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Granholt budget largely maintains early childhood programs, but with a troubling exception

LANSING – Governor Jennifer Granholm’s fiscal year 2011 budget is a mixed bag of relief and concern for early childhood advocates.

While the budget maintains funding for most early childhood programs, it eliminates the state’s only mental health program for children 0-5.

The Child Care Enhancement Program (CCEP) serves high-risk children with social-emotional and behavioral challenges who are in danger of being expelled from child care. The FY 2010 budget includes \$1.8 million for those infant and toddler mental health services.

“Not supporting the social and emotional health of young children puts them at risk of failing in school,” said Judy Samelson, CEO of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation. “It also puts the burden on schools to address the problems of these young children.”

Prekindergarten and other early childhood programs are well-documented as critical to school readiness. Samelson cited a recent [economic impact study](#) by Minnesota-based Wilder Research that indicated Michigan’s prekindergarten programs save the state \$1.15 billion annually by lowering special education, welfare and criminal justice costs.

According to a survey last year of Michigan kindergarten teachers, one-third of their incoming students aren’t able to keep up, owing to emotional, physical, social or educational weaknesses. Eighty six percent of those teachers said children who are not ready impact the children who are.

The governor’s proposal also:

- Maintains \$107 million of funding for early childhood programs in the School Aid budget.

- Maintains \$14.6 million of funding for the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, most of which is used for child care quality programs.
- Maintains \$3.8 million of funding to the Zero to Three Secondary Prevention Initiative, which provides services to families who may be at risk of having a child removed from the home.
- Lowers the amount available for subsidy payments to low-income working parents from \$238.8 million in 2010 to \$223 million.
- Lowers funding for Public Health Department immunization programs.
- Drops School Aid budget language that allowed local school districts to use prekindergarten funding for other purposes.

Early childhood advocates worry that while the budget supports many early childhood initiatives, it also relies on potentially controversial revenues and reforms that may prove difficult for the Legislature to pass in an election year.

“The governor’s plan clearly recognizes the value of early childhood, but the question is will lawmakers approve it in the current highly polarized atmosphere?” said Scott Dzurka, president and CEO of the Michigan Association of United Ways. “And if they don’t, will they target early childhood like they did last year?”

Samelson said early childhood advocates will work to see that doesn’t happen.

“We have to continue educating lawmakers so they understand that to researchers, economists and educators there is no debate any longer - helping children birth to 5 is without a doubt good business. And there should be no debate in Michigan either.”

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation was founded in 2005 to be the state's focal point for information and investment in early childhood in Michigan. Fifty-five Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions serve as the local infrastructure for the Great Start system. These local groups of parents, educators, business and community leaders, clergy, law enforcement, philanthropic organizations, local public agencies and others are the "knowledge leaders" and "change agents" for young children and their families.

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