



Public policy in the best interest of children

Date: September 17, 2015  
To: Members of the House of Representatives, Education Committee  
From: Matt Gillard, President & CEO  
[matt@michiganschildren.org](mailto:matt@michiganschildren.org) or (517) 485-3500  
Re: H.B. 4822 – Third Grade Reading Bill

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on H.B. 4822. As many of you know, Michigan's Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children and youth from cradle to career and their families, with a focus on policy solutions that can improve equitable outcomes for children.

Michigan's Children has offered recommendations to the Legislature on what it takes to improve the literacy outcomes of children and youth in our state, and we've provided a handout on that today. We're also glad to provide specific comments on H.B. 4822, specifically around the read-at-home plans. Thank you for recognizing that schools must work with parents to improve children's literacy. As you know, parent engagement in their children's education makes a difference in education outcomes. However, we have some specific recommendations to strengthen the read-at-home plans that we hope you will consider.

First, we would like to see a requirement for the school districts and public school academies to collect data on any barriers parents/guardians have with implementing a read-at-home plan. We know that children's education success is closely connected to their parents' education and that many children struggling to read may have parents with their own literacy challenges. Or, parents may be unable to implement a read-at-home plan due to evening work hours. Having a better understanding of these types of barriers will allow schools and the state to better support parents with identified challenges to supporting their children's literacy journeys.

Second, we recommend expanding the language of the read-at-home plans to allow for the inclusion of after-school providers and other caregivers in the development and implementation of the read-at-home plan. Knowing the many challenges of working parents – particularly for parents who have their own literacy challenges – engaging other caregivers in addition to parents/guardians in developing a read-at-home plan who can then assist with the implementation of this plan just makes sense.

Third, while the read-at-home plans are the requirement of the school districts and public school academies, the literacy coaches are housed at the Intermediate School District level. We think this is a great opportunity from the read-at-home plan perspective to think about how the expertise of ISDs are utilized in developing and implementing those plans. Specifically, the ISDs oversee many of the early childhood

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programs that include family engagement as a critical component. Literacy coaches can work closely with those early childhood experts within the ISDs to assist LEAs and PSAs in how to best work with families to develop and implement read-at-home plans. Our concern with this, however, is that one literacy coach per ISD as written into the state budget is likely insufficient for the coaches to provide the supports that teachers need to not only improve their teaching inside the classroom but also to support the development and implementation of the read-at-home plans. While not the purview of this committee, we hope that you will work with your colleagues on appropriations – some of you sit on that committee – to increase support for literacy coaches in the FY2017 budget.

And finally, I must highlight that the success of the Grand Rapids pilot this summer that was supported by Mr. John Kennedy through the GVSU Charter was the result of a five-week, intensive, summer program. Michigan's Children has been a long-time advocate of expanded learning opportunities, understanding that the summer months are a critical time when children who have access to summer enrichment programs maintain their learnings during the school year and often start the new school year ahead of their peers, while children who lack access to summer programs often lose some of those learnings and start the school year behind. Having access to a high quality expanded learning programs during the summer months can not only ensure that no children start the school year behind but can also help students who are behind in their literacy to catch-up. We urge this committee, and those of you on appropriations, to consider supporting programs similar to the Grand Rapids pilot by investing in targeted expanded learning programs to improve literacy outcomes.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. Michigan's Children stands ready to work with the Legislature and the Department of Education to ensure that all children and youth are reading proficiently and on a path towards education and life success.