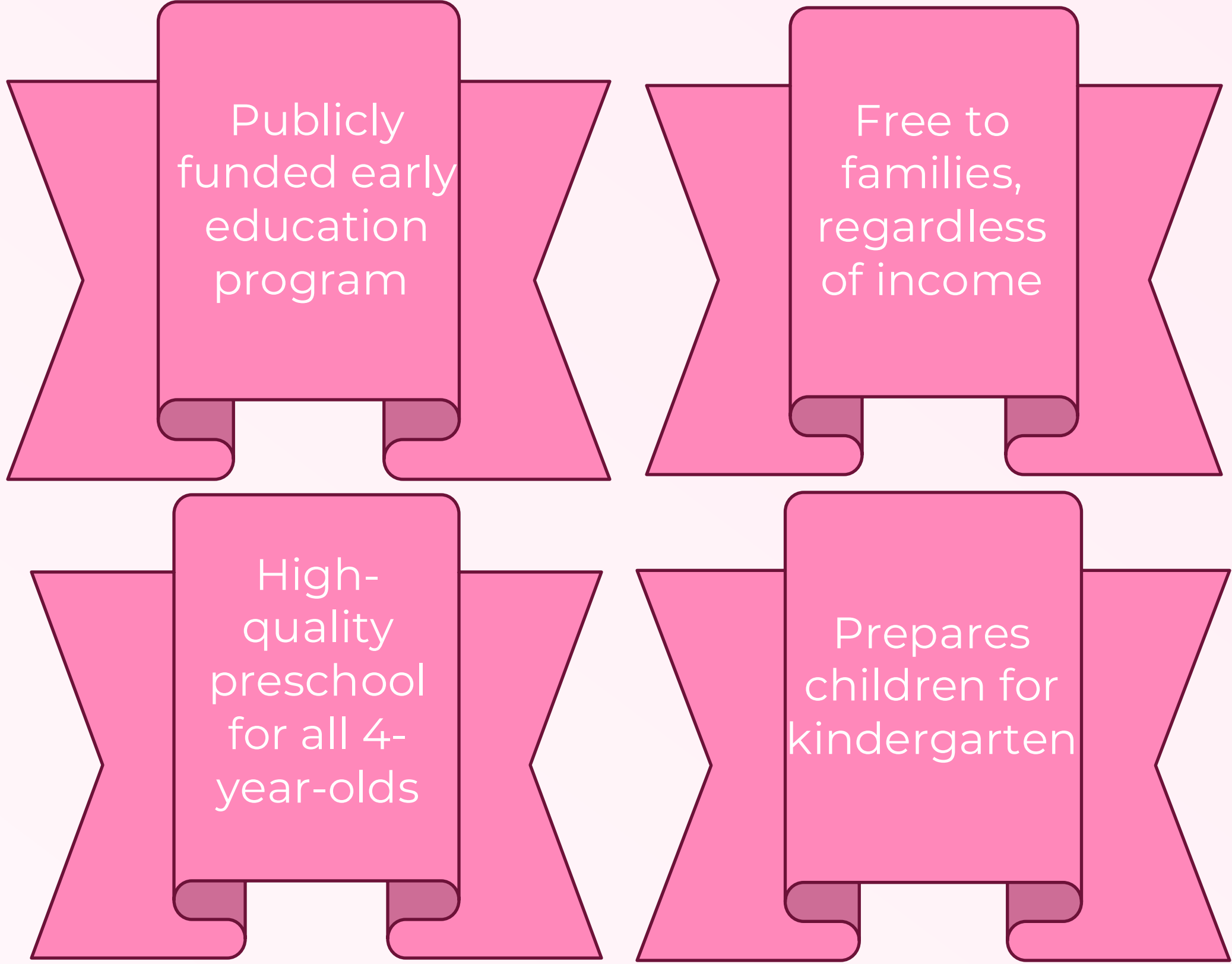


Breaking Barriers: Navigating the Road to Universal Pre-K in Michigan

Morrigan Potter| Master's in Public Policy| Michigan State University

What is Universal Pre-K?



"PreK for All gives kids the strong foundation they need to thrive in kindergarten while also saving families \$10,000 a year."

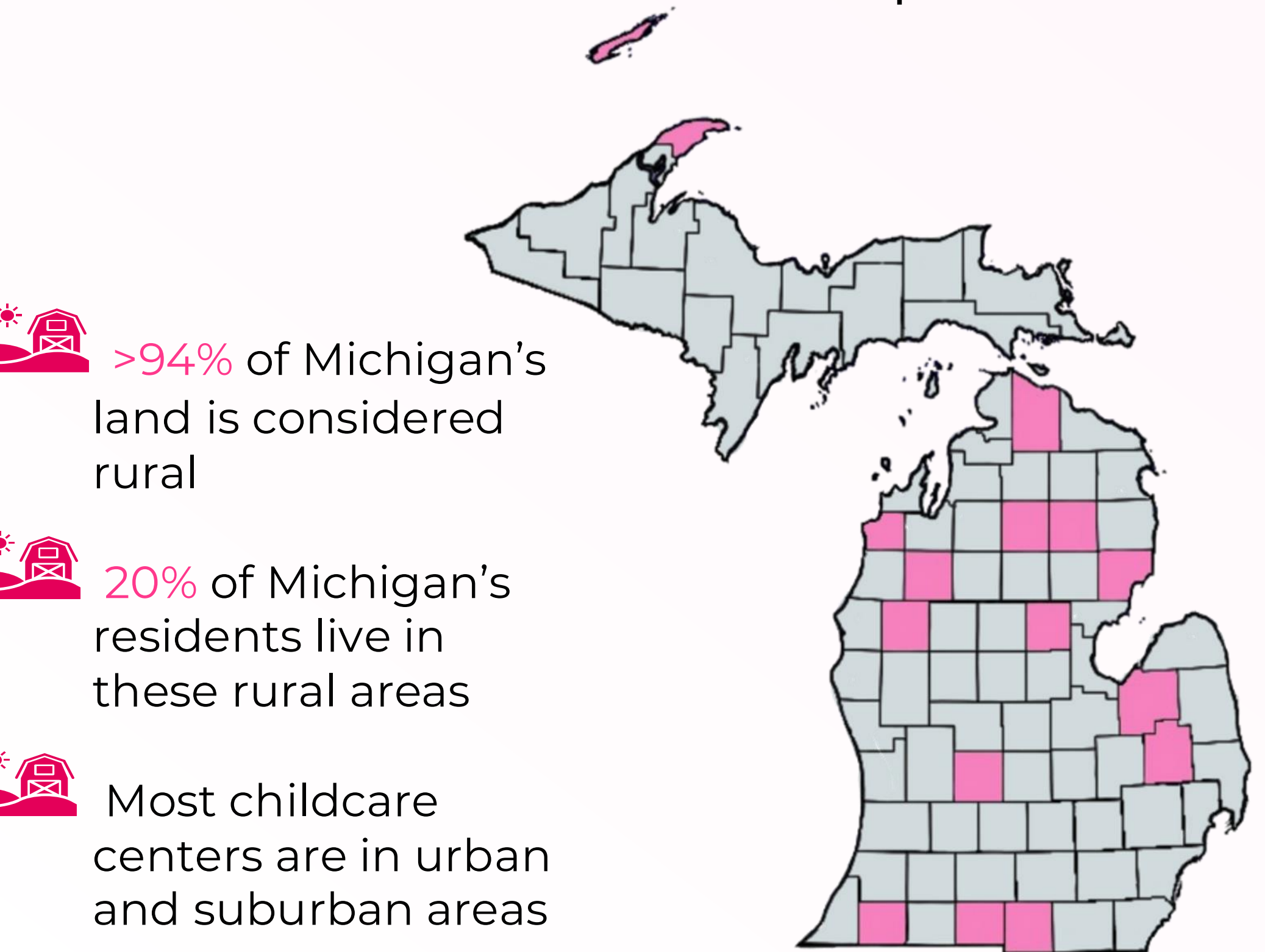
-Governor Whitmer 2025

Rural vs Urban Michigan

MSU has an ongoing study regarding the childcare deserts in MI

The pink squares represent childcare deserts in MI for ages 3-5

Childcare desert means there is more than 3 kids for every one available state funded spot



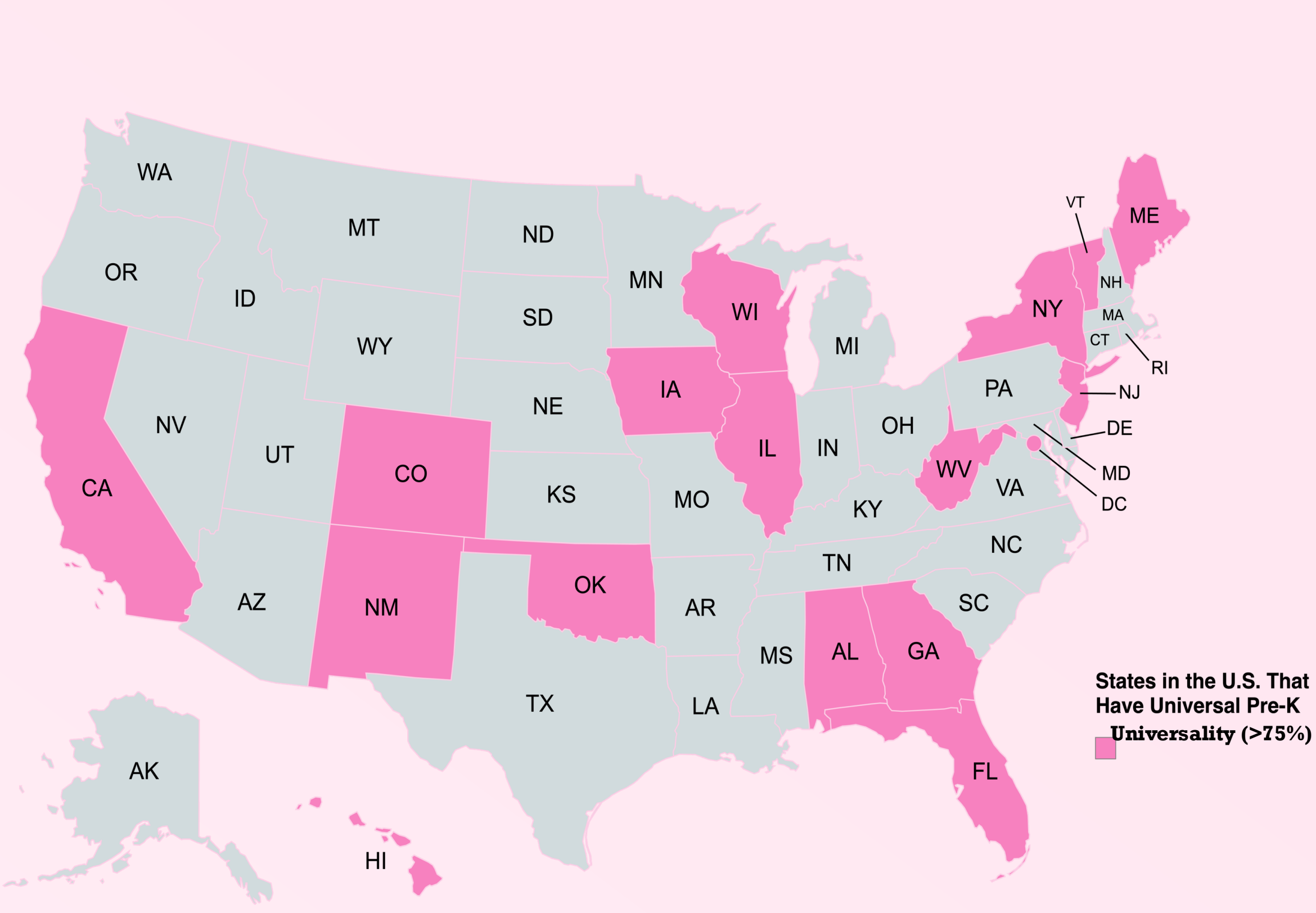
Benefits of Early Education

- Closes achievement gaps
- Boosts long term academic success
- Reduces crime and incarceration rates
- Increases projected lifetime earnings
- Expands employment opportunities
- ROI of 7-10% per year due to increased earnings and reduced social costs
- Allows working parents to focus on job responsibilities

What is Needed for Success?



Which States Have UPK



"Whitmer's budget included nearly \$700 million for the universal pre-K program, which would provide free preschool education for all 4-year-olds in Michigan."

-Matt Gillard President of Michigan's Children 2025

Challenges for Rural Areas

- Funding
- Workforce shortages
- Access and equity issues
- Political and bureaucratic hurdles
- Parental awareness and engagement

What State Can We Look At?

In Oklahoma...

- In the 2014/15 and 2018/19 school years, ~82% of children in rural counties were in state-funded pre-K
- Compared to 71% in nonrural counties
- Established and thrived using the five main steps to achieving UPK at the state level

What Has Michigan Done?

Established the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) in 1985

Created a Pre-K for All Roadmap

Increased funding in Early Education (at the state and local level)

Initiatives at the community level (GSRP, Head Start, etc.)

Lansing established a UPK program in 2021

What Does Michigan Need to Do?

Legislate UPK into state law

Expand rural access with flexible delivery models (in-person, online, hybrid, full-time, part-time)

Strengthen the Early Childhood workforce (higher teacher retention, better pay, more training, etc.)

Foster public private partnerships (public school system, grant foundations)

Ensure high quality standards and program accountability

Steps to Achieving Universality at the State Level



Legislation



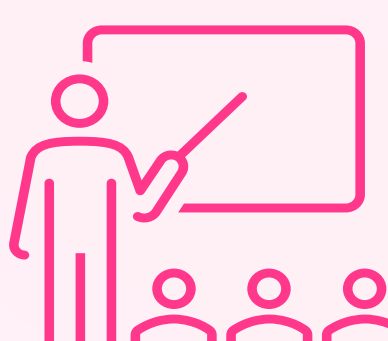
Community partnerships



Stable funding



Lasting political support



Dedication to teachers