STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

GLENN M. MALEYKO, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

January 14, 2026

Dear Michigan Legislators,

As we begin the 2026 legislative year, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is energized by the opportunity to work with you in positive collaboration, grounded in the belief that every Michigan student deserves a world-class education and that our work begins with Students First. MDE is grateful for the progress made in recent legislative sessions, and as state superintendent I am committed to building on those successes with shared responsibility, a clear focus, urgency of action, and strong results. Together, we can strengthen public education across Michigan while ensuring that policy and budget decisions remain centered on student opportunity, equity, and long-term impact for communities across our state.

The Michigan Department of Education and the State Board of Education appreciate the legislature's continued commitment to Michigan children and the educators who serve them. We appreciate the legislature's passage of a fiscal year 2026 budget that will help the state make continued progress toward goals in Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan. Of particular note were the 4.6% increase in the per pupil foundation allowance, 25% increases in support for at-risk students and bilingual students, and the 5.7% increase for Section 51e for students with disabilities, a category that has increased more than four-fold in the last few years. The inclusion of $64.4 million for research-based, high-quality early literacy materials will quicken the implementation of the new K-12 literacy/dyslexia law (MCL 380.1280f), and $65 million will provide lower class sizes in high-poverty K-3 classrooms in four districts, a pilot that should rightly serve as prelude to lower class sizes in all high-poverty K-3 classrooms in future budgets. The budget also includes continued funding for Michigan School Meals, greater access to Career and Technical Education, and assistance for economically disadvantaged children to be able to afford Advanced Placement exams, as more of our children are taking rigorous Advanced Placement courses.

In the coming year, the department will continue a statewide listening tour to support renewal of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan. We have already begun meeting with legislators and stakeholders and will continue these conversations across the state. The priorities outlined below reflect practical, high-impact actions that will help accelerate progress toward the eight goals of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan while ensuring that all students receive a high-quality education regardless of zip code or circumstance.

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Here are our 2026 legislative priorities:

1. **Literacy and early learning implementation at scale**

   Michigan has built strong momentum in literacy through recent legislation and coordinated statewide efforts, including a statewide Literacy Summit convened with the State Board of Education, MDE, and the governor's office. The next phase of this work must focus on consistent, high-quality implementation across districts.

   2026 Requests

   A. Structured literacy professional learning

      We appreciate prior investments in Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading & Spelling (LETRS) and related professional learning aligned to the science of reading. Thousands of educators have completed training, with many more currently enrolled, and districts report improved instructional practice and stronger student outcomes. We are asking the legislature to provide continued funding and implementation support so all elementary educators responsible for early literacy instruction, including preschool through grade 5 where applicable, can complete high quality structured literacy training aligned to Public Acts 146 and 147 of 2024 (MCL 380.1280f). This LETRS mandate and investment should be paired with clear statewide expectations and reasonable implementation timelines.

   B. High-quality literacy materials requirement

      To strengthen implementation of MCL 380.1280f, the department recommends requiring districts, ISDs, and public school academies to select Tier 1 elementary reading curriculum materials from the department-approved list of evidence-based programs. This requirement would ensure statewide coherence and equitable access to high-quality literacy materials.

   C. Continued section 35m funding for high-quality literacy materials

      The department requests at least $100 million in continued Section 35m funding to support district implementation of evidence-based literacy curriculum, screening, progress monitoring, and intervention systems in preparation for full compliance beginning in the 2027 to 2028 school year.

2. **Adequate and equitable school funding**

   Michigan has made important progress in recent budgets, particularly in funding for economically disadvantaged students, English learners, students with disabilities, early childhood education, and pupil transportation. These gains must continue as we reach toward fulfilling the School Finance Research Collaborative's funding recommendation.

2026 Request:
We are asking the legislature to continue improving the adequacy and equity of school funding, with particular focus on at-risk, English learner, special education, as well as funding for early childhood education, and pupil transportation.

3. **Disrupted education protections**

Public Acts 10, 11, and 23 of 2024 strengthened protections for students experiencing foster care. Additional statutory gaps remain for students experiencing homelessness and students involved in the juvenile justice system.

2026 Request:
We are calling upon the legislature to enact statutory protection that:

- Extend disrupted education protections to students experiencing homelessness and juvenile justice involvement.
- Ensure assignment of an appropriate education decision-maker.
- Require consistent statewide processes for credit accrual, transfer, diploma decisions, and personal curriculum options.

4. **Expanded learning and summer programming**

Michigan students benefit from high-quality expanded learning opportunities, particularly summer programs that combine academic support, enrichment, and social emotional development. Initiatives including the Summer Discovery Program through the Ballmer Group demonstrate the success of these efforts by providing free educational experiences that keep youth engaged in learning while enabling parents to continue working. State investment can also be leveraged through strategic partnerships with philanthropic organizations to expand access, enhance program quality, and scale proven models while ensuring programs remain aligned to local needs and accountability expectations.

2026 Request:
We request dedicated funding to support district-operated summer learning programs targeted at students who would most benefit, including those experiencing learning gaps, economic disadvantages, or disrupted education. These programs have demonstrated positive impacts on literacy, attendance, and student engagement when they are well-designed and adequately funded.

5. **Balanced statewide assessment system**

Michigan should strengthen instructional coherence and reduce duplicative local testing by moving toward a true balanced statewide assessment system. Establishing this system will ensure that assessments are aligned to instructional goals and provide meaningful data to support teaching and learning.

2026 Request:
We are requesting legislative support for a two-year phase implementation of

Smarter Balanced interim assessments connected to formative instructional supports. This transition would reduce reliance on multiple benchmark assessments, provide educators with actionable instructional support, and allow statewide coherence while gradually phasing out reimbursement for off-the-shelf assessments. This approach is projected to generate long-term state savings after initial implementation.

6. **Technology and innovation in education**

Michigan must ensure equitable and responsible adoption of artificial intelligence in K-12 education by establishing a statewide AI policy and support framework. This framework would provide clear guidance, model policies, and implementation tools aligned with national best practices to strengthen student outcomes and improve government efficiency. Without this investment, Michigan risks falling behind in AI adoption and widening educational inequities.

2026 Request:
We propose an investment of $2.75 million over five years to establish statewide AI guidance, model policies, and implementation tools to ensure equitable and responsible adoption across districts. In addition, we also recommend $3.5 million ongoing to establish a standards-aligned statewide technology and innovation framework with hands-on learning opportunities and professional learning for educators.

7. **Career readiness and high school relevance**

Michigan has made important strides in career readiness and high school relevance and now seeks to expand these efforts by strengthening Career and Technical Education (CTE).

2026 Request:
We propose continued investment to expand state-approved CTE programs through competitive grants, middle school pilots, and public awareness efforts.

8. **Educator workforce stability, safety, and smart compliance**

A stable, effective educator workforce depends on policies that prioritize student safety, support educator retention, and promote smart, fair compliance with state requirements. As districts navigate persistent staffing shortages, outdated systems and overly punitive regulations can undermine workforce stability and divert resources away from classrooms. MDE would like to focus on modernizing state policies to protect students, reduce unnecessary burdens on educators and districts, and ensure accountability measures are targeted, effective, and aligned with today’s educational realities.

2026 Requests:

A. Fund updated fingerprinting for active educators

We recommend that the legislature considers legislation to require updated fingerprinting for all active educators to ensure complete inclusion in the Michigan State Police's Criminal History Record Internet Subscription Service (CHRISS), particularly for individuals initially fingerprinted prior to 2016. We also recommend state funding to cover the cost of this requirement to protect student safety, support educator retention, and avoid shifting financial responsibility onto educators or local districts.

B. Modernize penalties for credentialing errors

We are asking the legislature to update language in the School Aid budget and other related statutes to ensure penalties for credentialing errors are proportionate, targeted, and focused on true noncompliance rather than inadvertent administrative mistakes. Reforms should recognize the realities of ongoing staffing shortages, prevent excessive state aid deductions for correctable errors, and avoid undermining districts' ability to deliver high-quality educational programs.

C. Expand MDE authority to act on educator credentials

We request that the legislature grant MDE the authority to take timely action against educator credentials when staff are convicted of serious criminal offenses that are not currently included in statute, particularly those involving evolving forms of misconduct such as online grooming or technology-facilitated predatory behavior. Updating state law will help ensure credentialing authority keeps pace with changing risks and strengthens protections for students.

D. Improve State Tenure Commission operations

We request that the legislature update statutes governing the State Tenure Commission by allowing remote or hybrid meetings to increase participation, geographic representation, and operational efficiency. Additionally, we recommend establishing a statewide, consistent process for documenting and verifying teacher tenure status to support lawful personnel decisions, reduce administrative burden on districts, and provide clarity for educators throughout their careers.

E. Continue educator recruitment and retention efforts

We appreciate the legislature's commitment to addressing the teacher shortage in Michigan. While we have made significant progress, we must continue funding and efforts to recruit and retain high quality educators and support staff in Michigan schools.

9. **Student health and learning conditions**

Students cannot fully engage in learning when their basic needs are unmet. A strong education system depends not only on classroom instruction, but also on the conditions that support students' health, well-being, and access to essential resources. Prioritizing student health and learning conditions ensures that every learner has the foundation they need to succeed.

2026 Requests:

A. Codify Michigan School Meals

Michigan School Meals (MSM) has been very successful in providing one breakfast (over 488,115 average per day) and one lunch daily (over 876,880 average per day) at no cost to all Michigan public school students. MSM improves nutrition security, reduces stigma, and increases positive student outcomes. While this program is funded in the School Aid budget, it is imperative to ensure its longevity by codifying MSM in the Revised School Code.

B. Preserve the Michigan eLibrary (MeL)

The $4.5 million Michigan eLibrary (MeL) is an anywhere, anytime library for all Michigan residents. It includes both a library of digital resources focusing on topics such as vocational and college test preparation, workforce skills development, small business development, and basic home and automotive repair, as well as educational content for students from preschool through college. It also includes an interlibrary loan system that allows for the sharing and delivery of physical books and materials throughout the state. The MeL enables equitable access to information resources for all residents of Michigan, including small and rural schools, colleges, libraries, and communities. It is crucial to ensure that the MeL receives the funds that it requires to continue serving Michigan residents.

C. Build a Student Engagement Center at the Library of Michigan

On January 3, 2026, State Librarian Randy Riley passed away suddenly at age 63. Riley, of East Lansing, had been state librarian since 2014 and was a Library of Michigan staff member since 1989. Riley is being remembered for his many contributions during a career dedicated to making reading more accessible to the public. One such way to continue his legacy would be to fulfil his idea of creating a student engagement center within the Library of Michigan. This space would support Michigan students' learning of Michigan history, early literacy, and good citizenship. Over 100,000 students visit the Michigan Historical Center building annually and most do not get the benefit of using and learning from Library of Michigan resources. This student engagement center, to be named after Randy Riley, would provide the staff and curriculum to do that.

10. **MDE talent recruitment and retention**

MDE has 1% of the state government workforce but is responsible for distribution and oversight of more than 20% of the state's revenue. MDE team members are experts in their fields. Expertise at this level requires years of experience and education. Often, teachers and administrators in school districts are interested in serving as staff members at MDE but choose not to move into state service due to the incompatible educator and state employee retirement systems. Those who do come to MDE from local districts often do so after retirement and thus only serve in the department for a few years.

2026 Request:
We urge the legislature to consider legislation that would allow educators who enter state service at MDE the option to remain in the Michigan Public School Employees' Retirement System (MPSERS), strengthening recruitment and retention of experienced staff who support statewide systems and outcomes.

11. **Michigan Blue Ribbon Schools**

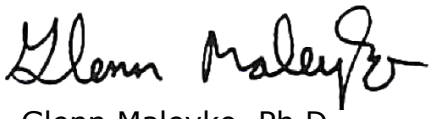
In previous years, the U.S. Department of Education bestowed the prestigious National Blue Ribbon Schools designation in recognition of schools that excelled in academic performance or made significant strides in closing achievement gaps among different student groups. However, this year the federal education department discontinued the national program after the nominations had been submitted. MDE and the State Board of Education wanted to make sure these outstanding schools in our state get the recognition they deserve and held a special ceremony honoring sixteen high-performing Michigan schools that were recognized as Blue Ribbon Schools.

2026 Request:
We are asking for a small amount of funding to continue this statewide program to recognize these deserving schools and to continue to honor their achievements.

We look forward to working together on these legislative priorities in partnership with the legislature, the governor's office, and stakeholders across Michigan. Through continued collaboration and shared responsibility, we can renew Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan, strengthen public education statewide, and ensure that every decision we make reflects a clear commitment to putting Students First.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Glenn Maleyko, Ph.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

cc: State Board of Education
Governor Gretchen Whitmer
Lt Governor Garlin Gilchrist II
State Budget Director
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