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Michigan Association
of Community and
Adult Education

FamilySpeak: Building Family Literacy Through Adult Education

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

Speaker's Library, State Capitol

Michigan's Children and the Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education were recently joined by two dozen local, state and federal decision makers at this FamilySpeak.

Fifteen students, almost all of them parents, spoke to the listeners about the life and school challenges that delayed their educational trajectory, and the motivators that brought them to the alternative and adult education system to continue that work toward a high school credential and beyond. They spoke eloquently, and often emotionally, about their interest in helping their own children succeed as a major driver to improve their own literacy and other basic skills, and about how their experience in adult education has helped them help their family. These skills not only allowed parents to be able to read to their children and help with their homework, but also better connect with teachers and health care providers.

There were a variety of reasons for not being able to finish high school the first time around, including a lack of English language skills, early parenting, struggles with drugs and alcohol and trouble with the law, and a lack of support or pressure from family and educators to continue. One young man spoke about "aging out" of high school, not having accumulated enough credits to graduate before traditional school funding ends at age 20. When they turned to solutions, there were many more common themes, including:

- The importance of individualized learning opportunities and a variety of paths for students to succeed. This was tied to the point that people needed more than one chance at their high school diploma and programs providing those 2nd chances were getting fewer and farther between. Two students talked about attending alternative high schools until those schools were forced to close due to state and local budget decisions.
- More consistent funding of the adult education programs themselves. Students and staff cited many issues including aging technology and the inability to hire substitute teachers or ESL teachers when needed to illustrate that point, as well as the impact of programs closing because of budget constraints.
- The importance of GED as a path for some, significant workforce connectors for others, and really needing to see a variety of programs to fit the variety of needs of this population of students.

Momentum is building around the state to improve 3rd grade reading in Michigan and to improve our overall standing in the nation for our education system. The lack of attention to assisting parents to engage in their children's learning will hamper the state's ability to improve literacy outcomes for all children all over the state. Research has consistently supported the testimony given at this FamilySpeak – the impact of parental education on children's success in school and in life.

This FamilySpeak has been made possible by the voices of the families supported through:

The Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education works to provide a cohesive framework for community education through collaboration and guidance at the local, state and federal level. MACAE's vision is to engage in partnerships, provide member support and advocate for lifelong learning, leading to employment and self-sufficient families.

Family Speakers:

Paulette Bigio, Saginaw Adult Education
Antonio Binns, Dominican Literacy Center, Detroit
William Burnes, Livingston County
Cynthia Davis, Saginaw Adult Education
Janielle Destin, Novi Adult Education
Chris Feltman, Mt. Pleasant Community Adult Education
April Flores, Novi Community Education
Justine Geiger, Novi Community Education
Leslie Gilbert, Saginaw Adult Education
Lori Hayes, Wyoming Public Schools Adult Education Program
Sagal Khalif, Okemos Adult Education
Earl Paulton, White Lake Area Community Education
Noor Salim, Niles Adult Education
Jeremy Showell, Wyoming Public Schools Adult Education Program
Yojana De La Cruz Valdez, Mt. Pleasant Community Adult Education

Families were joined by the following listeners:

Elected Officials and Staff:

Staff, U.S. Representative Mike Bishop
State Representative Christine Greig
State Representative Tom Hooker
State Representative Marcia Hovey-Wright and Staff
State Representative Adam Zemke
Staff, State Senator Bert Johnson
Staff, State Senator Dave Hildenbrand
Staff, State Representative Andy Schor
State Board of Education Member Pamela Pugh
Staff, Governor's Office of the Foundation Liaison
Senate Fiscal Agency

State Department Representatives:

Michigan Department of Education

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

Michigan Economic Development Corporation

Other Advocacy Partners:

Capitol Services, Inc.

Communities in Schools of Michigan

Huron Valley Adult Education

Metro Community Development, Flint

Michigan League for Public Policy

State of Opportunity, Michigan Radio

M.S.U. Extension

Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative

Michigan's Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that policymakers prioritize the needs of the most challenged children from cradle to career and their families. We have been creating opportunities for young people, parents and other community members to share their stories, concerns and suggestions directly with policymakers since 1996, and continue to find new ways to provide young people, families and the supporting professionals around them the tools that they need to advocate on their own behalf.

FamilySpeak, modeled after Michigan's Children's signature KidSpeak® forums, mimics a traditional legislative committee hearing. These forums have been facilitated since 1996. Connecting the experiences of families directly with policymakers has provided firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities and has proven to be an effective advocacy strategy. Their voices have changed the trajectory of policy conversation and have resulted in additional champions for parent-driven solutions in the Legislature, several Departments and other local policymaking bodies.

For more information about this FamilySpeak or other opportunities to hear directly from young people or their families, please contact Michele Corey, Vice President for Programs, at 517-977-0322 or michele@michiganschildren.org.