

Phil's column



Phil Power is founder and chairman of the Center for Michigan.

Early learning summit in June could impact Michigan's children

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by **Phil Power**
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Changes in our basic attitudes don't happen very often, but when they do, they can hit like a ton of bricks.

Take the realization that young children learn quickest and best – by far – from birth to around age 5. That has led to the creation of pre-kindergarten and early childhood programs all over the country, some private and some publicly funded.

That, in turn, has led to big increases in funding for public early childhood programs, especially here in Michigan, which now leads the nation in increasing public support for our Great Start Readiness Program, which is aimed at poor and vulnerable four-year-olds.

Now comes a global summit on the well-being of children, to be held at Central Michigan University June 3-5. The **“Early Childhood: Shifting Mindsets”** gathering will bring together experts from across Michigan, the United States and international organizations to “examine critical issues, exchange ideas, build bridges, and shape solutions to improve outcomes for children and families.”

Up for discussion are the science of infant development; how scientific research is affecting early systems of child care, education and support; and key policy issues, including how Michigan is developing policy through public, private, philanthropic and community-based strategies.

The two and a half-day summit is being designed and hosted by students, faculty and

staff at CMU's College of Education and Human Services in Mt. Pleasant.

"We see CMU as a catalyst to bring diverse groups together and formulate an action plan," says Dale Pehrsson, dean of the college.

The opening session June 3 will be keynoted by Dr. Joshua Sparrow, director of the Brazelton Touchpoints Center at Boston Children's Hospital, and associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. Sparrow will also take part in an opening panel: "Change the Questions, Change the World: Childhood Today & Propositions for Tomorrow." His fellow panelists will include Eileen Graf, director of research at the University of Chicago School of Medicine, and Joelle-Jude Fontaine, program officer at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

Graf has won considerable notice for her "Thirty Million Words Initiative," which encourages parents to talk to their children in a way that helps build their vocabularies, brains and futures.

Michigan policy shapers will come together there on June 5 in a panel to discuss key policy issues and the way Michigan's public, private and philanthropic organizations have responded.

Included among them will be Susan Broman, head of the Office of Head Start in the Michigan Department of Education; Matt Gillard, CEO of Michigan's Children; Traverse City's Doug Luciani, co-chair of the Children's Leadership Council of Michigan; and Peter Pratt, president of Public Sector Consultants. I'll be moderating a similar panel later that morning.

As Dean Pehrsson put it: "The forum will promote sustainable partnerships to solve complex issues along the shifting landscape that's challenging Michigan's children and families, including access to high-quality early learning, the health and well-being of children under five, family stress and poverty in Michigan."

Although developing early childhood policy has been under intense discussion in the research community for decades and in Lansing for the past 10 years, the CMU gathering is the first I know of to consider the entire spectrum of early childhood issues in an on-campus environment open to the public.

Registration fee is \$300, with an "Early Bird" rate of \$230 until May 1. The complete summit agenda and slate of speakers is available **here**.

I encourage anybody to sign up who has an interest in learning how childhood policy and programs have a direct effect on our state's future prosperity – especially if you think you might get involved.

The summit should be a fascinating experience.

7 comments from Bridge readers.

April 14, 2015 at 9:39 am

Oh the irony, not that they would really want to but most likely anyone directly affected by the topic being discussed probably couldn't afford to go to this.

Alison Arnold

April 14, 2015 at 4:01 pm

The summit is a 2 1/2 day program that includes costs to bring speakers to CMU and to convene and feed 300 attendees for 2 1/2 days. Registration fees will help defer costs. The forum is not a fundraiser. The College of Education has created a scholarship fund for its students to take part in the summit. This is the first year of the program and we hope that in future years, there may be further sponsorship support. Please contact Alison at: arnol1ab@cmich.edu

Doug Luciani

April 14, 2015 at 9:42 am

Great push for an important event around a critical issue. Thanks for your leadership Phil, and for the work being done by John Bebow and the team at the Center for Michigan. The Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce and Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance are with you!

R.L.

April 14, 2015 at 9:43 am

My wife and I had a combined 60 plus years in public education. Much emphasis is placed on the poor and what is needed to improve their educational opportunities. I agree, but let us not forget the value for all children in their needs pre-natal and ages one to five. A good foundation is absolutely necessary for them to succeed. Spend just one day in a five year olds classroom and you will see what I mean. R.L.

Duane

April 14, 2015 at 3:52 pm

As much as I value and recognize the need for the work of 'experts', I believe that the people who have succeeded independent of who or where they were have a treasure trove of practical knowledge and skills [a practical 'expertise'] that others could benefit from in developing their personal action plans.

Instead of taking Mr. Power's advice and attending the 'global summit' on learning, I will donate to The Center for Michigan to support Bridge posting an 'article' that asks readers about learning, the barriers they have faced, how and why they overcame those barriers, with a summary of ideas that readers offer.

I believe so strongly that there would be more value hearing from readers than attending that 'global summit' I will donate the amount I estimate it would cost me to follow Mr. Power's advice to Bridge in hopes that they will turn to readers for their insight on the issue of student learning.

As a idea start the Bridge consideration of this approach [turning to readers] there are three questions that might be asked; 'what barriers did you overcome?', 'why did you work to overcome them?', and 'how did you overcome them?' for readers to provide their experieinces/answers/observations to.

To minimize the burden to the Bridge staff I feel a few readers (I suspect there will be volunteers) adminisiter and summerize the responses for Bridge's staff consideration as an article.

Eric Sharp

April 15, 2015 at 12:43 pm

Duane, we already know what is needed to give kids a good start in life — a stable family that has enough money to provide a comfortable and stimulating lifestyle with parents who are motivated to care about their children's future. But as long as we have a society that begrudges head-start and school lunch programs for poor kids while spending

countless billions on welfare for oil companies, black budgets for the CIA, inane wars in the Middle East and any business supported by lobbyists who can blow into an elected official's pocket, it ain't going to change much. In nearly 50 years as a reporter I was often blown away by the thinking skills and insights from kids I ran into, especially those under the age of 14. We need to invest a lot more in keeping up the motivation of those youngsters once they reach puberty and insure that those smart enough to benefit from higher education get the chance to do so.

Duane

April 15, 2015 at 10:47 pm

Eric,

I am not as confident as you in 'conventional wisdom'. I have seen how individuals succeed in spite of what is said to be insurmountable obstacles and fail with just as significant advantages. A very public example is of a man who grew up in Detroit public schools to a single illiterate mother and as a less than stellar student in elementary school, yet became a world renowned pediatric neurosurgeon and his brother had similar academic success. The 'conventional wisdom' says that couldn't happen and yet it did. Don't you wonder why? Don't you wonder how? Don't you think he may have some practical 'expertise' others could learn from? Don't believe there are many others with success akin to his? I believe if not all many Bridge readers are successes that have overcome obstacles to their academic success, I would like hear how and why to see if there is something others could use from them.

As important as I see empirical science and the educational 'experts' are to the educational system, I also believe (when it's about people) that there is a practical 'expertise' that could be as valuable to the individual student. I believe in the collective wisdom and would like it include more often in community issues.