

The Best Education System for Michigan's Success

A Blueprint for Educating Michigan's Residents to Build the
Best Businesses, Win the Best Jobs, and Achieve the
American Dream

Prepared for Gov. Rick Snyder
Prepared by the 21st Century Education Commission
February 28, 2017

Michigan at a Glance

Early Childhood

- Number of children ages 0–4: 574,000¹
- Number of child care providers: 8,484²
- Number of children enrolled in state-funded prekindergarten: 48,854³
- State investment: \$720 million⁴

K–12

- Number of K–12 students: 1,491,151⁵
- Number of students enrolled in charter schools: 146,119⁶
- Number of students participating in schools of choice: 123,121⁷
- Number of students enrolled in career and technical education: 126,502⁸
- Number of traditional school districts: 540⁹
- Number of charter schools: 302¹⁰
- Number of intermediate school districts: 56
- State investment: \$14.9 billion¹¹
- Fourth-grade reading rank on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): 41st
- Eighth-grade math rank on the NAEP: 37th
- Average SAT score: 1001¹²
- Four-year graduation rate: 79.8 percent¹³

Higher Education

- Number of students enrolled in community colleges: 277,589¹⁴
- Number of community colleges: 28¹⁵
- Number of students enrolled in public universities: 259,754¹⁶
- Number of public universities: 15¹⁷
- State investment for community colleges: \$395.9 million¹⁸
- State investment for universities: \$1.4 billion¹⁹
- Students required to enroll in remedial courses: 27 percent²⁰
- Residents ages 25–64 with a postsecondary credential: 43.3 percent²¹

Cover photo taken at Countryside Academy in Benton Harbor

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Letter from the Chair

Dear Governor Snyder and fellow Michiganders:

On behalf of my colleagues on the 21st Century Education Commission, I am honored to share the Commission's final report—*The Best Education System for Michigan's Success: A Blueprint for Educating Michigan's Residents to Build the Best Businesses, Win the Best Jobs, and Achieve the American Dream*. This report was created through a collaborative effort, and every element of the report garnered a high level of consensus. I am proud of this work and honored to have been part of this diverse group whose members share a commitment to educating our young people.

As public servants, educators, business leaders, mentors, parents, and grandparents, my fellow Commissioners and I share a common goal: for our children to do better than us. We want them to participate fully in our democracy, create thriving communities, and build a strong economy. However, we also share a common fear—that this dream is slipping further and further away for too many of our state's children.

Executive Order 2016-06 issued us a bold and comprehensive charge: analyze top-performing states and nations and, based on that research, offer recommendations to significantly improve student achievement and career preparedness. We believe that the framework outlined in this report will help shape Michigan's education system for the next 30 years and restore the promise of the American dream for Michiganders across our great state.

The importance of education has been recognized as fundamental and vital to Michigan and its citizenry since its inception. Since the Northwest Ordinance passed in 1787, Michigan has encouraged education and intellectual and scientific pursuits in its constitution, requiring funding for the promoted pursuits at the K–12 and university levels.²²

This document continues in that esteemed tradition. Our intent is for this report to serve as a blueprint rather than a checklist—a design for the future. There are many critical decisions that will be necessary in the coming years. We urge our state leaders to maintain the same focus as this Commission—improved outcomes for students.

Please join me, as well as my fellow Commissioners, in accepting the challenge to act now to build a high-performing education system that delivers TALENT: A citizenry that is transforming, aspiring, leading, educating, innovating, and transcending.

Very respectfully,



Thomas J. Haas, Ph.D.
President, Grand Valley State University

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the time and talent of many stakeholders across the state. Commissioners would like to thank the residents who visited our website, participated in online polls, and attended listening tour events. Your input was valuable in informing our thinking and developing recommendations.

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- *West Michigan:* Kim Ashton, Gayle DeBruyn, Chris Hanks, Kelly Hillary, Kevin Holohan, Jerry McComb, Mike Posthumus, Tim Priest, Rob Rodriguez, Jennifer Teaker, and Cindy Todd.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	11
Call to Action	15
Our Opportunity: Lessons Learned from High-performing States and Nations	20
Education Strategies that Work	20
Essential Cultural Elements.....	22
Forward Progress in Michigan.....	23
Framework for Success: The Commission’s Recommendations	25
Our Vision for the Future	25
How We Get There: Nine Principles for a World-class Education System	25
Guiding Principle 1: Elevate the Education Profession	36
1.1—Enhance Teacher Preparation	40
1.2—Create Multiple Career Pathways	42
1.3—Improve Educator Professional Development.....	44
1.4—Strengthen Building-level and Organizational Leadership	45
Guiding Principle 2: Build Capacity to Do What Works	46
2.1—Support State Priorities with the Necessary Resources and Tools	49
2.2—Support Implementation of Evidence-based Practices.....	50
Guiding Principle 3: Invest in an Efficient and Effective System of Public Funding	51
3.1—Identify Efficiencies	54
3.2—Determine the Base Funding Amounts for K–12.....	55
3.3—Determine the Additional Resources Needed for Disadvantaged Students	57
3.4—Develop Funding Formulas to Support the System	58
Guiding Principle 4: Increase Access to Postsecondary Education	59
4.1—Determine the Proper Funding Level for Higher Education.....	62
4.2—Support Universal Access to Community College for All Michigan Students	63
4.3—Make Four-year Degrees More Affordable for Students Who Demonstrate Merit.....	65
4.4—Support All Students with Counselors Skilled in Career Guidance and Postsecondary Access	66
Guiding Principle 5: Partner with Parents	68
5.1—Connect Human Services to Schools.....	72
5.2—Nurture Parent and Educator Collaboration	74
5.3—Create User-friendly Tools to Navigate Educational Options	76
Guiding Principle 6: Enhance Accountability	78
6.1—Enhance Student Achievement Measures	82
6.2—Hold the Right People Accountable	84
6.3—Improve Data Reporting.....	86

6.4—Move toward a Competency-based Learning Model.....	88
Guiding Principle 7: Ensure Access to High-quality Learning Environments.....	90
7.1—Assist Poorer Communities with Funding for School Facilities	93
7.2—Support Public School Academies with Funding for School Facilities.....	94
Guiding Principle 8: Invest Early	95
8.1—Support Universal Preschool for All Four-year-olds	99
8.2—Develop and Retain a Quality Early Childhood Workforce.....	100
8.3—Increase Access to Quality Services Through Improved Coordination	102
8.4—Enhance Early Learning Outcome Measurement and Tracking.....	104
Guiding Principle 9: Update K–12 Governance.....	106
9.1—Reform State Board of Education Governance	110
9.2—Enhance the Function and Capacity of the Michigan Department of Education	112
9.3—Reconceptualize the Structure and Function of Intermediate School Districts.....	114
9.4—Support Local Efforts to Consolidate.....	116
9.5—Ensure Access to High-quality Educational Options for All	117
An Investment in Our Future	119
Where to Start	127
Appendix I: Public Education in Michigan: The Public Good.....	131
Appendix II: About the Commission.....	133
Appendix III: Listening Tour Summary	134

Terms and Definitions

- **Child:** This report uses the term child to refer to young children from birth through preschool entry—when education is generally informal. The report also uses the term to refer to young people in our state.
- **Classroom:** Learning occurs in many different places. The term classroom is referring to any place—physical or virtual—where learning happens.
- **Postsecondary credentials:** Degrees are not the only pathway to postsecondary success. Certificates, industry certifications, and apprenticeships also offer participants an opportunity to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to enter a particular field. Credentials may be awarded by career and technical programs, community colleges, or employers. The quality of programs varies dramatically, as does completers' earning potential. This report advocates only for credentials that are valued by employers and increase completers' wages above the expected wage of a high school graduate.
- **P–20:** A P–20 education system provides services and supports to children and students from prenatal (P) through graduate school (grade 20). It encompasses three existing systems: early childhood, K–12, and higher education.
- **Parent(s):** The term parent is used broadly throughout this report and refers to a child's legal guardian(s). Parents are children's first and primary teachers, and they are critical partners in education.
- **Postsecondary education:** Postsecondary education includes all education that occurs after high school that leads to a marketable credential. This includes certifications and certificates, and all forms of degrees, including associate, bachelor's, and professional/graduate degrees.
- **Student:** The term student refers to anyone participating in formal education from preschool through graduate school. Formal education can take a variety of forms and occurs in many different settings.

Introduction

We want our children to do better in life than we have. It is among the most basic tenets of American society to have the next generation do better than the one that came before. For nearly a century, the American dream has promised that if our children work hard and push to their full potential, they will achieve a higher standard of living than their parents.

For many of us, the American dream was ubiquitous. Nearly all children (93 percent) born in Michigan in the 1940s earned more than their parents; however, that started to change for children born as soon as the early 1950s. Still, 77 percent of these early baby boomers earned a higher income than their parents. The story becomes darker for children born in the 1980s—Michiganders who are now in their midthirties. Less than half of them (46 percent) are earning more than their parents at the same point in their lives. The world has changed. We now live in a global economy in which markets and labor forces are no longer local. Our education systems, structures, and supports that were designed to propel the next generation forward are no longer strong enough to meet the demands of a changing economy.²³

The Economy has Changed

As recently as 30 years ago, Michiganders could earn a high school diploma, enter the workforce, and earn a wage that could support their family. High-wage manufacturing jobs were the foundation of our economy, and our shared economic prosperity was among the highest in the country. Over the past three decades, the story has changed. In the 2000s, Michigan lost over 766,000 private sector jobs.²⁴ By 2009, the state had lost more automotive jobs than remained.²⁵ With the coming of technological advances and globalization, the high-wage, lower-skilled jobs

that were the foundation of our state's economy for a generation have disappeared and are unlikely to return. A high school diploma no longer serves as a ticket to economic prosperity.

At the individual level, the single most effective strategy to improve your economic outlook is education.

Today workers with a postsecondary education face an improving economic outlook. Since 2010, 99 percent of the jobs added to our nation's economy have gone to workers with at least some postsecondary education. While three in four jobs lost during the Great Recession required a high school diploma or less, only 1 percent of those jobs have come back.²⁶ This stark contrast in economic opportunity has been evolving for some time. Since the second half of the 20th century, industries that require more educated workers—such as healthcare, consulting and business services, financial services, education services, and government services—have been growing. Jobs have shifted away from production industries—like manufacturing and construction—and the jobs remaining in those industries now require more advanced education.²⁷

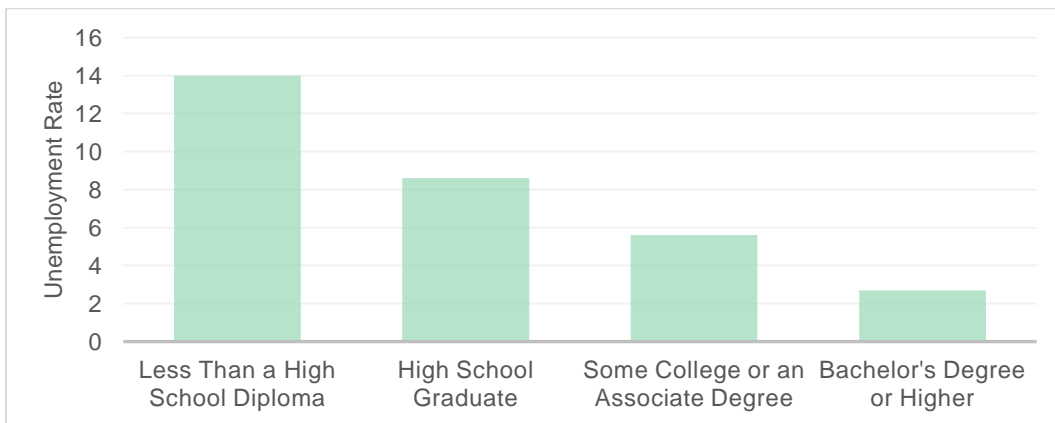
Education Improves Opportunity

At the individual level, the single most effective strategy to improve your economic outlook is education. From postsecondary credentials to bachelor’s degrees—individuals who master skills and knowledge that are in demand in today’s economy are more likely to be self-sufficient, less likely to be unemployed, and more likely to give back to their communities. While only half of generation Xers have a higher standard of living than their parents, most (80 percent) of that generation’s college graduates are more prosperous than the previous generation.²⁸

The power of postsecondary education—including not only degrees but also certificates, industry certifications, and apprenticeships—to restore the American dream is clear. The unemployment rate for Michiganders with a bachelor’s degree or higher is only 2.7 percent, and it is 5.6 percent for residents with some college or an associate degree. The unemployment rate increases, however, as workers’ education levels fall; it is 8.6 percent for high school graduates, and 14.0 percent for residents without a high school diploma.²⁹

As residents’ education levels rise, their ability to command higher salaries grows. On average, residents with bachelor’s degrees earn nearly twice as much as those with high school diplomas.³⁰ Residents with some college or an associate degree earn \$5,100 more than high school graduates, and high school graduates earn \$7,600 more annually than residents without a diploma.

Exhibit 1. Residents with a Bachelor’s Degree Are Three Times Less Likely to Be Unemployed Than High School Graduates



Source: 2015 American Community Survey, one-year estimates.

Education is a Public Good

As our state’s earliest leaders rightly recognized, the benefits of education extend beyond the individual, and it is critical for a thriving democracy. The importance of education has long been recognized in Michigan, even in the years before Michigan was granted state status. The Northwest Ordinance, passed in 1787 by Congress, created a compact between the original states and the Northwest Territory, which included Michigan, in which “schools and the means of education shall

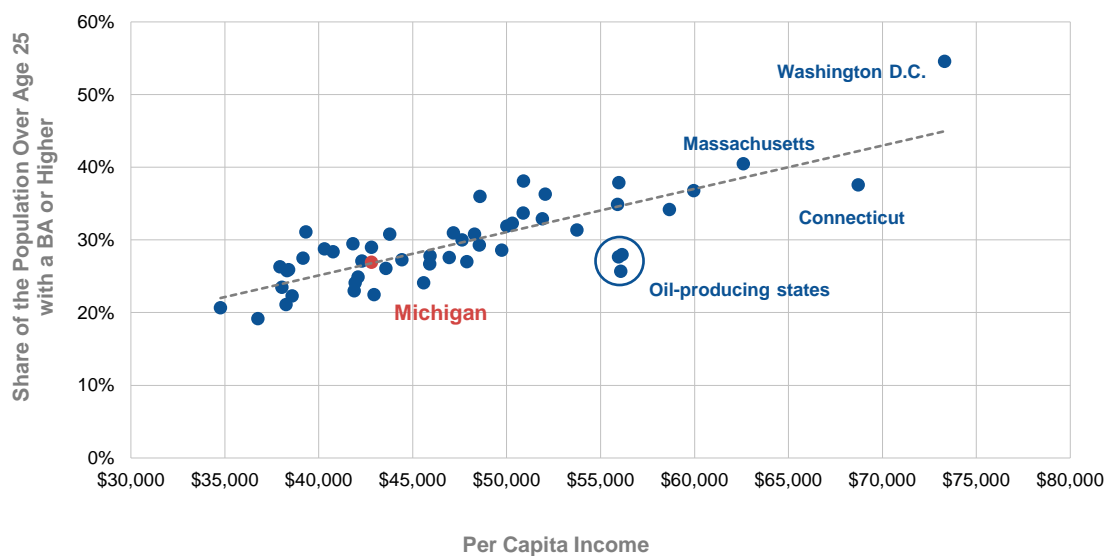
forever be encouraged.”³¹ When Michigan adopted its first constitution in 1835, two years before it achieved statehood, Michigan encouraged education and intellectual and scientific pursuits in its constitution, requiring funding for the promoted pursuits not only at the K–12 level but also for universities.³²

And although the funding mechanisms have since changed, Michigan has provided that education and schools shall be promoted in every iteration of the constitution and continues to do so today. Mirroring language from the Northwest Ordinance, in 1908 and in the current constitution, the people included the mandate that “[r]eligion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”³³ As in the state’s first constitution, Michigan chose not only to express such encouragement but also to continue funding the education system, both K–12, which is provided at no cost, as well as to maintain public colleges and universities in the current constitution.

This investment in our residents has allowed Michiganders to participate fully in our democracy, create thriving communities, and build a strong economy. Researchers have long recognized a link between education levels and civic and social engagement. Education increases multiple forms of engagement including voter turnout, tolerance, and political knowledge.³⁴ Today, more than ever before, we must continue our long tradition of educating citizens. Our state’s prosperity depends on it.

The correlation between state income (a proxy for prosperity) and education levels is strong. Highly educated states, such as Massachusetts and Connecticut, also boast the highest per-capita incomes in the country.³⁵ Michigan, however, ranks 35th for educational attainment (the number of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher) and 33rd for per-capita income.³⁶ This is not the path to prosperity.

Exhibit 2. Highly Educated States Boast the Highest Per-capita Incomes in the Country



We Need to Act Now

Over the past nine months, the 21st Century Education Commission has examined our state’s public education system and debated the best strategies to improve opportunities for every child and student in our state. A changing economy now demands that all residents earn a postsecondary education—an education level previously reserved for a select few. The current state of our education system demands that we all participate in this transformation: from students and parents to educators, school personnel, and administrators, and to business leaders and local residents.

Once regarded as having a strong public education system, Michigan’s schools—those in our most affluent suburbs as well as our rural areas and inner cities—are now quickly falling behind those of our competitors in Europe, Asia, and much of the United States. Most distressingly, we see a public education system unable to position our children to achieve the American Dream—to do better than the generation before them. The urgency could not be greater.

This report outlines recommendations for how to design and rebuild our public education system to prepare all children for the careers they aspire to and a bright future. The Commission aimed to build a P–20 education system that serves Michiganders from birth through life.



Photo taken at Jalen Rose Leadership Academy in Detroit



Photo taken at Schoolcraft College in Livonia

Call to Action

In an economy where a superior education is the most reliable ticket to a bright future, where our children create and compete for the best jobs in the world, and where the next generation does better than the one before it, young people in most other American states and developed nations are being better prepared than in Michigan. It is a harsh judgement, but an unavoidable one based on the achievement data. Until we are honest about current performance in our state, we cannot demand the changes our education system needs to more effectively support today's kindergarteners and tomorrow's college students. It is hard to imagine higher stakes for our state and its families.

Falling K-12 Performance

The urgency could not be greater. While it is difficult to face, the data are clear: Michigan's public education system is dramatically failing our children. As early as fourth grade, Michiganders are falling behind their peers, ranking 41st on fourth-grade reading performance nationally. Michigan is one of only three states that has seen a decline in fourth-grade reading achievement since 2003; only West Virginia experienced a larger drop in student performance during this time. While Michigan's performance dropped two points, the top states for growth improved by double digits: Louisiana (eleven) and Alabama (ten).³⁷

In eighth grade, we continue to see a trend of low performance and slow growth. In 2015, Michigan ranked 37th for eighth-grade math performance. In 12 years' time, performance inched up a mere two points. As in fourth-grade reading, however, other states saw significant increases in eighth-grade math performance. Massachusetts—the top-performing state in the nation—continues to see large improvements in student performance (ten points since 2013). Students in Hawaii improved 14 points, and performance in New Jersey and Arizona increased by 12 points.³⁸

Perhaps the most jarring finding is that black fourth graders in Michigan have the lowest reading performance in the country.

Results are worse for students of color, students in special education, and students living in poverty. On any performance metric, at-risk students in Michigan underperform their peers. Perhaps the most jarring finding is that black fourth graders in Michigan have the lowest reading performance in the country. Hispanic students perform slightly better—ranking 32nd nationally.³⁹ The story is the same for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities score 44 points below their peers without disabilities on the fourth-grade reading assessment.⁴⁰ Our system must recognize and address this disparity and do much more to reverse the connection between learning outcomes and race/ethnicity, disability status, and socioeconomic status.

Some may think that these unacceptable statewide outcomes are a result of changing demographics, but that is simply not true.

Michigan's higher-income and white students are also among the worst performing in the country. When we remove our lowest-income students from the data set, Michigan's performance falls in comparison to other states.

In fourth-grade reading, higher-income Michigan students rank among the worse in the country.

For example, in fourth-grade reading, higher-income Michigan students (those who do not qualify for the means-tested free and reduced lunch program) rank 48th among their peers—seven slots lower than our state's overall ranking in this grade level and subject.⁴¹ When we disaggregate performance by race, white students rank 49th.⁴² Even among schools with a low number of students participating in free and reduced lunch—a proxy for wealthier schools—Michigan ranks near the bottom (36 out of 42 states reporting).⁴³

In a 21st century economy, our students need more than strong academic skills and knowledge. Employers report that they want employees who are critical thinkers who can process information and share their opinions verbally and in writing. They want good listeners, readers, and presenters.⁴⁴ To prosper, we need to help our schools achieve rigorous academic outcomes and increase their focus on these crucial 21st century skills.

In a 21st century economy, we must also give our students multiple pathways to success; our system cannot be one-size-fits-all. This includes helping more students enroll in and complete career and technical education programs. In 2015, over 126,500 high school students enrolled in one of 1,861 skilled trades programs statewide. Only thirty percent, however, completed their program.⁴⁵

Low Postsecondary Attainment

By 2025, 65 percent of jobs in Michigan will require a postsecondary credential, and our workforce is not yet prepared to meet these new demands.⁴⁶ Only 39.3 percent of Michiganders ages 25–64 have earned an associate degree or higher—ranking Michigan 29th for degree attainment. By comparison, Massachusetts has the highest degree attainment in the country with more than half of its population (52.4 percent) earning an associate degree or higher. Minnesota leads the Great Lakes region with 48.9 percent of its residents earning at least an associate degree.⁴⁷

Degrees, of course, are not the only pathway to postsecondary success. Postsecondary credentials, including certificates, industry certifications, and apprenticeships, also offer participants an opportunity to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to enter a particular field and succeed. In Michigan, 4 percent of residents have also earned a certificate.⁴⁸ This increases the state's overall attainment rate; 43.3 percent of residents have earned a certificate or an associate degree or higher.

EXHIBIT 3. 43.3 Percent of Michigan Residents 25–64 Have Earned a Postsecondary Credential or Higher

Less than 9 th grade	9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	High school graduate	Some college, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate or professional degree
2.4%	6.2%	27.6%	24.5%	10.3%	18.1%	10.9%

Note: The American Community Survey does not report on postsecondary credentials. Residents with postsecondary credentials are likely included in the “some college, no degree” category. The Lumina Foundation estimates 4 percent of residents have attained certificates.

Like many K–12 outcomes, there is significant variation across residents of different races and ethnicities. For example, 63 percent of Asian residents have earned a bachelor’s degree compared to 28 percent of white residents, 17 percent of black residents, 16 percent of Hispanic residents, and 13.5 percent of Native American or Alaskan Native residents.⁴⁹

We also know that too often, access to higher education is a function of family income—something that is unacceptable if our state is committed to equality of opportunity. After high school, 69.8 percent of the students in the class of 2014 enrolled in postsecondary education. Only 57.1 percent of economically disadvantaged students, however, enrolled in a postsecondary program.⁵⁰ This disparity can be seen as students progress through college as well. National data show a dramatic difference in attainment between students with different socioeconomic backgrounds. Sixty percent of students from upper-income families earned a bachelor’s degree or higher eight years after high school graduation. Twenty-nine percent of students from middle-income families did the same, but only 14 percent of students from low-income families earned a bachelor’s degree in that time.⁵¹

Too many Michiganders face an uphill climb when enrolling in postsecondary education. Students face both financial and academic challenges. While state investment in higher education has steadily increased since its low point in FY 2012, Michigan’s investment is down 14 percent from appropriations in FY 2007–2008.⁵² At the same time, tuition at colleges and universities statewide has been on the rise, and state aid programs have been cut or eliminated.⁵³ This has increased the financial investment required for students to pursue postsecondary education. In addition to financial barriers, students too often enter postsecondary education underprepared. One in four graduates of the class of 2014 were required to take remedial courses when they enrolled in a community college or public university.⁵⁴ This is costly for students. Remediation requires the investment of time and resources without moving students closer to the credits they need to graduate. Michigan must reverse these trends to put more students on the pathway to success.

A Call to Transform, Not Tinker

It is easy to look for excuses or to believe that our local schools are doing fine—to believe that this is only a problem in other districts or for someone else’s children. We must be courageous enough to accept the fact that our public education system is falling behind those of our national and global competitors, and begin working immediately to reverse our trajectory. We need not blame people

or the past; we need to transform the system. This report outlines recommendations from the 21st Century Education Commission for how to design and rebuild our public education system to prepare all children for the careers, lives, and futures they aspire to and a better future for our great state.

A Commitment to Ambitious Goals

How will we know if we have built a high-performing public education system in Michigan that prepares our students for the 21st century? We believe that, together, these four goals help to assess Michigan's progress toward creating an education system that is more equitable and produces graduates that are more prepared and more competitive with their peers across the country and world.

To achieve these goals, we must all take responsibility for them. We must not expect that educators alone can be held accountable for these outcomes. Every stakeholder—from the Legislature to students and from parents to teachers—must take ownership of our state's outcomes. Michigan must also commit to publicly providing data about our shared progress toward the following goals. Data must be reported publicly and disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and county.

By 2025, 70 percent or more of our 25-year-olds will have completed a college degree, occupational certificate, apprenticeship, or formal skill training.

Why? Our economy demands that more Michiganders pursue postsecondary education to attract and create good-paying jobs.

Current performance: Of Michiganders ages 25–34, 45.8 percent have earned a certificate or an associate degree or higher⁵⁵

By 2025, Michigan children will score in the top ten among U.S. states on the bi-annual National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading, math, and science.

Why? We must prepare our students to compete with the best students in the country.

Current performance: Michigan ranks 41st in fourth-grade reading and 37th in eighth-grade math.⁵⁶

By 2025, the high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment gap between low-income and middle-income children in Michigan will have disappeared.

Why? This goal reflects our call for equity and a commitment to providing all children with a quality education. It also reflects the need for high schools and postsecondary institutions to collaborate for student success.

Current performance: In 2014–2015, Michigan’s overall four-year high school graduation rate was 79.8 percent. For that same year, 67.5 percent of economically disadvantaged students graduated—a difference of 12.3 points.⁵⁷ For the class of 2014, 69.8 percent of graduates enrolled in postsecondary within 12 months of graduation. Enrollment dropped to 57.1 percent for economically disadvantaged students.⁵⁸

By 2025, Michigan children will surpass the scores of Ontario school children on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in reading, math, and science.

Why? Michigan children must compete with the best in the world, and Ontario, our neighbor, has made significant education reforms and is now a top performer internationally. Michigan wants to see our performance increase overall and in comparison to top-performing states and nations. For context, PISA is an assessment tool used to evaluate educational performance worldwide by assessing 15-year-olds in more than 72 countries every three years.

Current performance: On PISA 2015, Ontario outperformed the U.S. by 28 points in science (Ontario: 524, U.S.: 496), 30 points in reading (Ontario: 527, U.S.: 497), and 39 points in math (Ontario: 509, U.S.: 470).^{59, 60}

Our Opportunity:

Lessons Learned from High-performing States and Nations

Evidence from high-performing systems gives us hope. There are states and nations that have faced similar challenges to Michigan and have been much more successful in educating all children to a high level. The Commission hosted speakers and reviewed literature to better understand what high-performing systems do differently. Here is what we learned must be included in Michigan's plan for the future.

Education Strategies that Work

Build a Comprehensive, Aligned Education Strategy

Every speaker and expert we encountered in our work was clear—there is no single strategy that will advance our state. We must abandon a piecemeal strategy and instead implement and sustain a series of fundamental changes to create the system our students and state need for the 21st century.⁶¹ These changes do not require us to close our existing systems and start new; many other systems have advanced from poor to good and good to great, and they did so by building on and improving existing systems. It does, however, require us to stop implementing disjointed strategies and instead create a shared vision for the future and shared strategies for achieving that goal.

Develop Excellent Educators

In high-performing systems, educators are respected and supported, and leaders commit to every student having an effective teacher.⁶² Before being accepted to preparation programs, educators meet demanding standards. They participate in rigorous subject matter training and complete apprenticeships

with master teachers which help ensure that they are well-prepared on their first day in the classroom. As educators progress through their career, they are well-supported and have opportunities to grow. High-performing systems have also restructured their school days to allow educators more time to collaborate with peers and hone their practice.⁶³

Set Rigorous Academic Standards for All Students

Lessons from a range of high-performing systems highlight the need to set and maintain the highest standards and expectations for our students.⁶⁴ We must have internationally benchmarked standards that articulate academic and noncognitive skills (sometimes called 21st century skills). Top performers align their assessments to these standards and ensure that assessments are designed to measure the complex skills their standards demand.⁶⁵

Create Multiple Pathways

High standards do not mean there is only one path to success. High-performing systems offer multiple pathways for students, and they work hard to ensure that the requirements at the end of one stage of education match the requirements for the beginning of the next.⁶⁶

One pathway is career and technical education and training. In high-performing systems, career and technical education has rigorous academic requirements. These programs are taught by highly trained educators, and they include apprenticeship components. Schools work closely with employers to ensure that students are well-prepared when they enter the workforce. In addition, students are educated so that they possess the academic skills to move between career education and college preparatory paths as their goals and interests evolve.⁶⁷

Invest Early

A key element of world-class education systems is investing in what happens to children before they begin formal schooling, even as early as prenatally.

Other countries implement this principle differently depending on their local needs, but all are working to ensure that children arrive at school ready to learn. Policy options include expanding access to quality medical and dental care, investing in early learning efforts such as preschool and child care, and improving service integration for families in need.⁶⁸

Recognize and Fight Inequality

High-performing systems also recognize that academic outcomes vary dramatically by race, ethnicity, income, disability status, and more. While some may blame students or parents for these achievement gaps, research suggests that society systematically expects less of poor and minority students and gives them fewer tools for success. Low-income and minority students are more likely to be assigned less experienced and less effective teachers. They are less likely to be enrolled in rigorous courses, and they are more likely to be suspended from schools. High-performing systems do not tolerate this disparity, and they actively

implement policies that recognize and address these inequalities.⁶⁹

For example, high-performing systems provide more resources to at-risk students to help them achieve at high levels. Most high-performing systems assign more teachers to support at-risk students and some provide incentives for teachers to work in needier schools.⁷⁰

Set Clear Goals and Measure What Matters

Accountability systems play an important role in motivating and monitoring change in high-performing systems. Good accountability policy prioritizes improvement for all students in all schools, including traditional public, cyber, and charter schools, community colleges, and universities. It sets clear goals and communicates these goals plainly with students, families, educators, and the broader community. Data is shared widely and used to inform practice. When a group of students is struggling, immediate action is expected and educators have access to evidence-based practices to better support learning. Throughout a strong accountability system, parents are partners—and their role in improvement is critical.⁷¹

High-performing systems also recognize the limitations of accountability. They recognize that accountability systems alone do not produce learning, and they fuse thoughtful accountability policy with a series of reforms that improve teaching and learning.⁷²

Essential Cultural Elements

Value Postsecondary Education

High expectations go beyond creating rigorous content standards. As a society, we must foster a state culture that sees postsecondary education as the primary path to prosperity. We must value academic success and expect students to put in the hard work required to succeed. We cannot just set these expectations for our own children. Our state benefits as more residents pursue postsecondary credentials. Data are clear—everyone can succeed at high levels.⁷³ High-performing systems recognize that different individuals will require different types and levels of resources, but they are committed to the belief that everyone can master the skills and knowledge necessary to be prosperous.⁷⁴



Photo taken at Escanaba Senior High School in Escanaba

Be Honest About Current Performance

As the previous section outlined, our current performance is subpar. It is easy to look for measures that assure us that our collective education performance is acceptable or to point to successful schools and districts and claim that our current system is working. We must

fight this urge and be honest about where we stand now, and we cannot simply say our state is in crisis. We must not accept mediocrity. We must energize our communities to understand that their schools can and must do better. As researchers regularly document, parents tend to believe their own school is doing fine, but the system at large is underperforming. High-performing systems challenge that notion in communities and capitol buildings. They are willing to face challenging facts. Several other statewide efforts to improve education started with a report like this one where residents were willing to say enough is enough. We can do better.⁷⁵

Do Not Accept Excuses

In addition to being honest, high-performing systems do not accept excuses. Many states and nations face challenges similar to Michigan's. We cannot tolerate excuses for poor performance. We must reject them now and we must have the courage to do so as we implement this plan for the future. Education performance is not about differences in children and students. It is about what we do in schools.⁷⁶

When comparing ourselves to high-performing states and nations, we too often explain away the differences, saying those nations do not educate all students, or they are homogeneous, or their cultures are too different from ours to suggest opportunities to improve. We must reject that thinking.⁷⁷

We need not look to other states and nations for evidence that all students can achieve at high levels. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) identifies schools that are beating the odds. These are schools where students face incredible challenges, but outperform schools with similar demographics.⁷⁸ In the 2015–2016 school year, MDE identified over 100 schools that met their definition.⁷⁹

Persevere

Change takes time. Leaders in our state must have a sustained commitment to improving our education systems, and they must commit to implementing a shared vision over time. Implementing the reforms in this report will require significant changes in classrooms and schools across the state. We must give teachers and school leaders the time and support needed to change their practices, and they must have confidence that state policy will not shift midcourse. This is not to say we may not need to adapt, rather that we must commit to a steadfast focus on a shared set of policies to underpin our efforts. For example, Massachusetts has been implementing a consistent reform agenda since 1993. This sustained, shared commitment has helped to propel the state to consistently rank among the top states in the nation.⁸⁰

Forward Progress in Michigan

We are not the first to articulate and understand the challenge facing our state. While there is significant cause for concern, we are energized by Michiganders' commitment to improving outcomes for students. In classrooms from Harbor Beach to Grand Rapids and Warren to Escanaba, educators are helping students improve. Commissioners had the opportunity to visit with educators in Detroit, Grand Rapids, Traverse City, and the Upper Peninsula to hear firsthand what educators are doing to improve instruction and learning. At the Grand Rapids Public Museum School, strong partnerships between community, businesses, and school leaders are expanding opportunities for students. At Voyageur Academy in Detroit, educators are setting high standards and clear accountability metrics to improve outcomes for at-risk students. At Traverse City West Senior High School, educators are integrating 21st

century skills into instruction to help students be more prepared for postsecondary opportunities. Through a virtual event, Commissioners connected with educators and residents from the Upper Peninsula to hear about challenges facing rural schools, new programs in competency-based learning, and the benefits of a balanced calendar. These are only a few examples of how committed educators are improving outcomes and opportunities for young Michiganders.



Photo taken at Baldwin High School in Baldwin

Outside of the classroom, policymakers thoughtfully explored many policy options that high-performing systems embrace. We have set higher standards for educators and have instituted evaluation systems to ensure they get the feedback they need to improve. Michigan has dramatically increased preschool funding and expanded support for pediatric dentistry. We have adopted rigorous standards and debated the most effective assessment tools. Our state has acted on troubling early reading data—passing higher expectations for schools and students and creating an ongoing literacy commission to spearhead statewide efforts. Students are participating in extracurricular programs like FIRST Robotics in record numbers where they can practice problem

solving and teamwork. We have increased access to career and technical education and promoted technical arts as a viable path to prosperity. Students now have more access to college courses during high school through early middle college programs, and when students enter postsecondary it is easier than ever to earn credits at one institution and transfer them to another. In our community colleges, there is an increased focus on skilled trades, and community colleges can now offer more bachelor's degrees. University leaders convene annually at the State Universities Summit, and partnerships between high schools, community colleges, and universities are growing. More universities are engaging with the business community to offer internships, and performance funding efforts have been implemented.

None of these policies are perfect, and they alone are not the recipe for success. We are energized because these policies prove that many Michiganders understand the challenges we face, and they are willing to take steps to improve.



Photos taken at Greenville Public Schools in Greenville

Framework for Success:

The Commission's Recommendations

Our Vision for the Future

For Michigan to thrive in the current century, our state must have a world-class education system, from prenatal through postsecondary education, that prepares every Michigander for success. Our students must:

- Learn the 21st century skills necessary to compete in the global economy, including critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration
- Achieve internationally benchmarked standards
- Succeed in earning postsecondary credentials to be prepared for careers

How We Get There:

Nine Principles for a World-Class Education System

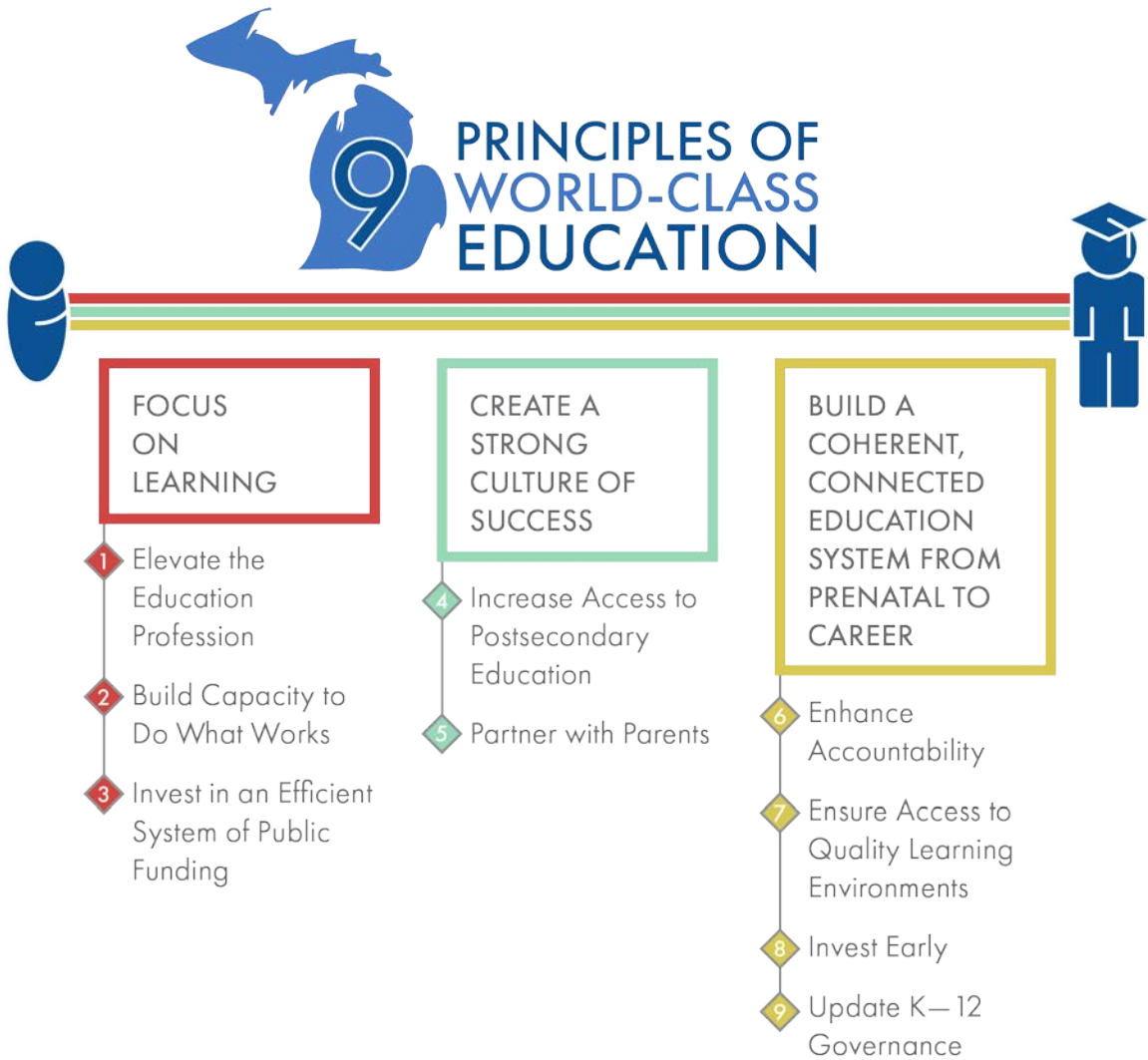
A critical underpinning of this report is the focus on a P–20 education system that serves residents from birth through life. Our state must intentionally invest in early learning opportunities for children and families. This means starting formal schooling with prekindergarten (pre-K) and providing supports and services to help parents be their child's first teacher. Our education system must continue with a high-quality K–12 experience for every student in the state where students have access to effective teachers, rigorous standards, and

quality facilities. As students move toward graduation, we must help them navigate myriad postsecondary options to find the one that is right for them. This may include enrolling in career and technical education, participating in an early middle college, enlisting in the armed services, applying to a college or university, and more. At every point in this continuum—and particularly at every transition point—students and families should encounter a quality, connected system that is designed to meet their interests and needs.

What we offer below purposely goes beyond less-disruptive improvements on the margins and instead proposes a set of strategies that we believe has the power to create a world-class P–20 education system. In choosing our recommendations, we have explicitly rejected warnings that certain changes could generate opposition, or be hard to get through the Legislature, or cost more money in an era where public resources remain scarce. We do so in the belief that catching up will not be easy. Based on what other states and nations have had to do to build high-performing education systems, what is required of us will be difficult.

We offer bold ideas because we are convinced that Michigan must choose them if our communities and our children are to have a future. We urge the Governor, the Legislature, educators, employers, and citizens broadly to join us in making our vision a reality.

Our recommendations are organized in three building blocks and nine guiding principles that explain what we must do, and 32 key strategies that explain how. These recommendations do not discuss how to connect the P–20 system to workforce development. That relationship will be an important topic for future work.



Focus on Learning

To improve outcomes for students, Michigan’s education leaders must support excellent teaching and learning. This requires high standards for all students; relevant and rigorous instruction; innovative practices, priorities, and policies; and well-trained, skilled teachers and administrators. This goal will require that Michigan significantly elevate the education profession, build capacity to identify and disseminate effective methods to teachers, and invest sufficient resources.



1. ELEVATE THE EDUCATION PROFESSION

Educators are critical to our state’s success, and we must design and support a world-class education profession, from early childhood through postsecondary, that attracts, develops, elevates, and retains top talent to meet the needs of every student.

- 1.1 Enhance teacher preparation**—Michigan must enhance its teacher preparation programs and ensure they are attracting the best and brightest candidates. The state must increase requirements and improve training for preservice teachers. This means that all teacher preparation programs must set higher standards for admission, require a year-long residency, and require evidence of skills in their subject matter, social-emotional intelligence, and pedagogy. Michigan must also look for strategic opportunities to attract diverse candidates to teaching preparation programs.
- 1.2 Create multiple career pathways**—Michigan’s educators—both those entering the profession and seasoned veterans—need to have multiple career path options to ensure they have opportunities to grow in their jobs and stay in the profession. The Michigan Department of Education should lead the development of new career paths for teachers that reflect their skills and responsibilities as educators, not the duration of their employment. These career paths must be developed in collaboration with a range of partners, including teachers themselves.
- 1.3 Improve educator professional development**—Teachers play a critical role in helping students learn. To ensure that students are getting the highest-quality instruction possible, teacher professional development should be focused on improving instruction. Michigan should invest in providing exceptional professional development to help our teachers become the best, including professional learning communities to support teachers as they learn and grow. Professional development should also be tied to feedback in teacher evaluations. As areas for a teacher’s improvement are identified in evaluations, professional development and trainings should be matched to the teacher’s classroom competence and growth.

- 1.4 Strengthen building-level and organizational leadership**—Effective school leadership supports student learning. To improve student outcomes, Michigan should implement a performance-based leadership development system that will ensure that building-level leaders are invested in student outcomes. This system would work to develop building-level leaders capable of fostering teacher growth and coaching teachers to positively impact student growth and achievement. This system should include basic administrator credentialing as well as more intensive programming focused on improving student outcomes, collaborating with community partners, and organizational development.



2. BUILD CAPACITY TO DO WHAT WORKS

Our educators need more support to do what works. Michigan must support the collection, deployment, and implementation of evidence-based strategies and ensure that state education goals are supported with the knowhow and teacher training to deliver on our commitment to improve learning, teaching, and leading.

- 2.1 Support state priorities with the necessary resources and tools**—When policies or practices are mandated by the state, we must recognize that it will take time and support to help educators integrate these changes into everyday practice. The state must allocate the resources, supports, and tools necessary to implement these changes at scale.
- 2.2 Support implementation of evidence-based practices**—Michigan needs a statewide effort to amplify evidence-based practices and coordinate efforts to deploy them. Together with local, regional, state, and national stakeholders, MDE should focus on the field's most vexing problems; identify, pilot, and evaluate possible solutions; and share what works at scale. Central to this work will be partnerships with districts, intermediate school districts, and universities across the state to amplify existing efforts and address gaps in our existing knowledgebase.



3. INVEST IN AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC FUNDING

To achieve the learning outcomes we want and need, Michigan must invest in an efficient and effective system of public funding that ensures that every student is supported by sufficient resources to achieve high performance standards. This includes necessary additional resources for students with higher risks.

- 3.1 Identify efficiencies**—Becoming a world leader in education will require additional investment. However, before Michigan taxpayers can be asked to support additional spending for education, they need to be assured that the state spends current funds

efficiently and effectively. Determining how to spend funds in the most efficient manner will require a careful review by policymakers with the input of education experts.

- 3.2 Determine the base funding amounts for K–12**—The Commission is recommending that Michigan adopt performance outcomes that are benchmarked against the highest-performing states and nations. If the state is going to be successful in meeting these benchmarks, schools need to be provided with the resources necessary for success. Michigan needs to efficiently distribute resources, and efficient distribution requires a transparent calculation of what it costs to meet performance standards. Tennessee and Washington provide good models for transparent funding. These models determine the costs associated with instructional, classroom, and nonclassroom services, and the foundation allowances are built from these costs.
- 3.3 Determine the additional resources needed for disadvantaged students**—Michigan’s funding formulas should be equitable. Similar districts and similar students should be provided with similar resources, and students with greater educational needs should be provided with additional resources where needed to have an equal chance of meeting the performance standards.
- 3.4 Develop funding formulas to support the system**—Once the levels of spending needed to meet Michigan’s performance standards are determined, Michigan needs to develop funding formulas that efficiently and effectively distribute these resources to the proper entities to support student success.

Create a Strong Culture of Success

Education is a public good, and it is not the sole responsibility of our formal education system. Schools are powerful engines to propel learning forward for all students; however, strong evidence tells us that school-based strategies alone cannot overcome the impact of social and economic disparities on learning. We must couple a sustained commitment to improve teaching and learning with a pledge to increase access to services and supports that help every child arrive at school ready to learn.

This means fostering a shared responsibility for public education across our state that extends beyond traditional education partners. We must engage all Michiganders in this urgent work—particularly nontraditional partners such as business leaders, human service providers, the armed services, and community organizations. We need a culture that values and demands exceptional student achievement and postsecondary aspirations. We must articulate the responsibilities of students, families, educators, and others in meeting this challenge, and hold each other accountable for achieving measurable results.



4. INCREASE ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

To start, our state must send a clear message: Michigan students need a postsecondary credential to succeed in a 21st century economy and achieve the American dream, and our state is committed to eliminating family income as a barrier to obtaining those credentials.

- 4.1 Determine the proper funding level for higher education**—Becoming a leading state for postsecondary degree and credential attainment will likely require significant new investment. The state should consider strategies including direct funding to higher education institutions, performance-based funding formulas, as well as other methods to incent best practices, tuition restraint, and spending efficiency.
- 4.2 Support universal access to community college for all Michigan students**—Michigan needs to view postsecondary education and training as a necessary step to fully participating in the economy and democracy. If Michigan is to become a leader in residents with postsecondary degrees and credentials, it is time to consider moving our current system of universal education from P–12 to P–14. Postsecondary education is becoming increasingly essential to earning a living wage. Michigan needs to make postsecondary educational opportunities available to every citizen so they can fully participate in society.
- 4.3 Make four-year degrees more affordable for students who demonstrate merit**—Michigan should provide scholarships to help students who have successful academic records afford four-year degrees at public universities without taking on onerous debt. It is important that the state earn the best rate of return possible on this investment. Toward

this end, the state should adopt best practices in improving completion rates, and continue to work with universities to constrain tuition cost growth.

- 4.4 Support all students with counselors skilled in career guidance and postsecondary access**—Michigan should ensure that every high school student has the support of a counselor skilled in career guidance and postsecondary learning opportunities. These counselors can help students select the program that best fits their interests and provides them with the best opportunities for success in college and the labor force. Counselors can also help students navigate the application and financial aid process.



5. PARTNER WITH PARENTS

Our system must clearly recognize that parents are children’s first and most important teachers. Michigan’s education system must partner with parents to actively support development and learning, build strong partnerships with educators, provide the information necessary to guide decision making, and ensure all children and parents have the support and resources necessary for success.

- 5.1 Connect human services to schools**—Michigan must embed human services in schools and strengthen links between schools and community-based human services in order to connect children, students, and their families with the right services at the right time. In the long run, social workers and caseworkers should be ubiquitous in schools across Michigan. This effort, however, should begin by serving our highest-need students first, including students receiving free and reduced lunch and students with disabilities.
- 5.2 Nurture parent and educator collaboration**—Michigan must be much more intentional about nurturing parent engagement. With a diverse set of stakeholders, we must identify and evaluate existing parent supports and recognize and address gaps. This includes offering innovation grants to districts and community-based organizations to improve existing supports. In addition to supporting parents, Michigan must actively share best practices with educators and teach them to strategically embed parent engagement to achieve our state’s educational goals.
- 5.3 Create user-friendly tools to navigate educational options**—Michigan must create a comprehensive set of user-friendly tools to help students and parents select the educational option that best meets their needs. This must include an online tool to help parents identify their choices, define criteria, evaluate their options, and select a school. Critically, this online interface must include all the educational options that parents consider, including early childhood services and providers, K–12 options, higher education, and workforce training. In addition to access to quality information from the state, Michigan must create consumer protections that ensure that educational providers share accurate information about their services, programs, and outcomes.

Build a Coherent, Connected Education System from Prenatal to Career

Michigan's 21st century economy and educational goals require an education system that is seamless and accessible to all, from prenatal through career. Young families need easy access to early childhood programs that prepare children to arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed. Students need clear pathways into postsecondary opportunities and career preparation, and adults need access to continuing education, training, and lifelong learning. Under the Governor's leadership, Michigan has advanced its awareness around the need for lifelong learning, and we encourage more work to make this system a reality for all students.



6. ENHANCE ACCOUNTABILITY

Our state must adopt and sustain statewide P–20 performance measures that are benchmarked against high-performing states and nations. These measures should align responsibility and authority and lead to strong outcomes for learners.

- 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 and should also disseminate useful data that informs instructional practice in the classroom and measures the performance of our schools for the general public and policymakers.
- 6.2 Hold the right people accountable**—Michigan must 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.
- 6.3 Improve data reporting**—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.
- 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.



7. ENSURE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Michigan must ensure that all students have access to high-quality, innovative, welcoming, and safe learning environments equipped with the technology necessary for teaching and learning 21st century skills and achieving high performance standards.

7.1 Assist poorer communities with funding for school facilities—Michigan is one of 11 states that provides no support to local districts for capital outlay. As a result, the playing field is highly uneven. Wealthier suburban districts can finance facilities at much lower tax rates than poorer urban and rural districts. Michigan should provide state aid to local school districts levying property taxes for facilities to ensure that every district is guaranteed a minimum yield for each mill raised.

7.2 Support public school academies with funding for school facilities—Traditional school districts in Michigan can ask local voters to support facility and infrastructure costs through local property taxes. This option is not available to public school academies (PSAs), which instead pay for facilities with their foundation allowance, donations, grants, and private funds. Michigan should provide direct funding to public school academies to help pay for purchasing or renovating facilities if there is demonstrated need for the project. Charter schools and their education management organizations will need to meet financial transparency requirements to be eligible for state funds.



8. INVEST EARLY

Michigan children must have access to safe, quality, and affordable early childhood care and education that prepares them for long-term educational success and supports whole-child development. That means investment and programming must start early—before children enter our traditional education system at age five.

8.1 Support universal preschool for all four-year-olds—Preschool is a proven strategy to improve school readiness, and the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)—Michigan’s homegrown preschool program—is among the best in the country. This program, working synergistically with Head Start, should be expanded to all four-year-olds in Michigan.

8.2 Develop and retain a quality early childhood workforce—In order to attract and retain qualified professionals in the early childhood field, Michigan must ensure that they are competitively compensated for their knowledge and skills. There are a variety of ways to accomplish this goal, such as offering state-subsidized salary increases after completing professional development, offering tax credits for child care workers, and offering scholarship opportunities, loan forgiveness, and more.

8.3 Increase access to quality services through improved coordination—Michigan needs to ensure that early childhood resources are spent efficiently, resources are deployed strategically, and programs reach the children and families who need them most. Given the wide range of service providers, from social service agencies to healthcare systems to school districts, this goal can only be accomplished if services and existing resources are well coordinated. Recent efforts to improve coordination have resulted in significant progress, but much more needs to be done.

8.4 Enhance early learning outcome measurement and tracking—Michigan must continue to enhance the early learning portion of the state’s longitudinal data systems to inform service delivery, improve program alignment, and increase our understanding of what works. First steps include improving early learning participation and outcomes data by expanding the number and types of programs participating in existing data collection and using developmentally-appropriate kindergarten entry assessments statewide to gauge the impact of early investments on readiness.



9. UPDATE K-12 GOVERNANCE

In our move toward a P–20 system, we cannot overlook the governance challenges in K–12. Michigan must reform K–12 governance as part of developing a coherent P–20 governance structure that ensures the public education and higher education marketplace produces high levels of learner outcomes, equity, efficiency, innovation, and collaboration.

9.1 Reform state board of education governance—At the state level, the Governor, Legislature, MDE, and Michigan State Board of Education (SBE) all, to varying degrees, direct state policy. Michigan must ask voters to decide how best to align state educational policy with accountability through the Governor by placing a constitutional amendment on the ballot to allow the Governor to appoint the members of the SBE, to allow the Governor to directly appoint the state superintendent and then abolish the SBE, or to expand the membership of the SBE and change the election process to include gubernatorial appointments.

9.2 Enhance the function and capacity of the Michigan Department of Education—To support the policies and practices outlined in this report, Michigan must dramatically reshape our department of education. We must enhance MDE’s capacity to help teachers, schools, and districts improve, and we must also situate education functions that are currently performed by a range of state agencies within the department.

9.3 Reconceptualize the structure and function of intermediate school districts—In order to facilitate higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency, Michigan must rename, reconfigure, and reassign tasks to intermediate school districts to enable high-quality and economically efficient delivery of services to students. Critically, this change in roles can

only take place after the changes to the SBE and MDE outlined above are implemented so there is alignment and coherence in the state's system.

9.4 Support local efforts to consolidate—In an era of declining enrollment, Michigan has too many seats for the number of students we serve. The state must support local efforts to consolidate by revisiting existing laws and regulations regarding the consolidation process, changing unnecessary barriers, and offering incentives for local districts to voluntarily consolidate.

9.5 Ensure access to high-quality educational options for all—Students and their families across Michigan have choices when deciding where and how they will learn. Michigan must develop policies that promote high-quality educational options for every child in every community across our state, but this will require managing Michigan's public education system to ensure that all schools are high-quality and that every student has access to a high-quality school, including traditional public schools, cross-district choice, charters, and online learning options.



Guiding Principle 1:



Elevate the Education Profession

Design and support a world-class education profession—from early childhood through postsecondary—that attracts, develops, elevates, and retains top talent to meet the needs of every learner.

Photo taken at Grand Valley State University
in Allendale



Rationale

A world-class education system must start with world-class educators and instruction. Quality instruction is foundational to student growth and achievement. Of all of the factors that schools control (including class size⁸¹), teachers have the largest impact on learning.⁸² Researchers have consistently documented that students have better outcomes on standardized assessments when they are taught by a highly-effective teacher compared to when they are assigned to an ineffective teacher.^{83,84} Despite recent reforms, teacher effectiveness varies widely across the state. Michigan must support effective teacher development to ensure that every student has an excellent teacher.

Countries such as Finland, Singapore, and South Korea consistently top the world in student performance, and they share a persistent focus on the quality of their teachers. One South Korean official said, “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.”⁸⁵ McKinsey & Company researchers agree, “We have never seen an education system achieve or sustain world-class status without top talent in its teaching profession.”⁸⁶

Teachers are a critical part of the education profession, but other educators deserve our attention, too. If we want to dramatically improve learning in our state, Michigan must strategically attract, develop, and retain top educators—from early childhood educators and classroom teachers, to paraprofessionals and school administrators.

What does a 21st century Michigan look like?

Michigan has made great strides in strengthening its education profession. Every student across the state has an excellent teacher, and students are surrounded by effective paraprofessionals, counselors, and building leaders. Becoming an educator is an honorable professional choice, and talented candidates are pursuing a lifelong career in teaching. Teacher preparation programs require subject matter expertise and deep knowledge in pedagogy. Prospective teachers participate in yearlong internships so they know how to work with the classrooms and students they will have in their career. Training under master educators prepares them to support diverse students, master content standards, and build critical thinking, cooperation, creativity, and communication skills.

In their first years of teaching, educators participate in strong induction programs, and they are mentored by master teachers. As educators progress through their career, they receive actionable feedback about their instruction and have access to relevant professional development. Educators have numerous opportunities to grow—both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers, schools, and districts have critical conversations about instructional practice. They use data and technology to guide instruction, and they leverage expertise at intermediate school districts (ISD), the Michigan Department of Education, and teacher preparation institutions (as discussed in the second guiding principle). They are also partnering with postsecondary institutions and businesses to ensure students explore careers, formulate their pathway to a career, and are ready to compete and succeed in a global workforce.

Michigan's education workforce reflects the diversity of its student population, and educators in urban, high-poverty schools, or those with at-risk students, have the resources needed for high student outcomes.

Schools work to retain the best educators. They create collaborative working environments and pay education professionals competitively based on merit and on an educator's movement along an improved career ladder.

What does Michigan look like now?

Nearly 100,000 individuals teach in Michigan classrooms. Of those educators, nearly 77 percent are female and over 90 percent are white.⁸⁷ Over 60 percent of teachers have spent more than ten years in the classroom, and most (68 percent) have earned a master's degree or higher.⁸⁸ While these figures do not include every educator in our state, they do illustrate the size and scope of the education profession. Any strategy to improve learning will require a multifaceted approach. No single approach can improve instruction across different levels of experience and school environments.

As Commissioners heard during listening tour events in West Michigan and Southeast Michigan, our current workforce does not reflect the demographics of Michigan's student population. While nearly all of our teachers are white, 33 percent of Michigan students are not.⁸⁹ In addition, childhood poverty rates

continue to rise in our state, and too many educators lack the preparation to best serve at-risk students.

The Legislature has been focused on teaching for a number of years. Certification requirements are now more rigorous, and all educators are evaluated annually; new laws make it easier to dismiss underperforming educators, and more difficult to earn tenure without classroom competence. While these changes have increased school districts' ability to improve the quality of instruction, they have not impacted the way we develop current and future teachers, nor other school personnel. Importantly, these changes have not yet improved student outcomes across the state. In addition to these policy changes, budget constraints have often impacted teachers' salaries and benefits.

Like many other states, Michigan struggles to retain novice educators, and a large portion of the workforce is likely to retire in the coming years. As many as one-third of teachers leave the profession in their first three years, and almost 50 percent leave after five years. Half of new principals leave the profession within their first three years, and enrollment in teacher prep programs is down by more than one-third from 2009–2010.⁹⁰ This leads to churn in our schools and increases the pressure of teacher shortages across the state.

Measuring Success

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

- How many educators are rated highly effective?
- Are graduates of teacher preparation programs effective?
- Do educators have multiple, meaningful career pathways?
- Are more teachers choosing to stay in the profession? Are retention rates on the rise?
- Does Michigan tie teacher professional development directly to performance evaluations?
- What systems and supports does Michigan have to improve building-level leadership?
- Do parent and teacher surveys demonstrate that building-level leadership is strong and effective?

Key Strategies

- 1.1 Enhance teacher preparation
- 1.2 Create multiple career pathways
- 1.3 Improve educator professional development
- 1.4 Strengthen building-level and organizational leadership

1.1—Enhance Teacher Preparation

To elevate the education profession, Michigan must enhance its teacher preparation programs and ensure they are attracting the best and brightest candidates. To accomplish this, Michigan’s teacher preparation programs must prepare educators who are ready to succeed in the classroom by training them to use evidence-based instruction and by licensing them via practice-based assessments.

Details

Michigan must increase requirements and improve training for preservice teachers. This means that all teacher preparation programs must set higher standards for admission, require a year-long residency, and require evidence of skills in their subject matter, social-emotional intelligence, and pedagogy. Michigan must also look for strategic opportunities to attract diverse candidates to teaching preparation programs.

Rationale

To attract the best and brightest candidates into the teaching profession, Michigan must raise the standards for admission to teacher preparation programs. Increasing the expectations of new teachers can elevate the profession in Michigan to similar levels as those found in high-performing states and nations. A more selective acceptance process will elevate the entire teaching profession, resulting in an overall increase in high-achieving teacher candidates. To recruit high-achieving future educators, Michigan’s education preparatory programs should emulate programs that set high standards for acceptance, such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Woodrow Wilson Michigan Teaching Fellowship.

In addition to attracting more accomplished future educators, it is important to attract diverse educators to the profession so that tomorrow’s education workforce better reflects our students. In 2015–2016, while 18 percent of Michigan students were African American, only 6 percent of our teachers were.⁹¹ Seventy-seven percent of our teachers were female; 23 percent were male.⁹² Research shows, and leaders in Southeast and West Michigan confirmed during listening tour events, that increasing the diversity of the education profession can increase minority retention and engagement.⁹³

Once a prospective educator has been accepted into an educator preparation program within the state of Michigan, in-class experiences, often called field experiences or student teaching, differ depending on the institution they are attending. The in-classroom experiences these educators are exposed to range from one semester to nearly two years, and often do not support a new educator with enough time for reflection and collaboration. Looking to the medical profession, creating a year-long uniform apprenticeship model of teacher training with a master teacher will improve the practice of the new teacher. Other states have embarked on these clinical preparation models already; in 2010, for example, a teacher preparation program at the University of California at Los Angeles launched an 18-month educator preparation apprenticeship model that includes one full

year of residency working with a master teacher. This program is “rooted in authentic collaboration, reciprocal feedback, and transformative partnerships.”⁹⁴

Finally, the current model of licensure in Michigan needs to change. Michigan’s model sufficiently measures the content knowledge of educators, but poorly assesses how the teacher will perform in their own classroom. State licensure exams contain multiple-choice questions that do not accurately assess best-practice pedagogy or readiness to teach at a high level. Michigan should investigate adopting an observation-based licensure examination that evaluates mastery of pedagogy and readiness to teach. Using rigorous performance-based assessments for licensure should be the standard to improve Michigan’s teaching profession.⁹⁵

Potential Responsible Party

MDE should implement this strategy in collaboration with the state’s higher education public teacher preparation institutions and educators. These partners should also work with K–12 administrators to ensure critical shortages are being addressed.

1.2—Create Multiple Career Pathways

Michigan’s educators, both those entering the profession and seasoned veterans, need to have multiple, meaningful career path options to ensure they have opportunities to grow in their jobs and stay in the profession.

Details

MDE should lead the development of new, meaningful career paths for teachers that reflect their skills and responsibilities as educators, not the duration of their employment. These career paths must be developed in collaboration with a range of partners, including teachers themselves.

Rationale

Unlike many professions, most classroom teachers have the same job on the first day of their career as they do on the last day. In an era of frequent job changes, Michigan must create meaningful opportunities for educators to grow in their career. Without doing so, we will not be able to attract and retain the best and brightest to the education profession.

Currently, educators who are interested in advancing their career must enter administration. While we need excellent educators to pursue administrative positions, we must also create opportunities for top educators to remain in the classroom, where they can have the most impact on student achievement.

To address this, Michigan must find ways to create multiple, meaningful career pathways for teachers, including different levels of teaching. Such a system should align career pathways with the teacher evaluation process, and have coherent structures for base rates of pay and advancement qualifications. These levels could include the following:

- **Teacher in residence:** Before advancing out of a teacher preparation program, new teacher candidates wishing to be employed in Michigan would complete a teacher-in-residence or practicum program as a capstone experience. This residency experience would replace student teaching. A teacher in residence would be supported by a master teacher to create mentorship opportunities. During the residency, a teacher in residence would receive a modest stipend for living expenses. Standards would be set to determine when a teacher in residence could become fully certified and ready to advance into the teaching profession. These standards may include, for example, an effective or highly effective district evaluation, ratings by students and parents, or additional professional learning.
- **Intermediate teacher:** After advancing beyond the teacher-in-residence level, teachers would move to the intermediate level, where pay and benefits would be determined by the local district contract. This would not include a hard-and-fast rule on number of years at this level; instead, this should be determined by what expertise the teachers have gained that have made them better instructors and may include a certain number of effective or highly effective district

evaluations, ratings by students and parents, additional professional learning, etc., as well as evidence of some level of student achievement.

- Distinguished teacher: Pay and benefits would be determined by the local district contract. MDE would determine what would be required to move to the next level and would not include a hard-and-fast rule of the years at this level. Instead, this would be determined by criteria such as the expertise the teacher has gained that has made them a better instructor, earning a certain number of effective or highly effective district evaluations, ratings by students and parents, additional professional learning, evidence of outstanding student achievement, and earning an advanced credential in a specialty area, or area of additional endorsement. Most teachers should be able to reach this level of teaching.
- Master teacher: In this role, top teachers would document mastery in their subject matter and pedagogy and be eligible for new responsibilities or pay increases. These teacher leaders could have hybrid roles where they teach students for part of the day and mentor peers for another portion of the day. In a recent national survey, a quarter of teachers report significant interest in a hybrid role.⁹⁶ This model may also include the opportunity for a teacher to pursue professional development or research for a limited amount of time.

Like certification, MDE would determine when a teacher has met the requirements to achieve each level. This would likely require teachers to submit a portfolio for the state to review that documents effectiveness across the domains required for each level of mastery.

Potential Responsible Party

The MDE, in collaboration with educators, teacher preparation institutions, and other stakeholders, should develop sample career ladder proposals.

1.3–Improve Educator Professional Development

Michigan should ensure that the goal of educator professional development is rooted in improving teacher effectiveness and student growth, and replace the current system with a more focused one.

Details

Teachers play a critical role in helping students learn. To ensure that students are getting the highest-quality instruction possible, teacher professional development should be focused on improving instruction. Michigan should invest in providing exceptional professional development to help our teachers become the best, including professional learning communities to support teachers as they learn and grow.

Professional development should also be tied to feedback in teacher evaluations. As areas for a teacher’s improvement are identified in evaluations, professional development and trainings should be matched to the teacher’s classroom competence and growth. A teacher’s supervisor or mentor should then coach the teacher on the application of new knowledge and instructional techniques learned through the professional development the teacher received. With accurate and timely feedback, skilled and knowledgeable coaching, peer review and dialogue, and consistent performance evaluations, improvement in teaching and learning will be continuous and measurable.

Rationale

High-quality teaching is vital for student growth and achievement. It is critical for all teachers to have ongoing and regular opportunities to learn, whether from a program or each other. Continuous professional development should keep teachers up to date on new research, emerging technology tools for the classroom, new curriculum resources, and other relevant topics. Michigan should seek to ensure that teacher professional development is ongoing, experiential, collaborative, and based on working with students and understanding their culture.

Potential Responsible Party

MDE, in collaboration with school leaders such as principals, superintendents, and local district boards of education, should lead this effort.

1.4–Strengthen Building-level and Organizational Leadership

Effective school leadership supports student learning. Michigan should investigate and implement a performance-based leadership development system at the state level that focuses on developing building-level leaders and school administrators as instructional leaders and effective managers of overall school functioning.

Details

To improve student outcomes, Michigan should implement a performance-based leadership development system that will ensure that building-level leaders are invested in student outcomes. This system would work to develop building-level leaders capable of fostering teacher growth and coaching teachers to positively impact student growth and achievement. This system should include basic administrator credentialing, as well as more intensive programming focused on improving student outcomes, collaborating with community partners, and organizational development.

Rationale

As Commissioners saw during listening tour events in West Michigan, building-level leaders play a major role in helping their teachers improve instruction. Their leadership matters to the teaching and learning environment established and maintained for students and teachers. It matters to the school climate and classroom culture of learning created within a building, and across a district. It matters to student achievement and to building and district outcomes. Building-level and organizational leaders are instructional leaders and are, therefore, critical partners in the effort to both elevate the education profession and to improve student outcomes.

Too often, schools recruit building leadership from their teacher workforce out of loyalty to their personnel for parameters not aligned to administrative professional requirements. It is paramount that building and district administrators receive ongoing leadership development that is more intensive than the informal system the state utilizes today. A more intensive system will help identify the necessary training and professional development to improve an administrator’s knowledge and skills in creating and maintaining a successful school. The state credentialing process for school leaders must be rigorous and applicable to the specific expectations and responsibilities of the role (e.g., elementary school, middle school, high school, and district levels).

Potential Responsible Party

MDE, in collaboration with district superintendents, boards of education, and professional organizations for school administrators should develop an approach to a more intensive, performance-based leadership development system for building-level leaders.



Guiding Principle 2:



Build Capacity to Do What Works

Michigan must support the implementation of evidence-based strategies to improve learning, teaching, and leading.

Photo taken at Grand Valley State University
in Allendale



Rationale

After focusing on who serves in Michigan classrooms, we must consider how our state learns, teaches, and leads. The state plays a critical role in helping educators be as effective as possible in their day-to-day work with Michigan's children.

Too often educators—especially classroom teachers—work in isolation. Michigan needs tools, processes, and resources to help every educator identify and adopt practices that improve student learning. Fortunately, Michigan benefits from tremendous knowledge in our universities, intermediate school districts, and local districts. Together these entities must work together to identify, aggregate, and share what is working, make it easy for other educators to adopt these practices, and help to bring them to scale.

In addition to broad support to improve learning, teaching, and leading, Michigan needs the infrastructure necessary to build capacity around specific statewide policies. When state-level leaders—from the Legislature to the state superintendent—mandate new policies, these initiatives must be accompanied by an intentional, robust capacity-building strategy that ensures that educators are equipped and supported to implement these initiatives effectively.

What does a 21st century Michigan look like?

Michigan is known as the place where educators and education leaders—from early childhood through postsecondary education—can hone the skills they need to effectively serve students. Educators know how and where to find information about evidence-based instructional practices. They discuss effective instructional practices with peers, and they receive feedback about how to improve. Michigan is committed to investing in the professional development of the teaching workforce. Teachers have time for professional development, and the state has invested in the capacity to identify what works and bring that knowledge to teachers to enhance their classrooms. When new policies or priorities are introduced at the state-level, they are accompanied by training and support to help local educators and leaders implement them.

School leaders and educators review local data and identify evidence-based strategies to improve school culture and climate and deepen student engagement. School boards and policymakers review research and demand a strong evidence base before deploying strategies at scale. When best practices are identified, they are quickly and seamlessly translated into classrooms.

At the state level, leaders fund what they mandate. Educators have the support they need to ensure that these policies are implemented effectively at scale.

Educators and leaders across the state value research and development. There are opportunities for researchers and educators to propose new methodologies, and these innovations are evaluated. Promising practices are carefully scaled and supported. All stakeholders recognize that children are not test

subjects and take care to ensure that students learn the skills and content they need.

What does Michigan look like now?

Across our state, there are people striving to identify what works and share best practices with educators. Too often, however, these practices are not shared or implemented broadly. When Michigan identifies statewide priorities, local and regional entities are left to

determine how, and if, to support capacity building. This leads to inconsistent support and failed policies. For example, over the past five years, Michigan has passed policies to increase content standards and improve teacher evaluations. Both of these strategies, however, have struggled in the implementation phase, and our state has not been able to realize the full impact these policies can have on student learning.

Measuring Success

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

- Do educators and leaders know evidence-based practices? Do they report knowing how to implement them?
- Are programs and strategies implemented with fidelity?
- Does Michigan deploy resources to support capacity building?
- Are student outcomes improving?

Key Strategies

2.1 Support state priorities with the necessary resources and tools

2.2 Support implementation of evidence-based practices

2.1—Support State Priorities with the Necessary Resources and Tools

Michigan must provide districts with the resources, supports, and tools necessary to implement the state mandates and policy with fidelity.

Details

When the state mandates that districts implement a policy or practice, we must provide districts with the resources, supports, and tools necessary to implement the policy successfully and with fidelity.

Rationale

When policies or practices are mandated by the state, we must recognize that it will take time and support to help educators integrate these changes into everyday practice. The state must allocate the resources, supports, and tools necessary to implement these changes at scale. In the newly redesigned MDE (discussed in strategy 2.2 and strategy 9.2), there must be a team of educators that identifies how to implement a particular change at scale. They should have a variety of tools at their disposal such as: offering flexibility to districts, suggesting how to reprioritize resources, providing professional development, and recommending the allocation of additional funding to support the effort.

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature must support capacity building and resources, when necessary, to ensure that state policies are implemented effectively statewide.

2.2—Support Implementation of Evidence-based Practices

Michigan must fund, staff, and empower MDE to build the knowledge and understanding of how to implement state priorities and evidence-based practices.

Details

Michigan must have a coordinated effort to identify best practices, disseminate those practices, evaluate what's working, and spur innovation. We must develop and invest in capacity at MDE to lead this work.

Rationale

High-performing nations identify and implement coherent, effective instructional policies and implement them at scale. Most individual districts lack the scale and resources necessary to develop the research capacity and expertise to maintain their schools and teachers on the pedagogical cutting edge. Michigan needs a statewide effort to amplify evidence-based practices and coordinate efforts to deploy them. Currently, there are many different entities attempting to understand what is working well in our state and across the nation and share those practices with educators. However, we lack organizational capacity and accountability to coordinate and lead that effort. A reconstituted MDE (as discussed in strategy 9.2) is a natural fit.

Together with local, regional, state, and national stakeholders, MDE should focus on the field's most vexing problems; identify, pilot, and evaluate possible solutions; and share what works at scale. Central to this work will be partnerships with districts, intermediate school districts, and universities across the state to amplify existing efforts and address gaps in our existing knowledgebase.

A more extensive discussion of MDE's broader role can be found in strategy 9.2.

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature must empower, staff, and fund MDE for this expanded role. MDE must recruit the best staff and create systems that can support diverse policies and evidence-based practice.



Guiding Principle 3:



**Invest in an
Efficient and Effective
System of Public Funding**

Michigan must invest in an efficient and effective system of public funding that ensures that every student is supported by sufficient resources, including additional resources necessary for disadvantaged students, to achieve high-performance standards.



Rationale

Meeting world-class education standards requires that Michigan boost classroom achievement. Michigan needs to provide schools with sufficient funding to enable students to meet these standards, and then hold schools accountable for the results. However, if Michigan taxpayers are going to be asked to support additional spending to help achieve these performance standards, they must first be assured that existing resources are being spent efficiently and effectively. Michigan's funding model should encourage innovation and collaboration to increase efficiency.

Michigan's education system must prepare every Michigander for success. Some students have special needs and will require additional resources to achieve the same outcomes as general population students. English-language learners, students growing up in poverty, special education students, and other disadvantaged groups will need additional resources to have the same chance of meeting Michigan's performance standards. Michigan's finance system needs to recognize this and have funding formulas that accommodate these differences.

What does a 21st century Michigan look like?

Michigan is committed to funding education at the level necessary for success. Michigan schools, community colleges, and universities have the resources necessary to provide programs and services that meet the needs of all students. Thanks to these supports, all students can achieve Michigan's high-performance standards, and student performance is no longer correlated with income and geography. While programs and services are robust, they are also efficient and every dollar is spent effectively. Educators select evidence-based programs, and there are mechanisms to collaborate when it is most beneficial academically and financially to do so.

Michigan's public education funding system is driven by student need and is easy for taxpayers to understand. Differences in per-pupil revenues between districts and pupils can be easily and clearly explained because they are based on documented differences in costs.

Funding levels for higher education are transparent and policy based.

What does Michigan look like now?

Michigan school districts receive varying amounts per pupil, but these differences are based on historical differences in property tax wealth and local tax efforts rather than on differences in the costs of educating students. Michigan's recently completed education finance study noted that the funding weights for at-risk students and English-language learners were far below the levels recommended by research and far below the weights used by many other states.⁹⁷ Michigan higher education funding levels rank poorly compared to other states, and there is little or no policy rationale for funding differences between schools.

Michigan's education outcomes historically have not been commensurate with spending, which suggests that the state may be able to find ways to spend money more effectively. Michigan is situated in the middle of states with

respect to spending, ranking 24th highest in per-pupil expenditures in 2013; however, the state has among the worst outcomes in 2013, ranking

38th in fourth-grade reading and 42nd in fourth-grade math.

Measuring Success

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

- Are funding levels supported by transparent and easily understood justifications?
- Is funding sufficient to implement the recommendations and meet the goals of the 21st Century Education Commission?
- Does the funding model provide all students with an equal opportunity for success?
- Are funds being spent efficiently?

Key Strategies

3.1 Identify efficiencies

3.2 Determine the base funding amounts for K–12

3.3 Determine the additional resources needed for disadvantaged students

3.4 Develop funding formulas to support the system

3.1—Identify Efficiencies

Identify opportunities to increase efficiencies in education funding.

Details

The Governor and Michigan Legislature, in conjunction with representatives from the education community, should undertake a comprehensive examination of how education dollars are currently spent in Michigan and identify opportunities to spend these funds more efficiently and effectively. This examination should include identifying opportunities including, but not limited to, eliminating redundancies, prioritizing evidence-based techniques, and determining the most efficient and effective ways of delivering services to students.

Rationale

Becoming a world leader in education will require additional investment. However, before Michigan taxpayers can be asked to support additional spending for education, they need to be assured that Michigan spends current funds efficiently and effectively. Determining how to spend funds in the most efficient manner will require a careful review by policymakers with the input of education experts.

Potential Responsible Party

The Governor and Legislature should work to determine ways to improve efficiency.

3.2–Determine the Base Funding Amounts for K-12

Determine the spending needed for K-12 students to meet performance targets.

Details

Michigan needs to determine the level of resources needed for K–12 students to meet its performance standards, as well as to implement the recommendations identified by the 21st Century Education Commission.

Rationale

The Commission is recommending that Michigan adopt performance outcomes that are benchmarked against the highest-performing states and nations, and that schools be held accountable for meeting these benchmarks. If the state is going to be successful in meeting these goals, schools need to be provided with the resources necessary for success.

Michigan’s per-pupil base spending amounts vary by district, and these variations are not based on underlying costs but instead on the level of per-pupil funding in place when the state reformed school spending in 1994.

Michigan needs to efficiently distribute resources, and efficient distribution requires a transparent calculation of what it costs to meet performance standards.

Tennessee and Washington provide good models for transparent funding. These models determine the costs associated with instructional, classroom, and nonclassroom services, and the foundation allowances are built from these costs. For example, under Tennessee’s model, an elementary school with 300 children in grades K–3 is assumed to need 15 teachers; schools are assumed to need one English-language instructor for every 30 English-language learners; they are further assumed to need \$76.75 for textbooks for each student, and \$74.50 for classroom materials and supplies. Total per-pupil funding is built up from calculations like these. These calculations will also allow the state to effectively account for differences in per-pupil costs for things like elementary and secondary education, the population density of the district, and other factors that impact the per-student cost of education.⁹⁸

Schools are not required to spend money according to these parameters, but the formulas ensure that the funding amounts are transparent and that the state has made an attempt to provide the resources it has identified as necessary for meeting the performance standards. Michigan should make a similar effort to identify the resources needed to meet the standards, and then distribute these resources in a similarly transparent manner.



Photo taken at Voyageur Academy in Detroit

Michigan made a partial attempt at identifying costs with the recently completed Education Finance Study.⁹⁹ However, many were unconvinced by the study's findings and questioned some of the methodological underpinnings.

Potential Responsible Party

The Governor and Legislature should determine the base funding amounts.

3.3–Determine the Additional Resources Needed for Disadvantaged Students

Determine the additional funding amounts needed to ensure disadvantaged students have an equal chance of meeting Michigan’s performance standards.

Details

Some students face additional challenges in meeting the state’s performance standards, such as being an English-language learner or attending a school with concentrated poverty. Commissioners saw this first hand during school visits in Southeast Michigan. Michigan’s funding formulas should recognize this and provide districts with the funds needed to give disadvantaged students an equal shot at success.

Rationale

Michigan’s funding formulas should be equitable. Similar districts and students should be provided with similar resources, and students with greater educational needs should be provided with the additional resources they need to have an equal chance of meeting the performance standards. For example, education performance in Michigan is highly correlated with income; lower-income children often arrive at school behind other students and often do not catch up. These students—be it in suburban, rural, or urban school environments—often face a myriad of problems which can make it difficult for them to succeed. At-risk students attending schools with concentrated poverty face particularly acute challenges. Providing at-risk students with an equal chance of success requires additional resources for remediation, wraparound services, and other interventions, and the system should provide the funding to support such measures.

The state’s recent education finance study cited research showing that Michigan’s spending on disadvantaged students trailed the levels recommended by the research and the levels of many other states. Michigan should strive to be a leader in funding equity.

Potential Responsible Party

The Governor and Legislature should determine the appropriate funding level for at-risk students.

3.4—Develop Funding Formulas to Support the System

Determine a method to efficiently and effectively distribute public funding throughout the state that accounts for the additional resources necessary for disadvantaged students to achieve high standards.

Details

Once the levels of spending needed to meet Michigan's performance standards are determined, Michigan needs to develop funding formulas that efficiently and effectively distribute these resources to the proper entities to support student success.

Rationale

Michigan's funding formulas need to recognize the different resources needed for disadvantaged students to have a high probability of success. These formulas must distribute these resources to where they can most efficiently be utilized, whether that is a building, district, intermediate district, or other body.

Potential Responsible Party

The Governor and Legislature should determine the appropriate funding formulas.



Guiding Principle 4:



**Increase Access to
Postsecondary
Education**

Michigan must commit to eliminating family income as a barrier to residents obtaining postsecondary credentials.

Photo taken at Grand Valley State University
in Allendale



Rationale

Michigan should strive to be the leading state in residents with postsecondary degrees and credentials. Postsecondary training is becoming increasingly important to earning a living wage, and Michigan needs to make sure that all Michiganders have access to the training needed to succeed in the labor market. The number of residents with a postsecondary credential is not changing fast enough to meet demands. Even among younger Michiganders—those aged 25 to 34 years old—only 41.8 percent have earned an associate degree or better, and Michigan must improve this number to be a top state.¹⁰⁰

Too often, cost is a major barrier to education attainment. Our state must make the commitment to eliminate this obstacle. Some students are forgoing postsecondary training as they perceive college and other training as out of reach financially, while others are assuming significant amounts of debt to pay for their education. Michigan ranks below the national average in the share of the population with a certificate or degree and is well below the level of leading states. Michigan will not be able to become a top state if postsecondary opportunities become increasingly unaffordable.

Investment in postsecondary education benefits everyone, not just Michiganders who participate in training programs. The availability of skilled workers is becoming increasingly important to attracting business investment and growing as a state, and the presence of a highly-skilled labor force will be a prerequisite to maintaining state economic growth. Additionally, college graduates raise the earnings of others in their communities. In total, the estimated benefits to the rest of society from college attainment are comparable to the substantial benefits that accrue directly to college graduates.¹⁰¹

What does a 21st century Michigan look like?

Michigan students—both traditional students (ages 16–24) and adult students—can access the training they need to be successful in the workforce, regardless of their income. Michigan has become a top state for college achievement and postsecondary credentials because it has made college and training affordable and accessible to all Michiganders. Access to community college is universal and public four-year colleges are affordable and within reach for all Michigan families.

Michigan financial aid programs are coordinated with higher education and training

opportunities and are easily understood by students, adult students, and their families. Students and their families have the supports they need to navigate the application and financial aid process. Students understand the return they will earn on postsecondary training, and see it as an important investment that will pay them lifelong dividends. Policymakers, colleges, and other training providers are all committed to ensuring that college and training remain affordable and that income is not a barrier to success.

What does Michigan look like now?

State support for higher education in Michigan has been falling and tuition has been

increasing. For two- and four-year universities, Michigan has had the fifth greatest decline in state funding over the past five years. Michigan now ranks 42nd for state support of two- and four-year institutions, and Michigan has the fourth least-affordable tuition levels in the nation.¹⁰² In the ten-year period between 2003–2004 and 2013–2014, Michigan cut grant aid in the state budget by 43 percent, while nationally, state-provided student financial aid increased by 61 percent. Michigan ranks 39th out of 52 states (inclusive of D.C. and Puerto Rico) in investment in student financial aid per capita. Michigan spends \$9.70 per capita in student financial aid.¹⁰³ To be a top-ten state, Michigan

would need to spend approximately \$46.85 per capita, or a total of \$464 million—four times the amount we currently spend.¹⁰⁴

College and training programs are expensive in Michigan, and students, adult students, and their families must often make the difficult choice of whether to take on significant debt to access postsecondary opportunities. This choice can be particularly challenging for low-income families. This challenge is amplified because dropout rates are high, resulting in a risk of taking on significant debt without earning a credential that would lead to higher earnings.

Measuring Success

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

- Is college attainment and the number of certificates earned increasing?
- Is the average debt burden of Michigan students decreasing?
- Is the average time to degree completion falling?

Key Strategies

- 4.1 Determine the proper funding level for higher education
- 4.2 Support universal access to community college for all Michigan students
- 4.3 Make four-year degrees more affordable for students who demonstrate merit
- 4.4 Support all students with counselors skilled in career guidance and postsecondary access

4.1–Determine the Proper Funding Level for Higher Education

Determine the proper funding level for higher education to support Michigan’s goal of being a leading state for postsecondary credential attainment.

Details

Becoming a leading state for postsecondary degree and credential attainment will likely require significant new investment. The Commission has recommended state investment in two strategies aimed at making postsecondary attainment more affordable: providing universal access to community college, and making four-year degrees more affordable for students demonstrating merit. The state should consider strategies including direct funding to higher education institutions, enrollment-based funding formulas, performance-based funding formulas, as well as other methods to incent best practices, tuition restraint, and spending efficiency.

Rationale

Postsecondary training is becoming increasingly important to earning a living wage, and Michigan needs to make sure that all Michiganders have access to postsecondary training. Too often cost is a barrier to attainment, and addressing cost issues will require both additional investment and efficient spending. Michigan currently ranks poorly in funding for higher education, ranking 41st lowest on a per-capita basis and 37th lowest as a percentage of income.¹⁰⁵

The low funding level is a contributing factor to Michigan having the fourth least-affordable tuition levels in the nation. Michigan will not be able to become a leader in higher-education attainment with low levels of investment and unaffordable tuition levels. Policymakers need to review how higher education is currently funded and determine the changes needed to make Michigan a leading state for postsecondary attainment. These strategies must account for changing demographics and enrollment trends and promote healthy enrollment management.

Potential Responsible Party

The Governor and Legislature should work to determine ways to improve efficiency.

4.2–Support Universal Access to Community College for All Michigan Students

Support universal access to community college for all Michigan students.

Details

Michigan should increase financial aid to support universal access to community college and preapproved career technical education programs. Universal access should be available to recent high school graduates and returning adult students. To qualify for expanded state support, community college students would need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and draw down any available federal grant aid. Policymakers should ensure that this program does not just include community college students seeking to transfer to four-year universities after graduation, but also supports skilled trades, including construction and manufacturing. Policymakers should also ensure that this program is well integrated with K–12 career and technical education programs, and the state should seek to expand partnerships with businesses to support internships and apprenticeships.



Photo taken at Marshall High School in Marshall

Community college tuition is currently relatively affordable in part because residents living in community college districts pay property taxes to help support the colleges. Areas not currently in a community college district should be required to join the nearest community college district and levy the commensurate millage to participate in this program. The state should also work with community colleges and public four-year universities to ensure that credits earned at community colleges transfer to four-year institutions.

Rationale

The United States led the world in making high school universally available to all students. Between 1910 and 1930, access to high school and high school attendance increased dramatically. The high school movement provides a clear illustration of the power of universal access. In 1910, just 9 percent of young people in America earned a high school diploma, but by 1935, 40 percent did, and this percentage continued to increase in the decades that followed. Universal high school

represented a substantial investment, but there is no doubt that its effects on the United States were both economically and socially transformative.

Michigan needs to view postsecondary training as a necessary step to fully participating in the economy and democracy. If Michigan is to become a leader in residents with postsecondary degrees and credentials, it is time to consider moving our current system of universal education from P–12 to P–14. Postsecondary education is becoming increasingly essential to earning a living wage. Michigan needs to make postsecondary educational opportunities available to every citizen so they can fully participate in society.

Although community college in Michigan is relatively affordable, it is still out of reach for some citizens. Ensuring universal access to community college will send a strong message to Michigan citizens regarding the importance of postsecondary training.

Potential Responsible Party

The Governor and Legislature must make the necessary investment and policy changes.

4.3—Make Four-year Degrees More Affordable for Students Who Demonstrate Merit

Michigan should provide scholarships to make four-year degrees more affordable for students who demonstrate merit.

Details

Michigan should provide scholarships to help students who have demonstrated successful academic records afford four-year degrees at public universities without taking on onerous debt. The scholarship should be provided to graduates of Michigan high schools with a high school grade point average of 3.0 or better. Students should be required to fill out the FAFSA and draw down any federal grant aid for which they are eligible.

The Commission encourages policymakers to leverage the scholarship program to incentivize enrollment and attainment of degrees in four-year programs leading to professions with current and future demand for qualified college graduates, including elementary and secondary teachers (see also strategy 1.1—improve Michigan's teacher preparation program).

To maintain the scholarship, students must be continuously enrolled and be making satisfactory progress toward degree completion. The scholarship can be claimed for four years.

It is important that the state earn the best rate of return possible on this investment. Toward this end, the state should adopt best practices in improving completion rates, and work with universities to constrain tuition cost growth.

Rationale

Postsecondary education is becoming increasingly important to labor market success, but cost is a major obstacle to students completing degrees and certificates. Many students take on onerous debt completing their degrees, debt which can prevent them from starting a new business, buying a house, or starting a family, with some students simply choosing to forgo college rather than taking on debt. To be a top-performing state, Michigan needs to commit to making college more affordable for students who have worked hard in high school and have demonstrated merit. Using a broad-based measure of success, such as grade point average, as a basis for the scholarship provides a more effective means of motivating students than using a single high-stakes test.

Potential Responsible Party

The Governor and Legislature must make the necessary investment and policy changes.

4.4—Support All Students with Counselors Skilled in Career Guidance and Postsecondary Access

Provide every student with a counselor with expertise in helping students access career and postsecondary learning opportunities.

Details

Michigan should ensure that every high school student has the support of a counselor skilled in career guidance and postsecondary learning opportunities. Commissioners saw the power of skilled counseling during a listening tour event in Southeast Michigan. These counselors can help students select the program that best fits their interests and provides them with the best opportunities for success in college and the labor force. Counselors can also help students navigate the application and financial aid process. These counselors should work with the business community to help identify the skills and careers that are most in demand so they can help direct students into high-demand fields. All students can benefit from college and career counseling, but counselors skilled in postsecondary opportunities are especially valuable to low-income and first-generation college students. Michigan currently ranks fourth worst in student counselor ratio at 732 students per counselor and so should strive to immediately be at the national average ratio of 491 students per counselor with a long-term goal of meeting the 250 students per counselor ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association. Achieving the goal of 250 students per counselor would make Michigan a top-five state in this metric.¹⁰⁶

Michigan colleges and universities must also have supports in place to help with student completion. The state should help colleges and universities identify best practices in supporting student retention and completion and provide incentives and support for adopting these best practices.

Rationale

Navigating the application and financial aid process is complex and can be particularly challenging for low-income and first-generation college students. Providing additional support to these students while they are in high school can help them successfully transition from high school to college. Students need assistance identifying the degree, certificate program, and career that is the best fit for their interests. They need assistance applying for these programs, and they need assistance filling out financial aid forms and identifying how to access the financial aid that will allow them to access postsecondary programs. Problems in any one of these areas can derail a student's chance at postsecondary learning.

To address these challenges, students need access to professionals skilled in college and career counseling. Many schools have too few school counselors, or counselors with too little experience and expertise in advising students for postsecondary opportunities and careers. This needs to change. Students should not miss out on college simply because they could not fill out a FAFSA, or because they were unaware of a program that would provide them with the training they need to access the job they want. Michigan needs to ensure that every student has access to a counselor that can answer their questions, provide guidance, and assist them with navigating the college application process.



Guiding Principle 5:



**Partner
with Parents**

Michigan's education system must partner with parents to actively support development and learning, build strong partnerships with educators, provide the information necessary to guide decision-making, and ensure all children and parents have the support and resources necessary to succeed.

Photo taken at Starfish Family Services in Inkster



Rationale

Parents are children's first and most important teachers. Across income levels and racial and ethnic backgrounds, children with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades, pass their classes, and earn college credits. Children have more regular attendance and better social skills, and they are more likely to graduate and go on to a postsecondary education.¹⁰⁷ (It is important to note that the term “parents” is intended to be an inclusive term that includes all caregivers parenting a child.)

Parent involvement can be taught and learned. There is a deep research base that identifies evidence-based strategies that educators, child care providers, schools, and others can deploy to build strong partnerships. These strategies broadly work to (1) build trusting relationships, (2) respect and support families' diverse needs, and (3) create a culture of partnership.¹⁰⁸

In addition to working together to improve academic outcomes, parents and schools are also natural partners to help children and their families access the services they need to thrive. It is well-documented that when children are struggling to meet their basic needs, they are also struggling to learn. Schools must partner with parents, as well as the broader community, to ensure that each and every child arrives at school ready to learn.

What does a 21st century Michigan look like?

Parents across the state report being engaged partners in their children's educations and feel welcome in their child's learning environment. From the time their children are born until the time they graduate from college, parents have access to information about child and adolescent development, and they understand how to effectively support their children. Communication between educators and parents is effective and ongoing, and parents regularly volunteer at school. Parents are confident helping their children with homework, and they understand what their children must know and be able to do to excel in a 21st century world.

Parents are equipped to make, and support their children in making, sound educational decisions. They know what quality programs look like—from child care and preschool to K–

12 and higher education—and they can weigh their options to decide which choice is best for their child and family. Parents also actively participate in local governance through opportunities such as the Parent Teacher Association, school councils, and school boards.

Critically, communities, schools, and parents are prepared to support all children—including those with additional academic, social-emotional, and socioeconomic needs. There are strong partnerships between educators and community agencies that allow children and families to access the supports they need to help their children thrive. Children's basic needs are being met, and when they attend school they are able to focus on learning. Statewide, these partnerships are creating a culture of high expectations and improving outcomes for children.¹⁰⁹

What does Michigan look like now?

In some classrooms, in some communities, parents are empowered to partner with their child's teachers, providers, and schools in exactly the way we envision. Schools are welcoming places, and parents support their child's education in a variety of ways, like helping with homework and speaking up when their child needs more help. Some schools offer specific programs to engage parents, and others help parents learn more about child development through home visiting or child development seminars.

However, access to the knowhow, programs, and tools necessary to be an engaged parent is by no means a guarantee statewide. Parent involvement is too often defined narrowly. Parents that can volunteer at holiday parties and run the concessions stand are considered highly engaged, others are not. Schools invite parents to open houses and fifteen-minute parent-teacher conferences, but parents do not feel welcome to engage actively with their

child's teachers. In some schools, unclear governance structures make it uncertain who is ultimately responsible for student outcomes, making it difficult for parents to raise and resolve concerns.

There are tools to help parents pick the best educational option for their child, but data are often nascent and the tools can be clunky, making side-by-side comparisons difficult. There are different tools for different levels of education, and not all parents are aware that the tools are available.

Michigan has made progress in connecting students and families to human services, but too often these connections are built on interpersonal relationships and do not ensure access for all children. Michigan's most struggling schools are serving high concentrations of low-income students without the support of robust wraparound services, and zip code continues to be highly correlated with outcomes.

Measuring Success

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

- Do parents report being engaged in their children's education?
- Do educators report having engaged parents?
- Do accountability systems reflect the importance of partnering with parents?
- Does our accountability system provide an easy tool for parents to evaluate and compare?
- Are families gaining more efficient access to human services?
- Are children learning more?
- Have we begun to close achievement gaps?

Key Strategies

- 5.1 Connect human services to schools
- 5.2 Nurture parent and educator collaboration
- 5.3 Create user-friendly tools to navigate educational options

Photo taken at Starfish Family Services in Inkster



5.1—Connect Human Services to Schools

Michigan must embed human services in schools and strengthen links between schools and community-based human services in order to connect children, students, and their families with the right services at the right time.

Details

In the long run, social workers and caseworkers should be ubiquitous in schools across Michigan because every school has students with needs that prevent them from achieving their full potential academically. This effort, however, should begin by serving our highest-need students first, including students receiving free and reduced lunch and students with disabilities.

Rationale

Children, students, and their families across Michigan struggle with basic needs, making it challenging, or impossible to focus on education. This was a common theme heard during listening tour events in Southeast and West Michigan. The effects of poverty on learning are clear, and Michigan must do more to level the playing field. One way to do this is to systematically increase access to services in schools. By making it easier to access human services, Michigan can support families and increase educational outcomes. Traditionally, schools provided education services, and human services were provided by the state and community-based partners. By collocating these services, strengthening collaborations between schools and community-based initiatives, and training and empowering some school personnel (such as principals or school counselors) to help families navigate and access human services, Michigan can respond to needs quickly and strategically. These collaborations allow experts in navigating and accessing services to support student's nonacademic needs, freeing up teachers and principals to focus on learning.¹¹⁰

One way to start doing this more systematically is to place a dedicated caseworker in every high-poverty school. To be successful, caseworkers must be trained in effective human service delivery, and continued funding should be contingent on outcomes such as improved attendance and falling dropout rates. This is a cost-effective and common-sense way to start bridging the divide between schools and community supports.¹¹¹ These caseworkers could be supported by a cadre of school personnel that are trained to help families understand the services available to them, complete the applications, and maintain their eligibility. This strategy would increase a school's ability to support families. This team could triage families' needs and assign the most difficult cases to highly trained caseworkers.

Michigan has already started moving services and supports out of government offices and into schools, where relationships can be built and services can be provided when they are needed most. Importantly, as Commissioners heard from leaders in the Upper Peninsula, need exists in rural areas as well as urban settings; many rural settings lack the support infrastructure often seen in denser regions of the state. With this knowledge and experience, Michigan can now work to expand access to caseworkers in schools statewide. Fortunately, as a state, we already make investments

in many of these services. This effort is not about duplicating existing services; rather, it is about making it easier to access the services families otherwise qualify for to help children and students focus on their education.

Potential Responsible Party

The Michigan Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, in collaboration with community-based human service organizations, must design and implement this strategy, including determining how to effectively deploy current resources and when additional resources are necessary.

5.2–Nurture Parent and Educator Collaboration

Michigan must invest in training and tools to help parents and educators across the P-12 spectrum partner more effectively to improve learning outcomes for children and students.

Details

Michigan must be much more intentional about nurturing parent engagement. With a diverse set of stakeholders, we must identify and evaluate existing parent supports and recognize and address gaps. This includes offering innovation grants to districts and community-based organizations to improve existing supports. In addition to supporting parents, Michigan must actively share best practices with educators and teach them to strategically embed parent engagement to achieve our state’s educational goals.

Rationale

Family engagement is a critical part of an effective education system. To fully leverage the benefits of parent engagement, however, Michigan must expand its definition of what it means to be an engaged parent. Research shows that attendance at school activities is important, but that setting high expectations, maintaining ongoing communication about school, and helping students develop good reading habits are far more critical.¹¹² Parents and schools need help understanding and operationalizing this broader view of engagement.

Parents need the knowhow and tools to actively engage in their child’s education, and residents in Southeast Michigan confirmed this during a listening tour event. Tools and knowledge can be gained through formal programming such as home visiting programs or parent university, where parents learn about topics such as developmental milestones and how to help with homework. Informal engagement, such as ongoing communication or evening events like homework nights, is also a crucial part of a broader parent engagement strategy. In general, all of this programming should be culturally and linguistically appropriate and aimed at improving school readiness and learning.

If we want schools to engage more effectively with parents, educators also need support and guidance about how to change current practices. In recent years, schools have started to offer more opportunities for parents through efforts like parent workshops or academies, but they have generally not offered the same type of development and support for staff.¹¹³ This void has been recognized nationally, and researchers have developed a framework for schools to revamp their parent engagement efforts.¹¹⁴ Michigan must now share this framework and provide support for implementing it, as well as other family engagement best practices, through the mechanism provided for in the second guiding principle. We recommend that this topic be one of the first researched and shared through the key strategies detailed in that part of the report.

Potential Responsible Party

MDE and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services should collaborate with school districts, early childhood providers, community-based organizations, and other critical stakeholders to implement this recommendation.

5.3—Create User-friendly Tools to Navigate Educational Options

Our state must create user-friendly tools to help parents and students make the best choices regarding education options—including early childhood, K–12, higher education, and workforce development.

Details

Michigan must create a comprehensive set of user-friendly tools to help students and parents select the educational option that best meets their needs. This must include an online tool to help parents identify their choices, define criteria, evaluate their options, and select a school. Critically, this online interface must include all the educational options that parents consider, including early childhood services and providers, K–12 options, higher education, and workforce training. In addition to access to quality information from the state, Michigan must create consumer protections that ensure that educational providers share accurate information about their services, programs, and outcomes.

Rationale

Publicly reporting data and aggregating information in a user-friendly way is a powerful tool to help parents and other critical stakeholders make sound educational decisions. Too often, online reporting interfaces are geared at complying with state or federal law rather than empowering constituents.¹¹⁵ For parents to be partners in education and informed consumers in our public education system, that must change.

The Data Quality Campaign suggests several criteria that together form a strong foundation for such a system. Data must be accurate, trustworthy, and safeguarded. It must be coordinated and connected across P–20 and workforce entities. It must meet the needs of all stakeholders—from parents and students to policymakers and the press. Finally, data must be easy to find, access, and understand.¹¹⁶ For example, as Commissioners heard during a listening tour event in Southeast Michigan, many parents only access the Internet through a mobile device, meaning that any online system must be mobile compatible.

In recent years, Michigan has taken significant, but insufficient, steps to improve access to quality information and data. MI School Data aggregates data across P–20 and is a powerful tool for savvy users. Many parents, however, are unaware the tool exists and struggle to make sense of the often-confusing data presentations. Parents can also search for child care options using Great Start to Quality which identifies providers in their area and provides basic information. This is a wonderful starting point, but again is underused and provides an incomplete picture due to a lack of provider participation. These platforms may prove to be a strong foundation for the additional work necessary to create the tools that parents want and need.

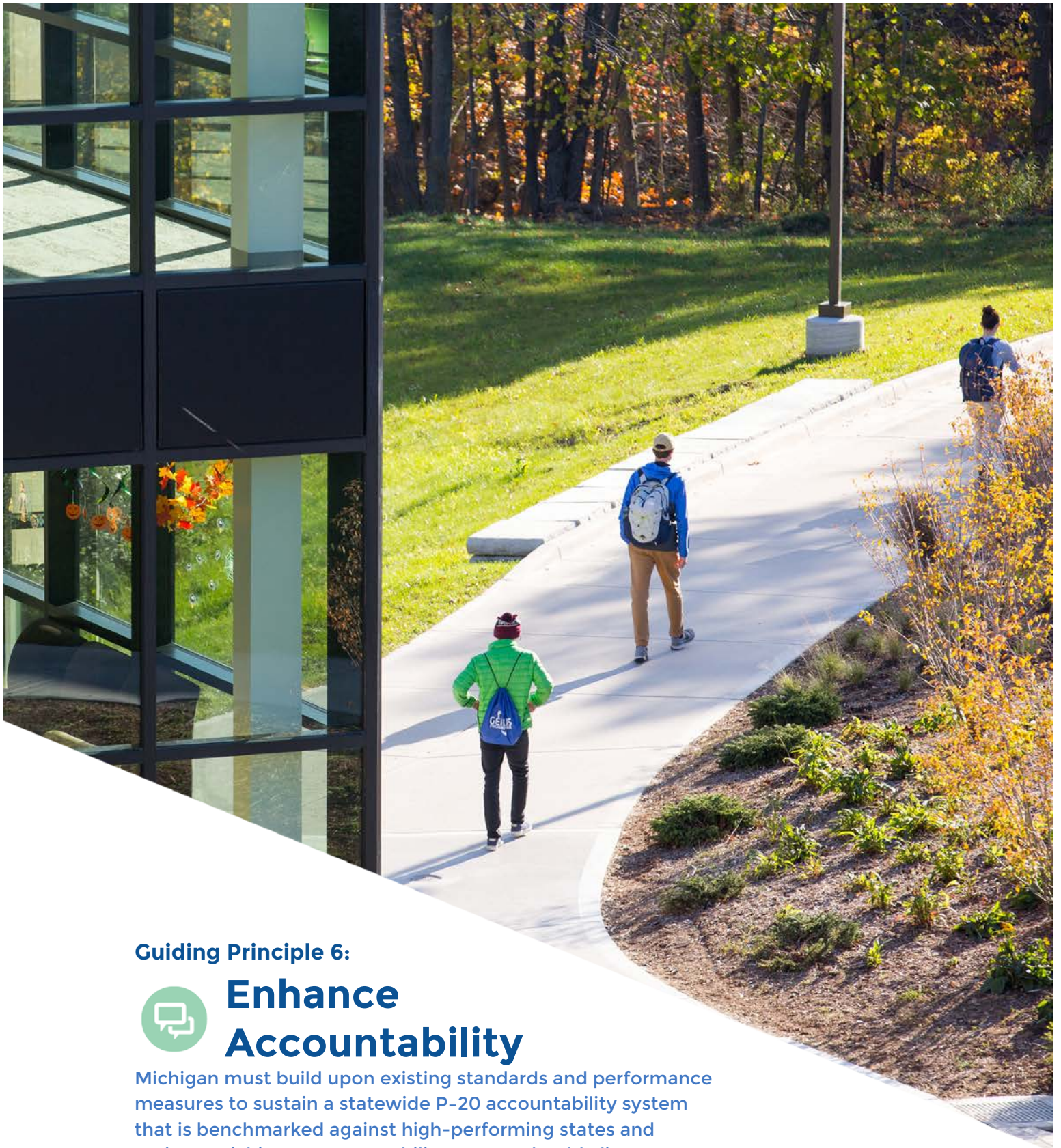
Accurate information is an important foundation, but Michigan must do more to help parents make the best educational choice for their child. One important way to do this is to prohibit the use of gifts—such as gift cards, computers, and groceries—to entice parents and children to enroll in a school. These gifts create perverse incentives and too often ask our state’s neediest families to choose between the best educational option and extra room in their family budget.

Potential Responsible Party

MDE and the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) should lead efforts to create a blueprint for an online comparison tool that reflects available data and the needs of diverse stakeholders. Stakeholders involved in this effort should include individuals who will use the tool (including parents, students, and the general public) as well as education providers (representing early childhood providers, traditional public schools, charter schools, community colleges, universities, and others). The State must then identify how to create and maintain the online tool and ensure there is quality information for all parents and consumers of educational information.

Photo taken at Starfish Family Services in Inkster





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.

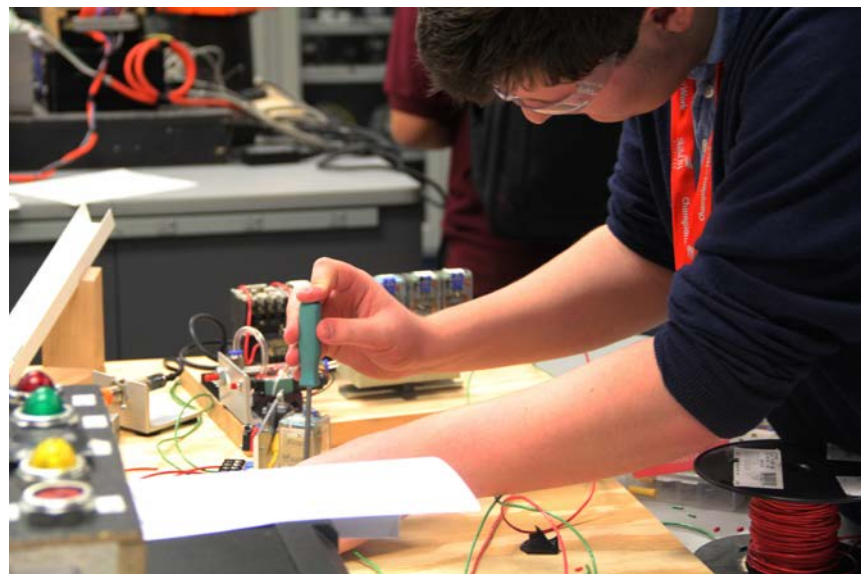


Photo taken at Grand Rapids Community College Applied Technology Center in Grand Rapids

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.



Guiding Principle 7:



**Ensure Access to
High-quality Learning
Environments**

Michigan must ensure that all students have access to high-quality, innovative, welcoming, and safe learning environments equipped with the technology necessary for teaching and learning 21st century skills and achieving high-performance standards.

Photo taken at Schoolcraft College in Livonia



Rationale

When providing a high-quality education, place and facilities matter. For optimal learning to occur, schools must be clean, safe, and welcoming. Students and teachers need access to 21st century technology for students to learn 21st century skills. School facilities affect student health, behavior, engagement, and learning.¹¹⁷ For teachers, facilities affect teacher recruitment and retention. Further, the quality of facilities is a statement about the value of education as well as the value we place on students and their learning. Michigan provides state-level support for facilities at community colleges and state universities through its capital outlay process. The state does not, however, provide any direct funding to local school districts for facility costs. Michigan cannot expect all students to succeed but then relegate its most disadvantaged students to its lowest-quality facilities. Instead, Michigan needs to send a message to students that they matter by educating all students in safe, high-quality learning spaces. High-quality learning environments are important not just for K–12 students but also for young children, college students, and adult students.

What does a 21st century Michigan look like?

Students and teachers in every community have access to the tools they need to teach and learn 21st century skills. All students feel safe and welcome at school, and urban and rural parents do not feel that they need to send their children to suburban schools for them to have access to modern, safe, and technologically advanced facilities. In addition, Michigan recognizes that learning occurs not just in the classroom, but also at home, in libraries, and in other community settings. Student access to the technology needed for learning does not end at the classroom door but is available to them wherever they need it. To achieve this, Michigan has implemented capital funding reforms, and all students have access to high-quality physical environments and technology.

What does Michigan look like now?

Currently, 540 traditional individual districts across the state are responsible for funding,

building, and maintaining schools. Districts fund capital expenses, such as constructing new buildings or updating current facilities, by asking voters to approve a local millage. Michigan's wealthiest districts can generate more than five times as much revenue per-pupil for a given millage rate than Michigan's poorest districts.

While Michigan's 1994 school finance reforms addressed inequality in operations spending, it ignored capital funding. As a result, wealthier suburban districts have significantly better facilities than poorer urban and rural districts, and Michigan is a bottom-ten state in terms of equity in capital funding.¹¹⁸ Many states address these challenges by assisting local districts with funding, but Michigan is one of just 11 states that does not provide any capital funds to local districts. In addition, public school academies in Michigan have no means to raise revenues for capital costs and must use operational revenues to fund and maintain spaces.

Measuring Success

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

- Is school facility spending more equitable?
- Do all students have access to the technology needed to learn 21st century skills?
- Are all schools safe?

Key Strategies

7.1 Assist poorer communities with funding for school facilities

7.2 Support public school academies with funding for school facilities

7.1—Assist Poorer Communities with Funding for School Facilities

Guarantee a minimum yield per mill to help traditional school districts in poorer communities afford high-quality school facilities.

Details

Michigan should provide state aid to local school districts levying property taxes for facilities to ensure that every district is guaranteed a minimum yield for each mill raised. On average, one mill of property taxes raises \$216 per student, but this yield varies widely by district, ranging from less than \$100 per student in the state's poorest communities to over \$500 per student in the state's wealthiest communities. Michigan should strive to ensure that every district can raise at least the statewide average of \$216 per student for every mill levied by supplementing local property taxes with state funds.¹¹⁹

It is critical that limited taxpayer funds be spent wisely. Therefore, the state should establish a process for evaluating the need for capital projects, and the state should only provide state funds to districts that can demonstrate need. Schools that are unable to demonstrate need could fund projects through a local millage if approved by local electors.

Rationale

Michigan is one of 11 states that provides no support to local districts for capital outlay.¹²⁰ As a result, the playing field is highly uneven. Wealthier suburban districts can finance facilities at much lower tax rates than poorer urban and rural districts. Taxpayers in the Shepherd School District would need a tax rate five times as high as taxpayers in the Bloomfield Hills School District to raise the same amount on a per-pupil basis. Since poorer students generally live in communities with lower property values, districts educating economically disadvantaged students are often doing so in lower-quality facilities, making success more difficult.

Facilities matter. They are important to attracting and retaining teachers, and they affect health, behavior, engagement, and learning of students.¹²¹ Facilities also make a statement to students that the community values their education. For all students to have access to high-quality infrastructure and learning environments, the state will need to support infrastructure spending in low-property-wealth communities.

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature must change state law to implement this policy.

7.2—Support Public School Academies with Funding for School Facilities

Details

Michigan should provide direct funding to PSAs to help pay for purchasing or renovating facilities provided that there is demonstrated need for the project. Charter schools and their education management organizations will need to meet financial transparency requirements to be eligible for state funds.

It is critical that limited taxpayer funds be spent wisely. Therefore, the state should establish a process for evaluating the need for capital projects, and the State should only provide state funds for purchasing or renovating facilities to charter schools that can demonstrate a project is needed. The building will be property of taxpayers and the state would recover any investment if the charter school were to close. Charter schools that are unable to demonstrate need could fund capital projects using private funds or other available funds.

Rationale

Traditional school districts in Michigan can ask local voters to support facility and infrastructure costs through local property taxes. This option is not available to PSAs, which instead pay for facilities with their foundation allowance, donations, and grants. Providing PSAs with support for facilities costs will allow them to direct additional funds into the classroom. Safeguards will be put in place to ensure that the funds are spent properly and that state funds are only used to support construction and renovation projects in communities that demonstrate high need.

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature must change state law to implement this policy.



Guiding Principle 8:



Invest Early

Michigan children should have access to safe, quality, and affordable early childhood care and education that prepares them for long-term educational success and supports whole-child development.

Photo taken at Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency in Kalamazoo



Rationale

Early childhood education and development matters. Experts have demonstrated what parents and families already know: children are learning from the moment they are born. Their brains develop very quickly in their early years, and this development is not hardwired—it is dramatically affected by children’s environment.¹²² Investments in quality early childhood education and care are a critical step to ensuring that children are developmentally on track and ready to succeed in school.

Research has shown that investments in high-quality programs and interventions work. For example, home visiting programs pair parents with professionals who provide them with support, knowledge, and resources to promote positive parenting practices, empower families to be self-sufficient, increase school readiness, and more.¹²³ Participants in Michigan’s own prekindergarten program, the Great Start Readiness Program are more likely to pass statewide assessments and more likely to graduate from high school than those who do not participate.¹²⁴

In addition to unequivocal developmental and educational benefits, research has demonstrated clear economic benefits to investing early. Investing in early childhood may be the most effective economic development strategy we can make as a state.¹²⁵ Estimates of returns vary, ranging from \$2.50 to \$17 for every dollar invested, showing the powerful return to children, families, and taxpayers from early investment.¹²⁶

These investments are also critical for families. Access to high-quality, reliable child care, for example, can be a difference-maker for parents trying to enter the labor market. High-quality, reliable child care makes it easier to enter and remain in the workforce. It reduces parents’ absenteeism and turnover, and allows parents to stay in the workforce for longer continuous periods—increasing their productivity and wages.

The structure of Michigan families has changed. In 1960, a single parent led 9 percent of households. In 2010, the portion of households had grown to 34 percent.¹²⁷ The result is more children are living in households where quality early learning development and care is a challenge for their parents.

What does a 21st century Michigan look like?

Michigan is a leader in early childhood development and learning outcomes nationally, and Michigan recognizes that investments in children and their families are critical and that different children and families have different needs. As a result, all children, regardless of their family circumstances, enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

To achieve this, children and families across the state have access to safe, quality, affordable services—starting during pregnancy and going through age eight. Children and families with the highest need receive the most significant support through programs like home visiting, early intervention, infant mental health, and preschool. As family need increases, the intensity of services changes to best fit their needs and effectively leverage public resources. Child care is one example. Michigan offers subsidies that allow families to access quality providers at an affordable rate.

Critically, across all programs and services, Michigan is focused on quality. Programs have skilled staff; small class sizes; developmentally appropriate curricula; safe, stimulating, language-rich environments; and positive relationships between providers, parents, and children.¹²⁸ Michigan now offers universal access to state-funded prekindergarten for all four-year-olds. For our children to thrive in the future, we believe our formal education system must now start at age four, not five. There are a variety of providers (all of whom implement evidence-based programs) that offer prekindergarten from child care providers to school districts.

What does Michigan look like now?

Michigan is more attentive than ever to the importance of investments in young children. Thanks to increased funding for

prekindergarten and home visiting, more children and families can access quality early care. In fact, Michigan's recent prekindergarten expansion was among the largest in the country, and Michigan is now ranked 15th for access to four-year-old preschool nationally.¹²⁹ The Office of Great Start is leading a more intentional effort to align state and federal investments and resources to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

Access to quality, affordable programs and services, however, continues to be a challenge. Too many children arrive at kindergarten inadequately prepared, leading to greater future expenses in areas such as special education and grade repetition. Child care is too expensive for too many families, and quality care is difficult to find. As a result, some families make tradeoffs between staying home to care for their children and pursuing work to increase their household income, or they may have their children in substandard care.¹³⁰ Child care workers (those charged with supporting children during these critical years of development) are, on average, paid minimum wage. In fact, qualified early childhood and care educators, regardless of program type, are increasingly difficult to find and retain. Investments in early interventions like Early On[®] are inconsistent across the state and often underfunded. Stakeholders, however, report optimism that the system can improve, and they note that Michigan understands the challenges in providing access to quality services and is actively working to improve access, service quality, and coordination.¹³¹

In addition, Michigan lacks a consistent measure of readiness for children entering kindergarten, while other states have benchmarks in place already. This prevents assessment of prekindergarten programs and interventions and limits the ability to scale or replicate successful efforts.

Measuring Success

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

- Are children developmentally on track?
- Do children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn?
- Can children read by fourth grade?
- Do families have access to quality child care?
- Do families have access to quality preschool?
- Are families able to afford and access the services they want and need?

Key Strategies

- 8.1** Support universal preschool for all four-year-olds
- 8.2** Develop and retain a quality early childhood workforce
- 8.3** Increase access to quality services through improved coordination
- 8.4** Enhance early learning outcome measurement and tracking

8.1—Support Universal Preschool for All Four-year-olds

Michigan must provide universal access to preschool for every four-year-old in the state.

Details

Michigan currently provides universal access to preschool for all four-year-olds based on a set of risk factors and a means test. Michigan should eliminate these requirements and offer state-funded, voluntary prekindergarten to all 117,000 four-year-olds in the state.¹³²

To achieve universal access to preschool, Michigan must increase investments in GSRP to allow every four-year-old in the state to attend state-funded preschool.

Rationale

Nearly every leader Commissioners spoke with during listening tour events, from Detroit to Traverse City to Houghton, highlighted the importance of ensuring that students arrive to kindergarten ready to learn. Preschool is a proven strategy to improve school readiness, and the GSRP—Michigan’s homegrown preschool program—is among the best in the country.¹³³ Currently, GSRP targets low-income children and works in partnership with Head Start to create universal access to prekindergarten for children below 250 percent of the federal poverty level. The program is voluntary and operated by school districts and community-based organizations. Families below 250 percent of the federal poverty limit do not pay tuition. The program includes instruction in language and early literacy; social, emotional, and physical health and development; and early math, science, and social studies. This program, working synergistically with Head Start, should be expanded to all four-year-olds in Michigan.

Three states—Georgia, Florida, and Oklahoma—offer examples of how to provide universal access to all four-year-olds.¹³⁴ Of the three, Oklahoma serves the largest proportion of students with the highest quality rating and may be a model for Michigan. In 1998, Oklahoma began offering universal access to state-funded prekindergarten, and today, 75 percent of four-year-olds participate in the program. Participation is voluntary for both children and school districts, and many other providers may offer the program, including Head Start programs and other community-based providers. Throughout implementation, Oklahoma has maintained an intense focus on quality. All programs must maintain strict quality standards, including requiring teachers to have bachelor’s degrees, requiring parity with elementary teacher pay, and setting student-teacher ratios intended to improve learning. Researchers have reviewed Oklahoma’s program extensively and have found that participants across all racial and ethnic groups and all socioeconomic groups benefit from the program and see improved literacy and numeracy skills.¹³⁵

Potential Responsible Party

The Governor and Legislature must lead the effort to increase funding, and current GSRP providers must collaborate with the Office of Great Start to craft a sustainable statewide implementation plan.

8.2—Develop and Retain a Quality Early Childhood Workforce

Michigan must develop and retain qualified personnel in order to have quality early childhood programs and services.

Details

In order to attract and retain qualified professionals in the early childhood field, Michigan must ensure that they are competitively compensated for their knowledge and skills. There are a variety of ways to accomplish this goal, including policies such as offering state-subsidized salary increases after completing professional development, offering tax credits for child care workers, and offering scholarship opportunities, loan forgiveness, and more.

Rationale

Investment in early childhood is a powerful strategy to improve school readiness and increase long-term school success. For this strategy to be effective, we must have quality programs and services and an early childhood workforce that is paid competitively and supported with professional development. Rightly so, programs and services expect a workforce that can support early development in areas such as language and social-emotional health. This expectation of quality—generally seen as increased investments in professional development and higher levels of education—has not yet been met with an increase in salaries, particularly for preschool teachers and child care workers.

Michigan preschool teachers have an average salary of \$27,740 annually. Kindergarten teachers, meanwhile, make \$52,460 on average, and elementary teachers' salaries average \$63,530.¹³⁶

This discrepancy minimizes the skills and knowledge needed to support early development and limits the ability to attract and retain the qualified educators necessary to have high-quality instruction and programs.

Child care workers, another critical part of the early childhood workforce, are among the lowest paid workers in our economy. The average child care worker makes minimum wage, and rarely receive benefits like health insurance or a pension plan.¹³⁷ Low hourly wages make it difficult to implement the quality measures needed to offer high-quality services to our youngest Michiganders. It also often means that child care providers have high levels of turnover, running counter to best practices which suggest that having a consistent caregiver is essential for early childhood development. As our state demands increased quality, increased professional development, and higher levels of postsecondary education for child care workers, we must also increase wages to attract and retain quality talent.

This wage gap cannot be addressed simply by increasing the cost of programs and care for parents. Currently, there is a tension between parents' ability to pay and programs' ability to pay teachers. The state must step in with strategies such as subsidizing salaries for early childhood and care

educators or increasing investments in child care subsidies to ensure that we are recruiting and retaining professionals to the workforce.

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature, in collaboration with early childhood stakeholders across the state, must take the lead on identifying how best to implement this strategy.

Photo taken at Starfish Family Services in Inkster



8.3—Increase Access to Quality Services Through Improved Coordination

Michigan must continue to improve the coordination of service delivery and the use of existing resources across federal funding streams, state departments, nonprofit agencies, philanthropic partners, local school districts, and other partners to ensure that all children and their families have access to high-quality early childhood programs and services.

Details

Michigan needs to ensure that early childhood resources are spent efficiently, resources are deployed strategically, and programs reach the children and families who need them most. Given the wide range of service providers from social service agencies to healthcare systems to school districts, this goal can only be accomplished if services and existing resources are well coordinated. Recent efforts to improve coordination have resulted in significant progress, but much more needs to be done.

Rationale

Early childhood initiatives include a wide range of programs aimed at improving the health, wellbeing, and development of young children and their families. These programs cross multiple state agencies and systems, leverage different sources of federal funding, and are implemented by a diverse set of community partners. Too often, these programs operate in silos, creating problems for families, providers, and policymakers. A parent seeking services often needs to complete multiple and often complex applications with a variety of service providers. Literacy challenges, gaps in access to technology, and geographic challenges can all work to prevent families in the most need from receiving service. Providers also struggle with coordinating multiple funding streams coming from a variety of government and philanthropic sources. These silos make it difficult for policymakers to create a coherent, aligned system that both serves families effectively and strategically leverages resources. As Commissioners heard from leaders in Northern Michigan, coordinating agencies, providers, and funding streams is difficult but necessary work if Michigan is going to effectively serve young children and their families.

Recent efforts in Michigan led by the Office of Great Start have worked to identify and align existing efforts for families. They have also worked to align strategic priorities to ensure investments are deployed in the most effective and efficient way possible, but there is more work to be done to eliminate the complexity of navigating programs and best meet the needs of young children and their families.

Potential Responsible Party

The Office of Great Start must lead this work in partnership with other state agencies, regional entities, and community partners. The Legislature must invest in this effort and recognize that coordination and alignment requires an upfront and sustained investment of both time and resources.

8.4—Enhance Early Learning Outcome Measurement and Tracking

Michigan must continue to enhance the early learning portion of the state's longitudinal data systems to inform service delivery, improve program alignment, and increase our understanding of what works.

Details

Michigan must improve early learning participation and outcomes data by expanding the number and types of programs participating in existing data collection and use developmentally-appropriate kindergarten entry assessments statewide to gauge the impact of early investments on readiness.

Rationale

Over the past decade, Michigan has committed to building a longitudinal data system that tracks children and students from early learning to K–12, postsecondary education, and workforce development. The Michigan Statewide Longitudinal Data System is maintained by the CEPI, and these data are presented to the public via the MI School Data portal. While early childhood data collection is nascent, significant progress has been made. Michigan now issues a unique identification code to all children enrolled in state-funded preschool and early childhood special education and publicly reports aggregate child counts. These data are being used in combination with K–12 data to show which kindergarten students participated in a state-funded early learning program and future reports will attempt to show the connection between attendance in the early grades and participation in a state-funded early learning program.

For this system to be comprehensive, however, Michigan must move beyond the small suite of state-funded programs currently participating. In Pennsylvania, for example, children are assigned a secure identifier when they apply for services, even if they do not enroll, and this information is captured to allow researchers and policymakers to better understand the effects of participation. This assignment process captures up to 40 percent of children ages birth to five in Pennsylvania.¹³⁸

In addition, data must extend beyond program participation and demographics to child outcomes. Michigan must join 29 other states and implement a statewide kindergarten assessment.¹³⁹ When implemented statewide, this tool will improve our shared understanding about whether children are ready for kindergarten when they arrive and which programs are most effective in improving readiness. These results can also be used to help program staff improve programming and to help policymakers make important decisions about how to allocate resources to achieve our state's early learning goals. Two important notes: first, kindergarten assessments are not standardized tests. Rather, they are observational tools that educators use to measure readiness. These assessments are not, and should not, be used to determine if a child is allowed to attend kindergarten. Instead, they provide important information for parents and educators about a child's development. Second, school readiness is an important and laudable goal. It is not, however, the only objective of early

learning programs. This tool and its results must be coupled with other measures to fully determine the impact of early learning investments.

Potential Responsible Party

CEPI should continue to lead this effort. The Legislature must allocate the funding required to launch and sustain statewide implementation.



Guiding Principle 9:



Update K-12 Governance

Michigan must reform K-12 governance as part of developing a coherent P-20 governance structure that ensures the public education and higher education marketplace produces high outcomes, equity, efficiency, innovation, and collaboration.

Photo taken at City High Middle School
in Grand Rapids



Rationale

Governance defines who is in charge and how decisions are made. In Michigan's education system, a wide range of entities—from teachers and principals to the SBE and Governor—has authority over many of the same policies and practices. At its best, this creates robust debates on best practices with collaboration toward a shared goal. At its worst, it causes conflicts or disconnects, creating incentives for educators to metaphorically—and literally—shut the classroom door and work independently without shared goals.

As detailed throughout this report, Michiganders need high-quality learning to succeed in a global economy. This includes early childhood developmental support at home, in child care settings, and in pre-K centers. It continues in K–12 schools through postsecondary institutions.

Michigan's current structures are failing to meet the needs of every student in our state, and the strategies outlined in this report must be supported by a better, and different state and local governance structure. Our current education governance structure has evolved over a century and has been periodically updated (by consolidating districts or creating ISDs) to respond to new demands. It has not, however, been reviewed and redesigned to meet new 21st century expectations.

These recommendations are a starting point to address Michigan's most pressing issues in K–12 governance. They should not limit future governance discussions as Michigan continues to create a true P–20 system. For a P–20 system to exist in practice and not simply on paper, policymakers must regularly consider how policies incentivize collaboration or create barriers to a connected system. Through those ongoing discussions, our system will continue to evolve to meet our needs.

What does a 21st century Michigan look like?

Michigan has built a coherent P–20 governance system. All education stakeholders have clear roles and authority, working together to implement a shared vision for a learner-centered education system. Much has been done to improve coherence in the K–12 system. The Governor has clear authority and responsibility for Michigan's education system. The Michigan Department of Education is well-equipped to help teachers, schools, and districts improve, and regional educational

service agencies are well-positioned to provide quality, efficient services to districts. Across the state, some local school districts choose to voluntarily consolidate to create higher levels of capacity and efficiency.

Students and families have access to a seamless experience appropriate for children from birth through graduation with a postsecondary credential. They understand the educational options available to them and know how to pick the path that best fits their needs. All of the options are high. All children are able to successfully access a high-quality learning

environment that meets their needs. Educational decisions are made based on what is best for the student. Different providers collaborate easily, and there is clear agreement about how such collaborations are funded, supported, and monitored. Each provider is governed by a knowledgeable board and it is clear who is accountable for results. Similar educational providers are held accountable for the same outcomes, and data about performance against these metrics is publicly available.

What does Michigan look like now?

Michigan's K–12 public education system has been governed and structured in largely the same way since the 1960s. The State has responsibility for education, and this responsibility is shared among the Governor, Legislature, and the SBE. The board of education was created in the constitution to provide “leadership and general supervision” over public education, excluding institutions of higher education that grant baccalaureate degrees.¹⁴⁰ This includes selecting a superintendent of public education (who oversees MDE), serving as the general planning and coordinating body, and advising the Legislature of the resources required to support the system. The Legislature is then charged with maintaining and supporting a system of free public elementary and secondary schools.¹⁴¹

Local school districts and public school academies (often called charter schools or PSAs) are responsible for the day-to-day business of educating students within the framework defined by the state. Each is governed by an independent, elected school board for local districts or a PSA board

appointed by charter school authorizers. There are currently 540 local school districts and 302 public school academies in Michigan.¹⁴² The state also created intermediate school districts to support activities such as coordinating special education and career and technical education, providing professional development, and consolidating back office support. Michigan currently has 56 ISDs.

At the higher education level, community colleges are supervised and controlled by locally elected boards with funding provided by the Legislature and local property taxes. Twelve of the state's 15 public universities are governed by boards filled by gubernatorial appointment. Three public universities—Michigan State University, University of Michigan, and Wayne State University—are governed by eight-member boards that are elected on a statewide basis.¹⁴³ While the Legislature is charged with appropriating money to support universities, the Legislature cannot pass legislation setting policy for them.

At the early childhood level—especially from prenatal until a child enters kindergarten—governance structures vary on a program-by-program basis. The MDE Office of Great Start was created by executive order in 2011 and is charged with coordinating services and investments. Great Start Collaboratives aim to do the same at a regional level.

This complex system creates silos that are difficult for students and families to navigate. It makes it challenging to adopt a shared vision and implement long-term strategies, and, in an era of declining enrollment, the system is unsustainable.

Measuring Success

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

- Are roles and responsibilities clear?
- Do students, families, and community members know who is responsible?
- Does our system have the right capacity for the number of students in our state?
- Are all educational offerings high quality?
- Do students and families have the tools necessary to select the educational options that are best for the student?

Key Strategies

- 9.1 Reform state board of education governance
- 9.2 Enhance the function and capacity of the Michigan Department of Education
- 9.3 Reconceptualize the structure and function of intermediate school districts
- 9.4 Support local efforts to consolidate
- 9.5 Ensure access to high-quality educational options for all

9.1–Reform State Board of Education Governance

Ask voters to decide how best to align state education policy with accountability through the Governor.

Details

To align state education policy with accountability through the Governor, there are several options that could provide a suitable outcome: place a constitutional amendment on the ballot to allow the Governor to appoint the members of the SBE, allow the Governor to directly appoint the state superintendent and then abolish the SBE altogether, or expand the membership of the SBE and change the election process to include gubernatorial appointments.

Rationale

At the state level, the Governor, Legislature, MDE, and SBE all, to varying degrees, direct state policy. The SBE was created in the 1960s to provide leadership and supervision over public education and make recommendations to the Legislature on the financial requirements for the institutions. This SBE structure acknowledged the importance of education and sought the benefits of insulating education decisions from day-to-day politics through long-serving (eight-year terms) members overseeing a professional superintendent and department of education. SBE members are nominated at party conventions and elected in statewide elections.

While well-intentioned by its architects, accelerating political forces do not allow the SBE to play its independent education policy leadership role. Education has risen to the top, or near the top, of state political and policy agendas. Governors and legislators are increasingly active in seeking to set and further education policies and practices. This can be a very good thing, as education is so important to state and personal economic opportunity that it should be a policy priority. However, it can be a bad thing if policies and practices being advanced are destructive, ideologically-motivated, or otherwise damaging to education.

While at one time a Legislature and Governor might have been content to accept the SBE's recommendations for educational policy and, crucially, its recommendations concerning the resources needed to implement them, that is no longer the case. Legislators seek to use their power of the purse to dictate education policy to the SBE; likewise, Governors propose an education budget and, looking to implement their own vision for education, remove powers from the SBE by executive order.

Any change to the composition and structure of the Michigan State Board of Education requires a change to the Michigan Constitution which requires a vote of the people. No top-performing states who have a state board of education choose their state board members through a party convention.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, the Commission proposes allowing voters to choose between the following models:

- **Allow the Governor to appoint members of the board of education, and allow the SBE to then hire the state superintendent.** SBE members would be appointed to staggered eight-year terms. This change would create greater alignment between the agendas of the Governor, Michigan State Board of Education, and MDE. It would also insulate education policy from the dramatic sea changes when a new governor takes office. It would encourage stability and continuity—something the field is clamoring for in the current environment.
- **Allow the Governor to appoint the state superintendent and abolish the SBE.** This would make MDE another cabinet agency with clear accountability through the executive branch. This approach recognizes that the Governor is in charge of education and the public has clear accountability measures if they are not pleased with the outcomes.
- **Expand the SBE and change the election process.** Expand the SBE through a number of appointments by the Governor and remove the party convention nomination process by which the elected members are chosen. Elected SBE members should run through a primary—possibly on a nonpartisan ballot as judges do. Additionally, the Legislature may consider conducting these elections on a regional basis.

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature must vote to place this policy before Michigan voters.

9.2—Enhance the Function and Capacity of the Michigan Department of Education

Enhance MDE’s capacity to support effective learning, teaching, and leading across the state.

Details

Michigan must enhance MDE’s capacity to help teachers, schools, and districts improve. We must also situate education functions that are currently performed by a range of state agencies within the department.

Rationale

To support the policies and practices outlined in this report, Michigan must dramatically reshape our department of education. Evidence from high-performing systems suggests that an effective department of education provides leadership on a range of education-related topics and is responsible for developing, aligning, and implementing effective policies at scale.¹⁴⁵

We must expand MDE’s personnel and expertise to provide a substantive focus on improving learning, teaching, and leading. This includes strategies outlined in the second guiding principle, such as identifying and sharing evidence-based practices and designing and executing statewide capacity-building efforts.

A critical component to this redesign is a renewed focus on recruiting top talent to work at MDE. If the department is to be a leader in instructional practices and school improvement, it must have an accomplished staff—like the master teachers discussed in 1.2—with deep expertise and experience in serving students and schools. Currently, there are policies that deter top talent from pursuing opportunities at MDE. These policies—particularly those related to compensation—must be reconsidered to build the staff necessary to perform these functions.

In addition, we must eliminate the fragmented state-level approach to education and centralize state functions in MDE. Michigan governors have wanted direct control of key education functions. To achieve this, they have moved education functions to state agencies under their purview. Key Strategy 9.1 works to address that concern by giving the Governor direct oversight of MDE through one of two proposed changes to the state constitution that would be put on the ballot. The current and previous governors have assigned education-related tasks to Departments of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs; Technology, Management, and Budget; and Treasury. This fragmented system must be reshaped in light of a new governance structure. Making this change will help to create the aligned, coherent state leadership we need to help our students excel.

The Michigan State School Reform/Redesign Office (SRO) exemplifies how an enhanced MDE could tackle some of our state’s biggest educational challenges. The SRO is charged with identifying, supporting, and closing schools in the bottom five percent of performance. This office

was moved from MDE to the Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget in 2015 because this function was important to the Governor and he did not have the ability to directly control it within MDE. Per this recommendation, the SRO would be moved back to MDE.

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature must authorize additional staff and realign state functions. MDE must reorganize to prioritize improving learning, teaching, and leading.

9.3–Reconceptualize the Structure and Function of Intermediate School Districts

Rename, reconfigure, and reassign tasks to intermediate school districts.

Details

Michigan must rename, reconfigure, and reassign tasks to intermediate school districts to enable high-quality and economically efficient delivery of services to students. Critically, this change in roles can only take place after the changes to the SBE and MDE outlined above are implemented so there is alignment and coherence in the state’s system.

Rationale

Michigan’s 56 intermediate school districts are misnamed. While ISDs have historically served as an intermediary between the state and local districts, this role often requires that ISDs serve multiple masters and perform multiple, sometimes contradictory, roles. Uniformly, ISDs should be renamed regional educational service agencies. This name represents a redefined role and clarifies that they are essential to providing customized and efficient services, when needed, to local districts.

In order to facilitate higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency, RESAs are necessary to support Michigan’s many school districts. Customizing regional help is essential and school boards should tap services rendered by RESAs for reasons of efficiency, effectiveness, and expanded learning opportunities for students.

We believe that:

- The boundaries and size of RESAs need rationalizing. In order to ensure sufficient capacity and efficient use of resources, there should be a minimum number of districts (including traditional school districts and PSAs) and students served. Geographical consideration must also be given and exceptions may be allowed for sparsely and densely populated areas. Key differences in tax structures between existing ISDs will need to be addressed to achieve this.
- RESAs should be in the service business. Local districts (including charter schools), early childhood providers, and MDE should be able to purchase services from RESAs.
- RESAs should not be regulators. Local districts must be confident that they can be honest about the areas they are struggling in without fear of a compliance finding. There may be some necessary exceptions, such as when ISDs authorize charter schools, but regulatory function should be the exception, not the rule.
- RESAs must ensure that all local districts in their service area have access to quality early childhood services, career and technical education, special education (birth through age 26), professional development, postsecondary planning services, and transportation. These

services may be provided by a district itself, purchased from another local district, or purchased from the RESA.

- Local districts with capacity to deliver high-quality services in one or more of these areas should not be required to purchase services. In financial or academic emergencies, however, MDE may require districts to purchase services from RESAs.
- The public should have a reasonable and clear expectation of the roles played, consistently and statewide, by RESAs. We acknowledge that needs vary by region and district size, and RESAs should be responsive to these needs.

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature must create protocols for rationalizing the boundaries of ISDs and redefining their roles. RESAs must also take the lead in reorganizing their operations.

9.4—Support Local Efforts to Consolidate

Eliminate barriers and offer incentives to support local voluntary efforts to consolidate traditional school districts.

Details

Michigan must support local efforts to consolidate by revisiting existing laws and regulations regarding the consolidation process, changing unnecessary barriers, and offering incentives for local districts to voluntarily consolidate.

Rationale

In an era of declining enrollment, Michigan has too many seats for the number of students we serve. Statewide, the number of students enrolled in public schools has dropped 13 percent since its peak in 2002–2003, and it is continuing to drop. Nearly two thirds of traditional school districts experienced a decline in enrollment between 2014–2015 and 2015–2016.¹⁴⁶ This decline has created significant financial challenges for local districts because funding is directly tied to the number of students served. In an effort to balance budgets, local districts use their fund balance and cut programs to rebalance the budget. Some districts have also considered consolidation as an option to maintain quality services for students in an era of declining enrollment and increased financial stress.

Consolidation is a difficult, emotional process. Conversations with local superintendents suggest that community pride, a desire to have their own local schools, and racial composition of districts make consolidation a hard sell locally. Too often, however, promising local efforts are stymied by state rules regarding debt, facilities, and more. The Legislature must revisit existing rules and regulations related to consolidation and determine if the process creates a necessary protection or a bureaucratic barrier. In addition, the Legislature should continue to fund grants to assist in this process and consider incentives to encourage more districts to reconsider how public education services are delivered and administered in their community.

Other states have opted to structure their school districts much differently than Michigan. Our state has 540 local school districts that—together with 302 charter schools—serve 1.5 million students. Maryland and Florida, however, have countywide school districts. Maryland has nearly 850,000 students attending 24 districts.¹⁴⁷ Florida serves 2.8 million students in 67 county school districts.¹⁴⁸

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature must revisit statute to make these changes and allocate funding to support grants and incentives.

9.5—Ensure Access to High-quality Educational Options for All

Michigan must manage its public education system to ensure that all schools are high quality and that every student has access to a high-quality school, including traditional public schools, cross-district choice, charters, and online learning options.

Details

Michigan must develop policies that promote high-quality educational options for every child in every community across our state.

Rationale

Students and their families across Michigan have choices when deciding where and how they will learn. Roughly one in six students participate in public school choice. More than 146,000 Michigan students now attend charter schools, and over 123,000 students attend classes in a traditional public school systems outside their neighborhood school district—18 percent of the K–12 student population.¹⁴⁹ Across the state, more schools are fighting to attract a declining number of students, challenging academic quality and creating fiscal pressure in some schools and districts. As a state, we must create policies that ensure access to an educational option while respecting school choice, demanding quality, and addressing fiscal realities.

While the Commission was unable to achieve consensus on the policies to achieve those goals, Commissioners agree that we must act. We believe:

- Michigan’s policies and governance structures must acknowledge that students across the state participate in a choice environment. Policies must also recognize that students have different educational and social-emotional needs.
- Michigan has too many seats in an era of declining enrollment, but it does not have enough quality seats.
- Michigan’s expansion of school choice has resulted in improved outcomes for some students, but has not yet been an effective strategy to improve achievement for all students.
- Some communities have too many choices, while others have too few quality options. Michigan has not yet performed a needs assessment to determine the number of quality seats that are needed and where they are needed.

This report includes many strategies that will dramatically improve learning across all types of schools. For example, families must have access to quality information about school performance to make the best decision for their child (as discussed in the fifth guiding principle). Schools and educators must be supported to implement best practices (as discussed in the second guiding principle). We must recognize that when students have increased needs, they need more intensive services that cost more to implement (as discussed in the third guiding principle). We must also

landscape. We were not able to achieve consensus on the best path forward, but offer these ideas to inform future debate.

- *Create a statewide needs assessment.* MDE should undertake a statewide community needs assessment, looking at both the quantity and quality of schools offered in a community.
- *Provide stable and predictable funding for school districts in a choice environment.* Michigan should follow the example of high-performing states (Massachusetts/Minnesota) through policy, whereby if a district loses a student through choice or attendance at another public school district, they do not lose the student's whole foundation grant, or it is phased out over time rather than immediately. This weighting provides time to right-size district costs.
- *Improve transportation.* For too many families, transportation limits their ability to exercise school choice with access to quality options. The state should explore how to address this access barrier and allow families from all socioeconomic levels to enroll in the school that best meets their child's needs—including examining the use of existing public transportation systems.
- *Create the New Schools Certificate of Need Commission.* As this report has demonstrated, Michigan has too many seats given the number of students in our state, and communities too often lack quality seats. To ensure that public dollars are spent wisely and that impacted communities have input on all new schools in their area, Michigan should create the New Schools Certificate of Need Commission to set the criteria by which a new school would be permitted to open. While local school boards and charter school authorizers currently debate the need for a new school, this Commission would provide a state-level review that would conduct an independent needs assessment and consider the new school's impact on the broader community. Commissioners serving on the 21st Century Education Commission differed significantly on this proposal for many reasons, including in their opinion of who would serve on the New Schools Certificate of Need Commission and which new schools would be required to participate.

To be clear: None of these ideas garnered the support necessary to be included as recommendation. They are offered here to enhance future policy debates.

Potential Responsible Party

The Legislature must develop policies that promote high-quality educational options for every child in every community across our state.

An Investment in Our Future

This Commission recognizes that the work of many government commissions, blue-ribbon committees, and similar efforts are often put on the shelf and not revisited because there is little appetite for generating the revenues needed to implement report recommendations. We also recognize that Michigan taxpayers have a right to be skeptical of requests for additional resources. K-12 performance in Michigan has not been historically commensurate with spending. Michigan is an average state in terms of its per-pupil spending, but is significantly worse than average in performance. If taxpayers are going to be asked for additional investment, they need to be confident that funds will be spent efficiently and effectively, and that they will see a return on their investment. However, we should be clear, without significant new investment, Michigan cannot become a top-performing education state.

Current Investments

While Michigan currently ranks 24th in per-pupil K-12 spending, this represents a sharp drop in Michigan's standing. Michigan ranked 8th highest in per-pupil spending as recently as 2000, but since that time, the state has seen inflation-adjusted per-pupil spending fall by \$663 per pupil, while the U.S. average for per-pupil spending increased by over \$1,400. Michigan schools have also seen increasing fiscal pressure from retirement costs. A recent House Fiscal Agency estimate found that in adjusting for inflation and retirement costs, per-pupil funds available for school operations were 12 percent lower in FY 2015 than they were in FY 2005.¹⁵⁰ Declining resources relative to other states is a likely cause of Michigan's recent poor performance relative to other states.

On the higher education front, Michigan ranks 42nd for state support for two- and four-year public institutions and has the fourth least-affordable tuition levels in the nation.¹⁵¹ Michigan simply will not be a leading state in postsecondary attainment if it is a bottom state in postsecondary funding.



Photo taken at Innovation Central High School in Grand Rapids

New Investments: Challenging but Essential

We are cognizant of the challenge facing policymakers. They must balance many competing priorities, including finding the funds to support the state's infrastructure. Taxes are generally unpopular with voters and there is

strong competition for state resources. The Legislature also need to be sensitive to tax changes that could negatively impact the state's competitiveness.

At the same time, our current level of investment puts the state's future at risk. The executive order creating this Commission stated, "Michigan cannot hope to maintain its economic vitality and quality of life without making dramatic gains in the academic achievement and career preparedness of all its residents." While finding additional funding is politically challenging, ensuring the economic vitality and quality of life of Michigan residents represents a goal that warrants facing these challenges.

Michigan can potentially find ways to incrementally improve performance through more efficient and effective spending. But we need to be realistic about where the state currently stands. Michigan is near the bottom in education performance and we have identified quickly becoming a top state as essential to Michigan's future. Dramatic gains will not happen without significant new investment.

Policymakers should view education as an investment, and increasing investment now will

lead to increased prosperity in the future. Business Leaders for Michigan has estimated the benefits of Michigan becoming a top-ten state for jobs, personal income, and a healthy economy. The benefits include 72,000 more people working, \$9,200 more income per person, and \$12,300 more in gross domestic product per person.¹⁵² This would increase Michigan's total state income by \$90 billion. At current tax rates, this would translate to over \$8 billion per year in additional state and local tax revenue—increasing state and local tax revenue to \$45 billion.

Many education investments can reduce future government expenditures. Early investments that improve kindergarten readiness can reduce grade retention and special education costs. Improved education attainment increases employability and earning potential and reduces the reliance on welfare programs. The claims of increased savings from avoiding investing now are false. If Michigan remains a bottom education performer, it will be a bottom economic performer. In exchange for tax savings now, we will forgo the jobs and income that would accrue to Michigan in the future if it were a top performer

Estimated Investment by Key Strategy

The Commission has purposely left much of the detail on how to implement the guiding principles and strategies to policymakers, meaning precise costs cannot be attributed to many of the recommendations. In addition, many of the individual recommendations do not require significant new investment to implement. This does not mean they can be done for free, but it does mean that they can likely be accomplished with existing resources by making the strategy a priority or through allocating a modest amount of new funding. Where possible, we have provided estimates of how much new investment would be needed for the Commission's strategies below.

- 1.1 Enhance teacher preparation**—Much of the implementation of this strategy would consist of a change in approach that would not require new resources. The strategy does suggest the creation of a teacher-in-residence program to replace the current student teacher model. During residency, the teacher would receive a modest stipend. If teachers in residence received a stipend of \$15,000 per year, it would require an annual investment of approximately \$75 million.

New investment: \$0 to \$75 million annually

- 1.2 Create multiple career pathways**—Once new career pathways are in place it may make sense to offer additional compensation to teachers achieving different levels. However, whether adjustments in the compensation of teachers will be needed or how they would be structured has yet to be determined. This strategy also contemplates creating a teacher-in-residence program for student teachers. The potential investment needed for this program is included under strategy 1.1.

New investment: Indeterminate

- 1.3 Improve educator professional development**—School districts already make a substantial investment in professional development and many improvements could be made without investing significant new resources. However, a more robust model that includes things like teacher coaches who observe teachers and provide timely and in-depth feedback would require new resources. The top end of the investment estimate assumes such a coaching model is put in place.

New investment: \$0 to \$75 million annually

- 1.4 Strengthen building-level and organizational leadership**—We assume an additional \$500 investment in professional development per administrator in addition to current investments.

New investment: \$6 million annually

- 2.1 Support state priorities with the necessary resources and tools**—The investment needed to support teachers and districts will vary from policy to policy and cannot be determined in advance. The investments required to implement the Commission's recommendations are itemized with each specific recommendation.

New investment: Indeterminate

- 2.2 Support implementation of evidence-based practices**—We assumes 50 to 100 additional staff people for MDE. This would require an investment of \$5 million to \$10 million annually.

New investment: \$5 to \$10 million annually

- 3.1 Identify efficiencies**—Implementing this strategy does not require new investment. This strategy may find ways to spend more efficiently, freeing up funds that can be used to support this report's recommendations.

New investment: Indeterminate

- 3.2 Determine the base funding amounts for K–12**—At this point, it is not clear how much new investment will be required, especially considering potential efficiencies which may be identified under strategy 3.1.

New investment: Indeterminate

- 3.3 Determine the additional resources needed for disadvantaged students**—Michigan's current funding formulas call for at-risk funding equal to 11.5 percent of a district's foundation allowance for each at-risk student. Some schools also receive significant federal funding to help address the costs associated with educating at-risk students. Michigan does not currently fully fund the appropriation for at-risk students. Fully funding the 11.5 percent additional funding for at-risk students would require new investment of approximately \$110 million per year.¹⁵³ Michigan's recently completed funding study recommended that schools receive an additional 30 percent for at-risk students. Funding at-risk students with an additional 30 percent foundation allowance would require an investment of approximately \$900 million per year. Additional study is needed to determine the appropriate amount.

New investment: \$110 to \$900 million annually

3.4 Develop funding formulas to support the system—Once new funding levels are set, Michigan will need to design new funding formulas. This can either be done by executive and legislative branch staff or with the help of outside experts.

New investment: \$0 to \$1 million one time

4.1 Determine the proper funding level for higher education—Michigan currently ranks among the bottom ten states for state support for two- and four-year institutions, suggesting that to be a top state, Michigan will need to spend significantly more than it does right now. However, much of the new spending needed for this strategy could be met through investment in strategies 4.2 and 4.3. While the investment needed for this recommendation is listed as indeterminate, looking at the level of support other states provide can offer some context. If Michigan wanted to be ranked in the top 15 among states for support for higher education on a per-capita basis, it would need to invest \$1.2 billion more per year. If Michigan wanted to rank in the top half of states in state-level support for higher education, it would need to invest approximately \$740 million more per year.

New investment: Indeterminate

4.2 Support universal access to community college for all Michigan students—The investment needed to provide universal access to community college depends on several policy decisions. Policymakers may decide that income is already not a deterrent to attendance, in which case additional investment is not needed. Fully covering the last-dollar cost of tuition for all Michigan community college students would require an investment of approximately \$400 million per year.

New investment: \$0 to \$400 million annually

4.3 Make four-year degrees more affordable for students who demonstrate merit—the investment needed to make four-year degrees more affordable for students who demonstrate merit is also indeterminate since the Commission purposely left the decision on the proper level of support to the Governor and Legislature. However, some context is helpful. Michigan currently spends roughly \$110 million for financial aid at the state level. Ten years ago, state-level financial aid totaled \$241 million. Therefore, it would take an investment of \$130 million to reach the level of state financial aid support Michigan provided ten years ago.

New investment: Indeterminate

4.4 Support all students with counselors skilled in career guidance and postsecondary access—The Commission recommends that Michigan move to be at the national average in the ratio of students per counselor. Michigan currently has 732 students per counselor and the national average is 491. Moving to the national average will require Michigan to hire an additional 1,000 counselors.

New investment: \$90 million annually

5.1 Connect human services to schools—The investment estimate assumes a social worker is embedded in every school with more than 200 students and more than half of its students eligible for free and reduced lunch (approximately 900 school buildings). The investment could be significantly lower if Michigan can redirect existing human service workers into schools.

New investment: \$70 million annually

5.2 Nurture parent and educator collaboration—Many of the potential options recommended in this strategy do not require new investment, while some, like parent workshops and family academies, do require new investment. Minnesota’s Early Childhood Family Education program is a good model of a family academy. This program, offered through Minnesota schools, is available to all families. It requires an annual investment of approximately \$45 million and Minnesota has roughly half the population of Michigan.

New investment: \$0 to \$90 million annually

5.3 Create user-friendly tools to navigate educational options—CEPI can likely achieve some of this strategy through its existing appropriation. However, some new investment will likely be required.

New investment: \$5 million one time

6.1 Enhance student achievement measures—Michigan currently spends more than \$40 million per year on assessments. It is not clear whether these enhancements can be accomplished with current spending or if additional resources will be required.

New investment: Indeterminate

6.2 Hold the right people accountable—MDE can accomplish this goal with its current resources plus the additional resources called for in strategy 2.2.

New investment: No additional investment required above the investments contained in other strategies

6.3 Improve data reporting—These changes likely will not require additional resources above the investment the state is already making.

New investment: \$0

6.4 Move toward a competency-based learning model—Michigan’s move to a competency-based learning model represents a philosophical shift in how the state approaches teaching and learning. Schools budget for two weeks of annual professional development, so it is unclear what additional investment will be required.

New investment: Indeterminate

7.1 Assist poorer communities with funding for school facilities—The investment required for this recommendation will depend on how many districts levy mills for new projects. Michigan has 302 districts where a mill generates less than the statewide average. If these districts levied an average of two mills (with some levying more and some not having a levy) the new investment would be approximately \$112 million per year. If the average across these districts was three-and-a-half mills, the new investment would be approximately \$200 million. (The average statewide debt millage was 4.63 in 2015.¹⁵⁴) The investment of new funds will be very small for the first several years after this policy is enacted since costs will only come online as new projects are approved for state support and as local voters approve millages.

New investment: \$100 to \$200 million annually when fully phased in

7.2 Support public school academies with funding for school facilities—The investment needed for this recommendation depends on the level of support the state chooses to provide. Michigan has approximately 300 charter schools serving 150,000 students. The per-pupil facilities cost for charter schools that own their own facilities is \$971 on average.¹⁵⁵ If schools representing half of the state’s charter school students received reimbursement under this program, and the state reimbursement was \$971 per student on average, it would require a new investment of \$30 million. If charter schools representing half of the students participated, the required investment would be \$74 million. The investment of new funds will be very small for the first several years after this policy is enacted since costs will only come online as new projects are approved for state support and as local voters approve millages.

New investment: \$30 million to \$74 million annually when fully phased in

8.1 Support universal preschool for all four-year-olds—Michigan’s Great Start Readiness Program provides preschool to four-year-olds with family income below 250 percent of the poverty line. The estimate of the investment needed for universal preschool assumes the income restriction is removed and that all students attend a full-day program. The estimate assumes the per-slot allocation stays the same, and that 85 percent of four-year-olds participate.

New investment: \$390 million annually

8.2 Develop and retain a quality early childhood workforce—Policies contemplated in this recommendation include offering state-subsidized salary increases after completing professional development, offering tax credits for child care workers, and offering scholarships and loan forgiveness. The investment required for this strategy will depend on the approach chosen by the Legislature. Some context can be provided, however. Michigan has approximately 17,000 child care workers and 6,900 preschool teachers. Therefore, a strategy with an average investment of \$500 per worker would cost \$12.0 million, while a more robust strategy with an average investment of \$2,000 per worker would cost \$47.8 million.

New investment: \$12.0 to \$47.8 million annually

8.3 Increase access to quality services through improved coordination—This strategy seeks to improve the coordination of service delivery and the use of existing resources. No new resources are required.

New investment: \$0

8.4 Enhance early learning outcome measurement and tracking—The investment estimate assumes a cost for purchasing an assessment tool and 40 minutes of teacher time per student to enter the data. It does not assume a cost for teacher observation time, as it is presumed that teachers will observe students through their normal course of work. This strategy also recommends enhancing the state longitudinal data system to better capture early childhood information. CEPI is already working to include additional data from early childhood programs in the data system. The investment estimate assumes modest additional investment to enhance and accelerate that process.

New investment: \$6 million to \$10 million annually

9.1 Reform state board of education governance—This recommendation will not require additional resources.

New investment: \$0

9.2 Enhance the function and capacity of the Michigan Department of Education—Over the longer run, an additional investment may be required, but in the short run, the investment needed for this strategy is assumed to be included in the investment estimate for strategy 2.2.

New investment: No additional investment above the investment included for strategy 2.2

9.3 Reconceptualize the structure and function of intermediate school districts—This strategy rationalizes the placement of various education functions but does not call for significant new services. Therefore, no new investment is needed.

New investment: \$0

9.4 Support local efforts to consolidate—The level of grant funding is a legislative decision, but an amount is given here to provide a guide for the level of funding that might be needed.

New investment: \$10 million annually

9.5 Ensure access to high-quality educational options for all—The strategy provides some options, but does not choose a specific approach. At this point, the required investment is still indeterminate.

New investment: Indeterminate

Where to Start

This blueprint is intended to transform education policy in Michigan over the next 30 years. The size and scope of the recommendations, however, can make it difficult to determine where to start. Commissioners prioritized strategies into four categories: short term (less than two years); medium term (three to five years); long term (six to ten years); and ongoing efforts that must start early and continue throughout this transformation process.

As Michiganders prioritize the work ahead, we must also resist efforts to veer off course. High-performing systems create a plan, and they commit to implementing that plan. We must do the same. Focusing our attention on these strategies alone is the first step in creating a cohesive, shared plan for our state and improving outcomes for our young Michiganders.

Short-Term Strategies

We urge the Governor and Legislature to discuss and make significant progress on implementation of the following items in the final two years of this administration. By doing so, our state will be demonstrating a shared commitment to dramatic change.

The strategies that follow are grounded in our work, but offer slightly more detail about how the principles ought to be executed. The Commission recognizes that as this report is implemented, policy details like those proposed below will be discussed and debated, which is a critical part of operationalizing this blueprint for Michigan.

Focus on Learning

- *As discussed in key strategies 1.1 and 1.2:* Elevate the teaching profession and raise the standards for admission to teacher preparation programs, increase rigor during preparation, and require a year-long residency for student teachers. Once educators enter the profession, offer meaningful career pathways for teachers advance in their career. The Commission suggests engaging a diverse group of stakeholders to lead this effort, including educators, school leaders, teacher preparation institutions, MDE, and others.
- *As discussed in key strategies 3.1 and 3.2:* Implement a process during the current legislative session to (a) determine the level of resources needed for K–12 students to meet performance metrics (assuming those funds are used effectively and efficiently), and (b) to make recommendations to the Legislature on the best ways to attain those resource levels. The

Commission suggests implementing the approach taken by Tennessee and Washington to construct an appropriate foundation grant.

- *As discussed in key strategy 3.3:* Adopt budgets for FY 18 and FY 19 that put Michigan on the path to providing significant additional resources for every disadvantaged student in the state that would follow the child to whichever public school he or she attends. The Commission believes this is an urgent investment and the Legislature should not wait to have a new foundation formula in place before increasing support for our neediest students.

Create a Strong Culture of Success

- *As discussed in key strategy 4.2:* Commit during the current legislative session to a K–14 education system for Michigan that offers universal access to community college and other skill training options for Michiganders. This should be a top funding priority in coming years.
- *As discussed in key strategy 4.4:* Provide incentives to districts to boost the number of high school counselors skilled in career guidance and postsecondary access. This will help students navigate their postsecondary education options. Our goal should be to quickly move Michigan to the national average of 491 students per counselor—with the longer-term goal of achieving an average ratio of 250 students to one counselor.
- *As discussed in key strategy 5.1:* Increase access to human services in schools by strengthening the link between schools and community-based human services in order to connect children, students, and their families to the right services at the right time. The short-term goal should be for every school that has a student population of over 50 percent disadvantaged students to have a caseworker on site.

Build a Coherent, Connected Education System from Prenatal to Career

- *As discussed in guiding principle 6:* Maintain our current content standards, and commit to relying on the M-STEP and SAT to measure student outcomes. High-performing states and nations set and maintain high standards for a long period of time. We must do the same by defining and protecting performance outcomes and assessments for the next decade for Michigan students. We must also work to identify additional measures for student success and specific tools to assess 21st century skills.
- *As discussed in key strategy 9.1:* Provide Michigan with the sole source of accountability a high-performing state public education system requires by placing a constitutional amendment on the 2018 ballot to determine if the people wish to (a) allow the Governor to appoint members of the State Board of Education and then allow the SBE to hire the state superintendent, (b) allow the Governor to appoint the state superintendent and abolish the SBE altogether, or (c) expand the SBE to include gubernatorial appointments and change how SBE members are elected.
- *As discussed in key strategy 2.2 and 9.2:* Establish a professionally staffed office in MDE to serve as a focal point for collecting the latest evidence-based knowledge about teaching and learning from local districts, ISDs, and universities and deploying these practices at scale.

Timetable

Exhibit 4. Implementation Schedule

#	Key Strategy
Short-term	
1.1	Enhance teacher preparation
1.2	Create multiple career pathways
2.2	Support implementation of evidence-based practices
3.1	Identify efficiencies
3.2	Determine the base funding amounts for K–12
4.2	Support universal access to community college for all Michigan students
4.4	Support all students with counselors skilled in career guidance and postsecondary access
5.1	Connect human services to schools.
6.1	Enhance student achievement measures
9.1	Reform state board of education governance
9.2	Enhance the function and capacity of MDE
Medium-term	
1.4	Strengthen building-level and organizational leadership
3.3	Determine the additional resources needed for disadvantaged students
3.4	Develop funding formulas to support the system
4.1	Determine the proper funding level for higher education
4.3	Make four-year degrees more affordable for students who demonstrate merit
5.3	Create user-friendly tools to navigate educational options
6.3	Improve data reporting
7.1	Assist poorer communities with funding for school facilities
7.2	Support public school academies with funding for school facilities
8.1	Support universal preschool for all four-year-olds
8.2	Develop and retain a quality early childhood workforce

#	Key Strategy
9.3	Reconceptualize the structure and function of ISDs
Long-term	
6.4	Move toward a competency-based learning model
9.4	Support local efforts to consolidate
Ongoing	
1.3	Improve educator professional development
2.1	Support state priorities with the necessary resources and tools
5.2	Nurture parent and educator collaboration
6.2	Hold the right people accountable
8.3	Increase access to quality services through improved coordination
8.4	Enhance early learning outcome measurement and tracking
9.5	Ensure access to high-quality educational options for all

Together We Can Improve Education in our State

Our existing education system is not built to produce the outcomes we want and need, but evidence from high-performing systems across the United States and internationally is promising. There are strategies we can pursue as a state that will move us into the forefront of public education systems in the nation. From parents and students to educators and administrators. From local residents to elected officials and business leaders to government officials. We all have a role to play. However, unless we resolve to take action quickly to transform our current public education system into one that gives our children an edge, the prognosis for our state and its citizens' future prosperity is bleak. There is no time to waste.

Appendix I:

Public Education in Michigan: The Public Good

Thomas J. Haas, Chair

The importance of education has long been recognized in Michigan, including before Michigan was granted state status. The Northwest Ordinance passed in 1787 by congress, created a compact between the original states and the Northwest Territory, which included Michigan, in which “schools and the means of educational shall forever be encouraged.”¹⁵⁶ When Michigan adopted its first constitution in 1835, two years before it achieved statehood, using slightly different language but the same concept, Michigan encouraged education and intellectual and scientific pursuits in its constitution, even requiring funding for the promoted pursuits not only at the K–12 level but also for universities.¹⁵⁷

Although the funding mechanisms have since changed, the Michigan Constitution has provided that education and schools shall be promoted in every iteration of the constitution and continues to do so today. Mirroring language from the Northwest Ordinance, in 1908 and in the current constitution, the people included the mandate that “[r]eligion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”¹⁵⁸ And like Michigan’s first constitution, Michigan chose to not only express such encouragement but also to fund K–12 (which is provided at no cost) and maintain universities in the current constitution.

Indeed, this concept was so important that the delegates of the Constitutional Convention of 1961–1962 considered the language found in Article VIII, § 1 as the first substantive proposal before the convention. A delegate from the education committee linked the language back to the Northwest Ordinance and asked that the language be adopted in as well, “not only because of the historic significance of the language but because of the importance...of the development of education in our state of Michigan.” Another delegate expounding upon the history of this provision stated:

It is therefore within this historic tradition that we consider this section today. It is within the realization that our basic liberties and our very foundations are rooted in an educated society as was foretold by our forefathers hundreds of years ago. It is fitting and proper that the purpose of education be the first item submitted for your consideration. There is no doubt that it has been one of the first items of government since we have known that institution on these soils. For us, the people of Michigan, the [Northwest Ordinance] was our first and most basic constitution. And its proper concern with religious freedom, the bills of rights and education is a living testimony to the wisdom of its writers.

As shown not only in the constitution's plain language but also in the testimony surrounding its adoption in the most recent Constitutional Convention, the importance of education has been recognized as fundamental and vital to Michigan and its citizenry since its inception.

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Appendix II: About the Commission

In 2016, Governor Rick Snyder created the 21st Century Education Commission to analyze top-performing education systems and make bold recommendations for transforming Michigan's education system in Executive Order 2016-06.

The 25-member Commission included representatives from the education, business, government, and nonprofit communities. All Commissioners shared a deep commitment to improving public education and brought expertise in local, regional, and state education system design. The Commission was comprised of 16 gubernatorial appointees, four legislative appointees, the SBE president(s), and four state department directors. The Commission was chaired by Dr. Thomas Haas, president of Grand Valley State University. For a full list of Commissioners, please see the page titled "Commission Members."

The Commission met eight times as a committee of the whole between June 2016 and February 2017. The Commission started its work by grounding members in Michigan's existing system and best practices from high-performing states and nations. A key component of this work was presentations from the following state and national experts: Natasha Baker, State School Reform Officer, Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget; Chris Gabrieli, cofounder and CEO of Empower Schools; Bill Guest, president and chief solutions architect of Metrics Reporting, Inc.; Kati Haycock, CEO of The Education Trust; Robbie Jameson, budget administrator for the State of Michigan; Venessa Keesler, deputy superintendent, educator, student, and school support with the Michigan Department of Education; and Marc Tucker, president and CEO of the National Center on Education and the Economy.

After the grounding phase, the Commission drafted a vision for the future. Based on this vision, the Commission formed three workgroups to allow for more robust analysis and debate. These workgroups were focused on three broad content areas: accountability, funding, and structure and governance. Each Commissioner served on at least one workgroup. Workgroups met dozens of times during the life of the Commission to further analyze high-performing systems, better understand the challenges facing Michigan, and craft recommendations to create a world-class education system.

At the same time, Commissioners engaged with parents and community members through listening tour events hosted with schools in Detroit, Grand Rapids, Traverse City, and the Upper Peninsula. A full summary of these engagement efforts see, "Appendix III: Public Engagement Summary."

Recommendations were then shared with the full Commission for review. Each element of the report was subject to approval by the Commission, including the vision, guiding principles, key strategies, goals, and priorities. The Commission required a high level of consensus support to adopt each element included in this report. Commissioners believed the power of the report was in a diverse set of stakeholders coalescing around a shared vision and strategy for the future. The Commission strived to craft a plan that could drive education policymaking for the next 30 years.

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 21st 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 21st 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 "21st 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 21st Century education system look like to you?

Perhaps the most common theme heard across the state in response to this question was that a 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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.

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