

June 30, 2011

Update on State and Federal Early Childhood Developments

Executive Order Establishes the New Michigan Office of Great Start

Yesterday afternoon, Governor Snyder signed [Executive Order No. 2011-8](#) to create the Michigan Office of Great Start. The Michigan Office of Great Start is intended to create a coherent system of health and early learning that aligns, integrates and coordinates Michigan's early childhood investments from prenatal to third grade.

Created within the Michigan Department of Education, the Office of Great Start will be overseen by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and will bring the following programs into the Office:

- Office of Child Development and Care, currently in the Department of Human Services
- Head Start Collaboration Office, currently in the Department of Human Services
- Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services, currently in the Michigan Department of Education

The Superintendent of Public Instruction will work with the Department of Human Services and the Department of Community Health concerning the administration and coordination of programs and services the Departments provide that affect early childhood development. The State Budget Director will determine the most fiscally efficient way to coordinate these services within the Office of Great Start. According to a [press released issued by the Governor's office](#), "a single set of measureable outcomes, including making sure children are born healthy, that they are developmentally on track from birth to third grade, that children are ready to succeed in school at the time of entry and they are reading proficiently by the end of the third grade" will be adopted by the Office of Great Start.

Joan Blough, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation's Vice President for Great Start System Development and Evaluation, will be on loan to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to lead the transition team. Ms. Blough will work directly under the MDE's Deputy Superintendent/Chief Academic Officer Sally Vaughn to implement the Executive Order.

Legislature Indicates Intent to Develop an Early Childhood Block Grant

In the fiscal year 2012 (FY 12) budget negotiations, the Michigan Legislature also addressed the need to coordinate early childhood services. The final FY 12 School Aid budget includes language indicating legislative intent to create an early childhood block grant in fiscal year 2013. Included in the block grant would be funding for the Great Start Readiness Program, Great Start Collaboratives and the Great Parents/Great Start program. The early childhood block grant would be administered by Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) "in conjunction with their regional Great Start Collaborative to improve program quality, evaluation and efficiency for early childhood programs". The Michigan Department of Education is directed to work with ISDs, school districts, Great Start Collaboratives, and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation to establish revised funding formulas, application procedures, program criteria and reporting requirements, with a report to the Legislature with recommendations no later than January 1, 2012.

Planning for the Federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund Continues

At the same time, federal efforts to improve early childhood services are underway. Last month the Obama Administration announced plans to use approximately \$500 million of the fiscal year 2011 Race to the Top funding for a major competition in support of bold and comprehensive State plans for raising the quality of early learning programs. The [Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund](#) will be jointly administered by the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services and will reward states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems with better coordination, clearer learning standards, and meaningful workforce development. States applying for challenge grants will be encouraged to:

- increase access to quality early learning programs for low income and disadvantaged children;
- design integrated and transparent systems that align their early care and education programs;
- bolster training and support for the early learning workforce;
- create robust evaluation systems to document and share effective practices and successful programs; and
- help parents make informed decisions about care for their children.

With the formation of the Office of Great Start, Michigan is in a unique position to apply for the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund and efforts are already underway in Lansing to begin pulling together components of the application. The federal request for proposals is expected to be released later this summer.

The Next 6 Months are Critical

With the creation of the Office of Great Start, the anticipated early childhood block grant in fiscal year 2013, and the federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Fund, now is an exciting and critical time for Michigan’s early childhood community to work together to strengthen and improve early childhood services for Michigan most at-risk young children. To help you stay on top of these developments, go to www.michiganschildren.org and sign up for our Early Childhood Action Network.