



June 4, 2009

To: Members of the House Education Committee
From: Jack Kresnak, President & CEO, Michigan's Children
RE: House Bills 4787-4789

On behalf of Michigan's Children and its Board of Directors, I am pleased to be able to share with you our priorities as you consider legislation intended to improve the educational system in Michigan, including House Bills 4787-4789. Michigan's Children is a statewide child advocacy organization that provides a voice for vulnerable children. Michigan's Children is independent; it does not receive any government funding or represent professionals who receive government contracts. We assess public policy based on a set of core beliefs:

- *Equal opportunity:* We believe all children need equal opportunities to thrive.
- *Prevention:* We believe that Michigan can and must prevent problems facing children and families, rather than intervene after children are harmed and families destroyed.
- *Civic engagement:* We believe everyone has a stake in ensuring the success of our future generations and we work to engage a range of stakeholders, including community leaders, parents and youths.
- *Collaboration:* We believe that neighborhood and community partnerships that include both the public and private sectors are critical.

The status of Michigan's education system is at the forefront of discussion this year and rightly so. As communities and as a state, there is broad recognition from a variety of sectors that we have to get EVERY child ready for post-secondary education and training, work, and life. This will only be possible if Michigan invests in multiple pathways for young people to graduate from high school – some in the traditional four years, some taking a longer time to progress through the curriculum, and some returning to complete their degrees after leaving school. We believe that in some ways we are in the best place we've ever been in this state to move the needle on this issue. We have better data systems in place, we know more about the causes of educational failure and high school dropout, and we better understand what keeps kids in school until graduation and brings them back after they have left. Further, the private sector is engaged, supporting research and innovation in Michigan and around the nation, and there is renewed public sector attention.

On the negative side, we are fully aware of the financial pressures facing the State and school districts, and believe that we will never be able to create the educational system we need to ensure Michigan's success if we do not address the structural budget deficit that is crippling our schools and our economy. To that end, we urge you to explore all revenue options, including a closer look at tax expenditures or "loopholes".

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Michigan's Children thanks this committee for working toward change, and we are honored to be a part of the conversation. We are particularly interested in policies that capitalize on partnerships between schools and other community and workforce resources, and those that are proven most effective in ensuring a successful transition to adulthood for the young people who are most at risk of failure.

Michigan's Children is in favor of supporting struggling students, educators and communities, and has provided leadership in the conversations around high school dropout prevention and recovery. Several things that we really like about the current Committee approach:

1. We applaud the statewide focus. While there are some issues specific to the outcomes of students in the Detroit Public Schools, students around the state need our attention and support.
2. We support public policy and program changes based on data, and are glad that this strategy will rely heavily on information gathering and analysis.

We would like to see the following as this legislation moves through the process:

1. A mandate or incentive for “failing” schools to utilize and expand community, higher education and workforce partners in their efforts toward reform. This could be in a mandate for these partners to be represented on school reform review boards, and there could be stronger language in the legislation about utilization of partners outside the school setting in actual reform efforts. Bringing in partners and resources is not just a good thing to do, we are convinced that it is the way it will work. Schools need strong out-of-school time partners, strong workforce development partners, and many others. Luckily, we have many examples of the impact of these types of partnerships all around the state. Michigan's children, as well as other partners like Communities in Schools, the Michigan After-School Partnership, the Michigan Association for Community and Adult Education, and many others would be glad to help guide the committee toward innovative partnership practices around the state.
2. Resources necessary to implement any reform strategy. This includes resources to the Department of Education and other Departments to provide the necessary technical and other assistance, and resources to the local school districts and buildings themselves to implement reform changes.
3. This initiative is a small part of what needs to be a much larger and comprehensive discussion about improving educational and life outcomes for young people. We are supportive of this small step, but also recognize that educational success is an outgrowth of successes and failures within many systems that have been built over the course of young people's lives. For students to successfully navigate school and life, they must be born healthy and remain healthy; they must feel safe and secure; they must feel supported and cared for; they must be challenged and inspired to achieve; and they must be engaged and connected in their learning, in their communities, to their future, to extracurricular activities, and at home. To change educational outcomes for young people, public policy must recognize the impact of all of those areas. We are thrilled to be able to work in partnership with the education community and others to promote

comprehensive policy improvement, and would offer our help with convening a broad group of stakeholders in some way to further this work.

The Committee has already discussed utilizing this legislative package as part of a strategy to compete for new federal funds targeted toward innovation. We agree with this approach, and are pleased that the Legislature is thinking strategically about how to link a variety of efforts and funding. We believe that a well planned effort in Michigan to maximize as many ARRA resources as possible to improve educational outcomes for young people would position us well in relation to other state efforts. This should include a comprehensive assessment of available ARRA resources specifically for education, as well as funds for workforce development and other related purposes. There are national partners available to assist us with this work in Michigan, including Andrew Moore, from the National League of Cities, who will be testifying next week before this Committee.

As you move forward with this work throughout this Legislative session, we hope that you will also capitalize on the many efforts being made to improve graduation rates through the Administration, and the philanthropic, business and nonprofit communities. For example, with the support of the Mott Foundation, Michigan's Children is currently engaged with four Michigan communities as they struggle to address dropout prevention and recovery. We are including in the network more than a dozen other communities that were engaged in the statewide Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit in October of 2008, and who are now working in collaborations that include educators, workforce development, youth serving organizations, business, local philanthropy and others to improve graduation rates.

The Shared Youth Vision Partnership, a public/private partnership housed in the Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth and supported by Michigan's Children and many others, provides a strong foundation for prioritization, investment and policy change in this area. The Partnership can be a resource for you as you develop strategic responses.

Thank you for this opportunity. I am available to address questions, and to connect the Committee to other federal or local resources of interest. Please feel free to contact me at 517/485-3500 or by email at kresnak.jack@michiganschildren.org.

April 24, 2008

Creating Equal Opportunities for High School Graduation

Why equal opportunity is important

- *We know how to ensure that all children succeed in school and earn a high school diploma – the key to higher education and successful employment.* Successful strategies for ensuring that all youths graduate from high school include instituting flexible and constructive disciplinary policies, and creating incentives for school districts to provide multiple pathways to high school graduation such as alternative education programs, truancy prevention, credit recovery initiatives, and innovative partnerships with community colleges and local agencies or business.
- *The consequences of failing to ensure educational success for all children are far-reaching.* The evidence is clear. Children who do not succeed in school and who drop out are more likely to be unemployed, reliant on public services, and commit crimes. Further, young people without a basic education are less likely to have the maturity and skills needed to parent effectively or the resources to promote the well-being of the next generation of Michiganders.
- *Embedded racial inequities produce unequal opportunities for educational success and high school completion.* Systematic policies, practices and stereotypes work against children and youth of color, limiting their opportunity to finish high school and receive the college education that is increasingly required for economic security. To level the playing field, policymakers will need to understand the impact of racial and ethnic disparities and how they are created.

Barriers to equal opportunity

- *Differential discipline.* Every day, school teachers and administrators must make disciplinary decisions. Ideally, punishments are fair, tailored to the individual student's motives and circumstances, and proportionate to the misdeed. In reality, there often is a differential response by school officials with a range of punishments for similar infractions. Michigan is one of only 10 states requiring mandatory expulsions for assaults on other students and the only one of its size that requires expulsion/suspension for verbal threats. In addition, Michigan's zero tolerance law is now one of the most expansive in the country. Unfortunately, the evidence shows that stricter, more uniform disciplinary policies, like those contained in Michigan's zero tolerance law, do not always result in a more fair system. The evidence: more than 1,600 Michigan youths are expelled each year, and African-American youths are twice as likely as white youths to be forced out of school.
- *Lack of educational services for expelled students.* Despite strict zero tolerance laws, Michigan does not require school districts to provide alternative education or services. As a result, the number of expelled students who receive no educational services increased dramatically over the last several years, with one of every three expelled students receiving no services in school year 2005-06. Alternative programs are simply not available in many areas of the state, and many existing programs were not designed and don't have adequate training for staff to serve disruptive, aggressive or violent students.

- *Disparities in educational achievement.* Children who are not succeeding in school are more likely to drop out. Racial and ethnic disparities in achievement in Michigan are among the worst in the country, and the gap in test scores between African American and white children increases as children move through middle school and high school.
- *A “one size fits all” approach to high school education.* Conventional high schools award a diploma to students who have successfully completed the required number of classes over four years. There is little opportunity to make up for unanticipated setbacks or failure. If the system isn’t flexible enough to respond to those setbacks or failures early, students who get off track will not graduate. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, students who do not graduate are leaving school earlier with fewer credits than ever before.
- *Unequal school resources.* Because of race and class segregation and its relationship to local school revenues, students in high poverty, racially segregated areas are not exposed to the same high quality curricula, teachers, and social network as students in wealthier districts. Funding for Michigan school districts ranges from more than \$20,000 per pupil to less than \$8,000 per pupil. In predominantly white, suburban schools advanced placement courses are universal. In poor and minority neighborhoods, only 43% of high schools offer AP courses.
- *A lack of data to track youths who leave school or to help re-engage them.* Although efforts are underway to improve data systems, Michigan currently does not have the data collection and reporting systems necessary to accurately assess the scope of the dropout problem or to track disparities for children of color.
- *Failure by the state to develop a coordinated strategy to address the needs of out-of-school youths.* Michigan lacks a coordinated strategy for ensuring that at-risk youths receive the supports they need to move into adulthood. Services that address the needs of young people are scattered throughout the major state departments and are not a high priority within most state departments. Better communication between sectors of the educational system and other systems that serve at-risk populations, including the Department of Human Services child welfare and juvenile justice divisions, the Department of Labor and Economic Growth and the Department of Community Health, is necessary to create a system that supports multiple pathways to graduation.

The consequences of unequal opportunity

- *Disparities in high school completion rates.* An estimated 46,000 Michigan students did not graduate with their peers in 2006, and more than one of every six young adults (ages 18-24) in the state do not have a high school diploma. African American, American Indian and Latino youths are more than twice as likely to drop out of school.
- *Disparities in access to higher education.* African American and Chicano/Latino students have lost considerable ground over the past few years in higher education enrollment as a percentage of high school graduates. Changing policies in higher education have included higher standards for high school achievement, more stringent admissions processes, increased reliance on student loans, soaring tuition costs, and implications of the 2006 voter-approved Proposal 2, which prohibits consideration of race/ethnicity as a criterion in college admissions.
- *Disparities in earning potential.* Average weekly wages for African Americans and Latinos were 20 percent less than white workers. The gap is wider for women. Findings from a study published in the *Review of Economic Statistics* that reviewed over 2,000 audits revealed extensive employer discrimination against minorities. Employers favored whites in invitations to interviews, job offers, compensation, job assignments and information about unadvertised opportunities.
- *Continued economic decline.* There are significant economic losses for Michigan communities when young people fail to graduate from high school. Dropouts earn at least \$7,000 a year less

than their peers with high school degrees. Dropouts who would have gone on to receive a bachelor's degree lose more than \$25,000 annually.

Strategies to promote equal opportunities for high school graduation

Open the public dialogue about the impact of race on educational and workforce success.

Address racial and ethnic disparities in school completion and work readiness, by beginning a broad, public conversation about the impact of race on schools and students. A first step is to ensure the collection of sufficient information to analyze the problem. Then it will be important to involve those most affected, including parents, teachers, and young people themselves, in the public conversation.

Demand a stronger, more coordinated, role for state government in dropout prevention and recovery. To create cohesion and priority among piecemeal efforts now scattered throughout the major state departments, the state must support, recognize, utilize and prioritize interagency efforts such as the Interdepartmental Task Force on Youth and the Shared Youth Vision Partnership, and these efforts must address equity issues.

Invest in early learning programs. Gaps in achievement and high school completion can be traced to the earliest years of a child's life. By the time minority children reach kindergarten they already are behind in reading and math readiness, and those disparities continue to grow. Access to high quality preschool programs for low-income children and helping parents learn the skills needed to serve as their child's first and best teachers will go a long way toward filling some of the gaps.

Address suspension and expulsion rates. To bring Michigan's harsh zero tolerance policy in line with other states and with federal standards and give schools greater ability to deal with challenging student behavior, Michigan needs to review current suspension and expulsion policy and its disproportionate affect on youths of color, and provide schools with incentives to create discipline alternatives.

Invest in dropout prevention and recovery. To help create multiple pathways to graduation, including alternative education, truancy prevention, credit recovery initiatives and innovative partnerships with community colleges and other local agencies and business, the state Michigan needs to provide funding for evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery programs.

Support local communities to coordinate services and fund proven programs. While the state has a critical role to play, so do communities who know what approaches have been successful in improving equity in youth outcomes. The C.S. Mott Foundation has provided significant investment in targeted Michigan communities to examine their out-of-school youths and existing services, and work toward creating more high school graduates. Other funders, public and private, should follow suit in this effort.

For more information on current advocacy efforts that impact equal opportunity for children and youth, visit Michigan's Children's Web site at www.michiganschildren.org

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A Community Call to Action!

Michigan Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit

www.midropoutsummit.org



We Are All In This Together: Sharing the Vision of High School Graduation for All Students

Michigan's Promise for the Whole Child.

All young people in Michigan need to be...

Healthy. For students to successfully navigate school and life, they must be born healthy and remain healthy. We must ensure access to prenatal care, immunizations, health screenings (vision, hearing), basic health care access including dental and specialty care. We must promote a life time of recreation and physical fitness, and good diet and nutrition. We must make sure that behavioral and substance use needs are taken care of.

Safe. For students to successfully navigate school and life, they must feel safe and secure. We must support stable homes and safe neighborhoods before, during and after school. We must prevent intimidation and bullying, and promote appropriate discipline, behavioral expectations, rules and routines.

Supported and Cared For. For students to successfully navigate school and life they must feel supported and cared for. We must promote empowered parents and access to other caring adults. We must ensure access to qualified teachers, counselors, mentors, positive role models and coaches, and we must encourage a community active in schools and youth programs.

Challenged. For students to successfully navigate school and life, they must be challenged and inspired to achieve. We must provide well-rounded curriculum that includes rigorous programs in reading, math and the sciences, the arts, world literature, foreign languages, economics, business and entrepreneurial literacy, social studies, life skills, health and wellness. We must promote multiple ways for meeting challenging graduation requirements.

Engaged and Connected. For students to successfully navigate school and life, they must be engaged and connected in their learning, in their communities, to their future, to extracurricular activities, and at home. We must demand motivated, inspired, active learning strategies in classroom; real-world connections to instruction; a variety of extracurricular activities; community-based apprenticeships, internships and youth programs; individualized learning pathways; and opportunities to develop social, civic and leadership skills.

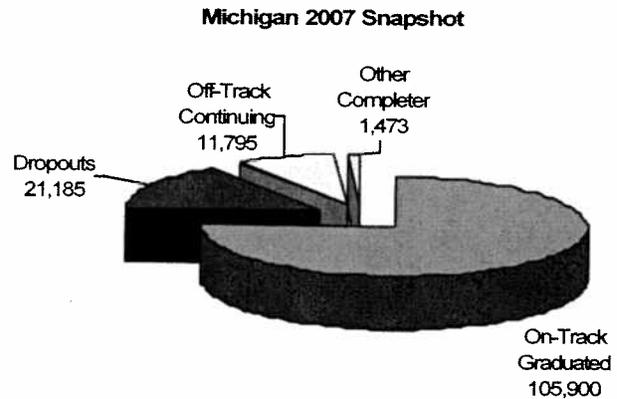
*These topics are drawn from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's INVEST IN THE WHOLE CHILD, Educating Our Children in the 21st Century, www.ascd.org

Michigan Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit
www.midropoutsummit.org

*We Are All In This Together:
 Sharing the Vision of High School Graduation for All Students*

A Snapshot of High School Graduation in Michigan, 2007

Over 21,000 young people who would have graduated “on-time” during the traditional four-year high school path in 2007, left high school without a diploma – 15 percent of all Michigan students who began high school four years earlier. Another nearly 12,000 did not graduate “on-time,” but were still on a path toward high school completion.



These data vary significantly depending on a student’s gender, race/ethnicity, geography, and other factors. Luckily, this information is available for every applicable school building and every school district in Michigan, allowing communities to better understand the status of their own young people.

	On-Track Graduated	Dropout	Off-Track Continuing
All Students	75%	15%	8%
Male	71%	18%	10%
Female	80%	12%	7%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	66%	19%	13%
Asian American	85%	10%	4%
Black or African American	56%	28%	15%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	78%	13%	6%
White	82%	11%	7%
Hispanic or Latino	58%	29%	12%
Multi Racial	69%	17%	10%
Economically Disadvantaged	57%	25%	17%
Limited English Proficient	70%	20%	9%
Migrant Education	57%	31%	10%
Students with Disabilities	61%	19%	18%

Source: Four-Year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Reports, CEPI

The "four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate" is calculated by tracking individual students from the time they were enrolled as first-time ninth-graders, with a four-year expected completion rate. The formula accounts for students who leave school and return later, for students retained in a grade and stay in school, and for students who transferred into and out of the public school system. Thus, this is a more accurate measure of the Graduation rate. Students included in building rates must have been reported to the state for two or more count days. Students included in district rates must have been reported to the state for one or more count days.

2007 Cohort Total: Students in the 2007 cohort for the state, for each district, and for each building after adjustments were made for transfers in, transfers out, and exempt students.

On-Track Graduated and Graduation Rate: Students in the 2007 cohort who completed high school with a regular diploma in four years or less. Rate is the percentage of On-Track Graduated over 2007 Cohort.

Dropout and Dropout Rate: Students who left high school permanently at any time during the four-year cohort period, or whose whereabouts are unknown (Reported and MER; missing expected records). Rate is the percentage of Dropout over 2007 Cohort.

Off-Track Continuing and Rate: Students who did not completed high school with a regular diploma in more than four years and are still continuing in school. Rate is the percentage of Off-Track Continuing over 2007 Cohort.

Other Completer: Students who earned a GED, other certificate, or reached special education maximum age. Also includes students who completed high school with a regular diploma in more than four years (Off-Track Graduated).

Data for all school districts and applicable school buildings in the state are available from the Center for Educational Performance and Information

http://www.michigan.gov/cepi/0,1607,7-113-21423_30451_51357---,00.html

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Michigan Dropout Prevention Summit Partners

America's Promise and State Farm Insurance® financially supported the Michigan Dropout Prevention Summit with strong support of other nonprofit organizations, funders, representatives from public agencies and associations, and others. This is the first time such diverse stakeholders have joined efforts to address Michigan's dropout crisis.

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