April 28, 2020

Governor Whitmer,

As advocates for equitable access and opportunities in public education, we appreciate the difficult decisions that you have made to protect the public health and wellbeing of Michigan students and communities. Your leadership on critical programs, including Pandemic EBT, Disaster SNAP and distance learning planning has rightly focused on addressing the many needs of Michigan students.

In the coming weeks, we urge you to maintain this focus on equity as decisions are made about use of GEER funding. Limited federal regulations present an important opportunity to invest in the students hit the hardest by COVID-19, continuing to focus on the priorities identified by your fiscal 2020 and fiscal 2021 executive budget recommendations. Prioritizing equity during this time of fiscal restraint will be especially critical as student needs are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and our population of students living in poverty will likely grow.

Specifically, we encourage you to use the approximately $90 million in GEER funding to address structural challenges that will leave a lasting impact. These include:

**Positively impacting the digital divide.** Michigan’s many longstanding educational inequities have been highlighted, but perhaps none as clearly as the divide in access to devices, reliable broadband and educators trained in blended and computer-assisted learning. Funds can be used to support district creativity in bridging the gap in device access, creatively providing broadband, and thorough, well-executed professional development and support for teachers new to virtual education.

**Expanding learning opportunities for most impacted communities.** Nearly all Michigan students will need additional support after the pandemic passes. From high-quality summer learning institutes over multiple years, to restructured school calendars, adaptive active learning tools and additional in-school supports, districts will be charged with making up for learning losses. Using federal stimulus dollars to target high-poverty districts will help address the gaps exacerbated as a result of this crisis.

**Using this crisis to create future opportunity.** During the current crisis, everyone is working with very limited information and without the benefit of prior experience. As every stakeholder strives to make the best decisions possible, we should do everything we can to better position ourselves the next time there is a disruption to learning. Plans developed by schools and districts should be publicly available and include specific measurables. A common, unified interim assessment system should be deployed across the state to better understand student learning levels in the fall. All of this information will help identify successful practices after the pandemic has passed.

Michigan’s most vulnerable students are at the greatest risk for the greatest loss. By targeting resources to address continued learning now and in the coming years, we can begin to chip away at the systemic inequities to prevent them from persisting for another generation of students. By insisting on transparency and accountability, the struggles of this moment can inform and improve strategies moving forward.
As always, thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented moment. We look forward to your continued partnership in advancing equitable access and opportunities for Michigan’s students.

Very truly,

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Black Family Development, Inc.

Jametta Lilly, Chief Executive Officer  
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