



*On the 2014 campaign trail
for Michigan's children*

August 2014

Why Early Childhood Matters this Election Season and the Work Remaining

Today's infants and toddlers 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. While Michigan has made great strides to expand access to high quality preschool programming through the Great Start Readiness Program, our work to support young children is not done. Too many kids start preschool well behind their peers, and services targeting young children from birth through age three can make all the difference. To ensure a foundation of lifelong success, equity gaps for children of color and low-income children must be addressed beginning at birth.

What we know about infants and young children:

- Children are born learning. 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 with the social and emotional foundations that support lifelong learning.
- Basic language and literacy skills are formed in the first three years of life. 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.
- The adverse effects of poverty are greatest for young children. The achievement gap 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.
- The educational attainment of mothers is a key predictor of future success for children. Not only do parents with limited education have more limited income, but they may also face more challenges navigating systems like education and health care for their children.

What we know about programs that work:

- Michigan's Early Head Start (EHS) programs provide comprehensive home- and center-based early childhood services to 5,940 low-income pregnant women and children under the age of three. 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.
- Voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs pair trained professionals with low-income families to promote early learning, support healthy development and prevent child abuse. 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 life.

The financial benefits of investing in Michigan's youngest residents.

- Leading economists agree that high-quality early childhood programs yield the greatest return on investment. For every \$1 invested, taxpayers save as much as \$16 with programs targeting young children prenatally and in the first three years of life generating the largest return.
- 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.
- Early childhood programs create jobs. 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.
- 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 is the Role of Congress?

Congress currently funds some programs targeting young children who have significant risk factors in their lives including evidence-based home visiting through the Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting program, IDEA - Part C Early Intervention Services, Early Head Start, and child care. However, all of these programs are not funded adequately to serve all eligible children and their families.

What is the Role of Michigan's Legislature?

Michigan relies heavily on federal funds to support programs targeting infants and toddlers. However, many states choose to appropriate some of their own funds enabling expansion of federal programs to ensure that more eligible children and families can appropriately access those programs. Unfortunately, for many of those programs, Michigan either invests very little additional funding or none at all.

Suggested Questions for Candidates

- We often say that kids don't come with an instruction manual, yet many challenged families in my community could benefit from some additional help with a new baby. What will you do to ensure that struggling families can receive appropriate support so their babies can have a great start in life?
- As a new parent, I've really struggled to provide for my family. What will you do to support other new parents like me who struggle to do the best I can for my family?
- As an early childhood provider, I've seen many young children who would benefit from early intervention services to address developmental delays. What will you do to ensure more families can access appropriate early intervention services so that their children don't need more costly special education services later in life?

What Candidates Can Do If Elected Into Office

- ✓ Expand existing programs with demonstrated improved child outcomes, including expanding the Michigan Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) to three-year-olds, increasing investments in evidence-based home visiting programs, and providing additional supports for mental health consultation programs for early childhood providers.
- ✓ Improve access to high quality child care for low-income 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; and invest state funding towards early intervention services.
- ✓ Support two-generation strategies that help children thrive while their parents move ahead by integrating high quality early education programming with workforce development or adult education programs and comprehensive wraparound services.