



The Michigan Division for Early Childhood (MiDEC)

Your Michigan source for information, resources, and guidance related to young children with special needs and their families.

Mission, Vision, and Governmental Relations Platform

September 2020

MiDEC Mission:

MiDEC is dedicated to promoting policies and evidence-based practice to support families and enhance the optimal development of all children. MiDEC shall encourage and promote the professional growth and quality practice to support young children with exceptional needs and their families.

MiDEC Vision:

- To prepare children for life success by increasing the dissemination of quality information, training and support for parents, professionals and communities
- Combined commitment to provide support and outreach in order to make Michigan a great place for ALL kids

Governmental Relations Platform

The Michigan Division for Early Childhood (MiDEC) Governmental Relations Committee has three priorities that they would like to put forward. The first is to support the appropriate personnel preparation and standards of practice for all early childhood professionals that provide support to young children with exceptional needs and their families in the state of Michigan. The second is related to *Early On*, Michigan’s early intervention system which provides support and services to families of eligible infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities. In order to promote optimal education outcomes for Michigan’s children, we must fully support our youngest learners, beginning with the infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities who are eligible for *Early On* Michigan and their families. Finally, an additional priority is to support increased funding for high quality preschool programming. GSRP, Michigan’s state-funded preschool program provides outstanding inclusive preschool education for students with disabilities, and funding for this critical program must be maintained.

Personnel Preparation

The Michigan Division for Early Childhood (MiDEC) supports the use of appropriate standards of practice and preparation for 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 ages Birth-8. It is essential that all early intervention

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providers and teachers have critical knowledge in academic content and whole child development, including what is necessary to support social-emotional development and mental health, as the purpose of early childhood education is to set a strong foundation for the rest of a child's life. As such MiDEC endorses the Council for Exceptional Children and Division for Early Childhood's recently adopted *Initial Practice-Based Professional Preparation Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators (EI/ECSE) (Initial birth through age 8)*.

Additionally, as early childhood education (ECE) encompasses the development and education of children with and without disabilities, classroom and field experiences with all children are essential. Having standards that prepare teachers and other personnel to appropriately address the needs of all children, including those eligible for early intervention and special education, is critical.

It is imperative that all early childhood educators demonstrate knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to implement the research-based strategies and developmentally appropriate practices that support families and create opportunities for all students to develop critical knowledge, skills, and behaviors that contribute to successful outcomes across the lifespan.

Also, administrators of early childhood and early intervention programming must have strong knowledge that enables them to support the unique needs of children, birth to age 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® Michigan

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) establishes states' early intervention systems for infants and toddlers, birth to age 3, with delays and disabilities. Michigan's is known as *Early On*. Until 2018, Michigan was one of few states without a state appropriation for its early intervention system. It is estimated that families with eligible infants and toddlers need Michigan to invest \$68 M to meet the current need. The 2019-20 state appropriation of \$7.15 M (Section 54d of the State School Aid Act) is a good beginning, but not adequate. We know that 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 intervention by being able to better meet their children's unique needs from an early age and throughout their lives.

State funding for 2019-20 for *Early On*, under Section 54d of the School Aid Act, was \$7,150,000, an increase from the previous year's \$5 million. Michigan DEC acknowledges this important beginning and investment in our infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities and their families. During the COVID-19 crisis, *Early On* providers across the state have continued to provide vital services to young children and their families, connecting them with important community resources to support their basic needs, health

needs and mental health needs. They have continued the important work with families related to their young child's development, and have gone to great lengths to maintain relationships with families during this difficult time. Michigan DEC acknowledges the constraints on the State School Aid budget and urges policymakers, at a minimum, to **maintain the current level of funding for FY 21** to support infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities and their families.

Great Start Readiness Program

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. Diagnosed disability and/or developmental delay is an eligibility factor for GSRP. GSRP provides inclusive preschool education for students with disabilities; maintenance of state funding for this program is a necessity. During the COVID-19 crisis GSRP providers around the state have continued to support students and families, and to prepare them for learning as they transition to kindergarten. Maintenance of funding for GSRP will ensure that there continue to be equitable learning opportunities for our young students in our state.