



March 4, 2009

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

From: Jack Kresnak, President & CEO, Michigan's Children

RE: FY 2010 K-12/School Aid Budget

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 the Fiscal Year 2010 budget for K-12 School Aid. 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.

Michigan's Children's work is based on a set of core beliefs, including:

- *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 damaged 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.

Unfortunately, we again find ourselves in the position of trying to protect basic services for our most vulnerable citizens in the face of devastating economic problems at the state and federal levels. We respect the tough choices that you need to make, and ask you to remember that the state budget is the vehicle through which you will express what we value as a state. We trust that you will make decisions that reflect first and foremost the needs of the most vulnerable children who will ultimately determine the state's future.

Michigan's Children urges you to support the following in the fiscal year 2010 budget:

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### **Early childhood programs.**

- *Interagency early childhood grants:* We urge you to protect funding for interagency early childhood grants (0 to 3 Secondary Prevention). The Governor eliminated all funding in the K-12 School Aid budget for interagency early childhood grants (\$2.123 million). These funds are combined with funding in the budgets of the Departments of Human Services and Community Health and are used by communities for services to support families, improve parenting, and prevent the abuse and neglect of young children ages 0 to 3. The programs have been evaluated, and the benefits are clear. In 2007, the total cost per family for early childhood grants was \$10 per day as compared to \$57 per child per day for the direct costs associated with child abuse and neglect. The Children's Trust Fund has estimated that in 2008, the program saved Michigan taxpayers an estimated \$49.6 million, a return on investment of 516 percent. More importantly, the programs have kept children safe. In 2008, virtually of the children (99.9%) whose families received services were not referred to the Department of Human Services for suspected child abuse and neglect (as of September 30, 2008).
- *Great Parents/Great Start program:* We also urge you to maintain funding (\$5 million) for Great Parent/Great Start early childhood programs. These funds, which flow through local ISDs, are used by communities to leverage other local dollars to provide services to encourage early literacy, improve school readiness, strengthen families, improve parenting and reduce the need for special education services. Many communities are funding local early childhood services through the creative coordination of public and private funds, including interagency early childhood grants (0-3 Secondary Prevention), Great Parents/Great Start dollars, philanthropic contributions and general donations. Although I am sure you will be hearing from many of those communities today, as one example, Saginaw County has been able to use its \$127,000 Great Parents/Great Start allocation to leverage \$1.1 million in funding for services for vulnerable families and children.

**Initiatives to address high dropout rates and low academic achievement in Michigan high schools.** One of Michigan's Children's top priorities is to ensure that all Michigan children are ready for post-secondary education, work and life. One critical step toward readiness is to make sure that more young people are receiving high quality educations leading to high school diplomas--the ticket to higher education and success in the 21st Century's knowledge and innovation economy.

Michigan's Children thanks the Administration and the Legislature for continuing to tackle the pressing dropout issue. The Governor's continued support for the 21st Century Schools Fund provides one vehicle for funding multiple pathways to high school graduation and that funding needs to be maintained. That, however, is not enough. To prevent young people from dropping out of school, Michigan will need to increase incentives for school districts to provide multiple pathways to high school graduation, including alternative education, truancy prevention, credit

recovery initiatives and innovative partnerships with community colleges and other local agencies.

As we listen to young people around the state, and look at research from other states, it certainly becomes apparent that the education system needs to become more personal. Young people who have dropped out often remark that they believed no one cared whether they were there or not, whether they did well or not. Resources to help districts develop small schools can create a different learning environment that promotes more personal relationships, and is certainly one piece of the puzzle. But there are others.

There is now 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.

We hope that you will work to capitalize on the many efforts being made to improve graduation rates through the Administration, the Legislature, 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 helping to network more than a dozen other communities who were engaged at the Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit in October 2008, who are 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. This Partnership can be a resource as you determine investments in preparing Michigan young people for productive adulthood, and think about strategic ways to utilize existing resources.

**Before- and after-school programs.** The Governor's budget recognizes continued federal funding for 21st Century Community Learning Center after-school programs, with up to \$50,000 for the Michigan After-School Partnership, an initiative that we strongly support. 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 high schools that might help adolescents stay in school and graduate, including, for example credit recovery programs and apprenticeships.

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 [kresnak.jack@michiganschildren.org](mailto:kresnak.jack@michiganschildren.org).

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