



# Becoming Top Ten:

## The Education Trust—Midwest AN ANALYSIS OF MICHIGAN'S ESSA PLAN

### A Policy Brief from The Education Trust-Midwest

By Sunil Joy

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In little more than a decade, Michigan has gone from being a fairly average state, to among the nation's bottom ten states in essential measures for student learning.<sup>i</sup> It's a devastating fall. And students of color and low-income students—long poorly served by the state—are suffering the most from the system's terribly low performance. Governor Rick Snyder and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Brian Whiston have joined many organizations across the state—including The Education Trust-Midwest (ETM)—in envisioning a new horizon for Michigan public education by setting a goal of becoming a top ten education state. As globalization accelerates economic change and Michigan's students are increasingly left behind other states' children in being prepared for college and career success, it's never been more critical to get serious about addressing the state's growing educational crisis.

This winter, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has one of the most important leadership opportunities of this decade in making that urgent goal happen. And state leaders are more empowered—and responsible—for providing the critical leadership, improvement systems and levers for dramatic statewide performance gains like never before. In 2015, the United States Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which handed down vast authority to state leaders, including most of the decision-making on the improvement systems that have been so effective in raising achievement in the nation's leading education states. This year, the MDE is required to turn in its ESSA plan to new U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos in order to plan these essential statewide improvement systems. Once the federal government approves this plan, it will become binding for the state—and, Michigan and its students and educators will

be expected to live with these improvement systems, or lack thereof, for years to come.

The question is whether the state is making the most of this extraordinary and urgent opportunity? And is it putting students—especially vulnerable students—at the forefront of that decision-making? The Education Trust-Midwest has spent months working alongside the MDE, K-12, major business and civil rights leaders to understand the needs of Michigan students; the opportunities provided by ESSA; and the major components of Michigan's ESSA plan. In this report, we share our analysis of the plan from both the lens of national best practices and Michigan-based expertise. The plan was released to the public on February 14<sup>th</sup>. Presently the MDE plans to submit its final plan to the U.S. Department of Education on April 3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>ii</sup> This is a critical moment for Michiganders to provide their input on the plan to the MDE. For more information about how to do so, please visit:

[edtrustmidwest.org/ESSA](http://edtrustmidwest.org/ESSA).

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What our analysis found was both encouraging and troubling. Improvement starts with honesty. Indeed, honesty is a cornerstone for any true transformation effort. By being honest with ourselves about how our public schools are truly performing, and basing educational improvement efforts on reliable data, our public schools will be taking the first steps toward educational recovery. Unfortunately, the MDE's proposed plan falls short of that essential element of quality in some places.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, CONTINUED

First, the encouraging news: Michigan's proposed accountability system has the potential to be a big step forward for the state. That is critical for dramatically improving student achievement in Michigan. Much as strong corporate leaders set the vision and high goals for their companies, and then direct resources, support, data and accountability toward making these goals happen, so too do the nation's best state education leaders through their state-led assessment, school accountability and support, and public reporting systems. Such improvement systems are essential in successful states' role in providing leadership and a vision for public schools' improvement, and communicating urgency and honest information about how schools are performing—while also giving educators honest feedback about how they are performing against those high standards to help them improve their teaching practice.

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Nonpartisan research also supports this. Research from across the nation shows states with strong school accountability systems often see the largest progress for academic achievement, especially for historically underserved groups of children such as African American, Latino and low-income students.<sup>iii</sup> As experts at the University of Southern California and Baltimore County Public Schools put it: “[School] accountability lifts all boats.”<sup>iv</sup> Other research has shown school accountability provides long-term life benefits to students, including higher college attendance rates and higher early-career earnings.<sup>v</sup>

The MDE's plan would take major steps forward on all of these fronts, and the Michigan legislature should support these specific aspects of the plan and its accountability methodology. The proposed system's attention to the results of all student groups also would be a significant improvement over the “top-to-bottom” ranking that Michigan has used in recent years. Among the plan's strengths:

- **Clear, summative school ratings:** Assigning a clear, single summative rating to schools that is based on whether schools are meeting expectations for their students, which is much more accessible and understandable. MDE proposes to do so through an A-F grading system.

- **Research-based measures of school quality:** The plan proposes to heavily weigh academic measures, which we strongly applaud. It also takes advantage of states' new flexibility to drive urgency and focus on the things that research says really matters for college- and career-readiness, such as chronic absenteeism and access to advanced coursework.
- **Meaningful focus on equity:** We appreciate that the MDE proposes to include the outcomes of all students—including our most vulnerable—meaningfully in school ratings, as well.

However—and this is a major caveat—the power of this proposed accountability system depends on the integrity and honesty of the data that underlie it. That means our state assessment and data system—from our annual assessment to our growth measures—must be honest and aligned with high teaching standards and 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations for college- and career-readiness. And therein lies the fundamental weakness of this proposal. Over the last year, despite growing voices of concern from the state's major business leaders—and many educators in the field—State Superintendent Brian Whiston has proposed to eliminate the very honest and aligned data systems that Michigan has put into place for the first time ever. By doing so, he essentially would be lowering the performance standards for teaching and learning in the state—and undermine all other improvement efforts for years to come.

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If the MDE goes forward with this plan to gut the current aligned M-STEP assessment system, 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 we're really catching up with the rest of the nation. Educators would not have honest feedback and reliable aligned data to calibrate and improve their classroom practices. After nearly two decades of declining performance, Michigan is just beginning to catch up with the rest of the country when it comes to high performance standards and aligned data systems through its relatively new M-STEP assessment system. To pull the rug out from educators, families and other stakeholders on this front now would be a grave error.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, CONTINUED

Honesty starts with transparency, too. There are improvements to be made to reach this quality bar both in terms of transparency and equity, including:

- **School ratings:** Under the MDE's proposed school rating system, half of schools are projected to receive "A" and "B" letter grades. This, in a state that's now a bottom ten state in key subjects and grades on the national assessment—and is now 49<sup>th</sup> in the country for white student achievement in early reading. Telling parents and schools that everything is fine when, in fact, student achievement levels are plummeting at a tragic rate would be downright dishonest.
- **Problematic growth measures:** While measuring individual student growth is essential to track student advancement, the current MDE proposal seeks only to measure whether students are making more or less growth than their peers. Comparisons to peers don't reveal whether a student will one day meet grade-level standards—and raises major equity concerns for historically underserved students. This risks setting lower expectations for students of color and low-income students, and does not incentivize schools to accelerate learning for historically underserved student groups.
- **Unambitious improvement goals:** One of the most important requirements of ESSA plans is that states set long-term progress goals for all of its schools and student groups. We recommend that the MDE be much more ambitious than what it currently proposes. For instance, the state's goal would only require that about half of students in a single school be proficient in math by 2024-25. Moreover, the state only expects about three-quarters of schools and student groups to actually get there. Not only is this a low bar for achievement, it ignores 25 percent of schools and student groups. There was also little public discourse on the state's long-term goals from stakeholders. Long-term goals should not only be more ambitious, but apply to all students and schools.
- **Weak plans for improving educator quality, especially in high-poverty schools:** Finally, research shows that quality teaching is fundamental to student learning and achievement—and of utmost importance in high-needs communities. In order to adequately address teacher quality and equity issues statewide, the MDE must show meaningful commitment toward the successful implementation of the state's educator evaluation and feedback system. And while strong

educator evaluation systems raise the bar for teaching and learning, the MDE must also have clear strategies for ensuring our most vulnerable students have access to the highest-quality educators. These students need and deserve excellent instruction.

What's more, the draft plan leaves far too many questions unanswered. Presently, the MDE plan does not define their methodology to identify low-performing schools for support and improvement. The MDE should take the time to develop this methodology with input from not only the state's most relevant stakeholders, but also experts in the nation's most successful states for turnaround, namely Massachusetts. Meanwhile, the expectations for performance on some of the indicators are still unclear. If the State Superintendent implements his vision of eliminating our rigorous, aligned assessment system, he needs to explain how he would get the necessary aligned proficiency and growth information out of the proposed new assessment system, including data that benchmarks against national performance standards and honestly reports how Michigan schools' performance is comparing with other states. Michigan students deserve no less.

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Michigan can be a top education state. We applaud the MDE's hard work on designing a proposed accountability system that would make great progress in ensuring public schools reach that goal. However, reaching that goal takes honesty and commitment to transparency using evidence-based improvement strategies. And this takes strong leadership. We urge State Superintendent Whiston and the MDE to embrace much more honest and rigorous systems of assessment, public reporting and goal-setting—the very systems that leading states such as Massachusetts, Tennessee, Florida and others have demonstrated as truly transformative for raising student learning. It's time to get serious about becoming a top ten education state.



## COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY STANDARDS AND ALIGNED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Academic standards provide an invaluable framework for educators by outlining what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level and upon graduating from high school. Setting rigorous college- and career-ready standards is one of the most important roles of states, as it sets performance standards for teaching and learning—and the expectation that students graduate high school ready for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. While standards provide the minimum expectations students need to meet, a common measuring stick—an aligned assessment—confirms that this goal is actually being met, and provides honest feedback about how well schools and educators are meeting that benchmark.

	BEST PRACTICE	MDE’S DRAFT PLAN	ETM RECOMMENDATION
COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY ASSESSMENTS	<p>Leading education states like Massachusetts started their educational transformation by moving to high performance standards, for good reason. When states set low bars for teaching and learning that is exactly what they get in return: low achievement. Indeed, if Massachusetts were its own country, it would be one of the top in the world. Its state leaders benchmark themselves and their schools against the expectations of the world’s best. Michigan is relatively new to this critical strategy; it recently adopted high standards for classroom teaching and began administering an aligned assessment—the M-STEP—in the 2014-15 academic year.</p> <p>Quality assessments provide critical feedback to educators and let parents know if their child is on track. Likewise, they ensure that all students—including our most vulnerable—are being held up to the same high expectations.</p> <p>Created with the input of thousands of experts and educators over multiple years, the M-STEP has for the first time provided a truly honest portrait of college- and career-readiness for the state’s students. M-STEP also allows Michigan to compare its results to that of other states—using a consistent and rigorous benchmark of achievement. Independent research also confirms that M-STEP test items adequately cover the breadth and depth of the state’s college- and career-ready academic standards.</p>	<p>Included with MDE’s draft plan are details surrounding a new assessment vision for the state—one that unfortunately no other state has attempted before.</p> <p>The vision includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Grades 3-7:</b> schools would be required to administer two assessments: one in the fall and one in the spring. Schools have the option of administering a winter assessment as well. Both are new changes for Michigan.</li> <li>• <b>Grades 8-10:</b> schools would be required to administer the PSAT assessment once in each of these grades. The 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade PSAT is actually the same exact test, administered both in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This is a new change for Michigan.</li> <li>• <b>Grade 11:</b> schools would be required to administer the SAT assessment. Michigan is doing this currently.</li> </ul> <p>This would be a radical departure from what Michigan is currently doing, particularly in grades 3-8, and the M-STEP assessment system is expected to be either gutted or eliminated completely.</p>	<p>ETM recommends that Michigan keep the M-STEP assessment system, and that MDE is explicit that this is their intent.</p> <p>Dropping an aligned, proven assessment like M-STEP in favor of a potentially low-quality and less rigorous assessment may undermine the state’s most important improvement systems for years. In addition, another change in assessments further delays school accountability and implementation of the state’s first educator evaluation and support system, which has been widely credited as essential for fast-improving states like Tennessee. Research recommends at least three years of the same assessment data prior to making any high-stakes decisions for schools. <b><i>For more information, please see the section on Strong School Accountability to Drive Equity and Improvement.</i></b></p>





STRONG SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY TO DRIVE EQUITY AND IMPROVEMENT

Strong school accountability systems are a key lever for creating urgency and demanding improvement. These systems communicate whether schools are meeting clear expectations around raising academic achievement—both for students overall, and for each group of students they serve. They celebrate schools that are meeting or exceeding expectations, and prompt action in those that are not. And they direct additional resources and supports to struggling districts and schools to help them improve.

	BEST PRACTICE	MDE’S DRAFT PLAN	ETM RECOMMENDATION
SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS	<p>School accountability indicators are the actual measures that schools are responsible for meeting. First and foremost, they should reflect that a school is truly preparing students for college and career. Weak, irrelevant or simply too many indicators may send wrong or confusing signals on whether or not schools are meeting their teaching and learning goals.</p>	<p>MDE’s draft proposes that schools are held accountable for the following:</p> <p><b>Academic indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proficiency rates on state assessments</li> <li>• Individual student growth on state assessments (by comparing students to their peers, known as student growth percentiles)</li> <li>• Participation rates on state assessments</li> <li>• High school graduation rates</li> <li>• Progress for English Learners (ELs)</li> </ul> <p><b>School quality indicators, consisting of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher and school administrator longevity</li> <li>• Student chronic absenteeism</li> <li>• Successful completion of advanced coursework, career technical education (CTE) or dual enrollment</li> <li>• Access to fine arts, music and physical education</li> </ul>	<p>ETM supports many of the indicators proposed by the MDE for the accountability system. In particular, we applaud the MDE’s inclusion of measures that research says really matter for college- and career-readiness, such as chronic absenteeism and access to advanced coursework. However, we know that without honest proficiency data from an aligned assessment—the single best indicator for measuring college- and career-readiness—school accountability as a lever for excellence and equitable improvement is dramatically undermined.</p> <p>While measuring individual student growth is necessary to understand progress, the current MDE proposal seeks only to measure whether students are making more or less progress than their peers. Comparisons to peers won’t reveal whether that student will one day meet grade-level standards. This risks setting lower expectations for students of color and low-income students, and does not incentivize schools to accelerate learning for historically underserved student groups. ETM recommends that MDE’s measure of student growth answers whether a student is making enough progress to meet grade-level expectations in a reasonable timeframe.</p>



	BEST PRACTICE	MDE’S DRAFT PLAN	ETM RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>SCHOOL RATINGS</b></p>	<p>School ratings refer to the final label that a school gets, as derived from the indicators found in the school accountability system.</p> <p>Clear and transparent ratings are a critically important tool for parents and the public to understand how their schools are doing. Without a single rating, we leave it up to parents and the public to dig through data on their own with no guidance on whether their school is actually up to par. It also makes it easy for the outcomes for groups of students in these schools to be swept under the rug.</p> <p>To create a focus on academic outcomes, accountability systems must weigh academic indicators most in the final rating, as this is a school’s primary responsibility. In addition, final ratings should clearly reflect how a school is advancing against the state’s long-term goals for improvement.</p> <p>Lastly, a school’s final rating should reflect whether every group of students is being properly served. For example, a school that is predominantly higher-income should not receive an “A” grade if its impoverished students are chronically low-performing. Doing so sends the signal that these students simply don’t matter.</p>	<p>MDE’s draft plan would propose a single summative rating: A-F letter grades.</p> <p>Each indicator receives an individual rating using a 100-point index. Ratings are reflective of whether a school is able to meet the state’s long-term goals for each indicator. <b><i>For more information, please see the section on Long-term School Goals.</i></b></p> <p>In order to calculate a final rating, MDE proposes the following weights:</p> <p><b>Academic indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proficiency rates on state assessments: 29%</li> <li>• Individual student growth on state assessments: 34%</li> <li>• Participation rates on state assessments: 3%</li> <li>• High school graduation rates: 10%</li> <li>• Progress for English Learners (ELs): 10%</li> </ul> <p><b>School quality indicators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An indicator of school quality: 14% (combines the four school quality sub-indicators)</li> </ul> <p>A school’s final rating is also dependent on the outcomes of each subgroup of students. Specifically, a school’s rating averages the results for each subgroup of students equally.</p> <p>Based on their methodology and modeling, MDE expects about half of schools will receive “A” or “B” ratings. About three-quarters of schools are projected to receive a grade of “C” or better.</p>	<p>ETM applauds the MDE for using a single, clear rating for schools. We also support that a school’s rating is based primarily on academics, and is tied to the state’s long-term goals.</p> <p>ETM is also very supportive that the MDE is incorporating the results for each group of students equally—signaling that schools must be held accountable for serving all of their students.</p> <p>At the same time, we recommend that MDE recalibrate final ratings—primarily by raising the bar on the state’s long-term goals. Signaling that half of schools are doing just fine doesn’t create the urgency to improve—especially in a state that is far behind the nation. <b><i>For more information, please see the section on Long-term School Goals.</i></b></p> <p>Lastly, ETM recommends that school districts receive individual ratings as well. School districts play a vital role in key school decisions in areas like staffing, professional development, budgets and curriculum. Districts should be held accountable for this role.</p>



STRONG SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY TO DRIVE EQUITY AND IMPROVEMENT, CONTINUED

	BEST PRACTICE	MDE’S DRAFT PLAN	ETM RECOMMENDATION
<p>LONG-TERM SCHOOL GOALS</p>	<p>ESSA requires that states set ambitious goals for long-term improvement. Long-term goals should be ambitious, creating a vision that every student will one day be prepared for college and career. Goals should be especially ambitious in states like Michigan, where academic outcomes are far behind their peers nationally.</p> <p>At the same time, goals should be attainable, so that schools aren’t being set up for failure. Goal-setting should also enable high-poverty, low-performing schools to be rewarded for their sustained progress against state goals.</p>	<p>MDE’s proposed long-term goal is for schools and student subgroups to meet the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of schools today on specific school accountability indicators by the 2024-25 academic year. Statewide goals only apply to three-quarters of schools and student groups as well. The MDE has set long-term goals for academic achievement, individual student growth, graduation rates, and English learner progress. It is not clear how goals will apply to other school accountability indicators.</p> <p>A school’s final rating is dependent on whether the school is meeting the state’s long-term goals for all students and subgroups of students. <i>For more information, please see the section on School Accountability Indicators.</i></p>	<p>Michigan’s long-term goal-setting should reflect becoming a top ten education state.</p> <p>While ETM supports the framework that a school’s final rating is linked to the state’s long-term goals, there is room for enhancement.</p> <p>First, goals should apply to all schools and groups of students, not just 75 percent. This sends the message that outcomes for the other 25 percent of schools and student groups don’t matter.</p> <p>Second, setting goals toward the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile just isn’t enough to transform Michigan’s academic trajectory. For instance, the 2024-25 proficiency rate goal in math is less than 50 percent. In other words, schools could have half of their students not be proficient and still meet the state’s long-term goals. Clearly, Michigan must set its sights much higher.</p> <p>In addition, the MDE should reward schools that are actually making progress toward the state’s long-term goals—not just awarding points based on where they are at the moment. Schools that are not meeting the state’s goals yet, but are on track to meet them by 2024-25 should get credit for their progress.</p> <p>Finally, for the sake of transparency, MDE should be explicit on the goals for the four school quality sub-indicators, as these are necessary for calculating final school ratings. <i>For more information, please see the section on School Ratings.</i></p>



	<b>BEST PRACTICE</b>	<b>MDE’S DRAFT PLAN</b>	<b>ETM RECOMMENDATION</b>
<b>INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS FOR LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS</b>	<p>When a school is identified as underperforming, school and district leaders must take proactive steps to address their deficits—with appropriate guidance from the state. Guidance should include specific strategies for schools that are not serving their most vulnerable groups of students well too—who often have unique needs.</p> <p>Specifically, states should provide guidance on timelines for school improvement planning, root cause analysis of needs, community engagement strategies, selection of evidence-based solutions, funding and progress monitoring.</p> <p>In the end, for the sake of all students and Michigan’s future vitality, these schools must be put on a long-term pathway for success.</p>	<p>MDE leaders have indicated that they do not plan to publish the methodology for identifying low-performing schools—including schools where a subgroup of students is struggling—before submitting the state plan to the federal government in April 2017. This includes criteria for determining whether a school has made enough gains to be on a path for long-term academic success, also known as “exit criteria.”</p> <p>The current draft plan also explains that federal school improvement funds will be appropriated through formula grants to low-performing schools. MDE also plans to create criteria for a competitive grant to one or more districts to facilitate statewide technical assistance.</p> <p>To help struggling schools and districts, MDE is also proposing a “district partnership-model.” The model is targeted at districts with one or more “F” schools and is aimed at addressing both academic and “whole child” outcomes.</p> <p>So while the MDE lays out some detail around the school improvement process, it does not go into much depth on the supports the state will be providing to low-performing schools—including specific strategies for where a subgroup of students is underperforming. In many areas, the MDE’s draft plan largely includes just promises to comply with the ESSA law itself.</p>	<p>ETM urges the MDE to develop and publish its methodology for identifying low-performing schools prior to plan submission, including schools where a group of students is struggling. Given the importance of identification, these decisions should be made in a transparent manner, in consultation with stakeholders and with opportunity for public comment. Without this information, the MDE’s plan is sorely incomplete.</p> <p>Similarly, the MDE must provide much greater clarity on the school improvement process for both low-performers and schools where a subgroup of students is struggling, not just promises that it will be done right. For the sake of students in the state’s low-performing schools, this isn’t something that can be taken for granted.</p> <p>Finally, research shows that sustained school improvement is hard work, meaning the MDE’s “district partnership-model” or any other federal improvement strategies and dollars must be monitored to show real impact. In the past, it’s often been unclear how federal school improvement dollars have proven to be effective. Leading states like Massachusetts demonstrate that this information is vital to the school improvement process.</p>





ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATORS FOR MICHIGAN’S MOST VULNERABLE STUDENTS

Research is clear: the number one in-school factor for student success is quality educators, including both teachers and school leaders. Unfortunately, data suggests that our most vulnerable students aren’t as likely to receive high-quality educators as their peers. ESSA requires that states not only identify where these gaps exist, but that states take active steps to close these gaps.

	BEST PRACTICE	MDE’S DRAFT PLAN	ETM RECOMMENDATION
<p>TEACHING QUALITY AND EQUITY</p>	<p>Addressing gaps in access to quality educators for our most vulnerable students is two-fold.</p> <p>First, states need a way to actually distinguish “effective” and “ineffective” educators—namely through a rigorous and objective educator evaluation and feedback system. Indeed, a strong educator evaluation system was among the essential levers that aided turnaround efforts in the fast-improving state of Tennessee.</p> <p>This involves a common definition of teaching quality—one that combines measures of an educator’s impact on their student’s academic growth along with observations of their instruction. To do so, states need an honest and aligned assessment, and to provide sufficient training to help facilitate thoughtful observations and feedback of classroom instruction. To support successful implementation in Tennessee, their department of education supported training for 5,000 school and district leaders on effective classroom observation strategies.</p> <p>Second, district leaders, principals and local superintendents should take proactive steps to close teaching equity gaps where they exist. Districts need to re-evaluate staffing policies to ensure strategic placement of top educators—those proven to dramatically impact student achievement—with their most vulnerable students.</p>	<p>MDE has four overlapping strategies to improve teacher quality in Michigan, with priority given to high-needs districts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships between districts and educator preparation programs</li> <li>• Mentorship for new educators</li> <li>• Professional learning and growth opportunities for educators</li> <li>• Career pathways and educator retention strategies</li> </ul> <p>According to the MDE, addressing inequitable access to quality educators can be inherently addressed if these strategies are actually done well. MDE does not, however, suggest separate strategies for addressing the different rates of access to strong teachers for our most vulnerable students.</p> <p>MDE’s proposal also notes that data systems are in development currently to track which students are assigned to ineffective, out-of-field, and inexperienced teachers. MDE expects such data systems to track educator equity to become available in June 2019.</p>	<p>Today, about 98 percent of educators are rated as “effective” or better, meaning there is no objective way to identify the state’s top educators. In order to create a meaningful definition of teaching quality, MDE must support local implementation of the state’s educator evaluation system—moving beyond voluntary guidance.<sup>vi</sup></p> <p>Likewise, plans to drop the M-STEP may not only weaken school accountability, but could prevent educators from receiving honest feedback on student progress. It could also further delay progress on teaching equity data, well past June 2019.</p> <p>The issue of defining teaching quality impacts other arenas too. Turning around low-performing schools often includes focusing on talent—which can’t be fully addressed without strong educator evaluation, either.</p> <p>Evaluation alone isn’t enough to improve teaching quality. MDE must also ensure an unwavering commitment to teaching quality in high-poverty and high-minority communities.</p> <p>And while efforts to improve teacher quality are critical, district leadership must ensure that their most vulnerable students are strategically placed with their best educators. The plan fails to address the role local leadership has in closing these gaps. MDE should provide incentives and consequences for local leaders to do so. This further emphasizes the need for a strong school district accountability system. <i>For more information, please see the section on School Ratings.</i></p>



HONEST AND TRANSPARENT PUBLIC REPORTING OF HIGH-QUALITY DATA

The annual transparency dashboard provides the public with data on how their schools and districts are performing on pertinent school quality measures. This information is indispensable for parents of vulnerable students, as this data can shine a light on the inequities of our public education system.

	BEST PRACTICE	MDE’S DRAFT PLAN	ETM RECOMMENDATION
<b>PUBLIC REPORTING AND TRANSPARENCY DASHBOARD</b>	<p>Unlike the school accountability system, which includes a limited set of indicators that schools are accountable for meeting, the transparency dashboard should provide the public with a broad overview of school quality.</p> <p>All of this data should be broken down by student subgroups as well, where appropriate.</p>	<p>MDE plans to report on 20+ different indicators across multiple topic areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement</li> <li>• Educator engagement</li> <li>• School climate and culture</li> <li>• Advanced coursework</li> <li>• Postsecondary readiness</li> <li>• Access/Equity</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the MDE is proposing that districts voluntarily report data from student climate surveys and suspension rates.</p>	<p>ETM commends the MDE’s commitment to transparency and recommends that any and all data be reported in a way that is accessible to the public.</p> <p>ETM recommends that the dashboard include measures like per-pupil expenditures, access to quality educators in high- and low-pov-erty districts, discipline data, early childhood program access, advanced coursework completion and postsecondary success.</p> <p>Most importantly, one of the key pieces of information that the state must share with the public is whether students are meeting grade level standards. To do so, the state must have a strong assessment—yet another reason Michigan should keep the M-STEP.</p>

<sup>i</sup> Amber Arellano, Suneet Bedi and Terry Gallagher, “Michigan’s Talent Crisis: The Economic Case for Rebuilding Michigan’s Broken Public Education System,” The Education Trust-Midwest (2016). <https://midwest.edtrust.org/michiganachieves/>

<sup>ii</sup> The U.S. Department of Education has established two dates for submission of state ESSA plans: April 3, 2017 or September 18, 2017.

<sup>iii</sup> Chad Aldeman, “Grading Schools: How States Should Define ‘School Quality’ Under the Every Student Succeeds Act,” Bellwether Education Partners (2016). [http://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether\\_GradingSchools\\_FINAL101916.pdf](http://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether_GradingSchools_FINAL101916.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Morgan S. Polikoff, Matthew Duque and Stephani Wrabel, “A Proposal for School Accountability under ESSA.” ESSA Accountability Design Competition (2016). <https://goo.gl/GrRVFe>

<sup>v</sup> David J. Deming, Sarah Cohodes, Jennifer Jennings and Christopher Jencks, “When Does Accountability Work?,” Education Next (2016), Volume 16, No. 1. <http://educationnext.org/when-does-accountability-work-texas-system/>

<sup>vi</sup> MCL 380.1249