

**Investing in Infants and Young Children:  
The Foundation for Educational Success and Economic Prosperity in Michigan**

Today's infants, toddlers and preschoolers are tomorrow's workers and leaders. They will be our scientists, entrepreneurs, teachers, parents, laborers, artists and elected officials. With the next workforce set to be its most diverse yet, and with a majority of Michigan babies of color born into low-income families, the need to expand access to services that support families with young children is great. To ensure a foundation of lifelong success, equity gaps for children of color and low-income children must be addressed early in life.

**An investment in early childhood now is an investment in Michigan's future.**

*WHY THE EARLY YEARS MATTER*

**What we know about infants and young children:**

- **Children are born learning.** Brain science confirms that by the time children reach school age, as much as 90 percent of the intellectual and emotional wiring of their brains has been set for life.
- **How children learn throughout their lives is shaped by their earliest relationships.** Responsive, nurturing and consistent relationships with parents and caregivers provide infants and toddlers not only with synapse-rich brains, but with the social and emotional foundations that support lifelong learning. Successful learners have confidence, self-control, curiosity, persistence and ability to communicate and cooperate. These "school smarts" are developed long before the first day of school.
- **Basic language and literacy skills are formed in the first three years of life.** Science confirms that children who hear fewer words or are engaged in less conversation with their caregivers before the age of three have dramatically smaller vocabularies than children with richer early language experiences. This may be in part due to long and often inconsistent work hours and issues surrounding the quality of child care available to families in low-income communities.
- **The adverse effects of poverty are greatest for young children.** Science has shown that the achievement gap that exists between children in poverty and their more economically advantaged peers is evident as early as 18 months with disparities in cognitive development emerging as young as 9 months of age. For an impoverished child, an 18-month gap at age four is still present at age ten. Gaps in achievement and high school completion can be traced to the earliest years of a child's life, continue to grow through their educational careers, and impact future economic prosperity.

**What we know about programs that work:**

- **High-quality early care and education programs:**
  - **Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)** provides more than 47,000 four-year olds at risk for school failure in full- or half-day early childhood programs annually, designed to help prepare children for success in school. GSRP evaluations show among other things, that the program significantly reduced grade retention, increased early math and print awareness among kindergarten students, and increased the percentage of fourth grade GSRP students who passed the MEAP compared to non-GSRP students. GSRP graduates were also 85 percent more likely to graduate high school on time.
  - Michigan's **Early Head Start (EHS)** programs provide comprehensive home- and center-based early childhood services to more than 3,700 low-income pregnant women and children under the age of

three. Recent data on the federal EHS program indicate that EHS *children* exhibit better social-emotional development and more positive approaches to learning than their peers; their *parents* are more supportive of their children's development, and more likely to enroll their children in formal preschool programs.

- Through **voluntary home visiting programs**, trained professionals work with low-income families to promote early learning, support healthy development and prevent child abuse. Studies show that evidence-based home visiting programs increase children's literacy and high school graduation rates, increase the amount parents read to their children, improve positive birth outcomes, increase the likelihood that families have a primary care provider, and cut child abuse by as much as a half.
- **Early screening, intervention and treatment services for a comprehensive range of physical, developmental and mental health concerns** help prevent or reduce the need for more costly treatments later in a child's life.
- Studies show that **access to a pediatric medical home** improves children's health, and limits unnecessary and more expensive treatment in hospitals.

### **Michigan cannot afford to ignore early childhood.**

- **Leading economists agree that high-quality early childhood programs yield the greatest return on investment.** Studies of high-quality early childhood programs, like the Michigan-based HighScope Educational Research Foundation's Perry Preschool, demonstrate that for every \$1 invested, taxpayers save as much as \$16 in reduced remedial and special education, health, public assistance, child welfare, criminal justice costs and the tax revenues generated by increased earnings. In 2009 alone, Michigan saved \$1.1 billion because of the state's school readiness efforts since 1984.
- **The benefits of early childhood programs are immediate.** Every \$1 invested in early care and education in Michigan generates \$1.11 for a total of \$2.11 in new spending in the state. This is higher than investments in other major sectors such as construction, retail trade, manufacturing, transportation and utilities.
- **Early childhood programs create jobs.** Recent research shows that early childhood services is a half a trillion dollar industry that employs 15 million workers nationally. In Michigan, for every four jobs created in the early care and education sector, one job would be created outside that sector.
- **Early childhood programs increase worker productivity.** Absenteeism and low worker productivity are costly to businesses. Research shows that on average, parents miss up to two weeks of work every year due to child-care issues; stable child care has been proven to increase worker productivity.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO as a Michigan legislator**

In keeping with Governor Snyder's focus on measureable outcomes, a prenatal to age 20 system of education, and health and wellness, we urge you to:

- ✓ Expand existing programs with demonstrated improved child outcomes, including the Michigan Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), evidence-based home visiting programs, and mental health consultation programs for early childhood providers.
- ✓ Establish a set-aside of at least 20 percent of all *new* GSRP funding to support evidence-based services and proven programs for children from birth through age three and their families.
- ✓ Improve access to high quality child care for low-income children.
- ✓ Expand access to pediatric medical homes for infants and young children.
- ✓ Increase the number of infants, young children and parents who are screened by well-trained staff for social and emotional diagnoses through the use of standardized instruments.