



Beyond The Pandemic

State of Michigan Education Report 2023



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In 2015, The Education Trust-Midwest launched the Michigan Achieves! campaign to make Michigan a top ten education state by 2030. Since then, a growing number of partners around the state have come together to advance the best practices and strategies from leading education states in order to close achievement gaps and ensure that every Michigan student is learning — and being taught — at high levels. Join the movement at www.edtrustmidwest.org.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By The Education Trust-Midwest

In every classroom across our great state – from Monroe to Manistee and Mt. Pleasant to Marquette – every Michigan student deserves access and opportunity to the educational resources and support to realize a bright future.

Yet for too long, Michigan’s education system has served **as an engine of inequality** when it should be providing opportunities for all students to achieve at high levels.

Our state’s longstanding inequalities were compounded further over the last three years as students, families, educators and communities faced unprecedented educational challenges amid the COVID-19 pandemic. And though many states – even those that were among the top-performing before the pandemic — lost ground, we now know that students in Michigan, a state that was not systemically well-positioned before COVID-19, fared worse than many states during the pandemic.

For instance, Michigan’s pre-pandemic performance in early literacy on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has long trailed leading states’ performance. And before the pandemic, Michigan was one of only 18 states performing worse in early literacy than it was in the early 2000s on the NAEP, also known as the Nation’s Report Card. On the 2022 test, our students’ average scale score dropped by more than twice as much as the national average. Michigan’s reading scores are now **seven points lower** than they were nearly 20 years ago.

While the effects of the learning disruption touched classrooms everywhere – suburban, urban and rural — the impact was far greater for students and communities that have long been underserved, especially students of color, English Learners and children from low-income backgrounds.

In 2022, Michigan ranked as the 11th worst state for low-income student performance in 4th grade reading, falling far below the national average. Results for Black students were even more troubling. **In our last report**, Michigan ranked in the bottom 10 states for Black students in 4th grade reading. This year, Michigan fell even further, into the bottom five for 4th grade reading among Black students.

New findings by Harvard and Stanford university researchers also reinforced the fact that while the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges and struggles for everyone, those challenges were not equal for all school districts.

Their research showed that during the pandemic, for example, students in Lansing Public Schools and Saginaw School District lost an entire year or more of math and reading knowledge, while students in Birmingham lost the equivalent of 20% of a school year. In Wayne Westland Community School District, students lost approximately 70% of a school year in both math and reading. Students in Charlotte Public Schools fared slightly better in reading, losing nearly 65% of a school year in reading, but lost almost 80% of a school year in math knowledge.

These data, while sobering, provide an honest foundation for the critical and necessary next steps. Being honest about students’ performance is the first step to have an opportunity for making great improvement.

Indeed, Michigan’s unprecedented challenges now need an equally unprecedented response to ensure that all children have the opportunity to catch up and accelerate. Coupled with an unprecedented opportunity of unspent federal COVID-19 relief funding, we believe the time is now for Michigan to change its trajectory.

Over the last six months, our research, data and policy team dug into the data, conducted new research and analyses and looked across the nation for educational recovery best practices for our **2023 State of Michigan Education Report: Beyond the Pandemic**.

As of October 2022, the school aid fund had a \$3.1 billion balance. More than \$2 billion of that is one-time money that could be spent on recovery. Additionally, Michigan school districts received more than \$3.7 billion federal American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Education Relief dollars (ARP ESSER) which must be spent by 2024.

As of mid-December 2022, however, districts in Michigan had spent only about 20% of their ARP ESSER dollars. Our report outlines why and how our state and district leaders and policymakers must act quickly and decisively, allocating these investments –especially unspent federal dollars – and leveraging research to ensure that students who fell the furthest behind during the pandemic have the support they need to catch up – and accelerate.

And the latest report released in December by The Education Trust reinforces that Michigan is one of only

fifteen states providing less funding to its highest poverty districts than the lowest poverty districts.

In the following pages, we present The Opportunity 10 – 10 research-based steps that Michigan must take now to make our state a Top 10 Education State by 2030, one of our organization’s goals. The recommendations include the need for urgent investments in educational recovery, a fair system of school funding, honesty about students’ performance, a strong system of fiscal transparency and accountability for spending, as well as other strategies that have shown to be impactful for students, especially the most underserved, in leading education states.

In this report, **Beyond the Pandemic**, our researchers delve into each of these areas. And we examine how these and other research-based strategies, such as extended and expanded learning time and full access to rigorous coursework and preparation for all Michigan students, can support educational recovery and acceleration for **all** Michigan students.

Additionally, because the disparities we outlined above often start very early and persist throughout school for far too many students, the latter part of our report delves deeply into early childhood education quality.

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The COVID-19 pandemic’s negative effects disproportionately fell on low-income students, students of color, English Learners, students with disabilities, rural students, and school districts that were already under-resourced.

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There is much research demonstrating that pre-K learning environments must be high quality to have a lasting impact and benefit for young learners, especially those from low-income backgrounds, yet our state’s programs often lack the fundamental building blocks to be high quality. Too frequently, early learning programs in Michigan do not meet students’ needs – even as Michigan’s education advocates, state leaders, and policymakers have made great strides to advocate for improvements in early childhood education.

Our report places a microscope on some of the early barriers to success in early childhood programs that contribute to these persistent gaps, as well as some of the key elements to consider. Our research has led us to identify The Foundational Five Elements of Early Childhood Education: Quality, Access and Affordability, Funding Structure Improvement, Data, and Workforce Recruitment, Compensation, and Retention Strategies. The final section of the report highlights our newly

updated Michigan Achieves Indicators and provides an in-depth look at a range of metrics evaluating the current state of Michigan education.

We implore state leaders, policymakers and district leaders to review the findings we have outlined and research-based strategies we have presented and become galvanized to redouble efforts on behalf of Michigan’s students.

Now is the time to act to ensure all Michigan students, particularly the most underserved, have the opportunity for a bright future beyond the pandemic.

We know what’s possible because we have seen transformative change happen for students in other states. Michigan’s students deserve the same opportunity for success. Working together, we **can** change the trajectory for our students and our state to make Michigan a Top 10 State for Education and create opportunity for all.



Many staff and partners contributed to the research and development of this report, including: Director of Policy and Research Jen DeNeal, Senior Policy Analyst Emily Hatch, Data and Policy Consultants Jacqueline Gardner, and Riley Stone. Special thanks to former Policy Analyst Hayley Butler, who is the primary author of the Early Childhood Transitions section of this report. We are also grateful for the input and collaboration of our colleagues across the country including Associate Director for P-12 Analytics at The Education Trust Ivy Morgan.

MICHIGAN'S EDUCATION PERFORMANCE:

Where we are and where we've been

While Michigan's parents and families have maintained hope for high-quality schools and steady improvement within the state's K-12 schooling system, Michigan's K-12 academic performance over the past 10+ years has given them cause for concern.¹ Even prior to the pandemic, Michigan's performance rankings compared to other states fluctuated with what could be perceived as declines and improvements in areas such as early literacy. However, the state's actual scores and early literacy performance reflected little change, revealing a deep and troubling reality of stagnancy. Now, as Americans work to move beyond the pandemic, Michigan's students are largely seeing lower scores on state² and national assessments, as well as persisting and widening achievement gaps.³ What we know, unequivocally, is that these losses were not evenly distributed across schools and districts.⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic's negative effects disproportionately fell on low-income students, students of color, English Learners, students with disabilities, rural students, and school districts that were already under-resourced.⁵

Since the pandemic affected school districts in different ways, it is critically important that we examine changes in student outcomes by district. The table below dives more deeply into this analysis for key districts in Michigan.

This table includes data from the Education Recovery Scorecard,⁶ a collaboration between Harvard and Stanford Universities which uses state testing data to estimate learning loss experienced by districts across the country over the years of the pandemic (between 2019 and 2022). The percentage of free and reduced price lunch indicates the percentage of students in each district, listed on the

far-left side of the table, who qualify for free and reduced price lunch—which is often considered a measure of student poverty. The math and reading learning loss is measured in grade levels, so “-0.5” would indicate a loss of math or reading knowledge equivalent to one half of a grade level. Rather than focusing on statewide or regional effects, these data provide an important opportunity for parents, teachers, and policymakers to understand the pandemic's effects at the district level for the first time.



Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were not uniform across Michigan school districts

District Name	% Free and Reduced Price Lunch	Math Learning Loss (grade levels) 2019-2022	Reading Learning Loss (grade levels) 2019-2022
Northville Public Schools	6.2%	-0.02	-0.23
Birmingham Public Schools	8.7%	-0.21	-0.21
Bloomfield Hills Schools	11.2%	-0.04	-0.04
Ann Arbor Public Schools	25%	-0.68	-0.4
Ravenna Public Schools	49.2%	-0.83	-0.67
Allegan Public Schools	55.4%	-0.41	-0.49
Alpena Public Schools	57.5%	-0.52	-0.66
Gwinn Area Community Schools	60.6%	-0.58	-0.67
Lansing Public School District	66%	-1.14	-1.14
Saginaw School District	72.3%	-1	-1.38
Pontiac City School District	77.9%	-0.68	-0.9
Grand Rapids Public Schools	78.2%	-0.68	-0.78
Detroit Public Schools	80.5%	-0.9	-1.03

Source: Education Recovery Scorecard, 2022

During the pandemic, students in Lansing Public Schools and Saginaw School District **lost an entire year** or more of math and reading knowledge, while students in Birmingham lost the equivalent of 20% of a school year. While the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges and struggles for everyone, not everyone suffered equally. We must act quickly and decisively, allocating investments to ensure that students who fell the furthest behind during the pandemic have the support they need to catch up and accelerate.

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WHERE WE'VE BEEN

NAEP

Michigan's pre-pandemic performance in early literacy on the NAEP — also known as the Nation's Report Card — has long signaled concern as Michigan has seen little to no improvement in comparison to other states.

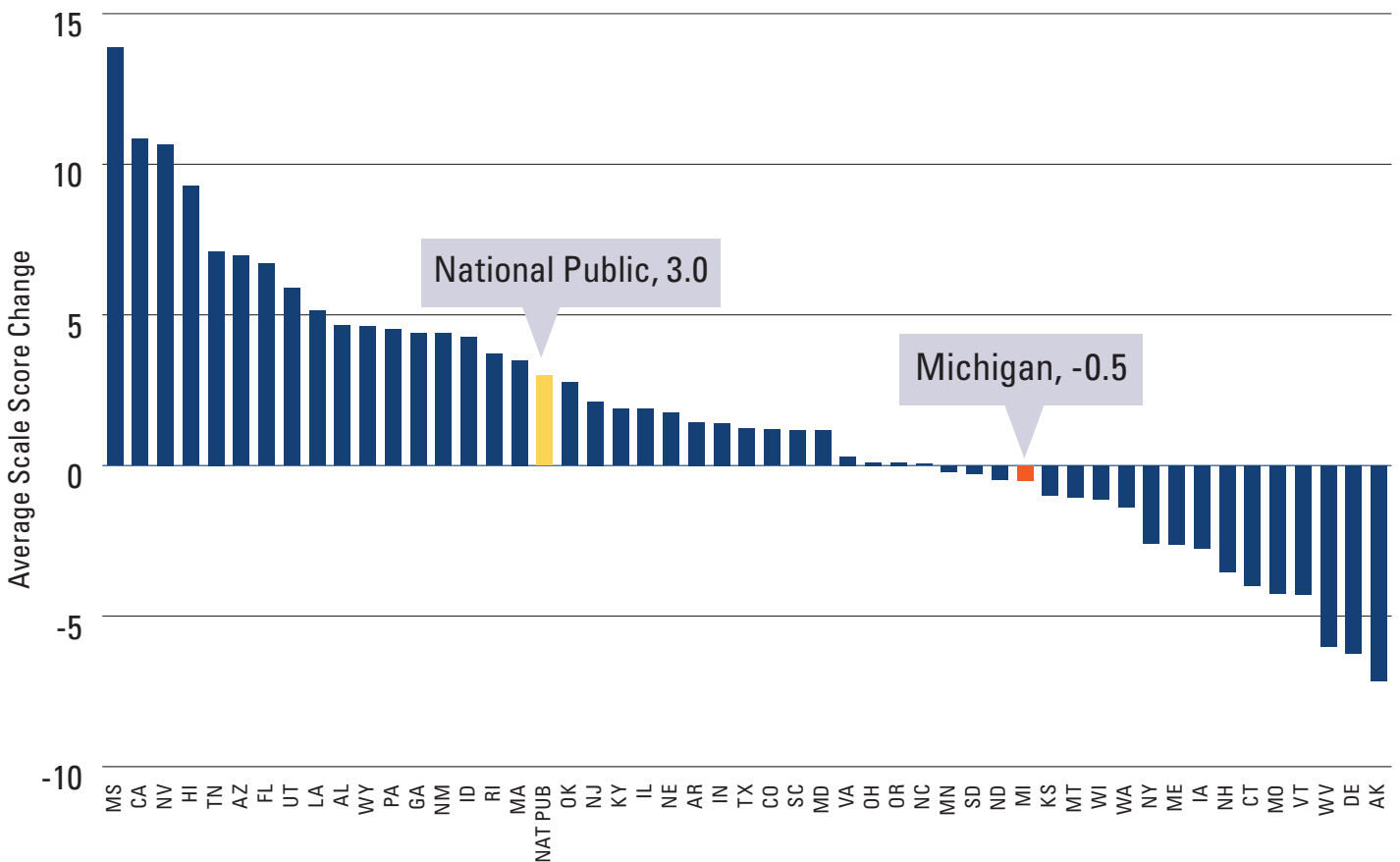
Between 2003 and 2019, reading scores for many states increased, with the national public average increasing by three points over that period. In contrast, Michigan's 4th grade reading scores, though they fluctuated, **fell** by half a point by the end of that 16-year period. Michigan's lack of investment, infrastructure, and committed leadership to support student achievement over the years resulted in serious consequences during the pandemic.⁷

According to the 2022 NAEP results, Michigan's average 4th grade reading scores plummeted during the pandemic.

In short, the entire country declined throughout the pandemic, but Michigan's long-time underinvestment in public education resulted in Michigan's students declining at a faster rate than the national average.

Between 2019 and 2022, Michigan's average scale score decreased by about 6.5 points, more than twice as much as the national average. By contrast, the national average scale scores for 4th grade reading look basically the same as they did in 2003. In Michigan, however, those scores are seven points lower than they were more than 20 years ago. In 2022, Michigan ranked a concerning 43rd for 4th grade reading overall, indicating that many of Michigan's students are not building a strong foundation for learning that would support them in the upper grades.

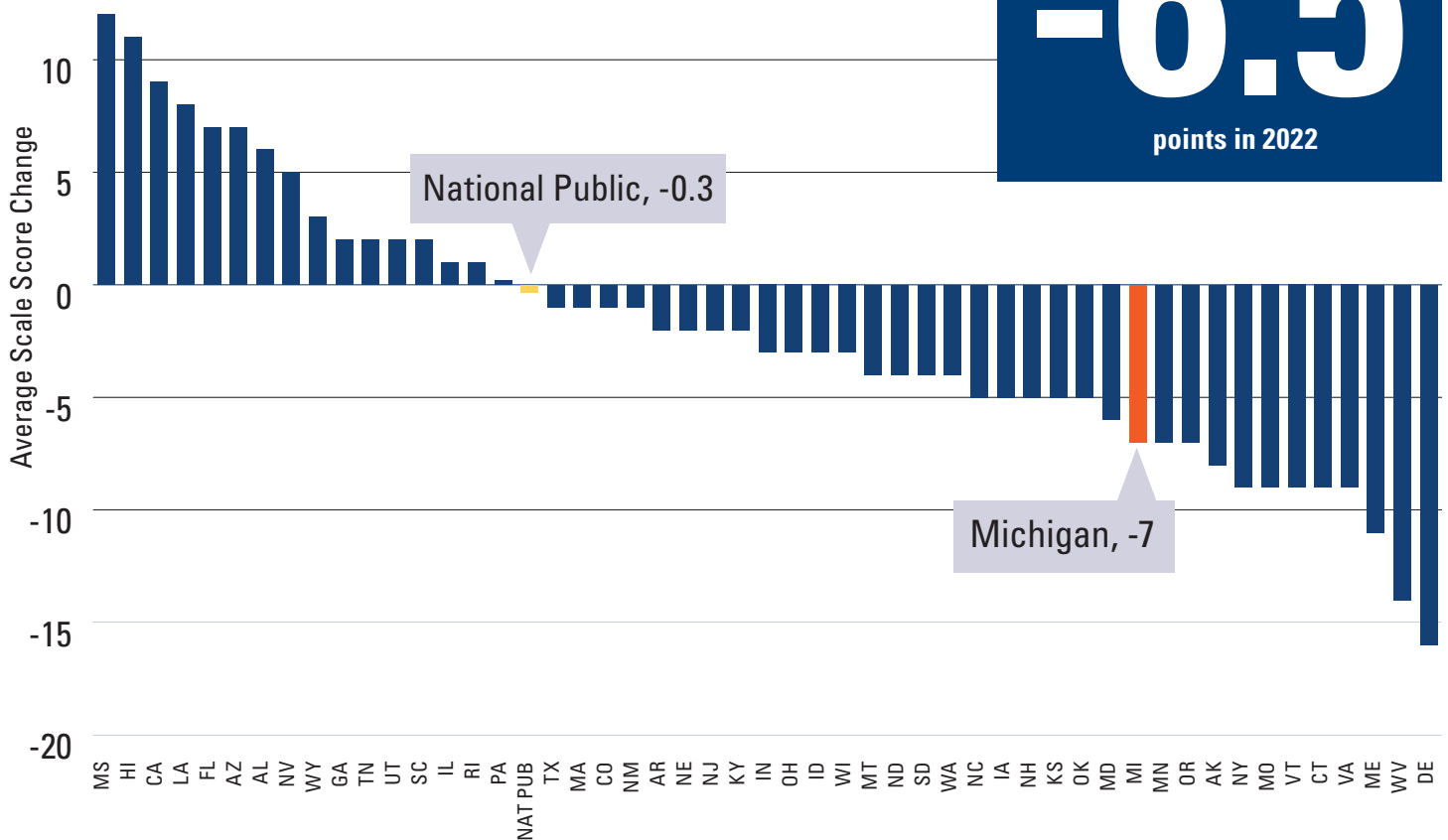
Average Scale Score Change, NAEP Grade Four — Reading — All Students (2003, 2019)



NOTE. Data from U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *The Nation's report card: NAEP data explorer*. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing>. Basic Scale Score=208; Proficient Scale Score=238.

-6.5
points in 2022

Average Scale Score Change, NAEP Grade 4– Reading– All Students, (2003-2022)



NOTE. Data from U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *The Nation's report card: NAEP data explorer*. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing>. Basic Scale Score=208; Proficient Scale Score=238.

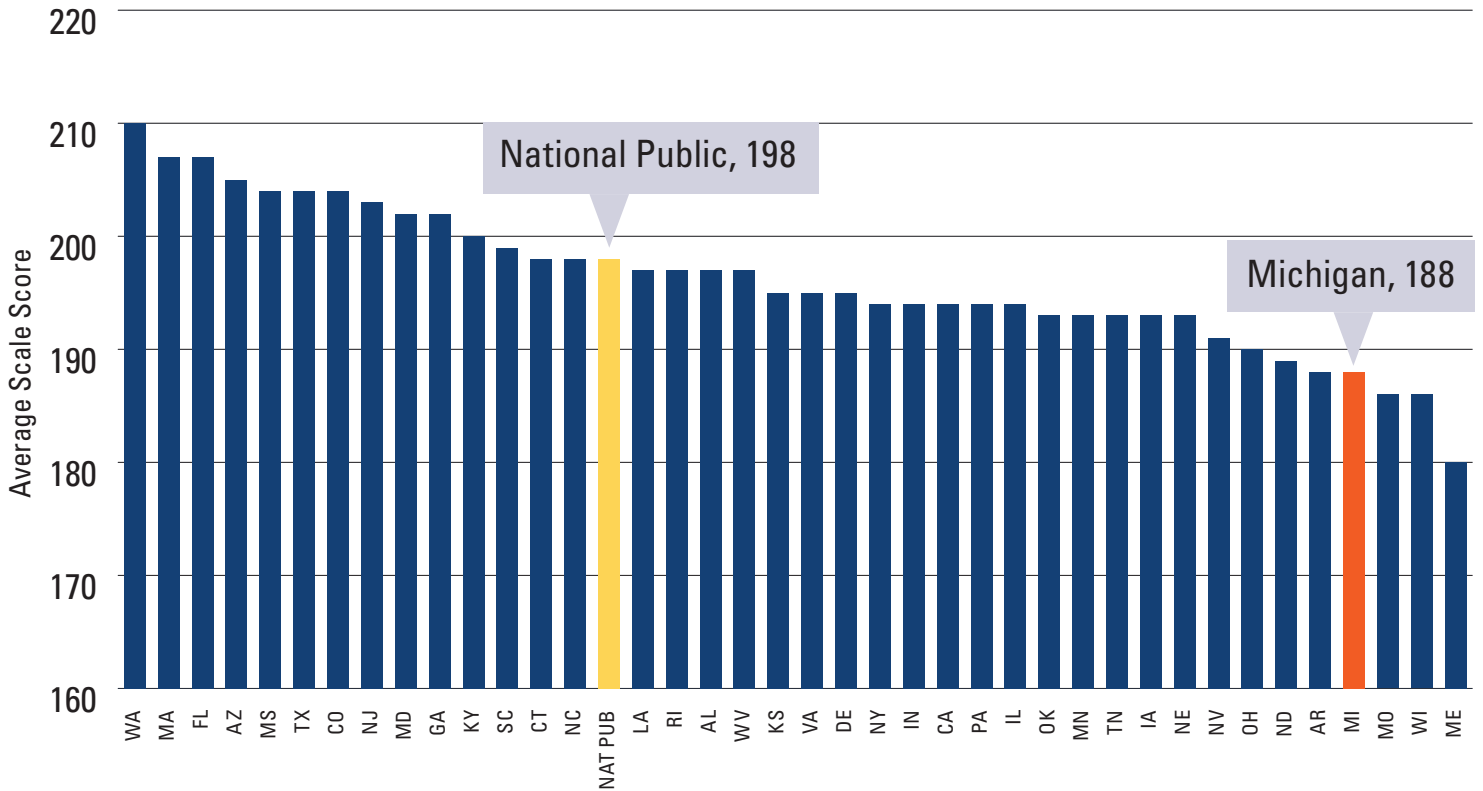
Source: NAEP Data, NCES (Basic Scale Score=208; Proficient Scale Score=238) 2003-2022

Results for Black students were even more troubling. Last year, we reported that Michigan ranked in the bottom 10 states for Black students in 4th grade reading. This year, Michigan fell even further, into the bottom five for 4th grade reading among Black students in 2022. Further, while White students' 4th grade reading scores dropped an average of 4 points from 2019 to 2022, Black students' scores dropped by nearly 11 points in the same period—a difference which equates to roughly an entire year of unfinished learning for Black students.

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Michigan Among Bottom Five States for Black Students in Fourth-Grade Reading

Average Scale Score, NAEP Grade 4 – Reading – Black Students (2022)



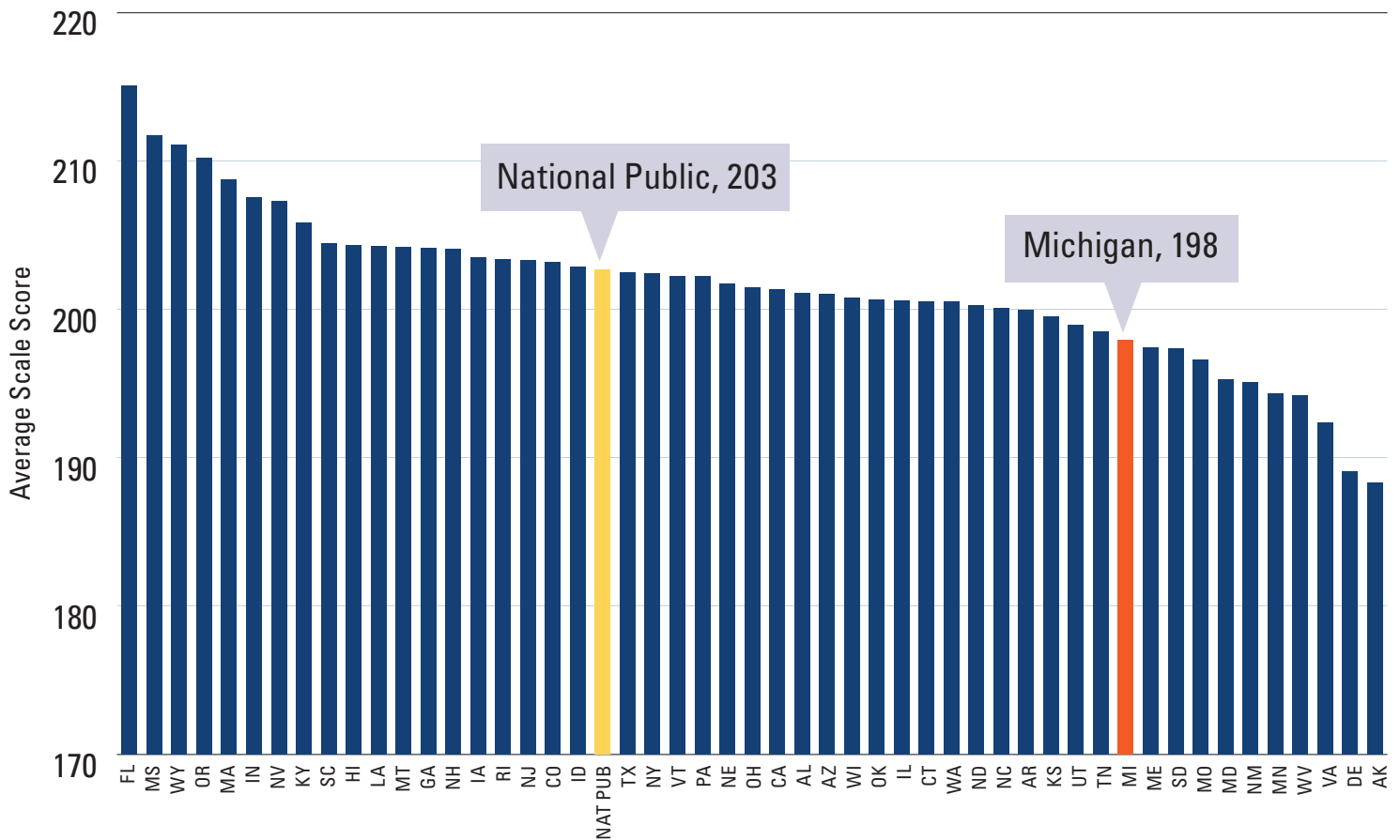
Source: NAEP Data, NCES (Basic Scale Score=208; Proficient Scale Score=238) 2022

Michigan students from low-income backgrounds also saw a steeper decline in 2022, with a substantial decrease of almost 8 points in 4th grade reading between 2019 and 2022, while higher-income students in Michigan saw a decrease of fewer than 2 points in the same period. In 2022, Michigan ranked as the 11th worst state for low-income student performance in 4th grade reading, falling far below the national average.

In 2022, Michigan ranked as the 11th worst state for low-income student performance in 4th grade reading, falling far below the national average.

Average Scale Score, NAEP Grade 4– Reading– Low-income Students

Average Scale Score, NAEP Grade 4 – Reading – Low-Income Students (2022)



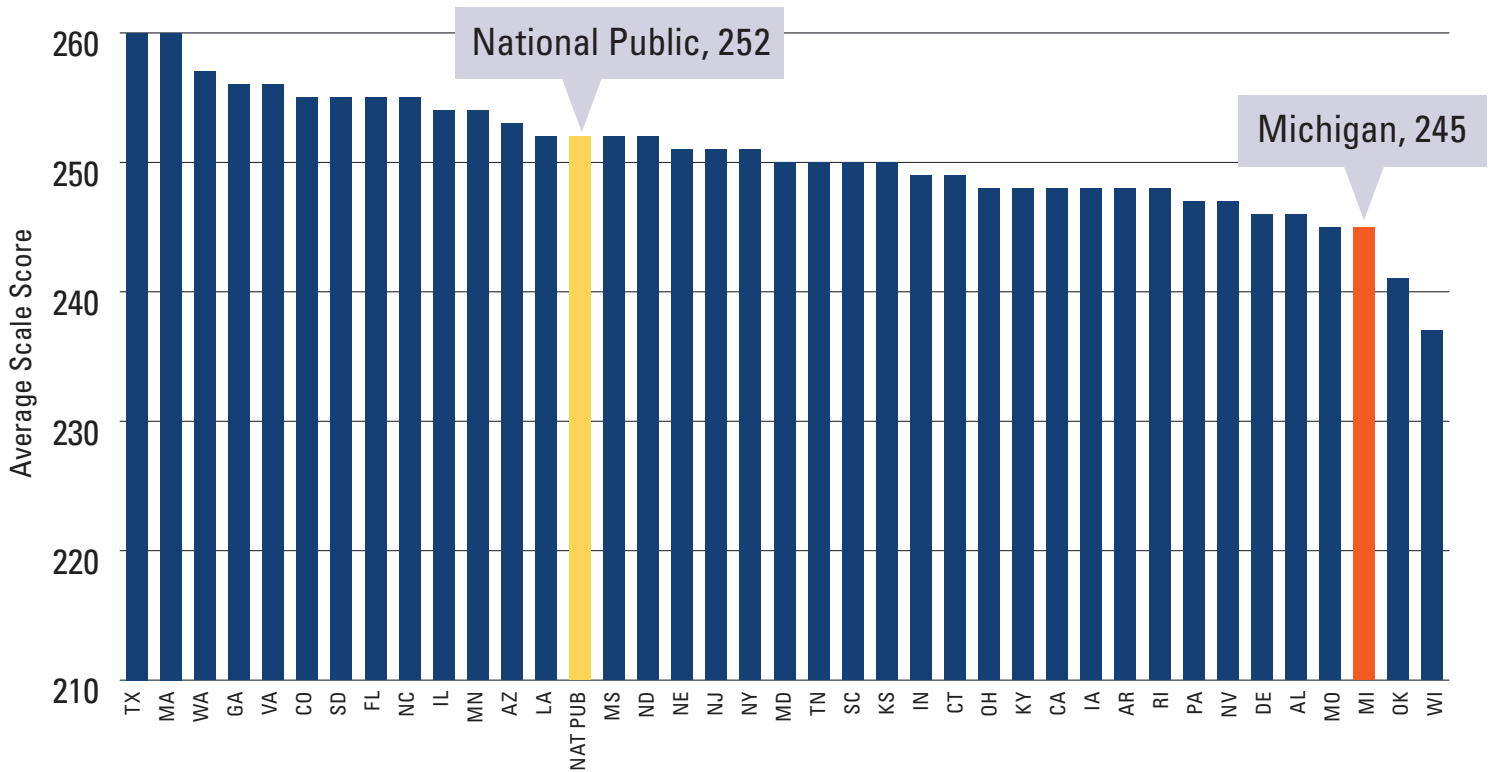
Source: NAEP Data, NCES (Basic Scale Score=208; Proficient Scale Score=238) 2022

Like the reading scores, math results were even more troubling for Black students. Michigan again ranked in the bottom five states for 8th grade math performance among Black students across states in 2022. The results for all students were better, with Michigan ranking roughly in the middle of the pack, at 26th in the nation.



Michigan Among Bottom Five States for Black Students in Eighth-Grade Math

Average Scale Score, NAEP Grade 8 – Math – Black Students (2022)



Source: NAEP Data, NCES (Basic Scale Score = 262; Proficient Scale Score = 299) 2022

M-STEP

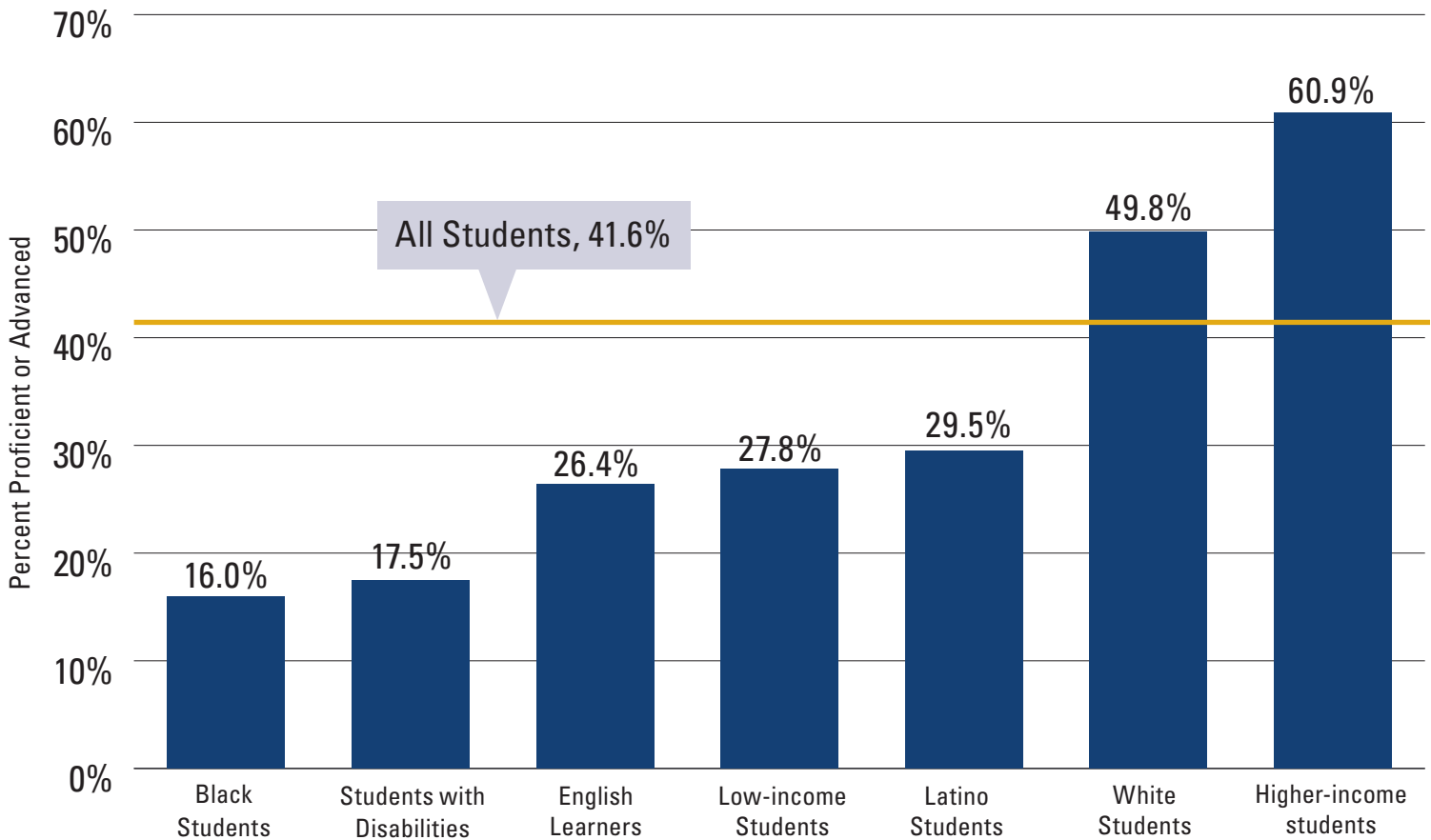
Michigan’s annual standardized assessment for students, the M-STEP, also paints a concerning picture post-pandemic. Only 41.6% of all students demonstrated proficiency in 3rd grade reading in 2022—down from 45.1% proficiency in 2019. The data also signal large and concerning equity issues, as Black students, Latino students, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds fell at least 12 percentage points below the statewide average in 2022.



Statewide 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency Rates by Subgroup (2022)

Statewide M-STEP Proficiency Rates

ELA — Grade 3 — Subgroup (2022)



Source: MDE, M-STEP Results 2022

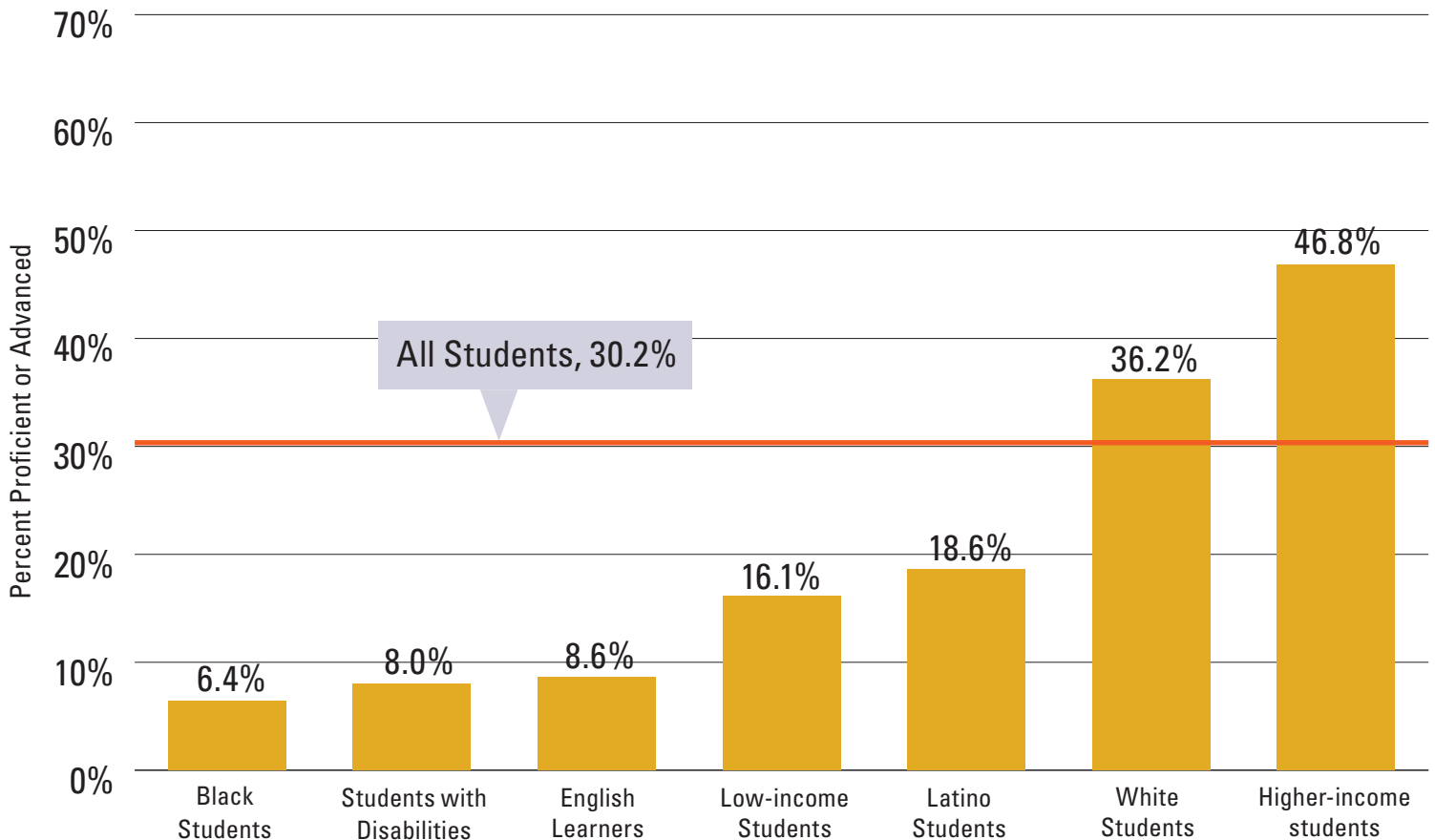
M-STEP 7th grade math proficiency rates post-pandemic are similar. The statewide average proficiency rate for 7th grade math for all students in 2022 is 30.2%. Yet again, proficiency rates for Black and Latino student subgroups and the low-income student subgroup were more than 10% below the statewide rate, while White students and higher income students scored at least 6% above the statewide rate.



Statewide 7th Grade Math M-STEP Proficiency Rates by Subgroup (2022)

Statewide M-STEP Proficiency Rates

Math — Grade 7 — Subgroup (2022)



Source: M-STEP Results 2022

Considering the Trends

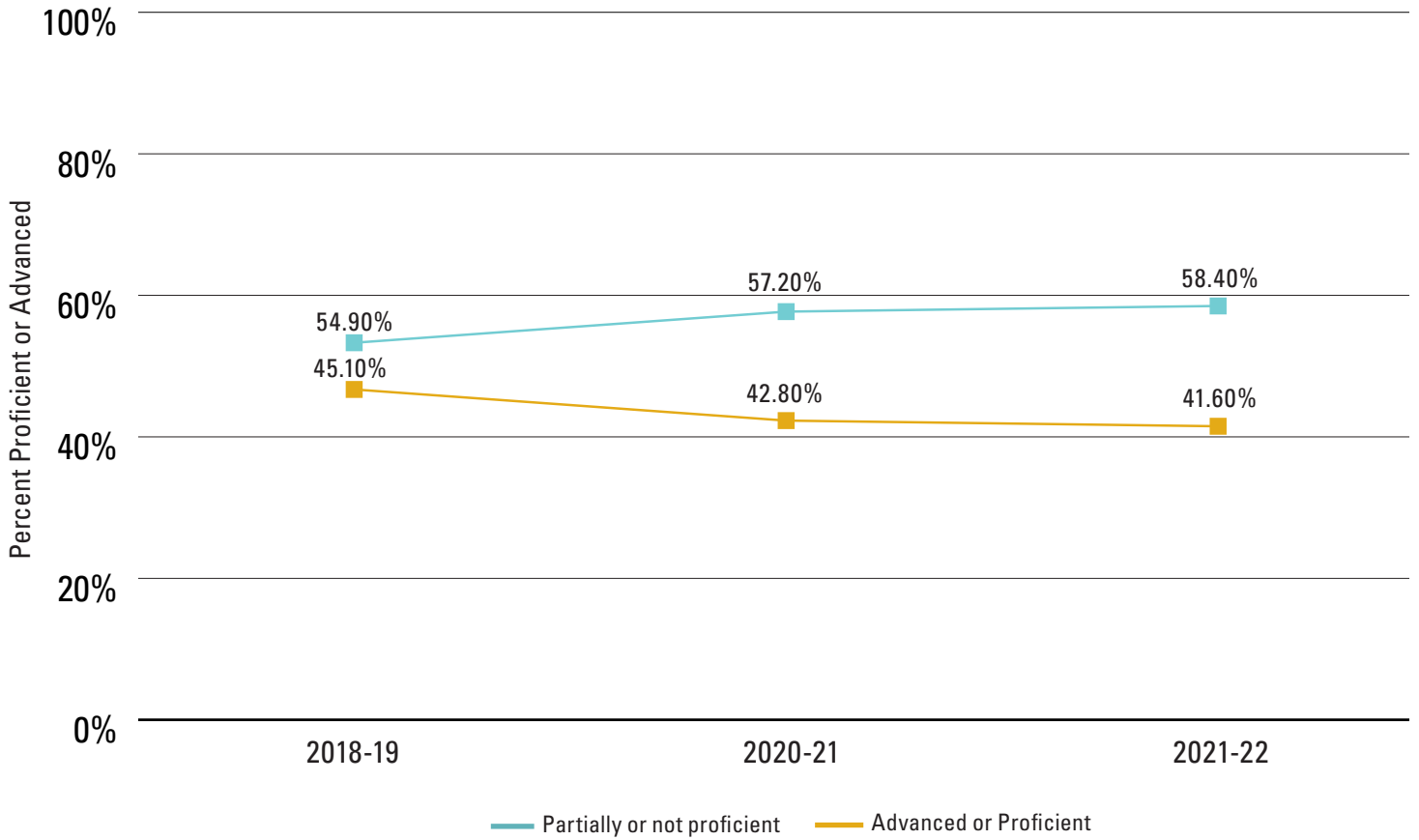
A concerning aspect of Michigan’s student assessment performance pre-pandemic was how much it didn’t change *over time*. Undeniably, since the adoption of the M-STEP in 2015, student results have largely remained stagnant, with minor increases and decreases in statewide scores. This sluggish movement up and down held for subgroups as well. Even within subject areas and subgroups that showed larger gains, scores were very low to begin with, overall resulting in a persistently disturbing picture.

Post-pandemic, stagnancy has largely been replaced with declines in scores. Some student subgroups’ learning declined more steeply, signaling a concerning trend for educational equity in Michigan.



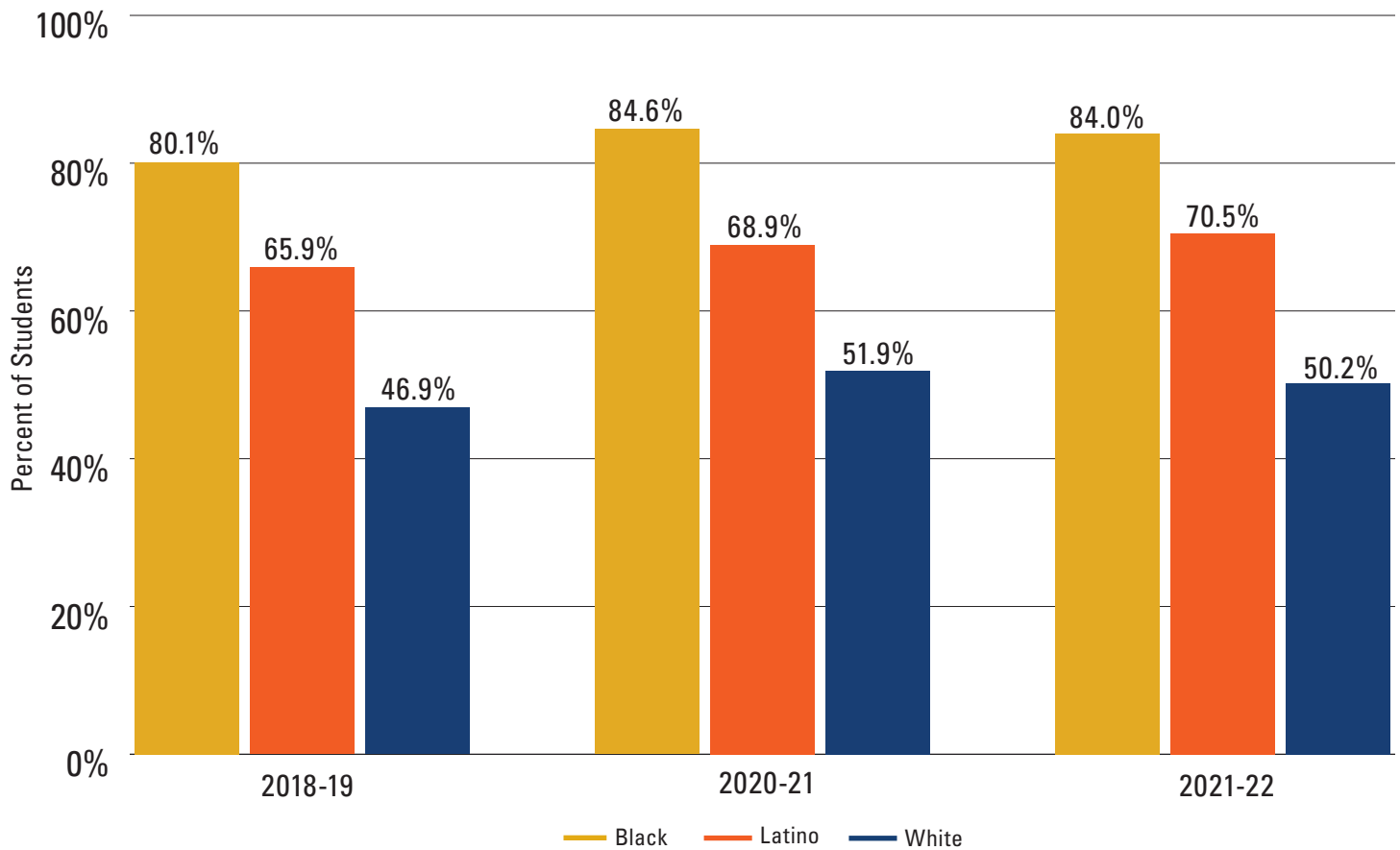
Fewer Michigan 3rd Graders Scored “Proficient” or Better in ELA in 2022 than in 2019

M-STEP 3rd Grade ELA Proficiency Rates



Opportunity Gaps Have Persisted in the Wake of Covid-19

Percent of Students Partially or Not Proficient in 3rd Grade ELA on the M-STEP

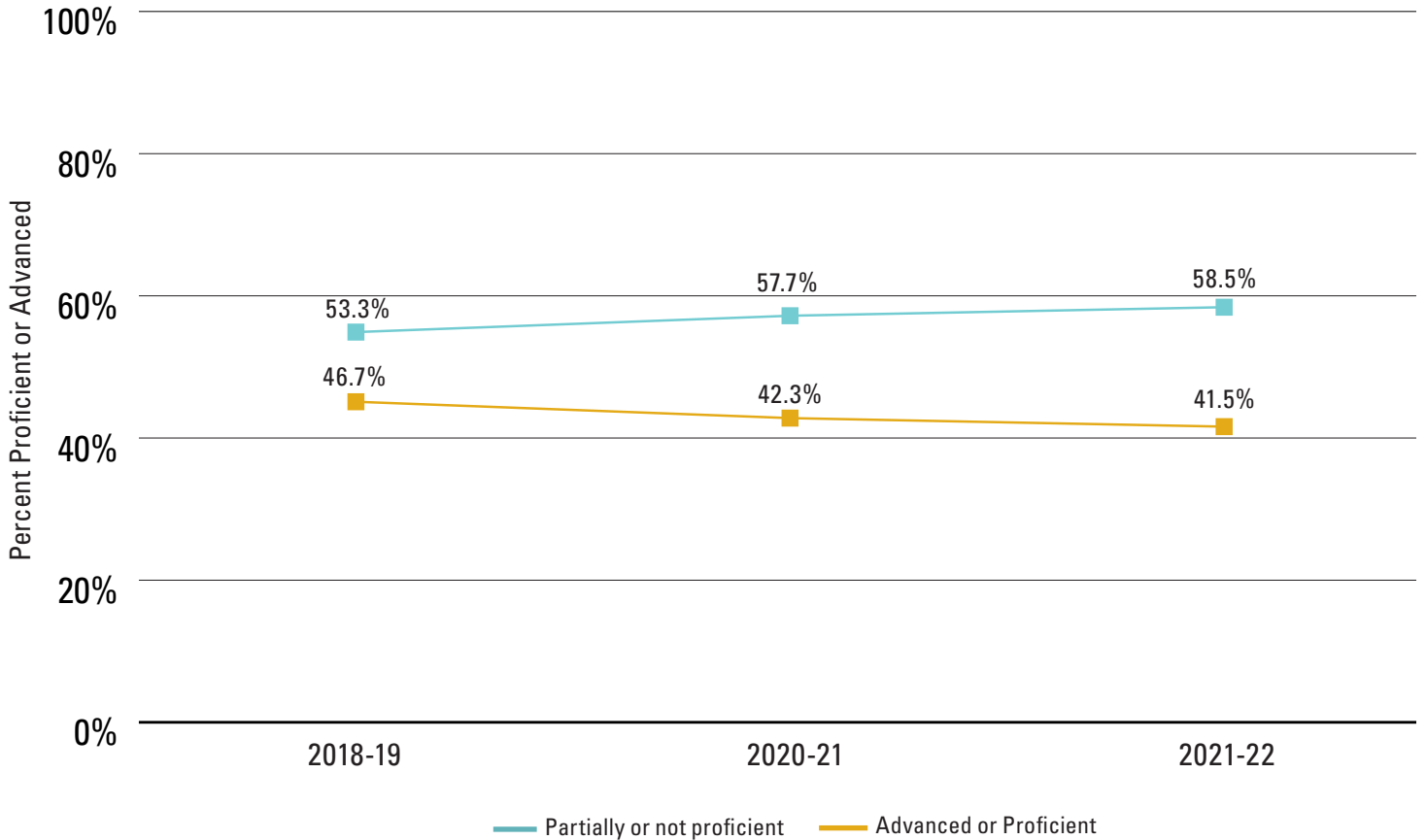


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Fewer Michigan 3rd Graders Scored “Proficient” or Better in Math in 2022 than in 2019 M-STEP 3rd Grade Math Proficiency Rates



3rd Graders who are Black, Latino, and English Learners Experience Largest Drops in Math Proficiency

Percent of Michigan 3rd Graders at least “Proficient” on M-STEP Math, by Subgroup

School Year	All	Economically Disadvantaged	Not Economically Disadvantaged	Black	Latino	White	English Learners	Students with Disabilities
2018-2019	46.7%	32.6%	64.8%	20.5%	35.4%	54.8%	41.3%	20.9%
2020-2021	42.3%	25.8%	59.6%	12.5%	28.3%	47.9%	30.2%	19.1%
2021-2022	41.5%	27.1%	61.6%	13.5%	28.2%	50.2%	32.6%	19.3%
Total Change from 2019 to 2022	-5.2%	-5.5%	-3.2%	-7.0%	-7.2%	-4.6%	-8.7%	-1.6%

PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Prior to the pandemic, we forecasted 2030 state rankings for early literacy and math by calculating the average change in average scale score between 2003 and the 2019 NAEP data. Based on these data, Michigan ranked 32nd in the nation for 4th grade reading and 27th in the nation for 8th grade math. Given Michigan's slower progress compared to other states, we projected that Michigan would drop in ranking to 39th for 4th grade reading and retain its place at 27th for 8th grade math by 2030.

Yet these projections were forecasted using pre-pandemic data. And as the evidence above shows, the pandemic has resulted in unfinished and stalled learning for Michigan's students.

Moreover, the pandemic only exacerbated existing inequities and outcomes experienced by Michigan's historically marginalized student groups, including Black and Latino students, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and students with disabilities.

Using the 2022 NAEP data, we updated our 2030 state ranking forecasts for early literacy and math post-pandemic. Based on the most recent data, Michigan ranked 43rd in the nation for 4th grade reading and 26th in the nation for 8th grade math. We now project that, by 2030, Michigan will remain stagnant at 43rd for 4th grade reading and drop even further to 29th for 8th grade math.

Our projections show that if Michigan continues down its current path, the state's current rank of 26th in 4th grade reading for Latino students will fall to 30th in 2030, out of the 47 states reporting results. While Michigan's 4th grade reading rank in 2030 is projected to increase compared to current ranks for other groups including Black students and students from low-income backgrounds, we still project an overall decline in average score for these students.

While subgroup projections for 8th grade math are slightly better, we still predict mixed results regarding improvement in scores by 2030 and any gains predicted are small.



OPPORTUNITY 10

Longstanding educational inequities compounded by the daunting challenges of teaching and learning through a pandemic bring us to a moment of important opportunity where strong state leadership and significant systems changes are critical for Michigan's educational recovery from pre-kindergarten through high school. State leaders must take these 10 research-based steps to set Michigan on a path to becoming a top 10 education state, one of our organization's goals:

- 1 Invest with Urgency in Michigan Students' Educational Recovery**
- 2 Be Honest about Student Performance**
- 3 Create a Fair School Funding System**
- 4 Develop a Strong System of Fiscal Transparency and Accountability for Spending**
- 5 Prioritize Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Support**
- 6 Ensure Full Access to Rigorous Coursework and Preparation for All Michigan Students**
- 7 Reimagine Early Literacy**
- 8 Identify Students with Dyslexia and Ensure They Receive the Support They Need**
- 9 Invest in Post-Secondary Innovation**
- 10 Strengthen Early Childhood for Disadvantaged Students**

1 Invest with Urgency in Michigan Students' Educational Recovery

Persistent educational inequities existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is no question that the pandemic exacerbated many of these inequities and created additional challenges for students, parents, and educators. In the wake of this crisis, students are facing unprecedented levels of unfinished learning and we must take steps to ensure all students are on the road to catching up now, not later. State leaders should provide immediate and ongoing support to districts and schools with evidence-based strategies to solve unfinished learning, including through targeted intensive tutoring and expanded learning time.

Targeted intensive tutoring, otherwise known as high-dosage tutoring, is an evidence-based practice that can help students catch up and reach high standards. High-dosage tutoring involves one tutor meeting regularly with students in groups of one or two for an extended period. In these sessions, tutors use skill-building curricula aligned with the school's core curricula and targeted to the students' needs.⁸ High dosage tutoring delivered in-person rather than through more self-guided virtual tutoring has the most potential to accelerate student learning. Expanded learning time is another evidence-

based approach which includes a set of programs and strategies which increase the instruction and learning provided to students. Extended learning time can take place in programs after school, in-school, and during the summer, but such programs are only successful if the extra time is spent in ways that maximize teaching and learning and in conjunction with effectively used time during the regular school day.⁹

District leadership is so critical in this moment. The American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) is an historic infusion of federal dollars to help districts recover from the pandemic. These dollars, if invested wisely, have the potential to support the rapid acceleration of student learning for all students.¹⁰ Districts must act urgently to use these dollars to support learning recovery. Importantly, districts must be held accountable for the money they spend on learning recovery and state leaders should prioritize program evaluation for effectiveness. Rigorous evaluation will ensure that programs and strategies employed by districts have the desired effect of improving student outcomes and accelerating learning recovery.



2 Be Honest about Student Performance

Without data that helps Michigan parents, stakeholders and policymakers know how Michigan children have been affected by the pandemic, it would be extraordinarily difficult to address their educational needs and recovery during a time of unprecedented unfinished learning. Indeed, it's more important than ever to know how the pandemic disrupted learning so that we understand how best to direct resources and supports to students and communities most in need through investments and solution-based, research-based strategies. This is especially true for children who are traditionally underserved by Michigan's inequitable education system: Black, Latino, rural students, English Learners, and students with disabilities.

Now is an urgent time for transparency and honest information about students' learning. We need to know not only where students are academically in the present moment, but also how much learning students lost during the pandemic. The only way to track achievement over time is through data and summative assessment continuity. Now is not the time to switch assessments or make changes to existing assessments that ruin our ability to monitor student performance before and after the pandemic. State leaders should instead prioritize making data from summative assessments available to districts more quickly and in a format that is useful for educators and parents.

In addition to improving the quality and turnaround time of assessment reporting, state leaders should prioritize Michigan's move to a more sophisticated student growth data system. If it's done right, a new growth tool will use data from state assessments aligned to national college- and career-ready standards and provide more accurate data on student learning.

Michigan should support our teachers with smart data that actually helps them inform their instruction. Such smart growth tools — especially when generated based on a high-caliber assessment— can provide valuable diagnostic information about students. This tool could be truly transformative for our schools. Educators in leading states not only receive such data on their students' learning gains, but they also use individual student **“projection reports”** that signal whether a student is on track to graduate from high school and even how ready the student is for college and career entrance exams — as early as elementary school. Such data would allow Michigan educators to intervene earlier in students' academic careers, tailor instruction and improve teaching strategies. Most states make student projection reports available to parents upon request, too. Imagine what parents, teachers and school leaders could do, together, if they knew a fourth grader is already off track to be college- and career-ready. The potential for helping our students is enormous.

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3 Create a Fair Funding System

Michigan has long been among the worst in the nation for resource gaps between wealthy and low-income school districts.¹¹ Now, after years of unfinished learning amid the pandemic, the need to invest in Michigan's historically underserved students is more urgent than ever.¹² National research has shown that historically and on average, Michigan's highest poverty districts have received five percent less state and local funding than Michigan's lowest poverty districts, despite serving a student population with significantly greater needs.¹³ Indeed, the allocations for low-income students that are part of Michigan's current formula are very low compared to what leading states provide, and the level of funding that research recommends.¹⁴

Money especially matters for students from low-income backgrounds. Increases in spending have been shown to improve educational attainment, lead to higher wages and reduce poverty in adulthood, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds.¹⁵ According to one estimate, the lifetime earnings of Michigan's current K-12 students could increase by \$27 billion if their educational achievement matched the national average.¹⁶ In a state that is rebuilding and transitioning its economy and tax base from a manufacturing-based, old economy model to a robust knowledge-based economy, there is perhaps no more important investment to make to ensure our Great Lakes State becomes a Great Education and Great Economy State — and catches up with the rest of the nation and the world both economically and for talent.

Researchers estimate that funding systems should provide at least 100% more funding for students from low-income backgrounds than for students from higher income backgrounds.¹⁷ Students in Michigan from low-income backgrounds are supported by an additional 11.5% of the statewide average foundation allowance,¹⁸ which, in FY20, was about \$960 in additional funds per eligible student.¹⁹ That 11.5% is well below what is recommended by research to close opportunity gaps.²⁰ Michigan can

significantly increase money for low-income students over time by changing the structure of how at-risk dollars are distributed to districts.

An opportunity index, which uses weights to provide additional funding to students with greater need, would provide Michigan with an opportunity to be fairer to students across the state. Massachusetts, the top performing state in the nation, prioritized equity over adequacy in its 2019 Student Opportunity Act with funding weights of up to 100% for students experiencing poverty, and its elementary school foundation amount is several hundred dollars lower than Michigan's.²¹ State leaders should use ETM's Principles of Fair and Equitable Funding Systems²² and commit to weights of at least 100% more for low-income students, 75% more for English Learners, and additional funding for special education. These weights are based on research and best practices from leading states. We know that the experience of being a low-income student in Okemos and Birmingham is different than the experience in the Upper Peninsula or in Lansing. An opportunity index accounts for concentrations of poverty and ensures that those students who face the greatest barriers to learning success receive the most resources, no matter whether a student lives in a rural community, in a suburb or in town.

For more on our comprehensive plan for overhauling Michigan's school funding system, please see our 2020 Report **"Michigan's School Funding: Crisis and Opportunity."**

4 Develop a Strong System of Fiscal Transparency and Accountability for Spending

Having the appropriate resources is necessary, but alone it is not enough. To improve student learning and outcomes, those resources must also be spent efficiently and effectively to drive improved learning outcomes. An important first step toward more equitable student funding in Michigan is directing any new additional resources first towards high-needs schools and districts. The state must also ensure that the necessary legal and regulatory frameworks are in place to ensure these additional dollars get to the schools where vulnerable students attend and are spent in ways that improve classroom learning.

Transforming Michigan’s funding structure should be accompanied with a strong new system of transparency regarding school and district spending that is desperately lacking today, especially if there is significant new state investment in high-needs student groups or a school funding overhaul, to ensure that dollars targeted towards equity actually reach historically underserved students. This is also necessary to avoid the tough lessons learned in other states that have made major shifts to their funding systems in recent years, such as in California. In an evaluation of California’s Local Control Funding Formula, researchers found that only about half (55 cents) of every dollar sent to schools to support high-needs students was spent at the schools with the most high-needs students.²³

In Michigan, unprecedented federal funding provided to school districts through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) were intended to provide a lifeline to schools suffering from the incredible disruption from the pandemic, which were forced to shutter in Michigan and across the nation amid COVID-19. Broadly written spending guidelines allowed districts to spend a portion of the money on regular operating costs and to save some of the unspent fundings in district reserves.²⁴ Unfortunately, putting ESSER dollars away for the proverbial rainy day means those dollars are not being spent on evidence-based recovery strategies to improve student outcomes right now. The murky ESSER spending experience demonstrates the critical need for better

systems to monitor district spending — and ensure dollars intended for students are spent on evidence-based strategies and practices that will improve student outcomes. Now is the moment for **greater fiscal accountability in Michigan** — and a commitment to improving the system’s transparency and effectiveness — to build trust in state government and the public education system.



5 Prioritize Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Support

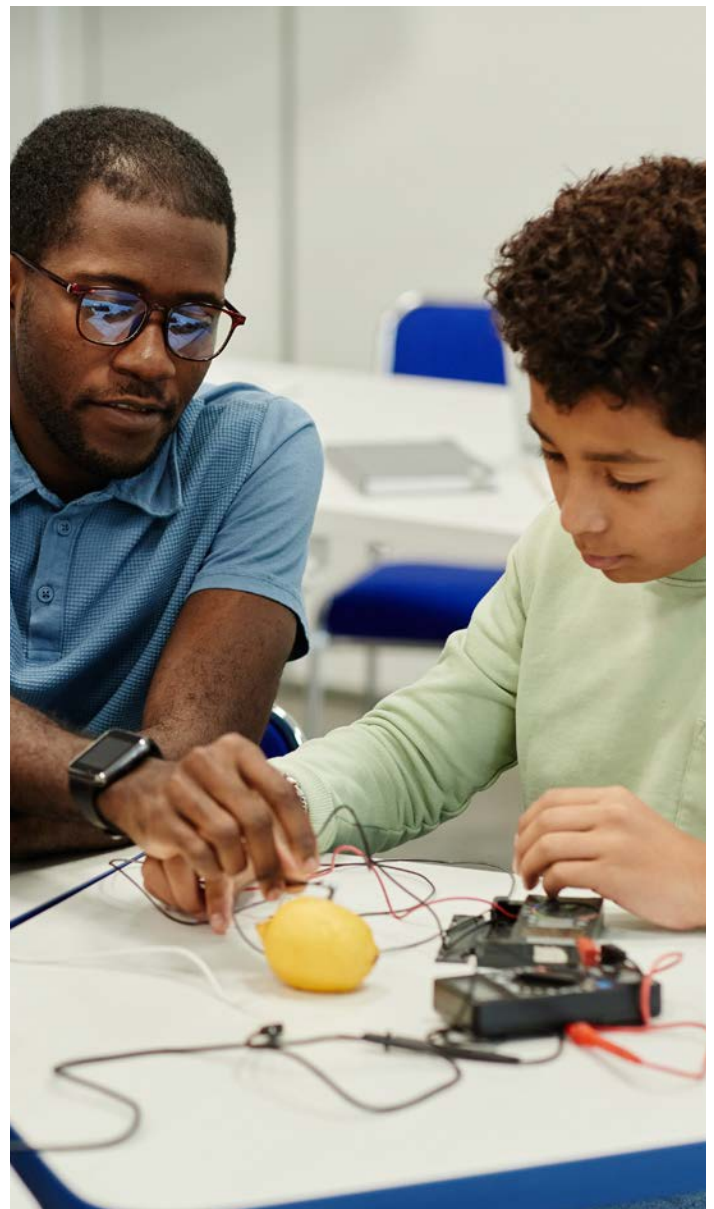
To truly improve outcomes for all students, Michigan also should be leveraging data from the statewide teacher evaluation and support system to better support teachers and their needs as professionals. The system should be better used and tailored to ensure educators have access to quality coaching and specific, individualized feedback and consistent support, especially early career teachers and new principals.

Michigan leaders also should ensure systems of feedback, professional development and evaluation are strongly aligned with national standards of college- and career- readiness and imagine innovative new strategies to leverage these data to inform supports to teachers and principals and ensure that historically underserved students have access to the state’s most effective educators. Educators deserve and need honest feedback that is aligned with those standards – and parents deserve to know teachers and principals are getting such feedback.

The roles and responsibilities in which many teachers serve—such as mentor, coach, master teacher and others—should be formally recognized and given opportunities for higher pay and greater recognition. Indeed, teachers should be paid for the many roles that they play.

The state should make every effort to be part of the solution. Steps should include significantly expanding salary incentives for both new and veteran teachers, especially in underserved districts; programs to close the teacher salary gap; support for districts in establishing “grow your own” teacher pipeline initiatives; and overhauling Michigan’s deeply inequitable funding system. In 2020-2021, the Michigan Legislature enacted a new section to the State School Aid Act, 99z, which set aside \$5 million dollars for teacher retention bonuses of up to \$1000 dollars for teachers in high poverty school districts.²⁵ This kind of incentive program is critical during an era of acute teacher shortages that

we know are that much worse in high poverty urban and rural districts. Differential bonuses for high poverty urban and rural districts are important tools the state can use to address teacher salary inequities between more and less-resourced school districts. Michigan state leaders should invest heavily in this type of retention program and create annual bonuses of \$7,000 to \$10,000 per teacher to ensure all districts in the state can retain, attract, and support top talent.



6 Ensure Full Access to Rigorous Coursework and Preparation for All Michigan Students

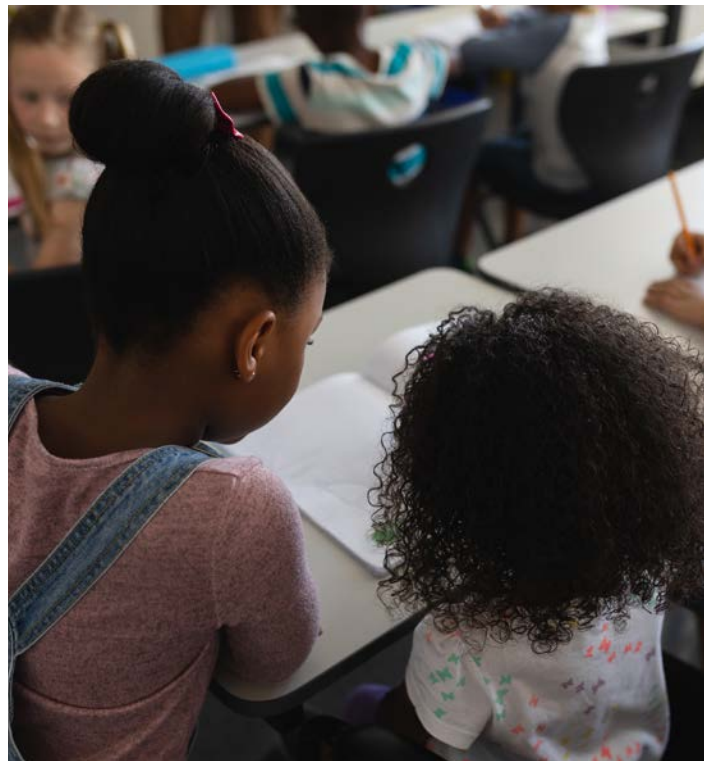
When students graduate without necessary fundamental skills, they are ill-prepared for both the workforce and post-secondary education. Advanced Placement (AP) courses provide students with exposure to collegiate-level work and with the opportunity to earn college credits by passing an end-of-course exam. In Michigan’s public schools, students of color are underrepresented among students who take AP courses. Even more troubling, students of color who do enroll in AP courses are less likely to sit for AP exams than White students.²⁶ Without access to rigorous coursework, underprepared students often need to enroll in remedial courses which can mean additional costs for students, plus more time to complete their degrees and a higher likelihood of dropping out. In 2006, Michigan passed a comprehensive set of graduation requirements, known as the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC), designed to make students’ high school experiences more rigorous and to better prepare Michigan students for post-secondary success.²⁷

Crafted with noble intentions, the MMC implementation faced many challenges. In a report on the MMC’s early implementation, the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy found that nearly half of schools surveyed had trouble aligning their courses with state standards, while still others struggled with fully staffing new courses with qualified teachers.²⁸ State leaders, including the Michigan Department of Education, should and could have played a stronger role with implementation and with supporting districts’ efforts, particularly in rural and urban communities that have faced considerable staffing challenges. Over the years, several bills aimed at rolling back the MMC requirements have become law.²⁹

Despite these legislative changes and a lack of state support and leadership on implementation, research has found that, under the MMC, the average Michigan student takes about one additional semester’s worth of math coursework and passes these additional classes about 88% of the time. The increase in students taking and passing more advanced coursework was driven largely

by students in economically disadvantaged schools.³⁰ Researchers also found that more well-prepared and economically advantaged students saw increases in college enrollment in the years following high school graduation.³¹ Positive effects for students of diverse backgrounds bolsters the possibility that the MMC could be a powerful policy tool to improve outcomes for all of Michigan’s students.

Michigan has the opportunity now to double down on the foundational beliefs of the MMC: all students should have full access to rigorous coursework that prepares them well for college and career opportunities not only in the immediate term but for their lifetimes. State leaders can build on the MMC’s already positive impact by taking proactive steps like ensuring equitable access to advanced coursework and qualified teachers in typically hard to staff areas like world languages. We do not need to keep tinkering with the MMC—we need to be more assertive and thoughtful about implementing it well and strengthening it through rigorous end-of-course tests aligned with state standards.



7 Reimagine Early Literacy

More than 15 years of research has resulted in a much better understanding of the needs of young children in becoming strong readers by the time they reach third grade. The literature shows that many early literacy efforts nationwide have either failed to be successful or to produce sustainable results. Three major obstacles facing early literacy educators contribute to these failures: (1) The risk of educators' focus on "easier-to-learn" reading skills at the expense of vocabulary, conceptual knowledge and content knowledge, and reading comprehension strategies, or what are commonly known as "core knowledge." (2) A lack of expertise among educators on how to teach these deeper-level skills and (3) Limited time in the school day and year to meet new expectations.³² Despite Michigan leaders' stated intentions to prioritize early literacy, the state's overall lack of a strategic, coherent system of implementing best practices far too often left it largely to chance for students to get the instruction they needed to become strong early readers.³³

In 2021-2022, 5,600 Michigan students received reading scores low enough that they could be required to repeat third grade—a 20 percent increase in retention-eligible

students. Worse yet are the disparities: Black students are 4.5 times as likely to be retention-eligible than are White students.³⁴ As leading education states demonstrate, Michigan will require innovative approaches in systems change—and greater thought and attention to aligned and coherent standards, assessment, instruction and capacity-building and more effective implementation—to reach this ambitious goal. Michigan's current investment in early literacy strategies do not reflect such alignment and coherence, resulting in problematic implementation for educators and principals, especially in high-poverty schools where students often are most behind in reading.

For ETM's more comprehensive recommendations regarding early literacy, please see our 2018 report, "[Top Ten for Education: Not by Chance.](#)"



8 Identify Students with Dyslexia and Ensure They Receive the Support They Need

The most recent 2022 M-STEP results show that more than half of Michigan’s third graders are behind in reading, reinforcing the point that Michigan struggles with an early reading crisis. Decades of research shows that promoting early literacy is key to improving education overall.³⁵ If students read well by third grade, they have a better chance to succeed in school, are far more likely to go to college, participate in the job market and even have greater lifetime employment earnings.

One key group of students who struggle to read on grade level are those students who have dyslexia. Currently, there is bi-partisan legislation to help students with dyslexia improve their reading skills by requiring schools to screen early elementary students for characteristics of dyslexia and provide multi-tier levels of support for students who demonstrate those characteristics. Additionally, the legislative proposal requires teaching colleges to provide specific training on dyslexia and to ensure that all current teachers receive professional development on how to provide the necessary resources for these students using evidence-based instructional methods and interventions to teach reading based on the science of reading.

Passing this legislation is critical to changing the trajectory for Michigan’s youngest readers by addressing one of the most common barriers to reading success: dyslexia. This learning disability is said to impact as much as 5-17 percent of students.³⁶ In a state that has significantly faltered in early reading instruction, passing this legislation would be a major win for all of Michigan’s students.



Decades of research shows that promoting early literacy is key to improving education overall.



Invest in Post-Secondary Innovation

For Michigan's students to fulfill their true potential and be the leaders of tomorrow, more must enroll in postsecondary training, whether that be at a trade school, community college or a four-year university. In the fall of 2018, about 65% of Michigan's high school graduates enrolled directly into college, which put Michigan slightly above the national average for post-secondary enrollment right out of high school. Increasing access and pathways

to success for underserved populations, rural students, and first-generation students will require investments in innovative programming, including dual enrollment, student-centered supports, and digital technologies. To increase the number of Michigan's students pursuing post-secondary training and meeting their fullest potential, Michigan must commit to additional investment and innovation into post-secondary pathways.



Strengthen Early Childhood for Disadvantaged Students

Recently released 2022 national assessment data clearly demonstrate opportunity gaps between groups of students as early as fourth grade. Unfortunately, those disparities often form far earlier in many children's lives – and they persist for far too long. High-quality early childhood education serves as an effective tool for intergenerational empowerment and social mobility for many students who are otherwise disadvantaged by the educational system. Unfortunately, early learning programs in Michigan too often fail to meet students' needs – even as Michigan's education advocates, state leaders, and policymakers have made great strides with advocating for improvements in early childhood education.

State leaders should focus on strengthening five foundational elements, discussed in detail in this report, to ensure that Michigan's early childhood education system meets the needs of all students:

1. **Quality**
2. **Access and Affordability**
3. **Funding Structure Improvement**
4. **Data**
5. **Workforce Recruitment, Compensation, and Retention Strategies**

The coordination of policies and programs across all five foundational elements, rather than a narrow focus on any single element, will foster progress and long-term benefits for historically underserved students. Together these foundational five elements provide the critical support that is needed to foster students' seamless transitions from early childhood education to elementary school.

In the following pages, we dive deeply into the early childhood landscape of Michigan and the foundational five recommendations for strengthening early childhood transitions into preschool and kindergarten.



EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITIONS:

Moments of Opportunity

INTRODUCTION

Children from low-income backgrounds often face early and persistent challenges to educational success.³⁷ By the age of three, children who grow up in poverty hear 30 million *fewer* words than their more economically advantaged peers,³⁸ a disparity which contributes to later differences in reading skills.

Children of color also face early and persistent challenges to attaining educational success. In addition to the barriers resulting from enduring systemic racism, Black and Latino children are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as their White and Asian counterparts.³⁹ In Michigan, 47% of Black children and 23% of Latino children live in high-poverty areas, compared to 5% of White children.⁴⁰

The Perry Preschool Project, a revolutionary program and study conducted in Ypsilanti, Michigan in the 1960s, demonstrated the significant and holistic lifelong benefits of high-quality early childhood education (ECE) and proved that high-quality early education could address and avert educational inequities for children of color and those from low-income backgrounds.⁴¹ The program—and subsequent programs modeled after it—have shown that high-quality ECE can positively impact socioemotional development, academic achievement, and graduation rates.⁴² Moreover, participants of high-quality programs experience lifelong benefits, including better health and employment outcomes, higher lifetime earnings, less justice system involvement, and more stable relationships in adulthood.⁴³ ECE participants' children also grow up in more stable families and experience better school, health,

and employment outcomes.⁴⁴ Recent research on the rate of return for kindergarten readiness suggests that, for every one child who is well-prepared for kindergarten and was otherwise at risk for academic failure, Michigan saves \$47,000.⁴⁵ More recent studies confirm that, for ECE programs to have a lasting impact and benefit for young learners from low-income backgrounds, early childhood and pre-k learning environments must be high-quality.⁴⁶

Undoubtedly, high-quality ECE serves as an effective tool for intergenerational empowerment and social mobility.

PREVAILING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CHALLENGES IN MICHIGAN

Despite profound benefits, early childhood education in Michigan and across the nation lacks sufficient funding. This creates an affordability barrier for both families and providers: the cost of high-quality care (hereafter referred to as “high quality”) is exorbitantly expensive for families and the cost of pursuing, providing, and maintaining that high quality is prohibitive for ECE business owners, given current subsidy and reimbursement rate structures. Further, aspiring early childhood educators lack an equitable and well-defined pipeline for entry into the workforce and do not receive livable compensation on par with their K-12 colleagues. Fragmentation in the ECE system also creates wide disparities in quality, educator preparation, and educator compensation, limiting the retention of talented ECE teachers.⁴⁷

In 2021, Governor Whitmer signed legislation that raised the foundation allowance of Michigan’s public preschool program—the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)—

to match the state's K-12 per pupil allowance for the 2022 fiscal year.⁴⁸ While the funds will go a long way towards improving quality of and access to the state-funded program, more comprehensive action will be needed to develop a sustainable ECE infrastructure that supports cohesion, workforce development, and high quality across all programs in the ECE system. For example, federally-funded programs such as Early Head Start and Head Start, private centers, and home-based programs should also receive the support needed to pursue high quality and alignment with the rest of the ECE system.

In addition to its lack of alignment across the ECE landscape, Michigan's ECE system also lacks vertical alignment with the K-12 education system. Instructional alignment between ECE and K-12 systems is especially important to sustaining the gains students make in preschool.⁴⁹ Additionally, strong handoffs between systems ensure students who need additional supports are identified and accommodated at the beginning of their kindergarten year. Lack of alignment between ECE and K-12 systems also poses a threat to students' progress, especially for students with disabilities or multilingual students who benefit from the continuity of additional assistance. Students participating in GSRP programs housed within a school district benefit from a higher degree of alignment, but the current infrastructure, including a lack of commonly held data-sharing practices, does not support coordination and alignment for students in federally funded care, private center-based programs, and home-based programs.

Students of color and students from low-income backgrounds particularly **encounter many barriers** to accessing high-quality early childhood education. These barriers include a lack of available care in state-funded programs for infants and toddlers; lack of full-day, full-year programming; and conflicts between parents' work schedules and ECE programs' hours of operation.



THE FOUNDATIONAL FIVE ELEMENTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

To provide every student with an equitable opportunity to reach their full potential, leaders and policymakers should focus on five foundational elements to fortify the ECE system and facilitate students' successful transitions from preschool into kindergarten and beyond:

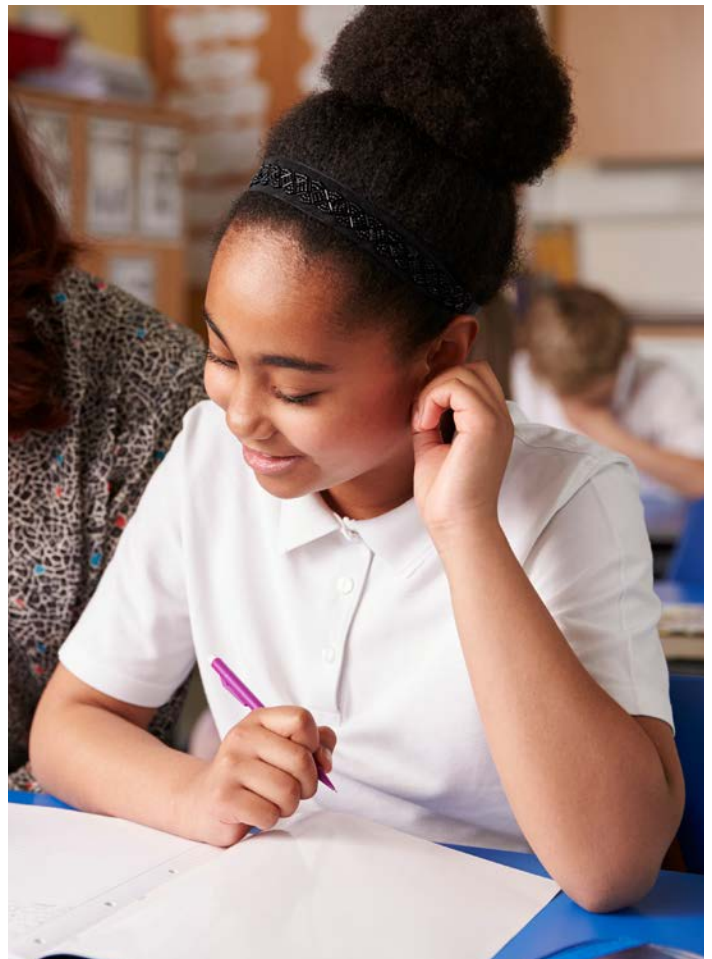
1. **Quality**
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The coordination of policies and programs across all five foundational elements, rather than a narrow focus on any single element, will foster progress and long-term benefits for historically underserved students. Together these foundational five elements provide the critical support that is needed to foster students' seamless transitions from ECE to elementary school.

TOWARD STRONGER SYSTEMS ALIGNMENT

Education is a continuous journey, not a set of discrete experiences. From funding to design, our systems must adapt to meet this reality: that from their earliest moments, children are learning, developing, and growing into the people they will become. Many organizations and advocates continue to carry out important efforts along the prenatal-to-20-year-old continuum, applying their expertise to ensuring children have what they need to thrive in their first 1,000 days of life—a critical time of development.⁵⁰ Likewise, many fellow education advocates and stakeholders have created and continue to create momentum and change in the areas of equitable access and affordability, quality, and ECE's funding structures. Their work is urgent and necessary. Still more are focused on equitable postsecondary transitions and supports that usher young adults into careers and college.

In this report, The Education Trust-Midwest brings its equity lens and extensive work in K-12 data and teacher effectiveness to spotlight the preschool through third grade (P-3) period of that continuum, emphasizing alignment within the data and workforce development foundational elements. This report details the importance and critical features of a robust data infrastructure and practices as well as current challenges and potential leverage points for cultivating a strong ECE workforce to support that transition phase. This is not intended to be a comprehensive early childhood or preschool report. Rather, we focus on investment in key levers within the foundational five elements that could support stronger alignment between Michigan's early childhood education system and K-12 system, with a focus on connecting strategies between preschool and third grade. However, while we seek to "zoom in" on that period within the continuum, we do so with a regard for the bigger picture.



Highlighting Progress and Identifying Challenges: Quality, Access and Affordability, and ECE Funding Structure Improvement

Across the state, advocates and stakeholders have garnered attention and acted to improve quality, increase ECE access for Michigan’s children, and advocate for specific policy measures to strengthen Michigan’s ECE business model.

QUALITY

Studies show that high-quality Pre-K learning environments offer the highest benefits, and those benefits are highest for young learners from low-income backgrounds.⁵¹ While there is still work to be done, Michigan shines with its commitment to improving ECE quality by expanding access without sacrificing its focus on high standards and continual process monitoring.⁵² Michigan’s GSRP is aligned with the state’s kindergarten through third grade standards and Head Start frameworks, demonstrating the critical role that systems alignment plays in defining high quality and establishing the

structure for students to succeed in elementary school and beyond.⁵³ As part of the GSRP, dedicated Early Childhood Specialists support teaching teams and site administrators in continuous quality improvement and also support children’s transition into kindergarten and partnerships with families as their ISD/RESA resources allow. Early Childhood Specialists also help teaching teams understand and implement community, school, and classroom transition plans.⁵⁴

Beginning in 2019, the Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) and the Office of Great



Start facilitated further study of and revisions to Michigan’s ECE quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), known as Great Start to Quality.⁵⁵ Recent studies of QRIS systems indicate that a high-quality rating does not consistently correspond to students’ kindergarten preparedness.⁵⁶ Although student-teacher interactions are consistently linked to student outcomes, not all QRIS systems include student-teacher interaction observations at every quality rating level. Beginning in 2023, after completing a program self-reflection, Michigan’s Great Start to Quality program will allow providers to pursue a thorough on-site observation using Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). This and other QRIS system improvements will improve both the equity and accuracy of quality levels for all participating early childhood environments.⁵⁷

Michigan’s Current Challenges to Next Level ECE Quality

While Michigan has shown admirable commitment to ensuring young learners have access to high-quality ECE programs across the state, state leaders must do more to move Michigan to the next level of ECE quality. Next steps include:

- **Addressing Challenges with Michigan’s Market Rate Approach**

Many ECE advocates and stakeholders, including Michigan’s Children, Michigan League for Public Policy, and Hope Starts Here, have advocated for changes to provider subsidies, reimbursement structures, and family eligibility thresholds.⁵⁸ Some have also called for a move away from the market rate approach, which determines the cost of services based on the fee schedules of similar businesses in the same market. Market rates fall well below the cost of high-quality care, which increases the cost of ECE for families and considerably limits ECE providers’ ability to achieve high quality, resulting in advocates calling for the state to move towards a model that considers the true cost of care.⁵⁹

As part of the requirements of the Child Care and Development Block Grant, MDE and the Office of Great Start commissioned two childcare market rate studies examining the cost of early childhood care in Michigan. The 2017 study identified gaps between the cost of high-quality care and the amount collected via subsidies or tuition.⁶⁰ Four years later, an April 2021 market rate study showed that subsidies continued to fall short, even when factoring in the 2020 Child Development and Care (CDC) rate increases for eligible children.⁶¹ MDE and other key stakeholders are exploring other tools to assess the true cost of quality care.

- **Addressing Challenges with Pedagogical Alignment**

Further recommendations from national ECE and P-3 alignment thought leaders address the pedagogical and cultural rifts related to Pre-K to K-12 transitions, especially for young learners of color and those from low-income households.⁶² For instance, ECE programs place considerable focus on social and behavioral skills, but the emphasis abruptly shifts to academic-based skills in kindergarten.⁶³ To address this disconnect, state leaders should:

- ❖ Develop frameworks for districts to offer shared professional development opportunities for educators across the P-3 continuum to meaningfully align on culturally- and developmentally-responsive classroom climates and pedagogy.⁶⁴ Ensuring that these opportunities are logistically, linguistically, and financially accessible to private centers and home-based ECE providers is vitally important to improving alignment.
- ❖ Ensure that curricular frameworks from preschool through grade three involve a gradual content and pedagogical shift into early elementary that bridges the gap for children.⁶⁵

INITIATIVES:

Developed by the global non-profit Education Development Center, the First 10 framework takes a holistic and comprehensive approach to fostering alignment across the first ten years of the educational continuum. Backed by strong evidence-based practices, First 10 combines highly effective components of well-studied national models, such as coaching programs, parent education and engagement initiatives, and community school models with wraparound physical and mental health services.⁶⁶ The First 10 approach centers culturally-responsive support for and relationship building with families starting in the prenatal period, with the understanding that a child's life outside of school is a critical factor in their optimal cognitive, socioemotional, and physical development. Focusing on collaborative improvement processes for teaching and learning, coordination of comprehensive services, and family partnership, the framework utilizes school hubs and community partnerships to empower and support students and families throughout ECE and the transition to kindergarten. Importantly, the First 10 approach is distinct from other “cradle-to-career” models in that it forms partnerships to work on all aspects of quality, coordination, and alignment across the full birth-to-elementary school continuum whereas many collective initiatives employ separate teams for kindergarten readiness and early literacy. It has been effectively implemented in over forty communities nationwide including Multnomah County, Oregon, Omaha, Nebraska, and York City, Pennsylvania, as well as communities across the states of Maine and Alabama.⁶⁷ The program is being piloted in select Michigan communities, and both Maine and Alabama provide examples of how state leaders can effectively support the initiative for optimal impact.⁶⁸ For example, in collaboration with the Education Development Center, Alabama produced a robust **Transitions to Kindergarten** toolkit that offers strategies and resources to guide communities in their implementation of effective transition programming.

ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

Along with GSRP foundation allowance parity, the fiscal year 2022 budget incorporated modest increases to reimbursement rates and temporary increases to eligibility thresholds. As a result, all income-eligible four-year-olds will have the opportunity to attend a GSRP Pre-K by the end of the three-year rollout.⁶⁹

Additionally, locales across Michigan have made notable progress in expanding ECE access. **First Steps Kent** led a successful ballot initiative for its Ready by Five program in November of 2018, which increased ECE access in community-based programs across Kent County and supports the health of young children and their readiness for kindergarten.⁷⁰

Advocating for system-wide equity, **Hope Starts Here** has consistently called for an equitable increase in access and for all providers—whether home-based, community-

based, or government-supported—to have the opportunity to participate in the growing GSRP program within a mixed-delivery system.⁷¹ Given consistent disinvestment in communities of color and low-income communities, equitable allocation of new funding that increases access for students in those neighborhoods must remain a priority.

Some research suggests that the short-term academic benefits of ECE wane with a fadeout effect by third grade.⁷² This troubling finding has led researchers and advocates to turn increased attention towards the role of vertical alignment in sustaining academic gains accrued in preschool. Indeed, while access to high-quality ECE is critical, access to high-quality ECE that is well-aligned with the K-12 system could protect the benefits from the “3rd grade fade.”⁷³ Therefore, sustaining equitable outcomes requires that “access” also encompass ECE providers’ access to and inclusion in alignment initiatives across the mixed delivery system.

ECE FUNDING STRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT

At present, diversified funding streams are important to an inclusive and sustainable ECE system for two main reasons: first, utilizing funds from different public and private sources, known as braided and blended funding, allows programs to serve children from a variety of backgrounds in a single classroom. Secondly, it fosters ECE system alignment that contributes to increased quality and access for low-income students in a business model that otherwise disincentivizes serving children from low-income backgrounds.⁷⁴ The economic stability of families also relies on an accessible early childhood education system, as the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated that high-quality childcare is critical to a thriving workforce.⁷⁵ However, the need for braided and blended funding stems from a lack of sufficient public funds to sustain a high-quality ECE system. It places an undue burden on program operators via complicated accounting processes, paperwork, and restrictive service delivery depending on who is in their classrooms and where each child's funding comes from. More—and more streamlined—funding is critical.

In recognition of this, a coalition of state leaders, businesses, legislators, researchers, and advocacy groups are piloting the Tri-Share Model in regions across the state to provide access to affordable ECE for more Michigan families.⁷⁶ This promising new approach broadens the table to include employers as key stakeholders and financial partners in ensuring that working parents and their children have access to high-quality ECE.

To reduce operational and administrative burdens for ECE providers, the Battle Creek Shared Services Alliance provides administrative and professional development support, interpreter services, behavioral specialists, and more.⁷⁷ This allows providers to focus their efforts on high-quality experiences in the classroom. Likewise, First Steps recently secured funding to implement a shared services network, connecting Kent County ECE providers with services to reduce the burden of operations, streamline processes to make them more efficient, promote business sustainability, and free up capacity to focus on quality.⁷⁸

Challenges to the ECE Small Business Model

While these examples demonstrate great progress towards universal access for young learners, we must also pay

attention to the business consequences incurred by providers not yet included in the GSRP program.

Many private and community-based ECE providers provide services to infants and toddlers in addition to three- and four-year-olds. Recommended teacher-student ratios for high-quality infant and toddler care are lower than ratios for the care of three- and four-year-olds, resulting in higher cost of care expenses for businesses caring for infants and toddlers. Therefore, the enrollment of three- and four-year-olds is critical to the financial stability of running an ECE small business.⁷⁹ The expansion of GSRP has the potential to increase alignment between early childhood and K-12 systems as more four-year-old children will concentrate in public schools administering the program. Unfortunately, it also makes alignment difficult and business unsustainable for many private center-based programs and home providers. This has the potential to impact families of color and families living in poverty hardest. Many of these families have an especially hard time finding affordable, high-quality care for their infants and toddlers.⁸⁰ Moreover, those who prefer to send their young learners to community-based or home-based Pre-K programs that align with their cultural or religious preferences may face a dearth of options.

As such, maintaining a mixed delivery ECE system—a system in which all models of ECE are sustainable and have access to quality improvement resources—is critical to maintaining equity in alignment between the ECE system and the K-12 system. A well-supported and horizontally-aligned mixed-delivery model would adequately equip providers and fully consider the kindergarten preparation of young learners transitioning from every ECE setting.

DATA

For Michigan to achieve stronger alignment and successful transitions across the P-3 continuum, Michigan must prioritize a robust data infrastructure that treats a student's educational career as a progressive continuum rather than a sequence of discrete experiences.

Enhancing data governance and infrastructure and engaging stakeholders in ongoing data systems alignment would allow educators and policymakers to answer important policy questions.

The Case for Strong Data Alignment Across P-3 Systems

Kindergarten Entry Observations and Data Alignment

Kindergarten observation data via a common, holistic observation tool could further inform curricular alignment between ECE and K-12 programming and offer insight into potential shared professional development opportunities. An ongoing, holistic, linguistically- and culturally-responsive kindergarten entry observation could also provide a strong academic and socioemotional baseline for kindergarten. This is especially helpful for students that need additional supports as they begin their elementary career.⁸¹

It is vitally important that this tool be paired with proper professional development. A well-implemented kindergarten entry observation could aid in closing the existing philosophical and pedagogical rifts between Pre-K and Kindergarten. Educators need rigorous training on the collection and use of observational data in culturally- and linguistically- sensitive ways to lay the groundwork for smooth and supportive transitions for early learners. Such training can ensure all educators on both sides of the transition share a common understanding of their students' developmental stages, needs, and progress.

Likewise, early educators would benefit from feedback on how well students were prepared for grade-level content as they enter kindergarten. An aligned kindergarten entry observation tool could provide early educators with opportunities to strengthen their process, structures, and pedagogy for future students. Integrating data from a kindergarten entry observation into a statewide data system also has potential to inform ECE quality improvement by linking trends in students' strengths and weaknesses.

Disaggregated Data to Support Multiple Levels and P-3 Alignment

Aligned and disaggregated data could also help to more accurately identify and address racial and socioeconomic disparities in kindergarten readiness for more targeted

support at the program and individual levels. An aligned data system also supports districts, as it allows district leaders to regularly examine feeder patterns—that is, where their kindergarten students are coming from—and could facilitate more intentional outreach and alignment between schools, families, and community-based and home-based providers.⁸²

At a systems level, collecting comprehensive disaggregated data across many domains beginning in early childhood would allow recordkeeping of students' entire educational careers. It would also allow stakeholders and policymakers to see growth and achievement patterns from students' ECE experiences through grade school.

Furthermore, disaggregated data would allow policymakers to assess the impact of infrastructure investments, provide insight into scaling effective programming, and address ineffective policies and practices that impede equitable outcomes particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students with disabilities.⁸³

Data to Support Recruiting and Retaining ECE Professionals

At present, ECE programs nationwide face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining ECE professionals. Low wages and poor or non-existent benefits, combined with limited career opportunities and trajectories for ECE professionals, disincentivize talented educators entering and staying in the field as a long-term career.⁸⁴ In addition to improving ECE professionals' compensation and access to professional development and long-term career stability, disaggregated data on the pay, professional development, and qualifications of early childhood educators would allow policymakers to understand trends specifically related to:

- 1. Equitable distribution of effective ECE professionals across geography and ECE programs**
- 2. Equitable, culturally- and linguistically- responsive pathways to becoming an ECE professional**

Data to Support Quality and Resource Distribution for All ECE Providers

A lack of detailed information about the ECE workforce hampers alignment within the ECE system.⁸⁵ This, in turn, makes alignment between the ECE and K-12 systems more difficult. A comprehensive data system that routinely collects and synthesizes information across multiple domains could facilitate more effective policymaking and targeted strategies for improved alignment and more equitable outcomes. Relevant domains to compare data would include:

- The geographic distribution of ECE programs
- Types of providers (i.e., community or home-based) and their Great Start to Quality levels
- The conditions, educational attainment, and ongoing development of the workforce across programs
- Teacher credentials, training, demographics, and multilingual status
- Students' health and developmental screenings, and
- Snapshots of students' academic progress as they enter kindergarten

Great Start to Quality levels and other relevant data points such as staffing constraints, access to professional development, and access to professional and business support networks provide the state with valuable insight into the specific supports and infrastructure improvements needed to further elevate quality and streamline alignment with K-12 systems. A comprehensive picture allows stakeholders, community leaders, and policymakers to better assess changes and respond to unique needs in an informed and efficient manner. For example, Michigan's recently passed Family Childcare Networks Act requires data collection and evaluation that could shed light on the networks' and broader ECE system's efficacy in improving the sustainability, professional training, and QRIS participation of home-based ECE businesses.⁸⁶

Lastly, better and more comprehensive data would help policymakers understand the number and geographic distribution of high-quality ECE programs that can support multilingual learners and students with disabilities. Such information allows decision-makers to assess whether there are enough programs in the neighborhoods where students and families need them most. A better understanding of access could facilitate prioritized expansion.

How Michigan Can Get to Stronger Data Alignment Across Systems

As K-12 systems receive new kindergarten students, a well-aligned data system could support curricular alignment at the local level and enhance educators' ability to meet students at their individual academic needs. Michigan currently links children's demographic and family characteristics data between the ECE and K-12 for students in certain state-funded ECE programs.⁸⁷ However, the state does not link program-level data or workforce data, nor does it link program participation or child development data to include if a child received development screenings or assessments.⁸⁸ In their 2019 application for renewed Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five funding (a competitive federal grant designed to improve states' early childhood systems), MDE and the Office of Great Start proposed the use of unique identifiers to be able to follow a child through the ECE system.⁸⁹ Expanding the use of these identifiers to include comprehensive connection to K-12 would be a powerful step towards strong ECE and K-12 alignment.

Building a holistically coordinated data system with data sharing partnerships across the ECE ecosystem would ensure that students receiving early intervention services, special education supports, or public services for low-income families can seamlessly transition to kindergarten with no disturbance to their services. It would provide K-12 educators with a baseline understanding of their new students at the outset of their relationship, reduce burdens on parents, and eliminate time delays in students receiving critical accommodations.

To move towards a vision of stronger data alignment between ECE and K-12 systems, we recommend Michigan state leaders address three crucial needs:

1. Michigan needs a comprehensive, centrally-housed data hub that integrates ECE and K-12 data systems that allows for efficient, one-stop entry for programs and LEAs.⁹⁰

The state's ECE data collection and reporting should include the following:

- ECE provider information that interfaces with their Great Start to Quality data profile, such that ongoing participation and progress in the QRIS can be followed over time and gap analyses in access to high-quality ECE can inform resource allocation.
- Compensation and credentials of the ECE workforce across ECE settings, disaggregated by race and ethnicity.
- Longitudinal student-level data that utilizes unique identifiers through ECE and K-12 and is disaggregated by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, IDEA and/or Section 504 status, and multilingual learners and their languages, and that allows for monitoring outcomes over time to evaluate implementation and inform further iterations of quality and alignment initiatives.⁹¹
- A user-friendly, publicly accessible dashboard that allows educators, leaders, policymakers, and advocates to view trends by examining correlations between ECE program type, program quality, geographic location, student subgroup, and assessment outcomes.



SPOTLIGHT: HOW IT'S BEING DONE

As of 2014, Pennsylvania was the first and only state to link ECE staffing, enrollment, QRIS, programming, and child-level ECE data to K-12 data.⁹² A partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) facilitates Pennsylvania's Enterprise to Link Information for Children Across Networks (PELICAN).⁹³ PELICAN encompasses seven key data systems: Certification, Child Care Works, Keys to Quality, PA Pre-K Counts, Early Learning Network, Early Intervention, and Provider Management.⁹⁴ Agency administrators, providers, and other authorized users input data into their respective systems and, where relevant, data entered into one system is integrated into another. Further, PELICAN data, the state's K-12 data system, data sets related to higher education, and the Early Learning Network data are all connected through the statewide longitudinal data system. This comprehensive data hub allows authorized users to understand children's progress from birth to age 20 and analyze trends and outcomes over time.

Because Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning is under both the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services, students are assigned two unique identifiers, one for OCDEL and one for the Department of Education. This structure allows for seamless, individual-level data tracking from ECE through K-12.⁹⁵

Pennsylvania provides a model for what's possible with intentional data governance and infrastructure design.

Michigan's Family Childcare Networks Act, passed in June 2022, calls for "data collection and evaluation to measure success" of Michigan's newly formed childcare networks.⁹⁶ Given that many home providers also provide services to preschool-aged children, it will be important to ensure that the data structure serving the childcare networks is a part of or interfaces with this central data hub. In doing so, Michigan will be better positioned to support the transitions of all students in every ECE-related environment.

*Michigan has the capacity to connect many elements of the data reporting structures in preschool and K-12, but no such link currently exists.*⁹⁷

To establish this link, Michigan's state leaders should:

- **Develop a strategic plan for enhancing existing structures and building needed capacity such that secure links between systems can be made.**
 - ❖ This plan should include strategies for data governance, privacy and security, access and use, quality, linking and matching across systems, cross-agency data sharing, and stakeholder engagement.⁹⁸
- **Further understand and leverage data collection already in place.**
 - ❖ At the regional and local level, Michigan should assess how existing data collection systems are working, where there are gaps in information, and how they can provide a foundation to what we need. Policymakers should also commit to designing policies that allow local communities to expand and adapt implementation to their students', families', and educators' needs.⁹⁹

2. Michigan also needs to fully implement and use a kindergarten entry observation tool.

In 2017, Michigan passed legislation requiring districts to implement the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment tool as part of the new Michigan Kindergarten Entry Observation (MKEO) system.¹⁰⁰ While statewide

implementation was set to begin in the 2020-2021 school year, ongoing pandemic conditions led to temporary suspension of the requirement. In 2021, the requirement was removed via legislation and implementation is now optional.¹⁰¹

In the short term, and to ensure that all students benefit from the use of data in their transitions from Pre-K to K-12, we recommend policymakers:

- **Require that state leaders provide professional development regarding alignment as it relates to a kindergarten entry observation tool at the ISD, district, and classroom levels.**
 - To effectively and properly use the data, educators and leaders first need understanding and training on the value of observational assessments. The state should provide the capacity and funding necessary to train district leaders, principals, and kindergarten teachers on the importance of observational data and how it can help educators understand students' educational progress and needs. Strong implementation of a kindergarten observational tool also hinges on state leaders building educators' knowledge on the crucial relationships between observational data, pedagogical and philosophical alignment between systems, and the critical role kindergarten educators play in P-3 alignment.
 - State leaders should emphasize the proper interpretations of observational results to support instructional improvement. State instructional leaders must also help bridge a common understanding of the intended use of the data at the state and local levels.
 - As kindergarten observations and readiness assessments are not designed or suited for use as student placement or program accountability tools, educational leaders must not improperly apply insights gleaned from the data. Implementing the tool for measuring program or teacher efficacy are beyond the tool's intended use.¹⁰² Kindergarten readiness assessments are

intended to provide critical information regarding socioemotional and academic readiness that can inform pedagogical and instructional alignment between ECE and kindergarten classrooms.

In the medium-to long-term, policymakers and state leaders should:

- **Require use of a common kindergarten entry observation tool.**
 - Understanding student progress at the beginning of kindergarten via a common tool is necessary to improve coordination, alignment, and continued supports to young learners. This would also allow for streamlined and efficient training and implementation for kindergarten teachers. Using one tool also provides all ECE programs and kindergarten educators with common definitions for measures and a uniform method for collecting data.
- **Provide funding for the administration of this singular assessment.**
 - Sufficient funding ensures that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or schools' resources, will benefit from data regarding their developmental and academic progress being incorporated into their kindergarten transition.
- **Require Michigan's observation tool be culturally and linguistically inclusive and implemented with fidelity.**
 - It is critical the state ensures students of all backgrounds are accurately assessed. Moreover, the assessment system must distinguish the difference between multilingual children and primarily English-speaking children. This can lead to better infrastructure development to support English learner students, especially given the state's growing population of English Learners. Linguistic sensitivity in the assessment can also inform seamless carryover of identified needs from ECE to K-12.¹⁰³
 - To mitigate bias in observational data, leaders and educators at all levels must be well-versed in

cultural and linguistic sensitivities in implementing the tool. Implicit bias trainings should accompany professional development regarding the observational assessment.

3. Michigan needs a cohesive and well-defined ECE-to-Kindergarten hand-off process

To facilitate P-3 alignment and strong supports for students, Michigan must intentionally create a well-defined ECE to kindergarten hand-off process. To do this, we recommend Michigan's state leaders should:

- **Pilot a framework for a qualitative and quantitative handoff process from ECE classrooms to kindergarten educators.**

- This process would be carried out by communities and districts and could particularly benefit students with greater educational needs by reducing the time it takes to identify need in a new environment. Many states like North Carolina, West Virginia, and Oregon already have or are piloting such processes.¹⁰⁴

- **Encourage districts to establish meaningful and culturally-responsive engagement and partnership with families well before kindergarten entry.**

- By empowering advocacy, sharing assessment data, and putting transition teams in place, districts can especially support the unique transition needs of students of color, students from low-income households, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities. Engaging families within the context of their own neighborhoods, and identifying and addressing barriers such as transportation, health, and other wraparound needs will foster a smooth, well-supported transition. Likewise, availing parents and caregivers of the data relevant to their child allows each student to have a full team of experts on their development at the table. Students will benefit most when parents and caregivers are involved in the analysis and decision-making regarding their student's transition.



Additional Data Considerations

Multi-agency data-sharing agreements limit redundancy in systems and the overhead incurred in the administration and maintenance of data systems. This would also allow all stakeholders access to a more holistic picture of student needs. To this end, Michigan should seek to leverage federal funding streams to incentivize sharing across ECE, elementary, child welfare, and health systems.¹⁰⁵

It is also important that Michigan’s newly aligned data system is strong and culturally sensitive enough to provide appropriate tools and supports to achieve high quality. While a common kindergarten readiness assessment will provide valuable information regarding students’ readiness for kindergarten in a variety of domains, none are well-suited for use as an ECE provider accountability tool.¹⁰⁶ As such, structural and process quality and the cultural responsiveness of ECE programs should continue to be evaluated through the Great Start to Quality system, with associated support provided to educators and centers in need of quality improvement.

It is also important to note that policies and procedures that are primarily concerned with quality also impact the efficient use of data, and care should be taken to break down any siloed approaches to both. For example, collecting and evaluating data for the purpose of providing process monitoring and accountability is more feasible and more effective with fewer curricular frameworks.¹⁰⁷ Administrators should seek to find the balance between philosophical diversity and the efficiency of process monitoring.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The ECE workforce must receive support and investment that is on par with K-12. As current research provides limited examples of robust ECE career pathway programs, Michigan has the opportunity to lead the way with intention and equity.¹⁰⁸ Three key areas of consideration can guide workforce development to improve and sustain P-3 systems alignment:

1. Create Equitable Opportunities to Join the ECE Workforce

Michigan’s recent ECE needs assessment identified that the state lacks a well-developed pipeline to recruit and retain ECE educators.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, children served in the ECE system do not have enough educators who represent their diverse cultures, languages, and racial identities.¹¹⁰ While the ECE professionals historically have been more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than the K-12 professionals, there is still a critical need to maintain and retain the racially- and linguistically-diverse workforce ECE already has, as well as recruit for a more diverse ECE workforce.¹¹¹ Further, while efforts to increase the educational requirements in the ECE workforce have been successful, more can be done to ensure that future teachers of diverse backgrounds have access to the postsecondary and credentialing programs that allow them to enter—and stay—in the career field.

Without a well-developed and supported pipeline, P-3 alignment efforts will be hampered by the many challenges experienced within ECE systems and programs, including high turnover, limited professional development, and a lack of culturally- and linguistically-representative educators who can provide important insight to the transition needs of students of color and multilingual learners. This is especially true for programs that serve more young learners of color and those from low-income backgrounds.

Currently, Michigan offers the **T.E.A.C.H Early Childhood Scholarship program**, coordinated by the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children. This program provides scholarships to



current early childhood educators to continue their credentialing and education. A variety of scholarships are available to applicants who work a minimum of 20 hours per week in an early childhood education setting.¹¹² The program is highlighted as a national best practice in cultivating a well-trained and diverse ECE workforce. Continued investment in the program is critical to breaking down financial barriers to ECE workforce entry.¹¹³

In addition to building on this program, we recommend policymakers and the Michigan Department of Education continue to develop an equity-centered ECE pipeline through the following multi-pronged approach:

- **Enhance preparation and development supports for ECE teachers who are non-native English speakers**
 - A diverse ECE workforce should include educators whose primary language is not English. As such, coursework should be available in their primary

language.¹¹⁴ Similarly, translation services and assistance with credit transfers from home country training could inclusively accommodate emerging ECE professionals.

- Once in the profession, ongoing support in the form of blended language professional development and easy access to continued education in reading and writing would cultivate stronger ECE teachers who can more readily collaborate across ECE and K-12 systems. The Education Trust and the U.S. Department of Commerce call on states and local chambers to strengthen connections with ethnic chambers such as the Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.¹¹⁵ These organizations are well-positioned to conduct outreach in multilingual communities and serve as a connection point for professional development, networking, and increased visibility for families looking for multilingual early childhood programs.

- **Pursue more comprehensive wage supports**

- ❖ Michigan urgently needs to address the current financial constraints that the ECE workforce faces. A 2018 study of Michigan’s ECE workforce found that at least 91% of ECE professionals across all roles within the study (administrator, teacher, assistant, or family childcare provider) qualified for and received at least one form of public assistance.¹¹⁶ Importantly, 90% of the respondents were White; however, approximately 64% of ECE educators nationwide identify as White. Given that Black early childhood educators earn an average of 78 cents less per hour than their White colleagues, Black ECE educators’ likely underrepresentation in this survey is an alarming concern.¹¹⁷

- ❖ Statewide programs such as WAGES\$, administered by the Child Care Services Association that also facilitates T.E.A.C.H. (a program Michigan already uses to support ECE educators) provides salary supplements to ECE

professionals.¹¹⁸ The Michigan Department of Education should apply to the Child Care WAGES\$ program and explore avenues for public and private funding streams to support its sustainability. Paired together, the Michigan ECE workforce could see an increase in retention rates, setting the foundation for the longevity and field expertise that could better serve alignment initiatives. While it does not achieve deserved compensation parity, this approach provides a more immediate—though short-term—solution to a critical need while long-term compensation parity policies are phased in.

- **Develop a registered apprenticeship pathway to certification**

- ❖ The passage of the federal **2014 Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act** broadened the frameworks for adult education programs to include career pathways for working adults. As such, states are required to identify in-demand occupations for targeted funding and are primarily



responsible for the planning and implementation of career pathway programs.¹¹⁹

❖ While Michigan has made efforts to improve ECE quality **by increasing the qualification requirements of early childhood educators**, the state must also responsibly ensure aspiring ECE educators have the tools and pathways to attain those credentials. Leveraging federal funding, state leaders in Michigan should work together with higher education institutions and philanthropic partners to develop infrastructure for pathways such as Registered Apprenticeship programs. These pathways offer an “earn while you learn” approach for ECE educators to attain more advanced credentials as well as associates or bachelor’s degrees. Registered Apprenticeships strengthen the ECE workforce by equipping educators to achieve higher earning potential that can enhance workforce stability. Additionally, legislators should consider granting credit for prior learning for students who pursue degrees with prior work experience.¹²⁰

2. Professionalize the Workforce Across the ECE System

While standards and credential requirements for Michigan’s ECE educators have increased, their compensation has not. Currently ECE personnel are among the lowest paid working professionals.¹²¹ As of 2019, the poverty rate for early educators in Michigan was 18.9%, and we know the COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the economic conditions for providers and their families.¹²² Moreover, between 2010 and 2015, Michigan was one of only three states that saw a 10% *decrease* in ECE wages.¹²³ Michigan ECE educators need a better long-term compensation solution, one where their wages are commensurate with their education, experience, and responsibilities.

Research has also pointed to ECE educators’ desire to be more involved in decision-making regarding policies that impact their classrooms and profession.¹²⁴ Meaningfully engaging early childhood educators as professionals with valuable expertise will also support talent recruitment and

retention. Retention, in turn, supports alignment as a seasoned ECE workforce can help sustain practices and connections between ECE programs, the P-3 continuum, and the K-12 system as a whole. Longevity in the field also fosters expertise that is critical to informed policy decisions.

To equitably and effectively professionalize Michigan’s ECE workforce, we recommend policymakers prioritize:

- **Compensation parity and wages that are commensurate with ECE professionals’ qualifications**
 - ❖ Despite the developmental and educational importance of a child’s first five years, Michigan’s ECE educators with bachelor’s degrees earn 21.5% less than degreed elementary educators, simply for choosing to work with students ages 0-5.¹²⁵ ECE professionals deserve a salary schedule and benefits that match their K-12 counterparts, with increases that are in step with experience and educational attainment. Michigan would encourage retention in the ECE workforce by offering wages that respect the educators’ education and expertise. It would also position K-12 districts for better alignment with ECE providers through partnerships built on collegiality and professional equality.
 - ❖ Alabama, New Jersey, and Georgia have policies that require full salary parity for lead teachers in every ECE setting.¹²⁶ While full compensation parity can present challenges, evidence from these and other states suggest that a phase-in period for compensation parity across the entire ECE workforce could mitigate tensions that often arise when policies instituting partial parity target certain segments of the workforce before others (e.g., public Pre-K teachers before private center-based providers with the same qualifications).¹²⁷
- **Meaningful engagement of ECE educators in inter-system alignment**
 - ❖ Policymakers at all levels should engage ECE educators as experts to assist in the development and implementation of ECE and K-12 systems alignment policies and practices.

Research shows that commonly used formal agreements or memoranda of understanding often don't produce meaningful and ongoing coordination for successful transitions from Pre-K to kindergarten.¹²⁸ Furthermore, successful transition programs require buy-in from both ECE and K-12 educators and a thorough understanding of early childhood development at the K-12 level.¹²⁹

3. Professional Development and Capacity Building

Interviews with educators and advocates engaged in systems alignment across the country indicate that it is critical for leaders at every level to be knowledgeable about early childhood education and alignment. Well-informed leaders increase the likelihood that ECE alignment implementation efforts will be prioritized in funding and resource allocation decisions.¹³⁰

In 2018, the Michigan State Board of Education approved a new certification structure that better serves alignment: teachers can now attain certification in PreK-3 and Grades 3-6, in place of the previous K-5 credential.¹³¹ Ongoing professional development that reinforces this alignment between ECE years and K-12 is important to ensuring that educators in both the ECE system and the K-12 system are on the same page through children's transitions. Training for educators across the Pre-K to 3 continuum in all settings should be grounded in similar foundational principles, including the importance of socioemotional development into the early elementary years.

Michigan currently provides an extensive guiding document for educators to help build shared understanding of core competencies and core teaching practices across the Pre-K-12 grade levels.¹³² Lansing School District in particular has taken alignment further by systematically engaging principals and teachers in each building to evaluate strengths and opportunities for growth in instructional practice that will serve students across Pre-K-12 grade levels. The district facilitates professional development for continued improvement based on

data from within and across grades as well as from classroom observations.¹³³

These effective practices provide a model for other districts in Michigan. To further build capacity and improve alignment in professional development statewide, Michigan should:

- **Explore how the state can leverage existing infrastructure**

- Entities such as the Office of Educator Excellence, ECIC, and regional Great Start Collaborative sites should explore the expansion of technical assistance to include capacity-building and professional development focused on alignment for districts and ECE providers. Many existing initiatives are limited to Pre-K programs housed within public school districts. Policymakers should capitalize on the infusion of federal and state ECE funds to expand and leverage this existing infrastructure. As regional, network-oriented support organizations, Great Start Collaboratives could provide an avenue to more inclusivity for all models of early education and foster comprehensive alignment between all ECE educators, parents, and K-12 schools.



❖ The Family Childcare Networks Act will scale regional shared service network programming statewide.¹³⁴ Passed in June 2022, the act requires MDE to establish family childcare networks to support home-based childcare providers in every region across the state. Equitable distribution of funding would facilitate supports related to business and operations, program quality, training and technical assistance, peer connections, and engaging new providers. Importantly, the Childcare Networks will be required to connect to the existing quality and licensing systems.¹³⁵ As a result, ECE educators across the mixed-delivery system will be better supported in pursuing high-quality and better positioned for alignment with the K-12 system. Fully funding these new networks and ensuring

that the supports, technical assistance, and professional development are produced and implemented with a P-3 alignment lens would amplify equitable impact for students in private and home-based programs.

- **Adopt a leadership capacity-building program**
 - ❖ Providing meaningful opportunities for district, school, and ECE leaders to learn and reflect together on alignment within their communities underscores the value and importance of P-3 transitions. MDE should seek partnerships with philanthropy and businesses to develop, fund, and implement leadership development opportunities that will galvanize alignment efforts across the state. These efforts could show promise for sustained system alignment that is responsive to local community considerations along with regional technical assistance sites.



CONCLUSION

Michigan's education advocates, state leaders, and policymakers have made great strides in pursuing ECE quality, access, and funding structure improvement. Further investment and collaboration can help the state in developing robust data infrastructure and equitable workforce supports, and in turn facilitate stronger alignment between ECE and the K-12 systems. With sustained commitment to improving these foundational five elements, Michigan can be a state where *all* children are well prepared for kindergarten and where kindergarten is well prepared for *all* children.

Michigan's long and troublesome history of educational inequities must not be allowed to endure. We know that other states across the nation have, with investment and commitment, made great strides for their students. For Michigan to do the same, we must begin with the **Opportunity 10**:

- 1 Invest with Urgency in Michigan Students' Educational Recovery**
- 2 Be Honest about Student Performance**
- 3 Create a Fair Funding System**
- 4 Develop a Strong System of Fiscal Transparency and Accountability for Spending**
- 5 Prioritize Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Support**
- 6 Ensure Full Access to Rigorous Coursework and Preparation for All Michigan Students**
- 7 Reimagine Early Literacy**
- 8 Identify Students with Dyslexia and Ensure they Receive the Support They Need**
- 9 Invest in Post-Secondary Innovation**
- 10 Strengthen Early Childhood for Disadvantaged Students**

These steps will not be easy. This moment of great opportunity is ours to seize. With strong, committed state leadership, Michigan can, and will, become a top 10 education state.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE EDUCATION TRUST-MIDWEST THANKS OUR FUNDERS WHO MADE THE PRODUCTION OF THIS REPORT POSSIBLE:



THE KRESGE FOUNDATION





2023 Michigan Achieves! Indicators

4th Grade Reading

CURRENT PERFORMANCE

43rd

2030 PROJECTION

43rd

WHAT IT IS

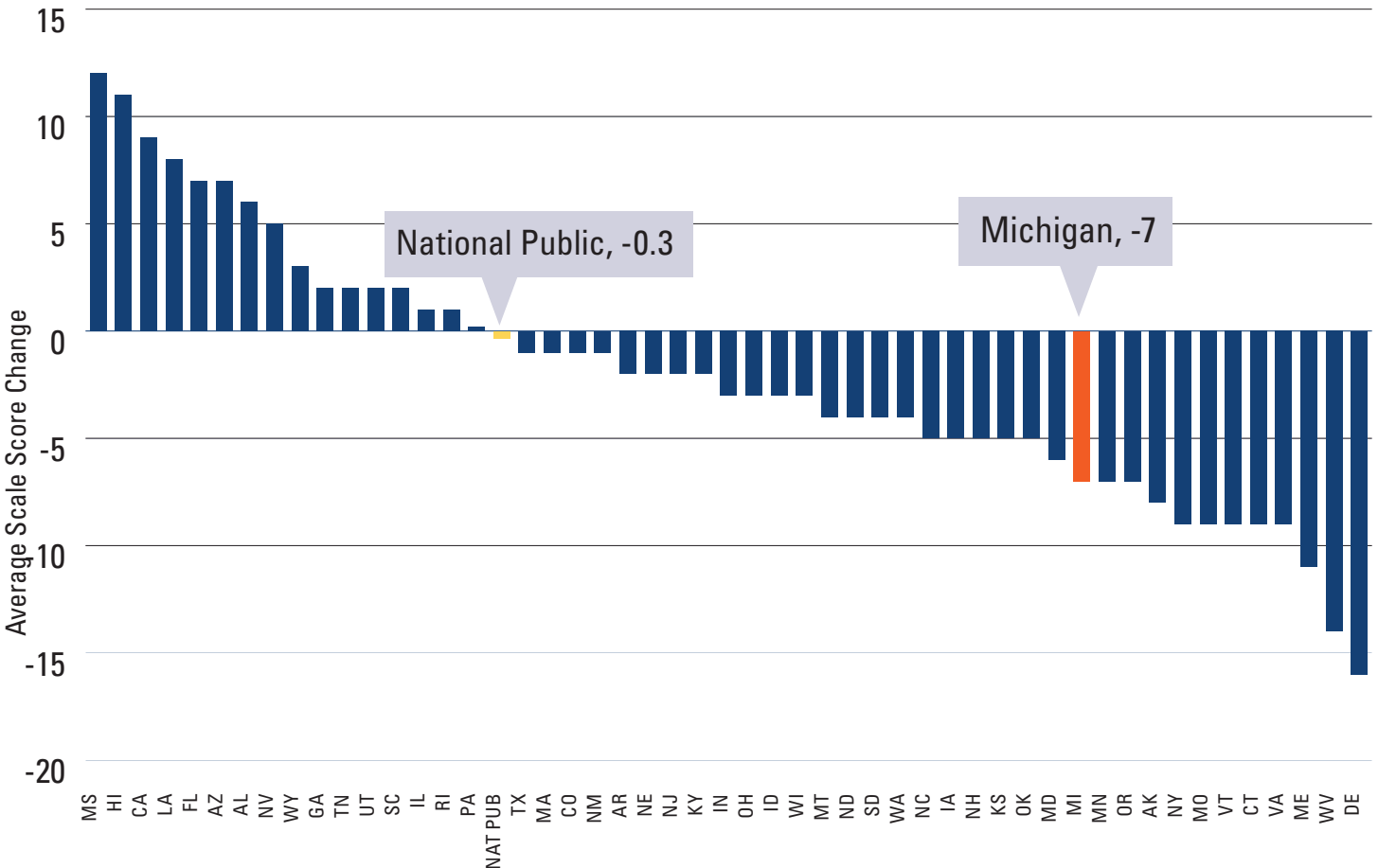
Early learners' reading proficiency is a telling indicator of whether Michigan's students are being prepared for success. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative assessment that provides for long-term comparisons of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. The assessment is given every two years* and provides necessary information about student performance and growth for several indicators, including fourth-grade reading.

WHY IT MATTERS

Reading proficiency is tied to all kinds of academic and life outcomes and is an important foundation for learning in the upper grades. Michigan must drastically improve its early literacy achievement for all students and close the opportunity gaps that keep far too many low-income children and students of color from fulfilling their potential.

Michigan State with 12th Largest Decline in Early Literacy

Average Scale Score Change, NAEP Grade 4 – Reading – All Students (2003-22)



SOURCE: Source: NAEP Data, NCES (Basic Scale Score = 208; Proficient Scale Score = 238) 2003-2022

*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NAEP was administered in 2022 instead of 2021.



WHAT IT IS

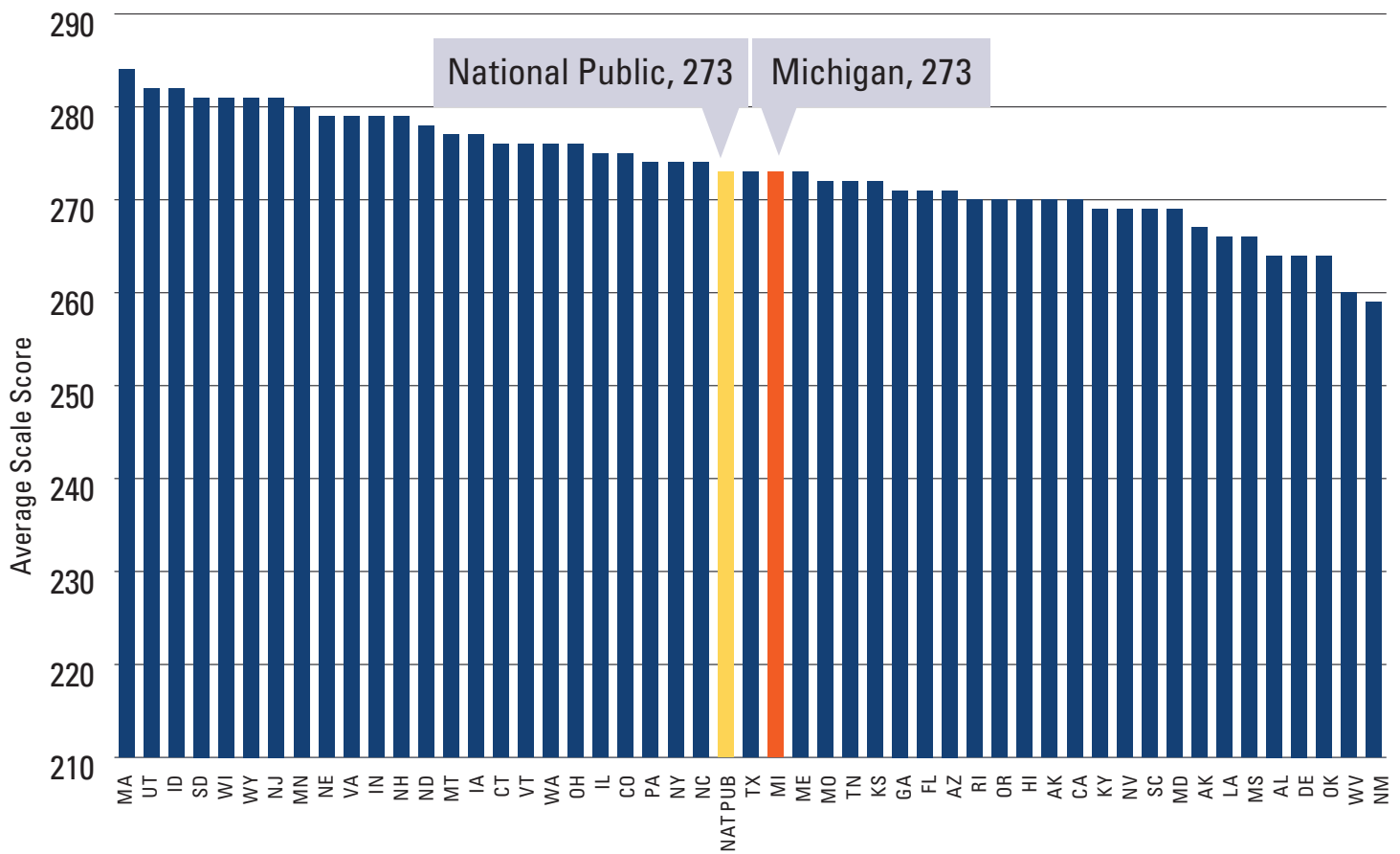
The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative assessment that provides for long-term comparisons of what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas. The assessment is given every two years* and provides necessary information about student performance and growth for several indicators, including eighth-grade math.

WHY IT MATTERS

In addition to basic reading skills, math skills are essential for all students. Basic algebra is the foundation for high-level math courses. When students have not mastered this foundation, they are required to enroll in remedial courses when they begin college. But eighth-grade math skills are not just for students attending college. A study conducted by ACT found that along with reading skills, math skills are essential for careers including those as a plumber, electrician or an upholsterer.¹

Michigan on Par with National Average for All Students in Eighth-Grade Math

Average Scale Score, NAEP Grade 8 – Math – All Students (2022)



SOURCE: Source: NAEP Data, NCES (Basic Scale Score = 262; Proficient Scale Score = 299) 2022

* Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NAEP was administered in 2022 instead of 2021.

Kindergarten Readiness

Michigan recently leveraged historic federal investment and committed substantial state investment to improve early childhood education access and increase the number of students who enter kindergarten ready to learn at high levels. From 2011 to 2021, the portion of Michigan four-year-olds enrolled in prekindergarten increased from 18 percent to 31 percent.ⁱⁱ However, the program saw a 30% decrease in enrollment in 2020-21, likely due to the pandemic.ⁱⁱⁱ A longitudinal data system that includes enrollment and quality metrics for all early childhood programs across the state would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of trends and their relationship to outcomes in kindergarten and beyond.

Data are not currently available because Michigan has not yet implemented a common assessment of kindergarten readiness, nor does the state participate in a national effort to collect these data. Consistent and comparable data from a common assessment of kindergarten readiness would inform alignment and provide families and educators with important information about strengths and needs as students enter elementary school.

We will track any state or national data on Michigan's kindergarten readiness when they become available.



Michigan recently leveraged historic federal investment and committed substantial state investment to improve early childhood education access and increase the number of students who enter kindergarten ready to learn at high levels.



18.8%

Enrolled in at least
one remedial course

WHAT IT IS

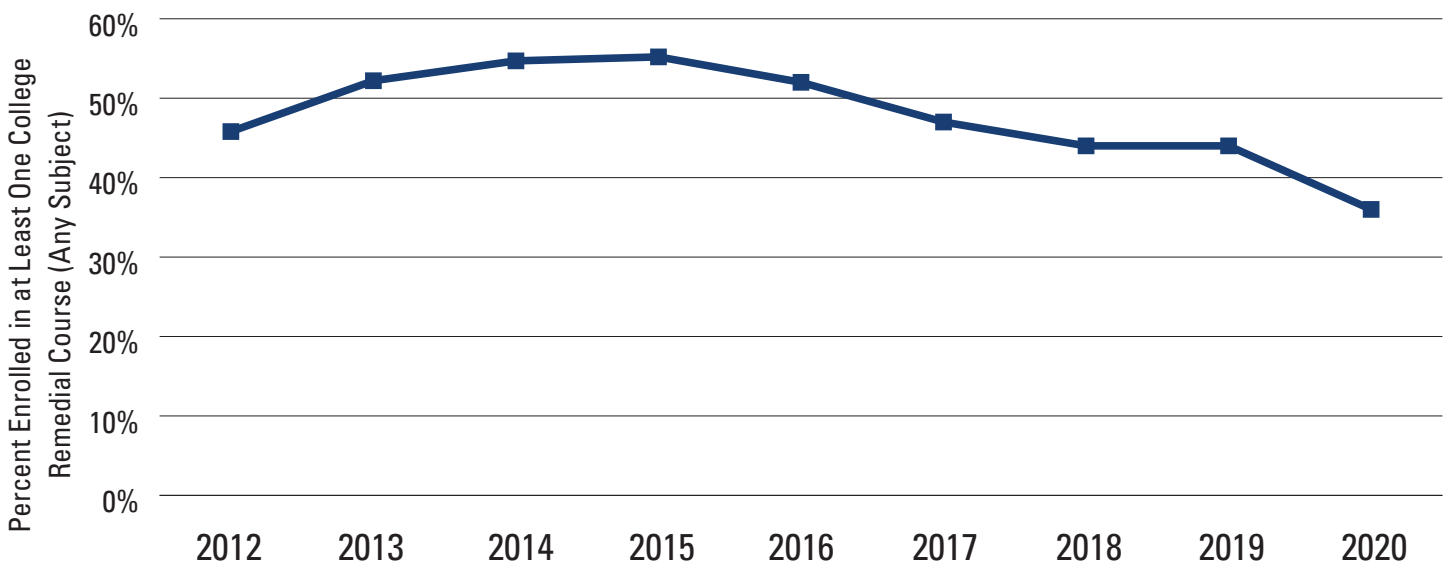
Remedial coursework is necessary for students who lack fundamental skills in a subject area – skills that should have been developed in K-12. These courses also are not credit bearing, meaning they do not count toward a degree.

WHY IT MATTERS

Almost 19% of all Michigan students were required to take at least one remedial course in 2- and 4-year college or university programs, according to the most recent data from 2019-20. That's almost a fifth of Michigan students who must pay for additional instruction in college before moving on to credit-bearing courses. The percentage is even more startling for historically underserved subgroups – 36% of Black students in Michigan are required to enroll in college remedial courses. Having to enroll in remedial courses can mean additional costs for students and more time to complete their degrees.

Remediation Rates Remain High for Michigan's Black Students

Michigan Black Student College Remediation Rates (Community Colleges & Four-Year Universities) (2012-20)



SOURCE: CEPI College Remedial Coursework Enrollment Trend 2012-20

NOTE: Remedial coursework includes math, reading, writing or science courses. Data is limited to Michigan high school graduates enrolled in college the following fall in a Michigan college or university only.

College and Postsecondary Enrollment

CURRENT PERFORMANCE



WHAT IT IS

This measure represents the percentage of high school graduates in each state who enroll in and intend to attend college anywhere in the U.S. directly from high school.

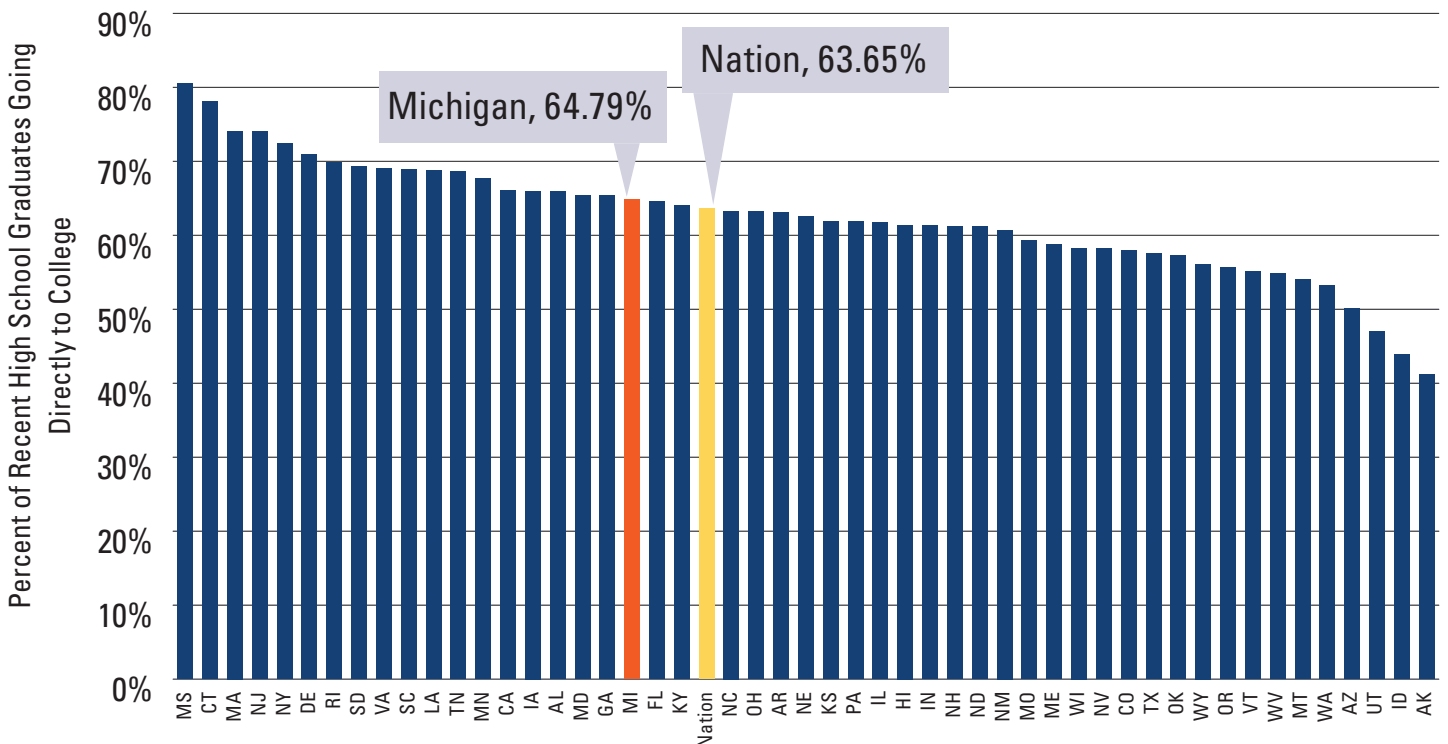
WHY IT MATTERS

In order for Michigan's students to fulfill their true potential and be the leaders of tomorrow, more must enroll in postsecondary training, whether that be at a trade school, community college or a four-year university. On this measure, Michigan is slightly above the national average, ranking 19th, with about 64.8% of high school graduates going directly to college in the fall of 2018.^{iv}

Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information reports that 60.8% of Michigan's 2020 high school graduates enrolled in a postsecondary program within 12 months of graduation.^v

In addition, research shows that completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) leads to higher postsecondary enrollment. As of September 30, 2022, the National College Attainment Network reported that Michigan ranked 33rd (at 52.4%) in the percentage of high school seniors completing the FAFSA for the current cycle, below the national average of 57.7%.

Michigan Slightly Above National Average with 64.8% of High School Graduates Enrolling in College Higher Education Enrollment Rate for Recent High School Graduates (2018)



SOURCE: NCHEMS Information Center 2018

*Current performance and projections are based on pre-pandemic data. Performance and projections may change based on future post-pandemic data.

College Attainment

CURRENT PERFORMANCE



2030 PROJECTION



WHAT IT IS

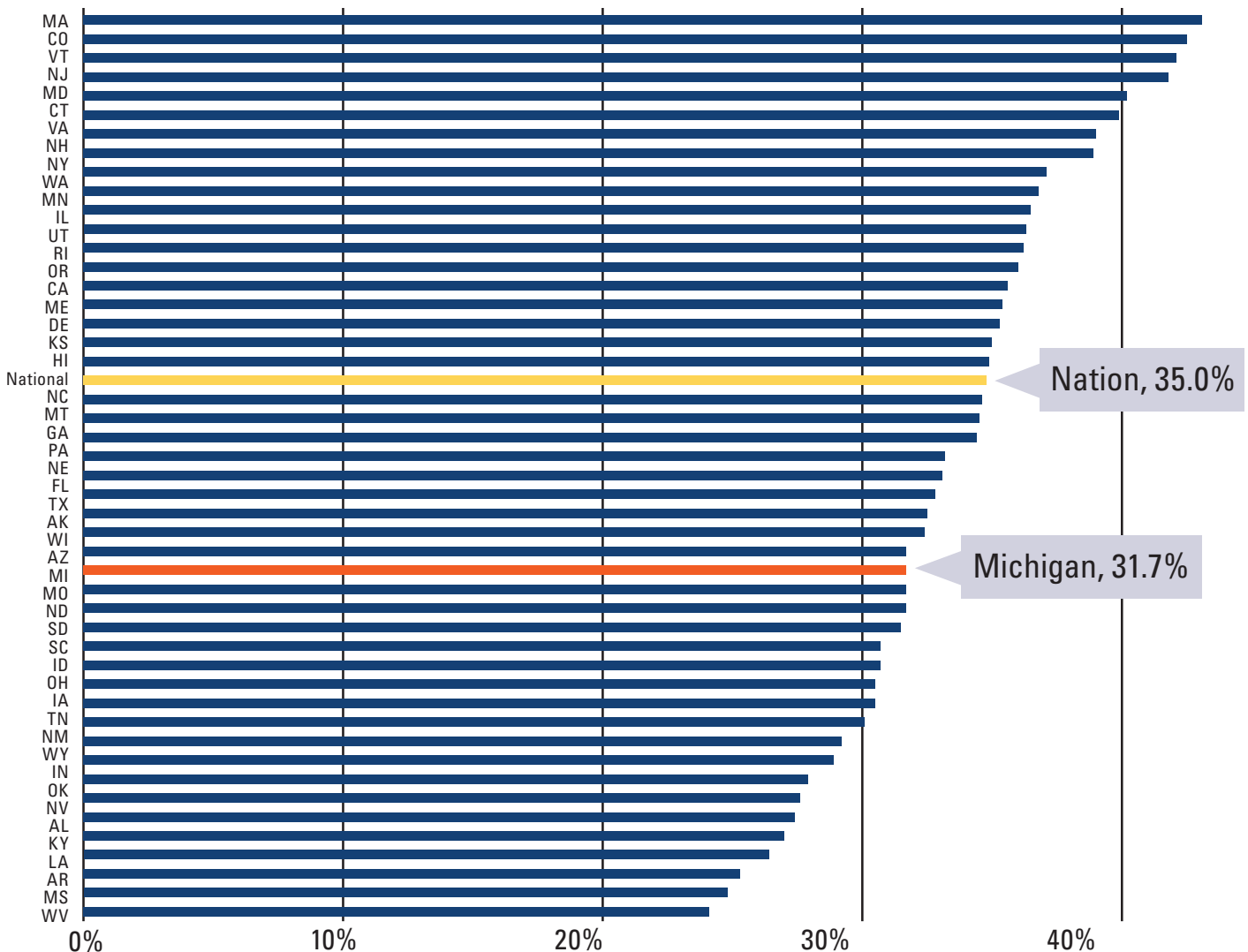
This indicator represents the percentage of people 25 years or older in each state and nationally who have completed a bachelor's degree or greater.

WHY IT MATTERS

Michigan's future economy depends on more adults earning college degrees. In 2021, Michigan ranked 31st in the percentage of adults 25 or older who have completed a bachelor's degree or greater, at 31.7%. Roughly 19.5% of Black and 22.6% of Latino Michiganders have completed a bachelor's degree or greater.

Michigan's Future Economy Depends on More Adults Earning College Degrees

Percent of People 25 Years and Older with a Bachelor's Degree or Greater in 2021



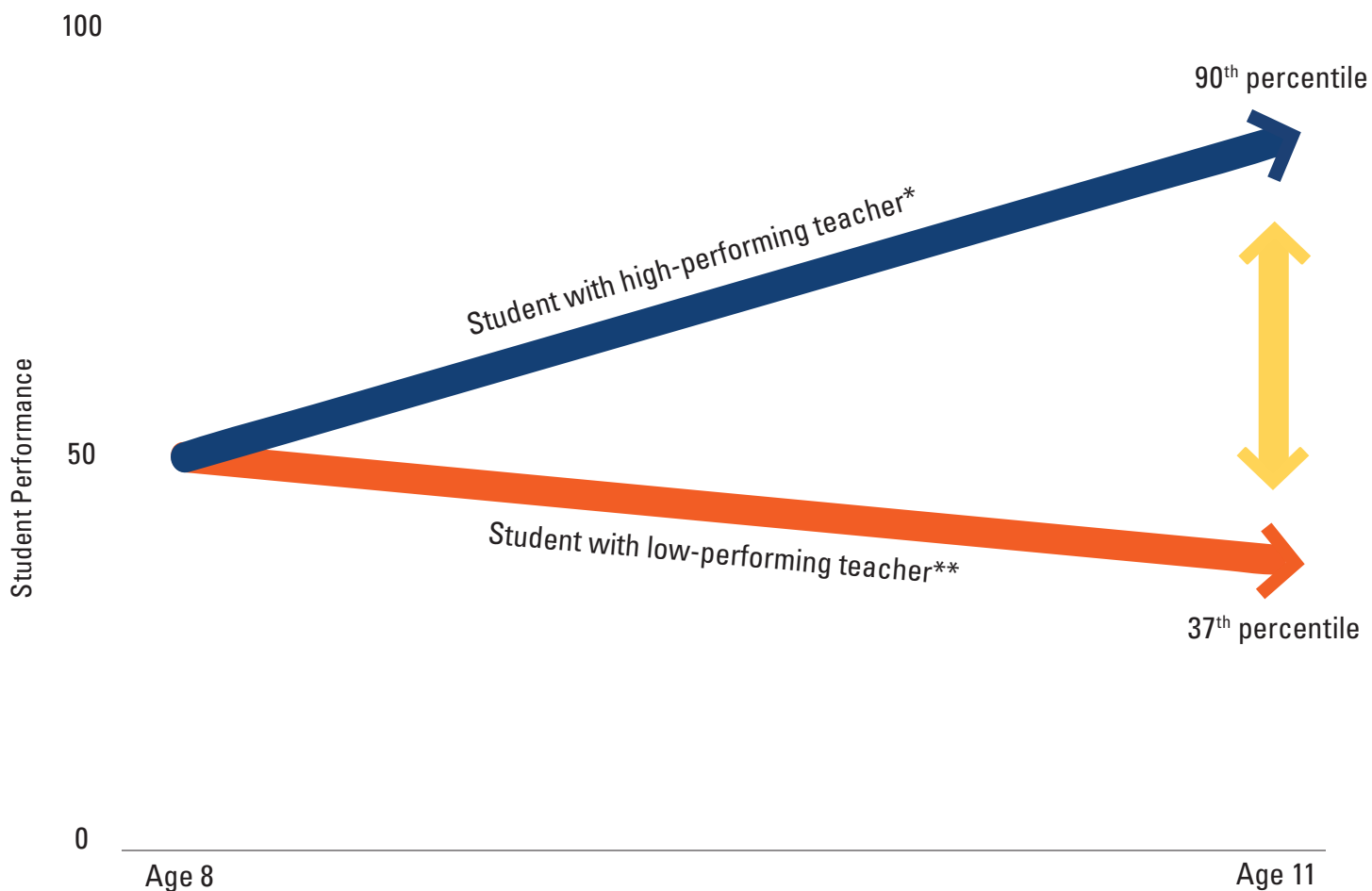
SOURCE: United States Census – American Community Survey – 1 Year Estimates 2021

*Current performance and projections are based on pre-pandemic data. Performance and projections may change based on future post-pandemic data.

Teacher Effectiveness

Without a doubt, student learning is dependent on many factors. But, the research is clear – the number one in-school predictor of student success is the teaching quality in a child’s classroom.^{vii} In leading states, sophisticated data systems provide teaching effectiveness data that are used for many purposes, such as professional development and early student interventions. In Michigan, those data are unavailable at this time.

The Effect of Teacher Quality on Student Learning



SOURCE: Sanders and Rivers (1996): Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Achievement

NOTE: *Among the top 20% of teachers; **Among the bottom 20% of teachers

Analysis of test data from Tennessee showed that teacher quality affected student performance more than any other variable; on average, two students with average performance (50th percentile) would diverge by more than 50 percentile points over a three year period depending on the teacher they were assigned.

AP Exam Participation

CURRENT
PERFORMANCE

25th

2030
PROJECTION

20th

WHAT IT IS

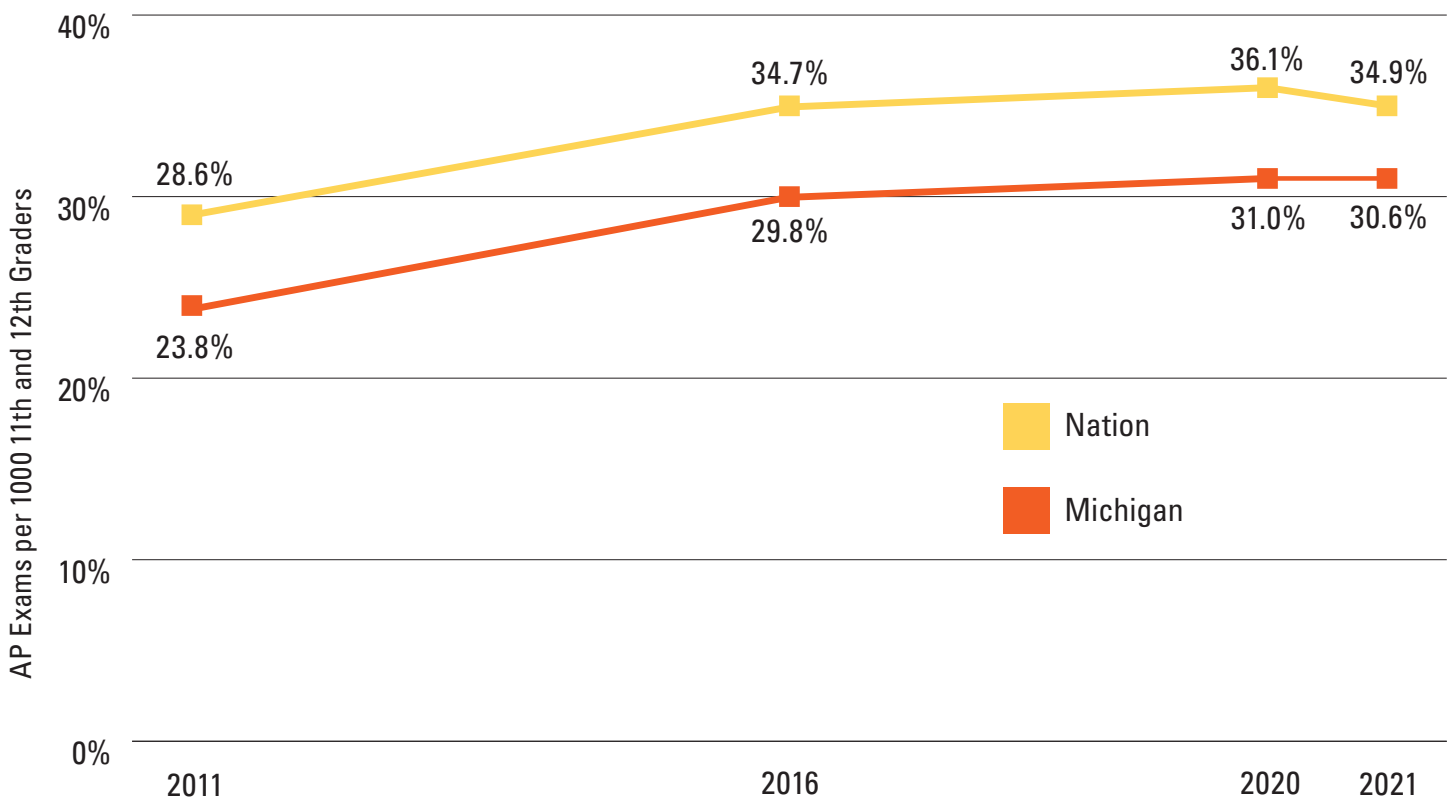
AP (Advanced Placement) exam participation is measured by the College Board's Percentage of Graduates Who Took an AP Exam During High School. AP exam participation signals access to rigorous coursework throughout a student's high school tenure.

WHY IT MATTERS

One of the best ways to ensure more students are college- and career-ready is to increase access to rigorous coursework in high school, such as Advanced Placement courses. Research shows that having access to rigorous coursework and high-quality instruction in high school is one of the best predictors of postsecondary success.^{viii} Michigan is currently ranked 25th for the percentage of graduates who took an AP exam during high school. Similar to the nation, Michigan saw a slight drop in the percentage of graduates who took an AP exam during high school in the 2020-21 school year.

Michigan Still Lags Nation in the Percentage of Graduates Who Took an AP Exam During High School

Percentage of Graduates Who Took an AP Exam During High School (2011, 2016, 2020, 2021)



SOURCE: College Board AP Cohort Data Report: Graduating Class of 2021

NOTE: Data are only available for 2011, 2016, 2020, 2021

*Current performance and projections are based on pre-pandemic data. Performance and projections may change based on future post-pandemic data.



WHAT IT IS

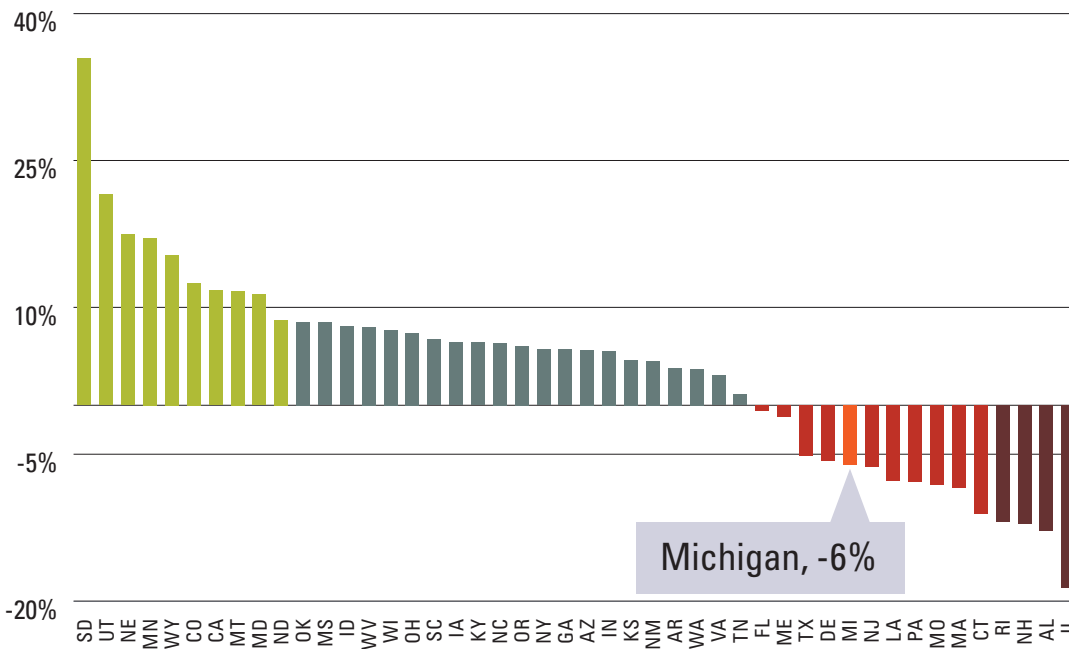
This measure represents how the highest and lowest poverty districts are funded based on state and local revenues and whether it is equitably distributed or not.

WHY IT MATTERS

Michigan ranks 36th of 46 states in the nation for funding gaps that negatively impact low-income students. On average, Michigan districts serving the highest rates of students from low-income families receive about 6% less in state and local funding per student than more affluent districts. This lack of equity can lead to further imbalances in our educational system as a whole.

Michigan is One of Only Fifteen States Providing Less Funding to Highest Poverty Districts than to Lowest Poverty Districts

Funding Gaps Between the Highest and Lowest Poverty Districts, By State (2018-20)



READING THIS FIGURE: In states shaded in light green (Moderately Progressive), the highest poverty districts receive between 10-40% more in state and local funds per student than the lowest poverty districts; in states shaded in grey (Neutral), they receive between 0-10% more, in states shaded light red (Moderately Regressive), they receive between 0-10% less, and in states shaded in dark red (Regressive), they receive at least 10% less. Note that although all displayed percentages are rounded to the nearest percentage point, states are ordered and classified as providing more or less funding to their highest poverty districts based on unrounded funding gaps.

SOURCE: The Education Trust, Funding Gaps Report 2022

NOTE: Hawaii was excluded from the within-state analysis because it is one district. Nevada is excluded because its student population is heavily concentrated in one district and could not be sorted into quartiles. Alaska is excluded because there are substantial regional differences in the cost of education that are not accounted for in the ACS-CWI. Vermont is also excluded. Because so many New York students are concentrated in New York City, we sorted that state into two halves, as opposed to four quartiles.

*Current performance is based on pre-pandemic data. Performance may change based on future post-pandemic data.

Teacher Salary Equity

CURRENT
PERFORMANCE

\$6,130

Avg. Salary Gap for highest- and lowest-poverty districts

WHAT IT IS

This measure represents the gap in average teacher salaries between Michigan's highest-income and lowest-income districts.

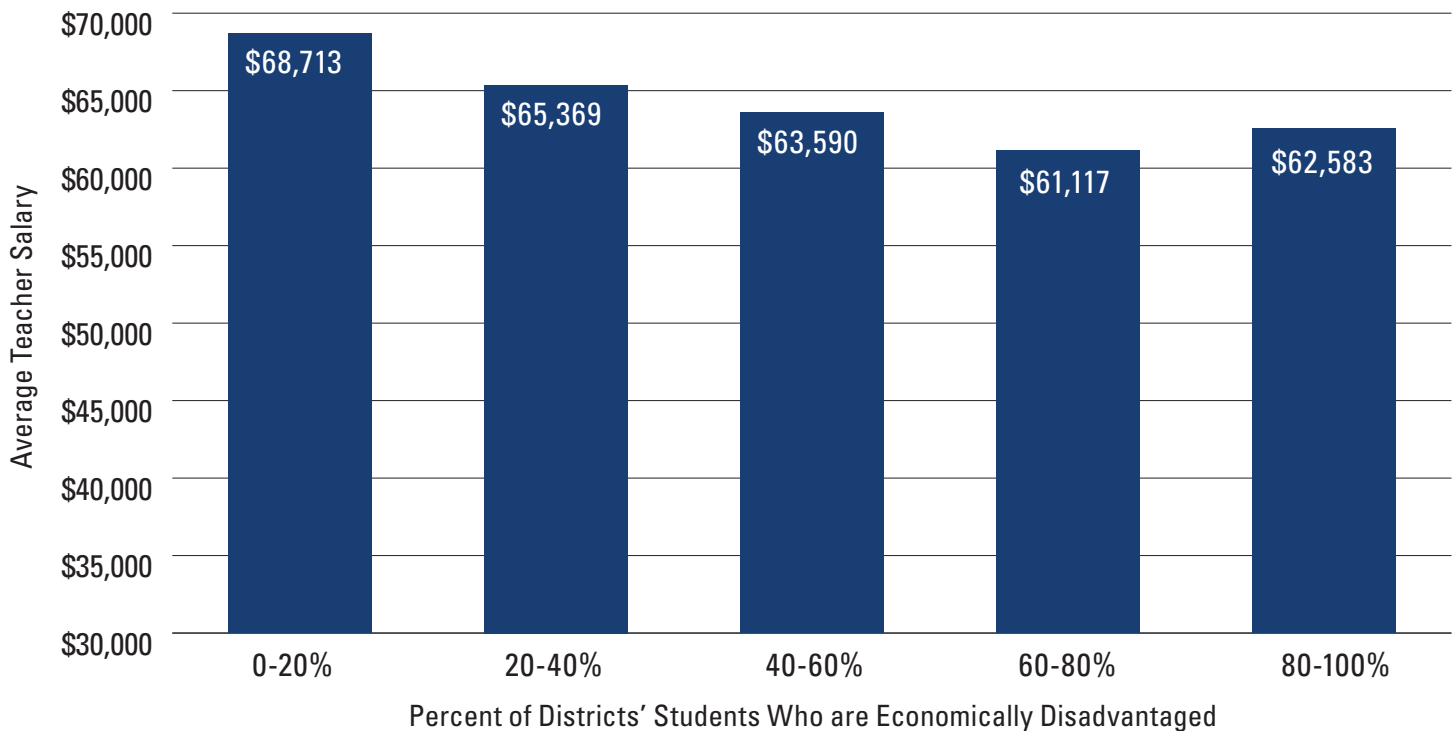
WHY IT MATTERS

Teachers in Michigan's wealthiest districts are paid just over \$6,100 more, on average, than teachers in Michigan's poorest districts. That's alarming, considering what we know about the importance of high-quality teachers in closing the achievement gap that persists between low-income and higher-income students.

To recruit and retain highly effective teachers in the schools that need them most, Michigan must close the gap in teacher pay.

\$6,130 Gap in Average Teacher Salaries Between Michigan's Highest-Income and Lowest-Income Districts

Average Michigan Teacher Salary based on Percent of Economically Disadvantaged Students (2020-21)



SOURCE: MDE Bulletin 1011, 2020-21; CEPI Student Counts 2020-21 (District)

Teacher Attendance

CURRENT PERFORMANCE



WHAT IT IS

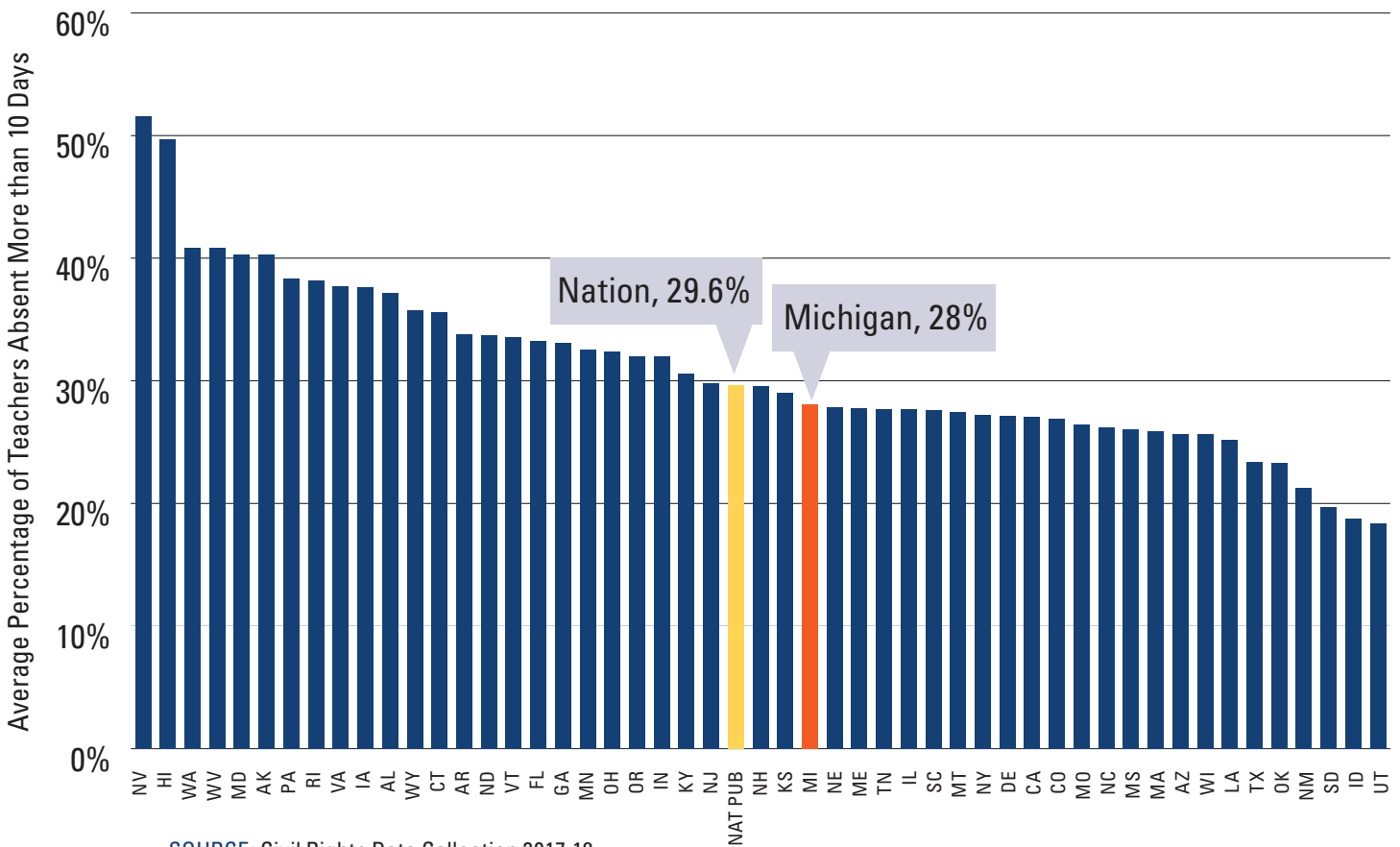
This measure represents the percent of teachers absent from work for more than 10 days over the course of one school year at the state level.

WHY IT MATTERS

28 percent of teachers in Michigan were absent from their job more than 10 days, on average.^{ix} That's about six percent of the school year, which is equivalent to a typical 9-to-5 year-round employee missing more than three weeks of work on top of vacation time.

About 28% of Teachers in Michigan Were Absent from Their Job More than 10 Days

Percentage of Teachers Absent More than 10 Days (2017-18)



SOURCE: Civil Rights Data Collection 2017-18

*Current performance is based on pre-pandemic data. Performance may change based on future post-pandemic data.

Student Attendance

CURRENT PERFORMANCE

2030 PROJECTION

37%

22%

8th Graders Absent Three or More Days in Surveyed Month

WHAT IT IS

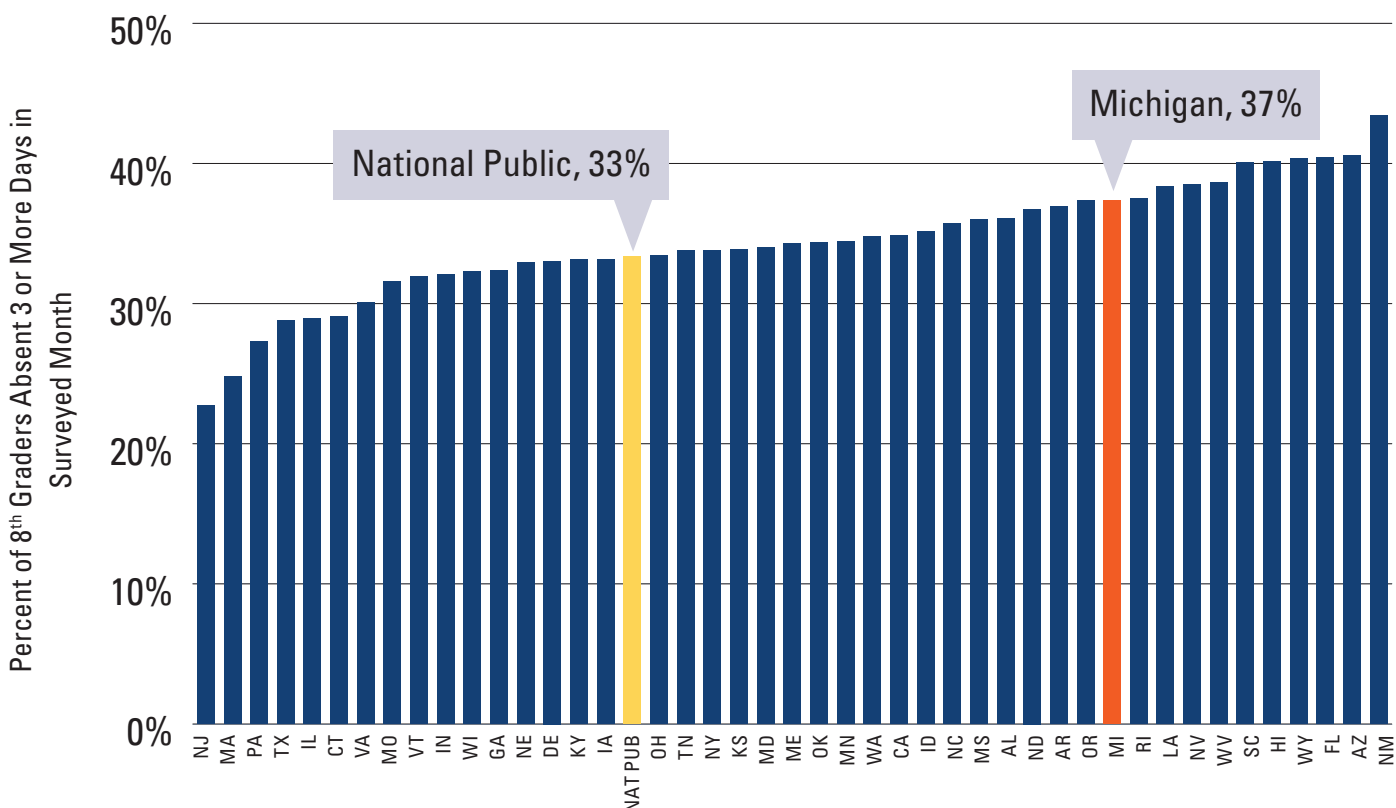
This measure represents the percentage of eighth graders absent three or more days in the last month before the administration of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP).

WHY IT MATTERS

Not only does Michigan have a teacher absenteeism problem, but Michigan's students are also missing far too many days of school—a problem which spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the 2022 national assessment, 37% of Michigan's eighth-grade students self-reported they had been absent from school three or more days in the last month, trending closely with the state average which indicates 38.5% of all Michigan students were chronically absent during the 2021-22 school year.^x Student absences are even higher in Detroit, where almost 43 percent of eighth-grade students self-reported they had been absent three or more days in the last month.

Over One Third of Michigan 8th Graders were Absent 3 or More Days in Surveyed Month in 2022

Percent of Eighth Graders Absent Three or More Days in Last Month NAEP Grade 8 — Math — All Students (2022)



SOURCE: NAEP Data Explorer, NCES (Reported for 8th Grade Math) 2022

NOTE: AK, CO, MT, NH, SD, and UT are not included in the analysis because data were not available.

Out-of-School Suspensions

CURRENT PERFORMANCE



WHAT IT IS

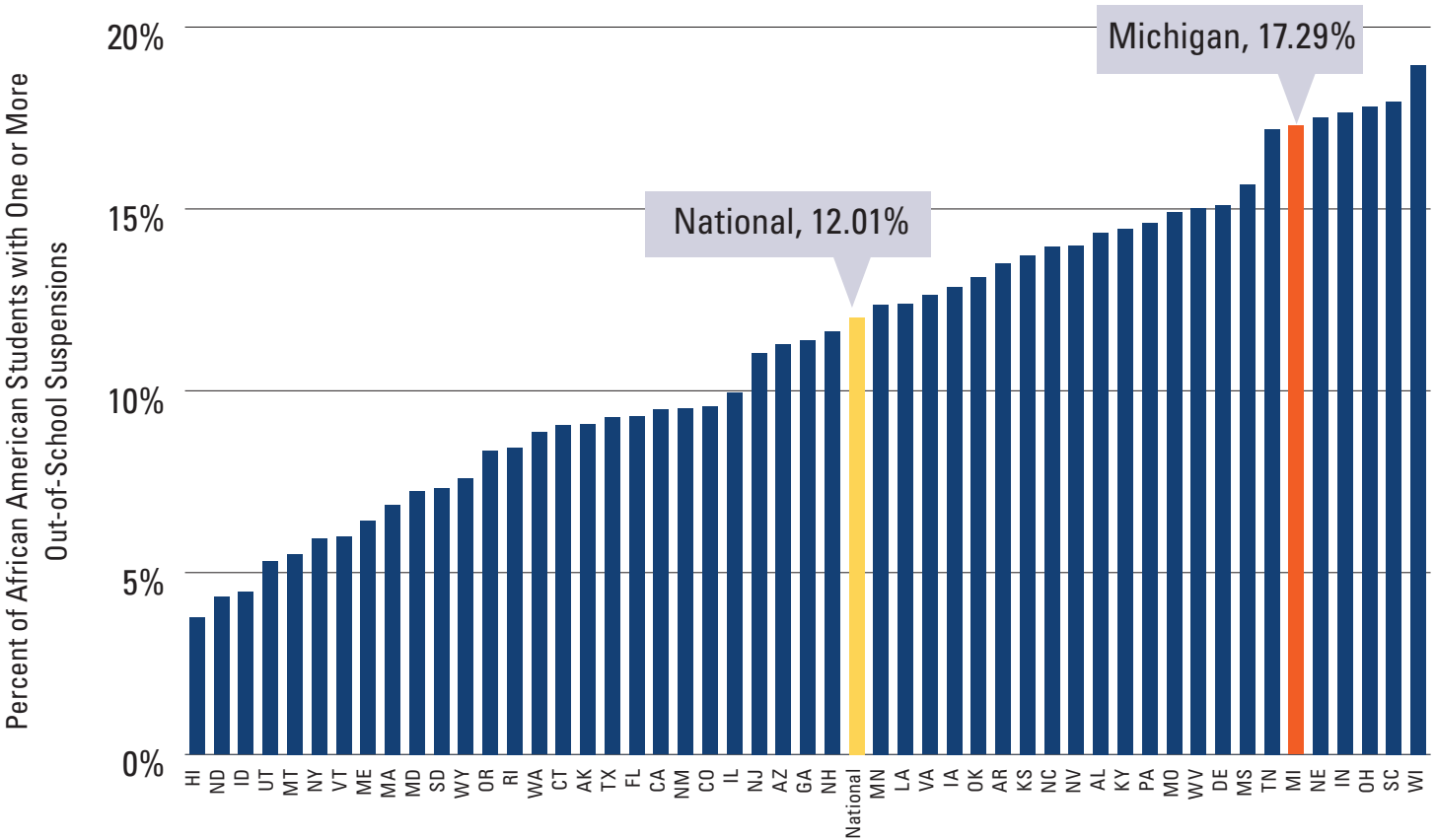
This data measures the percentage of students in each state who have one or more suspensions within a school year.

WHY IT MATTERS

One of the most troubling practices in Michigan – and around the country – is the overuse of suspension and expulsion, particularly for Black students. For all students and for Black students, Michigan ranks 45th when comparing out-of-school suspension rates. This means Michigan has the sixth highest out-of-school suspension rate in the country. 17.3% of Black students were given one or more out-of-school suspensions in 2017-2018.

Michigan Has 6th Highest Out-of-School Suspension Rate Nationally for Black Students

Black Student Out-of-School Suspension Rates



SOURCE: Civil Rights Data Collection 2017-18

*Current performance and projections are based on pre-pandemic data. Performance and projections may change based on future post-pandemic data.

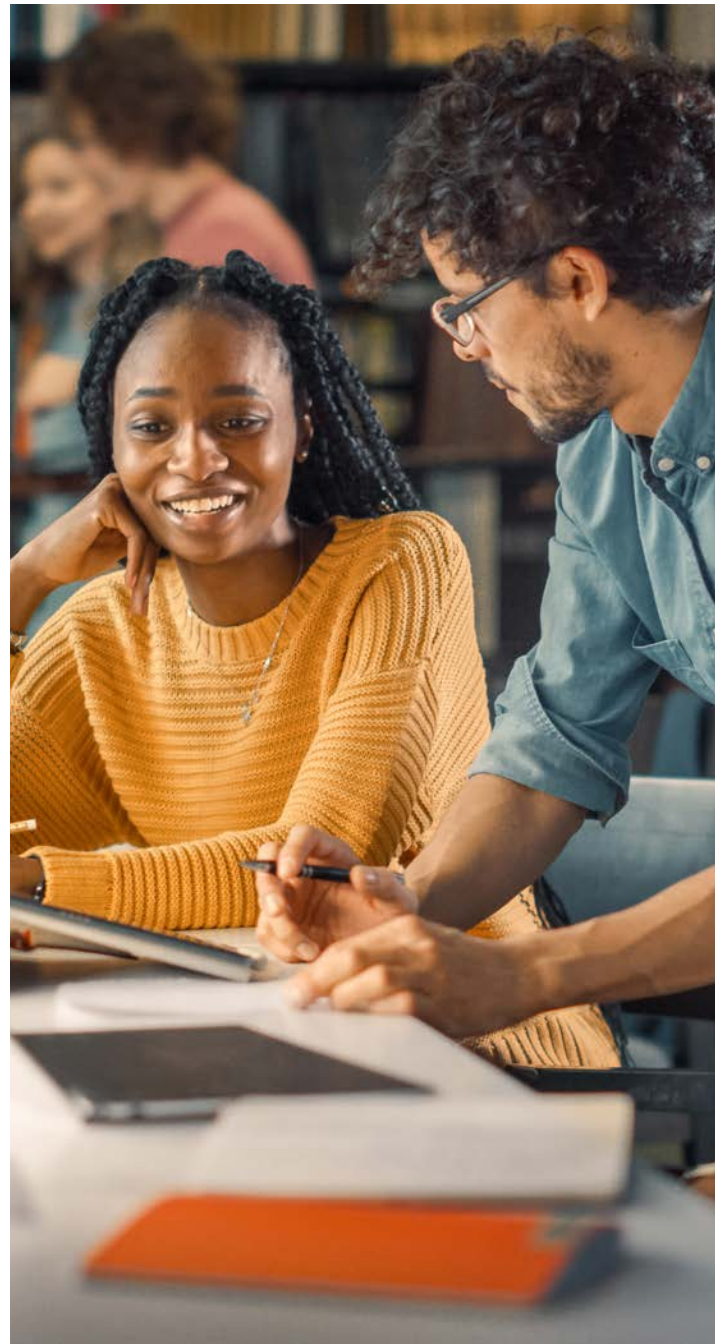
WHAT IT IS

This indicator measures the affordability of four-year public institutions by state for an average Pell Grant recipient who lives on campus, receives the average amount of grant aid, takes out the average amount of federal loans and works over the summer. Data represent the additional dollars needed to cover the cost of attendance.

WHY IT MATTERS

It's not enough to get into college. Young Michiganders must be able to afford to stay in school and graduate. On average, a low-income Michigan student paying in-state tuition at a four-year public institution, who lives on campus and works over the summer, faces a \$2,347 affordability gap. This means that despite financial aid and summer wages a low-income student still falls \$2,347 short, on average, of being able to afford Michigan's four-year public institutions. Michigan is currently ranked 26th for college affordability. While this is a slight improvement from Michigan's previous ranking of 29th, the affordability gap in the state grew by nearly \$700 from 2018 to 2019. This highlights a troubling trend in college affordability both in Michigan and nationwide. Additionally, a **recent report** by The Education Trust found that low-income students would need to work 20 hours per week at minimum wage to afford Michigan's public four-year institutions. Low-income students at Michigan's community and technical colleges would need to work 11 hours per week at minimum wage. Both figures exceed the recommended 10 hours per week of work – and if students worked only 10 hours at minimum wage they would face a \$4,595 and \$425 affordability gap at public four-year institutions and public community and technical colleges, respectively.^{xi}

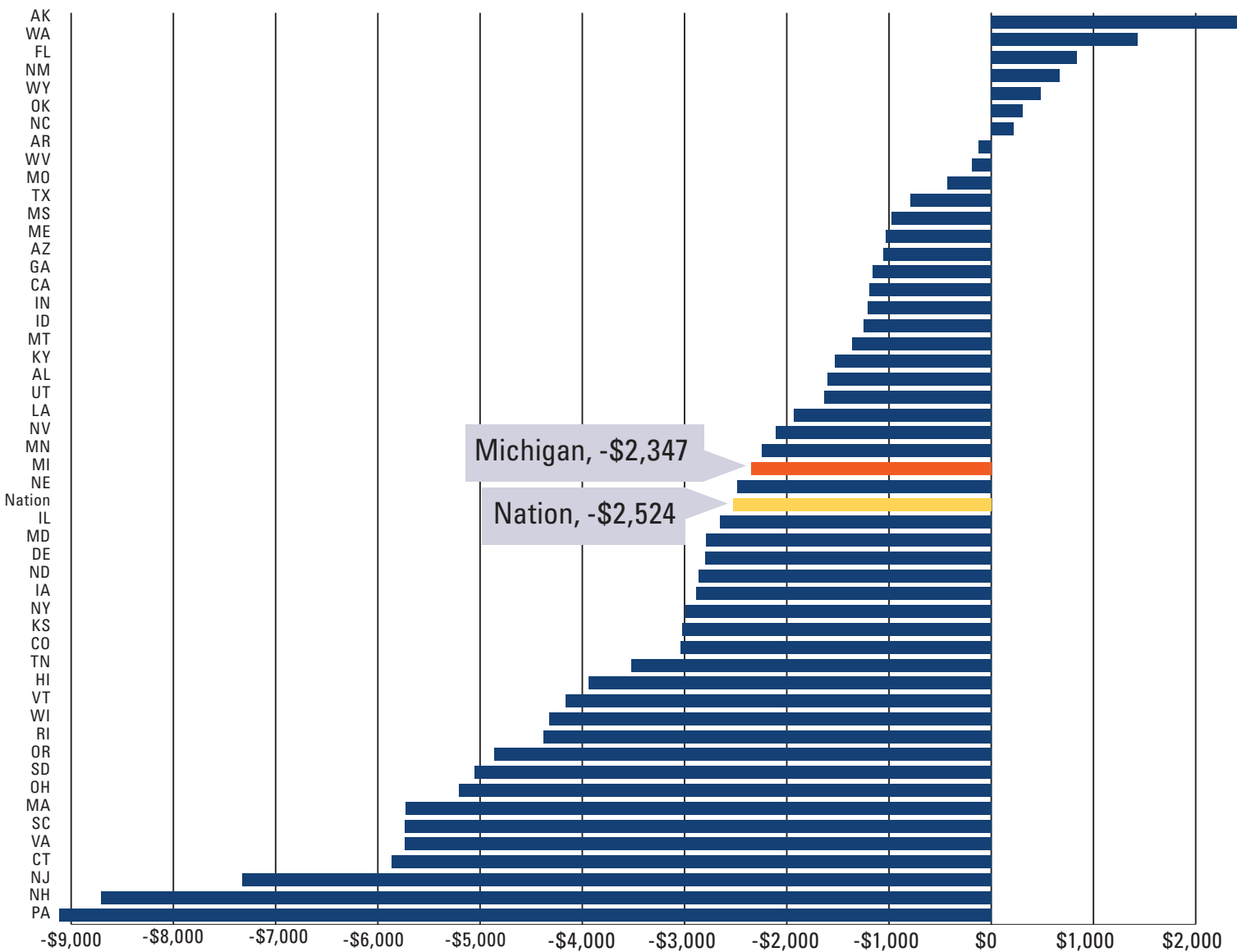
*Current performance and projections are based on pre-pandemic data. Performance and projections may change based on future post-pandemic data.



College Affordability

Low-Income Students Fall Short \$2,347, On Average, of Affording the Cost of Attending Michigan Four-Year Public Institutions

Four-Year Public Institution Affordability Gaps for In-State Students Living on Campus with Summer Work (2019)



SOURCE: National College Access Network, The Growing Gap: Public Higher Education's Declining Affordability for Pell Grant Recipients, 2021

Endnotes

To ensure the highest quality data available and up-to-date resources are used, the data sources used to track some Michigan Achieves! Indicators have been updated over time.

ⁱ ACT, Inc. (2015). Ready for college and ready for work: Same or different. <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/research/pdfs/ready-for-collegeandreadyforworksameordifferent.html>

ⁱⁱ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S.; Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook. National Institute for Early Education Research. <https://nieer.org/%20state-preschool-yearbooks-yearbook2021>

ⁱⁱⁱ The National Institute for Early Education Research at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education (2022). Too Many Michigan Preschoolers Didn't Receive High-Quality Education Amid Pandemic. https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/YB2021_Michigan.pdf

^{iv} National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (2018). College-going rates of high school graduates, 2017-2018. <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?measure=32>

^v Michigan Center for Education Performance and Information. (2018-2019). College Enrollment by High School [Dataset]. <https://www.mischooldata.org/college-enrollment-by-hs/>

Note: According to mischooldata.org, this metric is subject to change in the "within 12 months" timeframe as more data become available and is incorporated. The data published in this report reflect what was available on 3/18/2022.

^{vi} National College Attainment Network. (n.d.). National FAFSA completion rates for high school seniors and graduates. <https://www.ncan.org/general/custom.asp?page=NationalFAFSACompletionRatesforHighSchoolSeniorsandGraduates&msclkid=89095fda6ec11ecbca215454952ea82>

^{vii} Rivkin, S.G., Hanushek, E.A., Kain J.F. (2005). Teachers, schools, and academic achievement. *Econometrica*, 73(2), 417-458.

^{viii} Adelman, C. (2006). The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED490195>

^{ix} Harwin, A. (2018, June 05). How many teachers are chronically absent from class in your state? *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/how-many-teachers-are-chronically-absent-from-class-in-your-state/2018/06>

^x Levin, K. & Bakuli, E. (2022, Nov 7). Missing School, Falling Behind: Not 'present,' and paying a steep cost. *Chalkbeat Detroit*. <https://detroit.chalkbeat.org/2022/11/7/23422689/school-attendance-detroit-michigan-students-chronic-absenteeism>

^{xi} Nichols, A.H., Anthony Jr., M., & Schak, O. (2019). How affordable are public colleges in your state? *The Education Trust*. <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/How-Affordable-Are-Public-Colleges-in-Your-State-for-Students-from-Low-Income-Background-December-2019.pdf>





In 2015, The Education Trust-Midwest launched the Michigan Achieves! campaign to make Michigan a top 10 education state by 2030. Each year, we report on Michigan’s progress toward that goal based on student outcome performance metrics and opportunity to learn metrics. These metrics shed light on the health of education in our state – and the extent to which Michigan is succeeding at creating conditions that support teaching and learning in Michigan public schools.

Since then, a growing number of partners around the state have come to work together to advance the best practices and strategies from leading education states to Michigan, in order to close achievement gaps and ensure every Michigan student is learning—and being taught—at high levels. Join the movement at www.edtrustmidwest.org.

Acknowledgments:

The Education Trust-Midwest is grateful to the many funders, partners and supporters who are committed to lifting up public education as a top priority for Michigan.

About The Education Trust Midwest

The Education Trust-Midwest is a non-partisan, statewide research, policy and advocacy organization focused on what is best for Michigan students. Our mission is to close opportunity gaps, particularly for students of color, English learners, students with disabilities and children living in poverty — and to make Michigan a top 10 education state for all children.



The Education Trust—Midwest

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