



Michigan Association
of Community and
Adult Education



Public policy
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Contact: Teri Banas
Communications Consultant
Michigan's Children
teri@michiganschildren.org
(517) 256-0174

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The Untold Benefits of Adult Education: Parents Helping their Children Learn

NOVI, Mich. -- April Flores, 35, dropped out of high school at age 16 and had four children before she returned to school for a high school diploma.

The former hotel housekeeper, now studying for a college degree in criminal justice at Livonia's Schoolcraft Community College, says it's not only the best decision she's made for her own future, but is convinced the return to school has been life-altering for her children, too. Despite frustrations and setbacks, her educational journey has taught her how to effectively guide her children's learning and advocate for them at school in ways she wasn't capable of doing before. Today, her children are all thriving in school and she couldn't be happier.

"They've all got their dreams now. My kids would not be working as hard to get their diplomas if they knew mom didn't have her diploma. The chances of them dropping out would be high," said Flores, whose children are ages 7-16.

As state Legislators and the Snyder Administration strive to improve Michigan's educational climate -- working to increase 3rd grade reading proficiency and aiming to become a top 10 state in education -- state public policy organizations such as Michigan's Children urge they take into account the powerful impact parents have on their children's learning. It's an often overlooked process, but one drawing more attention as policy experts consider the importance of two-generation strategies for improving K-12 education. Research has consistently shown that helping parents in their educational attainment helps their children, too. Young learners will face more struggles to read proficiency if their parents cannot support their learning.

"Efforts to improve third grade reading scores will not happen without parents engaging in their children's learning," said Michele Corey, Vice President for Programs at Michigan's Children. "When 42,000 Michiganders ages 18-34 have less than a ninth-grade education, an assumption cannot be made about parents' ability to engage in their children's learning. After all, a child's first school is the home, and their first teachers are their parents and caregivers."

The Lansing-based policy group, working with the Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education, is bringing together families from across Michigan – including the Flores family of Redford Township – to testify before state Legislators about the importance of family literacy at the state Capitol on Oct. 28, 2015 in a special FamilySpeak forum. Michigan’s Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that policymakers prioritize the needs of the most challenged children from cradle to career and their families – children of color, children from low-income families, and children shouldering other challenging circumstances.

Flores tried repeatedly and unsuccessfully for years to pass a GED test before she learned of a rare high school diploma program for adults at Novi Public Schools. There she found the supportive atmosphere she needed to grasp course content, particularly math, which had vexed her.

While cleaning hotel rooms and going to school during the day, Flores created family time around homework time. In the hours after school and work, she and the children gathered daily to do their schoolwork. “They would tutor me and I would help them,” she said. In that time, she also discovered her eldest, a son, 16, had learning frustrations similar to those she had as a teenager. He was failing school and discouraged. Realizing they both shared a tendency to “learn differently,” she enrolled him in an alternative high school in neighboring Garden City where he is a straight A student today and last year took home the school’s President’s Award.

Meanwhile, Flores also discovered that her daughter would tune out when she felt under pressure and frustrated with schoolwork, in particular essay writing. With a mom’s intuition, she encouraged her daughter to take a break before she became overcome with anxiety, promising her that Mom would stay by her side every step of the way. It worked. “Who would have thought I would have been able to do an essay?” she said laughing.

Flores donned a cap and gown and graduated before a crowd that included her family and tons of neighbors and friends last year. She proudly delivered an address to the audience. Her son couldn’t stop hugging her, she said. “I’m all about education now. It’s a must-have.

“As parents, we’re the best role models. We set the examples by what we do.”

Michigan’s Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children from cradle to career and their families, with a specific focus on the needs of children, youth and families with the most challenges in their lives – children of color, children from low-income families, and children served by the foster and juvenile justice systems. For more information about Michigan’s Children, email Michele Corey at michele@michiganschildren.org, or visit michiganschildren.org

FamilySpeak, modeled after Michigan’s Children’s signature KidSpeak® forums, mimics a traditional legislative committee hearing. Connecting the experiences of families directly with policymakers has provided firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities and has proven to be an effective advocacy strategy. Their voices have changed the trajectory of policy conversation and have resulted in additional champions for parent-driven solutions in the Legislature, several Departments and other local policymaking bodies.