



ECIC's Top Ten Recommendations for MiLEAP

On July 12, 2023, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive order establishing the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential, or MiLEAP. As a statewide leader on early childhood, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, and our collaborative partners statewide, have identified several recommendations—our top ten—for how MiLEAP can make meaningful impact for young children, their families, and the early childhood workforce in Michigan.

"This is a big opportunity for young children, their families, and the early care and education workforce, which is the backbone of Michigan's economy," said Dawne Bell, CEO, Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC).

"We are so thankful for Governor Whitmer's leadership in unifying and aligning these resources and services and for her commitment to ensuring Michigan families have access to equitable, high-quality, and affordable early care and education.

At ECIC, we believe learning begins at birth. We look forward to collaborating with MiLEAP to further capacity and increase investments in the earliest years."

ECIC's Top Ten Recommendations for MiLEAP:

1. Improve Equitable Access to Free and Low-Cost Child Care
2. Rebrand "Subsidy" to De-Stigmatize Supports for Working Families
3. Make Michigan an "Early Adopter" of New Proposed CCDBG Rules
4. Go Beyond the New Proposed CCDBG Rules and Do *Even More* for Families
5. Accelerate Equitable Access to Universal Pre-K in Michigan
6. Announce a Vision for Universal Pre-K *and* Universal Child Care by 2030
7. Prevent Early Childhood Suspension/Expulsion in both Policy and Practice
8. Make Implicit Bias Training Available to Licensed Early Childhood Workforce
9. Remove Barriers to Universal Developmental Screening
10. Strengthen and Meaningfully Connect Community, Regional, and State Levels to Improve the Early Childhood System

Detailed recommendations appear on pages 2-6 of this document. For additional information and resources, please visit ecic4kids.org.

ECIC’s Top Ten Recommendations for MiLEAP (Detailed Recommendations):

#1 – Improve Equitable Access to Free and Low-Cost Child Care

- Remove the child support cooperation requirement for families applying for the child care subsidy. Michigan is one of only 13 states with this policy, which deters families from applying for free or low-cost child care at a time when eligibility has been expanded to help more families access the care and support needed to participate in the workforce.
- As of 2023, about 42% of children in Michigan under age 5 income-qualify for the child care subsidy program, however, only 10% are enrolled. More than 1 in 4 children in Michigan live in a single parent household,ⁱ and the child support program provides additional financial security to these children and families. However, there is no evidence that requiring cooperation with child support as a part of participation in public programs, such as the child care subsidy, results in additional resources for the child as intended when these policies were put into place.ⁱⁱ In fact, the requirement to cooperate with child support often deters parents from seeking assistance for child care, which can impact their ability to find care while they work or attend school.
- One of the more recent states to end the policy is Virginia, which eliminated the child support requirement in one simple sentence in legislation on child support enforcement: “The foregoing provisions of this section shall not apply to applications for the Child Care Subsidy Program.”ⁱⁱⁱ

#2 – Rebrand “Subsidy” to De-Stigmatize Supports for Working Families

- Consider renaming the Child Development and Care (CDC) subsidy program to the “Child Care Scholarship Program.” The term “subsidy” can be confusing for families, and “assistance” is often attached to social stigma, which deters families from enrolling in the program. This stigma remains prevalent in Michigan and was most recently reported by ECIC grantees across the state. Because Michigan currently has thousands more families eligible than enrolled in CDC subsidy, there is a unique opportunity for Michigan to increase program enrollment, address potential barriers, and make employment and education a more viable option for families.
- Maryland became the first state to enact this change in early 2019, when they renamed and rebranded their subsidy program to “Child Care Scholarship Program.” In the first year following the program name change, Maryland saw an increase of about 20% in the number of families enrolled in the program.^{iv}
- Changing the name of Michigan’s “Child Development and Care subsidy” program to “Child Care Scholarship” program would make Michigan a leader in actively combating stigma, while also addressing any confusion currently felt by families around the state.

#3 – Make Michigan an “Early Adopter” of New Proposed CCDBG Rules

- Although new proposed rules to the federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) will not go into effect for several months, Michigan should be a leader, an “early adopter” by fast-tracking implementation of several practices that will help both families and child care programs and their workforce, including:

- Increasing the affordability of child care by waiving co-payments for eligible families with incomes up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level; and eligible families with a child with a disability.
- Improving parent options by strengthening provider payment practices, such as using private-pay practices that account for child care fixed costs (based on actual costs rather than market rate surveys) by paying prospectively prior to the delivery of services and paying child care providers based on a child's enrollment or an alternative equally stabilizing approach.
- Building supply by funding child care services through grants and contracts as a strategy to increase the supply and quality of child care for infants and toddlers, families in rural and traditionally underserved areas, children with disabilities, and nontraditional hour care.
- Making family enrollment easier and faster by considering a child presumptively eligible for subsidy prior to full documentation and verification and simplifying verification by using enrollment in other benefits programs to qualify for free or low-cost child care.

#4 – Go Beyond the New Proposed CCDBG Rules and Do *Even More* for Families

- Increase access to free and low-cost child care by providing automatic eligibility for children with disabilities.
- Increase access to free and low-cost child care and fill staff openings in child care classrooms and home-based programs by providing automatic eligibility for the children of early care and education workers (including GSRP educators, Head Start and Early Head Start educators, center-based educators, and home-based educators and providers).
- For families eligible and approved for free or low-cost child care, remove the requirement that families reapply and be reauthorized annually. Eliminate disruptions to families by maintaining eligibility for parents until their child enters kindergarten (age 6).
- Ensure Michigan maximizes all federal and state funding for child care by augmenting the caseload consensus model and strengthening the budget process used to determine child care funding levels.

#5 – Accelerate Equitable Access to Universal Pre-K in Michigan

- Allow Intermediate School Districts, Head Start programs, and eligible Community Based Organizations that receive or could receive Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) funding to align GSRP policies and regulations with Head Start national standards for quality, *including ratios*, without requesting a waiver from either MiLEAP or the local grantee.
- Affirm Michigan's commitment to parental choice by expanding and investing in pre-K options that meet families' needs, with a special focus on shifting more resources to programs where children can stay in the same location rather than increasing transportation funding to transport children to multiple locations.

#6 – Announce a Vision for Universal Pre-K and Universal Child Care by 2030

- Building on the expansion of state-funded preschool for four-year-olds, articulate a commitment to incrementally expanding public funding (leveraging state and federal funds) to ensure all Michigan families have equitable access to affordable, high-quality child care and mixed delivery early learning programs—that meet the families’ needs—for both infants and toddlers and preschoolers.
- Articulate a commitment to incrementally expanding public funding (leveraging state and federal funds) to achieve competitive compensation for the early care and education workforce, in all early learning settings.
- In accordance with MiLEAP’s directive to streamline, coordinate, and align aspects of a lifelong education system, modernize and streamline early care and education line items in the state budget so that MiLEAP can effectively fund and implement current and future initiatives such as early childhood mental health consultation, without requiring legislative approval.
- In support of Governor Whitmer’s goal to increase access to and affordability of child care for Michigan families, implement a true Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECID) and bring more sunlight and transparency to how data on utilization of publicly-funded child care is accessed and utilized, such as publicizing monthly reports on the number of families that apply for publicly-funded child care, the number/percentage approved, the number/percentage then matched and enrolled in a child care program, and the number that remain on a wait list. Disaggregate the data by race/ethnicity, geography, and income.

#7 – Prevent Early Childhood Suspension/Expulsion in both Policy and Practice

- Building on previous studies and drawing from national resources, convene a task force to review how Michigan early care and education programs are implementing suspension and expulsion policies in practice and report on the impact on children and families. Direct the task force to gather information, qualitatively and quantitatively, on “soft suspensions” that are often the result of “modified schedules” and to examine the data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, income, and geography. Leverage national resources and experts to strengthen Michigan’s policies and practices so that the early care and education workforce is better trained and prepared to support all children, including children experiencing trauma.

#8 – Make Implicit Bias Training Available to Licensed Early Childhood Workforce

- Build on the state government efforts to require implicit bias training for licensed health care workers through implementation of this requirement for those in the early childhood workforce.
- Increasing personal awareness of and responses to unconscious biases is a critical first step to ensuring equity within the field of early childhood. To achieve this, implicit bias training must be required for those working in the field and funding must be made available to facilitate full participation. In addition, to improve accessibility, this requirement should be captured through multiple licensing systems whenever possible.

- Expand the implicit bias training requirement to include child care business owners, providers and their staff and makes these trainings progressive in mastery. MiLEAP would:
 - Require implicit bias training in their grant contracts.
 - Add State Continuing Education Clock Hours related to implicit bias into MiRegistry.
 - Encourage *Early On Michigan* updated personnel standards to include ongoing, required implicit bias training.
 - Coordinate with MDHHS, MDE, and other appropriate public agencies to utilize MiRegistry to offer yearly progressive implicit bias training and expands its offerings to the entire early childhood workforce and to establish a team of qualified professionals who can identify and/or deliver suitable implicit bias trainings.
 - Fully fund all required implicit bias training courses and ensure that the licensed early childhood workforce is fully compensated for their training time.

#9 – Remove Barriers to Universal Developmental Screening

- Michigan has opportunities to make significant progress in developmental screening rates. Between 2019-2020, 40% of infants and toddlers received all three recommended developmental screenings before 35 months.^v
- Despite consensus on the importance of screenings, a critical first step to connecting children and families to early intervention services and programs, thousands of children in Michigan do not receive them. Developmental screening is required for Medicaid-enrolled children and universally available to approximately 70 percent of Michigan’s young families through regional Great Start Collaboratives. Unfortunately, many Michigan families face barriers to accessing developmental screenings. Only 16.8 percent of families at or below 200 percent of the poverty level had been asked to complete a screening questionnaire, while 43.8 percent of those above 400 percent of the poverty level had done so (*Source: National Survey of Children’s Health*).
- To increase rates of timely, comprehensive developmental screenings and referrals to early intervention services, Michigan will need to focus on developing a clear statewide vision for a comprehensive early childhood development promotion, screening, and intervention system. While there are many efforts to make improvements, Michigan does not currently have one entity responsible for coordinating and collecting data specific to promotion, screenings and interventions statewide.

#10 – Strengthen and Meaningfully Connect Community, Regional, and State Levels to Improve the Early Childhood System

- Consider ECIC a key partner and task ECIC to convene a diverse work group to assess the existing local, regional, and state-level early childhood system coordination structures to identify strengths and gaps and to craft action steps Michigan implement to improve the early childhood system and ensure community-based entities feel less decentralized.

- Building on and honoring past and recent efforts to strengthen Michigan’s early childhood system structures, ECIC would engage both publicly funded and privately funded partners, including both formal and grassroots efforts, with a special focus on identifying strengths and opportunities for alignment on shared goals such as establishing and efficiently implementing a statewide Early Childhood Resource & Referral system that allows for local and regional customization to help interested families find and enroll in affordable, high-quality child care or preschool that meets their needs. A centralized system will center the needs of families and alleviate the burdens currently placed on child care programs.

Coda: ECIC’s Top 13 Recommendations

Because a child’s health and education are inextricably linked, ECIC supports our collaborative partners who are leaders in maternal and child health by amplifying the following recommendations that MiLEAP could support:

1. Implement mental health screenings for new birthing parents as part of their baby’s 4-week, 8-week, 6-month, and 18-month check-ups and require insurance (private and Medicaid) to cover the service.
2. Expand Medicaid reimbursement for the full continuum of perinatal care to address social determinants of health including doulas, birthing centers, group-based prenatal care, care received at birthing centers, and lactation supports.
3. Implement multi-year continuous eligibility for children enrolled in Medicaid through age six and consider broadening this policy to include other public health insurance programs that Michigan residents access.

About Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC)

Created in 2005 to serve as a statewide leader in early childhood, ECIC collaborates to increase public and private investment in the earliest years, elevate issues affecting young children and their families, and continuously improve Michigan’s comprehensive early childhood system. Our aim is to create a future where all young children in Michigan and their families thrive. To learn more about ECIC and the Child Care Innovation Fund, please visit ecic4kids.org.

ⁱ Kids Count Data Center, Child population by household type in Michigan, 2019, accessed March 11, 2022: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10916-child-population-by-household-type?loc=24&loct=2#detailed/2/24/false/1729,4290,7800,4291,4292/21213,21214>

ⁱⁱ Llobrera, Joseph, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Child Support Cooperation Requirements in SNAP Are Unproven, Costly, and Put Families at Risk*, February 5, 2020, accessed March 11, 2022: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/child-support-cooperation-requirements-in-snap-are-unproven-costly-and-put>

ⁱⁱⁱ Howell, Janet, LIS: Virginia’s Legislative Information System, *2020 Session: SB 578 Early childhood care and education; establishment of system, definitions, licensure*, 2020, accessed on March 14, 2022: <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+sum+SB578>

^{iv} <https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/data>

^v <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/9814-children-ages-9-months-to-35-months-who-received-a-developmental-screening?loc=24&loct=2#detailed/2/24/false/1769,1696,1648,1603/any/19102,19103>