



Michigan Division for Early Childhood

January 2024

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*

FY 25 Platform

The MiDEC has six policy priorities:

1. Increase investment in **Early On[®] Michigan**, which supports our infants and toddlers, birth to age 3, with delays and disabilities and their families.
2. Develop a cohesive and coherent approach to support **inclusion** as Michigan expands the Great Start Readiness Program toward universal access.

3. Fund **recruitment and retention** of early childhood, early intervention, and early childhood special education personnel.
4. Sustain state-funded support for the evidence-based developmentally appropriate **preschool for 3-year-old children**, Strong Beginnings pilot.
5. **Support 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.
6. Strengthen Michigan's child care infrastructure through increased funding for the 10 **Great Start to Quality Regional Resource Centers**

Early On[®] Michigan

Intervening as early as possible in the life of a child is the most effective and efficient strategy for supporting maximum developmental outcomes for young children with delays and disabilities. Early intervention 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.

Under Governor Whitmer's administration, funding for *Early On* has substantially increased. As a result, more families of eligible infants and toddlers are receiving higher quality, more frequent services. The increases in funding are strengthening our early intervention system. For Fiscal Year 2025, the Michigan Division for Early Childhood recommends continuing this important work through an **increase of \$15 million in state funding under Section 54d of the School Aid Act, to bring state funding levels to \$37.3 million.**

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.

In addition, **Michigan DEC recommends 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.
- Maintain full funding for early intervention services after alignment to ensure adequate services for eligible infants, toddlers and their families.

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 has significantly expanded access to the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) to provide quality preschool programming for the state's population of four-year-old children. 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. MiDEC applauds the governor and legislature for the current program expansion and funding of \$9608 per pupil, and \$11,530 per pupil for extended/5-day programs. The program is administered by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP). 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.

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.

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. Funding for the pilot comes from Section 32t of the School Aid Act. 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.

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*.

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.

Great Start to Quality Resource Centers

The 20 regional Great Start to Quality Resource Centers (RCs) are a resource to child care providers and families within their regions. Responsible for providing professional development, quality improvement consultation and technical assistance to child care, the RCs are also a support to families who are seeking care for their children. A study conducted by the American Institute for Research (AIR), funded by the Michigan Department of Education, found that the current funding provided to the Great Start to Quality Resource Centers (RCs) is insufficient to perform the activities and goals outlined in their work and that the chief resource that RCs need is additional funding to support current staff and hire additional staff. Michigan DEC recommends **increasing funding for the RCs by \$5 million** in order to equitably serve the child care infrastructure needs across Michigan.