

## **Appendix III:**

# **Listening Tour Summary**

In the months preceding the production of this report, the Commission spent many hours gathering public input from listening tour events held around the state and the Commission's website. As expected, Commissioners heard several conflicting viewpoints, especially pertaining to local control, assessments, and accountability. Below is a summary of that input. The Commission would like to thank everyone who attended a listening event or submitted comments on the website.

Commissioners visited West and Southeast Michigan for listening tour events that were open to the public. Commissioners twice attempted to visit Northern Michigan but were unable to due to extreme weather. At these listening events, Commissioners toured the hosting schools, met with educators and students, and engaged the public in small group discussions followed by question and answer sessions. The following questions were used to guide the small group discussions and were posted on the Commission's website for members of the public to provide their input.

### **What outcomes do you think Michigan's 21<sup>st</sup> Century education system should strive for?**

Answers to this question represented a wide variety of experiences, ranging from life skills to career readiness to foreign language skills. Commissioners consistently heard that residents want an education system that prepares students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy; however, there were differing views on how the term should be defined and what it entails. Members of the public noted specific skills such as programming or welding, and also identified "21<sup>st</sup> century skills" such as strategic thinking and mindfulness. Often heard were different variations of the "4C's" (creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking).

In West Michigan, many attendees focused on literacy and marketable skills. In Southeast Michigan, others desired good citizens, strong technology skills, and students prepared to raise successful families. Many respondents in Southeast Michigan also focused on systemic outcomes like equality, nutrition, and a reduction in achievement gaps.

Other desirable outcomes for listening tour attendees were soft skills, more arts, strong math skills, informed voters, and a system that respects teachers. Alongside these concerns, Commissioners also gathered many varying opinions on college vs. career readiness.

### **What does a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education system look like to you?**

Perhaps the most common theme heard across the state in response to this question was that a 21<sup>st</sup> century education system would include greater partnership between businesses, the community, and educators, and these educators would be respected, highly skilled, and

professional teachers. Respondents across the state also mentioned the need for the system to adapt to the student rather than the other way around.

In West Michigan, attendees talked about hands-on, inquiry-based, and project-based learning as the norm for a 21<sup>st</sup> century education. They expected a more regionalized system, principals as educational leaders, and different—often conflicting—changes to school choice. In Southeast Michigan, members of the public frequently cited a 21<sup>st</sup> century system that has highly engaged parents, more support for the individual needs of students, and more connection to higher education.

Other common features mentioned were an integrated early childhood system, safe and healthy schools, and high expectations for students.

Respondents across the state cited many things that differ between their vision of a 21<sup>st</sup> century education system and Michigan's current system, the most frequently mentioned being funding. Southeast Michigan attendees noted coordination amongst schools, the assessment system, and wraparound services. West Michigan attendees cited vocational education, the Michigan Merit Curriculum, and connections between pre-K, K–12, and postsecondary education.

## **From your standpoint, what expectations do you have for an education system?**

Respondents had many different expectations for an education system, including the development of life skills and lifelong learning, high-quality pre-K, and lower class sizes. Southeast Michigan residents reported that they expected the student needs to be met, a system with a clear and unified purpose, and equity, while West Michigan residents cited more accountability and a more inclusive system. Several attendees also cited fiscal responsibility.

### **How do you envision parents and students interacting in that system?**

Parent engagement was often cited as an opportunity to improve. Members of the public had varying views on how to achieve the higher levels of engagement that they expected. For example, West Michigan attendees cited Parent University and leveraging organizations like AmeriCorps, and Southeast Michigan attendees reported that cell phone apps, surveys, and more centralized information would be useful for both parents and students. Many respondents across the state reported that parents simply need more tools, information, and input regarding their child's education.

### **How do you envision the state investing in the system you expect?**

Respondents from all over Michigan suggested that funds should go where there is most need. There was considerable debate on funding for private schools, perhaps because it was a headline issue, as the listening events took place during the months leading up to state and presidential elections. Several respondents pointed to particular needs in facilities and technology, while others mentioned that the current system too frequently funds ineffective measures. Topics of discussion also included count day changes, more flexibility in use of funds, and equity.

### How should the system be governed?

Unsurprisingly, there was lively discussion over local control. Many respondents suggested that the current governing structure of schools is flawed, particularly around the quality of school board members. Several listening event attendees reported that the special interest influence on state education policy needs to be addressed, and others stated that no matter how the system is governed, accountability needs to align with that governance.

### How should the system be held accountable?

Assessments were another hot topic amongst respondents. Most respondents recognized the need for student assessments but wanted to see more reliance on growth, the use of multiple measures, and a recognition of the effects of disadvantage. In Southeast Michigan, respondents wanted to see immediate and actionable information from assessments. West Michigan attendees held a lengthy discussion of the current M-STEP exam and whether or not the state should keep it. Other accountability topics included aligning accountability with governance, more transparency, and providing proper information to parents.

## **What challenges should we work to overcome in order to achieve a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education system?**

Many participants across the state cited political pressures and funding as a barrier to transforming our education system. In Southeast Michigan, other challenges included a lack of accountability, competition, and an adherence to the current calendar that includes a summer break. West Michigan respondents reported that the state needed to stop blaming and start focusing on student achievement and the lack of parent involvement.

# Endnotes

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