



The Governor's Office of FOUNDATION LIAISON

A partnership between the
State of Michigan and the
Council of Michigan Foundations

Strengthening and Advancing Early Childhood Efforts in Michigan through Public-Private Partnerships

Michigan's nonpartisan Office of Foundation Liaison (OFL) was created in 2003 at the suggestion of Michigan philanthropic leaders. The Office — the first of its kind in the nation — works to foster partnerships between state government agencies and philanthropic organizations that are likely to result in policy and programmatic reforms to improve the lives of children and families in Michigan. Since its inception, OFL has brokered more than \$150 million in foundation investments for initiatives to increase Michigan's economic competitiveness through reforms in P-20 education, economic and workforce development, health, and land use.

OFL works within three priority issue areas: prenatal to postsecondary education, workforce development, and health. Bridging all three issue areas, OFL has been instrumental in the advancement of early childhood efforts in Michigan by supporting the creation and evolution of the Office of Great Start.

Elevating the Importance of Early Childhood

From the 90s to the early 2000s, there was a lack of strategic, coordinated movement on critical early childhood issues. Michigan trailed behind most of the U.S. in third grade reading scores and the state routinely lacked capacity to take advantage of all available federal funding for early childhood care and education. In addition, three different government agencies — the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), the Department of Human Services (MDHS), and the Department of Community Health (MDCH) — had some hand in early childhood work, resulting in a fragmented approach to addressing issues that affect Michigan's youngest populations and impact educational and economic outcomes. While the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) had been founded in 2005, in part, to address the fragmentation in state and federal early childhood funding, there was a growing need to ensure that early childhood issues were at the forefront of the MDE's work and that the department owned these efforts more fully.

Informed by the ECIC's work and advocacy, a collaborative effort — with bipartisan support from the legislature — emerged that recognized the need to improve Michigan's third grade reading scores, increase public education funding, and have one state office with a singular focus on early childhood work. This group of partners, including nonprofits, philanthropic funders, businesses, and government agencies, understood that Michigan could only get ahead if there was a concentrated effort in improving access to and quality of care and education from birth to eight years of age. By facilitating strategic discussions and mediating tough decisions, OFL worked with these partners to build consensus and hold them accountable to the vision of creating a more vibrant Michigan through a strong early childhood system.

Creating the Office of Great Start

With an Executive Order, Governor Rick Snyder created the Office of Great Start in June 2011, consolidating and streamlining the state's early childhood programs and services within the MDE. To ensure that the Office of Great Start would be effective in achieving its mission of supporting Michigan's families and children, OFL collaborated with the ECIC, the Governor's Office, the MDE, and philanthropic organizations to assist the Office in building a strong foundation.

The ECIC, under the leadership of former ECIC Vice President Joan Blough, supported the Office of Great Start in its early stages by conducting research on early childhood office models and taking the lead with nonprofits and state organizations to critically look at these models and decide what would work best for Michigan. OFL participated in these discussions to communicate this information to interested funders and to assist Blough as she became the Interim Director of the Office of Great Start.

Together with the ECIC, OFL reviewed the Governor's Executive Order language and facilitated conversations with staff involved in the shift of responsibilities from the ECIC to the Office of Great Start, as the ECIC had previously handled the majority of early childhood funding work. OFL helped the ECIC and the newly formed Office of Great Start figure out staff roles and how to move the early childhood agenda forward. OFL was especially instrumental in linking public and private partners to encourage foundation support for the new Office.

Thanks to OFL's unique sector-bridging skills, several funders came to the table to support the build-out of the Office of Great Start, including the Payne Family Foundation, the McGovern Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Colina Family Foundation. In addition, OFL maintained consistent communication with Susan Broman, former President of the Steelcase Foundation, as she transitioned into becoming the Office of Great Start's first Director. Broman's appointment as Director highlighted the importance of keeping the public and private sectors connected in service of Michigan's children and future.

Supporting Michigan's Children through the Office of Great Start

The creation of the Office of Great Start was in and of itself a great success for Michigan as there are few states in the nation with a dedicated center of support for young children and their families. The Office embodies the collaborative effort of public and private sectors, illustrating how diverse stakeholders were able to come together to help Michigan succeed.

Since the Office of Great Start's creation, a strong base of support for early childhood has been built. Through OFL's convening power, the Office of Great Start has partnered with foundations on a variety of projects and initiatives to strengthen Michigan's early childcare efforts, including the creation of the following reports:

- *Building a Better Child Care System*, written by Public Sector Consultants and funded by the Max and Marjorie Fisher Foundation.
- *Great Start, Great Investment, Great Future*, written by Public Sector Consultants and funded by the Kresge Foundation.
- *Building a Sustainable Future: Analysis of the Fiscal Resources Supporting Children from Birth through Age 8 in Michigan*, written by the Finance Project and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which was later used to support the Office of Great Start's *Early Childhood Program Inventory*.

OFL's Key Roles in Strengthening and Advancing Early Childhood Efforts in Michigan

- Facilitating strategic discussions and mediating tough decisions to build consensus among cross-sector partners and hold them accountable
- Collaborating with diverse stakeholders to create a strong foundation for the Office of Great Start to help it effectively support Michigan's families and children
- Communicating regularly with philanthropic funders about state issues to facilitate the growth of public-private partnerships
- Convening public and private partners to support projects and initiatives to strengthen Michigan's early childhood efforts

This positive forward momentum and cross-sector collaboration on early childhood has moved the Michigan legislature to add \$130 million to state preschool funding and grounded Governor Snyder's decision to increase Michigan's childcare subsidy income eligibility level and improve the childcare subsidy payment reimbursement system with the passage of the 2017-2018 state budget.

By convening public and private sectors and facilitating focused and constructive dialogue among diverse stakeholders, OFL played an integral role in supporting the Office of Great Start's evolution from its early stages to its central work in collaborating across government agencies and philanthropic organizations to strengthen and advance the state's early childhood efforts so that Michigan's children can have a brighter future.

