



AN ISSUES PRIMER FOR MICHIGAN'S 2011 LEADERS

FROM CRADLE TO CAREER: EARLY CHILDHOOD	GROWING MICHIGAN'S WORK FORCE FROM THE START	ECONOMIC IMPACT: ASTRONOMICAL
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WHERE MICHIGAN STANDS

Early deprivation affects the ability to learn, hampering school readiness and chances for success. Scientists have proven that by the time children reach school age, between 80 and 90 percent of the intellectual and emotional wiring of their brains has been set for life. Despite the evidence that children's earliest experiences affect the very architecture of their brains, too many young children are facing the type of deprivation that has been shown to thwart their growth and potential.

- More than one of every five children in Michigan under age six live in poverty, with much higher rates for Native American (47%), African American (44%), and Hispanic (38%) and Latino youngsters.
- Nearly 1,000 Michigan infants die in the first year of life, with Michigan ranking 33rd in the U.S., largely because African American children are three times more likely to die before age 1.
- The state's youngest children are more likely to be the victims of child abuse and neglect, with the number of child victims up 16 percent between 2000 and 2008.

Too few services are available to help parents become their children's first and best teachers, and to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Michigan has devoted few resources to supporting parents, and deep cuts have been made in prevention and family support programs during the state's recent fiscal crises. New federal funds are expected for home visitation programs as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act signed into law by the President on March 23rd, and state planning is underway, led by the Department of Community Health and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation.

Too many children enter school unprepared because of their lack of access to high quality early learning and preschool programs.

An estimated 40,000 at-risk four-year-olds currently eligible for the Michigan's Great Start School Readiness program are not served because current funding levels allow for less than half of all eligible children to enroll. A recent survey of Michigan kindergarten

Key Stats

1 of every 5 - Michigan children under age 6 live in poverty

16% - Increase in child abuse victims from 2000-2008 in Michigan

35% - Of Michigan kindergarteners are not ready to learn

\$1.1 Billion - Saved in Michigan last year due to school readiness efforts since 1984

83% - Of Michigan voters think early ed programs are absolutely necessary

teachers found that only 65 percent of children entering their classrooms are ready to learn, and the lack of opportunity to attend a preschool program is a primary reason that kindergartners are already trailing behind their peers. Further, 9 out of every 10 kindergarten teachers report that the time needed to work with children who are behind when entering school affects their ability to teach the rest of the students in their classes.

In addition approximately 36,000 young Michigan children are in child care settings subsidized by the state so their parents can work or participate in training and education programs. With subsidy payments averaging at less than 30 percent of the current market rate, two of every three children in publicly-subsidized child care in Michigan are in unregulated care, where little is known about safety or quality—a rate much higher than other states.

CAUSES & CHALLENGES

Despite strong science about the impact of the early years, state investments in early education and care services have eroded. While there were some increases in funding for Michigan's Great Start School Readiness program and local Great Start Collaboratives in 2007 and 2008, overall funding for early childhood programs is down over the last decade, with cuts in family preservation and support services, home visiting, child care, and preschool programs.

The state's current investments in young children are through a patchwork of services that result in too many children falling through the cracks. To ensure that children are healthy and ready to learn, Michigan must adopt reforms that help the state move from an array of disconnected programs to a more accountable system that engages parents and communities, and that links to Michigan's K-12 education system.

A stronger focus on the quality of services for young children is critical. The evidence is clear that Michigan will reap the benefits of early childhood investments only if children receive high quality services. In a time of budget retraction, too little has been done to invest in high quality services, and cuts in programs and reimbursements for providers have further jeopardized quality.

BUDGET IMPACT

Early childhood programs have been cut, and continue to be at-risk. In the current fiscal year, state lawmakers closed a \$2.8 billion deficit in part by reducing child care subsidies for low-income working parents, cutting preschool programs for more than 2,200 low-income four-year-olds, and further reducing funding for proven family support programs such as the Nurse Family Partnership and the 0 to 3 Secondary Prevention programs. As the Michigan Legislature faces additional deep shortfalls in the fiscal year 2011 budget, early childhood education and care programs continue to be at-risk.

The failure to invest in early education and care programs has a negative impact on the overall state budget. Research shows that every \$1 invested in high quality early care and education services for low-income children reaps a return to society of more than \$17—a return on investment that has convinced leading economists of the importance of starting early. A recent Michigan study shows that Michigan saved \$1.1 billion in 2009 alone due to investments made in the state's school readiness efforts over the past 25 years, with savings accruing from reduced costs related to K-12 education, child abuse and neglect, crime, public assistance, and substance abuse.

VOTER VOICE

Voters value early childhood services and are willing to pay for it. A 2009 poll of Michigan voters showed that most (83%) believe that early childhood development and education programs are an absolute necessity for their communities. Further, the majority favor making the funding investments needed to ensure that all children arrive at school ready to learn—even if it increases their taxes. Finally, a majority of voters would cast their vote based on a candidate’s position on early childhood investments.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Help all children prepare for school and life by protecting funding for children’s programs and services as the Governor and state lawmakers work to balance the state budget and resolve Michigan’s fiscal and economic problems.
- Improve coordination and impact of services and programs by reforming state early childhood systems, starting with better integration of early learning and K-12 education programs.
- Make as a top state priority investments in what all young children need to thrive, including:
 - Expanded access to high quality child care and early learning programs for at-risk children.
 - Increased access for parents and caregivers to the supports needed to be children’s first and best teachers, including home visitation services for at-risk children and families.
 - Improved access to preventive and primary health and mental health services for young children.