



THE EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENT CORPORATION

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STATE UPDATE

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The Legislature returned from their two-week deer hunting/Thanksgiving break this week. The focus in Lansing remains on enacting a series of sweeping educational reforms in order for the state to be eligible to apply for the federal "Race to the Top" grant. The final guidelines have been released by the U. S. Department of Education and, as expected, Michigan will have to make some significant changes in education policy in order to have any chance of receiving the lucrative grants. It is anticipated that only 7-10 states will be awarded the \$3.5 billion in the first round of funding for which applications are due on January 19th.

The four most controversial reform measures that the legislature must undertake include:

- Lifting the charter cap allowing for the expansion of high-performing charter schools in Michigan.
- Creating an alternative certification process that would allow qualified, non-traditional teachers that want to teach into the classroom.
- Creating a turnaround plan for public schools that have been deemed to be failing after four or more years of unacceptable student achievement.
- Develop a system to link teacher evaluations to student performance.

All of these reforms and others that the Legislature is being encouraged to enact in order to make Michigan more competitive with other states are being met with different levels of opposition from various educational interest groups. This week, the state Senate passed their version of these reforms with limited Democratic support. The House Education Policy committee met all week and heard extensive testimony on all of the reform proposals. The House committee is expected to pass out their version of the reforms next Tuesday and it is likely the bills will end up in a Conference committee that will be charged with working out the differences between the House and Senate versions.

Public pressure to address the cuts to school funding appears to be growing as the impact of the cuts is starting to be felt in local school districts. Local school districts are beginning to make the difficult decisions regarding which programs will need to be reduced or eliminated at the semester break in order for the districts to make up for the reduction in state funding. Unfortunately, many districts are looking at pre-school programs as one area to be reduced. Please pay attention to what is happening in your local districts and do your part to let your local school boards know the value and importance of quality pre-school programs. Public school advocates continue to descend upon the Capitol on every session day demanding their local legislators find a way to fund their schools. Public outrage over the Legislature's inability to resolve the school funding issue will undoubtedly continue to build. It is imperative that we work to include support for early childhood program funding into this debate as well.