

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.)



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**“Supporting
Michigan’s
children
isn’t rocket
science—
it’s BRAIN
science.”**

Dear Friends,



This is an exciting year for Michigan’s future, as we work with a new crop of legislators, new faces in Congress, a new Superintendent, changes to the State Board of Education, and a new Governor. Children, youth and families don’t have highly paid lobbyists or “super PACs” looking out for their best interests in Lansing or in Washington, DC. What they *do* have is all of us.

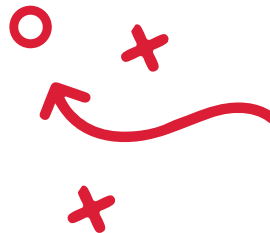
To help Michigan’s newly elected officials hit the ground running in 2019, we are sharing our priorities for this legislative session as a *Playbook for Michigan’s Children*, informed by the voices and experiences of young people, parents, and the professionals who support them.

Michigan’s Children continues to prioritize policies driven by research and best practice. Our policy priorities are always guided by the experiences and recommendations of children, youth and families and the programs that serve them well, helping to close equity gaps and improve the odds for Michigan’s future. This playbook was informed by youth- and family-led candidate forums in 11 communities around the state, as well as FamilySpeaks, KidSpeaks, and other training and outreach opportunities representing dozens more.

To know whether our policy priorities are meeting our mission, we evaluate how they stack up against our core policy principles (detailed on the previous page). To learn more about how we are fighting for children, youth and families this legislative session, please visit our website at www.michiganschildren.org.

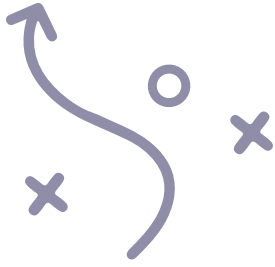
Sincerely,

Matthew Gillard, President & CEO





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.

1,500

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

Nearly 3,200 more unlicensed but connected to the system.

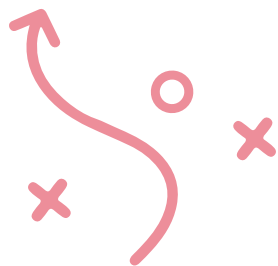
At least 10 times as many cared for by relatives informally.

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





PROVEN PLAYS FOR READY LEARNERS



Michigan’s economy is surging – unemployment is 4% for the first time since 2000. However, labor force participation remains low, especially for young adults, Black and Hispanic parents, and parents in rural and high-poverty areas, with business leaders and workers alike citing the cost and availability of child care as a major barrier. Under-served parents and their children are both at risk of falling behind Michigan’s economic boom. Without access to high-quality child care, parents aren’t getting to work, compromising families ability to succeed.

Beyond child care, other early childhood programs work with families to develop skills and access services to promote their young children’s healthy growth. Without them, kids enter kindergarten behind their peers, and stay behind. Third grade reading test scores in Michigan remain troubling, but a looming third grade retention crisis offers an opportunity to rethink how we support the factors that are proven to drive a child’s early growth: their parents, their health, and their social and cognitive development.



51%

of families who are eligible for state child care assistance don’t receive it.

Source: datacenter.kidscount.org
(Children Ages 0-12 Eligible for and Receiving Subsidized Care)

Quality Care for Children

Access to high-quality child care has been proven to close gaps in early learning by helping young children develop the social and cognitive skills they need to interact with others along with basic literacy and numeracy. High quality child care is also essential for parents to engage in work, job training, or education to support themselves and their children, but many families in need cannot access state support.

- ✘ **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.
- ✘ **Create an enhanced child care support system for families in the foster care system who struggle to find child care even though they automatically qualify for support.**

A Healthy Start

Ensuring children are born healthy and are developmentally on track results in a healthy start for young children. This includes access to developmental screenings and services for every family whose infant or toddler has or is at risk of delay and access to support for parents and other caregivers to ensure opportunities to build early skills needed to thrive.

- ✘ **Preserve and expand recent state investment in *Early On Michigan*** to provide recognized levels of service to all eligible infants and toddlers. *Early On* provides screening and services to families with infants and toddlers with and at risk of acquiring a developmental delay, equipping families in their homes with skills to help their children, often preventing the need for future costly K-12 special education services.
- ✘ **Create a single unified system that serves infants and toddlers** eligible for both *Early On* early intervention services and Michigan Mandatory Special Education. The current “two-tiered” system results in uneven services, creating equity gaps.
- ✘ **Increase state support for mental health consultants** to provide supports and services to providers and families in child care settings across the state in both formal and in-home settings.



Supporting Parents

Supporting parents to be their children's first and best teachers results in safe, stable, and nurturing home environments that promote children's early learning and development. Also critical is to enable communities to drive resource investments based on their own needs and the needs of their families.

- ✘ **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 and early learning outcomes.
- ✘ **Increase state support for local abuse and neglect prevention councils** which coordinate community support, assess needs, and build partnerships to provide needed services for families who without concrete support might experience trauma.
- ✘ **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, which help prevent instability.

Family instability at an early age leads to decreased reading test scores.

65%

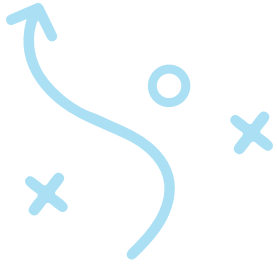
reading proficiency of 3rd graders whose families **were not** investigated for abuse or neglect.

57%

reading proficiency of 3rd graders whose families **were** investigated for abuse or neglect.

Source: www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/jacobs-and-ryan-report.pdf





6,000

Fewer hours spent by low-income kids in enriched learning — such as preschool, summer camp, or after-school activities — as their middle class or wealthier peers by sixth grade.

Source: www.expandedschools.org/policy-documents/6000-hour-learning-gap#sthash.baTUgK2E.dpbs

Michigan’s children will be our next scientists, entrepreneurs, teachers, parents, laborers, artists and lawmakers, and our future depends on preparing them for 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 the outcomes we need. By the time poor children are in the 6th grade, they have spent 6,000 fewer hours learning, resulting in gaps in their academic success. By the third grade, white students are well above their peers of color in reading, by the eighth grade those gaps are even larger for math outcomes. High school dropout rates remain higher for Black, Hispanic and American Indian students, and for those facing life challenges like poverty, disability and homelessness.

Years of research and the lived experience of youth and families have taught us that in order to succeed, students need: parents and caregivers who have tools to support their children’s learning at home; trained school professionals who can recognize and respond to student needs; access to basic resources that are essential to learning; and academic tools and pathways that enable their educational success.

Academic Tools and Pathways

Students who begin behind in school remain behind without appropriate intervention, and other students face life challenges that require additional academic supports, particularly those experiencing foster care, homelessness or juvenile justice.

- X Provide dedicated state funding to ensure quality after-school programs are available around the state.** Quality after-school and summer learning programs help struggling students improve attendance, behavior, and achievement through developing their own strengths and potential.
- X Remove barriers to families affording child care for their school-age children** by ensuring that quality after-school and summer learning programs can qualify for child care funds.
- X 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.

Family Skill-Building

Children learn best when their households are able to reinforce lessons from school and effectively interact with schools and other services. Building caregiver skills and improving access to services for families leads to resilient and successful students.

- 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 Require regional needs assessments for adult education programs** so that additional resources can be appropriately utilized to close service gaps.
- X Improve coordination of family skill building initiatives with other services,** including coordination of free and affordable child care for adult learners and co-location of supports for children with education and workforce training programs for their parents.
- X Require Early Literacy Coaches to collect data on barriers that parents/guardians have with implementing read-at-home plans,** which Michigan law requires for families of students who do not score proficient in reading. Understanding parents’ barriers must inform decision-making.



Access to Resources for Learning

Children learn best when their brains and bodies are healthy and ready to learn. Supporting responsibility for education beyond the school doors can create a system of integrated services that better serve the most challenged children, youth, families and communities.

- ✘ **Allocate professional development resources for trauma-informed practices** to increase educators' capacity to diagnose and appropriately respond to student behaviors that may have been influenced by trauma. This helps bolster increased investments in student services and recent changes to state school discipline law.
- ✘ **Expand funding to ensure statewide access to school-based and school-linked physical and mental health services**, and invest in statewide capacity to match school spending for student health services with federal Medicaid funds.
- ✘ **Build programs that address the specific needs of children, youth and caregivers experiencing foster care**, including communications, trauma-informed practice, improved assessment and service provision for developmental and learning delays, and additional flexibility.

Skilled School Professionals

All students deserve access to teachers, counselors, health professional, social workers and others who are trained to help build important skills and connect with critical academic, health and social supports and services.

- ✘ **Allocate professional development resources to trauma-informed practice** to ensure that increased investments into student services and recent changes to state school discipline law are bolstered by increased educator capacity to diagnose and appropriately respond to student behaviors that may have been influenced by trauma.
- ✘ **Continue and expand support to schools to ensure access to trained mental health professionals and services** on-site and through community partnerships.

Early Learning

Providing high-quality early learning experiences can ensure that young children have the social and cognitive skills they need to start school prepared and will help prevent an achievement gap that emerges as young as nine months of age:

- ✘ **Preserve and expand recent state investment in *Early On Michigan*** to provide recognized levels of service to all eligible infants and toddlers. *Early On* provides screening and services to families with infants and toddlers with and at risk of acquiring a developmental delay, equipping families in their homes with skills to help their children, often preventing the need for future costly K-12 special education services.
- ✘ **Increase state support for local abuse and neglect prevention councils** which coordinate community support, assess needs, and build partnerships to provide needed services for families.
- ✘ **Increase state support for child abuse and neglect prevention 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.
- ✘ **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 and early learning outcomes.

1 in 5
students

experience mental health challenges.

2 in 5
of those

receive treatment they need.

2/3

of those receive services only at school.

Source: www.nasponline.org





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.

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

- ✘ **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.
- ✘ **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.
- ✘ **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.
- ✘ **Eliminate barriers to acquiring a state ID or driver's license** for youth in transition by coordinating DHHS and Secretary of State efforts.
- ✘ **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.
- ✘ **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).
- ✘ **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.
- ✘ **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/





Building on Progress We've Already Made



- ✘ Recent **state support for expanding access to preschool for 4-year-olds** in need through the Great Start Readiness Program can be reinforced by investing in healthy starts, quality care, and parent supports.
- ✘ Recent positive steps in **state support for child care** and other services for young children and their families, particularly those aged 0-3, have been laudable, but priorities have not matched the need, which still far exceeds statewide access.
- ✘ Recent **state investment in “at-risk” school funds** for academic, behavioral, and other services for low-income students, homeless students, pregnant students, students in foster care, and English learners, among others. Michigan can maximize these efforts by also investing into the integration of student services and into supports for parents and educators.
- ✘ Recent **state investment into career and technical education programs** including flexible credit programs and adult education must be preserved and reinforced by better integrations with workforce supports like child care.
- ✘ Recent **state support to fully staff Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative** can be fully leveraged by fully supporting the range of MYOI programs and services.
- ✘ **Improved legal protections for children, youth, and families in the foster care system** through the Children’s Assurance of Foster Care Quality Act. However, for the Act to be fully realized, Michigan requires improved accountability mechanisms within the department and investments in representation for the youth’s interests when important decisions are being made.
- ✘ Michigan’s Medicaid expansion through the Healthy Michigan Plan **dramatically increased children’s access to physical and mental health care services** by getting their parents insured, and helped many previously uninsured young adults build the financial and educational foundation they need for a stable adult and family life. Unfortunately, work requirements threaten health care access for the parents of school-aged children and young adults.
- ✘ Recent **state investment into payments for unlicensed relative foster caregivers** is a very positive step forward. For relative caregivers to adequately navigate the foster care system, they will need a program beyond what is being provided through federal sources.



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Children