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The Great Start Readiness Program is seeing a huge expansion, but is it enough?

By [STATESIDE STAFF](#) ([/PEOPLE/STATESIDE-STAFF](#))

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An interview with Mina Hong, a Senior Policy Associate of Michigan's Children, and Scott Menzel, the superintendent of the Washtenaw Intermediate School District.

State lawmakers recently approved a huge expansion of the Great Start Readiness Program. That's the state's preschool program for 4-year olds at risk of being under-prepared for kindergarten.



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Credit Jennifer Guerra / Michigan Radio

More money for preschoolers was one of the main initiatives in Governor Snyder's State of the State speech last January. And the Legislature was listening, because that \$65 million increase represents a 60% expansion of the Great Start Readiness Program.

We wanted to talk about what this expansion means to preschoolers all over Michigan and what more needs to be done.

Mina Hong is a Senior Policy Associate of Michigan's Children, and Scott Menzel is the superintendent of the Washtenaw Intermediate School District, and he also chairs the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators' Early Childhood Committee.

Hong and Menzel joined us today to discuss the issue.

"Far too many students were entering kindergarten not prepared to be successful," said Menzel. "Too many of our students then end up labeled as special education when in fact, if we'd provided earlier supports, they wouldn't be labeled that way."

According to Menzel, students who go through the GSRP are more likely to graduate on time, less likely to be held back a grade, and perform better on the MEAP.

With the new expansion, more students who are eligible for the program will be able to gain access to it.

However, Hong believes that it would be beneficial to start at a younger age.

“Kids come to preschool already behind, and the achievement gap is evident even before four years of age, and so we really need to start younger,” she said. “We know young children are more likely to be living in poverty and facing adverse risk factors which will have long-term effects. So if we can start targeting kids even before they hit preschool, and then also couple that with a quality preschool program like GSRP, we know we’re going to get the most bang for our buck.”

And programs like these affect everyone in Michigan, not just those with preschoolers. According to Menzel, providing early childhood programs can have an impact on the value of homes and the job opportunities available in a community.

“How we treat and value our youngest citizens, those who don’t have a voice, who don’t get to vote, says a lot about who we are as a state and also reflects on our country,” he said. “We can actually raise the level of opportunity for all of our students and citizens, and it starts with early childhood and goes through the entire educational continuum. That’s what’s at stake for the state of Michigan.”

-Michelle Nelson, Michigan Radio Newsroom

Listen to the full interview above.

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