

# Early On<sup>®</sup> System Costs: Understanding Early Intervention in Michigan

Report Brief – December 2023



Advancing Evidence.  
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As part of the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five renewal grant, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Office of Great Start partnered with the American Institutes for Research<sup>®</sup> (AIR<sup>®</sup>) to study the costs of high-quality early intervention (EI) services. Michigan's EI program, called *Early On*<sup>®</sup>, provides services through intermediate school districts (ISDs) to children from birth to age 3 with disabilities and/or developmental delays.

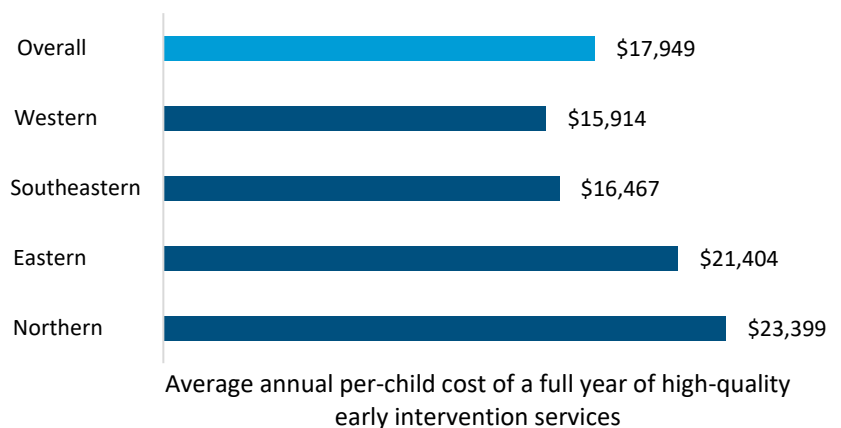
## Data and Methods

Through eight expert panel meetings in each of four regions (see map), more than 50 expert practitioners (including staff members from 40 ISDs) and family members defined an ideal high-quality system and provided information on resources needed to implement the ideal high-quality EI system. The team used the ingredients approach<sup>1</sup> to calculate the true cost, using regional salaries and prices where available. The true cost includes personnel, travel, materials, equipment, and facilities costs for ISDs to provide high-quality EI services and for MDE and other organizations to provide statewide supports.



## The statewide annual average per-child cost of providing a full year of high-quality early intervention is \$17,949.

This cost represents providing high-quality *Early On* services to a child for 1 full year, including outreach, referral, eligibility determination, individualized family service plan (IFSP) creation, service coordination and provision, transition, and state supports, divided by the 12,783 children reported as being enrolled in



<sup>1</sup> Levin, H., McEwan, P., Belfield, C., Bowden, B., & Shand, R. (2018). *Economic evaluation in education: Cost-effectiveness and benefit-cost analysis*. Sage.

services in February 2023.<sup>2</sup> Costs are driven by personnel, which represent 89% of costs; 7% of costs are for travel, and 4% of costs are for equipment.

**The average annual per-child cost of a full year of high-quality *Early On* services varies by region** due to differences in needed resources, number of children, and travel time. The annual average per-child cost ranges from \$15,914 (Eastern) to \$23,399 (Southeastern). The annual minimum per-child cost varies from \$11,357 (Southeastern) to \$17,461 (Eastern), and the annual maximum per-child cost ranges from \$19,187 (Western) to \$30,493 (Northern).

**The overall annual cost of the ideal high-quality *Early On* system statewide is \$229,443,320** and represents implementing an ideal high-quality EI system at the current service levels. The average annual ISD cost varies from \$1.5 million (Northern) to \$10.2 million (Southeastern).

*A high-quality EI system empowers families, supports and providers and creates informed communities working together to promote equitable access to EI services to help children thrive.*

## Summary and implications

Providing adequate funding for *Early On* is key to ensuring each child in Michigan has access to a high-quality EI system. AIR gathered feedback from ISD staff, MDE staff, and family members to generate the following recommendations to increase the quality level of the current EI system.

- **Support staff** by providing guidance on appropriate caseloads to help avoid burnout.
- **Build a stronger recruitment pipeline** by supporting pre-service providers and conducting outreach to colleges and universities.
- **Increase outreach to families** and ensure that funding is responsive to increased child enrollment.
- **Provide more state services to ISDs in areas of common need**, such as language interpretation services and data systems.
- **Align eligibility** for the system's two tiers (Part C only and Michigan Mandatory Special Education).
- **Take steps to smooth transitions and transfers for families and children** by providing additional guidance to ISDs and expanding options for care for 3-year-olds.

*The project described was supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0055-03-00, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

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