



## Testimony Presented to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on School Aid

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On behalf of the Michigan League for Public Policy (formerly known as the Michigan League for Human Services), a 100 year-old organization advocating for low-income families and children in Michigan, I urge you to support the Governor's proposal to significantly expand funding for the Michigan Great Start Readiness program. This expansion is a significant and very positive step in the direction we all want to go: higher educational achievement, reduced high school dropout rates, and a more ready and skilled workforce. It begins to lay the foundation for a true P-20 system, or a cradle to career investment in Michigan's next workforce.

The benefits of early education, and more specifically, Michigan's Great Start Readiness program, are well known, and we are sure that you have been briefed on the research behind early investments, and will hear more as the budget process progresses. If not, we are happy to provide any supporting information. Included is longitudinal research on Michigan's state-funded preschool program by the High Scope Research Foundation, as well as studies by Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman and other economists showing a very strong return on investment. This research has led to strong support from national and Michigan-based business and educational leaders, including the Children's Leadership Council of Michigan.

As you move forward, we would like you to consider the following:

- *Invest not just in new slots, but in high quality programs.* The GSRP per-slot allotment has not been increased since 2007, when it was raised by only \$100. As a result, districts have been forced to subsidize their preschool programs, or in some cases face reducing or eliminating preschool altogether because of the lack of funds. We recommend an initial increase in the per-slot allotment to \$3,800. While we appreciate the governor's recognition of the need for an increase, we understand from the field that the true cost of providing high quality early childhood services—the type we know from the research gives us the outcomes we want—is higher.

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- *Give the Office of Great Start (OGS) the flexibility it needs to spend early childhood resources in ways that guarantee the results we all want.* The OGS was created by Governor Snyder to coordinate early childhood services to enhance programs, create a true P - 20 educational continuum, and get the positive outcomes we seek.

Included in that system would be:

- *Flexibility and funding to enroll three-year-olds in the GSRP.* There is strong evidence that the lowest income children with the most risk factors do best when they have two years of early childhood education.
- *Full day/full year early childhood education.* The OGS should be given sufficient funding to expand its efforts to build incentives for better collaboration between the GSRP, Head Start and subsidized child care services. Full-day, full-year services provide better outcomes, as well as fewer work disruptions and greater flexibility for low-income working parents.
- *Funding for children ages 0 to 3:* We have so far tried to build an educational system that leads young people into good jobs without investing in the foundation. Michigan invests very little in programs for infants and toddlers and their parents, and many of the programs that did exist—like the ASAP-PIE programs and the 0 to 3 Secondary Prevention programs—were some of the first on the chopping block when Michigan began to struggle with its structural deficit. More significantly, we must consider the high price we pay for increasing child poverty in this state, which is highest among the youngest children. Policies and programs that help low-income families access basic income resources, including the Earned Income Tax Credit, high quality child care, and meaningful access to job training and education are critical to the continuum.

Again we urge your support for the GSRP expansion, and hope that this is just the first step in the creation of true a P-20 system.