



May 11, 2010

To: Michigan State Board of Education
From: Jack Kresnak, President and CEO
RE: **Recommendations to Better Support Michigan's Education System**

The case for investments in education is right on:
Education is THE most reliable path to the state's economic prosperity.
Education is the proven way to provide equal economic opportunity.

As U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said "We have to educate our way to a better economy."

But to the severe detriment of Michigan children, businesses and all citizens, our current state budget priorities and fiscal crisis are weakening Michigan's commitment to education and threatening long-term economic progress.

A 21st century commitment to education needs to start at birth and extend through adulthood. Research supports it, and Michigan's economy demands it. Unfortunately, we agree with the State Board's assessment that our current policy priorities and revenue structure cannot assure it. Clearly, a new and bold direction is needed to build the educated and skilled workforce that can lead Michigan back down the path of prosperity, and this work is a good step.

We are particularly encouraged that the State Board included in the basic elements of an effective Michigan education system universal access to quality early childhood programming for all four year olds. The evidence is overwhelming that early childhood investments are the necessary springboard for educational achievement. And leading economists agree that early investments yield the highest returns. Michigan saved \$1.1 billion in 2009 alone due to investments made in the state's school readiness efforts over the past 25 years. Failure to invest early affects children's health, development and ability to learn and succeed, resulting in fiscal and social costs borne by individuals, families and communities.

Decades of research have proven that as much as 90 percent of a child's intellectual and emotional brain wiring is set for life by age 5 – before the majority of children ever enter a classroom. This shows that even the most aggressive education reform efforts will fail if we don't start when the brain is forming the fastest and laying the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

We believe that preschool is critical, but alone, it also will fail to produce the outcomes we need. We hope that the State Board will consider the importance of early childhood investment that begins at birth in four critical areas:

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Jack Kresnak
President and CEO



1. Public health services that result in healthy mothers and babies - We know that educational outcomes are connected to health, for to learn and succeed children must be born healthy and have continued access to preventive health care.
2. Home visiting and family support programs - Children must be raised by parents and other caregivers who have the supports they need to be their children's first and best teachers.
3. High quality child care - High quality care can help children develop the social and cognitive skills needed to make the transition to school.
4. High quality preschool programs - As the State Board has indicated, ensuring access to high quality preschool will result in more children prepared and ready to learn for a lifetime.

We must continue to invest in and support these children when they enter school. Schools must develop relationships with community resources that strengthen curriculum and instruction, increase parent involvement and meet children's ever-changing developmental needs. While reforming the education system itself is critical, and the State Board has defined a path for that reform, alone it is not enough. Families, students, schools and communities often face layers of challenge and will need a coordinated approach that leverages the resources within all sectors of the community.

We urge the State Board to recognize the need for a birth to adulthood system, utilizing a cradle to career perspective that is built on a partnership of resources from a variety of sectors. The only way to operationalize such a system would be to establish a partnership to develop and maintain it. 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 acknowledges 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 this small step, but would ask the State Board to take it further and follow most states in the nation in recommending the creation of a P-20 Council that could serve as a more permanent home for this challenging work. It makes sense that the State Superintendent would be charged with facilitating this group, and Michigan is fortunate 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.

Right now, budget discussions are taking place following years of significant reductions in school funding, as well as cuts to programs improving school readiness, child and adolescent health, high school completion, and college and career access.

Despite this, Michigan is poised to make great strides in improving the educational success of all children. The unprecedented attention and engagement of the private sector, supporting research, innovation in Michigan and around the nation, and renewed public sector attention provide an opportunity. Michigan's comprehensive system helping communities around the state support parents with young children, getting more kids ready for school and getting more schools ready for kids provides an opportunity. We must make a commitment to invest in our children and take advantage of these opportunities before we lose them to more disinvestment.

Thank you.