



INSIGHTS FOR ACTION

Understanding the needs & barriers that students and families face in order to enrich students' future stories

September 2015 | v.2



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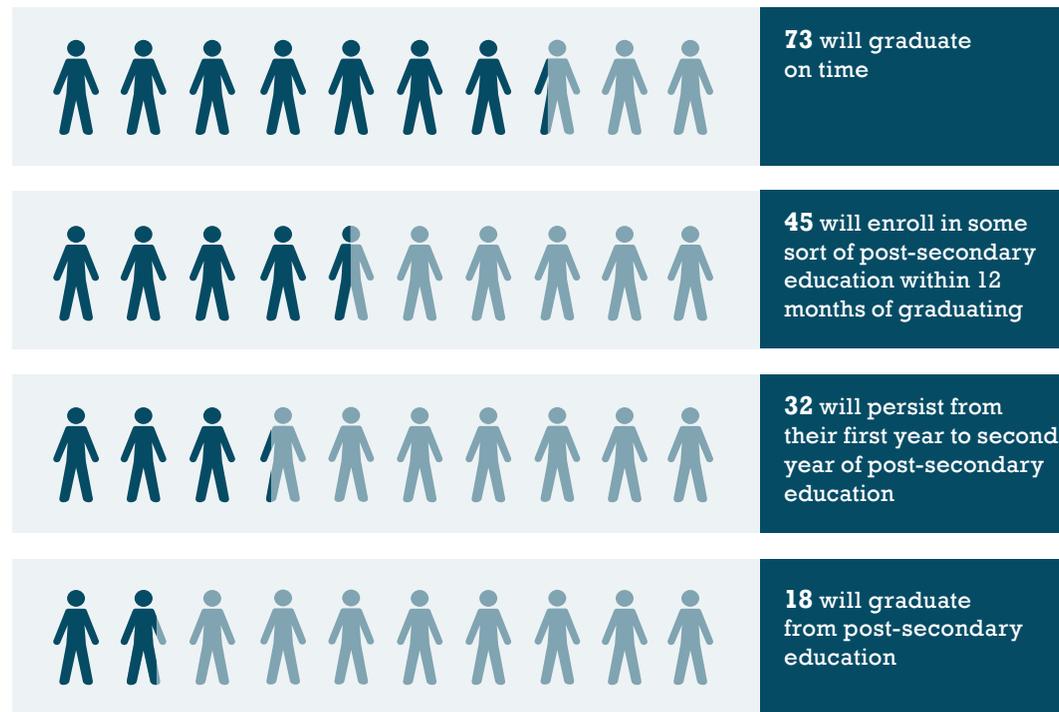
FRAMING THE PROBLEM

As a community, as a state and as a country, we have been collectively working on education for many years, but what we are doing is not enough. The world in which today's students live has profoundly changed from the time when the system was originally designed.

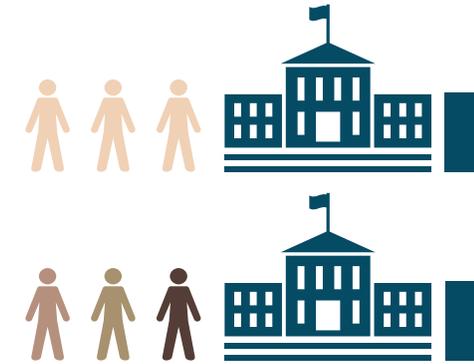
Our employers need a stronger pool of talent to draw from, talent that is ready to learn, work together and create new businesses, services and products. Our country needs better citizens, our families need more support and our kids deserve a more robust education and supportive environment that prepares them for the new realities of our changing world.

Our kids deserve better. Over the years, many in West Michigan have identified, through quantitative data and anecdotal evidence, that our high school seniors are not graduating ready for post-secondary education or a career.

Out of 100 9th graders:



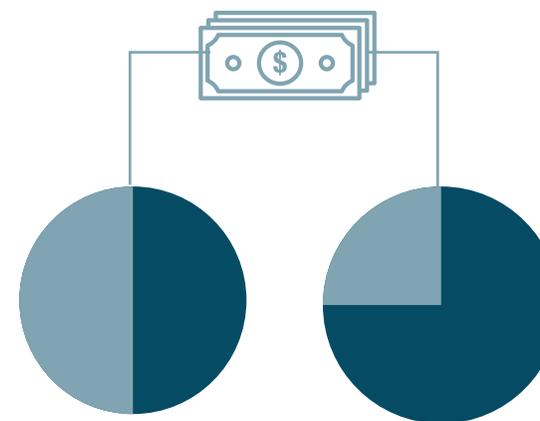
Employers cite a lack of work readiness among many recent graduates.



Black and Hispanic children are 12x more likely than white children to attend a school with concentrated poverty.

Remediation rates for first-year college students range from 40 to 60%.

So...why are children of West Michigan not graduating ready for post-secondary education and/or careers?



More than half of Michigan's low-income children are white

75% of Michigan's black and Hispanic children are low-income



High school dropouts are six times more likely to live in poverty than college graduates.

FINDING THE ROOT CAUSES

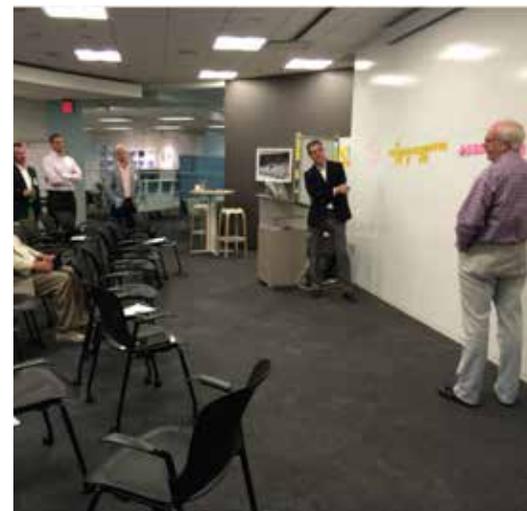
In 2013, CEOs and superintendents in West Michigan came together to create a shared understanding of the root causes preventing students from successfully completing school. Many causes emerged and the group was able to organize these root causes into three main areas.



In an effort to contextualize the meta-analysis to the West Michigan community, an ethnographic research project was designed and implemented. Through a series of interviews with students and families from a variety of circumstances and backgrounds, the design research project uncovered the barriers and needs behind the root causes of Ecosystem, Relevance and Rigor. The project contained two main objectives:

1. Understand System Context

What is the emotional and tangible experience of neighborhoods, school environments, home environments and economic environments, as well as understanding day-to-day interactions with the global economy?



2. Understand Kids and Families

- What are the motivations and aspirations that families have?
- What experiences do families have with learning, formal education and employment?
- What barriers do they face day-to-day?
- What success stories and achievement points do they have?
- What are key milestone/life moments (positive and negative)?
- Development of a cognitive map of the places children go each day and why

CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

A key element of the power of the K-12 Working Group (and TALENT 2025 as a whole) is the intentionality of approaching the education system with a cross-sector lens. Employers (representing the business community, as well as school districts and post-secondary institutions), Education, Government and the Community (including families as well as non-profit entities).

Needs, leading practices, evaluation of current solutions and ideation of new solutions need to be cross-sector in their approach. The challenges we face today, including the education system, are too complex and multi-faceted for any one sector to own and manage alone.

The recommendations and action steps at the end of this document outline possible responses for each sector:



WHY WAS THIS APPROACH DIFFERENT?

- A focus on bridging quantitative and qualitative data
- Remembering the true users of the education system: kids
- Acknowledging that schools face the burden of being the societal nexus point
- Coming to terms with the burden schools face as the societal nexus point
- Recognizing that the broader ecosystem is complex

THEN vs. NOW

In the past, the K-12 education system was focused on **rigor**, assumed **relevance** and had a much simpler **ecosystem** - even 20 years ago. The Ecosystem of 2015 and the future, is more complex and more interconnected than ever before. Understanding and addressing the realities that face students and the broader K-12 system requires a more intentional, urgent and creative approach than ever before.

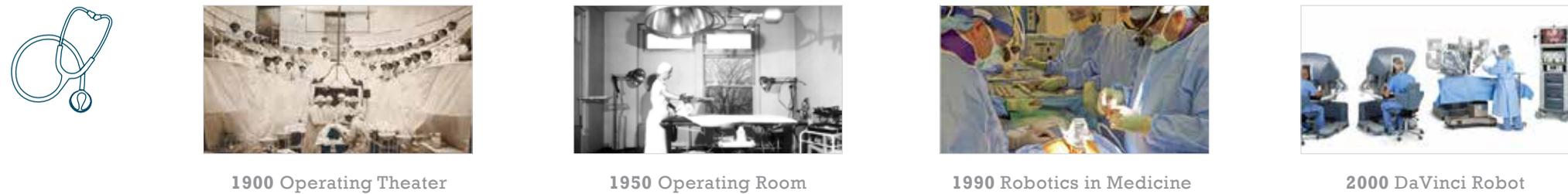
FAMILY STRUCTURE



AVERAGE U.S. HOUSEHOLD INCOME (ADJUSTED TO 2015 DOLLARS)



MEDICAL PRACTICES THROUGH THE YEARS



THE WORLD HAS CHANGED

THEN
1995



Motorola 8200



Oklahoma City Bombing



Dubai 1990



Ford Explorer



Tesla



Dubai 2015



ISIS



Apple Watch

NOW
2015

THEN vs. NOW

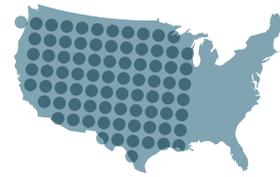
CHINA



Population:
1.2 Billion

GDP:
\$732 billion USD

UNITED STATES

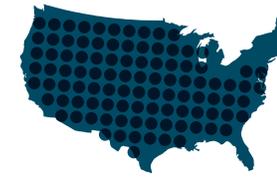


Population:
266.3 Million

GDP:
\$7 trillion USD



UNITED STATES



Population:
325 Million

GDP:
\$18 trillion USD

CHINA



Population:
1.4 Billion

GDP:
\$10.3 trillion USD



BULLYING 1995



AMAZON 1995



AMAZON 2015



CYBER BULLYING 2015



THE CHANGING WORKFORCE

In 1995 the average worker had around 6 jobs throughout their career.

Millennials are now expected to have 15-20 jobs throughout their career (staying at each 3 years or less).

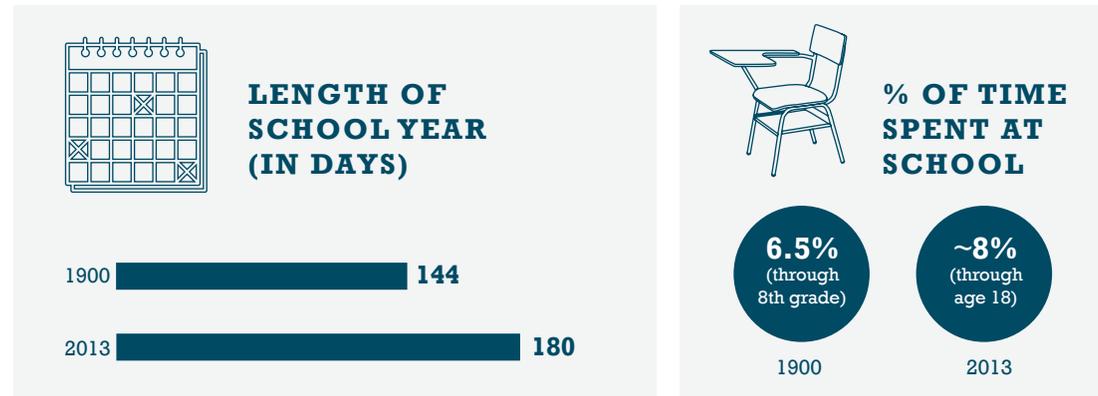


Jobs that exist now, but didn't in 1995:

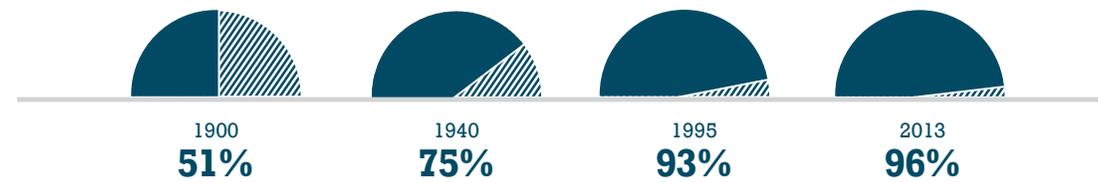
- Mobile App Developer
- Offshore Wind Engineer
- Big Data manager
- 3D Printing Designer
- Drone Pilot
- Social Media Coordinator
- Sustainability Consultant
- Chief Population Health Officer
- and the list goes on...

SCHOOL LIFE

The education system and school structure has certainly evolved over the past century, with great advances being made with the structure of the school day, the amount of the population that accesses and participates in the system and the number of children graduating from high school.



% OF POPULATION ENROLLED IN K-12



% OF POPULATION GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL



HAS EDUCATION EVOLVED WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD?

1900s



1950s



1990s



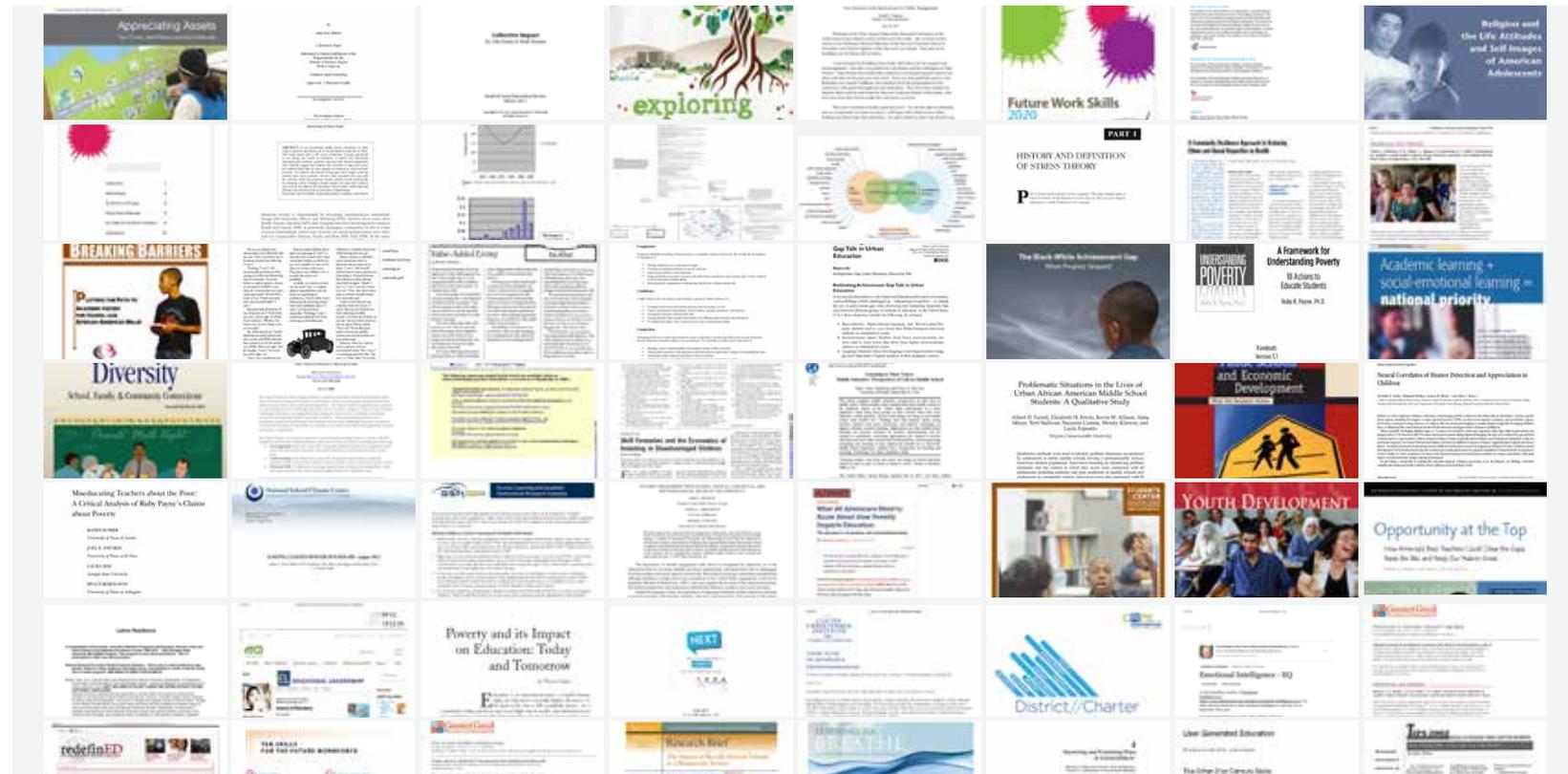
2000s



META ANALYSIS

To begin the K-12 barriers and needs project, the research team reviewed over 200 sources; books, studies, blogs and articles submitted and curated by superintendents and teachers, as well as Talent 2025 and NewNorth teams. The content provided a comprehensive view of the state of the broader ecosystem surrounding the K-12 education system, with the intent of gaining insights into conditions that either inhibit or motivate educational success and talent development for

youth; the primary focus was on populations that are statistically less likely to achieve traditionally defined educational success. The research team reviewed the content, captured key insights and synthesized the information into five key themes. The meta-analysis process and themes (and their associated key factors) provide consistent language behind the key drivers of success K-12 student performance, based on recognized and trusted academic research.



To begin the K-12 barriers and needs project, the research team reviewed over 200 sources

Emergence of Key Themes:

200 Articles, books, blogs, studies and white papers curated by Talent 2025, regional superintendents and research team.

* See Appendix for a list of sources

Resiliency & Emotional Intelligence:

The hub of one's resilience cycle is strong emotional intelligence and purposeful management of emotions. Emotional intelligence can be strengthened by individual, micro- and macro- level factors and developed with practice over time.

Cultural Competence:

It is possible to create a culturally competent ecosystem that values success of each individual without sacrificing academic rigor, relevance or belonging for any group.

Hope, Awareness & Future Perspective:

When students and educators have a growth mindset, they understand that intelligence can be developed. Students focus on improvement instead of worrying about how smart they are. They work hard to learn more and get smarter, look to the future and are engaged in their educational opportunities.

Family Matters:

The family is the primary human social organization that prepares the next generation to become members of society. Living conditions, stability and situational experiences are core drivers of positive youth development. Framing the context of poverty concentrated neighborhoods exclusively from a risk perspective significantly limits the scope of productive action.

The Power of Collaboration:

Collaboration across sectors is necessary to impact change within and for educational systems. Isolated interventions are not sufficient. Developing a common agenda to create collective impact is effective but rarely attempted.

ON SITE ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

APRIL – MAY 2015

The research team took the meta-analysis themes and developed attributes, which in turn guided the creation of an interview structure, discussion guide and interview toolkit.

The Meta-Analysis themes generated five key interview attributes, including:

- **Family and life (structure, culture and community)**
- **Personal and family values and perspectives (resiliency and future orientation)**
- **Access and navigation (resources, cultural challenges, community support)**
- **Secondary support systems (non-family)**
- **Personal experience and opportunities (learning to learn outside the school)**

The actual interviews lasted 90 minutes long and included four main sections (some were directly referenced by the discussion guide and some were investigated through interactive tools).

Interviews were conducted in the families' homes (where possible) or at a location of their choosing (such as a community library or coffee shop). Interviews included the student, siblings and guardians/parents. The research team consisted of a lead interviewer, a documentarian and a photographer. Several interviews included members of the K-12 Working Group on the research team, as well.

Families were recruited using local networks of influence and individual connection, as well as working with superintendents in the K-12 Working Group. Anonymity was guaranteed, names were changed, and families received photos and a movie gift card in exchange for their time.

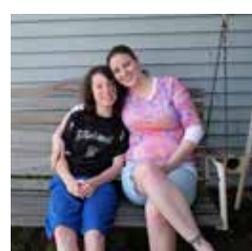
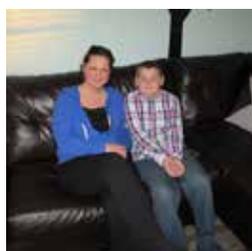
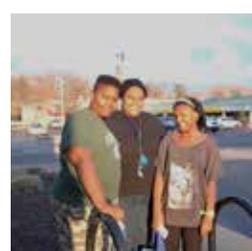


FAMILIES INTERVIEWED



Who we talked to

- 20 kids, from fourth grade through high school, representing 14 families
- Students attending private, charter and public schools in urban, suburban and rural communities across MEDC's Region 4
- Family units ranged from two parent homes, refugee families, adoptive families, and single parent homes
- Families represented a variety of ethnicities and socio-economic levels



INSIGHTS FOR ACTION:

Identify and describe key overarching observations grounded in a set of student needs



For each Insight, we have taken the work of the Leading Practices subgroup and integrated examples of key leading practices that exemplify and address key aspects of needs for each insight. In addition, we have used Martinez and McGrath's book *Deeper Learning* and matched examples from their book. As we looked at the insights presented in *Deeper Learning*, our research team was encouraged by the considerable amount of overlap and validation from national-level research and examples.



CONNECT PASSION & INTERESTS TO FUTURE



"I always draw when I'm home. Like every time I'm home I'm like ..." - Jenna

"Creative?" - Researcher

"No. I'm not creative. I'm more of just a drawing person." - Jenna

"Like artistic?" - Researcher

"No ... I just like to draw. I'm not really artistic." - Jenna

Student's passions fall between different areas within the ecosystem and few clear pathways exist for linking interests and passions to future applications.

WHY Many students, at this age either have difficulty connecting what they are most passionate about to their future, or feel they must delay practical application of their passion(s) until later in life. When students are able to connect their interests to future occupations it is often a very literal projection: "I'm good at math - I think I'll be an accountant!" "I love art and cartoons - I want to be an animator!" "I love planes - I want to be a pilot!" "I love to sew - I want to be in fashion."

When a teacher or mentor aligns a topic or task with a student's passions or curiosities, students are more likely to be self-motivated and have rewarding and memorable learning experiences. Students thrive when they have the opportunity to experience "life learning lessons" which are aligned with their own interests and benefit. In these instances, they are more apt to connect what they are learning and the skills they develop to future opportunities.

KEY POINTS

Passion as Hobby

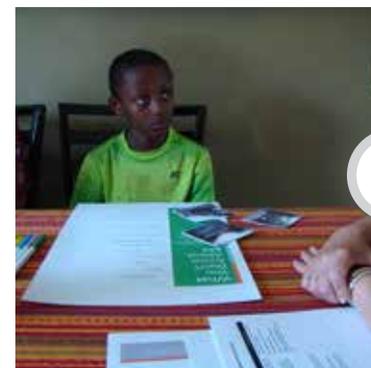
Passions are often thought of as "hobbies" (especially ones found outside the core curriculum) and are often left at home or reserved for free time.

Personal Connection to Learning

Students can use personal interests to overcome subject difficulty or connect with a topic in a more meaningful way. The ecosystem has the ability to motivate and expand student learning by connecting to their passions and interests leading to more rewarding and memorable learning experiences.

Delaying Passions

Many students believe they must wait to apply their passions until they reach a certain milestone: in high school, in college, when I'm adult, when I move out of Michigan.



"Writing is not my favorite, but one time for a journal assignment my friends and I wrote about us each being superheros and that made it fun. We even asked the teacher for more time to spend on them and she gave us 20 more minutes."

Ben
6th Grade

NEEDS & BARRIERS

Student's passions fall between different areas within the ecosystem and few clear pathways exist for linking interests and passions to future applications.

Noah loves art and wants to be an animator one day, but he doesn't enjoy the art classes at his school and doesn't see them as a way to help prepare him for a future in art.

"I love Disney, and I love animation. That's why I painted the Little Mermaid 'Kiss the Girl' scene. We'd never get to do something like this in art class. It's too prescriptive. They tell us what the end product should look like instead of letting us be creative."

Noah
5th Grade



“

"I believe I can make it to college and be a fashion designer . . . I've looked at Miami College, Yale and New York."
- Amy

"Do you know of any right here in Grand Rapids with a fashion program?"
-Researcher

"Umm... Not really."
- Amy

From:

Passions and interests have a time and a place

To:

Passions and interests are integrated throughout the ecosystem, promoting possibility and exploration

Learner Need:

Exposure to mentors and leaders with similar passions, illustrating a range of opportunities for the future

How Might We:

Help students explore and connect to relevant assets within W. Michigan that allow them to explore the context of their passion?

Learner Need:

Exposure to mentors and leaders with similar passions, illustrating a range of opportunities for the future

How Might We:

Help me explore and connect to relevant assets within West Michigan that allow me to explore the context of my passion?

Learner Need:

Truly understand what I'm passionate about and what elements can be put to use in other areas of my life now and in the future

How Might We:

Give students new outlets to explore their passions and develop skill sets they can apply in everyday life?

LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

Casco Bay High School's (in Portland, Maine) Susan McCray says:

"Do any of us live in a compartmentalized way? ... When things are so disjointed, they become discrete tasks and don't have purpose and meaning...Everything is related. Everything matters and we are all working all the time to help them see the connections. Everything is also integrated, so they can see and feel the meaning and purpose of what they are doing."

Ottawa County FuturePREP'd

In Ottawa County, FuturePREP'd creates a link between classroom teaching and workplace relevance, beginning with content, curriculum and experiences in sixth grade. Students, teachers and local employers are linked together to work on real-world projects.





DEVELOP VALUABLE CONNECTIONS THROUGHOUT MULTIPLE SUPPORT SYSTEMS



“I think there are some unintended consequences of moving away from neighborhood schools. The people my kids go to school with, versus the people they go to church with, versus the people they play with aren’t the same people.”

Brittney’s dad

While support systems are seemingly abundant, non-geocentric lifestyles challenge the ability to create deep relationships and connections.

WHY Community is no longer viewed as the people and places in the immediate area around a home, rather it is the various social circles in which a family interacts. Many families have different touchpoints and connections within each social circle, and those circles rarely intersect.

Student support systems are primarily influenced and defined by parents. Students need assistance and guidance to make meaningful connections and relationships that will benefit their future. Parent(s)/guardian(s) may have to search outside of the student’s school and immediate surroundings in order to find connections that fit best with their lifestyle and their student’s interests. Often, parents of currently achieving students will do this successfully, but in some cases, parents facilitate too many connections, spreading their student’s time too thin and hindering their ability create deeper relationships.

KEY POINTS

Breadth vs. Depth

Time, location and an abundance of choices can be barriers to collaboration and discourage depth in relationships. Depth can come from consistent relationships and activities, especially when social circles overlap.

Parent/Guardian Connectors

It’s often the responsibility of parents to create and foster a sense of community beyond the school setting. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of currently achieving students recognize where and how to get support to connect students with opportunities for growth outside of school.

Faith Community

Churches and other faith-based organizations influence priorities and character-building at home, bolstering parent/guardian and family values. They can also provide unique collaboration and opportunities for future building and support.



“Going on the College and Justice Tour [through their church] changed his life. He was 99% sure he wanted to go to GVSU and be an accountant, now he sees there are other options.”

Dillon’s mom

NEEDS & BARRIERS

While support systems are seemingly abundant, non-geocentric lifestyles challenge the ability to create deep relationships and connections.

Jenna's family has recently started to realize that being involved in too many activities can do more harm than good.

“If there's one thing I need to change in community it's to slow down and prioritize (the activities we're involved in). I'm realizing we can't do it all ... we're just spread too thin.”

Jenna's mom



“

“We do a lot of stuff with a community development organization, but the leaders live here with us. It makes our community better, gets us to interact and know each other. And you know when we see them out picking up the streets or something we want to go out and help them because this neighborhood is all of ours.”

Alex's mom

From:
Isolated, surface-level acquaintances

To:
Relationships with breadth and depth

Learner Need:
Relationships that are maintained across different settings

How Might We:
Encourage collaboration between multiple organizations within the ecosystem to facilitate consistent relationships?

Learner Need:
A sense of community beyond the classroom

How Might We:
Increase student awareness of existing opportunities for growth outside of school programs?

Learner Need:
Balance consistent activities and relationships with unstructured downtime

How Might We:
Help parents/guardians and students evaluate and prioritize which activities fit a student's lifestyle and interests?

LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

Heights of Hope (Holland, MI)

Heights of Hope is a faith-based Community Development organization based in a neighborhood in Holland. Residents are challenged to contribute their skills and talents to “make the neighborhood even better than it already is.” The core project team lives primarily in the neighborhood and works alongside neighborhood leaders to make a community that is healthy, safe and thriving. Students in the community are given access to mentors and after-school programs, and summer programs engage children and families on a near-daily basis. Many members of the neighborhood define Heights of Hope as their “community.”

ENGAGE



NURTURE ORGANIC RELATIONSHIPS (OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL)

Alex has been with his mentor, Jon, through a Christian community development organization for four years now. Jon has taken him to Disney World and takes him golfing so he can drive the golf cart. The two meet every Saturday for two hours at a time.

“With him I get to do things we can’t do at home, things we can’t afford ... he’s helping me learn it’s going to be important to plan ahead in your job.”

Alex
6th Grade



Students benefit from consistent, natural forming relationships with people and places that nurture their personal interest and growth.

WHY Relationships that grow organically and evolve over time have a positive impact on a student’s life, allowing them to gain confidence and giving them the motivation to excel. A student responds more positively to a mentor or friend who treats them like a peer instead of a project. When a student is dealing with difficult personal issues, in trouble, or not doing well in school, they are often offered perfunctory and temporary solutions that do not foster genuine or lasting connections.

KEY POINTS

Consistency is Key

Consistent, positive influencers that remain a part of students’ lives can have more meaningful and longer-lasting impact than sporadic and cursory relationships. Lasting and trustworthy relationships boost confidence and the feeling of security in students.

Mentorship + Counseling

Mentorship and counseling can have different effects. Often, counseling is seen as a mechanical step to take when something is wrong and needs to be fixed. Many students reference seeing their school counselors to schedule classes or if they are in trouble. Conversely, meaningful, formal mentorship is often the result of reciprocal relationships that are most often found outside of school.

Peer vs. Project

Social agencies that do not have patriarchal views of members create an environment where engagement and conversation are encouraged. They often inspire others to give back in other aspects of their lives.

Interests + Talents as Drivers

In some instances, skills and interests connect students to mentors who not only help them develop their talents, but create trusting relationships and provide holistic life guidance.



Jenna had trouble thinking of anyone in her community that was a positive influence or mentor. ... Finally, her mom had to remind her of the counselor she had been seeing for a year.

Jenna
6th Grade

NEEDS & BARRIERS

Students benefit from consistent, natural forming relationships with people and places that nurture their personal interest and growth.



“My coach is my hero. He’s a great soccer player. He’s funny and a great and nice person. He treats us with respect and doesn’t yell or want us to look bad like some other coaches do.”

Tanner
5th Grade



“

Brought together by their love for music, Chris had a close relationship with the pastor of their church. He encouraged Chris to pursue music and got him involved in the church band as a drummer at a young age. Today, Chris is an extremely talented musician who has recorded multiple albums, was the guest conductor at the GR Symphony and has yet to pay for a music lesson thanks to the connections made through his church community and family members.

Chris
6th Grade

From:
Relationships primarily in the classroom

To:
Ecosystem-wide relationships

Learner Need:
Relationships and support systems that provide consistent and proactive guidance

How Might We:
Connect students to touch points within the ecosystem to cultivate impactful, long lasting relationships?

Learner Need:
External recognition and development of my interests and skills to create personal support systems

How Might We:
Discover a student’s interests and connect them with a mentor who will help develop their talents as well as life skills?

Learner Need:
To know that I am uniquely valuable to the people around me

How Might We:
Encourage genuine communication to help all parties in a relationship learn what value they bring?

LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

Kids Hope USA

Mentoring organizations like Kids Hope USA effectively bridge the gap between school and community by partnering an at-risk child with a mentor that visits once a week, for an hour. Mentors are trained and helps the student acquire basic academic skills, based on guidance from teachers, and often form deep relationships. Students, teachers and mentors often cite the consistency of the mentoring approach as the key differentiator of success.



GUIDE TRANSITION FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE



“My favorite memories are from when I was little... when you didn’t have to worry about anything besides maybe putting your clothes away.”

Daniel
10th Grade

Students have difficulty navigating milestones on the way from childhood to adolescence both at home and at school.

WHY Students feel a tension between the carelessness of childhood and the increasing responsibilities of growing up. At home they are transitioning into different family roles as they grow older. Some parent(s)/guardian(s) consciously help their child focus and define an appropriate role for them, but different family situations can create roles for students that might not align with their age, maturity or interests. At school many students have difficulty navigating key milestones as they move from elementary school, to middle school, and finally to high school. Students find it stressful to manage their time, and often feel as though their time is not their own. They must also adjust to an increased number of teachers (and teaching styles) and classes, subject difficulty and additional extracurricular activities.

KEY POINTS

Balancing Roles

There is often a discernible tension between longing for the carelessness of childhood and the increasing responsibility of growing up. Though not always easy, parent(s)/guardian(s) and other influences within the ecosystem can help balance this tension by purposefully helping their learners prioritize their responsibilities as a student and developing child.

Time Management

Time management is a pain-point for many students as they juggle homework and multiple extracurricular activities (their own or their sibling’s). External pressures can create frustration when students perceive a lack of control over their time.

Routines + Resiliency

Constantly being pulled in and out of various activities, programs or schools can prevent a student from building resiliency and momentum during transition periods. While variety can be positive, consistency and routine is more important to maintaining momentum.



“I have a hard time remembering what I need to do when. I need a ... what’s that thing called ... a calendar.”

Alex
6th Grade

NEEDS & BARRIERS

Students have difficulty navigating milestones on the way from childhood to adolescence both at home and at school.

“I can’t keep track of my schedule because it’s always different. I’m always running around going to my brother and sisters activities and it’s hard to find time to do homework.”

Jonathan
5th Grade



“

“Home is ‘crowded’. It’s busy and stressful because I have to do homework, piano lessons, zumba with mom and I want to play too.”

Jenna
7th Grade

From:

Being thrown into stressful transitions without support and trying to survive

To:

Being nurtured through meaningful transitions where I thrive

Learner Need:

The skills to plan and balance daily activities throughout the ecosystem.

How Might We:

Help students develop proactive time management and prioritization skills in order to plan for and anticipate future milestones and transitions?

Learner Need:

Navigational support throughout school transitions

How Might We:

Provide a map and compass to students and parents/guardians during times of transition?

Learner Need:

Understanding and empathy during times of transition at home and at school

How Might We:

Recognize and address that today’s life stages create harder, faster and earlier transitions?

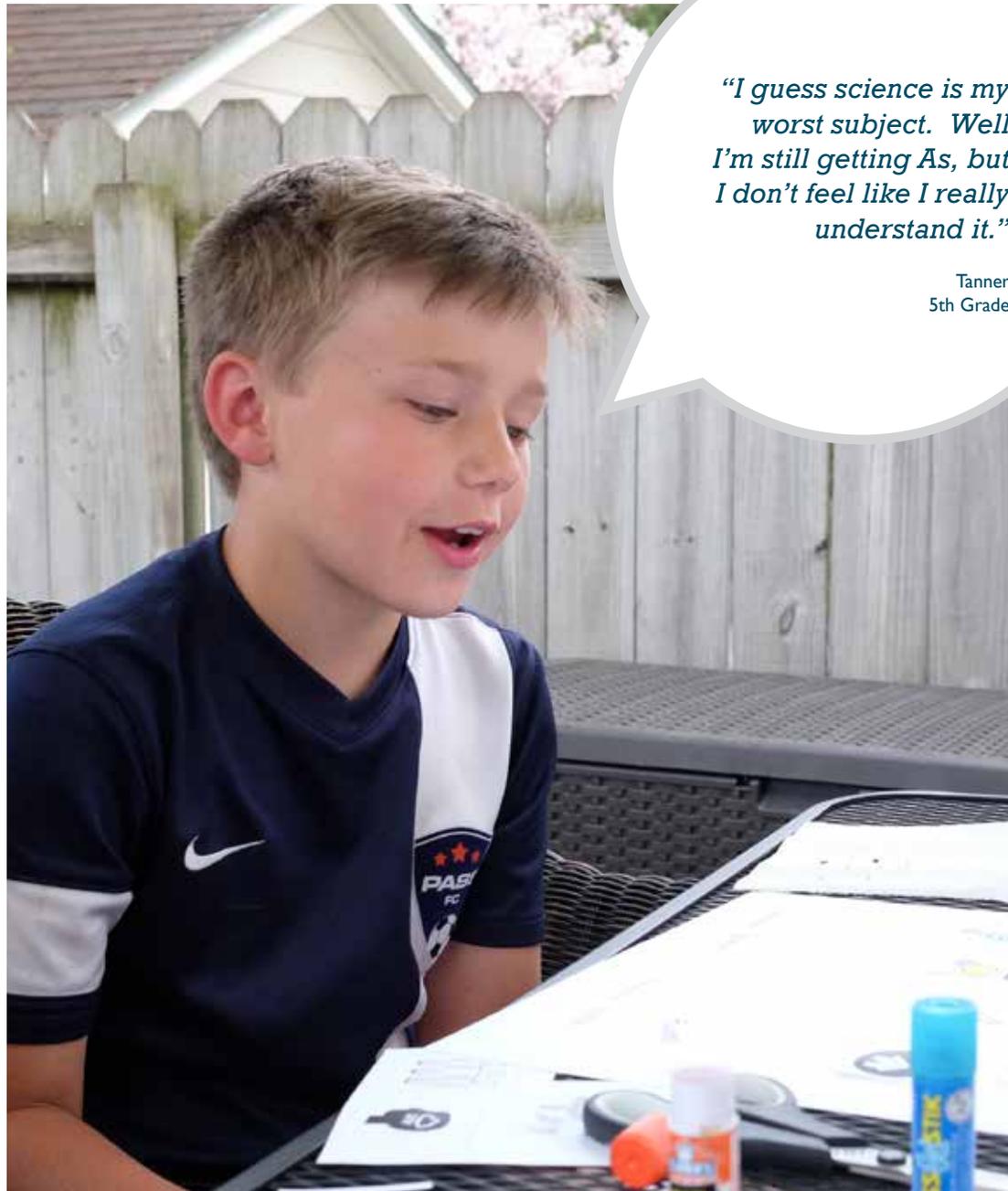
LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

Kent County Health Department - “Life Skills for Middle School”

The Kent County Health Department offers a 14-session “Life Skills for Middle School” curriculum aimed at helping improve student’s social and decision-making skills. The curriculum is targeted for 6th through 8th grades and provides information on a variety of topics from coping with anxiety, cyberbullying, decision-making, goal setting and healthy relationships. The program also helps to reduce the likelihood that middle schoolers will use alcohol, marijuana, tobacco and other drugs.



FOCUS ON UNDERSTANDING VERSUS ACHIEVEMENT



“I guess science is my worst subject. Well I’m still getting As, but I don’t feel like I really understand it.”

Tanner
5th Grade

A growth mindset is fostered when understanding is valued more than achievement.

WHY Motivated and resilient students believe their abilities can be developed through their efforts and view learning as a journey instead of simply knowing the right answer. They are aware of their strengths and learning styles and use them as stepping stones rather than boundaries for what they can and cannot do. This growth mindset can be hindered by today’s test culture where students are increasingly pressured to earn high scores and grades, putting the focus on immediate achievement over sustained understanding. In addition, students have difficulty connecting what they are currently experiencing (in school and at home) to their future. They might know what skills and strengths they have, but are not aware of occupations that utilize those skills.

KEY POINTS

Grades do not equal understanding

Grades alone are not enough to give currently achieving students satisfaction. While they obtain good grades, it does not mean they are comprehending what they are being taught.

Strengths as a constraint

At times students can pigeon-hole themselves by sticking to only what they are good at or what comes easy to them. Resilient students are able to build-off their strengths, using them to develop new skills.

Variety of Learning

Teachers and students are frequently on different pages when it comes to the value of assignments. Homework feels more like redundant busy-work than an opportunity to practice and apply what is being taught. Students desire ‘unpredictability’ in classroom styles and assignments and nearly all students prefer project-based work and see projects as a chance to express and challenge themselves.

Consequences

The existing disciplinary system does not often leverage discipline as a learning opportunity and students do not often see or understand the connection of their consequences to their misconduct.



“I just make decisions off the bat. Like do I really need to do this homework assignment now at the beginning of the semester or could I make the grade up later with a different assignment?”

Daniel
10th Grade

NEEDS & BARRIERS

A growth mindset is fostered when understanding is valued more than achievement.



“Math is my hardest subject, but I want to be a math teacher. I know I’ll just need some tutoring along the way to get there, but I can do it.”

Lara
8th Grade



Tanner and Kara both loved math. When asked what they might do with Math in the future they had trouble coming up with other professions besides a math professor or a cashier.



“I like thinking... I see [students] around me on their phones, not caring. We’re going to have to do something after school - people seem short sighted.”

Jordan
7th Grade

From:
Learning as a destination

To:
Learning as a journey

Learner Need:
To enjoy the journey of the learning process and see how it impacts my future (beyond grades/test results)

How Might We:
Help students connect the learning process to results outside of grades and test scores in order to develop a clearer vision of the future?

Learner Need:
A clear and appropriate connection between actions and consequences

How Might We:
Help students and teachers co-create relevant consequences that provide meaningful learning?

Learner Need:
Ability to identify and leverage my knowledge and strengths in everyday activities

How Might We:
Provide everyday opportunities for students to identify and apply their unique skills and resources?

LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

Ottawa County’s “Skills4Success”

Ottawa County’s “Skills4Success” educational framework promotes a set of seven interrelated “soft skills” identified as important by area experts, including:

- Technical literacy
- Collaboration and global thinking
- Communication
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Ethical citizenship
- Personal accountability

The program hopes to develop and deliver a robust continuum of learning and career exploration options to support students’ academic and career goals.



MENTOR THE ABILITY TO SELF-MANAGE



“I wish we could have more say in the work that we do. Like what if we didn’t just get small worksheets due each day, but get weekly projects where you can pick when you want to work on it.”

Brittney
7th Grade

The amount of involvement and flexibility parents and teachers give a student impacts their level of ownership, engagement and success.

WHY Many students desire to be autonomous, yet they do not always possess the skills to self-manage and are not always given the opportunities to develop or utilize those skills. Some students are able to self-manage more naturally than others. Many students expressed that the flexible structure needed to be productively autonomous is not always in place.

Often students struggle with the ability to truly understand school/classroom culture and align with required behaviors and expectations. While schools are moving toward more openness and collaboration, students feel as though there are a set of accepted and seemingly rigid communication channels.

KEY POINTS

Involvement in Decision Making

If students are given a role in decision making they are more likely to act upon and be accountable for that decision.

Personal Coping Strategies

At times students can pigeon-hole. Currently achieving students are aware of their own limitations and communicate their needs with others and develop appropriate strategies to cope.

Openness to Creativity not Confrontation

Students desire the ability to express themselves and bring up their own opinions and suggestions in school. On the positive side, students perceive an openness at school to consider creative ideas; unfortunately, they also feel an inability to approach or critique techniques or school decisions.



“Noah saw his biggest obstacle as sometimes feeling restricted by teachers or the curriculum, but he felt he couldn’t tell them that because in his words, “that would be a felony.”

Noah
5th Grade

NEEDS & BARRIERS

The amount of involvement and flexibility parents and teachers give a student impacts their level of ownership, engagement and success.

"I get anxiety if I sit too long. I work best when I can get up once in awhile. In class I'll ask to get something from my backpack or go blow my nose. I've been doing that since middle school and I've even talked to my teachers about it so they know."

Dillon
10th Grade



“

"It's a project based learning school and I've had some classes where we haven't done one project yet this year and it's spring!"

Daniel
10th Grade

From:
Students comply with requirements

To:
Students partner with teachers to adapt their experience

Learner Need:
Opportunities to develop self-management skills within a flexible structure

How Might We:
Give students flexibility within a structure that encourages them to develop their own working styles?

Learner Need:
To feel ownership over my ideas and know those ideas are being considered

How Might We:
Give students specific avenues to find their voice and bring their ideas and concerns to light?

Learner Need:
Situations that embrace and support my natural tendencies and learning style(s)

How Might We:
Provide versatile outlets that allow students to feel less constrained at school?

LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

King Middle School (Portland, ME)

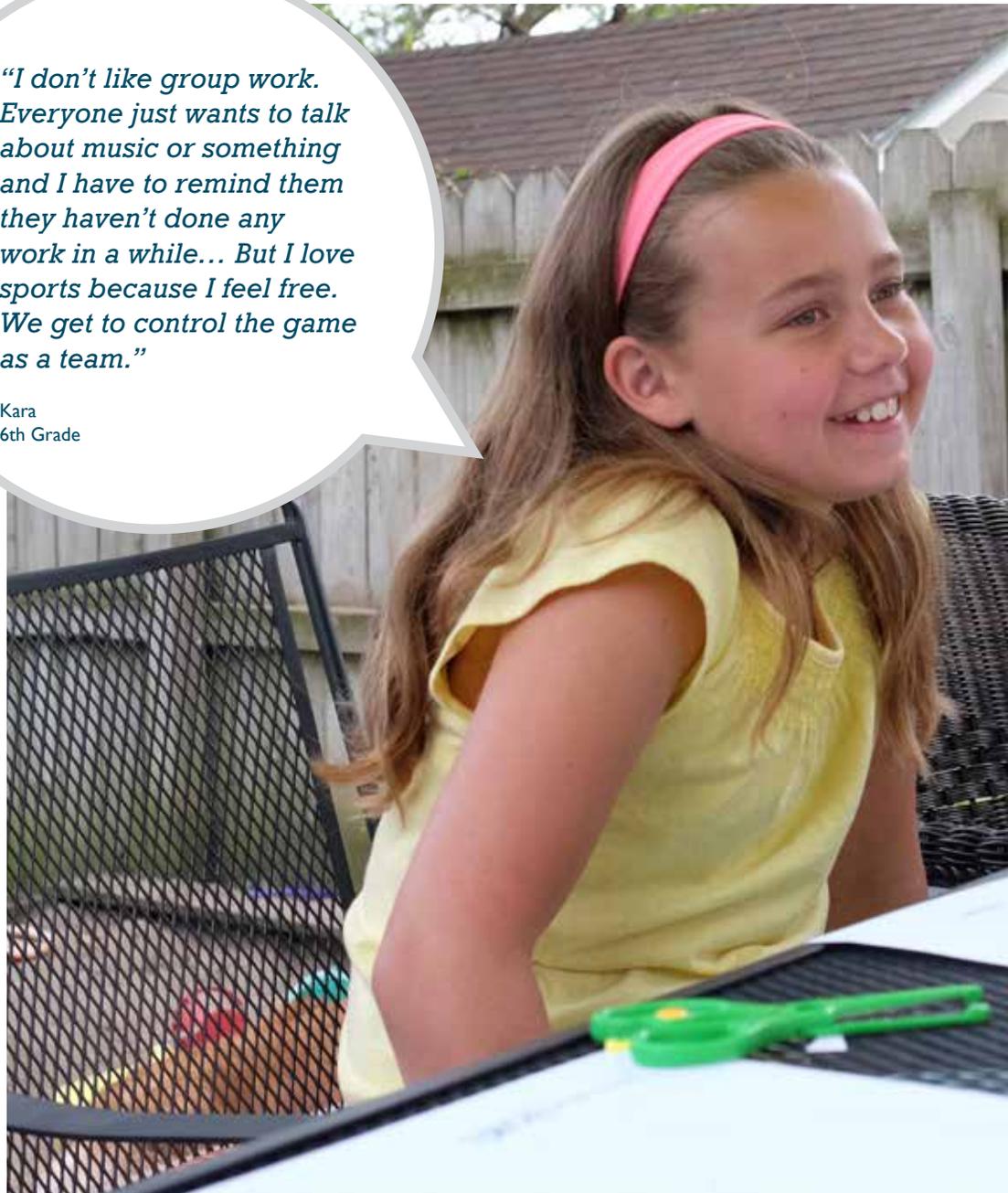
At King Middle School in Portland, ME, twice yearly student-led conferences (versus parent-teacher conferences) are "one of the most important things we do to have students own their own learning." Students present to both teachers and parents/guardians. Teachers encourage students to "reflect on the connection between the effort they have made and the quality of their work." They are tasked with choosing three examples that help "tell their students a deeper story: one that shows they have recognized both a personal strength and an area in which they are struggling. Most students have never thought about their learning in this way. Nor have most of their parents."



CULTIVATE THE ART OF COLLABORATION

"I don't like group work. Everyone just wants to talk about music or something and I have to remind them they haven't done any work in a while... But I love sports because I feel free. We get to control the game as a team."

Kara
6th Grade



While it is a necessary skill to develop for future success, collaboration is often not adequately facilitated or taught through group work.

WHY Group work does not automatically equal teamwork. Group work is not often facilitated on a case-by-case basis to provide guidance to the unique dynamic of each group. Within a group there is often a lack of focus on the goal at hand and truly shared responsibility which diminishes opportunities for collaboration. Students may believe that collaboration is necessary in the workplace, but some cannot associate what they are being taught about collaboration and how it might relate to their future occupations.

When true collaboration is achieved it often results in a team mentality that extends beyond the field or even the school. This type of mindset creates cohorts instead of cliques, which see the value of uniting with different friend groups that journey together and encourage each other to do their best.

KEY POINTS

Friend Groups

Many currently achieving students have a tight-knit group of friends that grow together. They hold each other accountable and motivate each other to do their best. Often, currently under-achieving students' parents would cite an outside (or external) bad influence as part of the reason for their behavior or grades.

Cohorts Excel

Currently achieving students have a cohort vs. clique mentality: they journey together and push each other forward instead of focusing on being better than or conforming to others.

Group Work is a Chore

Group work is seen as an obstacle where currently achieving students often must pick up the slack of other members who either do not understand how or desire to contribute in a meaningful way.



"I don't just have one group of friends, I make friends in all groups. We help each other out in our areas of weakness ... That's how your circle grows. I know it's better to unite with different types of people now instead of just being acquaintances."

Dillon
10th Grade

NEEDS & BARRIERS

While it is a necessary skill to develop for future success, collaboration is often not adequately facilitated or taught through group work.

Parents of Ben's friends have purposely moved their kids to be together in the same class because they support one another and push each other to do well in class and in sports.

Ben
4th Grade



“

“My best friend is my mom.”

Amy
4th Grade

From:
Required group work

To:
Cohort-creation and accountability

Learner Need:
Collaborative experiences that develop a cohort mentality

How Might We:
Provide valuable experiences where students can support one another and share in an overall purpose?

Learner Need:
Exposure to mentors and leaders with similar passions, illustrating a range of opportunities for the future

How Might We:
Develop teams around students with common interests to drive positive team experiences?

Learner Need:
Understand and create successful team dynamics (via facilitation and support)

How Might We:
Facilitate on-going team building activities that allow students to develop their own skills and respect the skills of others?

LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

Avalon Charter School - St. Paul, MN

At St. Paul, MN's Avalon Charter School, students have a daily 20-minute "advisory period," a "kind of homeroom during which students, who are usually in the same group for three to four years, can informally check in with each other and with their same teacher, who follows them through their school career."

Deeper Learning

"My job is to fade into the background in a classroom. If I have planned well, the setup is good, and the directions are clear on some independent or group activity, the students can do it." - Teacher interviewed by Deeper Learning researchers.

Deeper Learning goes on to say, "While this might give the impression of a teacher doing less actual work, that's far from the case. This major shift in the teacher's role indeed requires fewer hours actively managing and lecturing students, but also many more in thoughtful preparation."

RECOGNIZE AND ENGAGE FAMILY INFLUENCES

Samuel's family moved from Nepal to the U.S. when he was 10 years old. Samuel's parents don't speak English, making him one of the cultural translators in the family.

Samuel
7th Grade



Students' perspectives on school, their future and work ethic are significantly impacted by their family and parent/guardians' identity and values.

WHY Family history and parent/guardian future vision is a strong influencer in a student's life and is often used as a motivator and sometimes a threat to push their child to excel. A parent/guardian's personal experiences influence their involvement in and assessment of their child's development. Sometimes parents have difficulty helping with or relating to student concerns and schoolwork due to busy schedules, education level, or unfamiliarity with current teaching methods.

Because students are so receptive to the influencers in their life at this age, mixed messages from parents/guardians or a change in family structure can be stressful and cause confusion of identity, expectations and priorities.

KEY POINTS

Parent's/Guardian's Vision

When parent/family vision for their student's future is misaligned or miscommunicated with the student, this can cause mixed messages about success and priorities. Parents often want their children to "just love what you do" and at the same time "change the world".

Family Structure

Changing family structure due to divorce, marriage, parent death, parent incarceration, or transitioning from being an only child to the oldest child has significant impact a student's identity as time, attention and support given to the child fluctuates.

Transferring Culture

Children whose parent/guardians are English Language Learners serve as both a translator of language and culture. Newcomer families, whether refugee or immigrants, desire a balance of keeping one's ethnic culture and identity while integrating into American culture.



"As parents, we have this idea that we want our kids to do better than we did... [his mom] and I have broken so many statistics. We remind him of the statistic: young, Hispanic, male, born to teen parents. Statistics tell you who you would be... An ideal goal would be for him to get a masters degree."

Daniel's mom & dad

"I think success for me would be getting an associates degree [offered through his high school] and being happy doing what I can."

Daniel

NEEDS & BARRIERS

Students' perspectives on school, their future and work ethic are significantly impacted by their family and parent/guardians' identity and values.

"My dream for Alex would be graduating high school and making it to college. I believe he can do it."

Alex's mom has a middle school education.

Alex's mom



“

"Each year, for each child, we ask ourselves 'what's going to be the best fit for them? I keep my ear to the ground, I listen to families that come into my clinic to see, what are the best options (for their education and their future)."

Noah & Jordan's mom

From:
Teachers and families are siloed

To:
Teachers and families engage relationally toward student success

Learner Need:
Opportunities to create my own identity and path

How Might We:
Help students develop and reach their own vision and preferred future?

Learner Need:
Appreciate and positively navigate my individual family culture

How Might We:
Promote positive perspective and utilization of individual family culture?

Learner Need:
Balance my personal dreams and goals with family values and/or expectations

How Might We:
Facilitate student-parent/guardian alignment to reach a shared future perspective?

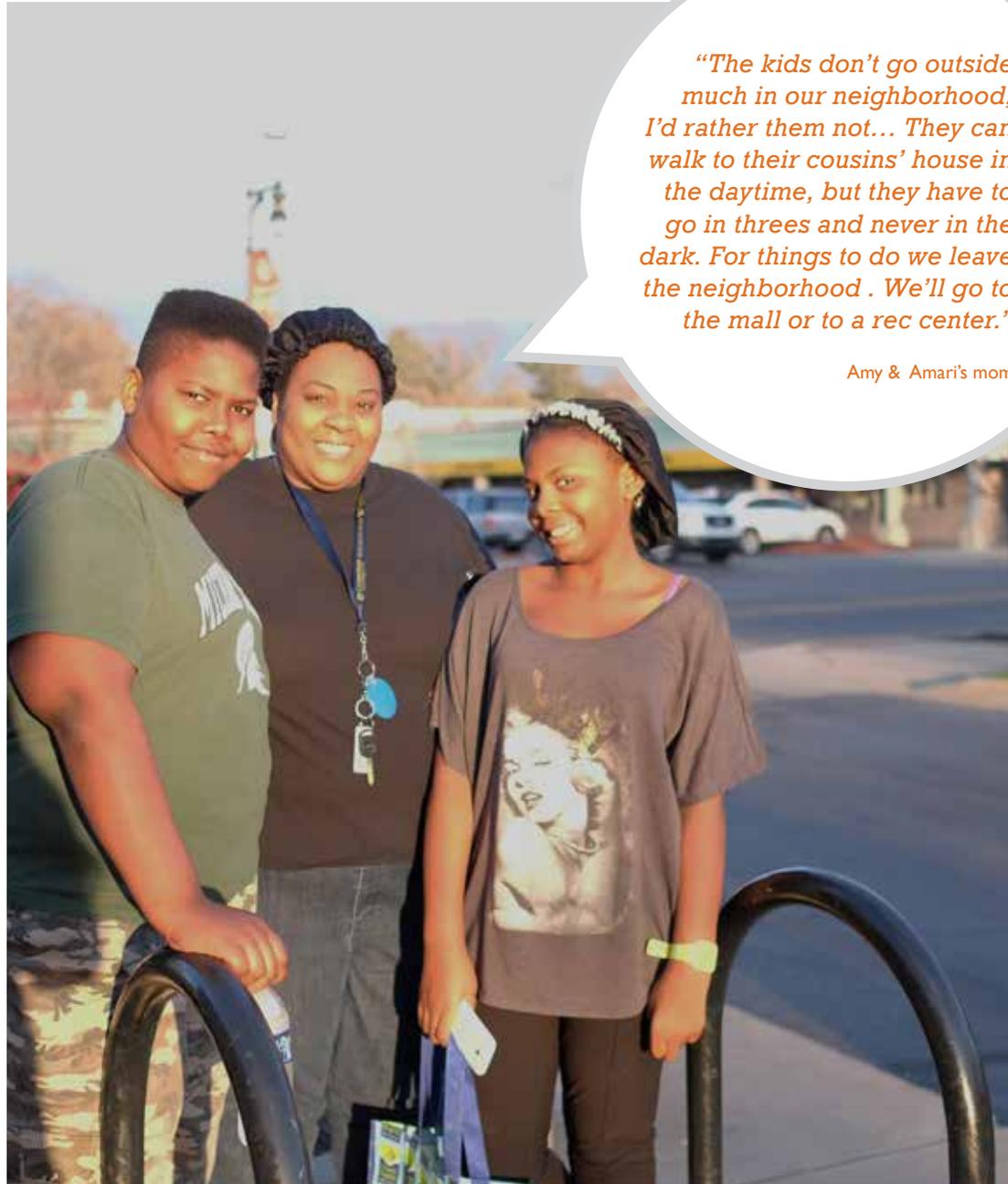
LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

The Grand Rapids Community Foundation and Grand Rapids Public School

The Grand Rapids Community Foundation and Grand Rapids Public School launched the first class of its Challenge Scholars program in 2014. Core tenets include Academic Achievement, School Attendance, Parent Engagement, Scholarships and "Big Dreams." The program provides incentives and support systems that help students (beginning in 6th grade) and their parents get exposed to opportunities and pathways to post-secondary education, scholarship opportunities and career options outside of their current realm and experience. The program has build partnerships with local post-secondary education providers and employers to build a new ecosystem around families in the program.



PROVIDE ENVIRONMENTS THAT PROMOTE WELL-BEING



“The kids don’t go outside much in our neighborhood, I’d rather them not... They can walk to their cousins’ house in the daytime, but they have to go in threes and never in the dark. For things to do we leave the neighborhood . We’ll go to the mall or to a rec center.”

Amy & Amari’s mom

When a student is given a safe and stable environment, it is easier for them to focus on making proactive choices toward a better future.

WHY Physical and virtual environments impact a student’s perception of safety and well-being, as well as their attitude and behavior. A consistent, safe place filled with caring family and friends brings security in a student’s life. In these environments students are free to express who they are and take time for themselves rather than worry about shutting out negative influences. Students who encounter threatening environments experience tension between actively making the right choices - or giving into circumstance that could lead them down a destructive or misguided path.

Physical and virtual environments- if utilized in the right way- can promote positive behavior and self-expression. Many students felt that the classroom did not create an environment where they could explore their interests and the learning styles that work best for them.

KEY POINTS

Environmental Distractions

The physical and emotional environment of a neighborhood can shape a student’s or family’s perceptions of safety, forcing them to take extra precautions to avoid misdirection. Concern about negative influences can impact otherwise natural behaviors and interactions within the neighborhood.

Virtual Environments

The internet can be used as an educational and social resource where students can teach themselves how to sew or talk to a friend when they’re having a bad night. In other situations it can be a stage for bullying and can negatively skew a student’s perception of themselves.

The Classroom

Many school and class environments are not aligned with students’ physical needs and interests. Well-designed physical school environments can create consistency, increased engagement and symbolism for parents and students.

Desire for Nature

Students can find solace, rejuvenation and inspiration from nature and desire to spend more time outdoors during the school day.



I think [my hero] would be nature. You can go out and [it’s] just the wind and the air. When you are having rough days, like when I was small, my Dad would take me outside at night to breathe the air and it would calm me down.”

“We don’t go outside at school at all ... I think it’s just that way because when you’re in school your IN school ... unless you’re in gym.”

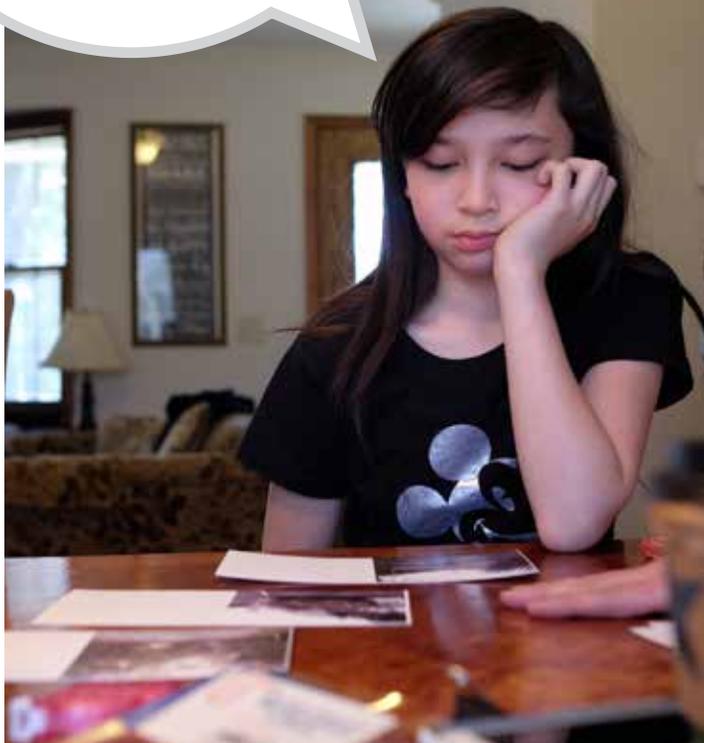
Lydia
9th Grade

NEEDS & BARRIERS

When a student is given a safe and stable environment, it is easier for them to focus on making proactive choices toward a better future.

"I share Facebook with my mom. She doesn't really trust me with my friends. Well ... I didn't see this coming but in November there was this girl that started calling me bad words and also threatened to beat me up."

- Jenna
6th Grade



“

"For once, FINALLY we went outside and learned differently... I want to do something that gives us memories of school. I want to look back at 5th grade and have good memories."

Noah
5th Grade

From:

Environments that are not energizing, stable or predictable

To:

Environments that have opportunities for safe haven and inspiration

Learner Need:

Consistent (physical and virtual) environments that allow me to be myself without the threat of toxic influences

How Might We:

Create supportive and relevant environments that optimize a student's development?

Learner Need:

Experiences that provide me with solace, rejuvenation and inspiration

How Might We:

Design atmospheres that promote positive attitude and behavior?

Learner Need:

School environments that satisfy my physical and emotional needs and fit my learning style.

How Might We:

Explore the classroom as a tool that actively and holistically influences my learning experience?

LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

Kids' Food Basket

In Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa Counties, Kids' Food Basket provides sack dinners to students whose only guaranteed meals are those provided through their school's free- and reduced-lunch program. Since that program fails to provide meals in the evening or on the weekend, Kids' Food Basket does so instead. The link between student success and secure food access is strong.

Kent School Services Network

Kent School Services Network found a direct correlation between access to quality health-care and increased MEAP scores, indicating that health services are vital to student academic success. ADD/ADHD are specific focus areas of KSSN's program which means that mental health issues among vulnerable populations were able to be treated. Pathways to Success is a new statewide program of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, and is modeled after KSSN's work.

CREATE MEANINGFUL TOUCH-POINTS (STUDENTS/TEACHERS)



“Home is a good place to be, I’m goofy at home. School depends on the teacher, if we do something a little bit wrong we are on lock down.”

Chris
6th Grade

Students have the capacity to rise to high expectations when they perceive that they are valued by the person setting the expectations

WHY Many students naturally want the attention of the teacher; although they may never explicitly say it. As social beings, students want to connect with their peers and even though teachers often want to facilitate these interactions, the pressures of the classroom setting can be stifling. When teachers take the time to get to know their students on a personal level, students will feel more inclined to push themselves, will be more likely to approach their teacher with problems, and be more receptive to critique.

KEY POINTS

Emotional Connection

Students desire the ability to emotionally connect with their teachers. When teachers take the time to get to know their students individually and give them a chance to share their opinions, they are motivated to work harder and are more proactive in their communication with teachers.

Students are Social Beings

Students see themselves as social beings at school - more so than at home - yet feel stifled by classroom rules. There are restrictions at school and students are therefore required to keep a part of their personality (typically humor) separate from classroom life. Socialization at school is often reserved for specified times outside of class in the halls or at lunchtime.

Actions vs. Words

Students sometimes perceive a disconnect between the role of the teacher and the teacher’s conduct causing them to doubt or discredit what is being taught because they do not appear to be genuine.



“

“Our counselor looks very depressed all the time but talks to us about how to be happy and be friends. She even has brown bags under her eyes.”

Noah
5th Grade

NEEDS & BARRIERS

Students have the capacity to rise to high expectations when they perceive that they are valued by the person setting the expectations

“In some classes they lecture a lot. Some teachers give you work and others see your opinions. Like, in some classes we have discussions with students and teachers. The teacher will give an input and all the students give their opinions. I like those classes a lot.”

Daniel
10th Grade



“

“My two favorite teachers are the ones that take the time to have conversations with us. They ask us how our weekends were and seem to want to get to know who we are. That makes me want to work harder in those classes.”

Lydia
9th Grade



From:

Joining a system that requires you to redefine your identity on its terms

To:

A system that promotes personal expression and individual values

Learner Need:

Socialization to be more prevalent in school instead of being reserved for specific places and times

How Might We:

Allow students to express their personality and incorporate humor into their school life?

Learner Need:

To personally connect with my teachers in a meaningful way

How Might We:

Foster deeper relationships and understanding between students and teachers?

Learner Need:

Touchpoints that allow me to witness positive examples that exhibit model behavior

How Might We:

Model appropriate and consistent behavior?

LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

Deeper Learning

The research behind *Deeper Learning* identified the need to inspire and to customize learning to motivate each student.

“A truism about teenagers - one that actually seems to be true - is that they’ll rarely be open with adults when surrounded by their peers. Such honesty is even rare in the top-down context of most high schools, and especially when the teens in question have been struggling in school, with their confidence often sapped. Yet when students are able to meet individually with teachers, in the course of working as members of groups or on individual projects, they more readily see that teacher as a supportive resource rather than simply another judgmental adult. This allows students opportunities to reveal themselves more fully, while their teachers can help them develop their talents.”

CREATE MEANINGFUL TOUCHPOINTS (PARENTS/TEACHERS)



“I wish we could see the assignments as they’re given, that way we could help with the work and make sure it’s getting turned in on time.”

Jonathan’s mom

The relationship between parent(s)/guardian(s) and the school is often dependent on the student and their ability to facilitate a connection between home and school.

WHY The communication path between students, parents and teachers can easily become convoluted and varies depending on the student’s communication with and perception of access to the teachers. Often, parents rely on their children for information which can lead to miscommunication or missed opportunities for parent-teacher connections. Typically, when parents initiate communication with the teachers, rather than waiting until the student is struggling, the student’s performance is higher.

KEY POINTS

Student as mediator

Parents’ first point of contact with the school is usually their student. Parents rely on the student during points of conflict for information versus going directly to the teacher which can lead to misalignment and miscommunication between student, parent and teacher. When parents have access and take initiative to connect with teachers, students typically excel.

Proactive Lines of Communication

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) often wish they had more awareness of problems sooner so they could have helped address issues before they escalated. The current state of communication causes many parents to see “no news is good news” which may be the case, but could result in missed opportunities for parent-teacher connection.

Parents as Facilitators vs. Bystanders

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) do not always understand the vital role they can play in facilitating their child’s achievement. Parent involvement in the education process can be hindered by busy schedules and difficulty understanding how and when to connect with teachers.

Students as Teachers

Sometimes parent(s)/guardian(s) have difficulty helping or relating to student issues and schoolwork due to cultural differences, varying education levels and life experiences. Often, their children must help them fill in the gaps but may be unwilling or unable to do so.



“She doesn’t get that much homework any more at this new school. I just feel homework is a way for us to know what she’s doing at school and how she’s doing. When she does have questions on homework like math it’s hard for me to even help her with a lot of the work because it’s totally different than the way I was taught.”

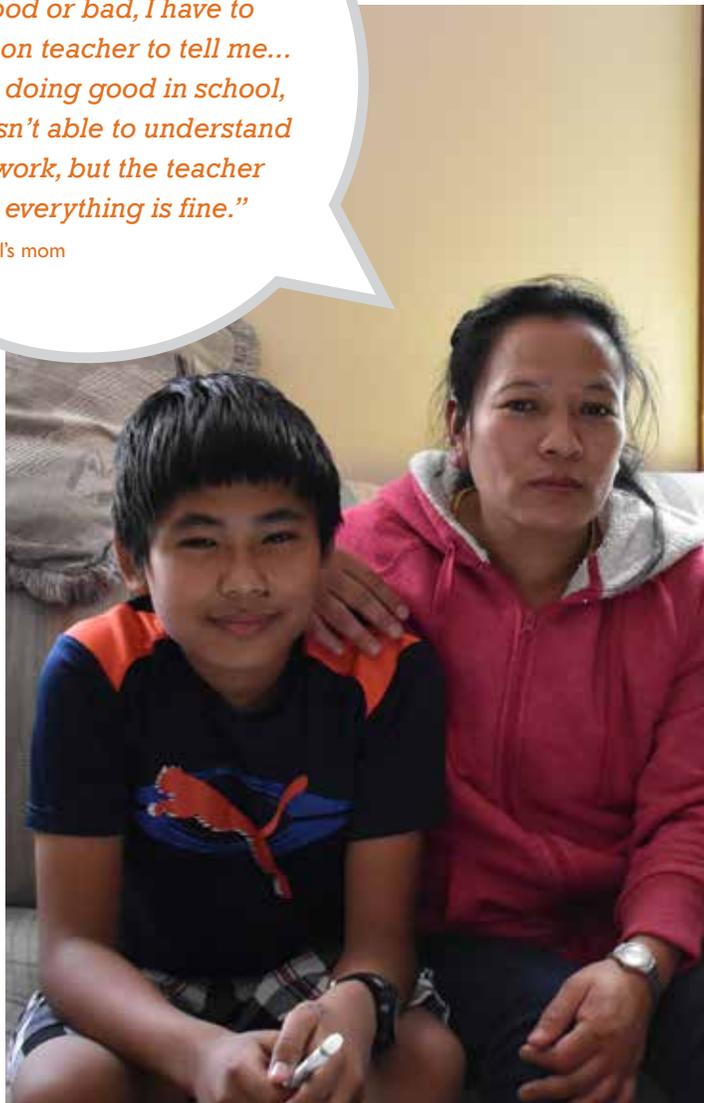
Jenna’s mom

NEEDS & BARRIERS

The relationship between parent(s)/ guardian(s) and the school is often dependent on the student and their ability to facilitate a connection between home and school.

“If I were to look at report card, I wouldn’t know what is good or bad, I have to rely on teacher to tell me... He’s doing good in school, I wasn’t able to understand the work, but the teacher said everything is fine.”

Samuel’s mom



“

“His teacher said ‘call me anytime’ - but I didn’t, teachers need a break too... We don’t go to parent teacher conferences, we know our kids are doing well.”

Ben’s mom

From:
Complex communication that lacks clarity

To:
Clear and consistent communication that encourages engagement

Learner Need:
Give parents optional insight into my schoolwork and progress

How Might We:
Provide a platform that gives parents access into their student’s progress in more specific ways than a report card or test score would show?

Learner Need:
Clear points of contact between me, my parent(s)/guardian(s) and my teachers

How Might We:
Simplify the process for teachers and parents to communicate about their student’s performance?

Learner Need:
Allow for parent/guardian support and involvement in my school work

How Might We:
Give parents insight into how and what their students are learning so they can assist their student along the way?

LOCAL & NATIONAL LEADING EXAMPLES

Grand Rapids Public Schools

GRPS’ Parent University equips parents with the knowledge and resources to be effective advocates for their child’s academic success. Parents receive skill-development training and education in effective parenting, personal growth, navigating education, health and wellness, and professional development.

K-12 EDUCATION WORKSHOPS: OTTAWA, KENT & MUSKEGON COUNTIES

Following the conclusion of the work, three county-level workshops (Ottawa, Kent and Muskegon) were conducted to embrace and engage the broader TALENT 2025 ecosystem and community. A cross-sector audience was invited to each event and attendance exceeded expectations.

Participants were exposed to the needs and encouraged to interact with the output, as well as prompted to work in groups to identify current and create new responses to the need statements.



Top Three Insights and Needs Addressed by Participants

Ottawa County:

- 1. Connect Passion and Interests to the Future
- 2. Focus on Understanding versus Achievement
- 3. Cultivate the Art of Collaboration

Kent County:

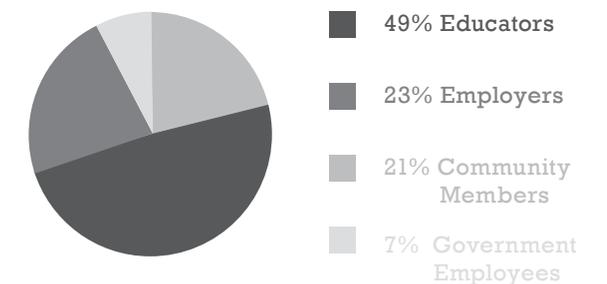
- 1. Connect Passion and Interests to the Future
- 2. Focus on Understanding versus Achievement
- 3. Mentor the Ability to Self-manage

Muskegon County:

- 1. Connect Passion and Interests to the Future
- 2. Recognize and Engage Family and Parent/Guardian Influences
- 3. Focus on Understanding versus Achievement



OVERALL ATTENDEES BY SECTOR:



SECTOR LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The challenges that face K-12 education are not a one sector problem; the challenges are complex and require a cross-sector approach. Given the unique abilities, experience and capacity of each sector, we believe that each has a role and responsibility and can take the lead in addressing

different aspects of the post-secondary education and career readiness problem. For each sector, we have identified two or three key insights for that sector to lead and change current and create new responses to the need statements.



EMPLOYER RECOMMENDATIONS

Relevance

Employers need to lead the conversation with educators regarding relevance.

1. Take to scale programs like Career Quest that show career pathways for middle and high school students.
2. Expand programs like Skills4Success and Educator in the Workplace to increase the relevance of middle school and high school curriculum.
3. Emphasis the value of the National Career Readiness Certificate to high school juniors and seniors.

Ecosystem

Employers can evaluate current and future community investments that improve the ecosystem in areas such as:

1. Food security for child and families
2. Persistent low adult literacy across the region
3. Quality after school programs
4. Mentoring for children without positive role models

Public Policy and Funding

As it has been demonstrated already, Talent 2025's CEO Council has a tremendous capacity to influence public policy and funding decisions. No other body in the state combines business leaders and stakeholders to define the problems and solutions to improve the talent development, attraction and retention efforts in the region.

1. Expand the school year calendar to eliminate the summer reading loss.
2. Adopt a common measure of teacher effectiveness.
3. Support legislative efforts to increase 3rd grade reading proficiency.
4. Retain the WorkKeys test as a measure of career readiness for high school graduates.
5. Address the unfunded liabilities and legacy costs associated with the Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System (MPSERS).
6. Fund programs to support mental and physical health outside the school budget
7. Fund schools to ensure the resources are dedicated and weighted based on individual need without increase the total amount spent.

NEXT STEPS

The K-12 system was designed, developed and considered successful in a time where the world was much different. The world of today and the future is changing at a rate and with such complexity that the K-12 system requires significant attention, cross-sector partnerships and unique solutions. The ecosystem surrounding the families of West Michigan is both supportive and challenge; poverty and diversity issues have an undeniable negative impact on the performance of students and teachers.

The good news is that there are leading practices, many of

which are rooted right here in West Michigan, that have positive and radical effects on the performance and livelihood of students, families and teachers. These practices and programs need to be scaled. As employers increasingly realize the challenge that they currently (or will soon) face with attracting, hiring and retaining skilled, exceptional talent, urgency will increase. If the K-12 system in West Michigan is going to produce students who are ready for the careers of tomorrow and ready to engage with post-secondary education that will help them achieve their goals and become productive

citizens, then we must take successful and innovative efforts to scale. Removing duplicative and ineffective efforts, leverage what is known to work and organize the collective effort of a cross-sector team.

Complex problems require cross-sector solutions. Working together to create shared understanding of the problem is half the battle; what comes next is working together to evaluate the current solutions and leading practices and then, quite simply, doing something.



SO, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

In short, get equipped and understand the issues of rigor, relevance and ecosystem. Understand the current realities of the West Michigan ecosystem and change your perspective, if needed. Remember the true end-users of the system...students. And do something with another sector. Complex problems require cross-sector solutions.

1

Employers need to lead the conversation with educators regarding relevance; employers have a responsibility to intentionally work to develop and scale programs, opportunities and partnerships that help teachers, students and families better understand the current and future business and career climate and to help students “connect their passions and interests to the future.”

2

For employers, educators, government and the community alike: evaluate current and future community investments to support the ecosystem that the families of West Michigan live within. Get acquainted with the insights and needs presented within this report and use them as a lenses to help filter current and new opportunities. Ecosystem change will drive change in relevance, and rigor will follow accordingly.

3

Public policy needs to change in order to support a new K-12 system, and to encourage growth, improvement and change within the entire ecosystem.

Thank you for taking the time to engage with this report and for supporting the efforts of Talent 2025. Educators, thank you for your dedication, support and passion for the students of West Michigan. Employers, thank you for working hard to build a better Michigan, a place where individuals and families can succeed in many different ways.

APPENDIX A: WORKSHEET TEMPLATES

NEEDS WORKSHEET	What are you trying to solve?
------------------------	--------------------------------------

NEEDS Select the needs that are most relevant to your problem	RELEVANCE How is this relevant to your problem? What do you think it means to your users?
ENGAGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships that are maintained across different settings <input type="checkbox"/> Exposure to mentors and leaders with similar passions, illustrating a range of opportunities for the future <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships and support systems that provide consistent and proactive guidance 	
GUIDE & DEVELOP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The skills to plan and balance daily activities throughout the ecosystem <input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to develop self-management skills within a flexible structure <input type="checkbox"/> To enjoy the journey of the learning process and see how it impacts my future (beyond grades/ test results) <input type="checkbox"/> A clear and appropriate connection between actions and consequences <input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative experiences that develop a cohort mentality 	
SUPPORT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to create my own identity and path <input type="checkbox"/> Consistent (physical and virtual) environments that allow me to be myself without the threat of toxic influences <input type="checkbox"/> Give parents optional insight into my schoolwork and progress <input type="checkbox"/> Socialization to be more prevalent in school instead of being reserved for specific places and times 	

Who is the user you are solving for?

OPPORTUNITIES Cross-sector collaboration is necessary to impact change within and for educational systems. What existing organizations might be addressing these needs? How can you and your team work together with those organizations or other sectors to address these needs?
<p>Existing Organization(s):</p> <p>How they can help:</p> <p>Ideas for working together:</p> <p>What is the benefit to the user/educational system?</p>
<p>Existing Organization(s):</p> <p>How they can help:</p> <p>Ideas for working together:</p> <p>What is the benefit to the user/educational system?</p>
<p>Existing Organization(s):</p> <p>How they can help:</p> <p>Ideas for working together:</p> <p>What is the benefit to the user/educational system?</p>

APPENDIX B:

META ANALYSIS RESOURCE LIST

APPENDIX B: META-ANALYSIS RESOURCE LIST

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APPENDIX C:

LEADING PRACTICES SUBGROUP REPORT

APPENDIX C: LEADING PRACTICES SUBGROUP REPORT

TALENT 2025 | K-12 WORKING GROUP

Recommendation of Leading Practices

INTRODUCTION

Talent 2025 is committed to our vision for West Michigan to become globally recognized as a top 20 region for talent in the U.S.

In late 2013, members of Talent 2025's CEO Council began a conversation with K-12 superintendents from Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties to address the reasons why so many West Michigan high school students don't graduate college and career ready. Flat graduation rates, the large percentage of high school graduates that require a remedial class in college, and the difficulty many employers have finding high school graduates with the basic skills for employment were cited as evidence. Together, they acknowledged the performance of the region's K-12 system needed to be better, if the region was going to have the talent to prosper economically.

What ensued was a discussion of the barriers and root causes that prevent students from successfully completing school. They identified a range of factors including the role of parents, busy family schedules, limited opportunities for career exploration, the quality of instruction, funding constraints, state requirements, the relevance of curriculum, the increase in the number of households living in poverty and much more. These were organized into three major themes:

- 1) **Rigor** speaks to the academic performance, curriculum, skills sets, etc. These fit most closely with the traditional domain of education.
- 2) **Relevance** speaks to the customers of the education system: students, parents, and employers. This set focuses on the perceived relevance of education by students and the perceived outcomes of education for stakeholders in the broader ecosystem.
- 3) **Ecosystem** addresses the larger socio-economic environment in which students, parents, employers and the education system all reside.

The net result of this work was an understanding that schools have many problems. Some of these problems are specific to the system of education. However, many of the problems evident in schools are symptoms of the larger ecosystem. Schools do not cause the growing effects of poverty, but schools are the nexus point for many of the barriers poverty creates. For years, employers have missed a big opportunity to show students the relevance of subject matter to real world application. While current funding models fail to recognize inequities in funding, particularly the support of at-risk students.

Early this year, Talent 2025's K-12 Working Group initiated a comprehensive research effort with assistance from the New North Center to examine the barriers and needs faced by West Michigan students and families, the current state of funding in K-12 education, and leading practices that could be deployed to make West Michigan a leader in K-12 education.

This report details the result of this unique collaborative effort by West Michigan business and education leaders to co-define the challenges and solutions to ensure every high school student graduates college and career ready.

To accomplish this, it is time to act boldly to address the needs of West Michigan's they thrive personally can contribute to the success of our community.

KEY FACTS

Hypothesis: West Michigan high school graduation rates are not reflective of kids being ready for work or college.

- Only 31% of students are proficient in MME reading and math tests
- Yet 80% of 9th graders graduate from high school
- Remediation rates for first-year college students range between 40-60%
- Employers cite a lack of work readiness among many recent graduates

One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time

Performance of K-12 education declines after 3rd grade.

By 2025, 95% of all occupations will require at least a high school diploma or equivalent and 64% will require a post-secondary credential.

In 7 years, the proportion of Michigan children from low-income households has increased from 2/3rds to nearly half.

More than half of Michigan's low-income children are white, but around 3/4ths of Michigan's black and Hispanic children are low-income.

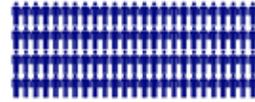
Children from single mother households are about 5 times more likely to be living in poverty.

The children of many low-income parents did not graduate from high school, let alone college. High school dropouts are 6 times more likely to live in poverty than college graduates.

Michigan's special education services are much more likely to be used by low-income children.

Black and Hispanic children are 12 times more likely than white children to attend a school with concentrated poverty.

Of 100 Michigan 9th graders



73 will graduate from high school on time



45 will enroll in post-secondary education within 12 months of graduation



32 will persist from their first to their second year at a post-secondary institution



Only 18 will graduate with a degree within six years



BACKGROUND

West Michigan's K-12 education system isn't meeting the needs of its students and adequately preparing them for success later in life. Third grade reading proficiency – a leading indicator of future academic success—hovers around 72%. The average math score among West Michigan 3rd graders is at 43% percent in 2013 and is a full five points lower among 8th graders in the region. Meanwhile, high school graduation rates are flat, a large percentage of students require a remedial course when they enter college, and many employers cite a lack of work-readiness among recent high school graduates.

Meanwhile, 64% of all West Michigan jobs in 2025 – just 10 years from now – will require a post-secondary credential. We have a long way to go if our region is to reach its potential. And, those who do not graduate from high school are much more likely to be incarcerated, have lower rates of employment, receive lower wages, and are more likely to live in poverty. Consequently, they are also far more likely to rely on government assistance.

These statistics underline the need for educators, business, policy makers and communities to work together to ensure every student in West Michigan succeeds academically and become productive citizens.

At the crux of the problem is the fact that in education we have a manufacturing model, built on an agrarian calendar, which is supposed to prepare kids for a knowledge economy that is fluid and ever changing. Many of the reforms made to date have not achieved the success we need to make Michigan a top 10 state nor are they scalable to reach all students.

So the question becomes, what is necessary to create an adaptive 21st century model for education that ensures students can thrive personally and succeed as adults?

ON FUNDING

The leading practices that follow are promising approaches to bettering Michigan K-12 education, but many are difficult to implement without first addressing issues of funding. Many schools in Michigan struggle with the costs of day-to-day operations, let alone the implementation of new programs. Recent research by Public Sector Consultants (PSC) provides several funding recommendations worth mentioning here.

Under current funding models, Michigan schools experience sudden losses in revenue and are unable to adjust their budgets accordingly. Most schools' funding is provided by the state and determined per-pupil—however, since students cannot be counted until after the beginning of the school year, unexpected enrollment drops may suddenly impact an operating budget that was set several months prior.

To counter this problem, PSC recommends slowing down budget adjustments so that schools have time to react. Michigan might determine funding according to the higher student count between prior and present years, for example. With this method funding would be effectively the same over time, but schools would be able to set their budget according to historic facts, rather than projected futures. A short-term solution like this would give the state time to determine an improved, more gradual funding solution.

PSC also points out that, while universally-determined funding seems equitable for all students, it simply does not make sense. Certain student populations, such as at-risk students, English as a second language students, and members of other vulnerable groups, cost more to provide quality education.

To account for this, PSC suggests weighting per-pupil funding formulas so that more funding is allocated to schools with large populations of students from “expensive” groups. In these new funding formulas, at-risk populations would have their funding calculated at a higher rate than the foundation allowance, for example. This would allow schools more of the funding that they need to provide vulnerable students with the education that they need, which is particularly helpful when considering the ways that the following leading practices would impact such groups.

LEADING PRACTICES

Advise MI

Summary: Previously known as the Michigan College Advising Corp, Advise MI is a program of the Michigan College Access Network, which provides academic college advising to students in high poverty and high minority schools around Michigan. On average, 59 percent of students in the schools in question are on free and reduced lunch.

Research conducted by the Michigan College Access Network showed that, of those students reached by the Advise MI program, 69.5 percent of high school graduates enrolled in higher education institutions within 12 months of high school graduation. Of these, 52 percent earned an Associate's degree, certificate, or transferred to another institution within six years. 60.5 percent of first time, full-time, degree-seeking students earned a Bachelor's degree within six years, which represented an increase from both the previous year and the baseline.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Advise MI	High	Low	Medium

Recommendation: Every high school in West Michigan with a free and reduced lunch program above 50% should have an Advise MI coordinator.

Rigor & Relevance Philosophy (Daggett School Model)

Summary: Willard Daggett's unique educational philosophy has led to a teaching model that provides a personalized education to beat the odds. The teaching model emphasizes a number of innovative teaching methods. Schools that adopt the model establish a “no excuse” policy that encourages administrators to have blunt conversations with failing teachers and replace them with motivated and innovative educators. The philosophy also establishes a “stretch strategy”, where teachers are able to extend the curriculum to meet the needs of all students, even when they learn in different ways. Lastly, the Daggett School model posits that teacher evaluation is vital to student success and that teachers should be evaluated on a number of factors including student success, test scores, and student engagement.

One recent example of Daggett's philosophies in action is the adoption of data-driven instruction methods, which aim to use frequent assessment to gather information on students' strengths and weaknesses. By evaluating student performance early and often, instructors are able to make effective curriculum adjustments that address learning gaps.

Although schools that have adopted Daggett's methods are often high poverty with large minority populations, they still manage to exceed state testing standards, and students demonstrate an accelerated educational attainment. According to a study conducted by the International Center for Leadership in Education, Daggett's methods have increased student educational attainment by up to 1.44 years of growth. The study shows that teachers giving feedback to students resulted in 1.7 years of academic growth, student to teacher relationships resulted in 1.44 years of growth, professional development opportunities resulted in 1.24 years of growth, and peer tutoring resulted in 1.13 years of growth. In addition, all of the elements of a

Daggett school have a relatively low cost to implement. With this said, the environment in which a student lives also greatly affects their educational attainment. According to the study, socioeconomic status accounts for +/- 1.14 years of academic growth.

The success of the early literacy programs identified by the Reading Now Network (highlighted later in this report) offer local examples of this approach, which require the right leadership, but little additional financial investment.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Rigor/Relevance Model	High	High	Medium

Recommendation: That a committee be established with a dual purpose: first, to identify schools that would benefit from the Daggett teaching model; and, second, to advise and coach those schools in a conversion to Daggett’s principles.

Career Quest

Summary: Career Quest is a one-day event hosted by Michigan Works! and Kent ISD, which helps students become acquainted with West Michigan industries that are expecting rapid growth in the near future. During the 2014-15 Career Quest event, more than 5,500 middle and high school students attended from nine West Michigan counties. 87 percent of students attending the event reported that they learned something new about careers and the career education process, while 98 percent of educators felt the event was valuable for the students.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Career Quest	Medium	High	Low

Recommendation: Expand the Career Quest model to reach every middle school student in West Michigan.

FuturePREP’D (Ottawa Area Intermediate School District)

Summary: FuturePREP’D creates a link between classroom teaching and workplace relevance. The program begins in sixth grade with projects relevant to the needs of local employers. Then, between eighth and tenth grade, students visit employers and establish mentor relationships. This makes it easier for companies to host students for job shadowing and internships later in high school. The FuturePREP’D program has been rapidly expanding. During the 2013-14 school year 96 students were enrolled with 12 educators. By the 2014-15 school year, 124 students were enrolled with 22 educators.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
FuturePREP’D	Medium	High	Medium

Recommendation: Expand the Future Prep model to districts across the region.

Early Literacy (Reading Now Network)

Summary: The Reading Now Network is inspired by the well-established tenant that early reading proficiency is one of the most significant indicators of future academic success. Drawing from the philosophies of Willard Dagget (discussed above), the program has emphasized third grade reading benchmarks by organizing a group of superintendents from 13 West Michigan counties to foster improved literacy and student achievement in their school districts.

The Reading Now Network identified evidence-based strategies that require little investment to ensure children read proficiently by the end of third grade: 1) an uncompromised focus on reading; 2) using relevant data deeply; 3) sharing leadership and sustaining commitment; 4) managing classrooms to better focus on learning; and 5) collectively sharing responsibility for children’s success.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Reading Proficiency	Medium	High	Low

Recommendation: Every school district should adopt these strategies and monitor their effectiveness to increase early literacy.

Teacher Effectiveness

Summary: Well-prepared, quality teachers are an imperative factor in meeting grade-level benchmarks and unlocking student potential. The phrase “Teacher Effectiveness” refers to several recently-popularized systems of teacher support, including (but not limited to) the involvement of key stakeholders, the use of multiple evaluation measures, the maintenance of clear academic policies, and the providing of effective resources. Many studies also recommend increased funding for educators’ mentoring and professional development courses.

Although the importance of teacher effectiveness cannot be overstated, it means very little if quality teachers do not remain in their careers. For this reason, it is also useful to incentivize teaching jobs, perhaps through bonuses and attractive salaries that encourage teachers to continue working. Incentivizing teaching is especially useful in low-income schools, which experience particularly high teacher turnover as a result of the unique challenges present in such environments.

A study conducted by Bill Sanders at the University of Tennessee concluded that students who are placed with a highly effective teacher in third grade scored in the 96th percentile in math by the end of fifth grade. Students with similar achievement histories who were placed with a low achieving teacher in third grade, scored in the 44th percentile at the end of fifth grade. With this, Sanders concluded that the most significant factor in a student’s success is the teacher with whom they are placed. In a similar study conducted in Dallas, Texas, students who were placed with highly effective teachers from first through third grade had increased scores from the 63rd percentile to the 87th percentile. In contrast, the students’ comparable peers with low achieving teachers had their scores decrease from the 58th to the 40th percentile. The researchers concluded that teacher effectiveness plays a significant role in how well a student will do in years to come.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Teacher Effectiveness	Low	High	Low

Recommendation: Adopt a common measure of teacher effectiveness statewide.

Parent University (Grand Rapids Public Schools)

Summary: This program is a unique model designed to equip parents with the knowledge and resources to be effective advocates for their child’s academic success. Parents receive skill-development training and education in effective parenting, personal growth, navigating education, health and wellness, and professional development.

During the 2013-14 school year, Parent University served over 1,000 parents. All classes are free to all parents with students attending GRPS, and most classes are offered in both Spanish and English. Parent University offers courses on a variety of subjects including personal growth, health and wellness, and navigation of the educational system. In addition, the program provides parent groups for added parent-to-parent support.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
GRPS' Parent University	Low	Medium	High

Recommendation: Expand the Parent University model to every school district with a high at-risk student population.

Physical and Mental Health (Pathways to Potential)

Summary: Pathways to Potential is a new statewide program modeled after the Kent Schools Services Network and facilitated by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. These programs are designed around the positive association between health and educational achievement and utilize school buildings as the vehicle through which to provide quality health services to students.

Although Pathways to Potential is a new program, the Kent School Services Network serves as an effective proxy by which to understand the power of health services programs. The KSSN has found a direct correlation between access to quality healthcare and increased MEAP scores, indicating that health services are vital to student academic success. KSSN focuses especially on mental health issues such as ADD or ADHD, which can hinder a child from succeeding academically and often go untreated in uninsured families. Effectively, this meant that more mental health issues among vulnerable populations were able to be treated, such as the region’s African-American and Hispanic families. In uninsured families, mental health issues such as these often go untreated. Over the past few years, clinicians have seen over 2,327 unique students—an encouraging indication of a healthy school-community partnership.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Pathways to Potential	Low	Medium	High

Recommendation: Expand the model to schools with high concentrations of at-risk students.

Food Security (Kids’ Food Basket)

Summary: Kids’ Food Basket is a nonprofit organization that provides sack dinners to the children of Kent, Muskegon, and Ottawa counties. The program recognizes that, in some low-income households, children’s only guaranteed meals are those provided through their school’s free- and reduced-lunch program. Since that program fails to provide meals in the evening or on the weekend, Kid’s Food Basket does so instead.

There is a great deal of evidence that draws a connection between secure food access and student success. A Food Research and Action Center study reported that insufficient access to food harms a student’s alertness, comprehension, memory, and learning. A report published by UCLA, which analyzed over 160 scientific studies of food’s effect on the brain, found that healthy foods provide many benefits, including a decreased chance of mental disorders such as depression.

In Michigan, it is estimated that 25% of children are food insecure. Thanks to the work of KFB, nearly 7,000 children who would otherwise go hungry will receive their third meal of the day. The principal of Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School in Muskegon Heights attributes an increase of 21 percent in MEAP test scores after Kids’ Food Basket began providing sack suppers to students in 2014.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Kids' Food Basket	Low	Low	High

Recommendation: Replicate the Kid’s Food Basket model to reach students across the region facing food insecurity.

Teach for America (TFA)

Summary: Teach for America is a national non-profit program that works to strengthen educational equity by employing recent college graduates as teachers in low-income areas throughout the country.

Teach for America Teachers are found to be as effective as other teachers in math and reading. In fact, elementary TFA Teachers produce reading growth that is 1.3 months above the rate of their non-TFA counterparts, while secondary schools experience a similar improvement in math scores. Although results vary by school and region, the most effective TFA programs (located in Miami), have provided the equivalent of three additional months of math instruction, according to test score data. In North Carolina and Tennessee, TFA is consistently the most abundant source of teachers, according to statewide studies. Despite the effectiveness of the program, Teach for America teachers are rarely (if ever) used in West Michigan schools.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Teach for America	Low	Medium	High

Recommendation: Pilot the Teach for America program at a West Michigan elementary or high school.

Skills4Success (Ottawa Intermediate School District)

Summary: Skills4Success is an educational framework created by OAISD’s FuturePREP’D academy that promotes a set of seven interrelated “soft skills” identified as important by area experts. These include 1) Technology Literacy; 2) Collaboration & Global Thinking; 3) Communication; 4) Critical Thinking & Problem Solving; 5) Flexibility & Adaptability; 6) Ethical Citizenship; and 7) Personal Accountability. Skills4Success promotes each of these skills by providing a rubric with which to evaluate the presence of these components in classrooms. In this way, the program hopes to develop and deliver a robust continuum of learning and career exploration options to support students’ academic and career goals. More concretely, the goals of Skills4Success are to get 100 percent of students to graduate with the necessary college and career readiness skills by 2023, and to get 100 percent of students to complete some form of post-secondary education/career credentialing by 2020.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Skills4Success	High	High	Medium

Recommendation: The Skills4Success framework should be integrated into existing curriculums in classrooms region-wide.

National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) ACT

Summary: The National Career Readiness Certificate is an evidenced-based credential possessed by nearly 1 million workers in Michigan. Employers can use the NCRC to help select the most qualified job candidates, match the right person to the right position, and assist in predicting potential for advancement. Today, over 60 employers across West Michigan use the certificate.

The test to receive this credential is given to every 11th grader attending a public school in the state of Michigan and measures the individual’s abilities in applied mathematics, locating information, and reading for information. Unfortunately, very few students and their parents understand the value of the NCRC at a time when employers are looking for evidence a job candidate is job-ready.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
WorkKeys/NCRC	High	High	Medium

Recommendation: School districts should educate high school faculty, parents, and students on the value of the NCRC and provide a copy of the certificate for students who earn it.

Obtaining College Credit in High School

There are a variety of leading educational practices focused on getting students onto a university track early by helping them to obtain college credit while still enrolled in high school. Although each of the following programs meets this goal in its own way, all three have demonstrated success in enhancing college readiness and enrollment.

Early College

Summary: Early College is an option available to many West Michigan students through their public high school. This model enables students to take college-level courses at a local community college while completing their high school diploma by adding on a 13th grade in which students earn a high school diploma and their Associate’s degree simultaneously. Students enrolled in Early College spend their 12th and 13th school years almost exclusively taking courses at the partner college.

Early College students can jumpstart their career or four year degree by earning either an Associate’s degree or 60 college credits while enrolled in the program. Various studies have shown that Early College is an effective program through which students are prepared for college and career. 86% of Early College high school students graduated from high school compared to 81% of comparison students in surrounding districts, and 81% of Early College students enrolled in college. Early college students also had significantly higher English language arts assessment scores in high school than comparison students. Additionally, Early College’s impact is particularly salient among underrepresented populations, including female students, lower-income students, and students of color.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Early College	High	High	High

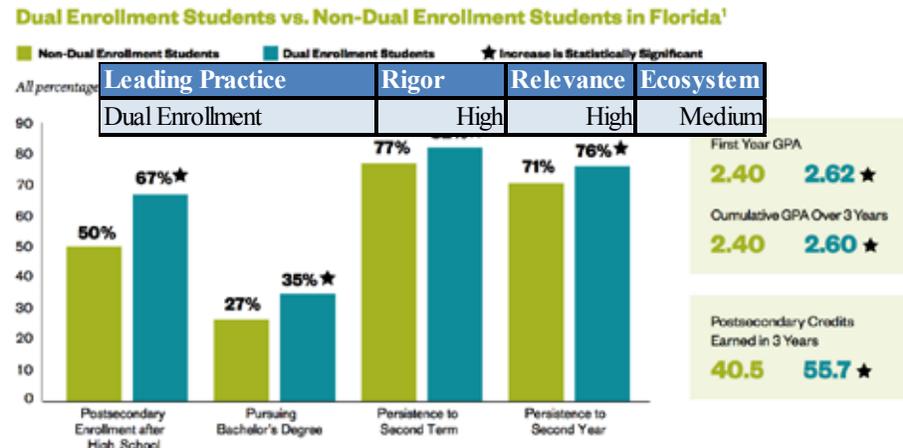
Recommendation: Ensure every West Michigan high school student has the option of Early College through their high school.

Dual Enrollment (DE)

Summary: Unlike Early College, Dual Enrollment programs do not extend students’ time at high school, but rather allow students to take college classes while in high school and earn credit for both. In lieu of one of their high school classes, students enroll in a college course and complete all work accordingly. Upon completion, students obtain college credit in the same fashion as traditional university enrollment.

Dual Enrollment programs improve college attendance and retention among students who might otherwise be ill-prepared for higher education. Not only does Dual Enrollment give students a head start on their required credits, but it also helps them to better understand their future course’s required workload. Originally, these programs targeted the most advanced high school students, but today’s national focus has moved toward the recruitment of disadvantaged, first-generation, and middle-achieving students.

Recent national data shows that 71 percent of high schools offer dual enrollment opportunities and that 800,000 high school students take at least one college course during the school year. In addition, those students who participate in a DE program are more likely to enroll in post-secondary education following graduation and were also more likely to pursue a Bachelor's degree and persist through post-secondary education, according to a study conducted by the Community College Research Center.

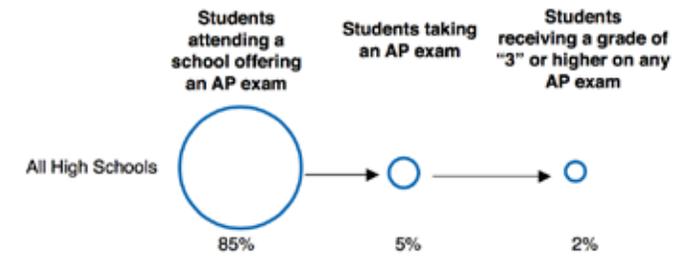


Recommendations: Increase awareness of the Dual Enrollment process in high schools.

Advanced Placement (AP) Courses

Summary: Advanced Placement (A.P.) courses are advanced high school classes oriented around university-level assessments that help to advance students' academic position at the onset of college. In many cases, college credit is offered for sufficient AP test scores, allowing students to come into college with general education requirements already completed. Alternatively, some colleges place incoming students who were successful in AP courses into more advanced courses in a given subject. In short, AP courses place students in higher-level courses and may allow them to complete more majors or minors than the traditional college student.

According to research, Advanced Placement courses are beneficial to a very small number of students. In fact, the majority of students (98 percent) earn less than a three on the AP exam, which does not earn them any credit or placement with any colleges. There are also very apparent socioeconomic issues with AP course. Schools with low socioeconomic status often do not have the funds or teachers to offer as many AP courses as a suburban school district. Rural school districts offer the least amount of AP courses, overall. Below is research conducted by a nonprofit Educational Testing Service (ETS), with a mission to increase the quality and equity of education by providing fair and valid assessment research.

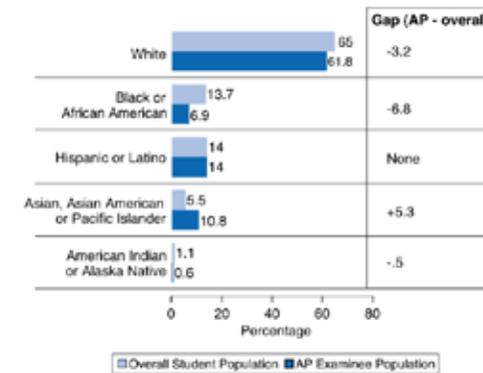


Percent of Students (by racial background) Who Attempted At Least One A.P. Exam

- Asian American 10.3 percent
- White 5.3 percent
- Hispanic 2.4 percent
- African American .5 percent

Figure 2

Percentage of AP Examinees Compared to Graduating Senior Population, U.S. Public Schools, 2006



Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Advanced Placement	Medium	Medium	Medium

Recommendation: Improve the access to and effectiveness of AP courses to reach more students and increase their benefit to students who enroll in them.

Occupations in Demand

For many years West Michigan K-12 and higher education leaders have cited a lack of effective data on the occupations, knowledge and skills needed by the region’s employers now and in the future. This lack of data creates a significant barrier to educators, especially guidance counselors, when they try to show relevance of curriculum and potential career paths for students.

In 2014, Talent 2025 issued its first Talent Demand Report

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Occupations on Demand	Medium	High	Low

Recommendation: West Michigan K-12 educators should incorporate this data into their career advising and program development processes to increase the alignment of secondary education with post-secondary education and employers.

EduGuide

Research has begun to identify the non-cognitive factors that help explain many of the performance gaps in school and work. In fact, some of these factors have been shown to be better predictors of student success than IQ.

Innovative programs like Michigan’s nonprofit EduGuide (www.EduGuide.org) can help fill these gaps. With the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, EduGuide has created an online blended learning program that scales up interventions based on control group studies that have raised students’ GPA by an average of .3 and improved academic behaviors.ⁱ These control group studies have also narrowed gaps for minorities and young women in STEM subjects at the k12 and college level.ⁱⁱ More than 80% of the teachers using EduGuide’s program report 5 or more impacts including better grades and test scores, better preparation for class, better participation in class, stronger student-teacher bonds and more students mentoring and encouraging each other.

Schools and colleges plug EduGuide’s brief weekly self-paced activities into advisory programs or classes, where they also do double duty meeting English objectives. And because EduGuide equips students to mentor their friends and family, using it school-wide can build a culture that is not only academically college-ready, but also ready to contribute more as problem solvers in the workforce.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
EduGuide	High	Medium	Medium

Recommendation: Build non-cognitive skills in local schools and colleges with EduGuide to narrow achievement gaps and prepare students to persist in education and the workforce.

Class Size Reduction

Reducing the number of students per classroom is a particularly challenging practice because it cannot be done without increasing staff. However, its positive effects on educational attainment

cannot be denied. Smaller classes sizes have consistently resulted in increased educational growth, particularly in grades K-3, where performance improves in every measurable way, including test results, grades, and attendance.

This positive effect is even more noticeable among black and Hispanic students, which is evident in the estimated 38% reduction in the minority-white achievement gap that results from reduced class sizes. This is especially important because minority students are also the least likely to be found in small classes.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Classroom Size Reduction	Medium	Low	High

Recommendation: More teachers should be hired throughout the region so that every classroom in West Michigan can have fewer than 19 students.

Increased Time in Classrooms

Traditionally, K-12 institutions operate from early fall until late spring, with an extended summer vacation. This operating calendar, inspired by the agrarian needs of the 19th and 20th centuries, must be rethought in the 21st. For this reason, a number of schools throughout the country have worked to increase the amount of days that students spend with quality teachers each year. By doing so, schools allow their teachers more time to teach carefully and deliberately, and increase the amount of “time on task” for projects each year. This change has been particularly effective among poor students, who lose valuable academic gains made during the year in the summer months.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Increased Class Time	High	Low	Medium

Recommendation: West Michigan schools should increase the number of days in their school year to better serve students.

Increased Leniency for Work Based Learning (WBL)

“Work-based learning” refers to a set of programs through which students earn school credit while exploring their futures through on-site, career-oriented work placements. WBL programs modify traditional K-12 education to increase its relevancy, particularly to students who are interested in transitioning directly into a career after high school. However, West Michigan school districts tend to be cautious when it comes to WBL programs, and a variety of restrictions exist that render students’ work placements challenging. Among these restrictions are a requirement that certified teachers make themselves available to supervise WBL sites, that insurance coverage is heightened, and that careful training plans are laid out for student performance while participating in WBL programs. While these restrictions are useful and well-intentioned, they greatly decrease the likelihood that students will participate in a highly relevant and useful form of alternative education. For this reason, it would be useful to promote WBL programming by making it more flexible and therefore easier for interested students to pursue.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Work-Based Learning	Low	High	Medium

Recommendation: Lower the restrictions for WBL programs so that they are more accessible to students.

Trading a Focus on Time for a Focus on Achievement

Traditionally, progression in K-12 education has been focused largely on the amount of time a student spends at a particular level: a middle school student spends 180 days in the 7th grade before moving on to the 8th grade, and subsequently moves on to high school after another 180 days. The problem with this model is that, if time is the constant by which progression is measured, then learning is the variable. Students would be much better served by reversing this relationship, and focusing on academic achievement as the constant by which we measure progress.

Some school districts in the U.S. have adopted a model that is inspired by this philosophy, to great effect. Lindsay High School in Central California has replaced assessment grades with proficiency scores that better capture a student’s progression along a series of benchmarks. At Lindsay, students are moved on to a more advanced class when they reach a certain benchmark, rather than at the end of a school year, and are in this way able to progress at their own reasonable pace. If a student takes a longer time to learn math skills, he or she can take that time to learn properly, while moving on in other subjects in which he or she has demonstrated proficiency.

Leading Practice	Rigor	Relevance	Ecosystem
Achievement-Based Progress	High	Low	Low

Recommendation: Implement an achievement-based progression system in Michigan’s K-12 institutions.

Conclusion

The leading practices discussed in this report are promising ways by which to foster improvements to the rigor, relevance, and ecosystem of education in Michigan. With support from business leaders, legislators, and parents, these practices can be implemented effectively throughout West Michigan to overcome some of education’s greatest challenges. The state can and should become a leader in reading by the year 2025 and by 2020 should be the most improved in early literacy. Through extensive research Talent 2025 has laid out the following recommendations to make Michigan a leader in education by the year 2025.

- Implement the usage of research based screening tools to catch students who are falling behind before it is too late
- Provide teachers with the training to use diagnostic driven measures
- Require a minimum of 90 minutes of reading instruction and focused reading time
- Teach teachers to be passionate and engaged to help motivate their students
- Choose teachers with strong content knowledge
- Provide a reading specialist or reading coach to each classroom and teacher
- Provide school building leaders with leadership skills and early literacy training
- Use national assessment tools in order to give Michigan students, parents, and stakeholders accurate data on how the state’s schools are performing

If West Michigan’s K-12 system is going to produce students who are college and career ready we must take successful and innovative efforts to scale. Doing so removes duplicative and ineffective efforts and leverages what is know to work and organizes the collect effort of educators, employers, government and the community to ensure every student in West Michigan graduates college and career ready.

ⁱ Oyserman, D., Bybee, D., & Terry, K. (2006). Possible selves and academic outcomes: How and when possible selves impel action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91, 188-204.

ⁱⁱ Good, C., Aronson, J., & Inzlicht, M. (2003). Improving adolescents’ standardized test performance: An intervention to reduce the effects of stereotype threat. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24, 645-662.

APPENDIX D: T2025 FUNDING PROPOSALS

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FUNDING

The goal of Talent 2025 is for every child in West Michigan to graduate from high school college/career ready. The State must fund schools to ensure the resources are dedicated and weighted based on individual student need. For example, we know that in high poverty areas, students starting Kindergarten are one to two years behind students in more affluent areas and additional effort and resources are necessary to elevate student's proficiency. The same is also true for English Language Learners and special education students. We also know that it costs more to educate a high school student than an elementary student and yet the per pupil funding is based on a single flat rate. At the same time, roughly the State of Michigan will invest roughly \$14 billion in K-12 education for the 2015-2016 school year.

Recently the Department of Technology, Management and Budget commissioned a funding adequacy study. The study will determine the sufficient resources per pupil to provide a public education that enabled a pupil to demonstrate successful completion, in terms of proficiency, of all of the credit requirements of the Michigan Merit Curriculum. The study must be done in a "needs" based manner that provides all children the opportunity to reach proficiency.

As this closer examination of funding begins, we offer the following recommendations to align funding to meet the needs of Michigan school children and overcome the challenges the ecosystem poses to their academic success and ability to thrive as adults:

1. **Blended Pupil Count:** Michigan has a blended pupil count when services are shared to provide education to a student. For example, students who participate in a half-day kindergarten program only receive .5 FTE in foundation allowance. The same blending occurs for students who participate in dual enrollment or CTE programs as well. This concept could be expanded to provide additional financial support for districts that provide "value-added services." Value-added services could be services provided above and beyond the foundation allowance. For example, if the state wanted to incentivize more dual enrollment opportunities they could provide 1.2 FTE for students enrolled in that programming. The same could be done for students in poverty if you were trying to make the funding formula more equitable. Free and reduced lunch students could qualify for 1.1 FTEs.

2. **School Aid Budget Concerns:** The School Aid Fund (SAF) is comprised primarily of sales, property and income tax. This diverse set of revenues shields the SAF during economic downturns and also provides consistent revenue growth. Unfortunately other areas of the state budget have not rebounded since the great recession. This has caused additional programs to be placed into the SAF (community colleges, higher education, etc.) and less resources available to make additional strategic investments in K-12.

Additionally, if the state was to relieve the debt of Detroit Public Schools that would have a dramatic impact on the SAF. Analysts predict anywhere from \$70 - \$100 per pupil for up to 10 years. The last thing to consider is Michigan has experienced consistent economic growth for the last 7 years. We're beginning to reach outlier territory and should at some point in the near future expect a slight downturn in the economy. This will place additional strain on tax resources and the state does not have adequate reserves to keep services whole.

3. **School Aid Act Re-Write:** Ensure schools are funded based on the true cost of meeting the individual academic needs of each and every child – and the (unfunded) federal/state mandated services for high needs students (poor, special education, English Language Learners). Ensure greater equity and fairness, including a per pupil funding formula that is appropriately adjusted for student needs, grade level, bricks/mortar vs online, etc.

4. **Sinking Fund Technology Expansion:** This is particularly necessary to support 21st Century teaching and learning as the current sinking fund law prohibits expending funds for most technology (computers, ipads, smart boards, etc.). The Michigan Department of Treasury has defined technology in the case of sinking fund expenditures to mean wiring and materials for installing equipment, but not technology, equipment or software. It makes economic sense for districts to be able to make technology purchases using sinking funds. Bonds require taxpayers to foot the bill for interest and other charges, which could be directed to the classroom.
5. **Retirement Reform:** Address the unfunded liabilities and legacy costs associated with the Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System (MPERS). While progress has been made, there is a false perception that the problem has been fixed when in fact much more is needed. Grand Rapids Public Schools alone has seen retirement costs skyrocket from 15% of payroll in 2007 to 34% of payroll in 2014.

WHO WE ARE



Business leaders across West Michigan came together in 2010 to form TALENT 2025. The organization is supported by more than 90 business leaders representing over 80,000 employees and a wide variety of industries across 13 West Michigan counties. Employers are key to a region's economic prosperity and member CEOs want to help craft solutions.

The goal of this CEO-led effort is to dramatically improve the quality and quantity of the region's talent to meet increasingly more complex and diverse workforce needs. Regional collaboration among all stakeholders in the talent system will ensure that our region is globally competitive with a greater quality of life for all.

TALENT 2025's vision is for West Michigan to be globally recognized as a top 20 region in the U.S. where entrepreneurship thrives, and employers want to be, because diverse talent wants to work, learn, and live here. TALENT 2025 is a catalyst to create a truly integrated talent development system designed to make West Michigan a magnet for both talent and jobs.

Find out more: www.talent2025.org

About the K-12 Working Group

In late 2013, members of Talent 2025's CEO Council began a conversation with K-12 superintendents from Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties to address the reasons why so many West Michigan high school students don't graduate college and career ready. Flat graduation rates, the large percentage of high school graduates that require a remedial class in college, and the difficulty many employers have finding high school graduates with the basic skills for employment were cited as evidence. Together, they acknowledged the performance of the region's K-12 system needed to be better, if the region was going to have the talent to prosper economically.



NewNorth is a non-profit, hybrid education and business institution, advocating, teaching and using the discipline of design thinking. The Center is located in Holland, MI, with clients and students nationwide, and focuses on building Michigan-based organizations. NewNorth believes in the value of disciplined creative systems and embedded, repeatable innovation processes that are effective in companies, government entities and organizations of all kinds and sizes.

NewNorth offers:

“Unconsulting“ + Custom Projects

Customized, intensive (1 to 5 day), project-based engagements that guide and teach a team a systematic, repeatable approach to problem solving and design.

Learning Experiences

Long-and short-format learning experiences, including Innovation Management Certification (25 weeks) and workshops (0.5 to 5 day)

Community Impact Projects

Projects developed in partnership with NPOs, community objectives and other social impact organizations. Design research and design sprint sessions.

The Center for Applied Innovation & Design (dba NewNorth) is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit (EIN 27-0440934). We have a Board of Directors that provides advice and oversight.

Find out more: www.newnorthcenter.org



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