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Supporting Children's Learning Outside the Classroom: High Quality Child Care and Expanded Learning Options Matter to Michigan Communities

Education is a lifelong process that begins at birth – from cradle to career. But the children who most need additional learning opportunities are often the least likely to get them. Differences in literacy skills emerge as early as 9 months of age, and educational disparities grow through early childhood and the early elementary years depending on available learning opportunities. Families need affordable, high quality child care for their young children and after-school and summer learning opportunities (or expanded learning opportunities) for their school-aged children while they work or engage in job training or other education.

The research is clear and extensive. High quality afterschool and summer learning programs that take advantage of community, post-secondary and workforce partnerships offer opportunities to build on the school day and provide the supports listed above that students need. They can help students get motivated and engaged, and can help them catch up. They successfully engage parents in their children's learning. The research clearly illustrates that afterschool and summer learning programs positively impact attendance, achievement, behavior and eventual high school graduation. A high quality expanded learning summer program pilot in Michigan helped students retain academic skills from the previous school year; 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. Despite these and other research findings, quality expanded learning opportunities are not available consistently across the state, and a lack of state investment has contributed to the lack of accessibility.

Each year, roughly 12,000 school-age children in Michigan spend part of 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 spend 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 and including quality programs that need additional resources to expand their reach and impact.

Michigan only began to invest the minimum state funding needed to take advantage of federal child care dollars in the last budget cycle, after failing to do so for several years prior. Michigan does not invest in our own afterschool or summer learning programs beyond what is supported through the federal 21st Century grants, which become more and more at-risk in the federal budget.

Why High Quality Child Care, Afterschool and Summer Learning Matters 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 to 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 experience that much more challenging. Fortunately, Michigan's high quality expanded learning summer programs have proven to help students retain academic skills from the previous year, improve their performance in reading and math, increase participation and engagement, and promote development in other areas needed for life and school success.

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; and it can determine how Michigan's child care system functions, like setting reimbursement rates for subsidized families, determining the subsidy payment structure – currently and hourly structure that does not meet market demands or fit well with after-school and summer learning programs – and determine eligibility, rules, etc. The Michigan Legislature need to:

- ✓ Appropriately invest in the subsidy system and improving its 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; and
- ✓ Prioritize the needs of Michigan students and families by investing state funds from School Aid or the General Fund 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.

Question to Ask Decision Makers: As an active member of my community, I see the benefit that afterschool and summer programs have on young people and their families, and my community supports them to the best of our ability. How will you ensure that Michigan puts up its fair share of support for these important programs?