



Date: July 15, 2020
To: House and Senate Education and Career Readiness Committee Members
From: Matt Gillard, President & CEO
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RE: Essential Considerations for Michigan's Schools

Michigan's Children is an independent organization committed to uplifting the needs of all of our state's children, youth, and families, especially those who shoulder significant burdens, in policy conversations. As you weigh priorities for next steps for education in our state, we write to highlight factors that will help ensure that every student learns and succeeds, many of which we have raised in a previous sign-on letter to decision makers but which are at risk of not being prioritized equally to the level of impact they will have on learning outcomes. Leaving these priorities to be made squarely on the local level, especially without sufficient public support, will result in our leaving children and youth who shoulder some of the greatest challenges, including disability, foster care, juvenile justice, or homelessness, and migrant status, and their parents, behind.

Keeping Track of Special Populations

Before the crisis, high school dropout rates for students shouldering significant burdens were dismal compared to their peers -- 27% for youth experiencing foster care, 14% for youth with a disability, 18% for migrant students, and 20% for youth experiencing homelessness. While some of these rates had been decreasing, pre-pandemic there were systemic barriers to student need identification and sufficient access to services. Currently, no plans discussed by policymakers seem to include requirements for districts to report how they will meet the needs of all subgroups of students, or how they will work with community partners to do so.

Parent Support Beyond Engagement

There has been a heightened focus on parents' role in supporting children's education during this crisis, however, many parents face life or skill-based challenges that make it more difficult for them to help. Lower-skilled parents have suffered some of the greatest employment losses, and demand for programs focused on adult basic skills and other skills training will undoubtedly increase. While released plans have recommended some family outreach and strategies to support child learning, we have seen no requirements for schools to work, including with community partners, to meet their community's adult education needs, to help advance their K-12 goals.

In addition, supporting children through adult foundational skill building will be crucial to meeting the needs of the most marginalized populations in our state. This investment in parents will be important to help children as they return to school, address the gaps in educational loss and empower parents to be actively engaged in their children's education.

More parents are noticing developmental delays in their infants and toddlers, but many cannot find appropriate services for early intervention. Before the crisis, experts estimated a \$65 million gap between current funding for services and funding necessary to meet all of the need for Early On services in this state. That gap has only grown. Failing to support early intervention needs will cause K-12 special education strain in a few years.

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Prioritize Social and Emotional Supports

Coordinating with families and community partners and local agencies to promote social and emotional health and learning deserves more than a primary role in back-to-school policies. We are concerned that other states are outpacing Michigan in encouraging school-community partnerships that deliver resources and services for student social and emotional growth. For example, the state of Connecticut is requiring school districts to “Develop a detailed plan to re-engage all students, staff and families. Particularly...identify and engage populations and specific students that have been disengaged” In the MI Safe Start Plan, no social and emotional measures are required, and all recommendations disappear from the health and safety guidelines in the “Phase 6” section.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning also urges schools to reflect on disciplinary practices and changes that could be made, but our state’s currently released plans contain no recommendations or requirements for reviewing disciplinary policies or practices in light of changes in many students’ out-of-school experiences and in-school behavior.

Protecting Postsecondary Access

Recent reports indicate that colleges and universities are noticing some trends that could predict lower enrollment rates for lower-income groups of students and would-be students for classes in the Fall. Many of the students who have lost access to postsecondary or workforce programs have experienced additional costs or barriers related to their status as parents, experiencing homelessness, experiencing a disability, and recent foster care experience.

To continue this conversation and work towards framing the solutions to these issues, please reach out to us to connect. Thank you in advance for your consideration in these matters that we know will serve the best interests of our state's most vulnerable children, youth and families. We look forward to working with you to make public policy decisions in the best interests of children, youth, and families at this important moment.