

Separate letters to Governor Rick Snyder, Superintendent Mike Flanagan, and Susan Broman

The undersigned organizations applaud the creation of the Office of Great Start as a recognition of the need for high quality early childhood programs and services as a critical component of a P – 20 (prenatal to age 20) education continuum. As the OGS moves forward on its ambitious agenda, we urge you to focus on the needs of the youngest children ages 0 to 3 and their parents.

Michigan has made much progress in identifying what it takes to prepare children for school entry and educational achievement, and some of the necessary components are in place – including the successful Great Start School Readiness (GSRP) program, which currently serves at-risk 4 year-olds. While evaluations show that the GSRP has proven outcomes, for many high risk young children, one year of preschool is too little, too late to close the achievement gap – a gap that emerges long before children reach preschool doors. The research is clear: experiences in the first 1,000 days of life alter the architecture of young children’s brains in ways that permanently affect their health, learning and development.

Specifically, we hope that you will work to:

*Establish a consistent funding stream for programs for infants and toddlers and their families.* We believe that a portion of any expanded funding for the Great Start Readiness program (to increase the number of children served) should be set aside for services for at-risk infants, toddlers and their families. Other states have successfully adopted this model. An infant-toddler set-aside in Michigan could ensure that at least 20 percent of any *new* money for early childhood programs will be designated for an infant-toddler set-aside that will flow through the Office of Great Start. The infant-toddler set-aside would supplement rather than supplant already existing funding for infant-toddler programs and would fund proven programs and services that include the following components:

- Serve the most at-risk infants, toddlers and their families.
- Improve efficiency and accountability for scarce public funds through better coordination and collaboration.
- Link infant-toddler programs and services to the larger birth to five early childhood system.
- Improve the quality of services through training, technical assistance and evaluation.

Learning begins before birth, and the strength of our public education system is dependent on children’s experiences prenatally and through the first three years of life. We stand ready to work with the Office of Great Start and the Administration to develop an infant-toddler strategy that ensures the best possible outcomes for Michigan’s most vulnerable children.

Sincerely,