



MichiganWomenForward



## Ruth Zweifler

(1929 - )

*Inducted: 2003*

*Locale: Ann Arbor*

*Era: Contemporary*

*Area(s) of Achievement: Education*

Ruth Zweifler has been a long-time advocate for at-risk youth, and has dedicated her life to ensuring that children receive the education to which they are entitled.

Perhaps Zweifler's greatest contribution to the children of Michigan is the Student Advocacy Center of Michigan (SAC) which she co-founded in 1975. She has served as its unpaid director ever since. The SAC, under the leadership of Zweifler, works to ensure that all children, especially minority, under privileged, and those at-risk, receive equal access to college preparatory classes, needed special education opportunities, and are treated fairly in regard to discipline. As the director of SAC, Zweifler travels throughout the state to sit in on Educational Planning Committee meetings of children with special needs and disciplinary hearings for students recommended for suspension and expulsion. The Center was instrumental in the challenge to end the standard practice of separating African American students who spoke with a black dialect into special education classes where they were not taught alongside their affluent, usually white, counterparts. One of the most vital roles of the SAC is to help kids stay in school. Over the years, Ruth Zweifler has helped over 7,000 alienated, overlooked, discriminated against, or disabled children continue their education and become productive citizens of their schools and communities.

Ruth Zweifler introduced the idea of dual enrollment at local community colleges to help troubled high school students. This program offered these students personal and specialized help in choosing classes and meeting educational needs while earning a high school diploma and community college credit. This program has prevented countless students from dropping out of school and giving up on themselves. She initiated the Positive Action Center at MacKenzie High School in Detroit, a community-operated in-school suspension program that has dramatically reduced out-of-school suspensions and expulsions among at risk students. She was also involved in the campaign to end the long-time practice of allowing teachers and administrators to spank students. Since 1995 she has focused her energies on challenging Zero Tolerance policies and practices that exclude vulnerable children from access to all public education.

The outstanding work and tireless devotion of Ruth Zweifler to the often forgotten and ignored children of Michigan has not been overlooked. The students whose lives she has touched and their families are grateful for her services and often acknowledge that they could not have made it without Ruth Zweifler. She has been awarded the Washtenaw County Bar Association Martin Luther King Award, the 2000 Jerome Strong Civil Liberties Award, and a Community Recognition Award from Washtenaw Community College. She is furthered honored with her induction into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.