

**NEWS > LOCAL NEWS****Take a stand — in the sandbox**[Print Page](#)***Sandbox Party to push for early childhood education***

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**EAST LANSING** — When one thinks of a sandbox party, an image of smiling children surrounded by shovels, pails and mini sand sculptures may come to mind. For children, the sandbox is a common ground for hours of amusement, a place to come together with peers to share toys — and friendship.

Coming Aug. 26 at the Breslin Student Event Center, a different kind of sandbox party will come together. It will be a common ground for like-minded adults who want to ensure their children have the best possible start to their education, which needs to be years before they step foot in kindergarten.

The newly formed "Sandbox Party" invites everyone to a free convention, which will take place from 1 to 4 p.m. Children are welcome — and encouraged — to attend along with the adults. The convention will include speeches from athletes, business leaders, celebrities and organizations about the importance of investing in early childhood programs. Gubernatorial candidates also have been invited to speak.

The event also will include dance and music acts, a mock election for children under 18, dozens of exhibits geared toward parents, educators and professionals and interactive crowd activities.

The Sandbox Party is an effort of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, its 55 Great Start Collaborative (including Huron County), more than 70 Parent Coalitions, Regional Resource Centers and Michigan's early childhood advocate partners. The party's primary goal for the upcoming convention is to help spread the word about the importance of investing in early childhood education. Such an investment would not only help prepare children across the state for academic success — it would have a positive economic impact on the state, party representatives say. It also would be an important element in rebuilding the state's struggling economy.

Becky Gettel, director of the Huron County Great Start Collaborative (GSC), said positive early childhood development is crucial for success in kindergarten and beyond. She said children who are behind in kindergarten often stay behind throughout their K-12 years.

According to a statewide survey of kindergarten teachers, two-thirds of Michigan children start their school careers at a disadvantage because they have physical, emotional and/or educational shortcomings. Unprepared students, teachers said, take time away from other students, slowing everyone down.

"Huron County is not unlike other parts of the state," Gettel noted. "The early childhood assessment the GSC conducted (in 2009) showed that 30 percent of last year's incoming kindergarten students did not have the skills needed to be successful in kindergarten."

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