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Building Family Literacy

Caregivers have a powerful influence on their children's lives. Over 40,000 Michiganders aged 18-34 have less than a ninth grade education and over 14,000 babies are born each year to a mom without a high school credential. Limited education leaves parents disadvantaged in the job market and in their abilities to both engage in their children's learning and navigate systems for their children.

Much attention has been placed on ensuring more young children are reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Despite research consistently showing the impact of parental education on children's education and life success, little focus has been placed on the importance of supporting the educational needs of parents with limited skills themselves. While some public funding streams may include family literacy as a component of their service provision, there is no dedicated public resource at the state or federal level to support family literacy, despite its importance to success.

Adult education programs support young adults and parents to build literacy skills, earn a GED or high school credential, and prepare for a career, improving workforce participation and family literacy rates. Despite their ability to provide critical literacy and other basic skill services across the state, these programs lack the capacity to meet the full demand. Funding for Adult Education has not been adequate to meet the need.

Michigan has seen significant investment in early literacy over the last couple of years. Investment in family literacy must be included and supported in third grade reading efforts and Michigan must continue to rebuild its adult education investment. Both can further the educational attainment and skill-building of parents, while providing opportunities for them to learn alongside their children. Broader public commitment of resources can ensure that the family literacy opportunities currently available to a small number of children and families are consistent and sustainable all over the state.

Recommendations:

1. Increase adult education funding by \$10 million, coupled with regional coordination to determine service gaps where that additional investment would be best directed.
2. Support increased investment in Early Literacy Coaches for teachers, strengthening the capacity of those coaches to assist with read-at-home plans for Michigan families. Require coaches to collect data and report on barriers that parents/guardians have with supporting their children's reading and other skill building at home.
3. Improve the coordination of family skill building initiatives with other services, including coordination of subsidized child care for adult learners and co-location of supports for children with education and workforce training programs for their parents.