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The Governor's Proposed Fiscal Year 2013 Budget: Is It Promoting Equity to Ensure All Children Are Ready to Learn & Lead?

The single best predictor of economic prosperity is a state's success in educating and preparing its workforce. Sadly, long-term disparities in educational success have had profound and unacceptable economic, social and fiscal consequences for Michigan. Gaps in learning and achievement can be traced to the earliest years of children's lives, and continue to grow through their educational careers and into adulthood.

The state budget, as the single most powerful expression of the state's priorities, is a powerful tool for either improving equity or widening gaps. With the next workforce set to be its most diverse yet, Michigan needs to allocate its scarce resources in ways that ensure that ALL children can thrive. The evidence is clear, all children need:

1. To be born healthy and have continued access to high quality health care services.
2. To be raised by parents or caregivers who have the supports needed to be their child's first, consistent and best teachers.
3. To be assured a high quality education that begins in early childhood, extends through a career, and leads to economic self-sufficiency.

So how did the Governor's fiscal year 2013 budget proposal promote equity in these key areas?

A healthy birth and access to high quality health care services

Steps forward

- The Governor proposes to expand the Healthy Kids Dental program, increasing access to dental care for Medicaid-eligible children.
- The Governor proposes to raise Medicaid primary care physician reimbursements rates, increasing access for pregnant women and children.

Mixed results

- The Governor proposes some new investments that relate to his "dashboard," including small expansions in funding for infant mortality and obesity prevention, as well as health and wellness. In a state where African American infants are three times more likely to die during the first year of life, the proposed funding will not be sufficient to dramatically move the dial on the infant mortality dashboard indicator or other key public health indicators.

- The Governor recommends that Medicaid and MICHild coverage be expanded to include treatment of autism spectrum disorders for children under the age of 6, yet Michigan does not have a mental health parity law, a more comprehensive approach not limited to children with certain diagnoses.

Parents or caregivers with the supports needed to be their child's first, consistent and best teachers.

Steps backward

- The Governor's budget maintains last year's cuts to family support programs including the Family Independence Program, the Food Assistance Program, and the Earned Income Tax Credit – commonly referred to as the EITC. Childhood poverty is clearly linked to many negative outcomes for children including poor health and reduced access to a high quality education.

Mixed results

- The Governor recommends small increases in child abuse and neglect and family support programs, but not nearly enough to offset the deep funding cuts these programs suffered over the last decade.

A high quality education that begins in early childhood, extends through a career, and leads to economic self-sufficiency.

Steps backward

- The Governor's budget further reduces funding for the child care subsidy program as a result of anticipated caseload reductions--rather than reinvesting those savings in quality improvement initiatives.
- After a decade of disinvestment, the Governor provides no further funding increases for programs that build educational equity, including out-of-school time programs and opportunities for the 5th and 6th year of high school.

Mixed results

- While funding for early childhood education programs is maintained, the Governor does not provide the additional resources needed to ensure that all eligible children have the opportunity to benefit from high quality early learning programs – programs that have been shown to reduce the educational equity gap that emerges in children as young as 9 months of age.

For more information on the Governor's proposed fiscal year 2013 budget and what it means for children and families, visit www.michiganschildren.org.