



June 4, 2009

To: Members of the House Education Committee
From: Jack Kresnak, President & CEO, Michigan's Children
RE: House Bills 4787-4789

On behalf of Michigan's Children and its Board of Directors, I am pleased to be able to share with you our priorities as you consider legislation intended to improve the educational system in Michigan, including House Bills 4787-4789. 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. We assess public policy based on a set of core beliefs:

- *Equal opportunity:* We believe all children need equal opportunities to thrive.
- *Prevention:* We believe that Michigan can and must prevent problems facing children and families, rather than intervene after children are harmed and families destroyed.
- *Civic engagement:* We believe everyone has a stake in ensuring the success of our future generations and we work to engage a range of stakeholders, including community leaders, parents and youths.
- *Collaboration:* We believe that neighborhood and community partnerships that include both the public and private sectors are critical.

The status of Michigan's education system is at the forefront of discussion this year and rightly so. As communities and as a state, there is broad recognition from a variety of sectors that we have to get EVERY child ready for post-secondary education and training, work, and life. This will only be possible if Michigan invests in multiple pathways for young people to graduate from high school – some in the traditional four years, some taking a longer time to progress through the curriculum, and some returning to complete their degrees after leaving school. We believe that in some ways we are in the best place we've ever been in this state to move the needle on this issue. We have better data systems in place, we know more about the causes of educational failure and high school dropout, and we better understand what keeps kids in school until graduation and brings them back after they have left. Further, the private sector is engaged, supporting research and innovation in Michigan and around the nation, and there is renewed public sector attention.

On the negative side, we are fully aware of the financial pressures facing the State and school districts, and believe that we will never be able to create the educational system we need to ensure Michigan's success if we do not address the structural budget deficit that is crippling our schools and our economy. To that end, we urge you to explore all revenue options, including a closer look at tax expenditures or "loopholes".

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Michigan's Children thanks this committee for working toward change, and we are honored to be a part of the conversation. We are particularly interested in policies that capitalize on partnerships between schools and other community and workforce resources, and those that are proven most effective in ensuring a successful transition to adulthood for the young people who are most at risk of failure.

Michigan's Children is in favor of supporting struggling students, educators and communities, and has provided leadership in the conversations around high school dropout prevention and recovery. Several things that we really like about the current Committee approach:

1. We applaud the statewide focus. While there are some issues specific to the outcomes of students in the Detroit Public Schools, students around the state need our attention and support.
2. We support public policy and program changes based on data, and are glad that this strategy will rely heavily on information gathering and analysis.

We would like to see the following as this legislation moves through the process:

1. A mandate or incentive for “failing” schools to utilize and expand community, higher education and workforce partners in their efforts toward reform. This could be in a mandate for these partners to be represented on school reform review boards, and there could be stronger language in the legislation about utilization of partners outside the school setting in actual reform efforts. Bringing in partners and resources is not just a good thing to do, we are convinced that it is the way it will work. Schools need strong out-of-school time partners, strong workforce development partners, and many others. Luckily, we have many examples of the impact of these types of partnerships all around the state. Michigan's children, as well as other partners like Communities in Schools, the Michigan After-School Partnership, the Michigan Association for Community and Adult Education, and many others would be glad to help guide the committee toward innovative partnership practices around the state.
2. Resources necessary to implement any reform strategy. This includes resources to the Department of Education and other Departments to provide the necessary technical and other assistance, and resources to the local school districts and buildings themselves to implement reform changes.
3. This initiative is a small part of what needs to be a much larger and comprehensive discussion about improving educational and life outcomes for young people. We are supportive of this small step, but also recognize that educational success is an outgrowth of successes and failures within many systems that have been built over the course of young people's lives. For students to successfully navigate school and life, they must be born healthy and remain healthy; they must feel safe and secure; they must feel supported and cared for; they must be challenged and inspired to achieve; and they must be engaged and connected in their learning, in their communities, to their future, to extracurricular activities, and at home. To change educational outcomes for young people, public policy must recognize the impact of all of those areas. We are thrilled to be able to work in partnership with the education community and others to promote

comprehensive policy improvement, and would offer our help with convening a broad group of stakeholders in some way to further this work.

The Committee has already discussed utilizing this legislative package as part of a strategy to compete for new federal funds targeted toward innovation. We agree with this approach, and are pleased that the Legislature is thinking strategically about how to link a variety of efforts and funding. We believe that a well planned effort in Michigan to maximize as many ARRA resources as possible to improve educational outcomes for young people would position us well in relation to other state efforts. This should include a comprehensive assessment of available ARRA resources specifically for education, as well as funds for workforce development and other related purposes. There are national partners available to assist us with this work in Michigan, including Andrew Moore, from the National League of Cities, who will be testifying next week before this Committee.

As you move forward with this work throughout this Legislative session, we hope that you will also capitalize on the many efforts being made to improve graduation rates through the Administration, and the philanthropic, business and nonprofit communities. For example, with the support of the Mott Foundation, Michigan's Children is currently engaged with four Michigan communities as they struggle to address dropout prevention and recovery. We are including in the network more than a dozen other communities that were engaged in the statewide Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit in October of 2008, and who are now working in collaborations that include educators, workforce development, youth serving organizations, business, local philanthropy and others to improve graduation rates.

The Shared Youth Vision Partnership, a public/private partnership housed in the Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth and supported by Michigan's Children and many others, provides a strong foundation for prioritization, investment and policy change in this area. The Partnership can be a resource for you as you develop strategic responses.

Thank you for this opportunity. I am available to address questions, and to connect the Committee to other federal or local resources of interest. Please feel free to contact me at 517/485-3500 or by email at kresnak.jack@michiganschildren.org.