



## Michigan Division for Early Childhood

February 2023

### Mission

The Michigan Division for Early Childhood (MiDEC) is dedicated to promoting policies and evidence-based practices to support families and enhance the optimal development of all children. MiDEC shall encourage and promote professional growth and quality practice to support young children with exceptional needs and their families.

### Advancing Equity

The Michigan Division for Early Childhood endorses the [DEC Message about Racism and Inequality](#) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children's position statement on [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#):

*All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that help them achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, all early childhood educators have a professional obligation to advance equity. They can do this best when they are effectively supported by the early learning settings in which they work and when they and their wider communities **embrace diversity and full inclusion** as strengths, uphold fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities*

### Platform

The MiDEC has five policy priorities:

1. Funded strategy for **recruitment and retention** of early childhood, early intervention, and early childhood special education personnel
2. **Personnel preparation** and standards of practice for all early childhood professionals that provide support to young children with exceptional needs and their families in

Michigan, including a funded strategy to support the active engagement of personnel in professional learning to support **culturally responsive practices** through understanding bias and institutional racism.

3. Increased investment in **Early On<sup>®</sup> Michigan**, which supports our infants and toddlers, birth to age 3, with delays and disabilities and their families.
4. Sustain state-funded support for the evidence-based developmentally appropriate **preschool for 3-year-old children**, Strong Beginnings pilot.
5. Universal preschool with a cohesive and coherent approach to support **inclusion** in all preschool settings.

### ***Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Personnel***

The Michigan Division for Early Childhood (MiDEC) supports the development of funded strategies for recruitment and retention of early childhood, early intervention, and early childhood special education personnel. Michigan is experiencing a critical shortage of education personnel. This is a significant barrier to young children and their families receiving high quality educational services. MiDEC supports a number of initiatives that are being implemented by the Michigan Department of Education. These efforts include OPTIMISE (Opening the Pipeline of Talent into Michigan Special Education), and the Future Proud Michigan Educator Career and Technical Education (CTE) Teacher Recruitment and Retention Grants. These initiatives include funded strategies for recruitment, retention and continuing education that will address teacher shortages and provide opportunities for Michigan's educator workforce to grow and diversify. It is the recommendation of Michigan DEC that all teacher recruitment and retention strategies being implemented are inclusive of educators who serve children ages 0-5, and consider the need for a diversified workforce and specialized professional learning in early childhood for this population.

### ***Personnel Preparation***

The Michigan Division for Early Childhood (MiDEC) advocates for appropriate standards of practice and preparation of all early childhood professionals that support young children with exceptional needs and their families in the state of Michigan. This includes supporting certification that ensures personnel are highly qualified to teach and provide support to young children. As such MiDEC supports the 2019 Michigan Department of Education *Standards for the Preparation of Early Childhood Teachers of General and Special Education, Birth through Kindergarten*. Additionally, as early childhood education (ECE) encompasses the development and education of children with and without disabilities, field experience with children,

representative of all abilities and ages birth to 3, 3-5, and 6-8, in family, community, and educational settings, is critical.

It is essential that all early intervention providers, including speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, and others who serve young children and their families have key knowledge in academic content and whole child approach, including child development and learning, partnering with families, collaboration and teaming, assessment, application of curriculum, responsive and reciprocal interactions, and professionalism and ethical practices. Therefore, MiDEC supports the use of the Division for Early Childhood's 2020 *Initial Practice-Based Professional Preparation Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators (EI/ECSE) (Initial birth through age 8)* for the preparation of cross-disciplinary personnel who work in early intervention and early childhood special education in Michigan.

It is also critical that administrators of early intervention, early childhood, and early childhood special education programming have strong knowledge that enables them to support the unique needs of children birth-8 with exceptional needs and their families. This includes knowledge of models, theories, evidence-based practices and legal requirements that are pertinent to early childhood programs.

### ***Early On*<sup>®</sup> Michigan**

Established under the federal Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Michigan had been unique in its lack of state appropriation for birth to three early intervention, known as *Early On* Michigan. Intervening as early as possible in the life of a child is the most efficient and effective strategy for supporting maximum developmental outcomes for young children with delays and disabilities. Services to infants and toddlers who have or are at risk for developmental delays have been shown to positively impact outcomes across developmental domains, including language and communication, cognitive development, social/emotional development, and health. Families benefit from *Early On* by being able to better meet their children's unique needs from an early age and throughout their lives.

State funding for 2022-23 for *Early On*, under Section 54d of the Michigan School Aid Act, is \$21,250,000. It is estimated that adequate early intervention requires a \$73 million state investment for Michigan infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities and their families.

Currently Michigan has two systems serving infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities – *Early On* and Michigan Mandatory Special Education (MMSE). As currently enacted, for infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities, Michigan operates:

- two sets of policies and rules pertaining to *Early On* and Special Education;
- separate and unnecessarily complex eligibility criteria which requires additional evaluations, causing confusion for families and service providers, and a lack of options at transition; and
- disparate services for families across the state, including challenges in accessing qualified personnel.

Michigan Division for Early Childhood endorses the recommendations of the *Early On* Michigan Foundation, which call for incremental increases in state funding along with phased-in system change for *Early On* over the next three years in order to align eligibility, strengthen personnel standards, and increase support for our youngest children with delays and disabilities.

**Recommendations for *Early On*:**

**Make the following system changes to move towards one aligned, cohesive early intervention system.**

- Adopt a definition of special education eligibility for infants and toddlers that aligns with the current *Early On* eligibility.
- Strengthen *Early On* Personnel Standards and include all early intervention personnel recognized under Part C of IDEA as allowable providers for infants and toddlers currently eligible for special education.
- Phase in and fund changes over three years, utilizing a three-cohort adoption schedule, to allow for a planful implementation schedule that accommodates local readiness.
- Maintain full funding for early intervention services after alignment to ensure adequate services for eligible infants, toddlers and their families.

**Increase state funding for *Early On* incrementally, until funding is \$73 million, as follows:**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>SSA 54d Allocation</b>	<b>System Changes</b>
FY 23	\$21 million	1/3 of ISDs implement single, aligned system
FY 24	\$42 million	2/3 of ISDs implement single, aligned system

FY 25 and beyond	\$73 million	All ISDs implement single, aligned statewide system
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*Ultimately, funding a single aligned, cohesive early intervention system will improve equity and access to Early On regardless of community, resulting in better outcomes for children and families across the state.*

**Universal Preschool with Intentional Supports for Full Inclusion**

Michigan DEC applauds the strides that Michigan has taken to expand the Great Start Readiness Program to provide quality programming for a significant proportion of the eligible population of four-year-old children. MiDEC applauds the governor and legislature for the current program expansion and funding of \$9150 per pupil, matching the amount for K-12. The Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) is Michigan’s state-funded preschool program for four-year-old children with factors which may place them at risk for low educational attainment. The program is administered by the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Great Start. Research on preschool programs and specific research on GSRP indicates that children provided with a high-quality preschool experience show significant positive developmental differences when compared to children from the same backgrounds who did not attend a high-quality preschool program. Expansion to universal preschool needs a cohesive and coherent approach to ensure meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities in all preschool settings.

**State-funded Preschool for Three-Year-Old Children**

Michigan DEC recommends continuation of funding for the pilot preschool for three-year-old children, **Strong Beginnings** and plans for scale up. Three-year-old children require different teacher/child ratios, toileting/diapering accommodations, social-emotional curriculum considerations, and different family engagement components. The Strong Beginnings pilot was funded at \$12,000 per child plus classroom start up, transportation, technical assistance, evaluation, and administration. Funding for the pilot comes from Section 32p of the School Aid Act and is supplemented by funds from the Michigan Department of Education Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five. This program offers an important strategy for addressing the gap in programming available for 3-year-old children, including those aging out of *Early On*, Early Head Start, and other birth-to-three programs. As the state contemplates scale up of programming for 3-year-old children, it is important to consider funding for technical assistance, evaluation, and administration. In addition, state-funded strategies and partnerships within the Great Start to Quality system for childcare providers must be explored

to support existing child care providers and overall quality improvement. Funding for child care providers, and professional learning, to successfully implement publicly-funded preschool programs for three-year-old children is imperative.

Access to high-quality preschool programs for 3 and 4-year-olds is critical for overall school readiness and is essential for the highest-risk children. Lack of access to quality preschool programs continues to impact socioeconomic differences in educational achievement. Michigan needs to invest further in programs that support families with three-year-old children, including evidence-based home visiting through 32p and options for supporting strong transitions out of *Early On*.