

Michigan League for Public Policy

2019 BUDGET PRIORITIES

Continue to Expand Access to High-Quality Preschool Education

— LEAGUE RECOMMENDATION —

Provide sufficient funding to ensure that all eligible 4-year-olds can receive a high-quality preschool education through the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), and expand GSRP services to 3-year-olds from families with low incomes.

BACKGROUND: Michigan's state-funded preschool program was launched in 1985-86 to serve 4-year-olds from families with low incomes. The Great Start program, which historically provided a half-day of preschool, has in recent years moved to a largely school-day schedule—in part to meet the needs of working parents, and also to provide the more intensive learning experiences that can prepare young children for school. State funding for the GSRP, which started at \$1 million and served just under 700 children, has grown to nearly \$244 million for over 38,000 children statewide. With leadership from Gov. Rick Snyder, GSRP funding increased by \$65 million in both 2013-14 and 2014-15—for a total two-year increase of \$130 million.

In the current budget year, the governor recommended that eligibility for GSRP be limited to children in families with incomes of 250% of the poverty line or less. The final budget provided continuation funding for GSRP, and allowed children in families with incomes of up to 300% of poverty to enroll in the program—if all children at 250% of poverty and below have been served.

- **Young children of color are more likely to live in poverty and have less access to a preschool education.** High-quality early learning programs are some of the best tools for overcoming disparities in achievement and ultimately in earnings. Yet, access to a preschool education is more limited for children whose parents have low incomes, and 59% of 3- and 4-year-old Latinx children who are not in preschool and face additional barriers compared to other groups.
- **Michigan ranks well in its enrollment of 4-year-olds, but 3-year-olds are still not eligible for GSRP.** Michigan ranks 15th among the states in its enrollment of 4-years-olds in state-funded preschool. However, of the 43 states with a state-funded preschool, only 15—including Michigan—did not enroll 3-year-olds in 2016.

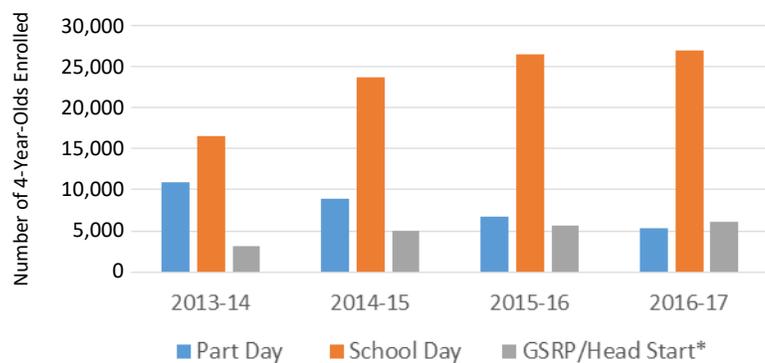
WHY IT MATTERS:

- **Early education is a foundation for success in school, including reading by third grade.** Evaluations of GSRP show that: 1) children who were in GSRP score significantly higher on early literacy and math assessments; 2) GSRP reduced the achievement gap in early literacy between children at the highest risk and other enrollees; and 3) the program has been successful in improving literacy in both urban and rural areas of the state.

- **Early education has long-term benefits for families and the economy.**

Preschool programs have an impact on two generations. They provide young children with the experiences they need to succeed in school and ultimately in the workforce. In addition, they make it easier for parents to work to support their families. The move from a half-day to more full-day programs has helped working parents and local economies.

GSRP is Increasingly a Full School-Day Program That Better Meets the Needs of Working Families With Low Incomes



*GSRP/Head Start programs are full-day, with half the funding from GSRP/remainder federal Head Start wages