credit recovery for these students. Once young people fall behind in school, or when they face significant personal and educational obstacles, a traditional high school setting is not always successful in reengaging them, yet few alternatives exist. In addition, school discipline policies often contribute to disengagement and lost credits. These barriers to success have always had significant implications for young people, their families and communities. Those implications have only grown with the recent change to compulsory attendance laws.

If we are really serious about serving ALL young people through age 18 or graduation, we need to create incentives for schools to establish effective discipline alternatives, and support truancy prevention and credit recovery initiatives. These can often be supported through local partnerships between school systems and other agencies, maximizing resources. We also need to focus on supporting alternative pathways: better support those that we have, like alternative and community education options, community college and workforce development partnerships; and create other pathways that we need to consistently serve young people throughout the state.

Neither the Governor nor the Senate did enough to recognize system changes needed to support the new compulsory attendance law. The proposed budget retains damaging cuts in the current year's budget that include an end to support for the 21st Century Schools Fund that provided one vehicle for funding multiple pathways to high school graduation, continued retrenchment in Adult Education funding, and cuts to the Youth Challenge Academy. The budget proposals retain flat funding for Middle College Programs, which serve to maximize School Aid, Community College, and other community resources to build an alternative path to graduation for some students.

Leveraging Resources Through Interagency Collaboration. We applaud the continued efforts of the State Board of Education to recognize a cradle to career perspective on education that is built on a partnership of resources from a variety of sectors. Other states have official task forces or councils that are charged with identifying, creating, incentivizing and supporting interagency, public/private partnerships to support an end goal of educational success for all young people. The State Board recently acknowledged the importance of this kind of body in their recommendation of the development of a bi-partisan task force charged with engaging diverse stakeholders and recommending comprehensive education-system reforms.

We support the small steps taken by the Governor in her budget proposal and the further definition from the State Board in its recent education reform recommendations. However, we ask the Legislature to follow most states in the nation in supporting the creation of a comprehensive P-20 Council that could serve as a more permanent home for this challenging work. We agree with the State Board that the State Superintendent should be charged with facilitating this group, and Michigan is fortunate to be able to build on existing interagency efforts for early childhood in the

Early Childhood Investment Corporation and Great Start system; and for youth services in our Michigan After-School Partnership and Shared Youth Vision Partnership. We recommend inserting language in the Department of Education budget better defining the make-up and scope of work of this Council, and would be glad to work with Committee members to do that.

Current actions that have diminished services for children, youth and families through cuts in the state budget are counter-productive to meaningful education reform. Consistent funding for schools and support programs will likely need to be expanded in order to see real improvement in school success for those most challenged schools, communities and young people.

As you well know, we are now in our tenth consecutive year of budget deficits and continue to at best hold flat funding for programs and services that people need now more than ever. We must be prepared to make investments needed in our children as the foundation of our future economy. To compete for the jobs of tomorrow, Michigan must invest in children today.

Thank you for this opportunity. I am available to address questions throughout the budget process. Please feel free to contact me at 517/485-3500 or by email at jack@michiganschildren.org