

An Infant-Toddler Set-Aside for Michigan

Why infants and toddlers? All babies deserve a great start in life. Research shows that experiences in the first 1,000 days of life alter the architecture of children's brains in ways that permanently affect their health, learning and development. With a majority of Michigan babies of color born into very low-income families, the need to expand access to services that support families with young children is great. To reduce equity gaps for children of color and low-income children, it is critical that the foundation for lifelong success begins early. For many young children, one year of preschool is too little, too late to close the achievement gap – a gap that emerges long before children reach preschool doors.

Why an infant-toddler set-aside? Funding streams that support programs for very young children have been vulnerable to budget cuts. An infant-toddler set-aside will statutorily mandate a portion of new monies to an existing funding stream that is required to be spent on services for high-risk infants, toddlers and their families.

What are infant-toddler programs and services? Michigan has several proven programs already in operation throughout the state that support families with young children for a variety of intended outcomes including health promotion, school readiness, family preservation, and child abuse and neglect prevention. These include home visiting programs such as the Maternal Infant Health Program, Early Head Start, Nurse Family Partnership, Healthy Families America and Parents as Teachers; parent education programs through Great Parents Great Start; and child abuse and neglect prevention programs funded by the Children's Trust Fund. Due to limited funding, these programs can only reach a small portion of eligible infants, toddlers and their families.

How have other states done this? The Illinois Early Childhood Block Grant provides a continued set-aside increasing from not less than 11% to 20% by FY 2015 through a phase-in. Twenty percent of all funding increase for the infant/toddler set-aside is for quality enhancements; and as of March 2011, total appropriation was \$296 million for 3-5 year-olds and \$46 million for 0-3. In Kansas, the Children's Initiative Fund, which supports the KS Early Childhood Block Grant, is assigned all new tobacco settlement payments and other tobacco revenues. The KS Early Childhood Block Grant receives \$11.1 million of which at least 30 percent must be spent on programs for at-risk infants and toddlers.

What would an infant-toddler set-aside look like in Michigan? At least 20 percent of any new money for the Great Start Readiness Program will be designated for an infant-toddler set-aside, which will flow through the Office of Great Start. The 0-3 set-aside would not supplant currently existing funding for 0-3 programs/services but rather supplement them. Allocated on a competitive basis, proven infant-toddler programs and services must include the following components:

- Serve the most at-risk infants, toddlers and their families.
- Collaborate with already existing 0-3 services/programs.
- Link infant-toddler programs and services to the larger birth to five early childhood system.
- Blend and braid already existing early childhood dollars.
- Include coordination between local Intermediate School Districts and local Great Start Collaboratives.
- A small percentage to be used to improve quality of services through training, technical assistance and evaluation.