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Learning Matters

Use this Election Season to Help All Kids Thrive and Achieve in School

Michigan's children will be our next scientists, entrepreneurs, teachers, parents, laborers, artists and lawmakers, and our future depends on preparing them education, work, and life. There is universal agreement that a high-quality K-12 education matters for our future, but our results are not meeting our high standards. 44% of Michigan children score "proficient" in reading at a third-grade level, with just 20%, 32%, and 31% of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students scoring proficient, respectively. For eighth-grade-level math, those scores are 36%, 10%, 20%, and 22%, respectively. And nearly two in ten Michigan students who should have graduated in 2017 failed to do so. Dropout rates remain higher for Black, Hispanic and American Indian students, and for those facing life challenges like poverty, disability and homelessness.

A High-Quality Education Needs All Hands On Deck

Research and the lived experience of youth and families teach us what kids need to succeed:

Parents and caregivers who have tools to support their children's learning at home

Children learn best when their households reinforce lessons from school. However, over 40,000 Michiganders aged 18-34 have less than a ninth grade education, and many live with the effects of [childhood trauma](#). For kids to succeed, we must wrap supports around their families as well.

Skilled School Professionals

Kids need well-trained teachers, [counselors](#), [health professionals](#), social workers, and others who are trained to help students build important skills and to connect them with critical academic, health, and social supports and services while they're in school.

Access to basic resources that are essential to learning

Children learn when their brains and bodies are healthy and ready to learn. But food costs for a Michigan family [have risen 15%](#) since 2007, and gaps exist in school meal programs, especially in summer. And thousands of children [still lack health care](#), and many Medicaid families with school-aged children are at-risk of losing coverage under new work requirement policies.

Safe, clean, and secure spaces, at home and at school

We know that minds develop best in [safe environments](#), in school and at home. But Michigan has billions of dollars in unmet school facilities need, in both urban and rural districts. And in 2016, in over 40% of school districts, at least 10% of students [experienced homelessness](#), and many more lived in poor or substandard housing due to a lack of resources or options.

Academic tools and pathways that enable their educational success

Most students at some point will need academic supports. Unfortunately, a sixth-grader from a low-income family has spent an estimated [6,000 fewer hours learning](#) than wealthier peers. For youth who need more time to complete high school, flexible credit options are limited, especially for youth experiencing homelessness, foster care, or juvenile justice.

What is the Role of Policymakers?

Lawmakers play many roles in supporting the educational success of young people, influencing factors that drive learning both within and outside of the educational system. Federal revenues impact nearly every child throughout the state. The vast majority of Michigan's funds for Medicaid; for child welfare (Social Security, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Act); for child care (the Child Care and Development Fund and Block Grant, and Head Start), and for food and housing assistance (TANF, the Fair Housing Act, and the Farm Bill), come from the federal government. Most cash assistance for low-income Michigan families comes from the federal government as well. Michigan also receives 15% of its K-12 education funding through the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Most federal funds go to areas with higher levels of students at or near poverty or funds special education, afterschool programs, and other initiatives. Federal lawmakers from Michigan must understand just how much our state - and our students - rely on the opportunities created by federal funding for basic needs, health and education programs.

State policymakers also impact the direction and prioritization of education policy, and other issues that directly influence educational outcomes. The state provides funds for public health insurance and other basic programs, sets tax policies that impact household resources and resources available for programs and services, and helps set policy for other critical areas that impact students, including child welfare and criminal justice. About 70% of K-12 school funds are state-appropriated, largely in the form of per-pupil foundation grants. In 2017, Michigan's minimum per-pupil grant was \$7,511, with a basic grant of \$8,229. Michigan also offers additional funding for "at-risk" students, career technical education, and English language learners and provides funds for early childhood education, adult education, and postsecondary education, including public community colleges, colleges, and universities.

Suggested Questions for Candidates

- How will you ensure that Michigan students who are at-risk of falling behind have access to programs that help them stay in school, catch up, and succeed?
- How will you ensure children enter school mentally and physically ready to learn?
- How will you support the academic success of homeless students and students in foster care and juvenile justice, whose situations demand unique educational strategies?
- If elected, how would you work to ensure that parents and other caregivers had the skills necessary to assist their children meet educational benchmarks like third-grade reading?
- How will you ensure that Michigan children and youth are growing up and learning in safe and stable housing and school buildings?
- How will you ensure that families of infants and toddlers have access to help when their young children may experience developmental delays?
- If elected, how will you ensure that fewer children in Michigan experience circumstances that seriously impede their school performance? (examples could include: abuse or neglect, homelessness, domestic violence, substance use, mental health issues)
- If elected, how would you ensure that every children has access to trained, supportive school professionals, including counselors, health professionals, and social workers?

Learn more about the ingredients of a high-quality education in our [Issues brief](#).