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New "Sandbox Party" to provide voice for kids

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LANSING - A group of children played in a sandbox this morning as a new "party" was launched nearby in Lansing.

Holding pails of sand, a bipartisan, statewide coalition of government leaders, social service professionals and parents launched a "Sandbox Party." They hope to highlight the need for funding for children, ages 0 to 5, at a critical stage of their intellectual and emotional development.

The effort was launched at the Educational Child Care Center, 1715 W. Main in Lansing. The nonprofit center receives roughly 15 percent of its funding from the state. State lawmakers this week are finalizing a 2010 early childhood education budget that includes a \$1 million increase.

"(Funding) is moving in the right direction," said state Rep. Kathy Angerer, D-Dundee, who serves as House majority floor leader. "Both Democrats and Republicans agree that early childhood education is important."

Group organizers insist the effort just isn't a flash in the pan, but will be a sustained movement.

On Aug. 26, the Sandbox Party will hold a "convention" at the Breslin Student Events Center at Michigan State University. Organizers say they will not endorse candidates in the Nov. 2 general election, but will educate voters where candidates stand on funding for early childhood education.

Read Friday's Lansing State Journal for more on this report.