



Michigan Division for Early Childhood

December 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 Racial Equity Point of View](#) (November, 2023) 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 26 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, including funded professional

learning support for use of **Pyramid Model practices** and a **\$3 million expansion of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation.**

3. Strengthen state-funded support for the evidence-based developmentally appropriate **preschool for 3-year-old children**, Strong Beginnings pilot.
4. Fund **recruitment and retention** of early childhood, early intervention, and early childhood special education personnel.
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. Help early care and education programs include children with disabilities by **increasing the state's child care scholarship rates for children with disabilities.**

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 \$23.7 million in state funding under Section 54d of the School Aid Act, to bring state funding levels to \$47.1 million.**

Of the \$23.7 million, it is also recommended to set aside **\$300,000 to fund the establishment of a task force** to examine Michigan's current Early On system, identify solutions and make specific recommendations to strengthen and support Early Intervention

services for Michigan families. The charge of the Task Force would be to: examine and make recommendations regarding the two sets of eligibility criteria, personnel standards, service provision, the true cost of a quality system, and future funding mechanisms. The Task Force's mandate would be to complete its work and report its formal recommendations to the administration and legislature within two fiscal years (by FY28).

Universal Preschool with Intentional Supports for Full Inclusion

Through Prek for All, 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. MiDEC applauds the governor and legislature for the current program expansion and funding of \$10,185 per pupil. 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 background 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. **In order to protect Michigan's investment in preschool and retain a qualified workforce, the coaching infrastructure must be strengthened with additional resources and strategies to support GSRP teachers and child care providers in successfully managing and preventing challenging behavior and including children with IEPs, a such as funded professional learning support for use of Pyramid Model practices and a \$3 million expansion of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation.**

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. Strong Beginnings supports three-year-old children from low-income families and children with other risk factors. The program aims to provide high-quality early childhood education to help address gaps in school readiness and promote healthy development. Strong Beginnings works closely with Michigan's existing Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) and is an integral part of the PreK for All pipeline. This allows families to start their school experience with positive engagement and support from the educational community. It creates a nurturing environment that fosters social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth. The program follows a play-based, developmentally

appropriate curriculum and emphasizes family engagement, providing families with resources and opportunities to partner with their child's school.

Important program components include:

- Small class sizes with low teacher-to-student ratios
- Certified early childhood teachers building foundational social and language skills
- Dedicated family liaisons supporting improved family well-being and independence
- A model based on current research on how young children learn best

To support continued scale up, Michigan needs to:

- **Fund 12 additional classrooms in FY 26**
- **Initiate Phase 2 of the Strong Beginnings model pilot to support expansion and ensure more inclusive program options in FY 27**
- **Allocate \$60.8 million for FY 26 - FY 29 to expand Strong Beginnings to include 100 classrooms in 42 counties by 2029**

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. In order to prepare the early intervention workforce, the preparation of early childhood teachers must include a rotation in appropriate early intervention settings.

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.

Increasing Child Care Scholarship Rates for Children with Disabilities

In order to provide options for working parents of children with disabilities and to fully include all children, Michigan needs to compensate the child care providers in a manner that allows them to adequately care for young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Providing an increase in the child care scholarship rate for children with medical conditions, individualized

family service plans, or individualized education plans is an important strategy that will aid child care providers and allow family members to join the workforce. **In order to retain a qualified workforce, the coaching infrastructure must be strengthened with additional resources and strategies to support child care providers in successfully managing and preventing challenging behavior and including children with IEPs, a such as funded professional learning support for use of Pyramid Model practices and a \$3 million expansion of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation.**