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Michigan Department of Education Funds Statewide Collaboration between *Early On*® and The PLAY Project Autism Early Intervention Program

Ann Arbor, MI; July 2020 – The PLAY Project’s autism early intervention program has been awarded \$315,000 from The Michigan Department of Education – Office of Great Start – Early Childhood Development and Family Education to conduct a yearlong statewide pilot program focused on training early intervention professionals to help children with autism.

Seventy-five *Early On* providers, who offer early intervention services to children birth to 3 with developmental delays, will be trained in the model. Underserved, rural and urban school districts of Michigan, will be targeted for PLAY Project services at no cost to families. *Early On* will begin serving families in the fall of 2020. Between 300-400 families will be served by this state initiative this year.

Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by deficits in social interaction and repetitive self-isolating behaviors/interests that affects 1 in 54 children. Thousands of young children in Michigan with autism need services. Intensive early intervention has been shown to significantly improve the developmental outcomes for many of these children who can be identified reliably as early as 14 months. When asked about award, Rick Solomon MD, a developmental and behavioral pediatrician, founder of The PLAY Project, and medical director of the state initiative said, "We are grateful to the legislators and governor for funding this initiative and to the Department of Education for the opportunity to work with the *Early On* system to help the youngest children who have early signs of autism. Early intervention leads to the best outcomes."

Evaluation of The PLAY Project, funded by the National Institutes of Mental Health, was published in the peer reviewed *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* in 2014 (http://journals.lww.com/jrnldb/Fulltext/2014/10000/PLAY_Project_Home_Consultation_Intervention.1.as). The study showed that parents can learn to engage their hard to engage children with autism. The children receiving PLAY intervention significantly improved in their social development when compared to a control group. The PLAY Project model has been implemented on the state-level in Ohio and Illinois. Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities Division of Policy and Strategic Deputy Director Kimberly Hauck stated: "The PLAY Project allows our providers to take a targeted, high quality intensive autism intervention and marry it to our existing Early Intervention program, ultimately enabling both the family and child to flourish in a natural environment with the necessary support."