

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 SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS



The increase in graduation rates when students are given a 5th or 6th year to complete:

5%

All Michigan Students

10%

Poor Students

18%

Homeless Students

Source: www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StudentInformation/GraduationDropoutRate2.aspx

The economic success of Michigan depends on getting all Michigan children ready for post-secondary education, work, and life, but too many young people aren't succeeding through traditional high school graduation routes, and many need more time or different paths to reach a diploma. In addition, many young people, including youth who have spent time in foster care or the juvenile justice system, or those who have been homeless, face barriers to graduation that education alone cannot remove. Maintaining support through young adulthood is even more critical for young people facing these kinds of challenges, and services should be available regardless of age or geography, with access based instead on skill building and successful outcomes.

Providing Stability

Ensuring that young people who shoulder significant burdens have some stability in their lives and education, coupled with trauma-informed services and opportunities to get ahead, will result in more supportive relationships, fewer criminal justice records and better educational, career and family outcomes.

- X Expand the Michigan EITC for young people who have experienced foster care** by lowering the minimum age to 16 and basing the credit on what would be available through the federal and state EITC combined if the current age threshold of 25 was met.
- X Fully fund programs and coordinated services through the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative** to put youth in foster care, who may take longer to get through high school and often have fewer home supports in their transition, on a path towards life success.
- X Develop inter-agency agreements between education and child welfare** to ensure the quick transfer of information when a student in foster care moves, better record of accumulated credits, and better communication about any special needs.
- X Eliminate barriers to acquiring a state ID or driver's license** for youth in transition by coordinating DHHS and Secretary of State efforts.
- X Improve legal representation for children, youth and caregivers in the foster care system through consistent support of Legal Guardians Ad Litem (LGALs)** by utilizing available federal match and expanding state funding, as well as increasing training and documentation requirements for courts.
- X Expand Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) representation for older youth in foster care** by piloting the National CASA Fostering Futures initiative, which targets transitioning youth, in at least three localities. Use this pilot to determine appropriate ways to layer support through this initiative and Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI).
- X Reintroduce, pass, and fund the Raise the Age bills**, which would allow prosecutors to choose to enroll 17-year-old offenders into the juvenile justice system with community-based rehabilitative services that are proven to reduce recidivism rates.
- X Continue and expand state support for the organizations within the Network for Youth and Families** who serve homeless young people, including youth who have experienced foster care, and youth living with a disability.



Preparing for Postsecondary Training and Careers

It is universally accepted that some postsecondary training is essential to access family-supporting jobs. Not surprisingly, postsecondary paths are even less accessible to young people who have struggled through high school, who may be coping with trauma stemming from previous instability, and who may continue to need financial and other support to succeed.

- ✕ **Improve collaboration between school districts and Michigan Rehabilitation Services** to ensure the completion of Individualized Education Plans for older high school students and the appropriate transfer of student records to post-secondary providers.
- ✕ **Expand state support for, and reform eligibility for, the Fostering Futures Scholarship**, which provides college tuition, room, and board, and supplies to youth who spent time in foster care. This scholarship needs to more flexibly layer onto other assistance programs and could be expanded to serve more young people in need.

Many of the same proven solutions for supporting students will also help young adults transition into postsecondary education and a career:

- ✕ **Direct state funds towards proven models of integrating student services at school**, which could be facilitated through inter-agency funding mechanisms. Coordinating academic, health, and other services between schools, service providers, parents, and community partners for students can remove barriers to learning that one system alone can't solve.
- ✕ **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.
- ✕ **Preserve and expand state support for competency-based education and flexible paths to graduation** which provide flexible scheduling, smaller classes, alternative credit-bearing options, and post-secondary pathways to students who may struggle to achieve and graduate due to their personal circumstances.

Outcomes for young people experiencing foster care by age 21:

Full / Part-time Employment

41%

Michigan Foster Care

49%

U.S. Foster Care

62%

All Michigan Young Adults

High School Diploma / GED+

66%

Michigan Foster Care

76%

U.S. Foster Care

91%

All Michigan Young Adults

Source: www.aecf.org/resources/fostering-youth-transitions/