

PreK–12 Workgroup Policy Recommendations

The Need: A Redesigned Education System

If Michigan is to reverse its population trends and **become a beacon for people around the country and the world**, it must begin by creating a world-class education system. This will attract businesses and cutting-edge technology sectors, build civic responsibility and commitment to democracy in our youth, and foster an enduring and committed community. A thriving education system will draw more families and businesses and retain graduates of our universities who will want to send their children to our schools.^{1,2}

This charge requires us to be bold and comprehensive. **We cannot make tweaks to the current education system. We must redesign it** so that Michigan leads the world in preparing every child to learn for life in a changing future. This will be **the defining factor** as to whether any other efforts to grow the population in Michigan are a success.

We propose four recommendations:

- **Align governance and accountability to system vision and goals**, while clarifying roles, eliminating inefficiencies, and bolstering capacity
- **Commit to the Michigan Education Guarantee** that students graduate with the competencies they need to thrive now and throughout their lifetimes
- **Reimagine learning and the job of teaching**, enabling educators to innovate so students can learn for life
- **Fund the system fully, equitably, efficiently, and transparently** so every student and every school has the resources needed to meet the system’s goals, including that of the Michigan Education Guarantee

¹ Elizabeth Heubeck. 2022. “What Do Top U.S. Companies Think Schools Could Do Better? We Asked.” *Education Week*. Accessed October 7, 2023. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/how-can-schools-turn-out-better-thinkers-and-workers-top-u-s-companies-have-ideas/2022/05>

² Nick Morrison. December 9, 2021. “Creative, Flexible, Global: What Millennial Parents Want from Schools.” *Forbes*. Accessed October 9, 2023. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorrison/2021/12/09/creative-flexible-global-what-millennial-parents-want-from-schools/?sh=6b0ece624563>

The Challenge: A Rapidly Changing World

We must face facts: Michigan's education system was **designed for a different time**, when a high-school graduate could stay at a well-paid factory job for their entire working life and earn enough to provide for their family. But even then, the system hardly worked to adequately support minority students and students from low-income households.

Whatever strengths our education system may have had then, they are now woefully **insufficient to meet current challenges**: widening gaps in performance between minority and low-income students and their affluent peers, increasingly intelligent machines, environmental crises, and profound challenges to democracy and civic life.

Michigan's education system does not lead among U.S. states, much less its global competitors. Our benchmarking shows that Michigan's performance is average among states, with the state's eighth graders trailing 17 states in math and falling in reading. Furthermore, the average U.S. 15-year-old lags 30 other countries in math, eight in reading, and 11 in science, according to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Good jobs and stable futures are rapidly disappearing for many of our students, especially those from the most historically underrepresented populations. The standards to which we held our education system in the past are no longer good enough. Revitalizing a prosperous, thriving, and equitable Michigan will require our education system deliver on a promise: that all learners achieve high skills. Critical thinking, communication, collaboration, resilience, independent learning, empathy, and good judgment, all grounded in a strong academic foundation—these are the skills **all our children need to thrive and lead purposeful and prosperous lives** in today's economy and society. And these need to be developed in inclusive environments that foster well-being and belonging for all students.

The Roadmap

Our recommendations are not meant to be considered in isolation. They are a linked and sequenced roadmap for redesigning Michigan's education system and emerge from our analysis of successful systems in the U.S. and across the globe. Michigan must start by ensuring that its system of **education governance and accountability** is coherent, efficient, and aligned to a forward-looking and unified vision. Once that coherent vision and oversight are in place, Michigan can establish the **Michigan Education Guarantee** to ensure students demonstrate the fundamental knowledge and skills needed to thrive. The Michigan Education Guarantee should serve as a North Star for the system. It will require innovation and lifelong learning in teachers and ultimately lead to a **redesigned teaching profession and richer learning environments for students**. However, none

of this will be possible unless the system is **funded fully, equitably, efficiently, and transparently** to meet that guarantee.

Such an innovative, equitable, and transparent system cannot be built overnight. It will require **legislative action as well as the formation of commissions, ballot initiatives, and maybe even a constitutional amendment**. We must act carefully but purposefully, acknowledge where our system has fallen short in the past and how we can do better moving forward, and be willing to change course if needed along the way.

Taken together, all of this represents an unprecedented restructuring and redesign of how we deliver world-class education for **every** child in Michigan, including a significantly different governance structure that is more efficient; an accountability system that guarantees outcomes for students rather than blaming teachers; an education system that includes a much higher set of expectations for students' performance, their learning environments, and the environments in which teachers work; and a redesign of the necessary funding to support this new system.

Recommendation One: Governance and Accountability

Recommendation:

Align governance and accountability to system vision and goals, while clarifying roles, eliminating inefficiencies, and bolstering capacity.

Description:

Michigan's current system of governance and accountability is inefficient, fractured, poorly aligned, and lacks a clear, shared vision for the system's goals. Conflicting and duplicating responsibilities and a lack of data transparency create disconnects among policy development, implementation, and classroom practice. There is a lack of capacity throughout the system to oversee progress today, much less achieve the outcomes we hope to see in the future.

Education governance should effectively bring actors together to set a forward-looking and unified vision for the education system and establish goals and a strategy for realizing that vision. It must hold every actor in the system accountable for those goals, while providing robust support to make the vision a reality. This includes clarifying responsibilities, sharing data on progress, strengthening capacity, and reducing inefficiency at every level.

This recommendation is about setting an ambitious, broadly shared vision for Michigan's education system and improving governance and accountability by aligning roles and responsibilities, streamlining duplicative bureaucracies and making the system more efficient, and building capacity at all levels to ensure the system is up to the task of guaranteeing a world-class education for every child.

Specific steps include:

- Developing a broadly shared state vision, goals, and strategy for Michigan schools through an inclusive process with input from educators, parents, businesses, community members, and students
- Aligning the priorities of the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), the State Board of Education, and the governor's office, including a reconsideration of how the state superintendent is selected
- Studying, streamlining, and aligning the roles and responsibilities of system actors at every level and eliminating redundancies and inefficiencies
- Bolstering capacity at the MDE, intermediate school districts (ISDs), and local school districts to support struggling districts and schools
- Supporting ISDs and local school districts to develop and implement strategies aligned to the state's vision, goals, and strategy

- Providing data to address the following needs:
 - Teachers need actionable and timely data to inform instruction
 - Parents and communities need data to enable them to understand their children's and their school's performance
 - Policymakers need data to monitor system performance
 - Taxpayers need data for transparency regarding their return on investment
- Incorporating more student-centered measures of performance, like student well-being
- Benchmarking other states and systems to ensure that our governance and accountability systems are consistently leading edge

Rationale:

We need a coherent and efficient governance structure that eliminates the overlapping and confusing lines of authority that we have now, and we need to articulate a clear vision for what we want for our children before they graduate from high school. We need an approach to accountability that is transparent and fair, aligned to our vision of what students need to know and be able to do, supports the expertise of educators, and guarantees a viable education for every single young person in Michigan, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and zip code. And we need to create that system of governance to be efficient so it eliminates wasteful and duplicative bureaucratic overlap.

Population Impact: Our vision positions Michigan as a magnet, attracting families because of our exceptional education system, robust communities, and thriving, future-facing economy. Taken together, our holistic recommendations will accomplish three things: attract new families, retain Michigan graduates who will want to send their kids to the excellent schools they attended, and attract new business and economic growth.

Recommendation Two: The Michigan Education Guarantee

Recommendation:

Commit to the Michigan Education Guarantee that students graduate with the competencies they need to thrive now and throughout their lifetimes.

Description:

The Michigan Education Guarantee sets a common standard that all students should meet and commits to providing up to an additional year of education after 12th grade if students need more time to meet the standard. The standard will describe the competencies students need to meet the vision established above, which describes competencies needed to thrive now and in the future and provides authentic examples of student work and explanations of how the work meets the standard.

The Michigan Education Guarantee will set a clear and transparent measure of success for all students, no matter their race, gender, socioeconomic status, and zip code, while providing incentives, structures, and supports for students to help them meet it. It will serve as a North Star for the system: a set of concrete graduation targets that will be used to backward map the goals, competencies, additional supports, and learning experiences needed at all levels. It will be the crux of the new accountability system in Michigan.

The Michigan Education Guarantee is not merely an aspiration. By funding an additional year of education for students who finish 12th grade without meeting the standards, the guarantee ensures that the system is accountable to students for supporting them so they develop the skills they need to succeed in work and life.

Establishing the Michigan Education Guarantee involves:

- Analyzing the knowledge and skills students need to thrive in a changing workplace and world
- Establishing that set of skills and knowledge as the Michigan Education Guarantee standard
- Creating ways for students to demonstrate competency in the Michigan Education Guarantee standard before graduation
- Establishing benchmarks at elementary, middle, and early high school for students to reach in order to stay on track toward the Michigan Education Guarantee standard
- Redesigning curricula and assessments to align with the Michigan Education Guarantee standard—including expanding high-school pathways, such as career-connected programs, early college opportunities, and Advanced Placement and other college preparatory programs—and ensure access for all

- Expanding pre-K for three- to four-year-olds, prioritizing middle- and low-income students, to ensure students are ready for kindergarten, while accounting for the impact this will have on child care availability overall and on parents' ability to secure high-quality, stable child care year round
- Committing to provide all students up to an additional year of education after 12th grade to meet the Michigan Education Guarantee
- Rethinking schedules to provide opportunities for students to learn independently and explore academic and career interests to make learning meaningful, relevant, and self-directed
- Providing funding for extended school-day and extended school-year models that offer student-centered learning approaches, to promote equity and flexibility to adapt to the needs of different students
- Expanding enrichment and out-of-school-time learning opportunities so students have equal opportunities to pursue interests, explore new topics, and find their passions

Rationale:

Michigan must develop, educate, and inspire our students to thrive throughout their lives by equipping them with a holistic set of competencies they need to continue learning in the workplace and in life.

Preparing students for an uncertain future requires creating learners who are adaptable, curious, collaborative, excellent communicators, and have a strong foundation of academic skills alongside respect for democratic values and a sense of morality. Most importantly, it requires learning for life, as students face a volatile job market and a changing society.

Enabling every student to meet the competencies needed to thrive in career and community and learn for life is the goal of a competitive education system. The entire system—from pre-K–12 curriculum offerings and supports through high-school and postsecondary pathways—must align to that goal. Ultimately, whether or not we are able to meet the Michigan Education Guarantee will determine the continued growth and resilience of our education system, our shared prosperity as a state, and how we are perceived by parents, businesses and employers, and students.

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our holistic recommendations will accomplish three things: attract new families, retain Michigan graduates who will want to send their kids to the excellent schools they attended, and attract new business and economic growth.

Recommendation Three: Reimagine the Job of Teaching

Recommendation:

Reimagine learning and the job of teaching, enabling educators to innovate so students can learn for life.

Description:

We propose redesigning how time is used in schools, the design of learning environments, the nature of the teaching career, and the role of leaders in education. We envision teachers as leaders and learners, with the responsibility of working with their colleagues to improve student learning across the school.

There is no one model for how to do this in any one school, but it would rely on:

- Rethinking school schedules to provide opportunities for teacher professional learning and collaboration (e.g., peer-to-peer observations, common planning time, debriefs, lesson study, action learning, etc.)
- Developing teacher career progressions with new roles that leverage teacher expertise to improve student learning
- Providing leadership opportunities for highly accomplished teachers in mentoring and leading professional learning throughout schools
- Incentivizing staffing models that provide more teachers and classroom instructional support (to free up more time in the school day to do the things described above)
- Providing incentives for highly accomplished teachers to pursue jobs in rural areas and other areas of the state with staffing shortages
- Strengthening teacher preparation to reflect the latest research in the science of learning, including the science of reading and the evolving teaching and learning environments in schools

Rationale:

How we utilize our time each day indicates our priorities as a system. Our school environments are not currently set up for teachers' ongoing learning and development. Getting there requires new designs for schooling. It may include structuring the school day to give teachers opportunities to work together, learn to improve their own practice, and consider how best to organize teaching and learning across their school.

This collaborative learning time is not only beneficial for teachers' continuing growth, development, and job satisfaction, it also drives stronger and more equitable student learning. When the most experienced and effective teachers mentor and support their peers, it improves the overall quality of teaching and learning for every child in the school.

We are not proposing one fixed model. This recommendation is designed to spur disciplined innovation to make schools into research and development hubs for testing and refining new and more effective models for teaching and learning that will fit the needs of local communities while ensuring that every teacher, in every community, has access to a world-class lifelong learning experience and, ultimately, promotes stronger learning for all children.

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Recommendation Four: Funding the System

Recommendation:

Fund the system fully, equitably, efficiently, and transparently so every student and every school has the resources needed to meet the system's goals, including the Michigan Education Guarantee.

Description:

It is critical to design a formula for this next generation of schools that:

- Fully funds special education and English language learner programs for students across the state and requires that funds follow students
- Provides additional funding to meet the broader needs of students from low-income families and schools with high concentrations of students in poverty by fully implementing the new Opportunity Index
- Addresses funding at ISDs/regional educational service agencies due to widely varying millage rates levied on widely differing property valuations
- Guarantees that all students, including those in remote and high-poverty areas, have access to the full set of services they need to thrive, such as English language support, extracurriculars, and higher-level classes
- Considers capital expenditures and operating costs and funds them centrally so that schools across the state can equitably address repairs and provide students with great facilities conducive to learning
- Provides districts with stable funding so that they can strategically plan long term, without disruptions from short-term shifts in enrollment

To do this, Michigan should:

- Build on, review, and update work done to date to cost out such a formula, such as the 2018/2021 School Finance Research Collaborative report, and analyze and determine the appropriate revenue streams to fund the formula, including potential revenue generation realized by modifying current taxation and budgeting practices
- Identify potential overlaps and inefficiencies in the current system, and propose ways to address those, such as sharing administrative services for districts at the ISD level in cases when this is more efficient
- Require transparent school-based budgeting and reporting so that we can ensure funds are spent as intended and consider the impact of our strategies

Rationale:

Michigan has long funded schools inequitably, creating huge opportunity gaps among students across the state. It has also underfunded schools—leaving them scrambling from year to year to maintain basic programming for their students without stable and predictable funding—and spent funds inefficiently, not targeted on the students who need it most and the strategies shown to work. Michigan has made major strides in addressing these historical inadequacies, including the addition of funding weights for populations that need more services and the recent infusion of \$609 million for pre-K, support services, tutoring, and the new Opportunity Index to address the needs of students from families living in poverty. But to meet the Michigan Education Guarantee for students and to provide the kind of schools that draw families to the state and the kind of workforce prepared for the future, Michigan needs to codify these promising changes and design a new kind of formula to fund a next generation of schools.

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