

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 in life outcomes for Michigan children, youth, and families

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 from birth through adulthood

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, both 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 that care for them.

Listen to Families and their lived experience in addition to data and research

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 perspective on whether programs are accessible and effective and for whom is crucial information for design and investment, but their voices are not always included in decision-making.

Make State Government Work for the kids and families whom it is meant to serve

Michigan's many state and local agencies administer scores of effective programs and collect millions of points of data, but existing resources and administrative manpower 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 who provide essential services for kids and families

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 roughly \$8.50/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 that we've already made

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.