



For Immediate Release

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Media Contact:

Ryan Jarvi
Director of Communication
Northwest Education Services
231.922.6242 | rjarvi@NorthwestEd.org

State Expanding Free Preschool Access to More Families

North Ed, Community Partners Support Early Education Initiative

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. – With its 2023-24 budget announced late last month, the State of Michigan is increasing its investment by more than \$72 million to support and expand free preschool options for 4-year-olds through the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), allowing more families to save thousands of dollars in child care and providing youngsters with a strong foundation for academic success.

[GSRP](#) is Michigan’s state-funded preschool program overseen by the Michigan Department of Education’s (MDE) Office of Great Start. Funding is administered to the state’s 56 intermediate school districts, including Northwest Education Services (North Ed), to administer the program locally in partnership with area school districts, community-based providers and Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency.

“With the State’s investment to expand preschool access, even more families stand to benefit from the high-quality education that GSRP teachers and providers offer young children,” said Yvonne Donohoe-McCool, North Ed’s director of Early Childhood. “Early education can help a child’s development in a number of areas, from social skills to language, all of which will prepare them for success in school and positively impact their life after graduation.”

The funding allocated in the State budget will provide incentives to GSRP providers to expand their hours of operation from four instructional days per week to five days per week, and from 30 to 36 instructional weeks in the year, according to the [MDE’s budget summary](#).

Additionally, the State is adjusting the GSRP’s income eligibility threshold to allow more families to access the free preschool program. Families can now make up to 300% of the [federal poverty level](#), or \$90,000 per year for a family of four, and still be eligible for the program. Even if an applying family’s income is above the threshold level, families can still be considered for enrollment as an over-income placement.

A quality preschool experience can establish basic developmental skills in the areas of social interaction, play, language, emotional development, early literacy and fine motor skills that can have a long-term impact on everything from reading at grade level to graduating high school and being career-ready later in life. Regardless of a child’s present abilities, preschool programming aims to provide skills that support a successful transition into the routines and expectations of kindergarten.

As the intermediate school district for Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Leelanau counties, North Ed serves as the local coordinator for GSRP regionally and works with several

child care and early education providers to offer free preschool to area families. On average, around 700 students from the five-county region participate in GSRP each year.

North Ed surveyed local families who used GSRP during the 2022-23 academic year, and found that 94.4% of the 91 people who responded strongly agreed that their family had a positive experience with the program. Moreover, 96.7% of respondents strongly agreed that their children's teaching teams helped their child grow and develop.

One parent said: "GSRP is an amazing program! I am so glad all our kids have been able to go through! Love that meals are provided, so our picky eater can try new food items. My son's teachers were so great and welcoming, he enjoyed going to school every day!"

Other parents echoed comments about the "amazing" staff members and how they "go above and beyond to make sure they meet all kids' needs."

Earlier this year, North Ed launched the [Help Me Grow initiative](#) designed to improve access to information for parents with young children by providing a "no wrong door" approach. In addition to connecting families to resources like GSRP, Help Me Grow offers families an Ages and Stages Questionnaire that can be used at home to assess the development of children, allowing them to be connected to various supports at an early age if needed.

To access the questionnaire and other information, or to begin a free preschool application for GSRP or another early childhood program, visit www.helpmegrow-mi.org/northwest, email HelpMeGrow@NorthwestEd.org or call 231.922.7878.

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