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Lt. Gov. Calley: Michigan Needs A New Attitude Toward Education *Legislative, Business Leaders Agree Early Childhood a Priority*

YPSILANTI – Ensuring educational success for all Michigan children requires a change in attitude toward education from do-nothing to can-do, Lt. Gov. Calley said Monday.

“We want kids to be successful but what do we need to do? So much of the feedback is that there’s not much we can do – we blame it on poor socioeconomic conditions or parents not being involved. As if these are throwaway kids,” Calley told a select group of more than two dozen legislative and business leaders gathered this morning at the HighScope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti to review the latest research on early childhood development.

“My wife and I felt very lost when we got the diagnosis that our daughter has autism. We didn’t know what to do, but our attitude was that we will do whatever it takes. What if we had that attitude with every kid? What if we said we’re just going to be successful. We’re going to do whatever it takes.”

Key to that attitude is committing to intervene early in the lives of Michigan’s most at-risk children, a commitment the Snyder administration has made in its budget proposal by protecting early education funds, Calley said.

The event featured presentations from early childhood experts and a visit to the HighScope Demonstration Preschool, used as a model of high-quality early education. The event was sponsored by the HighScope Educational Research Foundation, Michigan’s Children, The Center for Michigan, and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation of Michigan.

A bipartisan team of legislators co-hosted the event, including Sen. Randy Richardville (R-Monroe), Sen. Rebekah Warren (D-Ann Arbor), Rep. Mark Ouimet (R-Scio Twp.), Rep. Amanda Price (R-Holland), and Rep. Rutledge (D-Ypsilanti). Co-hosting from the business side was Phillip Wm. Fisher, secretary of the Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation Board and a member of the Children’s Leadership Council of Michigan, a group of business leaders committed to enhancing early childhood experiences and investments. Other Council members who attended included Debbie Dingell of D2 Strategies, Tim Salisbury of PNC Bank, Matt Clayson of the Detroit Creative Corridor Center, Tracy Connelly of Metro Parent Magazine and Phil Power of The Center for Michigan.

Experts presented compelling evidence that investing in the early years with quality services for children from birth to age 5 and their parents is a key component in building an educated and skilled workforce for Michigan. Quality programming, including adequate prenatal care, parental support, child care, preschool and more, prepare young children to learn and can significantly help them succeed once they enter school.

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“The first days, weeks and years of a child’s life are critical learning periods,” said Jack Kresnak, President & CEO of Michigan’s Children. “From an educational and economic viewpoint, we all benefit by seizing this period to optimize learning and later earnings.”

Dr. Joan Lessen-Firestone, Director of the Early Childhood Unit for Oakland Schools, shared research proving that the earliest years of a child’s life are the most formative, with as much as 90 percent of the emotional and intellectual brain wiring set by age 5 – before many children ever set foot in a school. That’s why investments in ages 0-3 are crucial, she said.

“This is basic brain science that we must understand to give our young children the best chance at success,” Lessen-Firestone said. “For our most economically disadvantaged children, preschool is too late to prevent an achievement gap.”

Leading economists agree that investments in the early years yield higher returns than in later years. A study by Nobel Laureate James Heckman found that every \$1 invested in high quality early care and education services for low-income children saves as much as \$16 on welfare, criminal justice, special education and other social expenses. Another study found Michigan saved \$1.1 billion in 2009 alone due to investments made in the state’s school readiness efforts over the past 25 years.

“These investments are even more important during economic downturns when families are struggling most and public expenditures must be on programs and services proven to work and yield high returns,” said Dr. Larry Schweinhart, President of HighScope Educational Research Foundation.

Dr. Schweinhart is the lead researcher and author of the groundbreaking Perry Preschool study, which changed the landscape of early education worldwide by examining the impact of a high-quality preschool program on a select group of African-Americans born into poverty and at high-risk of school failure, and compared it to the life courses of another group who received no preschool.

“The HighScope Perry Preschool Study was a game-changer for early childhood programs,” Schweinhart said. “Instead of being only for custodial care, they became a public policy tool for intervening in the cycle of poverty to lift children’s lives to a higher track of school success and adult economic productivity and social responsibility. The program’s great success led to a tremendous return on investment to taxpayers, many times as great as their investment in the program and even better than the long-term return on stock market investment before the recession. We should continue and even increase this investment in these difficult economic times.”

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