

Date: May 12, 2020

To: Governor Gretchen Whitmer
George W. Romney Building
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Superintendent Michael Rice
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RE: CARES Act Discretionary Funding Priorities

In the coming weeks, our state will apply for and receive federal relief funds through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to support their response to the COVID-19 crisis. With the necessary school closures and the adoption of a range of at-home learning strategies during the pandemic, it is vital that we ensure that funds are targeted to meet the needs of communities and students who are most likely to be negatively impacted by the crisis, many of whom already face significant educational inequities and barriers.

This moment calls upon us to reflect on the kind of educational opportunity we want to provide to all of our state's children and youth, no matter their age or situation, whether they experience a learning gap, disability, foster care, homelessness, or juvenile justice, and our adult learners. Now is the time to choose to get this right. Let's work together to get the future we want: a place where every student can thrive, and an education system that works for all students. These goals are necessary and within reach, and we can begin by ensuring transparent, equitable, and adequate educational supports right now:

Recommendations

Michigan could use up to \$130 million of CARES Act funds as discretionary state spending to close gaps in access to necessary educational services based on what school districts are spending, and ensure that the over \$380 million aid to local school districts and the nearly \$350 million aid to post-secondary institutions will not contribute to current service inequities through strong transparency and accountability practices.

- Hold the line on educational inequity despite opportunities for federal waivers, and use federal education funds to supplement, not supplant resources for education based on recent district reporting. In this time and into the future, many students will need more, not less, help. While our state must take advantage of all flexibility where it can improve child outcomes, we cannot focus any less on closing the learning gap. Utilize the new COVID Accountability Office to monitor levels of equitable spending across schools. Provide supports to ensure LEAs and ISDs are prepared to track and report the use of budgets and emergency funds.
- Require school districts to report how they will plan to serve special subgroups of students, including students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, and students experiencing juvenile justice.

- Ensure services for every student with an IEP or IFSP through individualized, tele-intervention services, distance learning technology or non-technological delivery methods (e.g., phone calls, print materials, etc). Support technology needs, training and coaching and other resources necessary for all service providers, school employees or others, and families they serve. Utilize Extended School Year in order to mitigate losses that might be realized due to changes in instructional format and time lost for every child and family who has not been able to access adequate services up to this point, and to ensure that they do not return to school further behind.
- Ensure infants and toddlers with disability and delay in all counties receive access to IDEA Part C *Early On* services, and ensure services are provided continuously throughout summer months in order to mitigate any losses that might be realized through changes in intervention delivery.
- Dedicate discretionary funding to strengthen afterschool and summer programs to serve student needs during this extraordinary time for education and workforce development. Michigan's 21st Century Community Learning Center funds are not enough to fund all quality program applications, which can inform need estimates. These programs connect families and students with both their schools and their larger community. They are trusted sources of support, and effective in dealing with socio-emotional needs as well as closing skill gaps.
- Dedicate discretionary funding to prioritize other services that families have accessed at school to fill gaps that schools cannot currently meet, like physical and mental health, social work, school counseling and other supports for learning. These resources are more needed now than ever, and will need to be strongly in place over the summer and as school resumes.
- Dedicate discretionary funding to meet current and projected need for adult education based on home-school responsibilities, employment changes, including family literacy, high school equivalency, career and technical skills expansion, staff training, and technology investment. Adult foundational skill building is more important than ever to the economic, educational and career success of Michigan families. This investment supports many initiatives ongoing in our state including high school equivalency attainment, generational family literacy growth, bridging the foundational skills gap, increasing employment and economic stability for families, connecting communities with needed essential services, access to postsecondary options and building resilient communities.
- Urge all agencies, local districts, and ISDs to communicate with each other and with students and families to identify needs, challenges, and the best uses of emergency fund. Include those most likely to fall behind and their families – homeless students, students with experience in the foster care system, migrant students and others with individual or family language barriers who are disproportionately impacted by the crisis.

Leverage technology resources provided to students to support distance learning to help all family members access critical resources and learning activities, including those offered by the early childhood system, such as through Home Visiting and Early Intervention and those offered for adult learners, like adult basic education and high school completion/GED.

- Direct post-secondary resources to programs that assist parents who are students, homeless and foster youth, and others without stable housing. Increased resource should be given to Community Colleges and trade schools who serve the majority of students facing life and educational challenges.

There are discretionary federal grants, up to \$20 million each, that could help our state prioritize two or more the important equity-building strategies above:

- Rethink K-12 Education Models Grants (ESF-REM) could allow Michigan to provide microgrants to working families to access important supports that otherwise might be out of reach financially, including high-quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities, or counseling services.
- Reimagining Workforce Preparation Grants (ESF-RWP) provide support to help states build new capacity to offer short-term postsecondary programs that are responsive to the needs of individuals to more rapidly adapt and evolve to ever changing workplace and community needs. Adult education and special education transition programs are prime opportunities to expand innovative workforce development strategies to populations at risk of falling behind in the economic recovery.

We the undersigned organizations represent the children, youth, and families who are most at risk of falling behind due to the COVID crisis, and those who serve them, and we are committed to working with you to bring a quality education to across Michigan. Thank you for your continued leadership during this crisis.

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