



MEMORANDUM

TO: Members, House Appropriations Subcommittee on School Aid and Education

FROM: Gilda Z. Jacobs, President and CEO

DATE: March 6, 2018

SUBJECT: FY 2019 School Aid/Education Budgets

I am pleased to share with you the priorities of the Michigan League for Public Policy for the 2019 School Aid and Department of Education budgets.

Michigan schools cannot successfully operate in a vacuum. The ability of children to learn and excel in school is the product of their mothers' health and prenatal care, good nutrition, stable housing and family income, and access to high-quality education and care. Given the importance of the earliest years of life, children who are exposed to the stresses of poverty may struggle in school without additional supports.

Of particular concern are inequities based on race and ethnicity. These inequities, which have their roots in a history of barriers for families of color, including housing and workplace discrimination, as well as differences in educational opportunities, have resulted in disproportionately high numbers of children of color who are not reaching their full potential. As a first step in addressing racial and ethnic disparities, the League encourages you to intentionally evaluate the disproportionate impact of the budget decisions you make on children of color, and we have attached a fact sheet on this recommendation in your packet.

For 2019, we offer the following recommendations for School Aid and Department of Education spending:

- **Support early intervention services.** The League strongly supports state investments in Early On, Michigan's early intervention program for infants and toddlers with developmental delays. Because Michigan is the only state that does not have a statewide budget allocation for early intervention, the state has not been able to provide the services needed to address cognitive, language, physical and social-emotional delays in very young children. The governor's recommendation falls short of what is needed, but is a positive move in the right direction.
- **Continue to address Michigan's child care crisis.** Over the last two years, the Legislature began to address Michigan's underfunded child care system by increasing rates for child care providers and raising the eligibility level from 120% to 130% of poverty. Even with these increases, child care is still unaffordable for many parents—forcing them to turn to care that is unreliable or of poor quality, or making it impossible for them to find and hold jobs. And, the number of families

eligible for child care assistance has dropped dramatically as Michigan's income cutoff for child care subsidies remains at the bottom of the states. We urge you to continue to invest in Michigan's child care system by increasing the eligibility level to 150% of poverty, with incremental increases until the eligibility level reaches 200% of poverty.

- **Continue to support access to high-quality preschool programs for 4-year-olds from families with low incomes, as well as additional funding to enroll 3-year-olds with the greatest needs.** Michigan has invested in high-quality preschool for 4-year-olds through its evidence-based Great Start to Readiness program (GSRP)—an investment that provides a foundation for children's success in school and beyond and should be maintained. In addition, research shows that children with the highest needs can benefit from two years of preschool, and Michigan—unlike many other states—does not enroll 3-year-olds in the GSRP. As a next step, the state should provide money for pilot programs to develop and evaluate appropriate curriculums for 3-year-olds.
- **Support additional funding for public school operations.** The League is a member of the School Finance Research Collaborative that analyzed what it costs to educate a child and how best to reform Michigan's school funding system. We believe that increases in per-pupil spending are justified, and that the governor's recommendations regarding funding for shared-time and cyberschools are reasonable.
- **Fully fund the At-Risk School Aid program.** The At-Risk program is the state's best vehicle for helping students in high-poverty schools. We appreciate the Legislature's support for the At-Risk program and urge you to continue investing until it is fully funded.
- **Expand funding for early literacy programs.** In addition to expanding access to evidence-based early childhood programs like home visitation and high-quality child care, Michigan must provide the resources needed by schools to implement the new third-grade reading law, including outreach to families to help them understand the implications of the new retention policy.
- **Expand funding for adult education.** Despite a high level of need, funding for adult education has been cut by 70% in Michigan. We recommend phasing in new funding, with an increase of \$10 million in 2019, which would allow the state to assist nearly 8,000 more students.

Please contact me if you would like additional information. We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations.