



## OUR VIEW — Child welfare report points to need for early intervention

### **Sentinel editorial board**

Posted Feb 17, 2011 @ 08:43 AM

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Holland, MI — The 2010 Kids Count report paints a frightening portrait of the condition of Michigan's children. Our state's youngest residents have suffered from our punishing recession as much or more than their parents, with rates of poverty, abuse and neglect rising sharply in the past decade. The indicators bode ill for the future success of Michigan's children and should cause us to rethink the practice of waiting until kindergarten to address children's education and development.

The report, prepared by the Michigan League of Human Services and the advocacy group Michigan's Children found that the poverty rate among the state's children rose from 14 percent in 2000 to 23 percent in 2009. Nearly half of Michigan students are eligible for free or reduced school lunches. The figures for Ottawa and Allegan counties are better than the state average but followed the same upward trajectory in the past decade. The rate of children qualifying for subsidized school lunches jumped by more than 10 percentage points in both counties in the decade as unemployment ravaged the state, to 35 percent in Ottawa County and nearly 40 percent in Allegan.

Our schools have to deal with the economic fallout from child poverty. Educators know that students from economically distressed households often start school behind the curve in terms of social and intellectual development and find it hard to catch up. For many the effects of a poor start, coupled with limited family support, creates a negative spiral they never break out of in school. Mastering reading by the end of third grade is considered a crucial benchmark in educational development, the report notes, and the failure to address the barriers holding back children at that stage can have lifelong ramifications.

A recognition of the importance of early childhood development is one factor behind Gov. Rick Snyder's promotion of changing the focus of our education system from K-12 to P-20 — pre-natal care to post-graduate instruction. Waiting until kindergarten to stimulate young minds may be too late.

Recognizing the need for change is easy compared with the challenge of developing a meaningful response. With school districts struggling to just stay even in terms of state aid and the state itself facing a \$1.8 billion budget shortfall, public funding for expanded early childhood development will be scarce if not non-existent. That puts more pressure on efforts in the private sector. Locally, that means organizations such as the Holland-Zeeland Community Foundation's Ready for School initiative (profiled in Wednesday's Sentinel), which recently won a \$398,894 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to expand its efforts to ensure local 5-year-olds are properly prepared to learn when they enter school. Its efforts to educate parents about early childhood development and to promote access to quality, affordable preschool deserve our support. Another group doing positive work is the Ottawa County Great Start Collaborative, which aims to promote and marshal the resources for a comprehensive system to address early childhood health and development needs.

The adage "It takes a village to raise a child" was unfortunately tainted by politics years ago, but it remains true. Overcoming the negative effects of childhood poverty and abuse requires a response that involves all sectors of the community, not just government or our school systems. We first need a paradigm change in how we view our timeline of education and then we need concerted action. If we think we can't afford the effort now, just wait to see the bills we'll be paying when these kids grow up.

#### ON THE WEB:

Ready for School: [www.readyforschool.org](http://www.readyforschool.org)

Great Start of Ottawa County: [www.greatstartshere.org](http://www.greatstartshere.org)

2010 Kids Count Data Book: [www.milhs.org/kids-count/mi-data-book-2010](http://www.milhs.org/kids-count/mi-data-book-2010)

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big al

2 months ago

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A continuing challenge for our community. Enough said. I'm turning off my computer, and going out to help fight this problem.

tbtr6

2 months ago

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Love reports can you tell me this? Shouldn't parents bear some of the child hood development?

I would like to better the root causes...poor is one thin but where can we focus to keep from happening.

What % were born to single mothers? How many were 2nd or 3rd child. causing poverty.

What % were born to under 18?

I am sure there are some actions and choices that the parents are taking have to do with the situation they are in. How do we correct this...if we do not correct root cause all the money in the world will not cure the ills.

MkyMtn

2 months ago

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When many parents are being forced to work two or more low paying jobs just to make ends meet, it puts a strain on the entire family situation. Granted, there are steps that could be taken to better educate single parents or young mothers, but unfortunately, it looks like those will all fall under the chopping block while giving away billions in tax breaks to the corporations who cry so loudly and hold the rest of us hostage because they have bought and paid for the politicians who actually create and pass the legislation.

The problem, as I see it, is that those who need education and help to do better in life and to be more productive are obviously here among us, it's just that they don't have the fat checkbook to buy the influence to promote their cause like the corporations do.

ju ju Beans  
2 months ago

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Coming from a close to poor family and attending a school with many 'poor' kids, I've seen many 'poor' kids be successful at school. It was the ones who thought school was a joke, and/or parents thought that and those kids did not do so good. Sometime it seems the parents try by influence so thier kid won't do good at school. So I believe most of this trend depends on the parents outlook on life and how they interact and raise thier own kids....

CleosMom  
2 months ago

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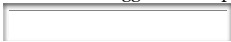


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ju ju Beans - I totally agree with you.

SenorLalo  
2 months ago

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So to you poor kids out there: you'd better pray that your parents value education cuz otherwise you're screwed. No help from the gov't and certainly no help from

CleosMom.

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