



TO: Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on K-12 School Aid and the Department of Education  
FROM: Gilda Z. Jacobs, President & CEO  
SUBJECT: 2021 Budget Recommendations  
DATE: March 4, 2020

I am pleased to share the priorities of the Michigan League for Public Policy for the 2021 School Aid and Department of Education budgets. The League and its local partners around the state believe that a high-quality education—beginning at birth and continuing through a career—is a critical lever for increasing economic growth and opportunity, while reducing inequities based on race and place. Fact sheets are attached with additional information related to the League’s priorities, which are highlighted below.

- **Help parents with low wages find affordable, high-quality child care.** Although eager to work, many Michigan parents cannot earn enough to pay for high-quality child care. The cost of child care for a parent with two children in a center in Michigan is \$18,602 a year—exceeding average annual housing costs, and rivaling the cost of college tuition. Yet, child care providers are some of the lowest paid workers in the state, and employers are finding it hard to attract and retain low-wage workers because of the lack of child care. We urge you to increase child care payments to help stabilize the child care market, and raise the income eligibility cutoff for child care—now one of the lowest in the nation at 130% of poverty.
- **Expand services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and delays.** Michigan’s early intervention program—Early On—has not been adequately funded, resulting in too few young children getting the services they need to improve their chances of getting ready for school. We appreciate that the Legislature approved the first state funding for Early On of \$5 million in the 2019 budget, with an additional \$2.2 million in the current budget year. We urge you to accelerate the path to full funding—an estimated \$68 million—over the next three budget years.
- **Ensure all eligible 4-year-olds can receive a high-quality preschool education.** The League supports an increase in per-pupil payments for the Great Start Readiness Program to align with K-12 foundation grants. The per-pupil payment hasn’t been increased since 2014, making it more difficult to attract and retain well-trained teachers.
- **Provide the resources needed to ensure children can read by third grade.** The promise behind Michigan’s Read by Grade Three law was that there would be adequate and early supports for children and their families to ensure success. We support the governor’s recommendation to continue to invest in well-trained literacy coaches in Michigan’s public elementary schools, as well as carry on with efforts to ensure that parents are engaged and know their options if their children aren’t reading proficiently.

- **Provide more state funding to public schools in high-poverty communities.** The connection between the stresses of poverty, school readiness and achievement are clear. We support investments that recognize the added costs of teaching children with greater needs, including full funding for the At-Risk School Aid program, adequate funding for special education services, and investments in English language learners.
- **Expand access to healthy foods.** The 10 Cents a Meal program, which provides incentives for schools to purchase healthy food grown in Michigan, began in the 2016 school year as a \$250,000 pilot program available in 22 Michigan counties. Every year since then, the Legislature has increased funding to enable expansion of the program to school districts in additional counties. For the 2020 budget year, the Legislature allocated \$2 million and expanded eligibility to school districts statewide as well as child care centers, but funding was vetoed. The League recommends restoring the \$2 million to support access to healthy food for Michigan children in both rural and urban areas of the state.
- **Increase adult education funding.** Entry-level jobs with a career track increasingly require a postsecondary credential, yet many Michigan workers need remediation in one or more basic skills in order to succeed in training that leads to a credential. Adjusted for inflation in 2001 dollars, state funding for adult education has fallen by 78%. We recommend an increase of \$10 million, to total funding of \$36 million, allowing the state to assist nearly 8,000 more students.

We hope the attached information is helpful as you deliberate a budget that touches thousands of Michigan families and children. We look forward to working with you as the budget process proceeds.