

## What is *Early On* Michigan?

*Early On* Michigan provides early intervention services to families of infants and toddlers, birth to three, who are eligible because they have a delay in development or a medical condition that is likely to result in a delay.

## Why do families need *Early On* Michigan?

New parents who are caring for infants and toddlers with mild delays to significant disabilities, often need help. *Early On* supports families when children are in their first three years of life and their brains and bodies are growing faster than at any other time in their lives. Trained professionals connect with families and visit them in their homes to teach skills for supporting their child's development. *Early On* provides services such as physical and speech therapy, hearing and vision services, and specialized instruction to set up children and their families for success. Intervening with children in these youngest years can have the greatest impact.

**Eligible population:** Infants and toddlers, birth to age three, with a 20% or greater delay in development or an established medical condition likely to result in delay.

**Number served:** 4.4% or 27,629 infants and toddlers annually; 13,667 on a given day.<sup>1</sup>

**Funding:** A recent study of *Early On* Michigan determined that the cost associated of a high quality early intervention system for our state are estimated at approximately \$230 million. Currently Michigan receives \$14.5 million in federal funding and \$23.7 million in state funding through **Section 54d** of the State School Aid Act. In addition, districts are able to supplement funding, utilizing state special education dollars for those infants and toddlers who qualify (on average 41% of infants and toddlers in *Early On*), and local millage dollars where available, inconsistently across the state.

**Status:** Referrals to *Early On* have increased by 35% since 2019<sup>2</sup> and the new requirement for universal lead screening is likely to result in increased referrals. In addition, components of the system are unnecessarily complex and in need of updates. A task force should be appointed to research and make recommendations.

**Outcomes:** Of children who enter *Early On* below age expectations, 72% substantially increased their rate of growth in social-emotional skills, 76% substantially increased their rate of growth in acquisition and use of knowledge/skills, and 75% substantially increased their rate of growth in use of appropriate behaviors to meet needs before exiting *Early On*.<sup>3</sup>

***Early On* Michigan needs funding to adequately serve the families of children identified as eligible.**

**Increased funding of \$23.7 million to \$47.4 million would allow ISDs to hire more staff and provide more frequent, higher quality services to infants and toddlers who qualify. Of this, Michigan needs \$300K to fund a task force to examine the system and make recommendations necessary to strengthen *Early On*.**

<sup>1</sup>Michigan Student Data System (June 2024). "Period" and "Snapshot" counts; <http://EarlyOnData.com>.

<sup>2</sup>Referrals processed via centralized intake at 1800earlyon.org, *Early On* Public Awareness, 2019-2024.

<sup>3</sup>Michigan Department Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential. (2024). FFY 2022 Part C Annual Performance Report.

<http://www.michigan.gov/earlyon>

Additional resources: 1800EarlyOn.org; EarlyOnCenter.org

## ***State Funds are Improving Early On Continued Investment is Needed***

*Early On* is Michigan's early intervention system responsible for implementing the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C, for families of infants and toddlers with moderate delays to significant disabilities. With the creation of **Section 54d** in the State School Aid budget in fiscal year (FY) 2018-2019, Michigan invested statewide in *Early On* for the first time. Since FY2019, Michigan has seen small increases to Section 54d, with the FY2025 budget including a total allocation of \$23.7 million.

Though funding for *Early On* continues to fall short of the statewide need, the increased investment has already positively impacted families. A voluntary survey of Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) in October 2022 found that all 40 ISDs who responded reported either increasing the frequency of *Early On* services and/or hiring more qualified staff to perform evaluations and provide additional services to ensure families are connected to the support they need. As some ISDs noted:

- “54d has allowed us to make **better decisions based on need** for services rather than fitting services into limited budgets. We have been able to assign staff to families and set frequencies and length of visit time based on need and family preference.” - Dickinson-Iron ISD
- “These funds have not only provided **additional staff** who are special education certified but also have **reduced the average caseload size** (It was 150 PER provider prior to 54D), **increased the frequency of services**, and reduced the amount of time that Part C Only children needing a special education evaluation wait for MMSE determination. Our special education eligibility percentage has increased, our percent served 0-3 has increased, our percent of families who drop out or withdraw early has decreased. These funds have been **a game changer for the children and families** in our communities.” - Oakland Schools
- “This funding is critical to providing families in my community with **high-quality services** by Special Education certified personnel! Without it, I would not be able to provide families with access to the service providers they need.” - Livingston ESA

*I am not sure Nye would have made the progress that she did without Early On's help. To see this beautiful little girl blossom has been nothing short of a miracle in my eyes.*

-Tom and Mary Holbrook,  
Ottawa Area ISD

While the increased investments for *Early On* have resulted in more frequent and higher quality services to better meet families' and children's needs, Michigan continues to fall short. Michigan is seeing record high referrals to *Early On*, and the need for more qualified staff to evaluate and serve young children has never been more pressing. As Kalamazoo RESA put it, “Incremental monies are helpful but not as much when it doesn't provide substantial FTE.”

**In FY2026, Michigan must continue to increase state funds for section 54d – by doubling the state investment to \$47.4 M – to continue to improve the *Early On* system and subsequently, improve services for families and their young children.**