



Public policy
in the best interest
of children.

Date: March 22, 2017

To: K-12, School Aid, Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Michigan Senate
From: Matt Gillard, President and CEO
Michigan's Children
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RE: Testimony On Early Literacy Programs, Section 35a

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the FY2018 state budget. 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.

Education is a lifelong process that begins at birth. Differences in literacy skills emerge as early as 9 months of age, and educational disparities grow through early childhood and throughout academic careers without access to effective strategies to close gaps. Today, we will take this opportunity to continue to offer our recommendations on what it takes to improve the literacy outcomes of children and youth in our state, and how Section 35a and other areas of the budget could be improved to better do that.

Section 35a (5), Additional Instruction Time in K-3rd Grade. By the time a child from a low-income family reaches the 6th grade, for example, they have spent an estimated 6,000 fewer hours learning than a peer from a wealthier household. Access to supplemental supports that stop equity gaps from growing through the school year and in the summer months are critical.

The Governor's FY18 budget recommendation again includes \$17.5 million for additional instruction time in k-3rd grade. **We are supportive of this investment in expanded learning opportunities, but recommend at least a portion of this funding be targeted to before-school, after-school and summer-learning opportunities for k-3rd grade.** Facilitating that resource through Michigan's federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) programs would ensure both quality programming and leveraging community resources. Michigan currently receives \$39 million in federal 21st CCLC funding to support expanded learning programs in the most challenged communities across the state, but this funds fewer than half of the best programs applying in Michigan. Targeted investment to fund additional 21st CCLC programs that focus on k-3rd grade literacy can improve students' performance in reading and math, increase student participation and engagement, and promote students' development in other areas needed for success in school and life.

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Section 35a (4), Early Literacy Coaches. While we are supportive of this increase in resources for Intermediate School Districts (ISD) to hire a literacy coach under this section, we continue to be concerned that one literacy coach per ISD is certainly 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, and other family literacy issues, which are so essential to children's success.

Include Family Literacy as a new strategy in Section 35a. As our efforts to improve early literacy continue, they cannot be successful with every struggling child without taking into consideration the literacy needs of their parents. Investment in family literacy must be included and supported in third grade reading efforts and Michigan must continue to rebuild its adult education investment. Adult Education programs are uniquely positioned to work with other K-3 staff in providing assistance to parents who are unable to help with their children's education because of gaps in their own learning skills. Specifically, we would recommend:

1. Additional resource to bolster support for the Read at Home plans, including a requirement to collect data on barriers that parents/guardians have with implementing read-at-home plans. Ensuring staff support through the early literacy coaches or elsewhere to better understand barriers will allow schools and the state to better support parents with identified challenges to supporting their children's literacy journeys.
2. Expand the current School Aid investment of \$25 million in Adult Education programs, under Section 35a or in Section 107, to better reflect the population in need of basic education support and to direct funding toward parents with low skill levels and two-generation literacy programming.
3. Move administration for the Adult Education program back into the Department of Education from the Talent Development Agency, where it can better integrate with other child and family literacy supports.

Thank you.