

Guiding Principle 6:



Enhance Accountability

Michigan must build upon existing standards and performance measures to sustain a statewide P-20 accountability system that is benchmarked against high-performing states and nations. Michigan's accountability system should align responsibility and authority, allow educators to consistently measure student achievement and growth, and lead to high outcomes for students.



Rationale

A high-quality, consistent, effective accountability system is essential for the state to guide the education system to high outcomes and assess Michigan's progress toward producing world-class student achievement. This kind of accountability system must include metrics that provide feedback at each stage of the P–20 system to evaluate how well the system is working.

Students have a right to know they will be prepared to succeed in their careers. Parents have a right to know the quality of education their children are receiving. Educators have the right to know how they can adapt to increase student achievement. Businesses should have confidence that Michigan's P–20 education system is developing a future workforce that is innovative, creative, and globally competitive. Policymakers should utilize data to continuously examine the system in order to improve student achievement. Taxpayers have a right to know that their tax dollars are being spent effectively. The state has a duty to ensure that every student receives a quality education.

What does a 21st century Michigan look like?

Michigan is a national model for accountability and outcomes. The state has unabashedly high expectations for the system and does not accept excuses for poor outcomes. Parents, educators, policymakers, and business leaders are pushing toward a shared goal because they have access to timely and informative metrics, leading to cooperation, focused resource allocation, and student success.

The accountability system's credibility is widely acknowledged, and the system is fair, transparent, and accessible—helping everyone from parents to policymakers make decisions together that result in better outcomes for students. As better measures become available, Michigan explores opportunities to update and enhance its accountability system to better support improved classroom instruction and higher student outcomes, balancing system enhancements with the need to preserve longitudinal data.

The state's accountability system uses multiple measures to assess student growth and academic achievement, with the goal of ensuring students are college and career ready. These measures include pre-K, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce success indicators that match the skills needed in the 21st century. The measures show when the system is leaving students behind, creating a feedback loop to allow timely interventions that ensure students are not denied the opportunity for success.

The system meets the needs of its varied users and provides up-to-date information and performance data that allow comparisons between providers, schools, and educational institutions from pre-K through postsecondary. Performance data are accurate, clear, concise, timely, and easily understood by the public. The accountability system supports Michigan's competency-based learning model.

What does Michigan look like now?

Michigan has made some significant progress and has adopted K–12 standards that are among the most rigorous in the nation. It is important that these standards are maintained. In recent years, changes in assessments as well as other challenges with implementing the new standards have led to confusion and frustration. More work needs to be done to help teachers implement the new standards and to help teachers and school leaders understand how to improve their performance. The state needs to articulate a shared vision for successful student outcomes.

Currently, Michigan cannot sustain a comprehensive P–20 accountability system, as it lacks standards to assess pre-K and some areas of postsecondary education. Meanwhile, schools and districts lack data to ensure that

students are learning at their speed, not just their age, which prevents innovative approaches like competency-based learning.

Parents and educators need more help understanding the metrics produced by the system and how they can use these metrics to make better decisions for their children. Data is available to help parents and educators, but it is often difficult to access; to use for comparisons between schools and school districts; to locate data, such as graduation rates, test scores, and available career technical programs; and to assess college attainment measures.

State policymakers want to intervene and support low-performing schools, but lack clarity around exactly how to do that, leaving students and parents to fend for themselves in poor-performing environments.

Measuring Success

While we implement these strategies, we must track progress and outcomes by asking questions such as:

- How many Michigan children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn?
- How many students read at grade level by third grade?
- What are the outcomes for at-risk students compared to their peers?
- How many students have gained some college experience while in high school?
- Are college graduates employed in a field relevant to their area of study?
- How do Michigan high school students compare to their peers nationally and internationally in math and science?
- What percentage of high school graduates enroll in a postsecondary program (i.e., career technical program or college)?
- Is Michigan's data reporting system timely enough information for parents to make decisions about where to send their children to school? Can parents use Michigan's data reporting system to gather information on the quality of education in their school?

Key Strategies

- 6.1 Enhance student achievement measures
- 6.2 Hold the right people accountable
- 6.3 Improve data reporting
- 6.4 Move toward a competency-based learning model

6.1–Enhance Student Achievement Measures

Michigan has adopted rigorous standards that should be maintained to ensure that longitudinal data on student growth remains intact. Michigan's assessment system should be enhanced to better align and measure 21st century learning skills known to prepare our students in becoming both career and college-ready. Michigan's system should also disseminate useful data that informs classroom instructional practice and measures the performance of our schools for the general public and policymakers.

Details

Michigan's assessment system must be aligned with our college- and career-ready standards to measure and disseminate useful data for classroom instruction and public reporting. As improvements are made, every effort must be made to maintain longitudinal records for student growth over time. School personnel should be trained to use assessment results to improve skills and practice. Data should be collected, thoughtfully collated, and disseminated to help educators improve student instruction, and to provide a clear picture of instructional competence for the general public and policymakers.

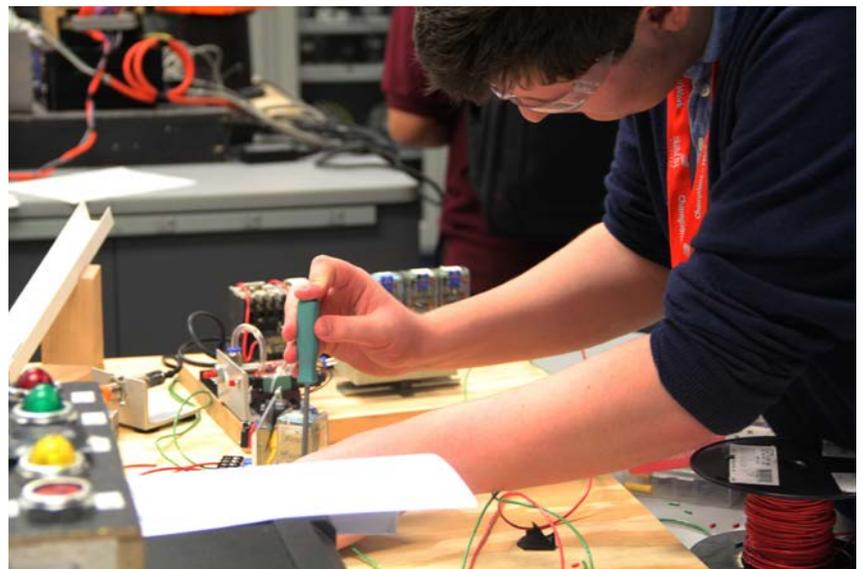


Photo taken at Grand Rapids Community College Applied Technology Center in Grand Rapids

Rationale

Moving forward, Michigan needs to continue to improve the measures used to assess performance. In particular, the state should adopt measures that better align to pre-K, K–12, and postsecondary outcomes and assess readiness at key transition points. These measures should also capture achievement gaps.

Potential areas of focus include:

- Developmentally-appropriate readiness at the start of kindergarten
- Third-grade reading proficiency in preparation for reading to learn
- Proficiency in math by eighth grade in preparation for science, technology, engineering, and math classes in high school

- College preparation test scores (such as the PSAT, SAT, or ACT) to have the option to pursue enrollment at a university and qualify for merit-based financial aid
- High school graduation rates
- Need for remedial coursework upon enrollment in college
- Postsecondary degree/credential attainment rates

Michigan also needs measures that allow the state to benchmark itself against leading states and nations. Michigan should continue participation in the NAEP and consider participation in PISA.

Over the longer-run, as standards-aligned assessments become available, Michigan needs to develop an assessment system that can provide educators with timely feedback during the academic year. This would allow teachers to inform their instruction and that can help better support a competency-based learning model.

Potential Responsible Party

MDE should lead this effort.

6.2—Hold the Right People Accountable

Create an accountability system with clear lines of responsibility that is well integrated with the state’s education governance system so that all stakeholders know what they are responsible for and can assess their performance. All actors in the system, from pre-K providers to teacher preparation institutes, should be held accountable for student achievement outcomes.

Details

The accountability system is the backbone for all Michigan education, from pre-K to higher education and teacher preparation institutes. Taxpayers, parents, and policymakers need to know how every part of the system is contributing to the success of students.

To start, the lessons from high-performing systems are clear. There must be a place where the buck stops. In strategy 9.1, the Commission recommends a realignment of Michigan’s governance structures to clarify that the Governor is ultimately responsible for educational outcomes in our state.

Beyond that, the Commission does not seek to design an entire accountability system, but rather provide guidance to policymakers as they design and implement such a system. Recognizing that there are other efforts underway to improve Michigan’s accountability system, the future measures and system should include the following elements:

- Identify expectations and consequences for all partners in the system, including educators, schools, districts, ISDs, and teacher preparation programs.
- Use multiple measures to gauge success. Accountability should be based primarily, but not exclusively, on academic factors.
- Use high-quality, state standards-aligned assessments that are comparable with those of other states.
- Require that student assessment data is disaggregated by subgroup and demand results across all subgroups.
- Make the data used in accountability decisions easily available.
- Build a collaborative, support-focused intervention strategy that, wherever possible, aims to improve rather than close schools.
- Explore alternatives to state-mandated school closure based solely on standardized assessments.

Rationale

The education of children is too important to be left to chance. Parents expect their children to receive a quality education—an expectation so strong that sometimes parents assume that their children are in quality schools, even when student achievement is low. Parents need measures

that are honest and easy to understand. They need to know how their children are performing and they need to be able to accurately assess the education options available to their children. If measures are going to be used to hold teachers and school leaders accountable, they need to be accurate, actionable, and easy to understand. Policymakers need to be able to assess the performance of the system as a whole, as well as individual schools and districts.

The accountability system should include a strategy for dealing with the state's struggling schools. One way to operationalize such a strategy would be to start with a focus on these schools. A process to accomplish this should include the following:

- Implement an assessment system that is efficiently administered to reduce the time away from teaching and learning in the classroom.
- Design a methodology (that includes multiple measures focused on, but not limited to, academic achievement) for identifying the low-performing schools.
- Identify schools based on that methodology.
- Partner with the schools (and their regional education service agency [RESA]) to:
 - Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to better understand the challenges the school faces, including an academic audit
 - Provide support to the school, including research-based practices and protocols, capacity building, and increasing access to resources to support improvement
 - Providing ongoing progress monitoring to fine tune the improvement strategies. Progress monitoring should include standardized assessment results as well as other measures that are specifically relevant to the school's challenges and improvement strategies.
- Hold schools accountable for results with enforceable consequences for failure.

Potential Responsible Party

MDE, in partnership with educators and policymakers statewide, must hold the right people accountable.

6.3–Improve Data Reporting

Provide an educational accountability data reporting system that is fair, transparent, accessible, and helpful to the general public and policymakers.

Details

Michigan must collect, analyze, and share quality data to hold all stakeholders accountable for performance outcomes. It is equally important that timely and relevant data are available to help educators, parents, practitioners, and policymakers make data-driven decisions in pursuit of continuous improvement.

Rationale

Once multiple growth and improvement performance indicators are chosen to constitute the accountability system, appropriate data aligned to these measures must be collected to assess growth and achievement. The data system is the tool that will help stakeholders at every level make decisions. It should be used to help parents make informed decisions about the education their children will receive and to empower teachers to improve their practice. It should be used by policymakers to hold districts accountable for results, provide incentives to districts demonstrating high growth and achievement, and allocate resources to districts that need targeted support.

An optimal data system will possess these qualities:

- **Aligned:** The system should precisely measure the indicators that make up the accountability system.
- **Timely:** The system must include timely, updated data that can be used to make informed decisions. A two- or three-year lag on data availability will stifle the ability of stakeholders to change course when necessary.
- **Trend-focused:** The system should allow users to see performance over time. In order to build a longitudinal trend line, it is important for the state to sustain/stabilize the indicators and assessments used for accountability.
- **Comparable:** The system should allow users to compare a school building/district to similar or nearby schools. When possible, Michigan’s performance should be benchmarked against high-performing states and nations.
- **Disaggregated:** All data elements must be disaggregated by subgroup, including race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.
- **Accessible:** The system should be user-friendly, especially from the perspective of a parent. It should be transparent and simple to navigate in order to find relevant information easily.
- **P–20:** The system should collect and display data across the education spectrum, including quality rankings for early childhood programs/providers as well as degree/certificate completion rates for Michigan’s public postsecondary institutions.

It is important to recognize that Michigan's current state longitudinal data system has made incredible strides over the course of the last decade. We should build upon and improve the infrastructure developed by CEPI, with a focus on making the system more relevant and accessible to families.

Potential Responsible Party

Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information should be responsible for implementing this strategy. CEPI should continue to act in partnership with key policymakers and leaders (the Governor, Legislature, superintendent of public instruction, and board of education) and gain input from K–12, higher education, the business community, philanthropic organizations, and nonprofit/advocacy organizations.

6.4—Move toward a Competency-based Learning Model

Over the next decade, Michigan should move its P-20 education system toward a competency-based learning model, an approach that focuses on the student's demonstration of desired learning outcomes as central to the learning process. The focus of learning should be shifted toward a student's progression through curriculum at their own pace, depth, etc. As competencies are proven, students will advance academically.

Details

Many Michigan students perform academically at a different achievement level than is expected for their age. The current system struggles to accommodate the diversity of achievement levels among students (whether a student is performing above or below grade level) especially as students move from lower to higher grades. This creates needless instructional complexity for educators, and means that meeting each student where she or he is academically and developmentally is virtually impossible.

A competency-based learning model (also called mastery-based or proficiency-based) is a model whereby students advance in the curriculum only once they have mastered the content. This is in contrast with the current system, whereby students are advanced after the passage of time, for instance, a school year.

This kind of model means that a student could be learning at an “eighth-grade” math level but a “fifth-grade” reading level (quotes are used here because true competency-based models do away with grade levels). It would also allow children learning ahead of their age group to accelerate their education.

To implement a competency-based learning model, Michigan should examine the state's districts that are already implementing this model and put the structures in place to enable competency-based teaching and learning in additional districts. For example, Commissioners saw examples of competency-based learning in districts in the Upper Peninsula and West Michigan. Michigan should then create incentives to help districts make the transition. The state should consider funding additional pilot projects around the state and (as Commissioners heard in Traverse City) should ensure that adequate training is provided to educators to allow the effective implementation of competency-based learning. The assessment system associated with a competency-based learning system should allow for multiple factors.

To support and complement a competency-based learning model, the following changes should also be considered:

- Provide more information on high school diplomas, like qualifications, grades/proficiency levels, and classes taken.
- Develop and fully integrate a system of career and technical education and training into the P–20 system.
- Use competency-based learning models with special education students to discover the gifts and talents of these students.

Rationale

In Michigan's current system, students have a set amount of time to master content; they are moved on when that time is over, whether they have learned it or not. Time is the constant, and learning is the variable. Michigan should move to a system where learning is the constant and time is the variable. As Commissioners heard from leaders in the Upper Peninsula who have already begun to implement this model, education should adapt to the child, rather than force a child to adapt to the system. This ensures that there are no dead ends for students, they master all content, they are consistently engaged in their learning, and they develop the skills needed for a 21st century economy.

Potential Responsible Party

MDE should lead implementation of this effort.