




STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.  
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** April 26, 2021  
**TO:** Michigan Educators  
**FROM:** Michael F. Rice, Ph.D., State Superintendent   
**SUBJECT:** Using Non-recurring Funds to Develop Gifts that Keep Giving –  
MEMO #COVID-19-183

Educators, today I shared a [video](#) message with you. In it, I acknowledge what we all know: that it has been a brutal year. But out of darkness comes light. In the next few months, you will have the chance to help shape decisions—in many districts aided by federal ESSER dollars—to change children’s lives. There is no one single plan or blueprint for a pivot to a new, better normal in public education, not in a local control state, not in a local control country. All of us will help to shape this new, better normal for children in our respective communities.

To improve schools for children, in the next three-plus years, Michigan will have nearly \$5.8 billion in federal ESSER funds, an historic infusion of dollars, coupled with additional federal child care dollars, additional undesignated federal dollars for states, and additional state funds for education.

In the video, I offer seven areas, among others, that local school districts should consider for investment of this extraordinary infusion of funds to help our children emerge out of the profound disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in no way meant to be the full range of ideas that districts should explore. It is simply meant to be a sharing of select research-based **gifts that keep on giving**.

1. Expansion of early childhood learning opportunities.
2. Improvement of early literacy.
3. Improvement of the health, safety, and wellness of our children.
4. Addressing of the shortage of teachers and other staff in the state.
5. Continuation of the narrowing of the home digital divide, both for devices and for connectivity.
6. Expansion of community partnerships.
7. Addition of time.

The text that follows reflects much of the message in the video and provides a few links to related research and supporting materials.

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### **Expanding Early Childhood Learning Opportunities**

Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) continues to be ranked tied for first nationally in quality. At the same time, we're ranked 21<sup>st</sup> nationally in access, because we provide the experience for a little more than 37,000 of the roughly 64,000 Michigan four-year-old students eligible each year. ***All eligible four-year-olds need this critical early opportunity***, the first goal of the state's new Top 10 strategic education plan.

More than 50 years of pre-school research demonstrates that the short- and long-term value of quality pre-school is a gift that keeps on giving throughout a lifetime. To view this research, please visit USED's [Key Research Studies on Early Learning Effectiveness](#) and also MDE's [website](#) for GSRP-specific research.

### **Improving Early Literacy**

We need to improve early literacy, the second goal of the state's new Top 10 strategic education plan. We need to continue our professional development of staff on the [literacy essentials](#). We also need to work on engagement of students through diversity in literature, the creation of diverse classroom libraries, and explicit work on engagement, joy, and identity in the teaching of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

As professor emerita Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, referred to by many as the "mother of multicultural children's literature," noted in this [YouTube video](#), it is important that all children see reflections of themselves (mirrors) and others (windows) in their literature. To support more diversity in literature, the department has shared related resources in the last few months, including production of a well-attended *Mirrors and Windows* diversity in literacy conference, release of our [equity in literacy guidance](#), creation with the Library of Michigan of a [compendium of authors of color and their great writings](#), and release of a [calendar](#) featuring Michigan educator-nominated great African American authors and their works to celebrate Black History Month. We will continue to drumbeat around this important theme.

Children who read because *they* see a value in the reading will read more, will develop greater vocabularies and background knowledge, and will become stronger readers and students, with greater chances of success in life.

Improved literacy is another gift that keeps on giving.

### **Improving the Health, Safety, and Wellness of Children**

We need to improve the health, safety, and wellness of our children, the third goal of the state's new Top 10 strategic education plan. In some schools, we need to change the physical conditions under which children learn and staff teach. While the new federal funds are constrained in this regard—and while we are still working with the U.S. Education Department to get maximum latitude in the federal guidance—districts need to consider, at the very least, improvements in or replacements of their mechanical systems and windows to help generate better air flow. MDE is sharing several [resources](#) to help districts assess, and plan improvements to, the air quality in their schools.

Improvement of health, safety, and wellness includes professional development for all staff members in CASEL's five competencies of [social and emotional learning](#) (SEL), in trauma-informed care, and in implicit bias. It also requires more significant children's mental health services for those children with substantial challenges. In this effort, we are going to have to develop and hire more school social workers, counselors, nurses, and psychologists.

Improvements in health, safety, and wellness are additional gifts that keep on giving.

### **Addressing the Teacher Shortage**

We need to address the shortage of teachers and other staff in the state, the seventh goal of the state's new Top 10 strategic education plan. The teaching profession has been undermined for years across the state and country, and it will take years to build it back.

In the short run, we need to boost staff salaries, particularly those for early-career teachers. We need to [remove barriers](#) to re-entry into the profession for individuals whose certifications have lapsed and to continue to expand certification flexibility where possible and helpful.

In the mid and long terms, we have to expand upon fledgling [Grow Your Own](#) programs for support staff and students who aspire to be, or have an interest in becoming, educators. We need to pave—and pay—the way at the local and intermediate school district levels for support staff members who have this interest. These Grow Your Own programs for support staff and students have the potential to expand our pools of teachers and to diversify these pools at the same time.

New teachers in, and returning teachers to, the profession are additional gifts that keep on giving.

### **Narrowing the Home Digital Divide**

We have to continue to narrow the home digital divide, both for devices and for connectivity. Instruction aided by home technology is rarely a perfect substitute for in-person instruction. At the same time, it has had—and can continue to have—a large role in public education, if only as a critical supplement to in-person instruction. We need to continue to narrow and ultimately close the digital divide, both to maximize children's education and to address clear equity issues between haves and have nots in this increasingly integral resource for education, health, and other areas.

To narrow and ultimately eliminate the digital divide helps to narrow the exposure gap between students of greater and lesser means. To narrow the exposure gap is to help reduce summer slide and narrow achievement gaps. This effort is another example of a gift that keeps on giving.

### **Expanding Community Partnerships**

We need to expand community partnerships, so important before and during the pandemic. These partnerships will allow us to extend children's out-of-school learning time and help support a wide range of children's needs before and after school, on

the weekends, during holidays, and over the summer. Powerful community partnerships can be the difference between summer slide and summer glide, particularly with the help of parent education, family literacy, and community literacy programs.

Strong community partnerships that help to extend children's learning beyond school days, years, and walls, engage children in a wide range of learning, and help develop children with myriad experiences that they would not otherwise have had are additional gifts that keep on giving.

### **Adding Time**

We need to add time to the next school year. In many cases, children have had fewer hours of instruction in the last 14 months. In many but not all cases, they will need to make it up. Whether we increase the state minimum number of days, each district is going to have to consider carefully three additional layers of time for students:

- Time for all students in a district whose children have been at a distance for a substantial amount of the year and/or who haven't progressed sufficiently, in spite of the best efforts of students, staff, and families;
- Time for particularly vulnerable groups of students: fledgling readers, beginning English learners, and children with profound special needs; and
- Time for individual students who may have been struggling pre-pandemic to stay close to their grade level and are now quite a bit below grade level....and at further risk of being separated from grade-level content. This additional time may be, but is not limited to, mentoring, tutoring, counseling, summer school, and summer camp.

Because of the challenges of the pandemic, lessons learned, and the infusion of new funding, primarily federal and non-recurring, it is a critical moment. These funds represent the greatest infusion of new education dollars in our history. In our work, we must collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, including parents and labor unions, and spend wisely to serve children. I encourage you to think of gifts that can keep on giving to our children long after the funds that have paid for these investments have been spent.

As educators, we know that the new dollars should be recurring, not non-recurring, whether federal or state. For the time being, they are non-recurring and we need to make sure that we spend them on non-recurring expenditures. That said, we need to continue to fight for adequate and equitable recurring school funding, the eighth goal of the state's Top 10 strategic education plan.

I share these ideas with you, with policy makers, and with community members because—in a local control state and country, with so many new dollars—there is a great opportunity for all of us to help shape a generation of students for a lifetime and, by extension, other generations of students. It is a big moment. In support of and on behalf of children, I thank you for your leadership and partnership in this effort.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance  
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors