



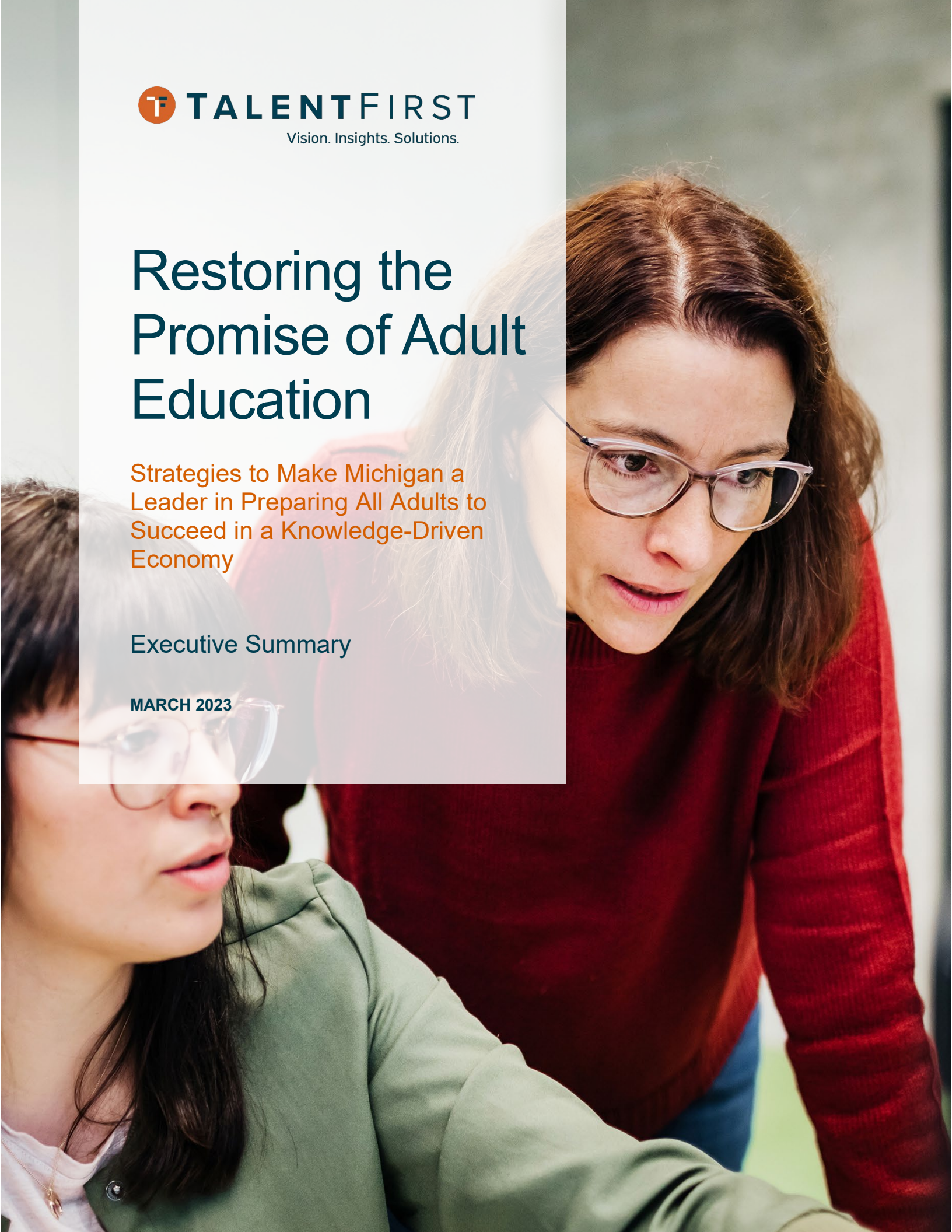
Vision. Insights. Solutions.

Restoring the Promise of Adult Education

Strategies to Make Michigan a Leader in Preparing All Adults to Succeed in a Knowledge-Driven Economy

Executive Summary

MARCH 2023



Restoring the Promise of Adult Education

STRATEGIES TO MAKE MICHIGAN A LEADER IN PREPARING ALL ADULTS TO SUCCEED IN A KNOWLEDGE DRIVEN ECONOMY

Michigan faces two significant challenges to its economic success.

One is demographic: An aging population is retiring, while birth rates and in-migration are failing to replenish the talent pool. The other is that Michiganders have less education and skills compared to neighboring states and the nation overall. Central to that concern: Far too many adults lack a high school diploma.

This is holding us back and harming our residents. If Michigan hopes to compete in the knowledge-based economy, it must maximize the education and skills of its workforce. This includes optimizing an adult education system that currently meets less than 4% of the need while hundreds of thousands are sidelined from the workforce.

Current state: Coming up short

Michigan is making significant investments in post-secondary training and education. But those initiatives – and the good-paying jobs they make possible – remain out of reach for those who lack a high school diploma, as 716,000 did in 2019¹. Yet, even as Michigan's adult education system serves just a fraction of the need, only 1 in 2 enrolled earn a high school diploma or GED. Adult learners are a diverse group and face a wide range of challenges with little support, resulting in unacceptable disparities in completion rates:

- If displaced homemaker, 1 in 4 chance of success
- With transportation barriers, 1 in 5 chance of success
- With transportation barriers and English language learners, 1 in 6 chance of success
- If Black/African American, 1 in 3 chance of success.

Meanwhile, state funding for adult education has plummeted for decades, and Michigan now invests 1 cent on adult basic education for every \$1.00 spent on higher education.²

In a state that produces only three graduates for every 10 job openings requiring a postsecondary credential, we must do better with this neglected component of talent development. Adult education can open the door to post-secondary programs, while also serving those who require basic education, English language acquisition, remediation, and high school completion/equivalency.

Our vision for improvement

The research-based strategies in this report aim to better align the adult education system, provide it with visibility and respect, expand capacity, and improve consistency, equity and learner persistence and success.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. *2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Survey*.

² Calculated by TalentFirst staff based on the Section 107 funding divided by the higher education budget appropriation as reported by the Senate Fiscal Agency, https://www.senate.michigan.gov/sfa/Departments/HighlightSheet/Hlhed_web.pdf.

Our five-year objectives:

- Grow enrollment from serving 3.6% of the need to 10%.
- Improve completion rates from 39.9% to 80%.
- Eliminate the gap in outcomes for people of color and English language learners.

Building a best-in-class system for Michigan

Elevating adult education at the state level while retaining and bolstering the regional partnerships necessary to deploy resources locally will require collaboration among all who are affected by and have a role in adult education — including state government, education providers, workforce development organizations, employers, community partners, and other advocates. Strong state and regional leadership will be necessary to facilitate change.

Based on our review of the literature, stakeholder input, and examination of high-quality adult education systems across the nation, a best-in-class system should contain the following characteristics.

1. Governance:

The state-level agency is connected administratively and/or by way of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with other relevant agencies to work toward more effective integration at state, regional, and local levels. Public-private partnerships at the regional level govern provider procurement and oversight through well-defined partner MOUs. A dedicated statewide task force of adult educators, workforce development professionals, business, and advocates advises the state agency and helps to monitor progress on performance, equity, employer engagement, and other system improvements. Regions also consult their existing community engagement advisory committee or other state-approved advisory committee.

2. Funding

The state braids federal and state funding and distributes funds to regional partnerships that meet performance criteria. The state agency ensures statewide coverage of service based on population need and equitable access to services.

3. Delivery

Local providers are contracted by regional partnerships. State-level agency ensures availability of relevant and sufficient professional development and educator certification. Regional professional development also occurs as needed to address localized needs.

4. Performance Management

The state sets performance metrics with input from the state-level task force and holds regions accountable for performance. Providers are held accountable to these metrics via the regional partnerships, with regional reporting to the state level. State-provided technical assistance supports provider improvement and partner alignment/integration.

5. Communication

Two-way state-local communication channels keep information flows open and effective. State-regional joint marketing occurs to potential learners.

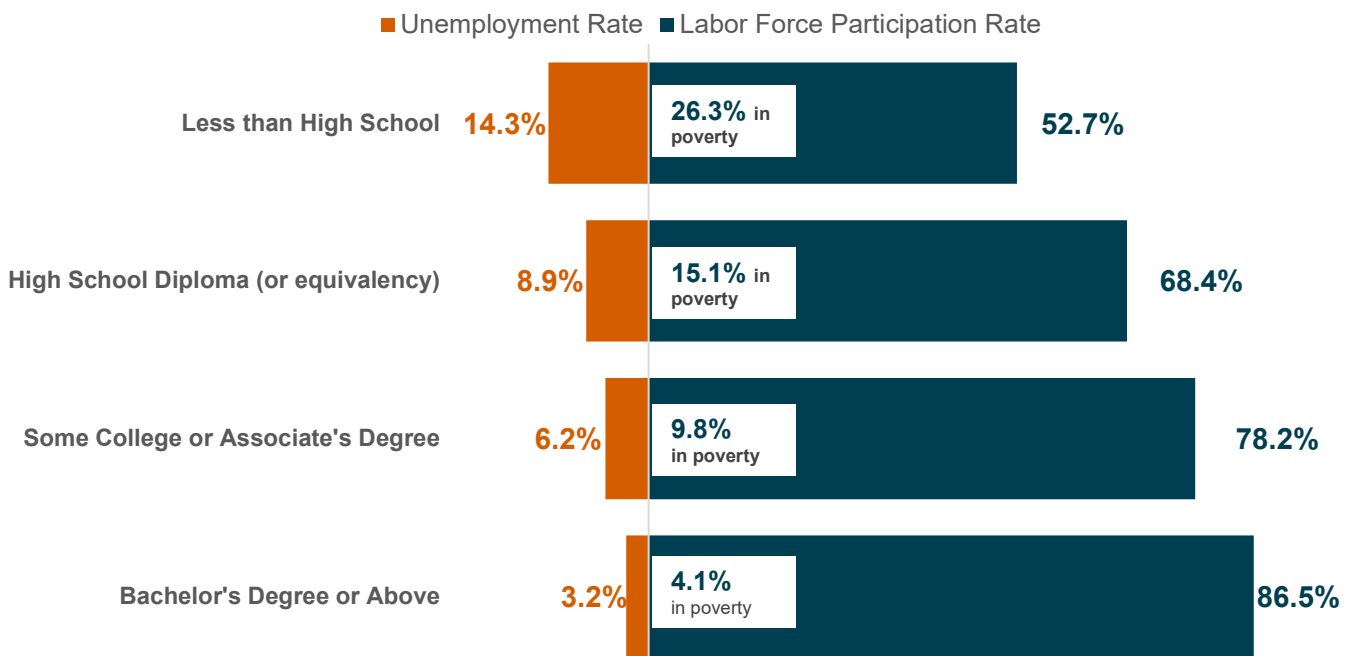
6. Learner Supports

The state requires regional partnerships (as part of funding) to provide wraparound supports and implement tools to foster learning and achievement. Partnerships pass these requirements on to providers, who deliver these services directly or through partners, with state-level coordination as feasible.

Current State: Big Need, Small Impact

Someone without even the most basic education credential, a high school credential, is significantly more likely to be out of the workforce, unemployed and living in poverty. (Figure 1) At the same time, jobs go unfilled because too few workers possess the knowledge and skills required by Michigan employers.

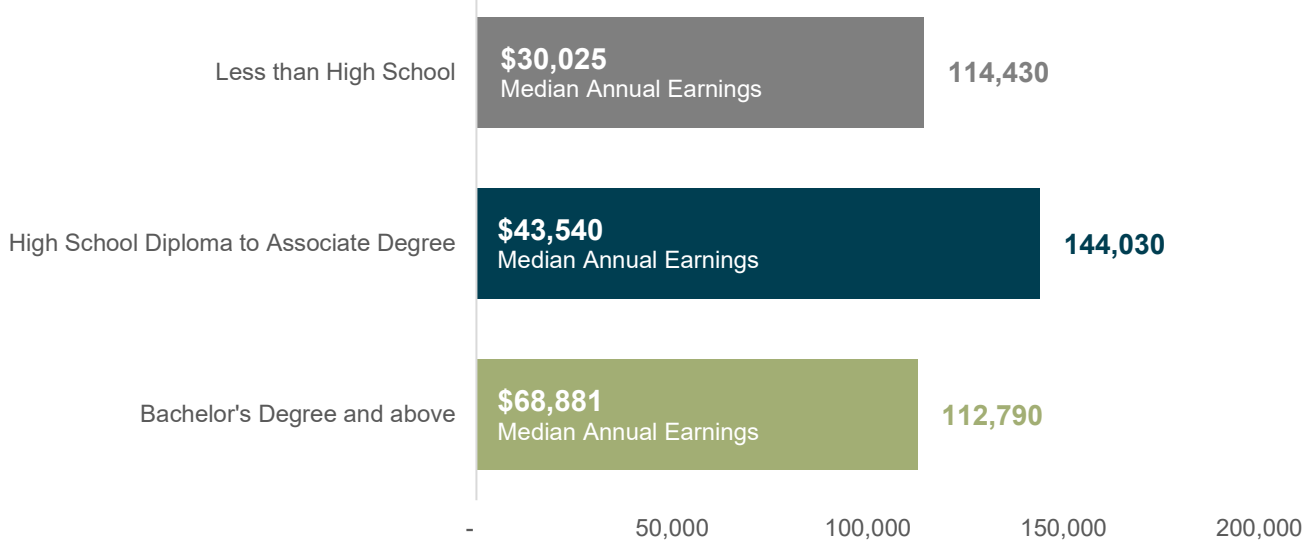
Figure 1: Labor Force Participation and Unemployment by Education, Ages 25-64, Michigan, 2021



Source: U.S Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates, 2017-2021

Two-thirds of job growth in Michigan through 2030 will be for positions that require at least a high school diploma. (Figure 2) Adults without a diploma will be competing for a shrinking pool of low-skill jobs that pay significantly less. This correlation to wages is evident across all levels of education. A high-school diploma alone corresponds to a 45% higher median wage.

Figure 2: Projected New Jobs by Education Required, Michigan (2020-2030)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Long-Term Forecasts (2020-2030)

MISSING TARGETS

In addition to serving a fraction of the need, as of 2020, Michigan was underperforming on most federal adult education outcome targets (Figure 3), such as whether a student earned a credential, gained academic skills, found employment, or increased wages.

Figure 3: Michigan Adult Education Performance to Federal Targets, 2020

CATEGORY	FEDERAL TARGET	MICHIGAN PERFORMANCE
Credential gain	40%	39.9%
Skill gain	50%	37%
Employment gain*	42%	36.9%
Wage increase (median quarterly earnings)	\$4,320	\$4,550

*Second quarter

Aggravating the problem of falling short, however, is the low impact these targets represent. For example, the 39.9% of the adult education enrollees in the 2020-21 school year who obtained a credential adds up to about 6,848 individuals – less than 1% of the population that lacks a diploma.

What’s more, the data presents an incomplete picture, tracking only activities of the state’s 118 publicly funded programs. National adult education experts have questioned career-focused performance targets, which may serve as disincentives to serving adult learners with the greatest needs – individuals with less than an 8th grade education.

Key recommendations: Refine outcome measures and use these to drive improvement; advertise to potential students; ensure access in every county.

Failure to Fund

CUTS SHOW LOW PRIORITY PLACED ON ADULT ED

Adult education has long existed as the poor relative of state education and workforce programming.

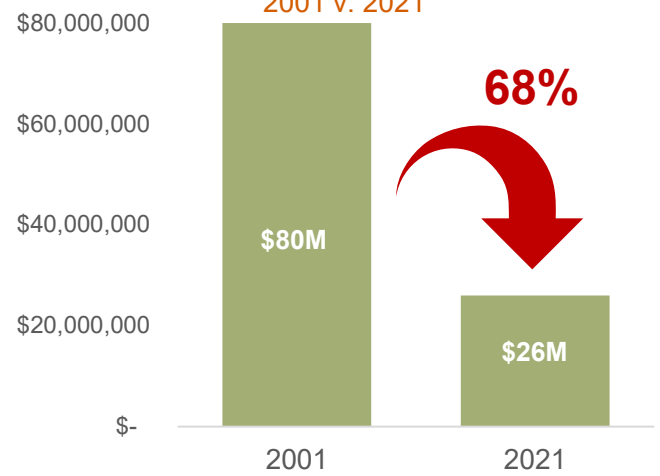
State funding, the primary resource for adult education in Michigan, fell 68% between 2001 and 2021.³ (Figure 4)

Michigan's state-to-federal funding ratio for adult education is about 4:1. But it's noteworthy that federal funding has declined as well, from \$15 million in 2011 to \$11 million in 2021.

The system requires more funding, but also greater flexibility so more providers can access state and federal funds and use those resources to address barriers and adopt best practices. State funding is only accessible to small subset of providers, those operating within the K-12 system, and has strict allowance guidelines that all but discourage innovation. For example, hybrid delivery models are shown to improve persistence and completion, but state funds cannot be leveraged to allow students to borrow laptops and mobile hotspots.

Key recommendations: Increase funding; make funding available to all providers based on successful outcomes; fund a large-scale pilot to test new strategies to scale statewide.

Figure 4: State Funding for Adult Education State Funding (Sec. 107) 2001 v. 2021



Alignment, Identity and Respect

RAISING THE PROFILE OF ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education in Michigan is treated and funded primarily as a branch of the much larger K-12 system, although the Office of Adult Education is housed within the state's Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity's Workforce Development division. National experts interviewed for this report endorsed integrating adult education into workforce development, largely because the workforce system has the flexibility and expertise to braid fundings streams to address barriers to enrollment and completion.

Providers operating within the K-12 system lack the funding flexibility to treat the adult learner as a whole person with unique barriers and career goals. For some the goal of adult education should be a diploma or

³ "2022 Budget Priority: Increase Adult Education Funding to Prepare More Workers for Training and Skilled Work," (Lansing, MI: Michigan League for Public Policy, 2022). Dollars adjusted for inflation.

GED and gaining skills valued by employers. For others, the goal should be foundational skills to obtain housing, childcare, and other resources with the opportunity to gain the credential and skills later.

Adult education has long been undervalued and misunderstood as limited to basic education and GED attainment classes. Worse, a stigma still shadows adult education programs and adult learners themselves. In fact, two-thirds of adult education providers surveyed for this report do not feel respected by the K-12 system. Amid this disregard, adult education does not receive the attention and support that it is due as a vital educational and talent development strategies.

Key recommendations: *Elevate state oversight; elevate the role adult education plays in Michigan’s talent development strategy; increase compensation and full-time positions for adult educators to achieved parity.*

Addressing Barriers

THE NEED FOR SUPPORT TO SERVE DIFFERENT LIVES

Many adult learners have had negative educational experiences and they come to their programs with a history of challenges. Barriers to adult education and learning fall into two categories:

Barriers to access:

- Accountability policies that inadvertently discourage enrollment
- Lack of awareness of programs
- Absence of available, high-quality programs
- Inadequacy of services and supports suiting adult learner needs

Compared to their White counterparts, Black students are about half as likely to exit a program with an academic success (skill gain or credential); Hispanic learners are about 20% less likely to exit with an academic gain or credential.

And barriers to participation, such as:

- Low English proficiency or literacy
- Learning or other disabilities
- Economic vulnerability
- Justice system involvement
- Family responsibilities
- Travel distance to reach adult learning providers
- Low self-image and the social stigma of needing adult education
- Racial/ethnic or class marginalization

Nearly 1 in 2 adult education providers interviewed for this report say that up to 75% of learners exit before completing their goals. Finding what works for the adult learner is essential to helping them succeed. Clearly support services for adult learners are a necessity – and supports need to be tailored to each learner’s circumstances in the context of safe learning environments.

Key recommendations: *Provide technology equipment and internet access; create individualized learning plans and address barrier reduction; offer digital literacy services; promote flexible schedules and formats.*

Seeking Solutions

SHARING GOALS, ADVANCING TOGETHER

Michigan needs to elevate adult education at the state level while retaining and bolstering the regional partnerships necessary to deploy resources locally. TalentFirst worked with Public Policy Associates, subject matter experts, and practitioners in the field to develop a model for adult education resource deployment:



System Integration: Positioning adult education as part of a coordinated talent development system by raising its profile, aligning goals, working closely with employers and partners, delivering services in a human-centered manner, and connecting adult education and career pathways, and more.



Funding: Injecting more resources to support adult education performance through increased state funding, redesigning the funding distribution strategy, greater flexibility through policy waivers, and investing in resources for systems change.



Educator Supports: Demonstrating respect for the field through increased compensation and full-time positions, professional development to serve this population's unique needs, and adult educator certification, among other strategies.



Learner Services: Addressing the whole learner to foster strong outcomes through expanded service access, flexible delivery methods, peer support, digital literacy, technology and learning environments, and learning plans that include assessment for disabilities and career connectivity.

Short-term strategies (0-24 months)



1. Make clear at every opportunity that adult education plays a foundational role in talent development, is a social determinant of health, and is a contributor to family economic stability with multigenerational benefits. At the state-level, educate partner agency leadership and staff about adult-learner needs, partner resources, and services to increase interagency coordination and positioning of adult education as a crucial component of the state's broader talent strategy.



2. Improve data sharing and coordination among all agencies operating within the adult education system by establishing best practice guidelines for robust memorandums of understanding (MOU), to detail how all partners will collaborate to support adult learner persistence and completion.



3. Improve language used and the outcomes to be gained in advertisements to increase program enrollment and employer engagement.



4. Elevate the office of Adult Education with the state Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity as part of the state's talent development in equal standing to efforts for early childhood, K-12, and post-secondary education and workforce development.



5. Increase adult education funding by \$15MM for FY 2023-24 to address unmet demand for services and stabilize program providers by ensuring a consistent level of state and federal funding is truly braided by providers aiming toward coherent goals.



6. Incentivize program providers to offer a hybrid, flexible adult learning models (e.g., HyFlex), where each learning activity is offered in-person, synchronously online, and asynchronously online to improve persistence and completion and ensure equitable access to programs.



7. Incentivize providers to develop individualized learning plans at intake that account for each learner's personal, professional, and digital literacy goals — including skill targets, barrier-resolution steps, and education and career-planning milestone — to contextualize programs to meet the unique goals and needs of each learner.



8. Revise the Adult Learning Plan (ALP) to be more inclusive and accessible for foreign-born learners, learners with visual impairments, and learners with low literacy levels.

- Barriers: include only terms with an addendum detailing explanations for providers to use but are not included on the form (mirroring structure of 2018-19 ALP). Providers should have flexibility to list only those barriers that are relevant to the services they provide or can potentially address.
- Race/Ethnicity: provide more options for learners to self-identify, avoiding options that are only applicable within an American context.
- Education: reword “U.S. based” and non-U.S. based” to “education in the U.S./outside the U.S.”
- Language: include a field to capture information on the learner's home language.
- Translation: translate the document into multiple languages or make clear that providers are welcome to translate the document into languages that reflect the needs of their learners.
- Goals: include goals before barriers, rephrase options to be more accessible to learners of all levels (e.g., “keep a job” instead of “retain employment”), or replace checkboxes with open-ended textbox allowing learners and providers to codevelop achievable, personalized goals.
- Accessibility: ensure the online ALP is compatible with screen readers across multiple languages for learners with visual impairments.



9. Ensure consistent evaluation and interpretation of performance across the continuum of adult education services, discouraging providers from filtering out hard to serve populations, by establishing separate performance benchmarks and outcome measures for adult basic education, English language acquisition, and high school completion programs that extend beyond WIOA-mandated measures. These outcomes should be developed by a committee comprised of representatives from state government, workforce development, business, and adult education.



10. Prevent provider monopolies and stagnation by expanding eligibility through Section 107 of the State School Aid Act to allow a portion (30%) of funds to be leveraged by community-based organizations, contingent on quality (using the refined outcomes described above).



11. Establish the Center for Adult Education Success with a five-year \$10MM grant modeled after the Center for Adult College Success to collaborate with interested adult education providers to expand services and pilot innovative practices that can be shared with other providers.

Medium-term strategies (24-48 months)



1. Incentivize providers to establish co-enrollment processes in partnership with Michigan Rehabilitation Services and/or other community organizations that offer disabilities testing and customized support to avoid duplication of services.



2. Increase Going PRO funding by \$5MM and expand eligible training activities under Going PRO to include high school completion/equivalency, literacy, remedial education, and digital skill development to encourage employers to partner with adult education providers to contextualize adult education and reduce childcare and transportation as barriers.



3. Establish robust and coordinated regional systems by enabling resource navigators and career coaches (from workforce development agencies) to co-locate with all adult education programs, or other community-based locations where adult education services are offered, to facilitate greater collaboration among employers, community groups, and other parties acting within localized adult education ecosystems.



4. Facilitate systems change and improve equitable access to services in every county through targeted funding (e.g., for consistent staffing, technology tools, action planning, professional development, innovation, collaboration), including dedicated funding to expand testing locations.



5. Enhance the quality and scale of the adult educator workforce by increasing compensation and full-time positions for educators to achieve parity with peers and ensure that all providers have a certified teacher or teacher of record on staff.



6. Ensure accessibility in every county, including access to high school equivalency testing. Advertise services directly to potential students and indirectly through partners and other relevant groups.

Longer-term strategies (48+ months)



1. Create a secure, confidential database that shares data on all adult learners among key partners by developing a database for non-WIOA funded learners that is integrated with the Michigan Adult Education Reporting System (MAERS) and the One Stop Management Information System (OSMIS). Connections should also be made to the statewide longitudinal data system to allow providers to better report on outcomes related to postsecondary continuation.



2. Allow time for programs to build capacity and scale effective models by incrementally increasing state funding of adult education to \$80MM by 2030.



3. Secure policy waivers from the federal government under WIOA to enable greater funding coordination, spending flexibility, and data tracking.



4. Build credibility, professionalism, and expertise among adult educators by establishing a separate certification that recognizes the unique knowledge and expertise required of adult education professionals, with higher compensation for educators who achieve this credential.

Conclusion

While Michigan has devoted considerable resources toward postsecondary education and training, adult education has been a neglected aspect of talent development.

We cannot afford to overlook the adults who require basic education, English language acquisition, remediation, and high school completion/equivalency. Doing so hinders Michigan's long-term competitiveness. It has a negative societal impact and adds long-term costs to taxpayers.

Every adult in Michigan has a right to develop the foundational and occupational skills necessary to:

- Access healthcare
- Manage their finances
- Engage in the community
- Be politically active
- Navigate social services
- Support their children (school, work, life)
- Find and maintain a good paying job
- Access postsecondary education
- Advance in their careers

By investing overdue focus on adult education, we also can expect long-term dividends with a positive influence on the next generation of learners and workers. Children benefit when parents value education. Parental success contributes to children's success.

The strategies summarized here and detailed in the full report would put Michigan on a path to being a national leader in adult education. We look forward to working with partners to build a stronger, more effective, more cohesive adult education system for all.

With concerted effort, Michigan can deliver on the promise of a system to help everyone reach their potential.



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