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"The growth in the quality of the workforce, which was a mainstay of economic growth until recently, has diminished. This trend must change or America's economy will be undermined."

-James Heckman, University of Chicago

Great Start is Michigan's nationally recognized state-wide initiative to foster school readiness and life success for young children.



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Live blogging from Parenting Leadership Institute - Judy Samelson, ECIC CEO; Jack Kresnak, Michigan's Children

Judy Samelson, chief executive officer, Early Childhood Investment Corporation, and Jack Kresnak, president and CEO of Michigan's Children.

Title: Our ECIC Roadmap for Election Activities

2:15 Thursday

This governor has now defined herself as the one who helped transfer Michigan economy. We need to keep that foremost in our conversations.

What's going to resonate is economics.

I was amazed last night she didn't make the link between early childhood and jobs.

Personally, I'm glad Michigan is diversifying its economy but if a third of our kids are arriving unready, I wonder where the workforce is going to come from.

We spend millions to remediate workers in business. Businessmen get it. It's too bad the governor didn't at speech.

We have built a communication outreach strategy built on three goals:

1) Make sure EC is embedded in election. That legislators are steeped in this. We're making sure they are.

Event: July 14 we're going to have an early childhood convention at Breslin Center. Spread the word, keep date in mind, plan to help us put early childhood on map. Want platform to come from this. Create buzz around issues.

If we can have 2000 people, people will know we're serious.

Event: May, Star Power.

Event: Road show of budget forums. In five communities around state. For people to talk about early childhood and other issues surrounding EC.

2) Hold the line on the budget and no more ground is lost. Many think Pre-K will be in crosshairs again. The good news is we got governor's office to pull pre-k from the discretionary part of the budget, not discretionary for school districts to use.

They'll also go after childcare.

3) We have to make this something that's good to something that is a priority. We have to climb that mountain this year.

We have a lot of work to do. We're throwing everything we have at this. The louder we are, the harder it is to not hear us. Your role is paramount in this.

Don't kid yourselves that we're not in a war for the hearts and minds of legislators.

White Paper

Before there was an ECIC or Great Start, a lot of people working on how to make this an issue for Michigan. White paper was created to address that, to get legislators' attention.

In the face of a new election, we have a new White Paper.

Michigan's Children authored.

Introduces Jack Kresnak, president and CEO of Michigan's Children. Former Free Press reporter.

Kresnak: "What we need is an American revolution to make children a priority."

Likens self to Paul Revere: "The tax cutters are coming, the tax cutters are coming!"

You can ameliorate so many problems by focusing on (that early brain development period.)

 

Tip: Use stories in your advocacy. Knowing the stories turned me from reporter into someone who is passionate advocate for children.

His turning point to advocacy: Father under arrest, abuse of children. Remembers line in social work report: Girls were so hungry they ate a rat. He didn't believe that. After talking to girls, he learned it was true.

Story angered him. "That was the point I became an advocate."

In looking at court records of kids, there was always a toxic environment, lack of nutrition, bad parenting. Kids got to school, did poorly, eventually kicked out of school.

We have 20,000 kids who drop out each year. Each one costs us \$3,500 per instead of adding \$4,000 to state in taxes. There are economic reasons for early childhood programs.

More than 1 in 5 kids live in poverty. "Those are the kids who are going to drop out of school, rape us, rob us, kill us, instead of having them as law-abiding tax-paying adults."

"This is not the way to grow our economy by cutting the programs that help our kids succeed."

Some legislators feel it's a waste of money to help poor children. That's why white paper articulates an economic argument for why it's not.

This is a turning point in state history. We need you to be our troops in field, speak up, share your stories. Share those stories with policy-makers. How important home visiting is, early checkups, prenatal care, reading to child.

Caring is more than talking about doing better or beating on parents, teachers. It's much more cost effective to help parents become good parents. Best anti-poverty program is a high school diploma.

2008 -- 180,000 kids reported as victim of abuse in Michigan, 13 percent more than previous year. With economy, numbers will go up again. We'll have to pay cost.

And yet lawmakers eliminated 2,200 slots in pre-k.

Is that being for kids or just talking about being for kids?

We've cut back on EC programs that leverage other federal dollars. We need to find a fair way to improve tax structure in order to compete on a global stage. We need a workforce that is smart, flexible.

Economist James Heckman said skill begets skill, early failure begets later failure.

Kids who are sick hungry homeless can't learn. They are sentenced to a lifetime of poverty if we don't give them a hand.

Legislators are well meaning people--but they are not experts. We are the experts. because they don't have a lot of time to learn this stuff, its out job to educate them on what it takes to raise an infant to become and educated healthy person. Grab your weapons--your information, your passion, your stories--and use them to influence the people whe elect to represent our interests. Get them to think broadly, think about investing in early childhood--it is critical.

Send letters in longhand to governor, legislators, then follow up. Next week when you see budget, write another letter. Advocacy is repeated effort. The children need you to be their advocate, to speak up.

White paper. Lot of solid evidence. Most people polled say they support. We have to get politicians to heed people.

We have to speak up today, tomorrow and every election season.

Speaker ends.

Questions on white paper

Samelson: Audience represents 17,000 people. Only 148 elected state reps/senators.

"If we can't make something happen on this, shame on us. it's time for us to kick some proverbial backside on this issue, and it's time for us to do it."

Audience: How do we talk about taxes?

Answer: Michigan League for Human Services is a good resource.

<http://www.milhs.org/>

Audience: How far can we in coalitions go in talking about specific tax revenues?

Answer: Best strategy is to keep focus on a fair tax rate rather than a specific tax. Stick to facts. If you're funded by us you have to stick to the facts. Got to be careful not to advocate tax proposals. (Example: statistics in ECIC voter survey.)

We don't have to tell them how to do their job (in terms of what to tax, what not to). But we do need to remind them to do their job, which is set the right priorities for spending.

Audience: Will you endorse candidates?

Answer: We need to share good and bad about candidates.

Submitted by aheller on Thu, 02/04/2010 - 16:33

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