



2022 Election Year Engagement Guide for Voters

Presented by Michigan's Children

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- Five election briefs on **Child Care, Family Issues, Foster Care, Learning and Mental Health**
 - A description of the **role policymakers play** in appropriating funding and setting laws and guidelines for priority issues involving children, youth and families
 - **Questions** you can ask candidates on the campaign trail
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Child Care including Afterschool Care Election Brief



The Role of Federal and State Policymakers: The federal government provides most of Michigan's funding for child care through two major investment programs - the **Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)** and the **Child Care and Development Block Grant**. A third, the **21st Century Community Learning Centers**, is the source of federal funding for afterschool programs nationally.

The State Legislature has a role to play, too, by appropriating state dollars that are leveraged to draw down the maximum amount of federal **child care funds** available to Michigan. Only in the last few years, however, has Michigan provided enough state funds to draw down its full CCDF allotment. Recently, the State Legislature has put one-time federal funds it received via pandemic relief toward expanding access to **afterschool programs**. Unfortunately, once that funding is used up there is no plan to designate another funding source for long-term state support of afterschool.

Laws and Program Guidelines: The federal government sets some broad policy guidelines for **child care systems**, including requiring caregiver FBI background checks and basic health and safety practices, but the State Legislature largely determines how Michigan's child care system functions, including setting reimbursement rates for child care providers who serve subsidized families, and determining eligibility rules. Policy guidelines for **afterschool programs** funded by the **21st Century Community Learning Centers** program are also set by the federal government, but Michigan sets the policy guidelines for other afterschool programs that are funded through the state budget.

Candidate Questions: Child Care and Afterschool Care



- We all know **child care is essential** for working families, but difficult to access particularly for lower-income earners. What would you do to address the problem of “child care desert,” where affordable licensed child care is scarce? Half of Michigan families live in child care deserts.
- The **child care subsidy program** in Michigan must be bolstered.
 - **As a child care provider**, I cannot accept many subsidized kids into my care without going broke. What will you do to ensure child care businesses like mine can stay open while helping more of Michigan’s lowest income families?
 - **As a parent** who relies on the child care subsidy, I struggle to pay for child care. If elected, would you commit to work to increase the child care subsidy?
 - The state’s **subsidy application process** needs work. There are reports that working parents wait weeks, up to 6 weeks, before receiving approval and in some instances have been unable to keep their jobs during the long waiting period. How would you streamline the subsidy application process to prevent eligible working parents from dropping out of the workforce because of administrative delays?
 - Michigan’s child care subsidy system does not work for thousands of families who are already eligible, including **foster parents and parents who work the third shift**. How will you make sure there’s a high-quality child care option for families in every situation?
- There’s a **workforce crisis** in the early childhood profession in Michigan largely because of chronic low wages. Today, the child care workforce is 12 percent smaller than it was pre-pandemic.
 - How would you help address the crisis and help keep more child care talent in the profession and in Michigan?
 - How would you help grow this critical workforce needed by thousands of Michigan families and make child care an in-demand career path?
- **Family/neighbor care** makes up a big part of Michigan’s child care system particularly in child care deserts, and especially for families in rural areas and families of color. As a license-exempt child care provider relying on family-pay and the state subsidy system, the hourly pay is merely \$4 an hour for one child. What will you do to ensure that license-exempt child care providers are paid a living wage and able to continue supporting families who need child care?
- Due to unaddressed challenging behaviors, young children, and disproportionately children of color, are **expelled from child care facilities** in Michigan at 13 times the rate of K-12 suspensions and expulsions. How would you help child care providers and parents build the skills young children need to better deal with challenging behavior?
- How would you support **access to afterschool and summer learning programs** for the growing numbers of working Michigan families who need them in your district, and across Michigan?

Thriving Families Election Brief



The Role of Federal and State Policymakers: To ensure that families can thrive, public policy decisions must take into account the needs of children and their parents. Both Congress and the State Legislature fund family-supporting programs that **embrace two-generation strategies** like Head Start and Early Head Start, evidence-based home visiting, child care, adult education, and workforce development opportunities. Congress also funds the vast majority of programs that support families connected to the child welfare system including **family preservation programs**.

The State Legislature has historically set aside **extremely low amounts of funding for child welfare** and family preservation programs in recent years, and has only recently invested more funds - just enough to draw down new federal funds for preventing families who are in the child welfare system from going into foster care. However, **all of these programs are underfunded at both the state and federal levels** and reach only a fraction of families who could utilize these types of support. State budget decisions have resulted in Michigan's continuous and strong reliance on federal funds alone – particularly for programs that support children and families. The combination of insufficient federal and state funds has resulted in **too many Michigan families struggling to get on a solid footing**.

Candidate Questions: Thriving Families



- Nearly 40 percent of Michigan households, especially families who have been traditionally underserved, **struggle to afford their basic needs** and provide for their families. What should Michigan be doing to help parents to better support their families, regardless where they live?
- What's your stance on expanding the **Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit** to help more working families improve their economic security and lift kids out of poverty?
- Over 40,000 Michiganders aged 18-34 have less than a ninth-grade education and over 13,000 babies are born each year to a mom without a high school credential. Given this data point, how would you improve access and funding to appropriate **adult education** training services so that struggling young parents can complete a GED or job training program to help them adequately support their families?
- One quarter of Michigan families have especially burdensome housing costs. What should Michigan do to expand access to affordable housing for families and young people in Michigan?
- The **child welfare system** has been created to support children and families in crisis. We also know that strengthening and stabilizing these families on the front end can prevent many from entering the system. What should we be doing to help stabilize families and prevent more families from entering the child welfare system?

- The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has the expressed goal of **reunifying** as many children and their families as possible in safe and stable home environments. Will you commit to doing all you can to provide DHHS and families with the necessary services to ensure that successful reunification of children and families is achievable?
- Many families whose kids enter the juvenile justice system are required to pay not only the fines that accompany their child's offense, but also up to **thousands of extra dollars in fees** covering their child's confinement, legal representation, and mandated services. This financial burden is viewed as unjust by many because a failure to pay increases the child's likelihood of confinement, impacting poor families at a greater rate than those more well off. Do you agree that we should ban fines and fees in the juvenile justice system that aren't directly associated with an offense that a child commits?
- Youth homelessness is a growing problem in Michigan. More than a dozen counties in Michigan do not have an agency that offers a **youth shelter** or transitional living program for older youth who experience homelessness or who run away from home. Shelters and transitional living programs not only provide a safe place for these youths, protecting them from trafficking and other harms, but their services also increase the possibility for family reunification. How can we improve our efforts to prevent and intervene in youth homelessness?

Foster Care Election Brief



The Role of Federal and State Policymakers: In the child welfare system and foster care, the state has the responsibility to make decisions involving children in crisis and their families, where they live, and who is responsible for their care. By extension, the public has the unique responsibility to **hold policymakers accountable** in order to help safeguard the well-being of these children. We accept that our child welfare system needs to be held to a higher standard of success for the children, youth and families in our care, particularly for children the state has removed from their homes.

The federal government affects state child welfare systems by tying requirements to the funding it provides the states. These requirements can apply to policies at the state level, as well as requiring states to “match” the federal funding they receive with state funds. To receive federal funds to pay for foster care, for example, states must follow certain safety guidelines and goals for keeping children largely out of institutions and housed instead with families in homes. Federal mandates to states includes specific policies such as the rights a child in foster care has to a speedy transfer of school records if they have to move schools.

Federal and state lawmakers play key roles in supporting policy and investments that should strengthen families, keep them out of the foster care system, better serve children, youth, and their caregivers in foster care, and better prepare young people for future success. Their decisions influence the future of public policy and investment for improving outcomes for vulnerable children, youth, and families in Michigan. Unfortunately, the state contributes **too few state funds** beyond what is required to draw down federal funds to assure that these standards are met. Simply, Michigan under-resources supportive services for children and families, resulting in a child welfare system that leaves many of our most vulnerable children, youth, and families unable to achieve the outcomes needed for life success. Because the state does not invest enough in child welfare, **Michigan has come to over rely on federal resources**, making it critically important that our federal policymakers – U.S. Senators and members of Congress – make the best decisions possible in policymaking and investments for this population. Under-investing in child welfare also leaves Michigan with a limited ability to innovate. It is critical then for state-level policymakers to take seriously their responsibility for providing support to children and youth in their care, and commit to finding better investment decisions for children and families in the child welfare system.

Candidate Questions: Foster Care



- Largely due to abuse and neglect, each year **13,000 children enter Michigan’s foster care system**, which includes a vast over representation of children of color. For children and youth who aren’t safe with their families, how will you improve the foster care system to ensure these children have the best chance possible for educational and life success?

- Studies show that many child welfare **cases could be closed before foster care** because they stem from poor housing, poor mental health, domestic violence, and poor financial stability. How would you prioritize supporting families so that they can avoid entering the child welfare and foster care systems?
- Children and youth entering the foster care system have experienced trauma. How would you ensure that children and youth in care had timely and consistent **access to physical and mental health and developmental assessment and services**?
- If children need to be temporarily removed from their parents, what policy and practices should be in place to **maintain family bonds** between children and their birth parents, siblings and relatives?
- There are several systems of care related to the child care system including **kinship care, foster care, and adoptive families**. Addressing one or all of these system, what would you do to better support these caregivers who we know need help to provide for children who have experienced traumatic?
- In Michigan, 1 in 12 families are headed by someone other than the child’s birth parent, including aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Many cannot access Medicaid or cash assistance for these kids that are available in other states.
 - How would you **help these “kin families”** get the resources they need to raise their children to the very best of their abilities?
 - As an elected policymaker, how would you ensure that caregivers in the foster care system receive **adequate training** to better support children who have been trauma by their experiences?
- Every county in Michigan has different standards and levels of funding for **legal support** for children and families who have an open child abuse case. How would you ensure that every child and family in Michigan has excellent legal assistance for an abuse and neglect case?
- Nearly half of children who exit foster care report **experiencing homelessness** in the first few years after they leave, with even higher rates for youth of color or those who have a disability. How would you work to ensure that young people exiting foster care had the tools that they need for educational and life success?
- In 2022, just **39 percent of students** who have been in foster care graduated from high school. What should we do to ensure that students who are in foster care have better opportunities to learn and succeed?

Learning Election Brief



The Role of Federal Policymakers: Members of Congress play a critical role in supporting the educational success of young people, influencing factors that drive learning both within and outside of the educational system. Federal dollars account for **12 percent** of Michigan’s K-12 education funding through the federal **Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act**. Most federal funds go to areas with higher levels of students at or near **poverty** or funds for **special education, afterschool programs, and other initiatives**.

Federal revenues also impact nearly every child across Michigan in areas of their health and well-being that research shows **impacts a child’s ability to learn**. Federal funding accounts for the vast majority of Michigan’s spending for Medicaid; for child welfare (Social Security, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Act); for child care (the Child Care and Development Fund and Block Grant, and Head Start), and for food and housing assistance (TANF, the Fair Housing Act, and the Farm Bill). Most cash assistance for low-income Michigan families comes from the federal government as well.

Federal lawmakers from Michigan must understand how much our students and the state rely on funding from Washington, D.C. for basic needs, and health and education programs. During the COVID pandemic in recent years, federal funding for education increased dramatically, playing a major role in the states including Michigan. Similarly, state revenues in the School Aid Fund used to support learning also increased. However, this increase is not expected to continue at current levels without continued federal funding and increasing state revenues.

The Role of State Policymakers: State policymakers are responsible for directing the vast majority of dollars toward the education of Michigan’s student, while prioritizing education policy, and other issues that directly influence educational outcomes. In 2022, **88 percent** of K-12 school funds were state-appropriated, largely in the form of per-pupil foundation grants. In 2022, Michigan’s per-pupil grant was \$8,700. Michigan also provides additional funding for **“at-risk” students, career technical education, and English language learners** and provides funds for **early childhood education, adult education, and postsecondary education, including public community colleges, colleges, and universities**.

In other areas that impact a child’s learning, state policymakers make decisions about investments in public health insurance, child welfare, criminal justice, and other basic programs; and also set tax policies that impact household resources and other resources available for programs and services.

Candidate Questions: Learning



- Test scores show that Michigan students have been learning at a slower pace than they were before the pandemic. What would do to ensure that Michigan students who are **at-risk of falling behind** have access to programs that help them stay in school, catch up, and succeed?
- Children who enter kindergarten **unprepared to learn** are more likely to repeat a grade in school, or fall behind socially, emotionally and academically. What should we be doing to help children and their families so that students are mentally and physically ready to learn?
- Many Kindergarten students are identified with **special education needs** that could have been dealt with before they entered school. What would you do to ensure that infant and toddlers experiencing developmental delays and their families get the services they need early in their learning process?
- If elected, how would you work to ensure that parents and other caregivers had the skills necessary to help their children meet educational benchmarks like **third-grade reading**, a skill critical to learning content in subsequent grades?
- Youth who experience disruptions in their education from foster care, delinquency, and homelessness have far **lower graduation rates** than the statewide average. What will you do to ensure that there are unique educational strategies and academic supports in place to provide these students with fair and equitable opportunities for their educational and life success?
- In 2021, 20 percent of Michigan students were **chronically absent** from school which we know leaves them more vulnerable to poor academic performance, falling behind in school, and even graduating on time. This is not an easy problem to solve, with many contributing circumstances including abuse or neglect, homelessness, domestic violence, substance use, mental health issues. If elected, how will you ensure that fewer children in Michigan experience barriers to school attendance?
- Michigan has a serious **shortage of school professionals**. If elected, how would you work to ensure that every student has access to trained, supportive school professionals, including teachers, counselors, health professionals, and social workers?
- For children to learn, they need to feel safe and supported. They also need safe and stable housing and school buildings in which to spend the many hours in their day. What would you do to **ensure safe environments** for Michigan's learners?

Mental Health Election Brief



The Role of Federal and State policymakers: Policymakers from both levels of government make decisions that impact access to mental health with funding attached to health care, education, child welfare, and juvenile justice policy. Federal lawmakers are responsible for much of Michigan’s health care spending through **Medicare and Medicaid**, and set health care laws that providers and health care insurers must follow. The federal government provides significant funding for **child welfare**, which provides mental health services to children in state care, and authorizes funding for **school-based health centers** that make mental health services more widely available to K-12 students.

State lawmakers are empowered to make decisions over the details of the **Medicaid service delivery** and its recent expansion. They also control additional funding for **community mental health agencies, for Early On developmental services, for child care, child welfare and foster care, juvenile justice, and for services for at-risk students, students with special education needs, and school-based health.**

Candidate Questions: Mental Health



- About 40 percent of Michigan children who have a diagnosed mental health condition are **unable to access the services** they need. If elected, what would you do to improve the odds and make mental health and substance misuse services available to all children, youth, and their parents who need them, thereby ensuring they can become healthy and productive?
- Due to the trauma they’ve experienced, children who enter **foster care have higher rates of mental health conditions** than their peers. If elected, what would you do to improve the system of care for children and youth in the foster care system so that they receive the consistent mental health and behavioral services they’re entitled to receive by law?
- *Early On* and other home visiting programs show demonstrated improvements in infants and toddlers with **developmental delays**. How would you prioritize investments in these services designed for the early years so that developmental delays can be mitigated and reversed before children get older and require expensive interventions?
 - Many parents who could benefit from voluntary home visiting programs don’t access them because they are unaware of the programs existence or how to apply. How will you support voluntary home visiting programs in Michigan so that more **parents are aware of them?**
- The bi-partisan Michigan Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform has recommended increased funding and policy reforms that would prevent youth who have made a poor choice from being incarcerated in a juvenile facility. To address their **behavioral health** at home in the communities they’re from, how would you act to support services there including behavioral health?