

Early On[®] System Costs: Understanding Early Intervention in Michigan

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As part of the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) renewal grant, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Office of Great Start partnered with the American Institutes for Research[®] (AIR[®]) to study the costs of high-quality early intervention (EI) services. Michigan's EI program, called *Early On*[®], provides services through intermediate school districts (ISDs) to children from birth to age 3 with disabilities and/or developmental delays.

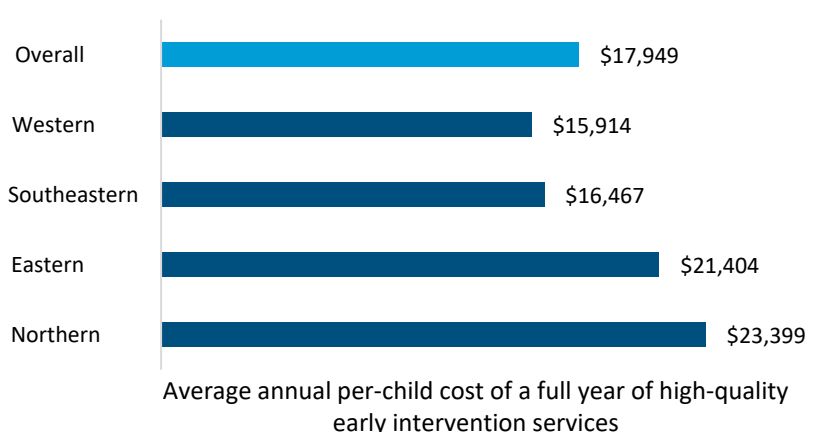
DATA AND METHODS

Through eight expert panel meetings in each of four regions (see map), more than 50 expert practitioners (including staff members from 40 ISDs) and family members defined an ideal high-quality system and provided information on resources needed to implement the ideal high-quality EI system. The team used the ingredients approach¹ to calculate the true cost, using regional salaries and prices where available. This includes personnel, travel, materials, equipment, and facilities costs for ISDs to provide high-quality EI services and for MDE and other organizations to provide statewide supports.



The statewide annual average per-child cost of providing a full year of high-quality early intervention is \$17,949.

This cost represents providing high-quality *Early On* services to a child for 1 full year, including outreach, referral, eligibility determination, individualized family service plan (IFSP) creation, service coordination and provision, transition, and state supports, divided by the 12,783 children reported as being enrolled in services in February 2023.²



¹ Levin, H., McEwan, P., Belfield, C., Bowden, B., & Shand, R. (2018). *Economic evaluation in education: Cost-effectiveness and benefit-cost analysis*. Sage.

² *Early On Data*. (2023). *Michigan Early On Part C data collection profile report*. Service area: State of Michigan. Collection date: February 2023. <https://earlyondata.com/?service=ST&coldate=Feb2023#Main>

These costs are driven by personnel costs, which represent 89% of costs, while 7% are for travel expenses and 4% are for equipment.

High-quality ideal system

The team defined a high-quality ideal EI system based on participant input:

A high-quality EI system is one that empowers families, supports providers, and creates informed communities working together to promote equitable access to early intervention services and help each child thrive.

The average annual per-child cost of a full year of high-

quality *Early On* services varies by region due to differences in needed resources, the number of children, and travel time.

The annual average per-child cost ranges from \$15,914 (Eastern) to \$23,399 (Southeastern). The annual minimum per-child cost varies from \$11,357 (Southeastern) to \$17,461 (Eastern), while the annual maximum per-child cost ranges from \$19,187 (Western) to \$30,493 (Northern).

The overall annual cost of the ideal high-quality *Early On* system statewide is **\$229,443,320** and represents

implementing an ideal high-quality EI system at the current service levels. The average annual ISD cost varies from \$1.5 million (Northern) to \$10.2 million (Southeastern).

Summary and implications

Providing adequate funding for *Early On* is key to ensuring each child in Michigan has access to a high-quality EI system. As part of the project, AIR gathered feedback from ISD staff, MDE staff, and family members to generate recommendations to increase the quality level of the current EI system. Recommendations include the following:

- **Support staff** by providing guidance on appropriate caseloads to help avoid burnout.
- **Build a stronger recruitment pipeline** by supporting pre-service providers and conducting outreach to colleges and universities.
- **Increase outreach to families** and ensure that funding is responsive to increased child enrollment.
- **Provide more state services to ISDs in areas of common need**, such as language interpretation services and data systems.
- **Align eligibility** for the system's two tiers (Part C only and Michigan Mandatory Special Education).
- **Take steps to smooth transitions and transfers for families and children** by providing additional guidance to ISDs and expanding options for care for 3-year-olds.

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