

The Michigan Ready to Learn Leadership Summit

Report to the Legislature Executive Summary

SEPTEMBER 1999

Prepared for
House and Senate Appropriations Committees
Michigan Legislature

Prepared on behalf of
Michigan Child Care Task Force

Prepared by
Public Sector Consultants, Inc.

The Michigan Ready to Learn Leadership Summit

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Facts: Current Michigan Early Childhood Education and Care

- Combined public and private investment in Michigan children under age five is about \$2,200 a year per child compared to about \$7,200 in public investment alone per school-age child.
- Only slightly more than half of Michigan parents believe that their child always is cared for by trained teachers and caregivers.
- The median wage of child-care professionals is \$6.85 per hour.
- Almost half (46 percent) of Michigan children under age five are receiving education and care from someone other than a parent. The other 54 percent are cared for solely by their parents.
- Many families are juggling multiple education and care arrangements. If parents have more than one child under age five, they frequently must have separate arrangements for each child (this is the case with 40 percent of parents).
- Stable relationships between children and caregivers are hard to maintain. More than a quarter of the children cared for by someone other than a parent change arrangements every six months.
- Children in nonparent early education and care are there for a significant amount of time—an average of 40 hours a week.

Introduction

Section 643 of Michigan Public Act 294 of 1998 provided \$100,000 to leverage and match funds for the purpose of holding a “Ready to Learn” leadership summit to explore the development of a child-care and early education system that meets the needs of every child prior to kindergarten. The legislation required that a report on the business conducted and recommendations made at the summit to be submitted to the House and Senate appropriations committees no later than September 30, 1999.

The Michigan Child Care Task Force, operating under the direction of its legislative leadership, has determined that the most significant result of the leadership summit is that

Michigan leaders are mobilized to create widespread recognition of the importance of quality early childhood education and care [ECEC] for all children in the state and to translate this knowledge into action to assure that all children have the opportunity to succeed.

This accomplishment was made possible by the generous contributions of the following funders, who provided an additional \$142,400:

C.S. Mott Foundation
Community Foundation for Muskegon County
Frey Foundation
Kalamazoo Foundation
Kmart Corporation
McGregor Fund
Michigan Education Association
MSU Coalition for Children, Youth, Families, and Communities
MSU College of Human Ecology
The Skillman Foundation
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

On the eve of the summit, Wayne State University Medical School hosted a reception, laboratory tour, and opportunities for summit participants to converse with distinguished neuroscience faculty. The event provided an excellent opportunity for participants to learn about the latest tools and techniques in brain science research.

Since this first summit, a bicameral, bipartisan Legislative Children’s Caucus has been created, and a second summit was held on September 7, 1999, to establish a vision and teams to pursue priorities for immediate action.

Anyone interested in receiving the full report to the Michigan Legislature may contact Pamela Sanders at Public Sector Consultants, Inc. (517/484-4954).

PART 1

Research Conducted and Materials Presented

Research was conducted—a good deal of it original—to provide summit participants with information from which to form a call to action that would enhance their commitment to the health and success of the first generation of the new century. In addition, findings were organized and presented summarizing the research revolution that tells us how and when the brains of children are “wired” for life. The following summarizes the research and materials presented.

BUILDING CHILDREN’S BRAINS

Presents findings from the research revolution that tells us how and when the brains of very young children are “wired” for life.

OPINION OF MICHIGAN PARENTS

Reports the findings of the benchmark survey of Michigan parents in regard to their young children’s education and child care.

EXPENDITURES FOR EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE IN MICHIGAN

Presents the first comprehensive documentation of Michigan’s investment in early childhood education and care, including total expenses and sources of funding and taking into account the value of uncompensated care provided by parents and relatives.

SEEKING A UNIVERSAL AND HIGH-QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE SYSTEM: THE CHALLENGE

Identifies three essential features such a system must have and describes specific strategies to realize them. The strategies were shaped by community leaders at local forums throughout Michigan.

CLOSING THE MICHIGAN EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE INVESTMENT GAP

Quantifies the cost difference between current expenditures on early education and care in Michigan and the cost of a proposed universal and high-quality early-learning system.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Presents resources for readers interested in learning more about the importance of high-quality early education and child care.

PART 2

“Dialogue with Michigan” Community Forums

Preparations for the Ready to Learn Leadership Summit included activities characterized as the “Dialogue with Michigan.” Nineteen community forums were held across the state to lay the groundwork for a successful summit. The community forums extended the dialogue about early childhood education and care by identifying and communicating with a cross-section of local leaders representing business, health, K–12 and higher education, labor, media, religion, philanthropy, and government. Citizens from across the state considered the essentials of high-quality education and care and shared their ideas for action. The following consistent themes emerged.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- Parenting education is of interest in communities.
- All parents should have the opportunity to learn all they need to know.

HIGH-QUALITY CAREGIVING

- Education and care providers are not paid enough given their responsibilities for nurturing our youngest children.
- Continuous and comprehensive training should be available for all parents and other caregivers.

COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

- We must build on what already is in place rather than seeking new mandates.
- We must support community innovation to meet local needs.

PART 3

Identification and Mobilization of Leaders

Summit sponsors and planners sought to attract a core group of leaders from the fields of government, business, labor, philanthropy, K-12 and higher education, health care, media, and faith. Public Sector Consultants, Inc., (PSC) conducted interviews with many leaders from those fields and created an invitation list consisting of 10-14 individuals from each of the eight fields. From these 100+ people were culled the 50 initial invitees and follow-up invitations were sent to those needed to round out a core group of summiteers numbering 50.

Some of the summit participants were knowledgeable about early childhood issues, but most were not. Summit planners wanted to recruit to the movement people who were lighthouses within their professional fields and not the state's existing experts in and advocates for early childhood issues.

It is a stretch to expect very busy people with myriad responsibilities to move outside of their area of expertise to learn about and become swayed by research about a different topic. The obstacles were particularly acute in the fields of business, labor, and faith; it is within these areas that much recruitment work must be undertaken.

Based on the numerous interviews with leaders, an analysis of opportunities and obstacles was written.

PART 4

Media Coverage

To build the interest of leaders attending the summit and to help the discussion resound across the state, summit organizers heightened media attention to the topic of early childhood education and care. The press was kept informed during the summit planning process, involved in the community forums, and encouraged to cover the summit and its outcomes. One result is that the media has become one of the key leadership sectors most engaged in action following the summit.

SPECIFIC MEDIA STRATEGIES

- Individual reporters, community affairs directors, and editorial boards were contacted and encouraged to cover the community forums and the summit and to generate stories on early childhood.
- Local sponsors of community forums were assisted in local media outreach.
- Arrangements were made for experts and summit planners to be interviewed by media reporters and commentators (e.g., Lansing's "NewsTalk 870") and TV programs (e.g., "Capital Connection").

Two press conferences were held prior to the summit, preceded by briefings for state agency public information officers on the research findings and the summit preparations.

- On May 19, 1999, the findings of the parent survey were released at the State Capitol Building.
- On June 2, 1999, the findings of the economic investment analysis were released, also at the State Capitol Building.

The media coverage was extensive and widespread, contributing a great deal to the excitement and momentum building to the summit and focusing the public's attention on early childhood education and care.

PART 5

Summary of June 11 Summit

The June 11, 1999, Ready to Learn Leadership Summit attracted 50 top Michigan leaders who explored the development of a universal, high-quality early education and care system that will assure every Michigan child has the opportunity to enter school ready to learn. Ninety-eight percent of the participants said the issue of early childhood now is among their priorities as a state leader, and 100 percent said that leaders attending the summit appeared strongly committed to a call to action.

The following summarizes the summit's important outcomes.

- Participants reached consensus on the implications of recent brain research—in particular, the absolute importance of the quality and quantity of time parents and adult caregivers spend with children from birth to kindergarten.
- Participants formally recognized that investment in our youngest children results in reduced social costs, improved work skills, and higher standards of individual behavior.
- Participants identified several specific actions that could be taken now to enhance quality and access, including instituting a broad public-communications and -engagement campaign, establishing links between local- and state-level action, and setting measures of progress to increase the quality of early education and care.
- Participants commissioned a work group to create a leadership vision, begin the public education campaign, and propose a call to action.

PART 6

Leadership Action

The June 11 summit produced immediate action. One vital outcome was creation of the bipartisan legislative children's caucus, which numbers 35 members as of the date of this report.

A second critical outcome was formation of work group of participants to develop a vision, define priorities for urgent action, and issue a comprehensive call to action. The group's work was presented and supported at a second leadership summit held on September 7, 1999, and hosted by Marianne Udow, vice president, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan. The following is the vision for early childhood in Michigan adopted by the second summit.

All children deserve the same start in life. Every Michigan child will enter school engaged in learning, with the capacity for success in school and in life. Every Michigan family will be able to access parent education and high-quality early childhood education and care through a system that respects the diversity of families with regard to ethnicity, religious beliefs, philosophy, and income.

To achieve this vision, all parents must have the knowledge and supports they need as their children's most important teachers and caregivers. The following conditions also are necessary:

- Every child always is with or closely supervised by a competent, informed, and caring adult.
- Communities are organized to provide safe havens for children to grow, learn, and play. Within communities, families must have access to affordable health care, with an emphasis on prevention.
- Businesses provide leadership in communities by supporting family life in the structure of the work environment.

Achievement of this vision will be assessed through global measures to be determined. These measures could include assessing child readiness at school entry and also measures related to each of the following priorities for immediate action:

- Multimedia public awareness campaign
- Parent education and support
- Professional development of nonparent adult caregivers
- State- and local-level public/private partnerships

At the second summit, David Lawrence stated that "It is only moral and fair and right that every child be entitled to have a chance to succeed." Michigan now has a cadre of leaders who share and will act on this belief.