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Michigan voters say no to funding cuts for early childhood programs

Poll finds overwhelming majority wants preschool, family services saved

LANSING, Mich. – On the heels of the Michigan Senate’s decision to slice hundreds of millions from the state’s early childhood efforts, a poll released today shows three-quarters of Michigan voters want early childhood development and education programs protected from such cuts.

Seventy-five percent consider it “extremely” or “very” important to spare Michigan’s youngest learners and their parents from the budget wrangling in Lansing, according to the poll released by the Early Childhood Investment Corp. (ECIC).

Similarly, 83 percent of those polled think early childhood development and education is “an absolute necessity” for their community, including 69 percent who strongly believe that.

The poll of 500 Michigan registered voters, conducted by Lake Research Partners and paid for by the Kellogg Foundation, also found that support for early childhood efforts cuts across demographic and geographic lines (see details below). Voters also favored funding early childhood efforts even if it increases their taxes.

“With times so hard and unemployment at 14 percent, Michigan families need early childhood programs and supports like pre-K, home visits and child care subsidies more than ever,” said Judy Samelson, CEO of ECIC, a public nonprofit corporation working on behalf of young families. “Legislators face truly horrible choices with this budget. But children, their future and the state’s future are not choices. They are necessities.”

Samelson was backed by a broad coalition of state organizations opposed to the Senate’s cuts to early childhood programs. The coalition includes the American Academy of Pediatrics – Michigan Chapter, Children’s Trust Fund, Children’s Charter, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, Early Childhood Investment Corp., Great Start Collaboratives, Great Start Parent Coalitions, Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children, Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health, Michigan Association of

United Ways, Michigan's Children, Michigan Coalition of Children and Families, Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health and Michigan League for Human Services.

"As any parent knows, providing for the needs of young children is not an optional activity," said Nancy Moody, chairperson of the Children's Trust Fund. "The state must not fail to meet its responsibilities to Michigan's youngest citizens and to its economic future, which those children will help create."

Ingham County Sheriff Gene Wriggelsworth, executive committee member of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Michigan, said: "We urge lawmakers to restore funding to the proven early childhood education and care programs that give kids the right start and keep them out of our prisons. Today, it costs as much to send someone to prison as it does to send them to Michigan State University or the University of Michigan. Preventing crime at the front end will save valuable taxpayer dollars, and it's in the best interest of our children and communities."

The Lake Research poll also found:

- People across the state view investing in early childhood as necessary, with voters in Wayne County (83 percent), West Michigan (70 percent), the metro Detroit region (66 percent) and Central Michigan (66 percent) all strongly agreeing on their value.
- Regardless of political affiliation, voters say these programs are vital, with 85 percent of Democrats, 63 percent of independents and 61 percent of Republicans strongly agreeing.
- 74 percent favor investing in early childhood even if it raises their taxes.
- 50 percent of likely voters said the state already spends "too little" on early childhood development and education. Only 6 percent of voters believe Michigan spends too much on early childhood.
- 95 percent said the years from birth to age 5 were either "extremely important" (65 percent) to learning and development or "very important" (30 percent). Research shows that 85 percent of a child's brain architecture is formed by age 3.
- 91 percent said ensuring that all children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn was either "extremely important" (56 percent) or "very important" (35 percent).
- 54 percent said they would be "much more likely" or "somewhat more likely" to vote for candidates who come out in favor of maintaining funding.

The poll comes as Michigan lawmakers are grappling to cut more than \$2 billion in the 2010 budget. Since the beginning of the year, early childhood and development programs across the board have been targeted for elimination or significant reduction, including:

- Elimination of pre-K programs for 30,500 Michigan 4-year-olds, totaling \$103 million.

- Reductions in child care supports for low-income working families (\$135 million).
- A reduction of \$25 million to Medicaid providers for work with children 0-5.
- Elimination of three programs to prevent child abuse and neglect – 0-3 Secondary Prevention, Nurse-Family Partnership and Great Parents, Great Start – totaling \$14 million.
- Elimination of all funding (\$14.3 million) for the Early Childhood Investment Corporation. Thirteen million of those dollars go for programs and supports that increase the quality of child care in Michigan.
- A reduction of \$750,000 for the ECIC’s 55 Great Start Collaboratives across Michigan. The collaboratives study local problems facing young learners and their parents then make a community plan to maximize resources, minimize waste, eliminate duplication of services and develop programs to “fill the gaps” in early childhood services.

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