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A Call to Action for Michigan Businesses

The restructuring of the world economy, global competition, international economic integration, and technological change are creating demand for a workforce with new skill levels and competencies. As organizations representing Michigan business and employing over 200,000 people, the members of Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence are concerned that the graduates of our schools are not prepared to meet the challenges posed by global economic competition.

Our state and nation's future economic security, and our ability to flourish as a democratic society, demands a generation of high school graduates with solid academic knowledge, world-class technical skills, conscientious work habits, and eager, creative and analytical minds. Despite some encouraging recent gains, business continues to have trouble finding qualified workers.

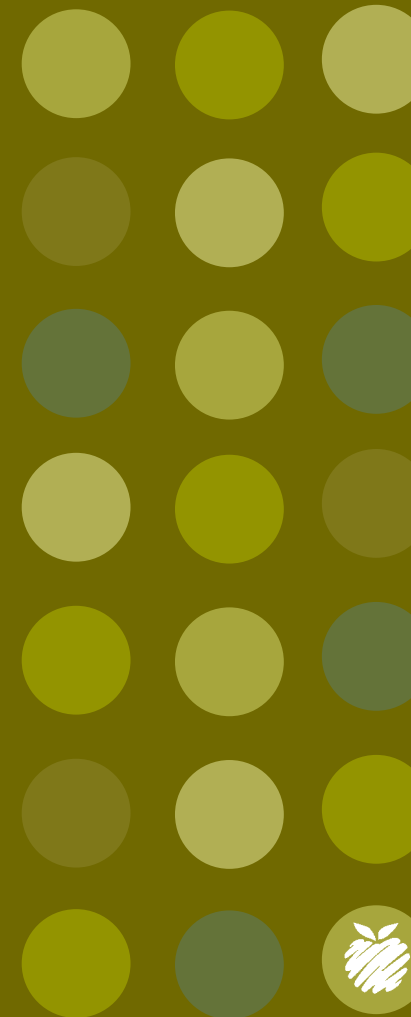
In this state there are remarkable schools, outstanding teachers, and examples of excellence in education in every region. But high standards and opportunities to achieve them must be available to all students, and must reach into every community. Our state is home to businesses ranging from global corporations to small entrepreneurs. The time has come for business to participate far more actively in promoting high achievement for all of our students. We urge every business to actively support efforts to improve education in every corner of the state.

After a decade of education reform in Michigan, including overhauls of finance, assessment, accountability and curriculum, the timing couldn't be better for a fresh look at educational progress and needs in our state. This report provides facts and data related to Michigan's educational achievement, perceptions and ideas of Michigan's leading educators and education organization executives, business leaders and policy makers, and an analysis of opportunities for impact.



Education NOW 2002

A Summary Report on the State of Education in Michigan
PROGRESS, GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT



PRESENTED BY THE MICHIGAN BUSINESS LEADERS FOR EDUCATION EXCELLENCE

MBLEE



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THE
TIME FOR
ACTION IS
NOW



In January 2002, the President and Congress finalized reforms of federal education programs. For the first time in the nation's history, federal, state, and community efforts will be aligned toward the same goals to improve academic achievement. The **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001** builds on the work started in the states and provides new accountability measures and resources to help raise the achievement of students nationwide. The national Business Roundtable (BRT), with a coalition of over 70 business leaders, played a key role in framing the **No Child Left Behind** legislation with most of its recommendations incorporated into the new law.

The business community has a vital role to play in efforts to improve the quality of education in Michigan. States now have great flexibility in how some reforms are accomplished and business leaders should advocate for the priorities that make the most difference. Over the next year local districts will be developing plans, accountability systems, and strategies for improving student achievement that will create opportunities for business involvement. This document is intended to serve as a starting point for discussion and for building an agenda for improvement with other education stakeholders in our state and communities. The data and details used to develop this report are available at www.michamber.com.

How this Report was Developed

Since its inception in 1990, the Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence has conducted three assessments of the progress of school reform in the state, in 1992, 1995 and 1998. The previous assessments, Gap Analysis I, II and III, were organized around the Essential Components of a Successful Education System, a nine point policy agenda for K-12 education improvement adopted by the national BRT. These Essential Components served as key focal points as the **No Child Left Behind** legislation was developed. This report on progress and opportunities examines Michigan's status on progress towards the Essential Components and the related requirements of the **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**.

Over forty of Michigan's leading educators and education organization executives, business leaders and policy makers were interviewed to assess their perceptions of Michigan's education reforms and progress. Research, data and documentation from universities, the state and federal governments, and nonprofit organizations were studied. Included in the full report are a summary of perceptions and ideas of survey participants and quantitative facts about Michigan's educational achievement.

The report is organized in two main sections that mirror the major thrusts of the **No Child Left Behind** legislation and the related Essential Components.

1. Measuring the Quality of Education
2. Improving the Quality of Education

The full report can be accessed at www.michamber.com or by contacting **Jim Sandy, Executive Director, Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence**.



Participants



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The Honorable Gary Peters, Vice Chair Senate Education Committee, Michigan Senate
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Jeremy Hughes, Michigan Department of Treasury
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Kathleen Straus, President, Michigan State Board of Education
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Ray Telman, Executive Director, Middle Cities Education Association
Jay Van Den Berg, Whirlpool Corporation
Glenn Walstra, Executive Director, Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools
Michael David Warren, Secretary, Michigan State Board of Education
Tom Watkins, Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Michigan
The Honorable Wayne Kuipers, Michigan House of Representatives
Joanne Welihan, Executive Director, Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association
David Whitwam, Chairman and CEO, Whirlpool Corporation

A New Model for Collaboration

At the state level, MBLEE, along with the leadership of other education-related organizations serving statewide constituencies has formed the Education Alliance of Michigan. Members of the Alliance, their names highlighted above, participated in this survey and are working together to collectively address the challenges each faces as we work to ensure that all students achieve. Community and regional alliances of stakeholders across the state have a new opportunity for impact. Let this discussion be a starting point.



The Business Roundtable's Essential Components of a Successful Education System

Our Agenda; Our Tie to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001



STANDARDS

A successful system clearly defines, in measurable terms, expectations for what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in school, in the workplace and in life. A successful system aligns and focuses its policies and programs on student achievement of high academic standards.

MBLEE supports the alignment of local curriculum frameworks with high state standards as a top priority for districts. High expectations, embodied in content standards that represent important learning are at the heart of the MBLER reform agenda. **No Child Left Behind** requires states to align challenging academic standards in core subjects with assessment, professional development and accountability systems.

ASSESSMENTS

A successful system focuses on results, measuring and reporting student, school and system performance so that students, teachers, parents and the public can understand and act on the information.

MBLEE has continuously pressed for an assessment program that is carefully aligned with content standards. The Standard and Poor's School Evaluation Services project and the Michigan School Report are two examples of reports on school performance that MBLER has promoted as a resource for all education decision-makers. **No Child Left Behind** requires annual testing in reading and math from grades 3 through 8 and participation in the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

ACCOUNTABILITY

A successful system bases consequences for policymakers, educators, and students on demonstrated performance. It provides students the curriculum, instruction and time they need to succeed. It assists schools that are struggling to improve, rewards exemplary schools and penalizes schools that persistently fail to educate their students.

MBLEE has long advocated for an effective school accountability system in Michigan that requires schools to ensure all students are making progress. MBLER supports a school accountability model that provides rewards and support for high-performing schools and tough sanctions for failing schools. **No Child Left Behind** requires all demographic groups in all schools to make "adequate yearly progress" toward being proficient against state academic standards. The Act provides rewards for improvement and consequences for persistent failure.

SCHOOL AUTONOMY

A successful system gives individual schools the freedom of action and resources necessary for high performance and true accountability.

MBLEE supports local autonomy of schools to create an environment in which parents and professionals collaborate, and advocates for positions that allow schools to make their own decisions related to their environment and operation. **No Child Left Behind** provides new flexibility for states in allocating Federal dollars to state identified priorities with the goal that every child in every school will succeed.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A successful system enables parents to support the learning process, influence schools and make choices about their children's education.

MBLEE has been a proponent of parental choice since its inception and has supported legislation to enable Charter school options and inter-district choice. MBLER has also supported initiatives to provide parents with information about school performance. **No Child Left Behind** ensures that parents of children in schools that are failing to make adequate yearly progress in learning for all student groups may exercise options to attend other schools.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A successful system insists on meaningful preparation and continuous learning for teachers and administrators that drives improved teaching, learning and school management.

MBLEE is working with other stakeholder groups to move toward a system of professional development for teachers that is focused on content area knowledge, designed to meet specific needs, and linked to the state's core content standards. A core component of **No Child Left Behind** focuses on improving teacher quality through training and assessment and, by ensuring that all teachers are qualified in the subjects they teach.

LEARNING READINESS

A successful system recognizes the importance of the years before children come to school. It provides high-quality pre-kindergarten education for disadvantaged children. It also builds strong partnerships with other public and private agencies to overcome learning barriers caused by poverty, neglect, violence or ill health for students of all ages.

MBLEE supports proposals to target funding for pre-kindergarten programs, especially in schools serving concentrations of low achieving students, and encourages business support of volunteer mentoring and child-supportive programs. Helping all children learn to read by the third grade is a pillar of **No Child Left Behind** and calls for substantial concentration and investment in pre-kindergarten programs.

TECHNOLOGY

A successful system places no barriers to the creative use of technology to broaden access to knowledge, to improve learning and productivity, and to achieve student expectations.

Michigan has implemented technology initiatives over the past decade, many of which are aligned to MBLER recommendations. Policies have been advanced for integrating the use of technology into the core curriculum content standards, emphasizing the applications of technology in teacher education programs and providing professional development for teachers. **No Child Left Behind** targets flexible funds to states to strengthen the integration of technology in teaching and learning.

SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE

A successful system provides a safe, well-disciplined and caring environment for student learning.

MBLEE advocates for business involvement in local community efforts to guarantee safe schools and for the safety of students traveling to and from school. Safety and discipline involves both facility and human issues and MBLER supports local efforts to address unique local needs in these areas. **No Child Left Behind** provides flexible funding to states to address priority issues.





Measuring the Quality of Education

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 calls for:

- **Testing annually to make sure that all children are competent in core subjects.** Within 4 years, all states must implement annual tests in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 to measure student achievement. By 2007-2008, states must administer science assessments at least once in each grade span from 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12.
- **Requiring participation in the National Assessment of Educational Progress.** All states are required to participate in NAEP testing every two years in both reading and math to verify results of state tests.
- **Holding schools accountable for results.** Within two years, all schools and school districts will be held accountable for all demographic groups making “adequate yearly progress” toward being “proficient” against state academic standards. The Act requires 100 percent of students to be proficient within 12 years.
- **Giving rewards to schools that improve and providing consequences for schools that persistently fail.** Schools that show improvement will be rewarded. Persistently low-performing schools are required to take corrective action or face complete restructuring.

Standards



The United States Department of Education released information on July 1, 2002, about the number of Title I schools identified for improvement. Because Michigan’s standards for achievement are much higher than those of most states, Michigan had the highest number of schools on the list. Support for maintaining those high standards was unanimous among survey participants, with the caveat that clear and consistent curriculum frameworks, textbooks and aligned professional development for educators must be provided.

Because Michigan’s standards for curriculum are not mandated, there is a great deal of variance across districts. Yet, all students are tested on the same standards for achievement through the MEAP testing program. This local control over curriculum creates inevitable inequities for students. The quality of local curriculum is determined by local educators and Boards of Education, which are made up of people with varying expectations for their students and varying degrees and types of expertise. Most participants agreed - the current set of curriculum frameworks and standards provided by the Michigan Department of Education needs further refinement, especially in light of the requirement for annual testing of **No Child Left Behind**.



Progress

The Department of Education has been in the process of developing curriculum frameworks aligned to the state recommended core curriculum for a number of years. Additionally, the Department has developed tools for teachers (MI CLiMB) to clarify the meaning of the Michigan Curriculum Frameworks by defining the specialized language of each benchmark, and by providing an instructional example, an assessment example, and resources.

Gaps

Because Michigan’s standards for curriculum are not mandated, local curriculums vary according to the will and priorities of local educators, citizens and boards of education, creating inevitable inequities for students. Additionally, the current set of frameworks provided by the state needs grade-level specificity and clarification.

Opportunity

A high quality curriculum with academic standards and skills that will lead to future success in the workforce is vital to our future. Michigan needs a focused, grade-level curriculum that is aligned to performance expectations on state and national tests as well as to employer expectations in a competitive, global economy. We must work to ensure that every student has the opportunity to benefit from the state curriculum.

Assessment



An assessment program carefully aligned with demanding standards for student learning is a vital element of any systematic effort to improve schools. Michigan's students have been participating in state testing programs since the 1970's. Survey participants largely agree that the Michigan Education Assessment Program tests (MEAP) are good tests, with a high standard for proficiency and a national reputation for excellence. Performance on these, and other standardized tests provides the most commonly applied indicator of educational progress.

Most survey participants said that they believe Michigan's students have made tremendous learning gains – with some important exceptions. Those who saw a marked improvement attributed the gains to a shift in attitude towards standards-based reform. Survey participants noted that the adoption of Public Act 25 in 1990 was the beginning of a new ownership and reaction to student achievement. A commonly held viewpoint was that for the first time, many people inside the education system accepted that there was indeed an achievement gap and that people in the school buildings now view measurement of student progress much differently than they did ten years ago.

“Overall, we’re improving, but is it enough? We need to make sure all of our students are achieving.”

– David Whitwam, Whirlpool Corporation



Progress

Michigan's MEAP tests have received much attention over the past decade and have evolved into a rigorous testing program with high performance expectations. Michigan's students are steadily improving their performance on the state tests. The MEAP Score Outlook shows that while progress is being made in reading, at the current rate of improvement, 100% of Michigan's students will reach proficiency in 2022, seven years after the 2015 target set by **No Child Left Behind**. In the last decade the number of students scoring in the Satisfactory range on reading and math tests has increased by over 20 percent. Michigan's students score slightly above the national average in every subject on national achievement tests (NAEP).

Gaps

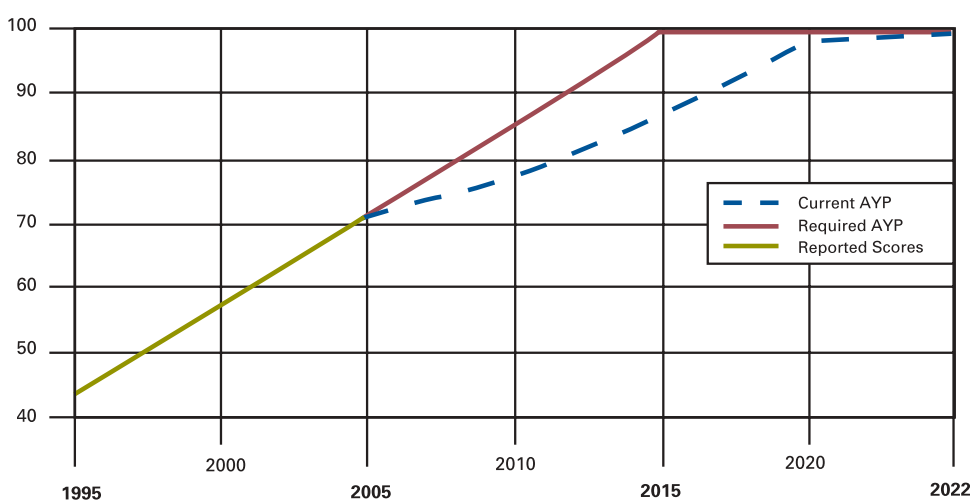
An alarming gap exists in achievement between minority and poor children and their white, non-poor counterparts. On national tests black 8th graders score nearly four years behind white students in math and science. Low income 8th graders score more than two years behind non-poor 8th graders in math and reading. When compared internationally, Michigan's students score well behind those in the highest performing countries, including Korea, Japan, Belgium, Hungary and Canada on math tests. Performance on the science test was better, with Michigan's students scoring above the national average by over twenty points. Although Michigan's performance compared to international competitors is far from stellar, it is better than the other participating states.

Opportunity

Michigan's rigorous testing program provides a solid foundation on which to build the annual testing program required by **No Child Left Behind**. However, research shows that the curriculum standards provided to educators lack coherence and are inconsistently applied. Without consistent preparation, performance on tests will continue to vary across populations and school districts. A world-class, demanding curriculum that is uniform statewide and aligned to global and national achievement measures will help to alleviate achievement gaps.

Meap Score Outlook

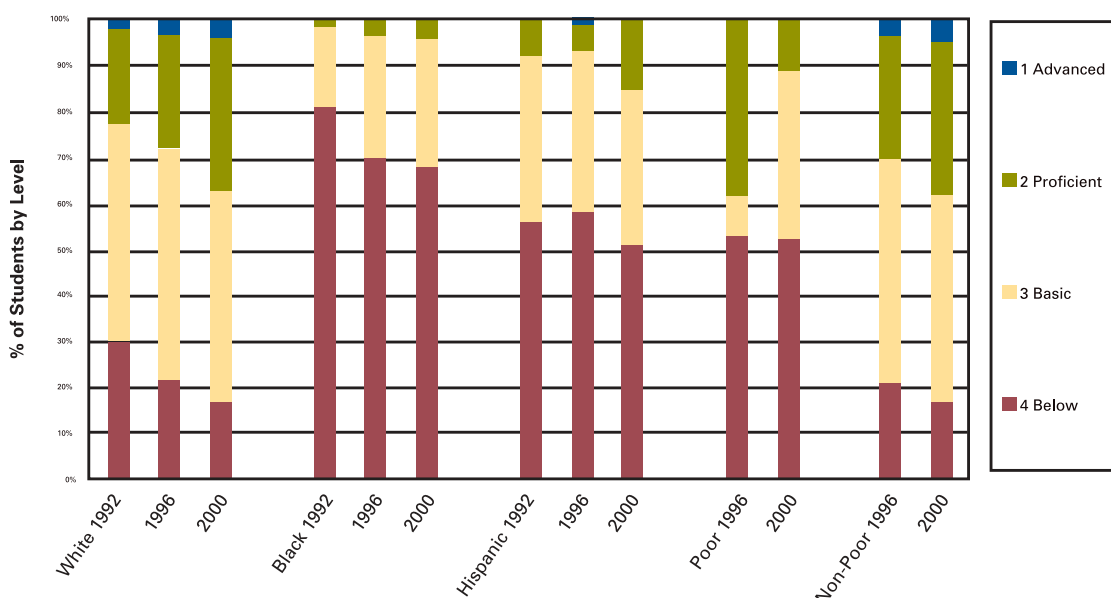
4th Grade Reading



Data Source: Michigan Department of Treasury

NAEP Average Math Achievement

4th Grade Michigan Students



Data Source: U.S. Department of Education



Accountability



The MEAP test has long been the cornerstone of Michigan’s school accreditation program. In 2002, State Superintendent Tom Watkins announced a new accreditation plan with multiple indicators of school success. Most survey participants said they thought the new plan was a move in the right direction, while several others expressed concern that achievement tests should continue to be the primary indicator of a school’s success. The **No Child Left Behind Act** requires that the state’s accountability system be based primarily on academic indicators.

The response to the **No Child Left Behind** requirement for annual testing was positive. Respondents agree that annual testing may provide important information about critical learning gaps in the elementary and middle grades and enable earlier intervention. Education and business leaders agree that the goal of the testing program should be to make the results available and accessible to parents and teachers in a timely manner so they, in turn, can use the information to help ensure that every child meets performance standards.

All survey participants agreed that developing an effective school accountability program that leads to improved student achievement is a complex task. All survey participants expressed a hope that the system would focus first on helping schools improve, then, if necessary impose sanctions as appropriate. Rewards for success and sanctions for non-performance are supported, although there is little agreement about the most effective ways to sanction schools without punishing students in the process.

*“Threat of closure isn’t enough.
These schools need help.”*

– Nellie La Garde, DaimlerChrysler Corporation

● Progress

Michigan has made great strides in the movement toward accountability for results. The Standard and Poor’s School Evaluation Service, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce’s P.A.S.S. program to identify high performing schools, the new Education Yes! accreditation program of the Department of Education, and the new Just For the Kids individual student record database project all provide public information about how our schools are performing. Mechanisms for accountability are in place, or near completion.

● Gaps

Data systems for accountability will only realize their true potential to impact student achievement when they have the capacity to be used for diagnostic purposes as well as for measurement. Currently Michigan’s schools lack the ability to use individual-level student data to identify learning needs. Further, a statewide system of resources to support teachers and schools with underperforming students is not coordinated, aligned, or readily available.



● Opportunity

Consequences for failing schools are important, and no student should be trapped in a failing school. However, we must implement a systematic structure of support to address school and student needs so that all students have an opportunity to achieve and schools have an opportunity to improve before sanctions are applied. Teachers need the capacity to use data on individual student performance to make instructional decisions that will enable each to progress, and to ensure that no child is left behind, and no school is failing.

A photograph of a female teacher in a green cardigan standing in a classroom, smiling, with several students in the foreground with their hands raised. A chalkboard is visible in the background.

Improving the Quality of Education



The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 calls for:

- **Aligning the educational system with the goals of student achievement.** All states must align challenging academic standards in core subjects with assessments, professional development and accountability systems.
- **Empowering parents by requiring schools to regularly report student performance data.** All school districts are required to disclose, by school and subgroup, annual student performance data in formats easily understood by parents and educators.
- **Improving the quality of teaching.** In five years, all teachers must be highly qualified in the subjects they teach. By then, veteran teachers must have a BA, and pass a state test or uniform state evaluation of proficiency, and all new hires must have a BA and demonstrate knowledge on a state test.
- **Strengthening math and science education and using technology to help children learn.** Math and science partnerships can tap higher education, business, and non-profit organizations to raise achievement in those subjects. Additional funds are targeted to integrate technology in teaching and learning.
- **Helping all children learn to read by the third grade.** States participate in a new \$1 billion initiative for pre-K through 3 reading programs to ensure all children can read by third grade.
- **Investing more money in education, and making sure that it's tied to results.** The law directs substantial reforms to state and local educational systems and will annually invest about \$22 billion nationwide to aid implementation.

School Autonomy



In order for schools to make informed decisions that lead to improved achievement for their students, a reliable, timely system of information is critical. Information, combined with effective school leadership, empowers teachers and parents to address weaknesses and target resources where they are needed most. Current research in education policy asserts that instructional leadership is at the heart of school leadership. Effective instructional leadership requires knowledge about pedagogy, curriculum standards and benchmarks, effective instruction, assessment and data analysis, and about constantly emerging research in all of these areas and more.

Progress

Michigan has recently forged partnerships with Standard and Poor's and Just for the Kids to assist with the state's data system and provide comparative analyses on school resources, performance and demographics. Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) is in the process of putting the finishing touches on a new information system that will include data on the performance of every child in every public school in Michigan. The availability of timely, specific data on student performance at the school building level is soon to be a reality that, if applied, will have far-reaching impact.

Gaps

Principal leadership and effectiveness has been eroded in recent years, weakening the ability of school staffs to make effective building-level decisions. A recurring concern expressed by survey participants was related to the shortage of qualified candidates for school principal positions. In a 2002 study of Michigan's school principal shortage, Professor Philip Cusick of Michigan State University, finds that the main reason many choose not to apply is that the job has become more demanding and less attractive.

Opportunity

The time is now to define and align the role of the school principal with the real requirements of effective school leadership and accountability. Michigan currently has no state requirements for principal certification. In this void lies an opportunity to create a leadership model that incorporates clear accountability for results with standards and appropriate professional development.





Parent Involvement

Everyone agrees – parental involvement is fundamental to student and school success. Survey participants noted an increase in parental involvement in many areas due to new collaborative school improvement efforts. Many also expressed dismay that there are still many barriers to parent participation, in schools and in society. **No Child Left Behind** offers unprecedented opportunity for parents to make informed choices and to actively participate in their children’s education through the availability of information about student achievement and the ability to exercise options when progress is inadequate.

In 1994, Michigan became one of the first states to pass legislation permitting the establishment of “public school academies.” Michigan’s so-called charter-school law is one of the most far-reaching in the nation – second only to Arizona’s and Delaware’s in the amount of autonomy given charters, the kind allowed, and other factors. Michigan’s charter school legislation, coupled with inter-district choice policies, has provided many families with viable alternatives to choose from for their children.



“There is a wealth of information available to parents now, thanks to technology and new reports.”

– Jim Sandy, MBLER



Progress ●

Michigan currently has 189 charter schools with approximately 64,500 students, 3.8 percent of all students. There was strong agreement among survey participants from all sectors that charter schools have provided important options for parents and families, especially in urban areas with low performing schools. **No Child Left Behind** requires that parents of children in persistently failing schools be given the choice to attend another school.

Gaps ●

When the charter-school law was enacted, supporters believed that the schools would introduce a positive competitive factor that would motivate traditional schools to perform better, and that the flexibilities created would create centers of innovation in everything from school structure and organization to instructional practice. Some expressed disappointment in the amount of innovation, while others noted that the ability to innovate has been stifled by increasing efforts to impose regulations on charter schools.

Opportunity ●

As Michigan’s charter schools become firmly established in their communities, opportunities to innovate may be explored. New flexibility in federal funding to the states will provide a way for schools to target innovations and improvements to specific needs of their students. **No Child Left Behind** creates an opportunity for parents to make choices about their children’s education.

Professional Development



“The quality of our teachers is good, but a different career model is needed.”

– Mike Schmidt,
Ford Motor Company

Experts and observers agree, what happens between the student and teacher is the biggest factor in the formula for student success. Michigan’s higher education system graduates more teachers than any other state in the nation – no evidence of a teacher shortage in this state. More than one survey respondent commented on the high quality of new graduates from Schools of Education. A more critical issue for Michigan’s schools now is having enough teachers teaching in content areas for which they are qualified, particularly in math and science.

Survey participants were unanimous in their desire for ‘more and better’ professional development at all levels of the system. All agreed that a new model, based on standards, driven by subject area content and learning needs of students, and delivered according to the individual needs of the teacher or administrator is paramount.



“Professional development needs to be about the content, and individualized between the teacher and the principal.”

– Mark Murray, Grand Valley State University

Progress ●

According to most survey participants, recent graduates entering the teaching field are well-prepared to use technology and to successfully connect with students. The new climate of accountability for results in education has gained widespread acceptance among educators, opening doors to improvement in many schools. Instructional resources for the professional development of educators provide a wide array of options.



Gaps ●

Professional development for teachers is inefficient and ineffective because it is not focused on content, individualized or coordinated statewide for easy access. As many as 20 percent of teachers are teaching content for which they are not qualified. And, most significantly, there is a dearth of school leadership, largely attributed to the weakened role and authority of the school principal. Because the rewards are not equal to the challenge and responsibility of the job, fewer and fewer qualified candidates are attracted to the job and willing to take it.

Opportunity ●

The time is right to strengthen school leadership by focusing on the accountability, authority and skills of the school principal. A coordinated system of professional development should be developed that is focused on individual needs of educators to help students achieve content standards. Schools of Education can now better prepare teachers to understand and use content standards and individual student achievement data to improve performance.



Learning Readiness



An overwhelming majority of survey participants voiced strong belief that efforts to work with children and their families from birth, and especially from ages three until five, are critical to their future success. Current research confirms this perception. Early childhood, the period from birth to age five, is critically important in brain development. During brief periods of activity, the brain builds connections between cells that create the foundation for emotional control, mathematical and language abilities, and the capacity to form social attachments. When these brief periods of opportunity are missed, developing the capacity for learning becomes more difficult. The level and type of nutrition, stimulation and interaction a child experiences during the first five years of life determines whether these critical connections are made.

Interviewees advocated for investing more money on the “front end” of a child’s education, even at the expense of high school options. More than one respondent said that the senior year of high school should be restructured enabling more funding for early education initiatives. Response to the READY Kits for parents and programs like Head Start was enthusiastic. There were no clear preferences for how Michigan should address the need for early childhood education, and the options are many.

“All the research shows that we need to be doing much more before kids come to school. Why aren’t we doing it?”

– Justin King, Michigan Association of School Boards

Progress

Research over the last decade has proven that early childhood, the period from birth to age five, is critically important in brain development. If a child does not receive appropriate nutrition, stimulation and interaction in the early years, his or her capacity for learning is diminished. Further, studies have proven that a variety of early education programs produce real results.

Gaps

More must be done at the local level to reach families with children who may not have the early education and care that will prepare them to succeed in school. This responsibility has been, until recently, viewed primarily as a parental responsibility for child-care, versus a shared societal responsibility for early education.



Opportunity

Local and state entities should explore shifting school aid priorities to emphasize early childhood education. Partnership initiatives to address the needs of young children are making strides that can be built upon and enhanced for the benefit of Michigan’s children.



Technology



The use of technology in the delivery of instruction remains a priority and a challenge for Michigan’s schools. Interviewees were unanimous in their perception that the most critical factor in reaping the benefits of investments in technology for learning was in teacher preparation. Integrating technology in the teaching and learning process remains a challenge. Another, potentially powerful use of technology that was repeatedly cited by survey participants was in the collection, analysis and reporting of data on student achievement. Providing the technological infrastructure and training that will enable educators to harness the true power of data was viewed a key priority.

Progress

Technology is increasingly being used as a tool to teach core academic content. As new teachers, who have “grown up” with technology enter the workforce, their skill and comfort with technology is more closely aligned with that of today’s students. Significant investments, such as the laptops for teachers initiative and technology grants, have increased access to technology for teachers and students in most areas of the state.

Gaps

There are still many talented, experienced teachers who are far behind their students in skill and comfort with technology. The level of utilization varies widely across the state, with too little integration into the process of learning academic content. With regard to the use of student performance data, robust data and management systems at the state level for measuring student and school performance are not currently in place to provide timely, student-specific information to teachers and schools in formats they can readily access and use.

Opportunity

The integration of technology for teaching and learning should continue to be a priority in the professional development of teachers. The constantly evolving nature of technology demands an ongoing investment in teacher training that is tied to specific learning needs. Training must also be provided for building principals and others in the use of data for effective decision-making. The rapidly progressing ability to collect, analyze and report on achievement data for all students in the state should be harnessed and put to use as soon as possible.



Safety and Discipline



Even before other school improvement measures are considered, schools must provide a safe, well-disciplined, and caring environment in which learning can take place. High standards and meaningful learning are irrelevant if students and educators are concerned about their well-being while in school. While the safety of school environments remains a concern to parents, survey participants are mostly concerned with unsafe, inadequate facilities and infrastructure. Interviewees generally felt that the school finance reform law, Proposal A, has brought stability to school funding and has, to a large extent, equalized funding for the operation of Michigan’s schools. However, participants also noted that while Proposal A addressed concerns about operating funds, inequities in funding for capital needs had grown. Opinion was split on whether providing for facility needs was a state or local responsibility.



Progress

In 2000 the Michigan Legislature strengthened school safety laws by giving greater authority to school boards to expel or suspend students. The laws also require schools to submit an annual crime report to parents. The Education Week report Quality Counts 2002 found that 90 percent of 4th graders and 87 percent of 8th graders in Michigan reported that they feel very or moderately safe in school.

Gaps

Not all school needs were addressed in the provisions of Proposal A, including maintenance and improvement of facilities, which many feel contributes to the overall safety of the learning environment. The remaining funding gap between rich and poor districts is evident in the varying quality of school facilities.

Opportunity

Local and statewide dialogue about new ways to meet needs for facilities and technology is paramount. As we work to ensure that every student makes yearly progress toward learning goals, we must seek ways to provide a safe, stimulating environment that will facilitate learning and motivation to succeed.