

WHAT OUR STUDENTS DESERVE

FACING THE TRUTH ABOUT EDUCATION
IN THE GREAT LAKES STATE



The Education Trust—Midwest

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An honest look at public education in Michigan reveals both hopeful and dismal news. While our state has taken a few bold steps in the past year to improve our education system, our students still lag far behind their peers nationally, and the performance gaps between them — across income level and race — are both alarming and persistent. Michigan cannot rebound economically if all our students are not prepared to participate fully in the global economy. It's time to get honest and get to work creating the education system that our students need and deserve.

In 2011, the State Board of Education bravely decided to raise cut scores to better align with the expectations students will face in college and the workplace. The more rigorous state standards revealed that only 40 percent of our fourth-grade students met expectations for math on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, which contrasts sharply with the 92 percent of fourth-graders who met or exceeded the previous year's cut scores for the subject.

Today, Michigan's cut scores more closely mirror proficiency rates on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In eighth-grade math, we see 29 percent proficiency on the MEAP and 31 percent proficiency on the NAEP.

What's more, Michigan consistently ranks in the bottom of states in both performance and

improvement on national reading and math tests — overall and by racial group and income-levels, in both fourth and eighth grades.

Faced with the state's educational shortcomings, too many observers, policymakers, school leaders, and teachers in our state tend to lay blame, rather than take meaningful steps to fix the problems. The conventional wisdom in Michigan holds low-income, and black and brown children responsible for our state's low averages.

Indeed, African-American children here achieve at the lowest levels of black students nationwide, urban Latino students lag behind their peers in other cities, and low-income kids are falling in national proficiency rankings. But those troubling trends do not tell the whole story. Michigan's underperformance transcends our communities of color and low-income neighborhoods. Compared with other states, white and higher income students here also are sinking in academic achievement.

Fortunately, a few bright spots remind us of what our schools could accomplish. African-American students at one Inkster, Mich., elementary school (*see story pg. 4*) are making marked academic gains, despite rising poverty in their community. Many of Baylor-Woodson Elementary School's students are already surpassing state standards. In 2011, 73 percent of the school's fifth-graders scored as

advanced in math, compared with 45 percent in Michigan. Meanwhile, 63 percent of fifth-graders tested as advanced in reading, compared with 44 percent statewide.

Helping more of our schools perform like Baylor-Woodson will require policymakers and educators to:

- 1. Set high expectations for curriculum, instruction, and achievement.**
- 2. Support and provide honest feedback to our teachers.**
- 3. Improve low-performing schools across the state.**
- 4. Build strong support and accountability systems for all our schools.**

Michigan's students are falling behind their peers across the nation because their schools are not preparing them for success. Even as parents must recommit to helping their children succeed in school, state political and education leaders must offer the leadership and resources needed to turn around student performance.

The Education Trust–Midwest is a team of passionate Michiganders who care deeply about Michigan. Our state is internationally renowned for its Great Lakes, and we are committed to an education agenda that will make Michigan a Great Education State as well. This report offers a road map to help us get there.



WHAT OUR STUDENTS DESERVE:

FACING THE TRUTH ABOUT EDUCATION IN THE GREAT LAKES STATE

By Amber Arellano, Sarah W. Lenhoff, and Drew Jacobs
The Education Trust–Midwest



Tucked away

in a scrappy African-American neighborhood on the outskirts of Detroit, an Inkster elementary school is quietly showing how Michigan can catch up its lagging students with the rest of the nation.

Baylor-Woodson Elementary is countering trends in Michigan. While too many of our state's low-income students and students of color are not meeting state standards, children at Baylor-Woodson are making marked academic gains. And they're doing so at a time of rising poverty.



About the authors: Amber Arellano is the executive director; Sarah W. Lenhoff is the assistant director of policy and research; and Drew Jacobs is data and policy analyst at The Education Trust–Midwest.

Photos by Daymon J. Hartley



Nearly all the school's students — 98 percent of whom are African American — met state reading and math standards in 2010. Indeed, they went beyond the standards: Last year, 73 percent of the school's fifth-graders scored as advanced in math, compared with 45 percent in Michigan. Their reading results also are impressive, with 63 percent of fifth-graders having scored as advanced, compared with 44 percent statewide.

Like many Michiganders, many of Baylor-Woodson's families face difficult economic challenges, even homelessness. In fact, 84 percent of its students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. Such conditions make many Michigan school leaders skittish about setting higher standards. The tension that

accompanied the State Board of Education's decision last year to raise cut scores on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) is an example. But Baylor-Woodson's educators say they consider higher expectations a challenge to which they must rise, regardless of the school's poverty rate.

These days, it's not uncommon to turn a traditional public school that's struggling into a charter school to effect improvement. Here again, Baylor-Woodson is bucking the trend. After the district fell into state receivership, a charter school company managed the Inkster district, but its problems continued. Eventually, the district regained control of the school and, under the leadership of then-Superintendent Tom

Maridada, instituted the strategies that transformed Baylor-Woodson.

And while many of our state's schools are losing population, Baylor-Woodson is gaining. Between 2004 and 2011, its student population more than doubled — growing from 250 students to more than 550 — in part spurred by its academic success. About 30 Inkster-sponsored buses line up at the school's doors on weekday mornings, bringing eager students from Detroit, Southfield, Farmington, and beyond.

"It's been great to see the community recognize our progress," says Principal Beverly Gerhard.

THE LITTLE SCHOOL THAT COULD

When Thomas Maridada was named superintendent of Inkster Public Schools in 2005, the district was in disrepair. As in other Midwestern urban districts, where globalization and job loss have decimated the local economy, many Inkster employees were treating the school district like a job center rather than a hub of student learning.

“It was chaotic,” recalls Mischa Bashir, the current superintendent. “... There was a lack of accountability in both performance and operations. A focus on teacher quality and instructional strategies was non-existent.”

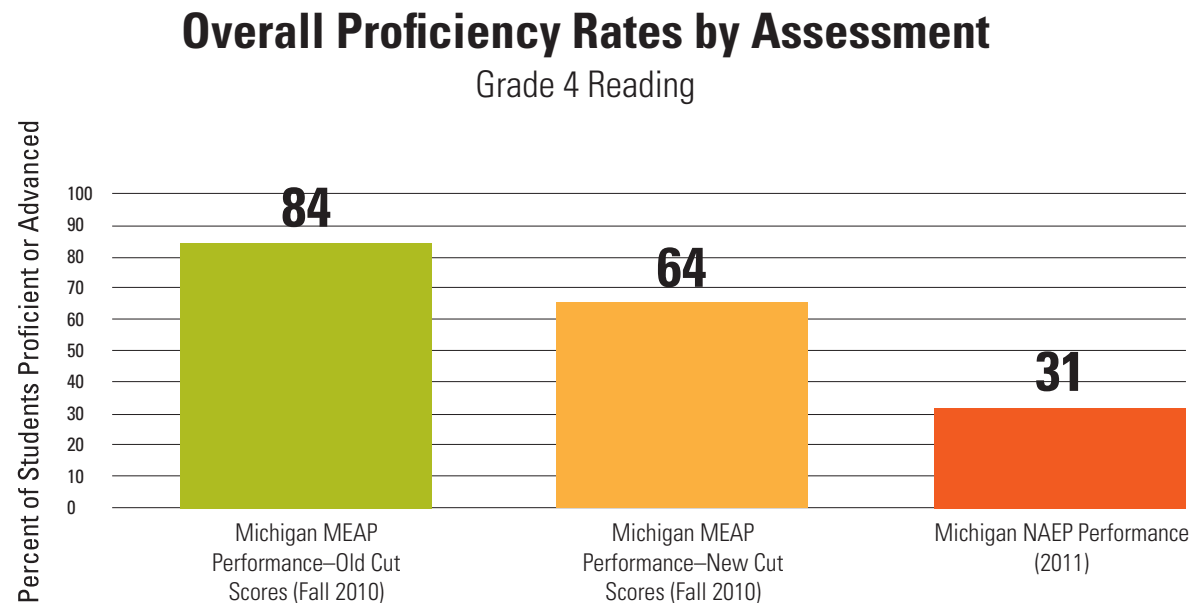
Since that time, Inkster administrators and union leaders have worked together to overhaul the district. Today, they aggressively implement Michigan’s new teacher tenure and evaluation reforms, seeing them as yet another opportunity to increase both professional accountability and student achievement. Moreover, the district’s schools maintain an acute focus on teaching and learning. Baylor-Woodson Elementary reflects the best of this hard work.

Michigan can learn a lot from Baylor-Woodson, a school where district leaders and educators focus on the levers that improve student learning. Unlike Baylor-Woodson’s students, most Michigan students — across all income levels — are falling farther and farther behind their peers nationally. Unsurprisingly, our schools are struggling in a state that, for years, has lacked a serious commitment to build stronger student learning and more effective schools and educators.

To turn that around, we in Michigan must get brutally honest with ourselves about how our schools are really doing. We must embrace the strategies that schools like Baylor-Woodson are using so effectively. Michigan has made some progress in the past year, but if our students are to catch up to their peers across the country, we must do much more.

THE BRUTAL FACTS ABOUT MICHIGAN’S LOW ACHIEVEMENT

For years, the MEAP, Michigan’s state assessment, made it appear that our students were doing just fine. We were told that more than 90 percent of third-graders and fourth-graders were “meeting or exceeding” state expectations in math on the 2010



Source: Education Trust—Midwest analysis of MEAP and NAEP data.

MEAP: Old cut scores: Fall 2010 grades 3-9; New cut scores: Fall 2010 MEAP Proficiency Data using New Cut Scores.

NAEP: NAEP Data Explorer.

Our schools are struggling in a state that, for years, **has lacked a serious commitment to build stronger student learning and more effective schools and educators.**

MEAP, even while national assessments showed that Michigan's students were actually far behind their peers nationally. What most Michigan parents and community members didn't know at the time was that the state's math expectations were so low, a third-grader only had to answer about one-third of the test questions correctly to be deemed proficient.

In 2011, Michigan leaders finally began revealing to residents just how poorly our students are performing. The State Board of Education made the courageous decision to raise our state assessment's cut scores so they better align with the expectations students will face in college and the workplace. Cut scores are used to determine which students are performing proficiently on academic tests, such as MEAP.

With the new, more transparent state standards, we now see that only 40 percent of Michigan fourth-graders met math expectations; that's starkly different from the 92 percent of fourth-grade math students who would have met or exceeded the cut scores in 2010.

Today, the Michigan cut scores more closely mirror proficiency rates on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), with 29 percent of eighth-graders scoring proficient in math on the MEAP and 31 percent showing proficiency on the NAEP math exam.

However, the new reading cut scores still appear to overstate Michigan student performance, with MEAP showing 64 percent proficiency in fourth-grade reading, but NAEP showing only 31 percent of these students as proficient (*see chart pg. 4*). Michigan parents should keep this in mind as they gauge how well their children are performing and learning in reading compared to national standards.

While Michigan's leaders should be commended for finally revealing the truth about our students' performance, that truth exposes serious problems in student achievement and achievement gaps in our state. The 2011 NAEP results confirm these problems.



(cont'd from pg. 4)

Student Success in an Unexpected Place

The demographics alone predict that a school like Baylor-Woodson would rank among the lowest performing in the state. Most of its students (98 percent) are African American, and 84 percent qualify for free and reduced-price meals. Serving third through fifth graders, the school was in dire financial straits and rapidly losing students to nearby charter schools when Maridada arrived. Despite the obstacles, he and his school leaders — including Bashir — committed to raising achievement.

Baylor-Woodson beat the odds, countering recent trends in almost every way. While student learning has stagnated for years across all racial and class distinctions in Michigan, the children at Baylor-Woodson have made huge academic gains.

In the 2010-11 school year, nearly all Baylor-Woodson's more than 550 students met state reading and math standards. Moreover, 73 percent of the school's fifth-graders exceeded the math standard; statewide, only 45 percent of fifth-graders posted advanced scores that year.

Reading proficiency rates in the school are almost as impressive, with 63 percent of fifth-grade students posting advanced scores in 2010-11, compared with 44 percent statewide.

Local families have responded

(*see "Little School," pg. 6*)

("Little School" cont'd. from pg. 5)

enthusiastically to Baylor-Woodson's success. Its student population has more than doubled in just five years.

"We're not used to getting attention," says Principal Beverly Gerhard. "We've just quietly worked away at our goals for years. It's been great to see the community recognize our progress."

Recipe for Improvement

If you ask the principal and teachers at Baylor-Woodson about the source of their success, all point to Maridada. Dig deeper, however, and you'll discover the school's success is attributable to more than one individual. It springs from the culture that teachers and Maridada's team put in place, the human capital in which they invested, and the school's consistent adherence to high standards.

Baylor-Woodson's outcomes show how quickly a school can turn around if it has the right ingredients and stays focused on the most important levers for student learning. They include:

- **Talent Transformation:** Baylor-Woodson leaders built a talented staff that continues to boost teaching and learning. Among

(cont'd. on pg. 7)

Michigan NAEP Performance

Relative Rank of All Students 2003-2011

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011
4th Grade Reading	28th	30th	30th	34th	35th
4th Grade Math	27th	32nd	32nd	38th	41st
8th Grade Reading	27th	29th	32nd	32nd	28th
8th Grade Math	34th	33rd	36th	36th	36th

Note: Rankings are among all 50 states.
Source: NCES, NAEP Data Explorer

MISPLACED BLAME FOR MICHIGAN'S SAGGING PERFORMANCE

Michigan now consistently ranks near the bottom in most subjects and grades. Since 2003, our position relative to other states has declined.

So why has our ranking declined? The conventional wisdom in Michigan holds low-income, and black and brown children responsible for our state's low average — and assumes middle-class and white children are doing just fine. Indeed, this belief is so prevalent that state educational leaders and

policymakers have been known to say, "If it wasn't for our urban and poor students, we would be doing a whole lot better."

Not only is this belief based on dated stereotypes, it also is patently false. Yet, it is used to justify inaction on improving our state's schools.

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(“Little School” cont’d. from pg. 6)

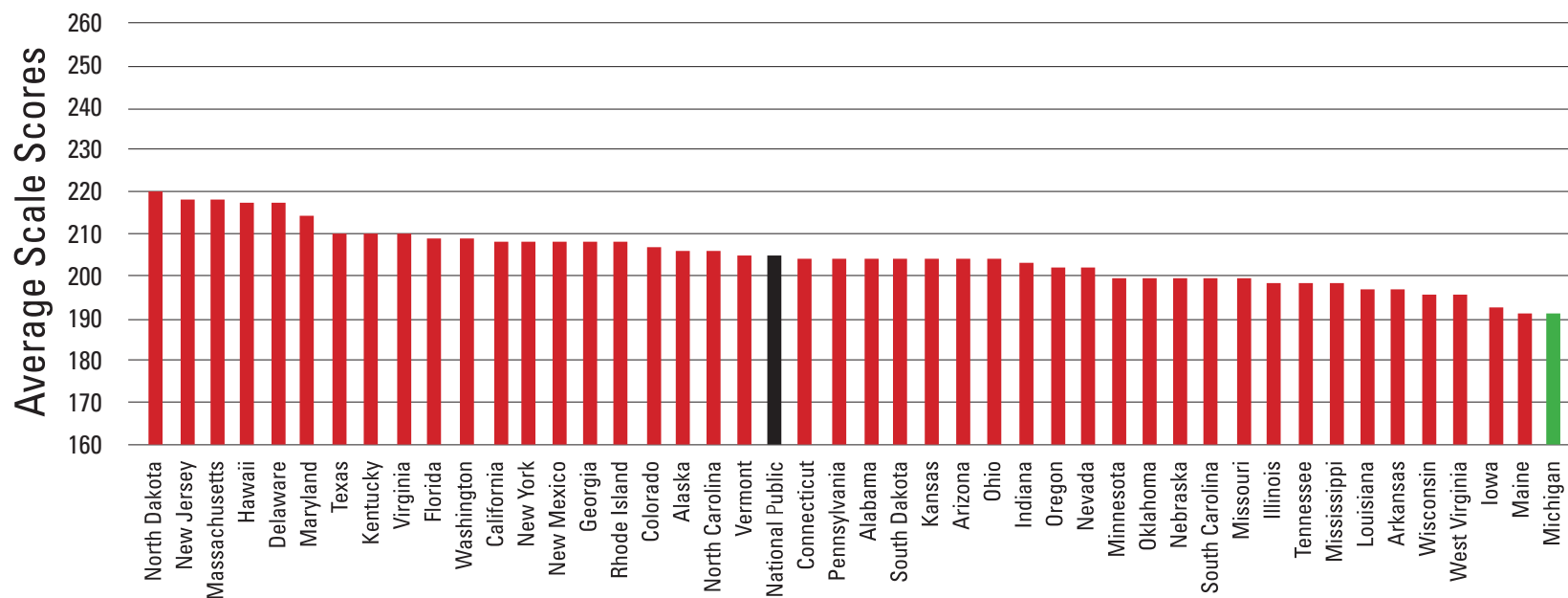
other strategies, they used the federal No Child Left Behind act to conduct a credential audit to ensure appropriate teachers were staffing classrooms.

- **Strategic Use of Resources:** District leaders and the local American Federation of Teachers union negotiated a progressive contract to allow the district to find cost-savings in benefits, which enabled them to raise teacher salaries and attract high-performing teachers to Inkster.
- **Improved Instruction and Alignment with State Standards:** Instructional teams worked diligently to align classroom teaching with rigorous state standards for all children across all grades. Their coherent approach to instruction goes far beyond reading and math. Physical education teacher Dave Thompson, for example, has won grants to invest in whole-body wellness. He teaches students about the importance of exercising and eating fruits and vegetables.
- **Taking off the “jacket of poverty:”** Bashir says Baylor-Woodson leaders and teachers address the deficiencies that poor children often bring to school by giving them basic necessities (such as hot meals), broadening their cultural exposure (through field trips, etc.), and providing additional academic enrichment.

(cont’d. on pg. 10)

African-American Students in Michigan Far Behind Peers in Other States

Grade 4 – NAEP Reading (2011)



Source: NAEP Data Explorer, NCES (Proficient Scale Score = 238).

Certainly, our African-American children are in deep trouble: They were the lowest achieving black students in the nation, ranking dead last in fourth-grade reading among the 45 states that reported data on African American students. They also were last among the 44 states reporting scores in fourth-grade math on the 2011 NAEP.

Michigan’s eighth-grade African-American students fared not much better, scoring 34th out of 43 states reporting for reading, and 42nd out of 43 states reporting for math.

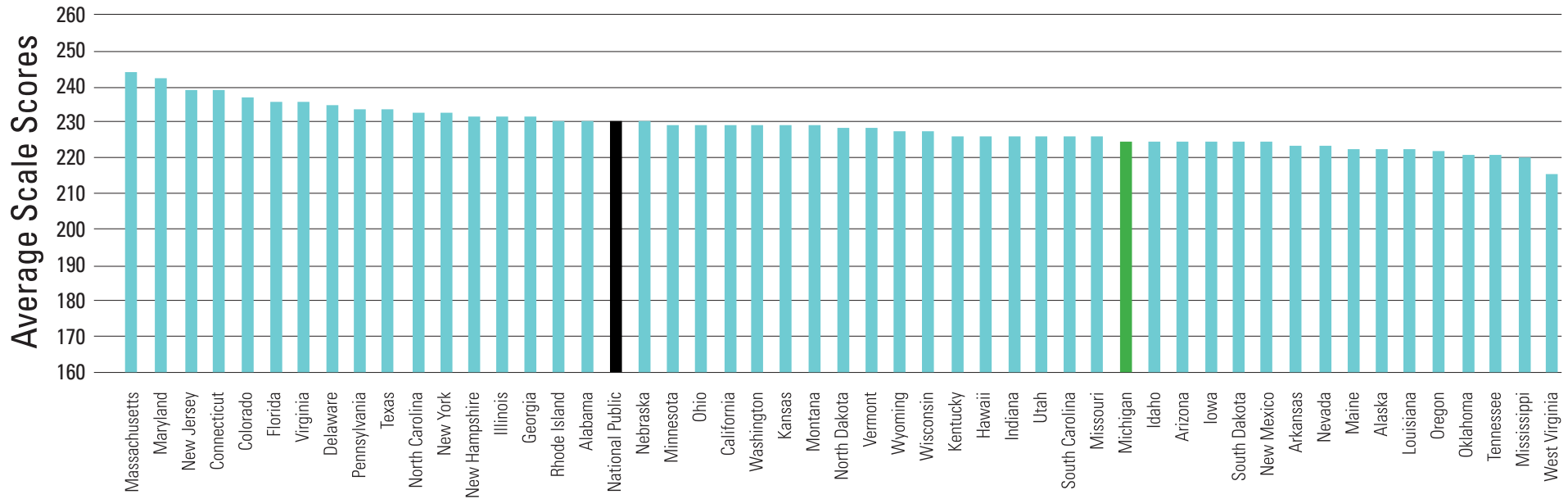
On first blush, it appears that a bright spot in our state’s educational landscape can be found among our Latino students. They are beating the national average in fourth-grade and eighth-grade reading. But look beyond the averages and it is apparent that

our Latino performance is much more mixed. Performance among Michigan’s Latino students remained flat between 2003 and 2011. During the same period, 10 states showed significant gains in fourth-grade reading for their Latino students. In eighth-grade reading, 19 states made significant gains for their Latino students.

Meanwhile, learning levels for our urban Latino students are particularly troubling. Detroit’s Latino students are performing far below the national average for urban Latinos in fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading. Motown’s Latino eighth-graders ranked 12th out of 18 cities in reading on the 2011 Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA), the nation’s report card for major U.S. cities. The city’s Latino fourth-graders ranked 15th out of 20 cities in reading.

White Students in Michigan Trail Peers in Other States

Grade 4 – NAEP Reading (2011)



Source: NAEP Data Explorer, NCES (Proficient Scale Score = 238).

But Michigan’s performance problem goes far beyond our communities of color. Our white students are sinking to the bottom of the national academic ladder, as well. They now trail 34 other states on the NAEP fourth-grade reading national examination.

While other states’ white students have been making significant gains in learning, our white students remain stagnant.

- **Transforming School Culture:** Baylor-Woodson teachers collaborate on school-improvement planning, and help lead programs such as a Saturday Academy. The school's positive culture is apparent in math and reading classrooms as well, where clear objectives for learning are posted on the walls. In Nelson Henry's classroom, students rise to their feet at a moment's notice to pledge to be the best they can be.

The Education Trust recently awarded Baylor-Woodson the prestigious, national Dispelling the Myth Award for its high academic performance. Educators everywhere, especially in Michigan, can learn from its dedicated leaders and teachers.

"We're not used to getting attention," says Principal Beverly Gerhard. "We've just quietly worked away at our goals for years. It's been great to see the community recognize our progress." ■

—Amber Arellano and Sarah W. Lenhoff

Our higher income students' achievement continues to decline compared to other states, from 24th in 2003 to 35th in 2011 in fourth-grade reading. For eighth-grade math, our higher income students have fallen from 34th in 2003 to 40th in 2011.

Like canaries in a toxic coal mine, our low-income children are suffering even more. Michigan's relative rank among the nation's low-income children has fallen from 34th in 2003 to 43rd in 2011 in eighth-grade math.

When confronted with these troubling performance trends, Michiganders tend to point fingers at one another.

Though Detroit was dead last among large urban districts on the nation's TUDA for African-American fourth-graders in math, there are districts in Michigan that are performing even worse than Detroit. Among the Michigan districts serving the largest number of African-American students, Grand Rapids is now the worst performing district for black students on the MEAP fourth-grade reading exam. Flint, Benton Harbor, Pontiac, and Kalamazoo join Detroit in performing at the bottom for black children in Michigan, across most subjects and grade levels.

MICHIGAN LAGS IN GAP CLOSING, TOO

While many Michiganders believe closing our achievement gaps is an admirable dream, they also think it is impossible. We need only look at those states that have closed gaps to know that such denial is simply an excuse.

Since 2003, some 27 states have significantly narrowed at least one achievement gap that had separated low-income students and students of color from their white and affluent peers. States such as Louisiana and New York prove that gap closing is possible when the right leadership strategies and investment are in place.

Michigan, on the other hand, has not significantly narrowed a single achievement gap between students of color and white students, or low-income and high-income students,

since 2003. Indeed, rather than closing gaps, Michigan has spent the last decade perpetuating the educational inequities in our society, making it difficult for low-income students and students of color to succeed in college and beyond.

The results of our state's failure on this front were made painfully clear in the 2011 NAEP results: Michigan has nearly a 34-point gap — the second largest achievement gap in the nation — between white and black students in fourth-grade reading.

Achievement gaps, and our lack of progress in closing them, are absolutely unacceptable. With the right solutions and tools, Michigan can do much more, and should do it quickly.

MAXIMIZING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE YEAR AHEAD

Clearly, our state's achievement challenge is hardly a "minority problem" or a "poverty problem." Michigan has an education problem — and it cuts across all income brackets, races, and school sectors.

Despite dismal news about our state's performance, some good education news is emerging. State leaders deserve kudos for passing historic reforms to teacher tenure, lay-off, and evaluation policies, and for raising the state's cut scores last year. These were critical first steps toward improving educational outcomes. Now we have to do the hard work of actually supporting our students and teachers to meet higher expectations.

To become a Great Education State, we need to make the most of several high-impact opportunities in the year ahead.

1. Support and Provide Honest Feedback to Our Teachers

In the last decade, an abundance of research on student achievement has taught two important lessons: Teachers are the most significant school-related factor in student learning.¹ And our current educator evaluation systems are inadequate for determining which teachers are performing well and which teachers are failing our students.² In some Michigan schools, leaders have not performed regular evaluations or observations of teachers in years. High-quality professional development and support for teachers also remain too rare.

Michigan must help its teachers grow and succeed. Honest evaluation is an essential step toward helping all our state's teachers reach their potential.

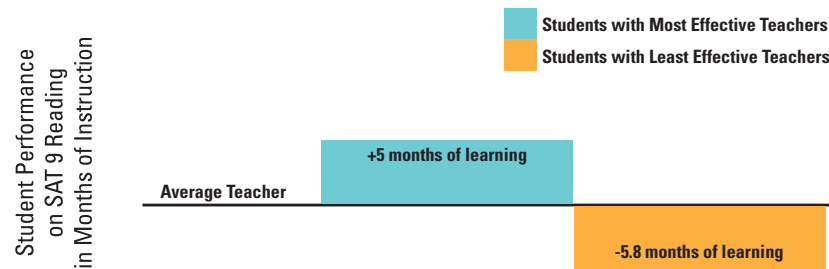
Studies show the rewards from investing in and nurturing the quality of our classroom teachers are enormous. Low-income students who have effective teachers for multiple years in a row can beat the odds and rise to the level of higher income students.³ Assuring that all students have effective teachers could, therefore, be a powerful lever for closing Michigan's huge achievement gaps and improving the learning outcomes of all our children. To do that, we need to develop reliable ways of identifying, recruiting, supporting, and retaining the most effective educators. Our students deserve nothing less.

The state's new teacher tenure and evaluation legislation, passed in June 2011, now makes it possible for schools to conduct evaluations that help them understand which of their teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement and which do

not. The reforms also were designed to ensure that new and experienced teachers alike get much more support and feedback to improve their practice, particularly during their most formative years. (See "Michigan's Teachers," pg. 12.)

The tenure and evaluation law's passage was a critical next step on the road to repairing our state's broken education system, but the work is not yet done. The work of the Governor's Council on Educator Effectiveness is now vital to the ultimate success of these student-centric reforms. In the years to come, it is critical that Gov. Rick Snyder, legislators on both sides of the aisle, parents, and philanthropic and community leaders support the council's work and implementation of a statewide evaluation system that is comprehensive and fair.

Student outcome differences for top and lowest performing teachers equivalent to more than a year of instruction.



Source: Measures of Effective Teaching Project, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

2. Set High Expectations for Curriculum, Instruction, and Achievement

Michigan has taken an important step toward establishing more rigorous curricular standards for its students by agreeing to adopt the Common Core State Standards, which aim to better prepare the nation's students for college and career. State leaders also have agreed to implement more rigorous assessments, aligned to the Common Core, at least by the 2014-2015 school year.

Still, these commitments are not enough to truly transform Michigan's education system so that all students are learning more and are better prepared for a 21st-century workplace. The state must invest considerable time and resources into preparing teachers and administrators for the transition to more rigorous standards. This investment should include high-quality teacher training, development of more rigorous courses, and instructional models that are aligned with helping students acquire higher order thinking skills.

Preparation for the Common Core standards and assessments must begin now, while Michigan has time to do this work carefully. With strategic investment, Michigan has the chance to be a national leader in the implementation and assessment of college- and career-ready standards.

3. Improve Low-Performing Schools Across the State

With the recent creation of the Education Achievement System (EAS), it would be easy to believe that state leaders have created a powerful network to support low-performing schools. Let's be honest, though: To have any chance of succeeding, EAS leaders will need to build slowly. In keeping with lessons from similar work in Louisiana and Tennessee, they will need to devote time and resources to developing infrastructure

STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORTING MICHIGAN'S TEACHERS

Michigan doesn't have to sit back and watch its schools continue to decline. Research and schools such as Baylor-Woodson Elementary (see "Little School" story pg. 4) show that Michigan schools can help students succeed, even under the most challenging circumstances. But we must be willing to make necessary changes. One issue requiring our immediate attention is the efficacy of Michigan's teaching force.

Teacher quality is the most important in-school predictor of student achievement.⁴ Yet for years, Michiganders have neglected to use this lever for change. Politics and adult interests have preempted the interests of our students. It's time for that pattern to stop.

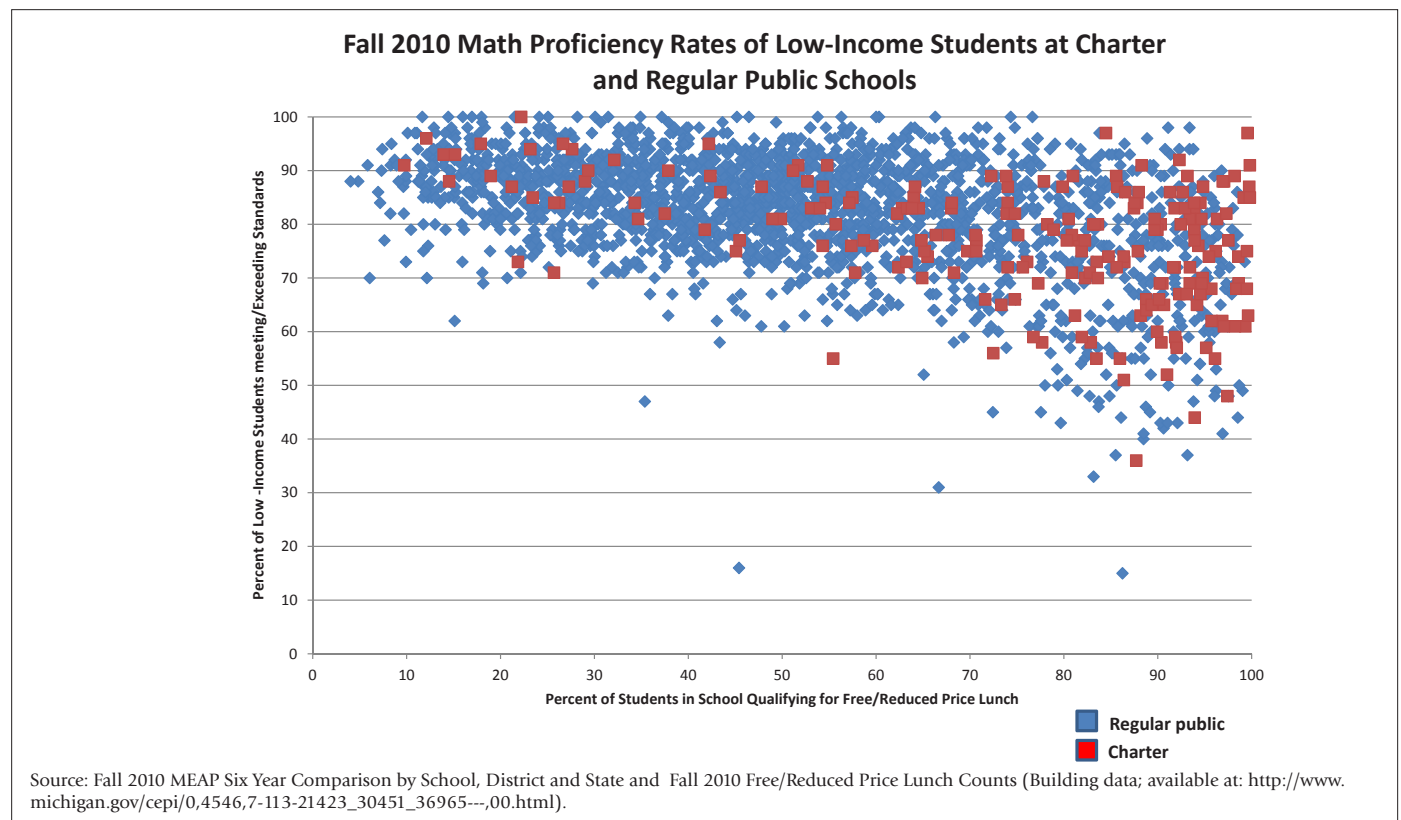
In 2012, Michigan has an unprecedented opportunity to build the teaching force that our students need and deserve. The state's new teacher tenure and evaluation law, passed in June 2011, now makes it possible for our schools to evaluate teachers and determine the supports they need to grow and succeed.

and operating systems that provide the transformative building blocks of high-performing, high-poverty schools.

Key among these building blocks is a teacher evaluation system so leaders can intelligently and fairly staff schools based on performance data, rather than only seniority. State standards around evaluation will help ensure leaders can recruit high-performing teachers and principals from outside of Detroit, as well. Other building blocks include creating talent incubators designed to staff high-poverty schools with strong leaders and teachers; granting building-level staffing authority to school leaders; and providing strong curricula, instructional supports, and data systems to help teachers pinpoint and bridge student knowledge gaps. These will require new kinds of philanthropic and public investment.

This labor-intensive early work is critical and will take the EAS leaders time. That means they will not be in a position to take on all the state's struggling schools anytime soon. To improve and succeed, Michigan's low-performing schools — especially those inside the city of Detroit, where the EAS will likely focus in its first few years — will need other supports and interventions. A new state support and accountability system must provide new, clear targets and more robust supports for traditional public and charter schools that are struggling.

As detailed earlier in this report, Michigan's school performance problem transcends Detroit. And our charter schools are hardly immune to poor performance. Indeed, their performance mirrors that of traditional public schools, both



for their students as a whole and for low-income students. There is wide variation in performance in both sectors. Some schools are shining stars, despite the challenges of poverty. Many more are mediocre to bad. And too many are downright dismal.

Clearly, an EAS that initially focuses mostly on a handful of schools in Detroit isn't enough. Families in Grand Rapids, Pontiac, Kalamazoo, Flint, and other communities deserve improved schools as much as the children of Motown, regardless of whether they are traditional public schools or charter schools. And state leaders must pursue multiple strategies to ensure that the children of these cities get the quality schools they deserve.

4. Establish Strong Support and Accountability Systems

Michigan has long lagged behind leading states in building a quality system for setting goals and creating supports for all its schools. We've been among the weakest states for interventions in low-performing schools, for example, and we have failed to provide clear improvement targets for the overwhelming majority of our schools. That doesn't make sense: if our state is to prosper and compete, all our schools must strive toward higher achievement for all our children.

As critical as it is, focusing on just the lowest performing schools — as we have in the past — won't get us where

we need to be. We must establish an accountability system that more honestly identifies failing schools, and that sets progressively higher goals — for absolute achievement, improvement, and gap closing. The accountability system also must encourage all schools, not just those in the bottom five percent, to educate our students to be ready for college and career.

In addition, Michigan should develop differentiated supports for schools depending on their needs. Schools that are doing well overall but are having a difficult time improving their low-income students' achievement, for instance, should have different supports than those that are struggling with ensuring that their special education students graduate. An effective state accountability system would address the needs of each school and would support and reward them based on a variety of metrics.

Last fall, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan offered states a chance to waive many requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in exchange for developing an educator evaluation system tied to student learning, adopting standards aligned to college and career readiness, and implementing a new accountability system with ambitious but achievable goals for all schools.

This rare opportunity gives Michigan a chance to abandon systems that have not worked and create new ones that

are more likely to make a difference for Michigan's students.

To their credit, Michigan leaders are working hard to seize this opportunity, but there are obstacles that stand in the way. To gain a waiver from Sec. Duncan, for example, the state will have to stand up to challenges to tying student learning to teacher evaluations. It's vital that Michigan continue down the path set by the teacher tenure and evaluation legislation. We must know how our teachers are performing so that the best educators can be recruited to serve the students who most need them.

It's also critical that the state go far beyond the previously proposed Michigan School Accreditation system, which is confusing and unclear. Instead, we must develop a coherent system of support, rewards, and accountability for all schools. This will require commitment to the belief that all schools can succeed at developing students for the 21st century.

Finally, the state must follow through on its commitment to implement new assessments for the college- and career-ready standards, and support the transition of teachers, schools, and districts to the new standards. Successful implementation will require investment at multiple levels of our educational system, but it is crucial to the long-term success of our young students and, in turn, our state.

(cont'd. from pg. 12)

The Education Trust–Midwest played an instrumental role in pushing for the reforms included in the law, which the National Council on Teacher Quality calls “the most ambitious” of such reforms across the country. More than 15 other states plan to give student achievement a significant, objective, meaningful, and measurable role in how teacher performance is assessed.

Now that the Michigan legislation is in place, the real work begins. The new law called upon Gov. Rick Snyder to create a Council on Educator Effectiveness. The council is charged with designing a statewide evaluation system for educators that includes student achievement data, new categories for a teacher rating system, and multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. Ultimately, the success and impact of these reforms will depend on the actions taken by the Governor's Council and their implementation by the state.

Today, Michigan parents and education leaders have no idea how well their schools' teachers are performing compared with their peers in other schools and districts. In 2009, district leaders were charged with building and implementing teacher evaluation systems by the fall of 2011. But there was no requirement that these evalua-
(See “Michigan's Teachers,” pg. 14.)

(Michigan's Teachers," from pg. 13)

tion programs adhere to any statewide guidelines. Why? Because state leaders shirked their responsibility, and left it up to local officials to handle the complex, and often costly, development of sophisticated teacher evaluation models. The result: Every district and charter network in Michigan is determining what effective teaching looks like, and using different measures to gauge how much our students are learning. That means educators, parents, and students have no idea whether their schools' teachers are performing better than other districts' teachers, or if they are simply setting low standards. And an educator considered to be high-performing in one district could actually be average or low-performing in another district. Our families and teachers need honest, comparable, and reliable information about how students and teachers really are doing.

Without greater state leadership and guidance, school districts are likely to perpetuate a useless patchwork of systems. A quality set of statewide guidelines will avert this problem, assuring teachers, parents, and policymakers that the results of teacher evaluations are trustworthy and comparable.

With accurate information on how our teachers are performing, the Governor's Council can help put an effective teacher in every classroom, making it ever more possible for us to close the achievement gap — and give all Michigan students the world-class education they deserve. ■

— Amber Arellano and
Sarah W. Lenhoff

Families in Grand Rapids, Pontiac, Kalamazoo, Flint, and other communities deserve improved schools as much as the children of Motown.

CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGE

As the data throughout this report make clear, Michigan's students are falling farther and farther behind their peers across the nation. This is through no fault of their own; our students are just as talented, intelligent and full of potential as any children in the United States.

Be they white, black, Latino, higher income, or low-income, Michigan's children are not the problem. Our state's education problem is something that we, the adults of Michigan, have created, and we must fix it.

Certainly, Michigan's parents must do their part by supporting their children in school and sending an unequivocal message that kids who work hard get smart. But we also call on Michigan's political and education leaders to step up and provide the leadership and resources that our state needs to turn around our dismal student performance.

If we commit ourselves to creating the excellent schools our students need and deserve, the Great Lakes State can also be a Great Education State. ■



NOTES

1. Stephen G. Rivkin, Eric Hanushek, and J. F. Kain. "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement," *Econometrica*, vol. 73, no. 2 (March 2005): 417-458.
2. Daniel Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Janet Mulhern, and David Keeling. "The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness," (New York: The New Teacher Project, 2009), 5-6.
3. Robert Gordon, Thomas J. Kane, and Douglas Staiger. "Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job," (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2006).
4. Stephen G. Rivkin, Eric A. Hanushek., and John F. Kain. "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement," *Econometrica*, vol. 73, no. 2 (March 2005): 417-458.

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ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST–MIDWEST

The Education Trust–Midwest works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, from pre-kindergarten through college. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement for all children, particularly those from low-income families or who are African American, Latino, or American Indian — in Michigan and beyond. As a statewide education policy and advocacy organization, we are focused first and foremost on doing what is right for Michigan students. The Education Trust–Midwest is affiliated with the national organization, The Education Trust, based in Washington, D.C. EdTrust–Midwest is the second state office of The Education Trust.



The Education Trust–Midwest

306 S. WASHINGTON AVE., SUITE 400, ROYAL OAK, MI 48067
P 734-619-8008 F 734-619-8009 WWW.EDTRUSTMIDWEST.ORG

ILLINOIS

