Preschool Inclusion Collective Action Plan

We can, we must, and we will do better for our preschool children with disabilities and their families both in the short term and long term to ensure services are provided in high quality, equitable, and inclusive settings.

Developed by the Collective Wisdom of Partners across Michigan

MICHIGAN Department of Education

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CALL TO ACTION

This plan supports the Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan and the Path Forward Strategic Plan. Specifically, the content set forth in this document addresses the following Michigan Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goals:

- Expand early childhood learning opportunities
- Improve early literacy achievement
- Increase the numbers of certified teachers in areas of shortage
- Provide adequate and equitable school funding

In 2019, Michigan was in the bottom 10% of states providing inclusive services to children with disabilities. In 2020, only 1 in 5 children with disabilities received their special education services alongside their same-aged, typically developing peers. With such low numbers of preschool children with disabilities in typical preschool settings, change is needed as soon as possible.

Collectively, we are responsible for challenging the current system and ensuring that Michigan's children, ages birth through 5, have the foundation necessary for a happy, creative, and successful life. We owe it to Michigan's families and Michigan's future to fully commit to universal access to all appropriate supports, with an emphasis on prevention. Without losing sight of the importance of equitable and supportive services for every child birth through 5, this plan focuses on inclusive learning environments specific to ages 3-5. Families must have every opportunity for high-quality early care and education settings that best meet their needs and, most importantly, the needs of their children.

Educator, environmental scientist, and writer Donella H. Meadows noted, "An important function of almost every system is to ensure its perpetuation." Yet, our system isn't working for a large number of children and their families across the state. We can, we must, and we will do better for our preschool children with disabilities and their families both in the short term and long term to ensure services are provided in high quality, equitable, and inclusive settings.

An inclusive system values diversity and equity while creating a dynamic environment for children, families, and professionals. We must strive to ensure environments are ready to meet the needs of all children rather than solely expect children to be ready for the environment. Research (see Brief Summary: Fact Sheet of Research on Preschool Inclusion in references) overwhelmingly indicates improved outcomes for both children with disabilities *and* their typically developing peers when early care and education settings are inclusive.

Michigan is one of five states receiving intensive technical assistance from the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center which focuses on improving inclusion rates and preschool outcomes. In addition, Michigan is one of 20 states selected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to receive a Preschool Development Grant – Birth through Five (PDG B-5) renewal grant. The need is urgent and the time is right.

The plan reflects the contributions and wisdom of many stakeholders representing a variety of perspectives from across the state. It was co-constructed utilizing a rigorous, democratic process in which every voice was equal.

APPROACH TO THE WORK

According to 2019 data, 28.24% of 3–5-year-old children with disabilities in Michigan received services in inclusive settings, ranking Michigan's inclusion data in the bottom 10% nationally. In 2020, the formula for calculating the inclusion rate changed, removing children five years of age who were attending kindergarten from the data. As a result, the percentage of preschool-aged children with disabilities in Michigan who received services in inclusive settings dropped to 19.46%. Regardless of the calculation method, the data indicate an urgency to support preschool learners in Michigan.

To address this articulated need, this collective action plan was developed by stakeholders across Michigan. Leveraging Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan and the Path Forward, it was essential to the sponsors at MDE to engage a diverse range of perspectives from all levels of the system to co-construct a strategic plan focused on creating a high-quality, equitable, and inclusive preschool system to benefit every child in Michigan, with emphasis on full inclusion of children with disabilities.

A Core Planning Team comprised of internal MDE and external perspectives (see "Contributors") was established in fall 2020. To mitigate the risk of under-conceptualizing the plan, the Core Planning Team engaged in a rigorous stakeholder analysis process to ensure a requisite variety of perspectives was represented in the workgroup. The Core Planning Team also contributed significantly to the drafting of the triggering question that would guide the dialogue of the workgroup. In addition, they assisted in logistics and provided constructive feedback regarding the process throughout the plan development.

Invitations to participate in a statewide workgroup were distributed in early 2021. Over 50 people accepted the invitation to participate in the Preschool Inclusion Workgroup (see "Contributors"). An aggressive, four-month timeline was established to develop the strategic plan. Due to the pandemic, the work was carried out in a virtual environment, combining synchronous and asynchronous activities. Careful consideration was given to logistics, including software to support the effort but also the opportunity to establish relationships.

The work included three distinct phases:

1. Vision – Participants were encouraged to dream of an ideal future and identify a collective vision, including ideal features leading to a high-quality, equitable and inclusive preschool system.

   Triggering Question:

   Allowing yourself to dream, what ideal features of a high-quality, comprehensive, and equitable preschool system ought to be present to produce positive outcomes for all children, with emphasis on full inclusion of children with disabilities?

2. Barriers – Participants generated barriers to achieving the identified vision.

   Triggering Question:

   What are CHALLENGES/BARRIERS to achieving the ideal vision of a high-quality, comprehensive, and equitable preschool system to produce positive outcomes for all children, with emphasis on full inclusion of children with disabilities?

3. Actions – Participants generated actions to address the barriers and approximate the vision.

   Triggering Question:

   What specific, concrete ACTIONS, if adopted and implemented, can address the identified barriers and approximate the ideal vision of a high-quality, comprehensive, equitable preschool system to provide positive outcomes for all children, with emphasis on full inclusion of children with disabilities?

In each phase of the work, participants independently and autonomously generated statements and clarified the intent of their idea. Ideas were categorized inductively based on significant similarity. A variety of methodologies (i.e., prioritization, ranking, influence mapping, impact/effort matrix, SWOT analysis, etc.) was utilized with participants to deepen their understanding of and appreciation for the ideas produced. Critical to the effort, every participant had equal voice. Facilitators, trained extensively in multiple methodologies but primarily the process of structured, democratic dialogue, were careful to remain content-neutral and protect the authenticity of every participant.

Upon completion of the development of ideal features and recommendations by the Preschool Inclusion Workgroup, a Review Team (see "Contributors") was established to conduct a comprehensive review of the draft strategic plan to ensure cohesion and clarity. Recommended changes were provided to the Preschool Inclusion Workgroup for consideration. Final recommendations were made, and members of the Preschool Inclusion Workgroup indicated their support for the plan.

The subsequent pages elaborate on the ideal features and the actions necessary to implement the collaborative plan. When successfully implemented, the plan will create a strong foundation toward an educational system better able to meet the needs of every child.

IDEAL FEATURES

Children engaged in high-quality, developmentally appropriate care and instruction in educational settings, centers, family childcare homes, or early learning environments in their first five years of life are more prepared for a successful K-12 experience and beyond. An extensive collaborative partnership including local, state, federal and community partners, families, and other educational stakeholders will be required to ensure success.

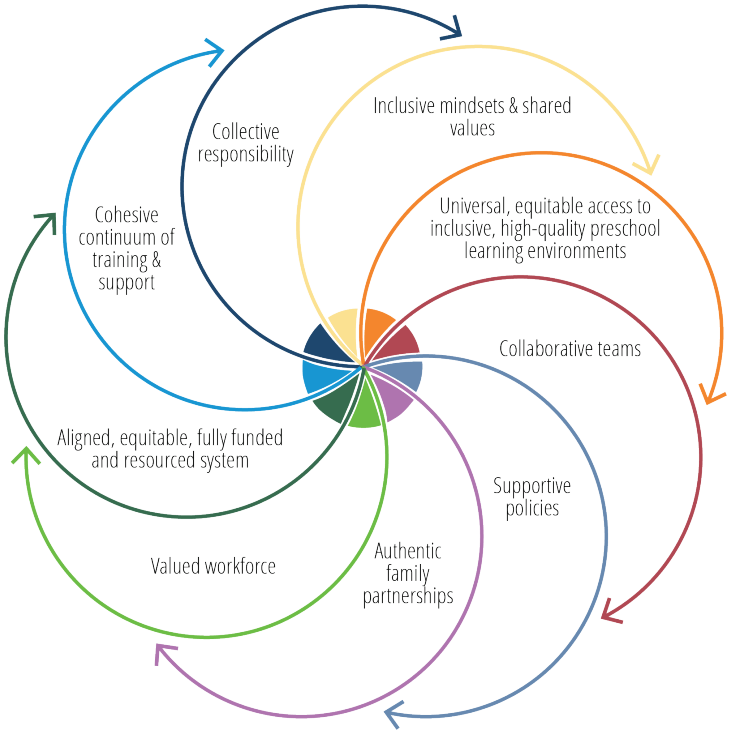
Each and every child, birth through age 5, has the right to equitable learning opportunities. We believe in investing in early childhood education so children can access universal preschool, inclusive of all learners with their diverse needs.

All children are born eager to learn; they take delight in exploring their world and making connections. The first five years of a child's development are an investment that carries into adulthood. We know that a developmentally appropriate and engaging preschool environment is a lasting investment. "Investment in early childhood education for disadvantaged children from birth to age 5 helps reduce the achievement gap, reduce the need for special education, increase the likelihood of healthier lifestyles, lower the crime rate, and reduce overall social costs" (Heckman, 2011, p. 32). The lasting investment is a benefit to the child and their community throughout their lifetime.

Over 50 participants representing a variety of perspectives (see "Contributors") from across the state engaged virtually through several work sessions to identify, free of all current constraints (policy, fiscal, programmatic, etc.), ideal features of a high-quality, comprehensive, and equitable preschool system that produces positive outcomes for all children, with emphasis on full inclusion of children with disabilities.

The interconnectivity of the identified ideal features will allow Michigan to achieve the vision of a high-quality, comprehensive, equitable, and inclusive preschool system. This work will require a collective effort with partners at all levels of the system.

Nine ideal features of a high-quality, comprehensive, and equitable preschool system for all children, with emphasis on full inclusion of children with disabilities, were identified through a robust, collaborative process.



FEATURE 1. INCLUSIVE MINDSETS AND SHARED VALUES

A belief that all children have a fundamental right to an inclusive preschool environment as the standard, rather than as the default, is critical to achieving the goal of a high-quality, comprehensive, and equitable preschool system. The placement must not be based on a child's skills or special education labels. Program rules must be reexamined and, as appropriate, challenged to ensure the promotion of inclusive practices. It is the responsibility of the system to ensure every environment is ready to meet the needs of each child. All individuals who make placement decisions will consider the child's best interest above all else.

FEATURE 2. FREE, UNIVERSAL, AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE, HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SETTINGS

High-quality, early care and education settings that are inclusive create opportunities for all 3- and 4-year-old children to be more sensitive, caring, and welcoming of diverse peers. These settings are developmentally appropriate and built on a foundation of evidence-based practices that address all learners' educational and social-emotional needs. Children across the state who have free, universal, and equitable access to these high-quality settings are assured a more effective process of identifying and responding to their unmet needs early in their development.

FEATURE 3. COLLABORATIVE TEAMS

Successful inclusion requires intentional and effective collaboration and teaming. Capitalizing on the collective wisdom of the team, multiple disciplines (general and special educators, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, etc.) take responsibility for co-planning and delivering differentiated instruction, collecting and analyzing data, and ensuring the environment is ready to support the whole child effectively.

FEATURE 4. SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

Local, state, and federal policies must be child-centered, aligned, and focused on ensuring preschool environments are ready to support all children. Regardless of ability, structures are in place to ensure accountability and commitment to universal, inclusive, and equitable practices (as outlined above) are preserved.

FEATURE 5. AUTHENTIC FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

The family is a child's first teacher and must be equal partners in their child's educational journey. Trust and respect are foundational to the partnership, honoring cultural norms and the voice of the family. Training and coaching are provided to families and staff on how to effectively partner through a variety of methods and environments. Partnerships strengthen skills, empower families to be engaged in their child's development, and improve child outcomes.

FEATURE 6. COHESIVE CONTINUUM OF TRAINING AND SUPPORT

The goal of a high-quality, comprehensive, and equitable preschool system with an emphasis on full inclusion of children with disabilities demands a robust pre-service program as well as an integrated and aligned professional learning system with ongoing coaching to prioritize implementation of evidence-based practices.

Cross-sector strategies must be developed and put in place that recognize and fully accept the diversity in the population as well as address the specific needs for support when behavioral or developmental issues arise.

FEATURE 7. VALUED WORKFORCE

Early childhood educators must be honored, respected, well-compensated professionals who are guaranteed the resources, training, and support necessary to create environments and provide instruction that meets the needs of every child.

FEATURE 8. ALIGNED, EQUITABLE, FULLY FUNDED AND RESOURCED SYSTEM

Financial investment in the future of our youngest learners is a must. Fully-funded universal preschool should be the standard, with every early care setting having equitable and necessary resources to ensure high-quality, inclusive environments ready to meet the needs of all children.

Understanding inclusion is not more expensive than having separate programs for children with disabilities, we must also ensure all funding and policies are aligned across all agencies to *promote* inclusive and collaborative preschool environments.

FEATURE 9. COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

We must be mindful of the need for cohesion and coherence across the entire educational system (Birth through K-12). Partnership with the broader community is essential to ensure high-quality and equitable opportunities. Central to the collaboration is mutual respect and shared responsibility, honoring the diverse perspectives of the community. Foundational to the collaboration is a broad understanding of three- and four-year-old development and mutual respect, honoring the diverse perspectives of the community.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The quote, “Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets”, often attributed to system scientist W. Edwards Deming, demands we rethink the current system and redesign it in such a way as to yield positive early childhood outcomes for every child in Michigan. The interaction of multiple systems both within the educational arena (Birth through 3; 3 through 5, and K through 12) and external to but influential of the educational arena increases the complexity of the effort. This complexity demands a co-constructed plan reflective of the community of stakeholders.

The action statements were generated in response to the following question:

> *What specific, concrete ACTIONS, if adopted and implemented, can address the identified barriers and approximate the ideal vision of a high-quality, comprehensive, equitable preschool system to provide positive outcomes for all children, with emphasis on full inclusion of children with disabilities?*

Each Action Statement, in no particular order of importance or sequence, has a bulleted list of activities likely to support the implementation of the Action. The lists are not exhaustive but intended as a guide. Specific roles are noted for each action, with various levels of the system identified as “Lead” and/or “Primary Partner.” However, if an organization or perspective is not noted as either a *Lead* or *Primary Partner*, this does not indicate they do not contribute to the achievement of the action or activity as success will require a collective effort across all levels of the system.

In addition, resources necessary to support each activity are included, as are anticipated timelines. Short-term indicates implementation within 1 year; mid-term indicates implementation within 2-3 years, and long-term indicates 5 or more years are needed to implement the activity.

ACTION 1: BUILD A UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL SYSTEM THAT INCLUDES A COHESIVE AND COHERENT APPROACH TO SUPPORT INCLUSION IN ALL PRESCHOOL SETTINGS FOR CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 4 (AND EARLY 5S).

- Build a coalition to further inform and implement the growing system, strengthening existing partnerships (i.e., Michigan Alliance for Families (MAF), Preschool Special Education Training and Technical Assistance, the Early Childhood Support Network (ECSN), Great Start to Quality Resource Centers, etc.) and forging new partnerships.
- Work with partners to co-construct the expanding system to mitigate under-conceptualization of the requirements and to assure integration and alignment of the preschool inclusion efforts into existing K-12 systems change efforts to ensure cohesion and coherence
- Clearly define roles and expectations for each level of the system.

Aligned with the Michigan’s Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goals

- Expand early childhood learning opportunities
- Improve early literacy achievement

Aligned with Ideal Features

1. Inclusive mindsets and shared values
2. Free, universal, and equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early care and education settings
3. Collaborative teams
5. Authentic family partnerships

9. Collective responsibility

Lead(s)

MDE, educational associations

Primary Partner(s)

Local districts, families, partner agencies, Intermediate School Districts (ISDs)

Resources/contributions/investments necessary to support the activity

Persistent commitment; trust; authentic collaboration; funding; communication & marketing

Anticipated Outcomes

Short-term to mid-term

- Coalition established
- Regular/periodic meetings with documentary evidence of coalition meetings
- Roles defined and understood
- Evidence of review by MDE and Ed partners of existing plans
- Evidence of partnerships formed

Mid-term to long-term

- Coherence across the system
- Evidence of high-quality, equitable and inclusive preschool settings across Michigan
- Increase in the percentage of children with disabilities ages 3-5 (excluding those enrolled in kindergarten) being provided services in inclusive settings from a baseline of 19.46% (2020 data) to 30% by 2024 and 50% by 2026

ACTION 2: INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS & PROVIDERS TO SUPPORT THE GROWING SYSTEM.

- Partner with educator training programs at universities to ensure inclusion is emphasized in pre-service learning and practicums and educators graduate feeling confident in their ability to provide supports to all students in the classroom and to include Division for Early Childhood (DEC) practices for early childhood professionals.
- Develop and implement a leadership institute to support inclusion - a multidisciplinary group of individuals (general education teachers, special education teachers/providers, administrators) that become champions for inclusion that can highlight how to make connections between groups (similar to Michigan's MTSS Technical Assistance Center (MiMTSS) or Statewide Autism Resources and Training (START) intensive trainings where ongoing technical assistance is provided).
- Advocate for equitable pay to attract and retain early childhood educators and providers.

Aligned with the Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goal

- Increase the number of certified teachers in areas of shortage

Aligned with Ideal Features

6. Cohesive continuum of training and support

7. Valued workforce

9. Collective responsibility

Lead(s)

MDE, educator preparation institutions

Primary Partner(s)

ISDs, local districts, educational associations, partner agencies

Resources/contributions/investments necessary to support the activity

Potential revisions to policies and/or standards; funding; coordination

Anticipated Outcomes

Short-term to mid-term

- Evidence of Leadership Institute established with regular meetings
- Documents developed, conversations with key stakeholders, etc.

Mid-term to long-term

- Changes in curricula at participating educator training programs at universities
- Changes in university students' confidence levels to support all students
- Changes (increases) the number of graduates who feel confident
- Changes in participants' learning and practice attributable to leadership institute
- Increase in the number of Early Childhood Specialists

ACTION 3: ESTABLISH MEASURES TO ASSESS PROGRESS, INFORM IMPROVEMENTS, AND HOLD EACH LEVEL OF THE SYSTEM ACCOUNTABLE FOR PROMOTING AND IMPLEMENTING HIGH-QUALITY, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES.

Adopt or create a capacity assessment (i.e., ECTA State Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion, Community, Local Program & Early Care & Education Environments Indicators) for organizations to regularly assess their progress.

- Develop or adopt tools to collect and analyze data around the implementation and impact of a cross-sector approach to produce positive outcomes for all children, emphasizing full inclusion of children with disabilities (i.e., policy, funding, professional learning, coaching, marketing, implementation of high-quality practices).
- Make inclusion a quality indicator for early childhood offerings by adopting clear measures with the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Consider the use of the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP) as a rating.
- Adopt and use evidence-based assessment tools specific to ensure the measurement of high-quality inclusion practices

Aligned with the Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goals

- Expand early childhood learning opportunities

Aligned with Ideal Features

1. Inclusive mindsets and shared values

7. Valued workforce

9. Collective responsibility

Lead(s)

MDE, educational associations

Primary Partner(s)

ISDs, local districts, partner organizations, and agencies (i.e., ECTA, Head Start, childcare)

Resources/contributions/investments necessary to support the activity

External evaluator and tools; funding; mechanism for stakeholder input and feedback

Anticipated Outcomes

Short-term to mid-term

- Evidence of data tools' development and/or adoption
- Evidence of initial use
- Evidence of use by stakeholders of data
- Introduction of inclusion criteria into quality indicators of QRIS

Mid-term to long-term

- Increase in the number of children with disabilities participating in gen ed classrooms
- Evidence of regular use by intended users
- Widespread use by ISDs and local districts
- Increase in the number of ISDs and districts using inclusion as a quality indicator

ACTION 4: DEVELOP A SYSTEM TO ENSURE ALL EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SETTINGS ARE DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE AND, THROUGH THE USE OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES, ARE SUPPORTIVE OF ALL LEARNERS AND THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED NEEDS REGARDLESS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY.

- Advance the use of evidence-based practices that support children with disabilities as a cornerstone of high-quality inclusion in and outside of the classroom.
- Create or adopt a guidance document that identifies key indicators of high-quality inclusion (a common knowledge, language, and competencies base) that will be utilized throughout the state to ensure evidence-based practices and guide professional learning (i.e., Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT), ICP).
- Encourage broad implementation of an evidence-based framework to build healthy social and emotional development (i.e., Pyramid Model, Conscious Discipline, etc.)
- Utilize the DEC Recommended Practices Improvement Tools.
- Develop a framework for teachers and related service providers to collaboratively create intentional lesson plans and include strategies for differentiation to meet the individualized needs of all students while promoting student support in the classroom environment.

Aligned with the Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goals

- Expand early childhood learning opportunities
- Improve early literacy achievement

Aligned with Ideal Features

1. Inclusive mindsets and shared values
2. Free, universal, and equitable access to inclusive, high-quality early care and education settings
3. Collaborative teams
6. Cohesive continuum of training and support
9. Collective responsibility

Lead(s)

MDE, ISDs, educational associations (i.e., Early Childhood Access Network (ECAN))

Primary Partner(s)

Partner agencies (i.e., ECTA, Early On Training & Technical Assistance (EOTTA), local districts, private providers

Resources/contributions/investments necessary to support the activity

Training, technical assistance, & ongoing coaching; adoption or creation of a collaborative workspace

Anticipated Outcomes

<u>Short-term to mid-term</u>

- Guidance document developed
- Evidence of substantial use of an evidence-based framework throughout Michigan
- Evidence of substantial use of DEC Recommended Practices Improvement tools throughout Michigan
- Collaborative lesson planning framework developed

<u>Mid-term to long-term</u>

- Guidance document used in many/most ISDs
- Evidence of widespread use of evidence-based frameworks throughout Michigan
- Evidence of widespread use of DEC Recommended Practices Improvement tools throughout Michigan
- Evidence of widespread use of the collaborative lesson planning framework throughout Michigan

ACTION 5: CONDUCT A COMPREHENSIVE CROSS-SECTOR REVIEW OF STATE AND FEDERAL POLICIES, FUNDING STRUCTURES, AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONTINUUM THAT INFLUENCE INCLUSION IN ALL PRESCHOOL SETTINGS TO IDENTIFY BARRIERS AND PROPOSE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT INCENTIVIZE INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL PRACTICES.

- Assess current funding structures at the federal, state, and local levels that are in place and leverage opportunities for blending and braiding.
  - ⇒ Utilize national technical assistance to gather information about other state funding structures.
  - ⇒ Investigate funding policy, regulations, and recommendations (i.e., School Finance Research Collaborative Fiscal Study, American Families Plan, Child Care for Working Families Act (CCWFA)) from federal, state, and local entities/organizations/agencies.
  - ⇒ Explore braiding of reimbursement for Early Childhood Teachers with special education credentials serving as a teacher of record for an inclusive classroom.
- Review and, as appropriate, advocate for the revision of federal regulations and state administrative rules for potential changes that include policy mechanisms to support a continuum of services for early childhood (ages 3-5) inclusion that is equitably and fully funded. Areas for review include:
  - ⇒ Head Start
  - ⇒ Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)
  - ⇒ Suspension, expulsion, and reduction of program time for children needing behavior supports
  - ⇒ Childcare licensing rules
  - ⇒ Rules regarding early childhood special education *classrooms*
  - ⇒ Rules regarding early childhood special education *services*, including mechanisms for generating Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)
  - ⇒ Allowable use of appropriately certified/endorsed teachers to provide educational oversight of special education supports to children (ages 3-5) with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) within regular early childhood programs.
  - ⇒ Transportation of children receiving special education
  - ⇒ Out of district placements or private preschool providers
  - ⇒ Funding allowances for professional learning regarding inclusive practices
- Identify conflicting policies and funding mechanisms present in cross-sector/interagency organizations throughout all levels in the state to inform necessary changes and promote inclusionary preschool practices.
- Establish policy and find funding for Universal Preschool within the current GSRP structure with a goal of expanding beyond GSRP in the future.

Aligned with the Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goals

- Expand early childhood learning opportunities
- Provide adequate and equitable school funding

Aligned with Ideal Features

4. Supportive policies

8. Aligned, equitable, fully funded and resourced system

Lead(s)

MDE, ISDs, educational associations

Primary Partner(s)

ECTA, Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA), partner agencies

Resources/contributions/investments necessary to support the activity

Tools for analysis; the political will to make necessary changes

Anticipated Outcomes

Short-term to mid-term

- Evidence of MDE, ISDs, and educational associations assessment of state, federal, and local funding structures
- Conflicting policies and funding mechanisms identified

Mid-term to long-term

- Evidence of MDE, ISDs, and educational associations **review** and, as appropriate, **advocate to revise** federal regulations and state administrative **rules** that include policy mechanisms to support a continuum of services for early childhood (ages 3-5) inclusion. Programs and policy areas include:
    - Head Start
    - GSRP
    - Suspension, expulsion, and reduction of program time for children needing behavior supports
    - Childcare licensing rules
    - Rules regarding early childhood special education *classrooms*
    - Rules regarding early childhood special education *services*, including mechanisms for generating FTE
    - Allowable use of appropriately certified/endorsed teachers to provide educational oversight of special education supports to children (ages 3-5) with IEPs within regular early childhood programs.
    - Transportation of children receiving special education
    - Out of district placements or private preschool providers
    - Funding allowances for professional learning regarding inclusive practices
- Evidence that funding has been established for Universal Preschool within the current GSRP system

ACTION 6: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING STRATEGY THAT WILL DEFINE INCLUSION AND PROMOTE ITS BENEFITS.

- Collect testimonials regarding the benefits of inclusive learning environments from families, general education teachers, special education teachers/providers, and administrators.

- Compile existing information from experts that supports inclusion as well as information on outcomes when students are included early in their educational career.
  - ⇒ Create a bridge between practice and research for inclusive practices by providing a visual of what inclusion looks like and how it is implemented (i.e., effective coaching, student teacher training, ongoing integrative professional development, etc.).
  - ⇒ Clarify funding flexibilities within existing policies and promote common messages across early childhood education sectors regarding the flexibilities.
- Create a "Family Matters Fact Sheet" on Preschool Inclusion.
- Disseminate information in a comprehensive toolkit regarding the benefits of inclusion for all children of all abilities (i.e., Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) toolkit, leadership toolkit, 0-3 transition toolkit).

Aligned with the Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goals

- Expand early childhood learning opportunities

Aligned with Ideal Features

1. Inclusive mindsets and shared values

5. Authentic family partnerships

Lead(s)

MDE, educational associations

Primary Partner(s)

Families, ISDs, local districts, partner agencies (i.e., ECTA, MAF, EOTTA)

Resources/contributions/investments necessary to support the activity

Funding for the development and distribution of information; feedback mechanism

Anticipated Outcomes

Short-term to mid-term

- Survey and interview a sample of families, general education teachers, special education teachers/providers, and administrators regarding the benefits of inclusive learning environments

Mid-term to long-term

- Evidence of the production and dissemination of Family Matters fact sheet on Preschool Inclusion to intended stakeholders
- Evidence of the dissemination of comprehensive toolkit to intended stakeholders

ACTION 7: DEVELOP A COORDINATED, CROSS-SECTOR APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, AND COACHING TO BUILD CAPACITY AND SUSTAIN HIGH-QUALITY INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS.

- Establish a statewide leadership team from diverse settings and perspectives that will champion inclusion and direct the work.

- Perform a cross-sector review of current professional learning & technical assistance needs and training requirements for inclusive practices among Head Start, GSRP, Great Start to Quality, Special Education, etc.
- Identify and coordinate funding streams, requirements, and resources to implement cross-sector professional learning.
- Create and develop an ongoing, cross-sector 'Coaches Network' that supports a consistent message, adapts to needs across the state, provides consistent resources, activities, and professional learning frameworks, and supports leaders in implementing inclusive practices.
- Define high-quality, ongoing coaching.
- Hire, train, and deploy coaches, mentors, and/or consultants for local programs.
- Identify current structures that support the use of coaches, mentors, and/or consultants for local programs.
- Incentivize the use of coaches, mentors, and/or consultants for local programs.
- Abandon structures that prevent the use of coaches, mentors, and/or consultants for local programs.
- Coordinate access to coaches, mentors, and/or consultants for local programs to ensure continuous quality improvement.

Aligned with the Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goals

- Expand early childhood learning opportunities
- Improve early literacy achievement
- Increase the numbers of certified teachers in areas of shortage

Aligned with Ideal Features

3. Collaborative teams

6. Cohesive continuum of training and support

7. Valued workforce

Lead(s)

MDE, Educational Associations

Primary Partner(s)

ISDs, local districts, private providers, partner agencies (i.e., ECTA, EOTTA, MiMTSS), families

Resources/contributions/investments necessary to support the activity

Collaborative space and mechanism for sharing resources, communication, etc.

Anticipated Outcomes

<u>Short-term to mid-term</u>

- Leadership team established
- Evidence that MDE and educational associations have created a 'Coaches Network'

<u>Mid-term to long-term</u>

- Leadership team meets regularly

- Leadership team reviews current professional learning & technical assistance needs and training requirements (Head Start, GSRP, Great Start to Quality, Special Education, etc.)
- Evidence of MDE and educational associations are identifying and coordinating funding streams
- Evidence that the ‘Coaches Network’ functions to support a consistent message, adapts to needs across the state, provides consistent resources, activities, and professional learning frameworks, and supporting leaders in implementation of inclusive practices

EVALUATING IMPLEMENTATION & IMPACT

Measuring success or lack thereof will be critical to the implementation of this strategic action plan. A combination of data sources (i.e., rating systems, self-assessment, inclusion rates, outcomes data, training data, assessment of developed resources, etc.) will be utilized to assess the implementation and realization of this strategic action plan. Careful examination of the data will inform adjustments to the actions and activities.

Key Questions:

1) How will we know *progress* has been made toward achieving each supporting action?
2) How will we know if each supporting action has been achieved?
3) What is the evidence for progress and action *achieved*?

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Action 1

- Was a coalition formed to further inform and implement the system, strengthen existing partnerships, and forge new partnerships?
  - ⇒ How did the coalition function?
  - ⇒ What did it achieve?
  - ⇒ What challenges did it encounter?
  - ⇒ What actions did it take to address these challenges?

Action 2

- Did MDE partner with educator training programs and successfully affect changes in curricula?
- Did university students express confidence as a result of changes in higher education curricula?
- How did the Leadership Institute work/function to support inclusion?
  - ⇒ What did it do?
  - ⇒ What were its challenges?
  - ⇒ What are the signs of its impact?

Action 3

- Were measures established to assess progress at ISD and local districts' levels?
- Were inclusion criteria introduced into quality indicators of the QRIS?
- If so, what difference did this make for students in ISDs and local districts?
- How many children were affected?
- What were the benefits for children?

Action 4

- Did MDE, ISDs, and educational associations develop a system to ensure that all early care and education settings support all learners and their individualized needs?
- Over time, is there evidence of substantial use of evidence-based frameworks throughout Michigan?

- Do teachers and related service providers collaboratively create lesson plans that include strategies for differentiation to meet the individualized needs of all children?
- If so, how many ISDs and districts created such lesson plans?
- How many failed to create these lesson plans?
- Over what period of time?

Action 5

- Was a comprehensive cross-sector review of state and federal policies, funding structures, and professional learning continua conducted?
- Were opportunities identified to leverage, blend, and braid funding streams?
- Were opportunities seized, and if so, what changes in funding occurred?
- How did children benefit?
- Was a review conducted of federal regulations and state administrative rules?
- Were policy mechanisms (to support a continuum of services for early childhood (ages 3-5) inclusion) funded?
- What challenges were encountered?
- Were conflicting policies and funding mechanisms identified?
- If so, what actions were taken to resolve and/or address existing conflicts?
- What challenges were encountered?
- What successes were achieved?
- How did successes affect children?
- Were efforts made to find funding for Universal Preschool within the current GSRP system?
- What were the outcomes of such efforts?
- Did these affect policy and practice? If so, how?
- Did these, in turn, affect children? If so, how?

Action 6

- Was a comprehensive marketing strategy re: benefits of inclusion developed?
- Was it implemented?
- What effects did it have?
- Was a “Family Matters” fact sheet and created and distributed?
  - ⇒ Was the fact sheet useful to parents? If so, how, and how much?

Action 7

- Did MDE and Educational Associations establish and support a statewide, cross-sector leadership team?
  - ⇒ What were the challenges and success of the team?
  - ⇒ Did it review current professional learning & technical assistance needs and training requirements (Head Start, GSRP, Great Start to Quality, Special Education, etc.)?
    - What were the findings of the review?

        - How were findings used?
- Was a ‘Coaches Network’ established?
  ⇒ What were its successes and challenges? Did the Network:
    (1) support a consistent message,
    (2) adapt to needs across the state,
    (3) provide consistent resources, activities, and professional learning frameworks,
    (4) support leaders in the implementation of inclusive practices?
  ⇒ What are the challenges and achievements associated with the Coaches Network?
        - What are the benefits of the Coaches Network for children and families?

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Many thanks to the individuals who dedicated significant time and energy over the course of several months. Their passions for improving outcomes for students with disabilities and the insights each provided from their perspective were essential to informing this plan. They will continue to be a crucial partner in moving this work forward.

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ACRONYMS

CCWFA .....Child Care for Working Families Act
DEC .....Division for Early Childhood
ECSN ..... Early Childhood Support Networks
ECTA.....Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center
FTE .....Full-time equivalent
GSRP .....Great Start Readiness Program
ICP .....Inclusive Classroom Profile
IDEA.....Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP .....Individualized Education Program
ISD ..... Intermediate School Districts
LARA.....Licensing and Regulatory Affairs
MAASE.....Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education
MAISA ..... Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators
MDE ..... Michigan Department of Education
MiMTSS ..... Michigan's MTSS Technical Assistance Center
MTSS .....Multi-Tiered System of Support
QRIS .....Quality Rating and Improvement System
START .....Statewide Autism Resources and Training
TPOT ..... Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

American Families Plan

A plan focused on investment in our children, our families, and our economic future https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/28/fact-sheet-the-american-families-plan/.

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021

A COVID-19 relief package providing $1.9 trillion in mandatory funding, program changes, and tax policies aimed at mitigating the continuing effects of the pandemic.

Child Care Subsidy

Funds received from the federal government for a state-run program that helps low-income families pay for childcare so they can work or attend school. Eligibility requirements are different in each state.

Cross-Sector

Includes the major organizations, agencies, and institutions in a state that provide services and support the development and learning of young children, their families, and the practitioners who serve them.

Division of Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices

The DEC Recommended Practices were developed to provide guidance to practitioners and families about the most effective ways to improve the learning outcomes and promote the development of young children, birth through age 5, who have or are at-risk for developmental delays or disabilities. The purpose is to help bridge the gap between research and practice by highlighting those practices that have been shown to result in better outcomes for young children with disabilities, their families, and the personnel who serve them.

Division of Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices Improvement Tools

Based on the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices, the Practice Improvement Tools help practitioners implement evidence-based practices. These tools and resources guide practitioners and families in supporting young children who have, or are at-risk for, developmental delays or disabilities across a variety of early childhood settings.

Early Care and Education Settings

Safe, responsive, and nurturing high-quality settings that are an important part of supporting the learning and development of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. These environments also help to prevent challenging behaviors and serve as a core component of interventions for infants and young children with identified disabilities.

Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)

In the field of early childhood, an evidence-based practice (EBP) has been evaluated and proven to provide positive outcomes for children and their families. The identification of EBPs is based on a process that combines the best available research and knowledge from professional experts with the data and input from children and their families.

Great Start to Quality

Great Start to Quality is Michigan's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) that supports early childhood programs and providers in their efforts to improve their programs. We also help Michigan families find and choose quality childcare programs that meet their children's needs.

Head Start Act

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 authorizes the national Head Start program, which provides comprehensive developmental services, including health, nutritional, educational, social and other services, to economically disadvantaged preschool children and their families.

High-Quality Inclusion

High-quality inclusion should have the following components: intentional, sufficient, and supported interactions between peers with and without disabilities; specialized, individualized supports; family involvement; inclusive, interdisciplinary services and collaborative teaming; a focus on critical sociological outcomes; effective, ongoing professional development; and ongoing program evaluation.

Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP)

The ICP is an observation rating scale designed to assess the quality of daily classroom practices that support the developmental needs of children with disabilities in early childhood settings.

Medicaid

Medicaid is a joint federal and state program that, together with the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), provides health coverage to over 72.5 million Americans, including children, pregnant women, parents, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.

Michigan Alliance for Families

Michigan Alliance for Families is a Michigan Department of Education IDEA Grant Funded Initiative. Michigan Alliance for Families is our state's federally funded Parent Training and Information Center. Michigan Alliance for Families is a statewide resource to connect families of children with disabilities to resources to help improve their children's education.

Michigan Top 10 Strategic Education Plan

Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan has a mission statement and a vision statement, which are unchanged from the original plan; six guiding principles, which maintain the spirit of the original principles; eight new goals that are more directional and streamlined; and metrics for each goal area to help monitor Michigan's educational progress. The Top 10 Strategic Education Plan is both a directional and aspirational document in which local education agencies, education partners and stakeholders, and MDE can contribute to its implementation.

Practice-Based Coaching

A cyclical process for guiding practitioners' use of evidence-based practices for promoting positive child outcomes. Practice-based coaching involves the following components: collaborative partnerships, shared goals and action planning, focused observation, and reflection and feedback.

Preschool Inclusion Finance Toolkit

Developed by ECTA Center, the document is intended to help better understand the financial requirements and responsibilities necessary to create inclusive placement options as part of the continuum of service options available for consideration by the IEP teams gathered for each preschool-aged child with a disability.

Pyramid Model

The *Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children* is a conceptual framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's healthy social and emotional development.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs.

School Finance Research Collaborative

A comprehensive school adequacy study, providing a roadmap to fixing Michigan's broken school funding approach and making it fair for all students. Updated to reflect the financial impact of COVID-19. (https://www.fundmischools.org/).

State Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion

Developed by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, the State Indicators of High-Quality Inclusion detail the key elements needed to be in place for an early childhood infrastructure across state agencies and federal programs. They are designed to inform state-level leadership efforts relative to supporting high-quality inclusion across the state to increase access and meaningful participation of young children with disabilities.

Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) for Preschool Classrooms

Observation tool used to reinforce high-quality practices that support children's social-emotional development and behavior. TPOT measures how well teachers are implementing the 3 tiers of the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children in classrooms serving children 2–5 years of age.

Universal Preschool

A statewide policy framework that gives all families with preschool-aged children the opportunity to voluntarily enroll their child in a publicly funded pre-kindergarten care and education program

BRIEF SUMMARY: FACT SHEET OF RESEARCH ON PRESCHOOL INCLUSION

Erin E. Barton & Barbara J. Smith

In 27 years, the practice of providing special education and related services in regular early childhood settings to preschoolers with disabilities has increased only 5.7%, and many young children with disabilities continue to be educated in separate settings.

Inclusion benefits children with and without disabilities.

The quality of preschool programs including at least one student with a disability was as good as or better than preschool programs without children with disabilities. However, traditional measures of early childhood program quality might not be sufficient for assessing the quality of programs that include children with disabilities.

Children with disabilities can be effectively educated in inclusive programs using specialized instruction.

Parents and teachers influence children's values regarding disabilities.

Individualized embedded instruction can be used to teach a variety of skills, including those related to early learning standards, and promote participation in inclusive preschool programs to children with and without disabilities.

Families of children with and without disabilities generally have positive views of inclusion.

Inclusion is not more expensive than having separate programs for children with disabilities.

Successful inclusion requires intentional and effective collaboration and teaming.

The individual outcomes of preschool inclusion should include access, membership, participation, friendships, and support.

Children with disabilities do not need to be "ready" to be included. Programs need to be "ready" to support all children.

Note. A sample of empirical citations is provided for each "fact." Thus, this fact sheet does not provide a comprehensive list of the references for each "fact." The citations were intentionally identified to include recent references, representation across disabilities when possible, and studies using rigorous methods.

*These facts are based on principles guiding the field of early childhood special education, recommended practices, and our collective knowledge and experiences.

The complete fact sheet with citations can be found at:
https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/topics/inclusion/research/Brief_Inclusion_Fact_Sheet_R.pdf

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