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Supporting Family Literacy: Equipping Parents and Children with Literacy Skills for Lifelong Success

Much attention has been placed on ensuring more young children are reading proficiently by the end of third grade. While research has consistently shown the impact of parental education on children's education success, little focus has been placed on the role of family literacy within the third grade reading context, and the importance of supporting the educational needs of parents with limited skills themselves.

Research documents the impact of parental education on children's success in school and in life. Multiple studies have shown that children with more educated parents have more literacy readiness skills and greater education success.ⁱ When 42,000 Michiganders ages 18-34 have less than a ninth grade educationⁱⁱ, an assumption cannot be made about parents' ability to engage in their children's learning.

Despite inadequate funding, some communities have pieced together other resources to maintain more limited family literacy programming without dedicated, consistent public resource. While there are other public funding streams that may include family literacy as a component of their service provision, there is no dedicated public resource at the state or federal level to support family literacy, despite its importance and success. Funding for Adult Education has not been adequate to meet the need and some mandates in that program have produced barriers to serving the hardest to serve families. In addition, many families don't have access to consistent and reliable child care while trying to fit in their own educational improvement with employment and family responsibilities.

Investment in family literacy must be included in a third grade reading plan and Michigan must continue to rebuild its adult education investment. Both can further the educational attainment and skill-building of parents, while providing opportunities for them to learn alongside their children. Broader public commitment of resources can ensure that the family literacy opportunities currently available to a small number of children and families are consistent and sustainable all over the state.

Recommendations:

1. Include Family Literacy as a strategy in Section 35a of the School Aid Act to bolster support for the Read at Home plans outlined in the Smart Promotion package of legislation intended to avoid third grade retention. Adult Education programs are uniquely situated to work with other K-3 staff in providing assistance to parents who are unable to help with their child's education because of gaps in their own learning skills.
2. Expand the current School Aid investment of \$25 million in Adult Education programs to better reflect the population in need of basic education support, and ensure that a portion of that funding is directed toward parents with low skill levels, particularly those with less than a 9th grade education.

ⁱ Child Trends. <http://www.childtrends.org>

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2011-2013 three-year estimates.

