

**FamilySpeak: Building Family Literacy Through
Adult Education**

Thursday, February 15, 2018

Speaker's Library, State Capitol

Michigan's Children and the Michigan Association for Community and Adult Education were joined by federal and state policymakers from two dozen legislative offices at our 3rd FamilySpeak focused on family literacy.

Twelve adult education students spoke to the listeners about their earlier and current educational challenges, their perseverance despite these challenges and the motivators behind their current work – most often their children and their teachers. In describing the challenges faced, they recommended making adult education programs work better for families by making them more consistently available across the state.

Students had their own individual stories, but all of the speakers reflected concerns and opportunities in the following areas:

1. **Recognize Educational Problems Earlier:** All of the speakers had dropped out or had been pushed out of high school prior to graduation. Some had family struggles like parent addiction, mental health challenges or homelessness that led them to truancy, repeated grades and failure. Some had to work to support themselves or their families, and for others, school just didn't work for them at the time. All talked about the lack of support they had in their K-12 experience to deal with these complications and about how the adult education system changed their relationship with learning in a positive way.
2. **Take Advantage of Current Motivation:** Adult learners have experienced road blocks in their lives – dead ends with their employment, inability to provide a good example or assist their children with their own education, or other circumstances that led them back to complete a diploma or GED. Students are motivated to work harder than ever before, with the demands of family and jobs, to get that credential. Systems should be in place to channel that motivation rather than put artificial timeframes around learning.
3. **Essential Services Enable Students to Succeed:** Families all had trouble accessing transportation and child care assistance, and financing structures understandably don't allow programs to use their adult education funding to help with those costs. These costs are exacerbated by the fact that many adult education programs have closed and students often travel great distances to available programs.
4. **Broaden Access to In-Person Programming:** Every student talked about how important the personal interaction with their teachers and other adult education staff were to their perseverance and eventual success. They all talked about staff never giving up on them and not letting them give up on themselves. While technology is a useful tool, students did not believe that it should replace relationships for struggling learners.

In order to improve outcomes for children and youth, we need to better support the skill building efforts of their parents. This conversation is timely. Investment in family literacy must be included and supported in third grade reading efforts, and Michigan must continue to rebuild its adult education investment. Both can further the educational attainment and skill-building of parents, while providing opportunities for them to learn alongside their children. The Governor failed to include investments in Family Literacy his recent budget recommendations, and now it is up to the Legislature to remedy that oversight through their work on the budget over the next few months.

Families were joined by the following listeners:

Elected Officials and Staff:

Congressman Dan Kildee

U.S. Senator Gary Peters

State Sen. Jim Ananich

State Sen. Hoon-Yung Hopgood

State Sen. Mike Kowall

State Sen. Peter MacGregor

State Sen. Coleman Young, II

State Rep. Sue Allor

State Rep. Stephanie Chang

State Rep. Erika Geiss

State Rep. Patrick Green

State Rep. Christine Greig

State Rep. Gary Howell

State Rep. Larry Inman

State Rep. Steve Johnson

State Rep. Donna Lasinski

State Rep. David Maturen

State Rep. Daire Rendon

State Rep. Sylvia Santana

State Rep. William Sowerby

State Rep. Curtis VanderWald

State Rep. Roger Victory

State Department Representatives:

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

This FamilySpeak was possible only through the voices of the families supported through the following partners:

Dominican Literacy Center, Detroit

Novi Adult Education

Novi Career Prep High School

Plainwell Adult Education

Pottersville Adult Education

Romulus Adult Education

Sienna Literacy Center, Detroit

Walled Lake Community Schools

Washtenaw Community College Adult Transitions GED Pathway

Wyoming Adult Education

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.

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 – children of color, children from low-income families, and children shouldering other challenging circumstances.

FamilySpeak is modeled after Michigan's Children's signature KidSpeak® forums 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, michele@michiganschildren.org.