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Investing in Michigan Adult Education Will Help Build a Strong, Vibrant Economy and Skilled Workforce

Michigan is on the verge of an important milestone in helping to reach the statewide attainment goal of 60% of Michiganders with a postsecondary credential by the year 2030. To achieve this success, we must not overlook the significant population of adult learners who do not have a current high school diploma or equivalent in reaching that goal. Now is the time to invest in programmatic supports for these adult learners to prop up our educational outcomes and build a bridge to economic prosperity for individuals and Michigan overall.

Adult education programs support young adults and parents to build literacy and other basic skills, earn a high school equivalency or high school credential, and prepare for a career as well as filling critical spaces in the current workforce labor shortage. Michigan has a critical need now more than ever for supporting these programs. The facts are that an estimated 1.7 million Michigan adults fall below a ninth-grade level for reading and math, disqualifying them from access to post-secondary education and job training. For these adults to be self-supporting, they must first have access to public school and community-based adult education, literacy, and ESL programs.

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.

Current Situation: The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a great strain on the demand for learning outcomes for adult participants and on the providers that offer quality programming across the state. The adult education system itself falls between the educational and workforce development fields, supporting accelerated learning for adults and workplace readiness]. It sits at a critical juncture in getting the state's economy back on course and helping Michigan families thrive. As so far, none of the 21-22 state budget or proposed COVID-19 investment relief funds have tackled the barriers and challenges facing adult learners. An investment in adult skill building now will mark a critical opportunity for Michigan families to come, connecting to broader educational and workforce development initiatives and supporting Michigan's goal to be an economic powerhouse.

Adult education providers understand the population they serve and place the needs of adult participants at the forefront of every decision. In these complex times, the resources needed to reach more learners and accelerate their next step has become even more critical.

Investing in Michigan adult education would help reduce and mitigate barriers around technology, teacher retention and recruitment, professional development for educational professionals and more.

Recommendations:

1. Support a supplemental bill with use of American Plan Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to invest \$20.2 million in adult education skill building.
2. Support the expansion of programs like Michigan Reconnect, Going Pro Talent Fund and Futures for Frontliners to include the Michigan population of those without a high school credential age 18-26.
3. Improve the coordination of family skill-building initiatives with other services, including coordination of subsidized childcare for adult learners and co-location of supports for children with education and workforce training programs for their parents.