Race Matters for Michigan Children | In-depth issue analysis on racial/ethnic disparities and policy/budget implications.

Voices for Michigan's Children

September 20, 2012

Racial Disparities in High School Graduation

Updated September, 2012

We know a lot about youth who drop out of high school in Michigan. Even though more Michigan young people are staying in school, over 15,000 Michigan young people who would have graduated in 2011 (11%) left high school without a diploma, down from 15% of the class of 2007. Improvements in high school dropout have been experienced by nearly all racial and ethnic groups, and gains have been made by low-income students as well. Despite improvements, the percentage of youth of color who dropped out in 2011 remains unacceptable, with one out of five Black and Hispanic students dropping out in 2011. Fortunately, another large percentage of youth – including higher shares of youth of color – are still connected to school but need more time to finish. This group increased by more than 55 percent since 2007, and illustrates the benefit of more time and the need for a variety of pathways to high school completion.

	On-Track Graduated			**Dropout**			**Off-Track Continuing**		
	2007	2011	2007-11 % **Change**	2007	2011	2007-11 % **Change**	2007	2011	2007-11 % **Change**
All Students	75%	74%	**-1%**	15%	11%	**-26%**	9%	13%	**56%**
American Indian/Alaskan Native	66%	62%	**-6%**	19%	16%	**-14%**	13%	19%	**44%**
Asian	85%	87%	**2%**	10%	7%	**-33%**	4%	5%	**27%**
Black or African American	56%	57%	**1%**	28%	20%	**-31%**	15%	22%	**53%**
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	78%	52%	**-33%**	13%	19%	**52%**	6%	24%	**326%**
White	82%	80%	**-2%**	11%	8%	**-24%**	7%	10%	**56%**
Hispanic or Latino	58%	63%	**8%**	29%	19%	**-36%**	12%	17%	**43%**
Multiracial	69%	69%	**0%**	17%	13%	**-23%**	10%	16%	**59%**
Economically Disadvantaged	57%	63%	**10%**	25%	14%	**-43%**	17%	21%	**23%**
Limited English Proficient	70%	62%	**-12%**	20%	17%	**-16%**	10%	21%	**116%**
Migrant Education	57%	60%	**5%**	31%	27%	**-13%**	11%	n/a	**n/a**
Homeless*	n/a	51%	**n/a**	n/a	17%	**n/a**	n/a	30%	**n/a**

**Information was not collected for homeless students until 2011.*

Source: Four-year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Reports, 2012 CEPI www.michigan.gov/cepi

Definitions:

On-Track Graduated: Students who completed high school with a regular diploma in four years or less.

Dropout: Students who left high school permanently at any time during the four-year cohort period, or whose whereabouts are unknown (Reported and Missing Expected Records).

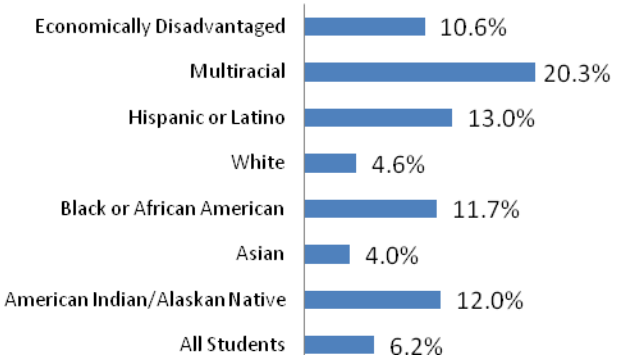
Off-Track Continuing: Students who completed high school with a regular diploma in more than four years, or did not complete high school in four years and are still continuing in school.

There is strong research that allows us to predict which students are at-risk of dropping out. Young people who fall behind in credits are much more likely to not complete school, yet there are very limited options for credit recovery for these students. Once young people fall behind in school, or when they face significant personal and educational obstacles, a traditional high school setting is not always successful in reengaging them, yet few alternatives exist. In addition, school discipline policies often contribute to disengagement and lost credits.

These barriers to success have always had significant implications for young people, their families and communities.

Additional time in high school improves equity.

Michigan law allows state payment for educating young people toward a high school diploma until they are 20 years old (under certain circumstances, until age 22), allowing students to continue for additional time beyond a traditional 4-years of high school. Graduation rates increased for nearly all groups after those additional years, but the fifth and sixth years of high school are significantly more important for low-income and students of color, with percentage increases of over 10% for most racial and ethnic groups and all low-income students, as compared to a 5% increase for white students.



Strategies to promote equal opportunities for high school graduation

Support multiple pathways to graduation that provide more time and flexibility for students. State and federal policy must better support the paths we have, such as alternative and community education options, community college and workforce development partnerships; and create other pathways to consistently serve young people throughout the state that utilize a broad range of community resources.

Invest in equity promoting options from cradle-to-career. High school dropout is a symptom of success and failures in systems serving kids and families throughout their lives. Gaps in achievement and high school completion can be traced to the earliest years of a child's life and continue to grow through their educational careers. By the time children of color and children from low-income families reach kindergarten they already are behind in reading and math readiness, they are less likely to score well on state and federal standardized tests and more likely to fall behind in grade level. Investments in parent support, high quality early education, expanded learning programs in K-12, physical and mental health services, and meaningful education reform through career or post-secondary are all necessary to increase equitable opportunities for educational success.

Address suspension and expulsion rates. Michigan needs to bring its harsh zero tolerance policy in line with other states and federal standards and give schools greater ability to handle challenging student behavior. To this end, Michigan needs to review its current suspension and expulsion policy and its disproportionate affect on youths of color, and provide schools with incentives to create discipline alternatives.

Support local communities to coordinate services and fund proven programs. Michigan is poised to make great strides in improving the educational success of all children. The unprecedented attention and engagement of the private sector, supporting research and innovation in Michigan and around the nation, and renewed public sector attention provide opportunities for educational improvements. We must make a commitment to invest in our children and take advantage of these opportunities before we lose them to more disinvestment.

For more information on dropout prevention and recovery, visit Michigan's Children's website at www.michiganschildren.org.