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Supporting Adult Skill-Building in the Michigan State Budget

The COVID pandemic has strained many caregivers with supporting their family's security and their children's education. Yet, 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. Limited education will leave parents disadvantaged in a recovering job market and in their abilities to both engage in their children's learning and navigate systems for their children.

Despite research showing the impact of parental education on children's education and life success, insufficient resources are dedicated to supporting the educational needs of parents with limited skills themselves so they may best assist in student success. Significant investments in early literacy committed over the last five of years will see the greatest return coupled with investment in adult skill-building, which can further the education and skill-building of parents while providing opportunities for them to support their children's learning.

Adult education programs support young adults and parents to build literacy and other basic skills, earn a GED or credential, and prepare for a career, improving labor engagement and family literacy rates. Despite their role in filling key state economic and educational needs, these programs lack the capacity to meet the full demand. Fully 70% of all adult education registrants have low literacy skills, and six in ten are parents of children school-age or younger. Adult education programs fail to receive adequate resources due to low funds overall and grant approval burdens from legacy reporting mechanisms. Access to support services is also limited.

Current Situation: The State House and Senate have entered Conference Committee for the fiscal year 2021-2022 state budget. The Senate proposed budget would re-allocate Section 107 Adult Education funds based on a formula weighted 60% by a region's population of individuals aged 18-24 who are not high school graduates, 35% based on a region's population of adults age 25 or order who are not a high school graduate, and 5% based on the region's population of adults who lack basic English language proficiency. While tying funding to needs is always advisable, the result of decades of underinvestment into adult education services would leave some programs with fewer resources to serve substantial populations of need if this new formula were to be implemented, which would contribute to widening inequity in access to high school completion and postsecondary learning opportunities.

Both the House- and Senate- passed budgets would make changes to an adult education program whose purpose is to connect adult education students with employers. Because this Adult Education Career and Technical (CTE) funding (\$4 million) has been a critical pin in helping adult learners graduate with not only a high school diploma or equivalent but a credential in a high demand field, programs deserve maximum funding flexibility so they can make necessary changes to meet any updated program goals.

Recommendations

- Provide an increase in adult education funding for the FY22 budget sufficient to hold programs meeting critical needs harmless from funding formula changes.
- Increase credential programming options to include certifications from the Michigan Talent Connect, a statewide repository of credentialed programs that lead to in-demand, high-need jobs.
- Provide for concurrent enrollment for adult learners to be enrolled in adult education and career training education as long as it falls within the same program year (July-June).
- Encourage providers to prioritize program enrollment for 75% of participants to those who are concurrently enrolled and actively working toward obtaining a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate.