



The Sandbox Party for Michigan's Youngest Learners

No one in Michigan doubts that the upcoming election is first and foremost about the state's economy.

Michigan is mired in economic chaos that won't be fixed until -- and unless -- we fundamentally alter the way we think about economic investment. It will take strong leaders who are willing to make commitments and decisions that reflect bold new thinking to get Michigan on the right track.

Strong leaders and bold thinking -- nothing less will do.

There is growing consensus -- based on rigorous academic and economic research -- that investing in the health, development and learning of young children from the time they are born until they enter kindergarten represents the best one-time opportunity to maximize every taxpayer dollar spent.

The power of this investment strategy resonates with voters -- especially when state coffers are nearly empty and populist political promises ring hollow.

Regrettably, too many for too long have dismissed putting children first as sentimental mush in a battle requiring major fire power.

In fact, investing in young children is anything but sentimental. Young children are not merely the lucky beneficiaries of our benevolent largess. They are the catalyst of our economic resurrection. Investing in our youngest learners is a fundamental building block in restoring Michigan as a competitive, quality of life state.

That is, if bold, new thinking plays its hand.

Well it's time.

It's time Michigan acts with enlightened self-interest to secure a standing in the 21st century economy.

It's time Michigan starts investing in young children as if they were our most valuable resource.

It's time we appreciate that young children in fact *ARE* our most valuable resource. Michigan cannot be competitive without a diverse, skilled workforce, and we cannot effectively build that workforce unless we start at the beginning.

That, of course, is just the fact of the matter. More compelling to each and every one of us is the *heart* of the matter – our dreams about what we want for our children and grandchildren and what we believe we can be as a state.

The opportunity to work at a well-paying job and raise a family in a safe neighborhood brought many of our parents to this great state. The quality of life Michigan offered fueled not only the state's economy but the nation's for many decades.

That is not ancient history – although as Michigan slogs through the economic downturn, it may seem like it.

It must be our resolve to harness the collective will of committed, determined citizens to once again make Michigan the best place in the country to raise a family, the best place in the nation to grow old, blessed with an abiding sense of security.

And it all begins with our realization that the only way to effectively begin that transformation is by investing in our young children. They are the start of ***EVERYTHING***.

The genesis of this thinking is more intuitive than academic. It arises from ordinary people who consider their families and their communities and start questioning the conflict between what they are told by politicians and what they experience in their own lives.

Consider this: Public opinion polls show 83 percent of Michigan voters think early childhood development and education programs are an “absolute necessity” in their community; 75 percent want them spared from state budget cuts.

Furthermore, a recent study by economists at Wilder Research revealed that Michigan saves \$1.15 billion *per year* because of past investments just in preschool.

Yet Michigan was one of just six states singled out by the National Conference of State Legislatures as being the worst for cuts to early education in 2010, including cuts to, of all things, preschool!

Obviously, there's a disconnect here. As the state struggles to balance its budget, someone needs to stand up for Michigan's future – someone needs to stand up for Michigan's youngest children and the majority of voters who support continued state investment in them.

And that “someone” is the Sandbox Party for Michigan's Youngest Learners.

Michigan's Sandbox Party specifically targets the interests of young children from birth to age 5.

Nonpartisan and nonpolitical, its membership is broad across the spectrum of early childhood issues, programs, resources and supports. The Sandbox Party is the unifying scaffold for all those who recognize the crucial role of young children in Michigan's economic turnaround and support continued state investment to make sure those children grow up healthy, capable and workforce-ready.

At its most fundamental level, the Sandbox Party embraces the belief that:

- Children must be born healthy
- They must be lovingly nurtured
- They must have access to high quality child care settings that support their earliest learning
- They must have access to preschool
- Their parents must have the information and help they need to be their children's first and most influential teachers
- And they must be empowered to advocate for their children

This is a job so large that success is only possible by working together – at both the state and local levels -- to achieve the overarching goal of ensuring that every young child in Michigan starts kindergarten ready.

So we call on everyone who believes in the ultimate power of young children to determine our future to join us in the sandbox – a place where we can put aside turf, partisanship and ignorance and “play nice.”

In the Sandbox, we acknowledge the essential understanding that Michigan's future depends on how much we value and invest in young children today.

Our purpose in this election year is formidable but crystal clear: To provide supporters with tools for reaching out to candidates and voters with information about the crucial role young children play in determining Michigan's future and the paramount importance of investing in them.

We cannot wait a moment longer to galvanize our forces. We've drawn a line in the sand -- we urge Michigan's leaders to look at the facts about how early childhood investment pays off -- and we insist that they invest accordingly.