



Public policy in the best interest of children

Date: July 15, 2019

To: Michigan FY20 K-12 School Aid and MDE Budget Conferees

From: Matt Gillard, President & CEO
matt@michiganschildren.org or (517) 485-3500

Re: FY20 K-12 School Aid and MDE Budget Recommendations

Thank you for the opportunity to again provide input into decision-making around the K-12 School Aid and Department of Education budgets. Michigan's Children is the only statewide and independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children and youth, from cradle to career, and their families, with a focus on solutions that improve equitable outcomes for children, including public policies and investments that encourage students to thrive and that strengthen families' ability to support their children's learning.

We understand that this year's budget process is a departure from those of recent years, and urge you to pursue a final budget that enables the state to maximize public investment into necessary educational programs and supports. As you make final recommendations on this budget through conference committee, we would like to highlight the following mechanisms that could help to better support children, youth and families:

- **Include the Senate's \$16.4 million reimbursement payment increase for child care providers, and turn the House's \$100 placeholder for increasing the family income eligibility threshold for the CDC program into an investment towards an ultimate goal of 250% FPL**

Child care allows parents to work or go to school, and offers young children an opportunity to build foundational skills, but child care can exceed the annual cost of rent, and only families with incomes below 130% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) are eligible for support for child care in Michigan. Access is particularly difficult for those who work outside of a 9-5 workday and for families, including foster parents, whose children have experienced trauma or other mental health needs. Michigan's below-market reimbursement makes it difficult for quality providers to serve children.

- **Improve family literacy by increasing adult education funding by \$10 million and support increased investment in Early Literacy Coaches for teachers to better assist with read-at-home plans for Michigan families.**

Much attention has been placed on ensuring more young children are reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Despite research consistently showing the

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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. 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. Maintaining the governor's proposed increase for early literacy coaches would help teachers better assist with read-at-home plans for Michigan families.

- **Maintain and expand the Senate's \$2.15 million proposed increase in funding for *Early On* services for families whose infants and toddlers have developmental delays**

Ensuring a child has a healthy start means ensuring that infants and toddlers are growing and developing physically, socially, and emotionally before they start Kindergarten. *Early On Michigan* provides screening and services to all Michigan families whose infants or toddlers have or are at risk of acquiring a developmental delay, equipping families in their homes with skills to help their children., Early On prevents the need for future costly K-12 special education services because many developmental delays, including speech and motor delays, are treatable, and relieves stress on parents by helping them better understand their child's development. The Senate's proposed increase of \$2.15 million for this program is a positive step yet significantly below the established need.

- **Support the House's \$2 million increase for School-Based and School-Linked Adolescent Health Centers in the Health and Human Services Budget.**

Michigan's Children recommends a \$1.5 million increase, The Governor and Senate maintained current year funding at \$6.1 million, but the House Health and Human Services budget proposes \$2 million. School-based and school-linked health services are key access points for students' physical and mental health services, resulting in improved educational and life outcomes, especially for children and youth who have experienced trauma.

- **Support the Governor's proposal to increase the per-pupil grant for Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) by \$1,250 to \$8,500.**

The Senate included a \$5 million increase for GSRP and the House has proposed a slight cut to overall funding. Increasing funding for GSRP is a positive step that will improve the early learning experiences of many young children and expansions to full-day care often better support their parents. However, research suggests that pre-school provides the most benefit to the lowest-income families and children.

- **Support the Senate's proposal to maintain \$30 million dedicated to mental health supports in schools, but ask to allocate ISD mental health service grants based on student population instead of equal grants for every ISD to better direct resources based on student need. Also support the House's increase of funding for ensuring that adolescent health centers can access mental health professionals.**

Michigan's Children is supportive of expanding support to schools to ensure access to trained mental health professionals and services on-site and through community partnerships.

- **Consider language in the budget dedicated to improving a school district’s capacity to coordinate integrated student services.**

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. Neither legislative proposal identified this priority, though it is possible that with a significant increase in their per-pupil funding, including to specific student services like mental health, local systems could dedicate some of that new resource to staff devoted to the integration of student services.

- **Support the Governor’s recommendation to increase funds for pupils labeled at-risk, and support the Senate’s overall increase to the per-pupil foundation grant.**

Michigan must move its K-12 public school investment towards the findings of the School Finance Research Collaborative in order to assure that all students may receive the school resources they need to learn. The Governor's proposal would increase funding for academically at-risk students by \$102 million, and career and technical education funding by \$50 million. The Senate proposed increasing the minimum and basic per-pupil foundation grants by \$135 and \$270 respectively, the most of any proposal, but allocates smaller increases for at-risk grants. The House approved a smaller per-pupil foundation increase and no at-risk increase. All parties proposed equal increases for K-12 special education.

- **We also support the current proposals to maintain funding for alternative diploma paths.**

Alternative post-secondary pathways serve as another critical option for students who may struggle to achieve and graduate due to their personal circumstances. Youth deserve another chance to graduate when things don’t go exactly as planned.

In the scope of the entire state budget, these are small costs relative to the benefit of better preparing thousands of young people for productive, positive lives. We appreciate your efforts and continued service to make Michigan a place where people want to raise their kids. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions. We look forward to continuing to work with you to improve the educational success of our children, youth, families, and our state.