

March 6, 2013

Honorable Howard Walker, Chairman
K-12 & Education Subcommittee of Senate Appropriations
State Capitol
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Chairman Walker & Committee Members:

Though Michigan lawmakers have already made a strong commitment to the state-funded Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), preschool for at-risk 4-year-olds, we urge you to do more by supporting a \$130 million increase over Fiscal Years 2014 and 2015. Today, 30,000 at-risk kids who are eligible are not enrolled in either the GSRP or the federal Head Start program due to a funding gap. Closing the gap will improve our business climate and give Michigan businesses the competitive edge.

To run a successful business, we need to do everything well and we need to do it quickly. This includes reaching out to our customer base, communicating seamlessly within our organization, and providing clients immediate, effortless access to our data. In the global marketplace, where companies must match up with fast-moving international competition, these are not operational luxuries. They are necessities. It is critical that Michigan produce the workforce required for businesses to compete. By 2018, nearly 62 percent of all jobs in Michigan will require post-secondary education. Yet, only 35 percent of Michiganians 25 or older have an associate's degree or higher.

Consider these statistics:

- 26 percent of Michigan high school students don't graduate on time;
- 65 percent of our 8th graders are below grade level in math; and
- 69 percent of 4th graders are reading below grade level.

To reverse these disturbing trends we must make every effort to train and re-train our current workforce. To see academic achievement become economic success, we must re-imagine our education system starting from the ground up with a focus on high-quality early childhood learning. The benefits of doing so roll out over time.

First, there's the immediate windfall. Our recent report shows that for every dollar invested in high quality early learning, Michigan generates a total of \$2.11 in economic activity – a better rate of return than investments in the manufacturing, retail trade or transportation sectors. Particularly, it's the quality components of these programs – like increased teacher compensation and smaller class sizes – that contribute to that multiplier effect by creating more jobs and circulating more money through local businesses. A copy of the report may be found at www.americasedge.org.

Secondly, there are the long-term benefits. High-quality early learning programs can produce students better prepared to succeed, both academically and professionally. Data shows that kids who participate in these programs can do better on early math and reading tests, have higher high school graduation rates and ultimately earn more as adults.

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However, it's not enough to create early learning programs and funnel our children into them. Not all early learning programs are created equal, and a low-quality program will not produce the academic and economic benefits that a high-quality one would.

Our economy is regaining its health and we are confident that Michigan businesses can be competitive. At the same time, we must support programs that make that competition achievable. High-quality early education isn't just good for our kids - it's also good for business.

We appreciate Governor Snyder's proposal to enhance early childhood care and education by \$130 million over the next two years.

We urge you and your legislative colleagues to support this wise investment, in addition to maintaining a solid commitment to the K-12 system. Ensuring that all children have a strong foundation and that they graduate on schedule is in everyone's best interest.

Best Regards,

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