



## Why Does Michigan Need a Sandbox Party?

### BECAUSE:

- **Children who start kindergarten behind tend to stay behind**  
And an incredible number of Michigan children do, in fact, start their school careers at a disadvantage. According to a survey of Michigan kindergarten teachers, fully two-thirds of their incoming students can't keep up owing to physical, emotional and educational shortcomings. Unprepared students, teachers said, take time away from other students, slowing everyone down. (Source: Kindergarten Survey, Lake Research, 2009)
- **Education is just one part of raising a school-ready child**  
Between birth and 5, children must be born healthy, be mentally and emotionally secure and have access to quality child care and prekindergarten programs. And their parents need supports to become good moms and dads.
- **Achieving all of that requires a unified, holistic approach that makes a seamless early childhood system out of individual programs**  
And while progress has been made, there are still 84 different funding streams for early childhood offerings in Michigan.

### And Yet:

- **One of every ten Michigan babies was born to a teenager as recently as 2006**

Why does that matter? Babies born to a teenager are at higher risk of living in poverty or with only one parent than those born to a mother over age 20.

- **45 percent of all births in Michigan are to single women who have incomes below the poverty line**

These mothers are working to make ends meet but simply don't have the resources of a two-parent or more affluent household.

- **Two of every three children in publicly-subsidized child care in Michigan are in unregulated child care settings**

That's a rate much higher than other states. In those settings, little is known about safety or quality.

- **One in five Michigan children live in a family with income below the poverty line**

Some Michigan counties find as many as one of three children living in poverty, according to Kids Count. That's troubling given what we know about the impact of poverty in the early years when children are most vulnerable. Poverty rates for Native American, Hispanic, and African American children are double and triple those of non-minority children.

- **Nearly 30,000 children were confirmed as victims of abuse or neglect in 2008**

That's an alarming increase of 16 percent since 2000. Roughly 8 percent of all children in Michigan live in homes investigated for abuse or neglect last year.

- **Thirty three percent of Michigan's children (0-18) are enrolled in Medicaid**

A key factor in childhood health - which affects school readiness - is public or private health insurance. As private health insurance has eroded, the state's Medicaid program has increased coverage. Many low-

wage workers do not receive health benefits for themselves, much less their family.

- **One of every two Hispanic children is born to a mother with less than 12 years of education, and almost one of every three African-American children**

To improve outcomes for poverty we must address ways to improve academic success for minorities in our schools.

**Our response as a state to all of that has been:**

- **Michigan was the sixth worst state in the nation for early childhood cuts in FY 2010, lowering funding by more than 20 percent**

That's according to a study by the National Conference of State Legislatures. That same study said Michigan was one of just 18 states lowering funding. Twenty states, despite the economy, increased early childhood spending.

**And yet:**

- **Eighty-three percent of Michigan voters in a poll last year said early childhood development and education are an "absolute necessity" for their community**

75 percent wanted those programs spared from state budget cuts. (Source: Voter Survey, Lake Research, 2009)

- **Michigan saves roughly \$1.15 billion *per year* because of past investments in prekindergarten**

The savings come from fewer children repeating grades and needing expensive special education services, and from fewer teens and young adults ending up in the criminal justice and welfare systems. (Source: Wilder Research, 2009)

**So, again, why does Michigan need a Sandbox Party?**

**Because:**

- **Michigan needs a unifying force, a rallying point for people who care about our children and our collective economic well-being**

Also, a rallying point for people who understand that the “same old, same old” approach to Michigan’s economic woes won’t work. Michigan needs fresh, bold thinking, beginning with the simple truth that starting at the beginning – in this case, with our youngest learners – is the surest way forward.

