



The Education Trust–Midwest

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Becoming Top Ten Starts With Honest Data and Best Practice

New report finds both encouraging and troubling aspects of Michigan’s new education plan; Michiganders have a critical opportunity for input now

ROYAL OAK, MICH. - (March 1, 2017) – Michigan’s new plan for improving student achievement shows significant progress in some areas, yet it also disregards best practice in other areas. These findings -- from a [new report](#) by The Education Trust-Midwest (ETM) -- come as the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) solicits feedback on its newly released Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) state plan, one of the most important leadership opportunities for educational improvement of this decade. The public comment period runs through March 16th.

In the report [Becoming Top Ten: An Analysis of Michigan’s ESSA Plan](#) – after months of working alongside MDE, [business and civil rights leaders on a vision for the plan](#) – ETM provides a deep analysis of the state plan; best practices from leading states for the major systems proposed; and recommendations to better align the plan with evidence-based practices. Presently the MDE plans to submit its final plan to the U.S. Department of Education on April 3rd. This is a critical moment for Michiganders to provide feedback on the plan. For more information about how to do so, please visit: edtrustmidwest.org/ESSA.

“Improvement starts with honesty,” said [Amber Arellano](#), executive director of The Education Trust-Midwest. “We applaud that this plan would create a more thoughtful accountability system for schools. However – and this is a big caveat – the MDE’s vision for a new state assessment system would undermine this strong accountability system by moving away from Michigan’s first honest and rigorous assessment system in two decades. Without this reliable, aligned data, Michigan parents and educators will not know whether Michigan’s public schools are truly on track to catch up with the rest of the nation.”

“Research shows states with strong school accountability systems often see the largest gains for academic achievement, especially for kids of color and low-income students,” says [Sunil Joy](#), ETM’s assistant director of policy and research and the report’s lead author. “While this plan would be a big step forward on that front, proposed changes to assessment would essentially sabotage the state’s new school grading and accountability systems – the very improvement systems that have been so effective at raising achievement in leading states.”

The report’s findings include:

- **Much Improved School Accountability:** MDE proposes a clear and single, summative rating to indicate whether schools are meeting the needs of *all* groups of students. It would largely rely on academic measures, while also considering factors that research says matters for career- and college-readiness, such as chronic absenteeism and access to advance coursework. We applaud these changes.
- **Honest School Data:** The power of the proposed accountability and school grading system depends on the integrity and honesty of the data that underlie it. State Superintendent Brian Whiston has proposed a new

assessment vision that may gut or eliminate the current M-STEP assessment system. “If the MDE goes forward with this plan, no one in the state would know for sure how our public schools are truly performing compared to other states around the country—or whether Michigan schools are really catching up with the rest of the nation. Educators would not have honest feedback and reliable, aligned data to improve their classroom practices,” said Joy. “MDE also would risk lowering performance standards for teaching and learning.”

- **School Grades and Improvement Goals:** The MDE’s draft proposal would result in about half of the state’s schools receiving “A” and “B” letter grades. This, in a state that’s now a bottom ten states on key indicators on the national assessment. Telling parents and schools that everything is fine with most schools when in fact, student achievement levels have been plummeting, would be downright dishonest. Meanwhile, Michigan’s long-term improvement goals should reflect the state’s overarching goal of becoming a top ten education state; they lack such ambition now.
- **Improving Support for Educators, especially in High-Poverty Schools:** While the draft plan outlines strategies for improving teacher quality, the plan should be more robust to ensure all student have access to excellent teachers. In high-poverty districts where students often have the highest rates of inexperienced educators, MDE should prioritize stronger support and professional growth opportunities for teachers and administrators. The draft is also missing an effective plan for the successful implementation of the state’s new educator evaluation and feedback system, which is an essential systemic lever for improving access to effective educators in high-poverty schools, as it has been in fast-improving states such as Tennessee.

“Michigan now has one of this decade’s most important leadership opportunities to get serious about becoming a top ten state,” said Arellano. “The question is, are MDE leaders making the most of this urgent opportunity? And are they putting students – especially vulnerable students – at the forefront of that decision-making? The answer is mixed. We encourage State Superintendent Brian Whiston and the MDE to stay strong on accountability and keep Michigan’s current assessment system. This is a critical plan for Michigan schools’ future improvement.”

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The Education Trust-Midwest is a nonpartisan research and advocacy organization dedicated to improving outcomes for all Michigan students, especially for African American, Latino, American Indian, and low-income students. The Education Trust-Midwest believes in the power of intelligent education policy and practices — informed by data, research, and the successes of other states — to make Michigan a top ten education state for all students.

Visit EdTrustMidwest.org/ESSA to read the full analysis, read the MDE’s draft ESSA plan and to submit public comment to the Michigan Department of Education.