

May 11, 2010

To: Michigan State Board of Education

RE: Principles to Guide Michigan's Education System Restructuring

The undersigned organizations are pleased to affirm the inclusion of early education in the State Board of Education's *Principles to Guide Michigan's Education System Restructuring*. We appreciate the recognition in the report that investments in preschool programs are a critical component of effective educational reform. The evidence is strong: preschool programs, including Michigan's Great Start Readiness program, improve school readiness and educational achievement, and set the stage for lifelong learning and economic success. We believe, however, that the most aggressive educational reform efforts will fail if investments don't begin in the earliest years of life—the first three years, when as much as 90 percent of the brain's architecture is developed. While preschool programs for four-year-olds are a critical link in the birth to work pipeline, alone they will not produce the outcomes Michigan needs to develop a world class educational system and revitalize its economy.

In a September 2009 report entitled *Lead Forward*, the Michigan Association of School Administrators called for a “public education system that provides all children with coherent, seamless, and relevant educational experiences from birth through adulthood.” The report also addressed the reality that the “system must interface with other public health and family services to ensure that all children receive proper prenatal, infant and toddler care”. *Lead Forward* calls for a “child investment strategy” that ensures that every student enters school healthy and ready to learn, recognizing that Michigan schools “cannot go it alone”.

We believe that to be successful, educational reforms must include investments in high quality, evidence-based services for very young children and families, and engage parents and communities. In addition, reforms should move Michigan toward a vision of a comprehensive system of early childhood services that is *linked to Michigan's public K-12 education system*, and begin with a focus on the most vulnerable children for whom research has shown the greatest return on tax payer dollars. Michigan is fortunate to have a base upon which to build, including the interagency work of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, and the coordination and streamlining of early learning services through local Great Start Collaboratives around the state.

Specifically, we urge the State Board of Education to include in its reform and restructuring principles language addressing the importance of early childhood investments beginning at birth in four critical areas:

- *Public health services* that result in healthy mothers and babies, including access to preventive and other health and mental health services for young children.
- *Home visiting and family support programs* that strengthen families and help parents and other caregivers be their children's first and best teachers.
- *High quality child care* that can help parents support their children, and provide children with the social and cognitive skills needed to make the transition to school.
- *High quality preschool programs* that will result in more children who are prepared and ready to learn for a lifetime.

Again, we appreciate the focus on early childhood in the State Board's principles for educational reform, and stand ready to work with you to build a public education system that places Michigan back on the path to prosperity.

Association for Children's Mental Health
Child and Family Resource Council, Kent County
Coalition for Adoption Rights Equality
Early Childhood Investment Corporation
First Steps, Kent County
Greater Kalamazoo United Way
Great Start Collaborative – Oakland
Ingham Birth to Five Great Start Collaborative
Leelanau Children's Center
LDA Association of Michigan
Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation
Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children
Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health
Michigan Association of United Ways
Michigan Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics
Michigan's Children
Michigan Coalition for Children and Families
Michigan 4C Association
Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health
Michigan League for Human Services
Michigan Protection and Advocacy Services, Inc
Monroe County Great Start Collaborative
National Association of Social Workers – Michigan Chapter
Quality Child Care Initiative of Saginaw County
Saginaw County Youth Protection Council, Teen Parent Services Division