

PLAYBOOK
FOR
MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN

2019-2020 Legislative Priorities

STRONG
FAMILIES



THRIVING
STUDENTS



READY
LEARNERS



SUCCESSFUL
TRANSITIONS

Michigan's
Children

michiganschildren.org

OUR CORE POLICY PRINCIPLES

“Will this change the odds for children, youth, and families in Michigan?”

It’s the most important question we ask ourselves when we begin our work, and it’s how we decide what work to pursue with each new legislature and administration. To know whether our policy priorities are meeting our mission, we evaluate whether or not they will:



Close the Gaps

Discouraging and unacceptable gaps in a wide variety of life outcomes for children, youth and families begin early and persist over a lifetime, with race, ethnicity, geography and family economics continuing to predict success. The most effective public policies and investments not only improve overall well-being, but also close gaps in access to resources and opportunities.

Grow Healthy Minds

Raising Michigan’s children isn’t rocket science—it’s brain science. Healthy development and good mental health are critical for the growth and well-being of children and youth and for the stability of families. Public policy and investment must promote access to concrete supports and services. This is critical to prevent harmful experiences that alter brain development in ways that make it difficult to participate and excel, and to better align services to changing brain architecture of children, youth, and those who care for them.

Listen to Youth and Families

To pursue the most effective solutions for children, youth, and families in Michigan, decision-makers need accurate information about what works and what doesn’t. This means that our legislature and administration must ground their work in data and research and create space for the voices of youth and parents to impact policy conversations. Children, youth and families experience the outcomes of lawmaker decisions every day. Their voices are not always included in decision-making and yet their perspective on whether programs are accessible and effective and for whom is crucial information for design and investment.

Make Government Work

Michigan’s many state and local agencies administer scores of effective programs and collect millions of points of data, but existing resources and administrative staffing are often insufficient for making information and services work together to improve the lives of citizens. The needs of families don’t neatly fit into individual programs or departments, requiring structures that enable cross-agency information sharing, research, constituent voice and program planning and investment.

Support Professionals

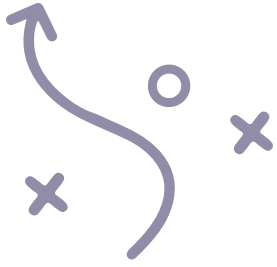
The individuals providing services to children and families across the state are helping grow Michigan’s economy by strengthening our talent pipeline. Many professionals who serve children and families, however, do not currently earn wages that reflect their contributions to our state’s economic growth and development. For example, in 2016, child care workers and mental health direct care professionals made under \$10.00/hour on average. Still others are overburdened with high caseloads, limited professional support, or populations with many needs and few available services. Public policy and investment decisions must also fortify those who serve kids and families on the front lines.

Build on Progress

Many programs have become less accessible to Michigan citizens over recent decades and child and family outcomes remain far below acceptable levels. However, Michigan has moved the ball forward on a number of initiatives in recent years, and we must recognize and build upon that progress. (See page 12 for examples.)



PROVEN PLAYS FOR STRONG FAMILIES



Michigan children whose parents achieved higher levels of education are less likely to repeat a grade and more likely to develop early literacy skills...

7%

of students whose parents finished high school repeated 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade.

14%

of students whose parents did NOT finish high school repeated 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade.

Source: www.childtrends.org/indicators/children-who-repeated-a-grade-2

Common sense and strong research demonstrate that the well-being of parents matters to their children's social-emotional, physical, and economic well-being, to their children's educational and life success, and to the strength and stability of families. Research shows that adversity in childhood affects the very architecture of the brain with lifelong implications.

Too many families face barriers to opportunities including poor mental health, violence, and economic instability, making it more difficult for their children to grow up physically and emotionally healthy and ultimately leading to greater difficulties learning, entering the workforce, and supporting families of their own. The families with the most challenges deserve consistent support to maintain environments and overcome stressful and traumatic experiences.

Keeping All Families Strong

Families are stable when they are free from violence, substance abuse and mental health challenges; when they have parenting knowledge and skill as well as access to parenting supports; and when they have resources and the skills to get resources including adequate support for work and school.

- X Preserve and expand state support for adult education programs** that provide opportunities for young adults and parents to build literacy skills, earn a GED, and prepare for a career, improving workforce participation and family literacy rates.
- X Invest federal and state funds into child care family support eligibility and provider payments**, which will ensure young children are closing the early learning gap, protecting against poverty-related risk factors, and enabling their parents to access a job or job preparation.
- X Ensure early diagnosis and treatment for developmental delays, physical or mental health challenges and other learning disabilities.** This includes preserve and expand recent state investment in Medicaid and *Early On* Michigan and school-based health services.
- X Increase state support to provide statewide access to voluntary evidence-based home visiting programs based on local needs assessments.** These quality programs work with families exhibiting some risk to promote early learning and healthy child development and improve birth.
- X Increase state support for local abuse and neglect prevention councils** which coordinate community support, assess needs and build partnerships to be able to provide needed services for families who without concrete support might experience trauma.
- X Increase state support for child abuse and neglect prevention direct services statewide.** Community-identified needs lead to evidenced practices like home visiting, parenting classes, counseling, child care, referrals, transportation and prenatal care for families preventing instability.
- X Conduct comprehensive needs assessments of parent basic skill levels** including literacy and use those assessments to guide additional program and investment decisions.



Supporting Struggling Families

Caregivers of all kinds need access to services and programs to support their families' overall success and help maintain family stability, including keeping children and youth out of the foster care system.

- ✘ **Expand state funding for statewide adoption of problem-solving courts for mental health and substance use**, which help parents and young adults receive the treatment they need to avoid losing custody of their children and spending time in jail or prison.
- ✘ **Supplement recent federal funding to create a kinship navigator program** for relative caregivers that provides the services and supports families need.
- ✘ **Ensure state funding to match federal match dollars for maintenance payments to approved kinship caregivers and allow informal kinship caregivers to receive payments to meet the needs of the children in their care.** Out-of-home placements with relatives and other kin, when paired with supports and services, can maintain important relationships and mitigate trauma.
- ✘ **Identify a four-year strategy to build investment in trauma prevention and intervention that will support existing community efforts.** Utilize the good work invested within DHHS to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and build trauma-informed systems and policies.

Responsibility for the Most Vulnerable Children, Youth and Families

When we decide to separate families, we bear the responsibility to definitively say that children and youth, and often their families and caregivers, are doing better with system attention than they would be otherwise, regardless of where they are born or currently living.

- ✘ **Include more citizen voices in Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Citizen Review Panels and require public discussion of panel findings in the legislature and state agencies** to ensure that state efforts around prevention; Children's Protective Services, Foster Care, and Adoption; and Child Fatalities Panels are effective and well-informed.
- ✘ **Mandate public responses from MDHHS and appropriate Courts** to all recommendations made by Foster Care Review Boards, who review child welfare complaints.
- ✘ **Strengthen the recently passed Children's Assurance of Quality Foster Care Act** by adding reporting requirements about child welfare complaints and corrective actions taken. Make these available to an independent evaluator like the Foster Care Review Boards to ensure that the voices of citizens in the system are fully acknowledged.
- ✘ **Direct MDHHS to analyze the root causes of family removals and barriers to reunification**, including poor or substandard housing, substance abuse, and mental health. Existing data should be reviewed, research partnerships should be supported, and constituent voice utilized.
- ✘ **Improve communication between caregivers, birth families, and caseworkers** by leveraging new technology and applications designed to improve child welfare experiences.
- ✘ **Expand Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) coverage statewide** to allow all children in the court system to have access to that resource. This expansion could begin by ensuring access in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.
- ✘ **Create an enhanced child care support system for relative caregivers and other families in the foster care system** that includes improved rates and social-emotional supports.



4,000

The number of children living with relatives licensed as foster parents.

Nearly 4,000 more unlicensed but connected to the system.

At least 10 times as many cared for by relatives informally.

Source: www.gu.org/grandfamilies-statistics/

