

Early Literacy Scores in FY2016 State Budget

The Legislature wrapped up its state budget for fiscal year 2016 which is a relatively good one for kids. More than \$31 million will be directed to **early literary efforts** – a major emphasis in Michigan's Children's policy work this year - out of a nearly \$16 billion education budget. As part of the literacy efforts, a huge win for children and families was the inclusion of a new \$17.5 million investment for additional learning time for K-3rd that can be provided through before, during or after-school or through a balanced calendar.

Other key components targeted towards early literacy interventions include new or increased funding for:

- home visiting services through the Intermediate School Districts;
- quality improvement efforts to the child care subsidy program that will increase access to high quality child care for families receiving the subsidy; and
- a host of other programs and services to improve teacher quality, student assessments, and other initiatives to bolster literacy.

While Michigan's Children was disappointed that the Legislature did not add state dollars to *Early On*, as we recommended, there were other gains. We were pleased to see a \$3 million increase to adult education – an important win given research that shows parents' literacy is intricately connected to the literacy success of their children. This was especially significant after the House proposed to completely eliminate adult education. Michigan's Children will continue to discuss how to bolster and better define how funds are used to improve literacy, focusing our attention on critical two-generation approaches.

Here's a summary of other important policy issues relative to children, youth and families that have emerged in Lansing in recent weeks.

Adoption Law: Gov. Snyder's signing of a bill that allows adoption agencies to refuse service to applicants they have "a religious opposition to" has shined new light on the needs of children in foster care awaiting adoption. The Governor's action last week codifies into state law what's been existing department practice for years. From our perspective, state policies should be crafted to make it easier to support loving families to adopt children, regardless of families' religious beliefs or structures, and not harder. The ultimate goal should be making good placements for kids waiting to be adopted, and not barring them. We hope that further public discussion on the practices of adoption agencies will lead to expanding opportunities for [children needing forever homes](#).

EITC and Road Funding: It will be interesting to see how the state Senate takes up the House road package which last week eliminated the Earned Income Tax Credit as part of its efforts to free-up state general fund dollars to fix the roads. Family and child

advocates have recognized that the EITC has been a help to low-income working families. Michigan's Children will continue to follow the issue in the Senate keeping in mind that Michigan's highly regressive tax system puts a high burden on the state's low-income wage earners and ultimately impacting child well-being. The Michigan EITC, layered onto the federal EITC, has been a help to many of our low-income working families.

On the broader issue of the road fix, the House plan would redirect \$908.9 million from general fund sources, repurpose \$135 million from funds previously used for economic development and raise \$119 million from new fees, according to an analysis from the House Fiscal agency. Drawing the lion's share of the road fix from general fund dollars is major worry for Michigan's Children and other advocates that utilize those funds for important child and family services. Relying so heavily on general fund dollars is certain to put kids and families in jeopardy. Everyone agrees that fixing Michigan roads will cost \$1.2 billion a year. We must find a solution that doesn't draw over \$900 million of that – every year -- from general fund sources.