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Where Michigan Children Stand This Election Season

Last week, our national partners at [First Focus](#) released a report in partnership with Save the Children called [America's Report Card 2012: Children in the U.S.](#) that gave a clear picture on the well-being of children in the U.S. To put it bluntly, the U.S. is not doing well. The report gave an overall grade of a C- based on five "subjects" – economic security, early childhood, K-12 education, permanency & stability, and health & safety. And in Michigan, children are faring just as poorly, and worse in many cases. In fact, according to the national 2012 Kids Count Data Book from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Michigan's overall ranking among all states was 32nd. Being in the bottom half of the states in a C- country is unacceptable. Action is required by decision-makers and Michigan residents to move the dime on child well-being in the state.

Economic Security

U.S. Grade: D/Michigan's Rank: 36th

The U.S. received a "D" in economic security due to the unacceptable number of children living in poverty, children living in low-income families, children with unemployed parents, and children suffering from food insecurity, and unstable housing. Michigan has seen larger increases in child poverty than the rest of the nation, with now more than one in every 10 children living in extreme poverty – families who are struggling to make ends meet at half the poverty level (an annual income of \$8,784 for a family of three). This economic situation is not just affecting certain groups of Michigan kids and families either. According to the 2011 Michigan Kids Count Data Book, children from every racial and ethnic group in Michigan except for Asian experienced higher child poverty rates than the nation – the nation with a "D" grade in economic security. Yet Michigan continues to strip away access to poverty prevention programs by putting stricter limits on cash assistance, requiring asset tests for food assistance, and greatly reducing the Earned Income Tax Credit. Furthermore, policy decisions made in areas like health and education often fail to take into consideration the thoroughly researched and long-term impact of the lack of economic security on other child outcomes.

Early Childhood

U.S. Grade: C/Michigan's Rank: Tied for 24th in Preschool Access

The U.S. received a "C" based on access to high quality early learning programs and access to child care. In Michigan, 30,000 low- to moderate-income at-risk four-year-olds who are eligible for the state's publicly funded preschool program are unable to access it due to limited state funding according to a

recent [Bridge](#) report. Further, Michigan's extremely low income eligibility requirement for child care subsidies makes it difficult for many families who struggle to make ends meet to access child care services so that parents can stay employed or stay in school. And for the youngest children who are most at-risk of not being prepared for school, family support programs that begin during pregnancy or at birth help parents become their child's first and best teacher. Expanding access to not only preschool but also services to families with younger children has been researched exhaustively and evidenced as the way to ensure that more Michigan kids are better prepared to enter and excel in kindergarten and beyond. Improved access to evidence-based programs from birth to school entry is particularly essential for young children of color and those from low-income families who benefit the most from these programs.

K-12 Education

U.S. Grade: C/Michigan's Rank: 33rd

The U.S. received a "C" based on disparities in math, reading and science levels in 4th and 8th grade; school resources; the number of at-risk and disconnected youth; and educational attainment disparities. In Michigan, the achievement gap between African American and White fourth graders was second largest in the nation; and one out of five Black and Hispanic students dropped out of high school compared to one out of ten White students in 2011. Disparities in school success can be traced to the earliest years of a child's life and continue to grow through their educational careers due to limited access to equity promoting opportunities such as parent support, high quality early education, expanded learning programs in K-12, physical and mental health services, and meaningful education reform. While these gaps in educational attainment continue to persist, the state's per pupil allotment has dropped significantly since fiscal year 2010, and no increases have been provided for extended learning/after-school access or opportunities for the 5th and 6th year of high school – both strategies that have proven to increase high school graduation rates for those who struggle the most in school. Linking high quality early childhood programs that prepare children for school to a high quality K-12 system with strategies that promote learning and high school completion for those who struggle most is critical to reduce the achievement gap and better prepare our future workforce.

Permanency & Stability

U.S. Grade: D/Michigan's Rank: Tied for 38th in Confirmed Child Maltreatment

The U.S. received a D based on the disproportionate number of youth of color in residential facilities and the number of youth incarcerated in adult jails; percentage of maltreated children who received insufficient services; and immigration issues. Michigan continues to disinvest in child abuse/neglect and juvenile justice prevention programs and what investments have been made are after children and youth are in the system. This is a huge problem since kids in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems face challenges to achieve academically. Since children of color continue to be over-represented in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, ensuring access to high quality prevention programs and continuing to support policies that reduce differential treatment of children once they are connected to the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are essential.

Health & Safety
U.S. Grade: C+/Michigan's Rank: 22nd

The U.S. received a high grade for percentage of children with health coverage and Michigan has been successful in providing insurance coverage for children. However, the problems that result from limited access to health care and prevention services even with health insurance in place are well documented around the state. Michigan's infant mortality rate is among the highest in the nation, children on Medicaid continue to struggle to find a primary care physician who will accept Medicaid, and Michigan children of color are more likely to be obese or suffer from asthma. The state's continued disinvestment in public health and safety has put increased pressures on local communities to make up the difference. Kids who aren't healthy struggle to focus in school, thus affecting academic success.

What this all means during an election season

The candidates who are eventually elected into office can make a huge impact on child well-being. The public policies and budget decisions they make must focus on improving the well-being for Michigan children who are most challenged by their circumstance. Children of color and children from low-income families face systemic barriers that do little to promote good health, school readiness, and academic achievement. During this election year, it is critical that candidates who support investments in children are elected into office and that those elected officials are held accountable for commitments to help children succeed. America's Report Card has shown us that as a nation, we're not doing well by our children, and the news for Michigan is even more grim. Each election provides a unique opportunity to get involved in changing that course. We CAN do better.