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Supporting Children's Learning Outside the Classroom: High Quality Child Care and Expanded Learning Options Matter This Election Season

Families need affordable, high quality child care for their young children and after-school and summer learning opportunities for their school-aged children – also known as expanded learning options – while parents work or engage in job training. Access to high quality child care can ensure that young children are building the foundation they need to succeed in school and life. High quality expanded learning programs ensure school-aged children stay engaged in learning and remain academically on-track. The research is clear that these types of high quality options provide the greatest benefit to the state's most challenged children and youth, including children of color and children from low-income families.

In fiscal year 2015, 29,600 children in Michigan ages 0-12 spent part or all of their day (and sometimes evenings or weekends) with a non-parent caregiver who received public child care assistance. Unfortunately, the quality of these programs vary significantly, and access to high quality programs utilizing the state's low level of subsidy is very challenging. Roughly 40,000 school-age children spent time afterschool and in the summer at high quality, federally funded 21st Century Learning Center programs. This program funding is able to support less than half of the fully qualified program applicants, constraining options for the lowest-income families. At the same time, thousands of additional families are accessing child care and expanded learning options through their own private dollars, including families that should have received some support but have faced too many barriers to do so. Michigan has not invested even the minimum state funding needed to take advantage of federal child care dollars in recent years, and has not invested in afterschool and summer learning significantly in many years. Policy solutions and public investment strategies that improve the quality of the child care and expanded learning system for both young children and school-aged children that makes high quality settings more accessible to all families are essential.

Why High Quality Child Care, Afterschool and Summer Learning Matter for Michigan's Future

- ✓ Over one-third of Michigan children begin kindergarten underprepared. Long-running studies on the impact of high quality early childhood care and education have proven that graduates of those programs are better prepared for kindergarten, achieve at higher levels throughout their k-12 education, are more likely earn a high school and college degree, and achieve greater employment success in adulthood.
- ✓ Gaps in literacy and math skills start early and compound. By the time a child from a low-income family reaches sixth grade, he or she has spent an estimated 6,000 fewer hours learning than a peer from a higher income household.
- ✓ Too many Michigan students lose some academic gains during the long summer break, making their K-12 education experiences that much more challenging. Fortunately, Michigan's high quality expanded learning summer programs have proven to help students retain academic skills from the previous school year, improve their performance in reading and math, increase participation and engagement, and promote development in other areas needed for success in school and life.

What is the Role of Policymakers?

The federal government currently provides the main source of funding for child care (Child Care and Development Funds/CCDF) and expanded learning options through after-school and summer programming (21st Century Community Learning Centers). These funds support access to care and quality improvement efforts, but continue to fall well-below the amount needed to ensure all low-income children have access to high quality child care and expanded learning programs. The State Legislature appropriates state dollars that are leveraged to maximize federal child care funds; unfortunately Michigan has failed to provide enough funds resulting in federal CCDF child care money left on the table for the last three years that could have been used to continue to increase access to high quality care. Additionally, the State Legislature can determine how Michigan's child care system functions like setting reimbursement rates for subsidized families, determining the subsidy payment structure – currently an hourly payment structure that does not meet market demands, determining eligibility rules, etc. Appropriately investing in the subsidy system and improving policies can ensure that families can access high quality, stable child care including expanded learning programs that can better blend child care funding into their programs to serve more children. Additionally, the Legislature can prioritize the needs of Michigan students and families by investing state funds specifically into expanded learning programs to ensure that more low-income children and youth can access high quality options – once a \$17 million state investment that is no longer.

Suggested Questions for Candidates

- Child care is essential for adults to be able to work. How would you ensure that high quality child care is accessible to more working families?
- As a parent who relies on the child care subsidy, I struggle to pay for child care. What will you do about this if elected into office?
- As a parent, I struggle to pay for programs for my child when s/he is not in school – after school and in the summer. What will you do to ensure that enriching programs that keep my kid safe and engaged while I'm working are available to families like mine?
- As a child care provider, the state subsidy is far too low for me to accept many subsidized kids into my care without going bankrupt. What will you do to ensure child care businesses like my own can stay in business while helping more of Michigan's lowest income families?
- As an active member of my community, I see the benefit that afterschool and summer programs have on young people and their families, and I support them privately as best I can. How will you ensure that the public sector puts up their fair share of support?

What Candidates Can Do If Elected Into Office

- ✓ Reform the child care subsidy system to a weekly or monthly rate and increase the level of reimbursement to allow Michigan's lowest-income families to access high quality, consistent care.
- ✓ Ensure that school-aged "child care" – aka expanded learning – receives the same prioritization as care for young children.
- ✓ Supplement the state's federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding to ensure additional high quality expanded learning programs are available to low-income families.
- ✓ Increase the quality of the entire child care system by passing a series of child care tax credits to support families, child care providers, child care teachers and directors, and businesses. Learn more about child care tax credits by reading our [Issues for Michigan's Children publication](#).
- ✓ Ensure that any child care policy changes take into account the needs of working families trying to get ahead while appropriately supporting the developmental and educational needs of their children.