News Release

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Michigan's Early Childhood Program Again Among Tops in the Nation

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LANSING – For the fourth straight year, Michigan has met all 10 quality standards for pre-kindergarten set forth by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), the Michigan Department of Education announced today.

"Early childhood education is critical to lifelong development, and I am proud of all the educators and administrators whose efforts have allowed us to meet all 10 quality standards set forth by national experts," said Governor Gretchen Whitmer. "We should continue finding ways to make lasting, transformative investments in early education as we build back better from the pandemic and seek to spend the billions in funds sent to Michigan under the American Rescue Plan."

In this year's NIEER report, Michigan ranks 14th nationally in state funding and 21st nationally in access. Michigan's state funding ranking of 14th remained the same as last year, but dipped in its access ranking from 18th the year before. The drop in access was not a result of Michigan serving fewer children, but rather other states serving more children over the prior year and increasing their rankings.

"Our top quality ranking in the country is a tribute to the hard work of Michigan early childhood educators, who do a great job for our children in a very strong program," said State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice. "At the same time, however, our national rank on early childhood access has fallen from 18th in 2019 to 21st this year. We have to do better for our children.

"In Michigan, 37,368 students received GRSP pre-school last year; 27,000 eligible students received no pre-school whatsoever. Legislators, educators, and philanthropists need to work together to make sure that all 64,000 eligible students each year receive GSRP services. The earlier we educate our children, particularly with a program as strong as GSRP, with research-based success, the better our children will do with their later educational outcomes and success as adults."

Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) serves children across 82 of the state's 83 counties. GSRP is Michigan's state-funded preschool program for four-year-old children with challenges that may place them at risk of educational failure.

Expanding early childhood learning opportunities is one of the eight goals in Michigan Top 10 strategic education plan.

Michigan is one of only six states nationally to meet all 10 NIEER standards for high-quality early childhood education. Those standards include:

- Comprehensive, aligned, supported, and culturally sensitive early learning and development standards
- Curriculum supports
- Requirement of a bachelor's degree for staff
- Teacher specialized training
- Assistant teacher degree
- 16 hours of staff professional development per year
- A maximum class size of 18
- A staff-to-child ratio of 1:8 for four-year-old in the program
- Vision, hearing, and health screenings
- A consistent quality improvement system of structured classroom observations and use of data for program improvement.

This year, Hawaii and Missouri have joined Michigan, Alabama, Mississippi, and Rhode Island as the six states nationally with the highest quality rating by NIEER.

Research on preschool programs and specific research on GSRP indicate that children provided with a high-quality preschool experience show significant positive developmental differences when compared to children from the same backgrounds who do not attend a high-quality preschool program.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (www.nieer.org) at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education in New Brunswick, N.J. supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research.

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