



March 8, 2011

To: Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee for School Aid

From: Jack Kresnak, President and CEO

RE: FY 2012 Education Spending

On behalf of Michigan's Children and its Board of Directors, I am pleased to share with you our education priorities as you consider the Fiscal Year 2012 School Aid budget. 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.

The science is irrefutable. Learning begins at birth, and efforts to create educational excellence will fail if we don't endorse and support a comprehensive cradle-to-career approach to education in Michigan. We were pleased to hear Governor Snyder's mention of the need for a "P-20" system in Michigan, one that begins with adequate prenatal care and continues through preschool and beyond. We believe that the P-20 system must begin early while a child's brain is developing most rapidly, include multiple pathways to educational achievement and high school completion, and result in college readiness or career success.

This is no small job. In addition to investments in young children, schools must be prepared and have the resources needed to work with children with a very wide range of problems and needs, including poverty, health and mental health issues, learning challenges and family problems. For all children to succeed, we must invest our education dollars wisely by beginning early, leveraging more resources through stronger school/community linkages, and developing multiple pathways to graduation for children who struggle to stay engaged with school or have already become disengaged. The state's attempts to expand access to higher education and modernize its economy will not work if we don't follow this path.

As you are all well aware, the Governor's proposed budget follows a decade of disinvestment in programs for children and families throughout the public sector, mitigated only slightly by the recent influx of federal economic stimulus

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dollars for health care and education, now depleted. This disinvestment included reductions in the last few years in early learning opportunities, per pupil grants to all local school districts, reductions for Intermediate School Districts, and cuts in programs that improve adolescent health, high school completion and college and career access.

Michigan's Children is well aware of the decade of budget deficits that threatened basic services and the quality of life in this state. As you move forward, we urge you to consider all alternatives to Michigan's structural deficit including revenue reforms. We particularly endorse a thorough review of Michigan's tax expenditure budget. While we believe that many tax expenditures, like the Earned Income Tax Credit, serve a worthy social goal, tax expenditures, which now exceed revenues collected, should be regularly reviewed like appropriations to ensure that they are giving us the outcomes we collectively desire.

Michigan's Children urges you to support the following in the fiscal year 2012 budget:

Per-pupil foundation funding for schools.

The Governor's recommendation of a total \$470 per pupil reduction in the foundation grant for districts on top of other reductions results in a clear shift of public support. You have and will hear from many school systems who will outline the impact of that level of cut on their class sizes and services. Per-pupil reductions of this magnitude force school systems to make reductions in optional programming including the support that they provide for critical early childhood programming as well as innovative partnerships and initiatives targeted toward young people most at-risk of school failure, like alternative education programming. This will prove particularly difficult when coupled with reductions in categorical programs that could also be used to target interventions toward the most innovative and proven effective practices.

Programs supporting young children.

Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP): The Governor maintained current funding for preschool programs. This includes \$88.1 million for district programs, and \$7.6 million for competitive programs. However, access to the preschool experiences that research shows lead to school readiness, and ultimately educational achievement, remains inadequate to meet the need. This funding must be protected, and a longer term strategy for increased investment needs to be developed. As part of that longer term strategy, we need to ensure: (1) that all eligible, "at risk," 4-year-olds are able to participate if their parents choose; (2) that children at the highest risk ultimately have access to two years of the GSRP and are able to enroll as three-year-olds; and (3) that a mechanism be put in place to carve out any new funding for voluntary programs for at-risk parents of young children ages 0 to 3—the period when much of the "architecture" of the brain is set for life.

Great Parents/Great Start program: The Governor maintained funding (\$5 million) for Great Parent/Great Start early childhood programs. These funds, which flow through local Intermediate School Districts (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. We urge you to also hold the line on these critical funds.

Great Start Collaboratives: The Governor maintains critical funding through the Early Childhood Investment Corporation for local Great Start Collaboratives. This investment of \$6 million dollars enables 55 local collaboratives and parent coalitions to increase the efficiency of local services and successfully leverage local and private resources to improve services to young children. These funds, which leverage several times their worth in additional private and local investment, must be maintained.

Initiatives to address high dropout rates and low academic achievement.

The flurry of education reform activity at the end of 2009 was focused to improve Michigan's national competitiveness. These and other education reforms must be funded, and they will not be successful if they take place within the context of disinvestment in other programs that support educational success. Michigan's Children is asking lawmakers to commit resources to dropout prevention and recovery, and remove policy barriers that prevent young people from obtaining educational success.

Before-and After School Programs: Michigan has eliminated all funding for extended learning opportunities, support that could assist community efforts to leverage federal and private dollars to build those partnerships. 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 middle and high schools that can help adolescents stay in school and graduate, including credit recovery programs and apprenticeships. We also encourage you to put language back into the budget allowing the use of federal funding to support the Michigan After-School Partnership (MASP). Michigan's Children works in partnership with others through MASP helping communities maximize their resources from multiple Departments and sources. As this committee continues to explore efficiencies, we urge you to prioritize support for existing partnerships in those efforts.

Child and Adolescent Health Centers. The Governor maintained current funding levels for adolescent health centers, which have seen reductions in state support of 25 percent since 2009. These centers are critical health service providers to young people and others in the communities where they are located. They integrate a variety of medical, mental health, social and counseling

services that would not otherwise be accessed. Michigan's Children urges you to at least hold harmless funding for these critical services and restore funding at FY2009 levels if possible.

Dropout Prevention and Recovery. There is 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 re-engaging them, yet few alternatives exist. In addition, school discipline policies often contribute to disengagement and lost credits. These barriers to success have always had significant implications for young people, their families and communities. Those implications have only grown with the recent change to compulsory attendance laws.

If we are really serious about serving ALL young people through age 18 or graduation, we need to create incentives for schools to establish effective discipline alternatives, and support truancy prevention and credit recovery initiatives. These can often be supported through local partnerships between school systems and other agencies, maximizing resources. We also need to focus on supporting alternative pathways: better support those that we have, like alternative and community education options, community college and workforce development partnerships; and create other pathways that we need to consistently serve young people throughout the state.

The Governor's budget eliminates funding for Middle College Programs, which serve to maximize School Aid, Community College, and other community resources to build an alternative path to graduation for some students. We urge you to retain the current \$2 million for that program.

Youth Employment as a Path. We applaud the move of youth employment programs into the Department of Education. Research suggests that the best way to re-engage young people who have left high school, and the best way to keep many young people who might otherwise drop out in school, is through connections to career education and actual employment. We urge you to take advantage of this move and ensure that youth employment programming in Michigan is considered to be not only a paycheck for young people, but also a path back or directly into diploma, post-secondary and career. We are glad to work with members of the committee on this, and connect you with other state and national resources that could be of help.

Leveraging Resources Through Interagency Collaboration. We applaud the Governor's recognition of the need for a cradle-to-career perspective on education that is built on a partnership of resources from a variety of sectors. Other states have official task forces or councils that are charged with identifying, creating, incentivizing and supporting interagency, public/private partnerships to support the goal of educational success for all young people. The State Board recently acknowledged the importance of this kind of body in its recommendation of the development of a bi-partisan task force charged with engaging diverse stakeholders and recommending comprehensive education-system reforms.

Now we ask the Legislature to follow most states in the nation in supporting the creation of a comprehensive P-20 Council that could serve as a more permanent home for this challenging work. In 2010, outgoing Governor Granholm renamed the Center for Educational Performance and Information advisory council the “P-20 Longitudinal Data System Advisory Council,” and we understand that it is Governor Snyder’s intention to continue supporting that Council. However, its sole function as currently implemented is data collection and its existence is not mandated by law. Michigan needs a bi-partisan, interagency P-20 council with a more broadly defined role to maximize and leverage resources from multiple departments and build public-private partnerships to support educational success. Michigan is fortunate to be able to build on existing interagency efforts for early childhood in the Early Childhood Investment Corporation and Great Start system based within the Intermediate School Districts; for connections between the community and schools in the Michigan After-School Partnership co-chaired by four state departments; and for coordination of services for youth transitioning to post-secondary and career in the Shared Youth Vision Partnership housed within the Department of Labor, Energy and Economic Growth. We recommend inserting language in the budget better defining the make-up and scope of the work of this Council, and would be glad to work with Committee members to do that.

A high quality system of education is essential to improving Michigan’s economy

Current actions that have diminished services for children, youth and families through cuts in the state budget are counter-productive to meaningful education reform. Consistent funding for schools and support programs will likely need to be expanded in order to see real improvement in school success for those most challenged schools, communities and young people.

As you well know, we are now in our tenth consecutive year of budget deficits and continue to at best hold flat funding for programs and services that people need now more than ever. We must be prepared to make investments needed in our children as the foundation of our future economy. To compete for the jobs of tomorrow, Michigan must invest in children today.

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 jack@michiganschildren.org