



August 19, 2015

### Making Michigan a Top 10 Education State by Shrinking the Learning Gap

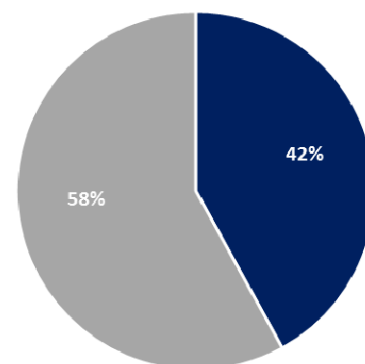
The new State Superintendent Brian Whiston is gathering input from a range of groups to identify ways to push Michigan into the top 10 states in education. The Superintendent and the State Board of Education have heard testimony on a range of priorities that focused on addressing poverty, increasing At-Risk funding, and holding high academic standards for all students. While these are all certainly critically important to address, research and evidenced practice points to some additional strategies to move the needle on academic achievement for the children, youth, families, schools and communities shouldering the most challenges.

Education is a lifelong process that begins at birth – from cradle to career. Differences in literacy skills emerge as early as 9 months of age, and educational disparities grow through early childhood and throughout academic careers depending on available learning opportunities. By the time a child from a low-income family reaches the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, for example, they have spent an estimated 6,000 fewer hours learning than a peer from a wealthier household. This includes fewer hours being read to by caregivers, fewer hours spent in quality preschool programs, and many fewer hours spent in after-school, summer and other extracurricular activities. Rates of school discipline remain higher and high school completion remains more elusive for young people of color and others facing multiple school and life challenges.

Shrinking that learning gap and improving learning opportunities for all children is critical to moving Michigan into the top 10. Specific investments can help us get there.

**Take Responsibility for Early Strategies Beyond Pre-School.** We must do more to support young children before they even enter school buildings. While Michigan has certainly made significant strides to improve access to high quality preschool programming for four year olds, we know that the beginnings of the achievement gap emerge long before that. Michigan must continue to increase access to evidence-based parent coaching and support through home visits so that all eligible families of young children can access services, and we must continue to improve our child care system so that all low-income working families can access high quality child care that truly meets the needs of working parents and their children's development. Additionally, we must begin to invest in the *Early On* system so that families with infants and toddlers who have developmental delays

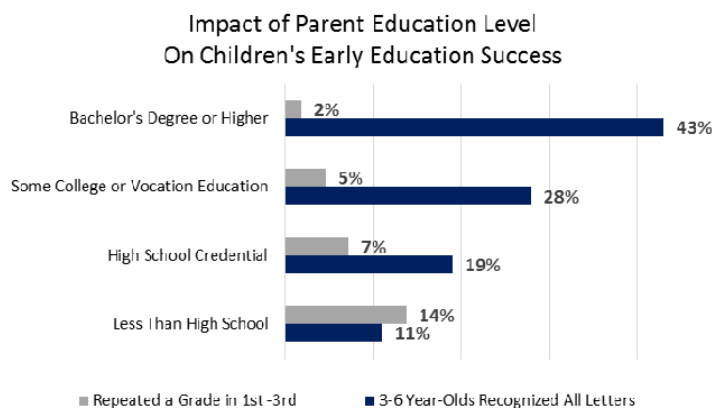
Need for Special Education Services at Kindergarten Entry After Receiving Appropriate 0-3 Early Intervention Services



Source: Hebbeler et al (2007)

and disabilities can receive the appropriate services they need for optimal development, which can dramatically reduce special education costs (see graphic above) while helping more children reach optimal development by kindergarten entry.

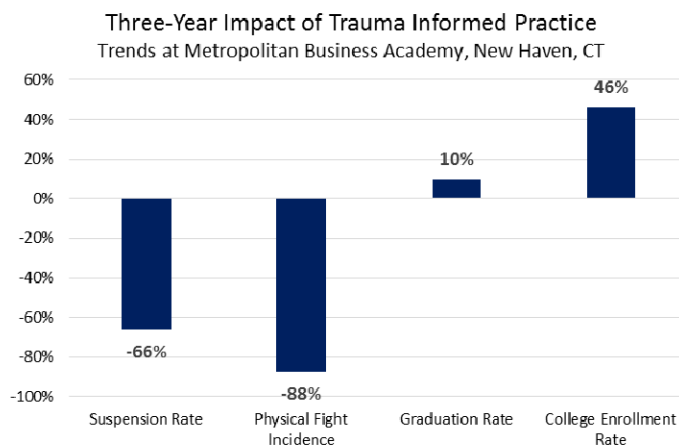
**Support Parents’ Role in Children’s Literacy.** As efforts to improve early literacy continue, they cannot be successful with every struggling child without taking into consideration the literacy needs of their parents. Research has consistently shown the impact of parental education on children’s education success. Any strategy for improving students’ reading proficiency needs a companion focus on supporting family literacy through adult education and other two-generation strategies so that parents



Source: Children Who Repeated a Grade, February 2013 and Early School Readiness, October 2012, Child Trends, 2015.

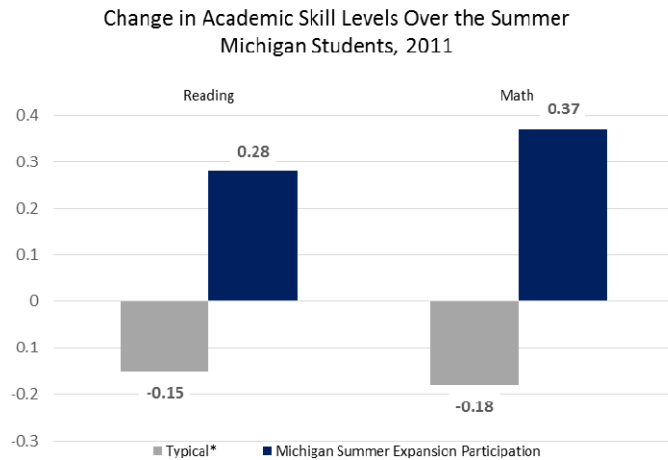
can truly support their children’s reading journeys. Decades of research, including research on Michigan’s former Even Start programs, demonstrate that family literacy is more effective than adults-only or children-only literacy/reading programs. Michigan must make sure that parents are equipped to assist their children by supporting opportunities for them to build their own literacy skills, complete a high school credential and move into post-secondary and family-supporting employment.

**Change School Practice Related to Student and Family Trauma.** Any efforts to improve the academic success of students will be hampered by the challenges students’ families struggle with on a day-to-day basis. This goes beyond meeting students’ basic needs outside of the classroom like safe and stable housing and adequate food, but also addresses other unresolved and continuing issues including mental and behavioral health, including their own and that of their caregivers; family and neighborhood violence and loss; and other traumatic experiences that clearly impact their ability to excel in the classroom. Trauma training can help school personnel identify these types of challenges when students exhibit their trauma through academic or behavioral problems. It can then can help them deal with certain challenges appropriately, with school practices and referrals to needed services like tutoring or behavioral health support. Schools that have implemented trauma training for their educators have seen the need for disciplinary action quickly and dramatically decline, leading to better academic outcomes for students.



Source: The Hetinger Report, 4/2/2015

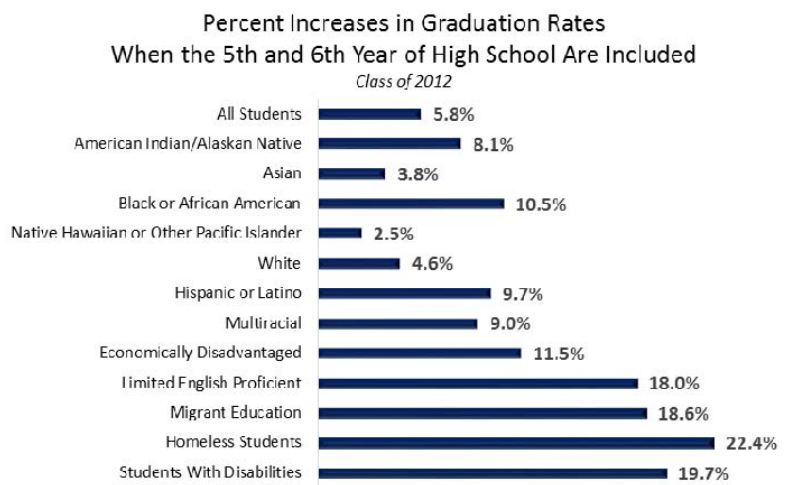
**Close Equity Gaps by Integrating Services and Expanding Learning Opportunities.** More must be done to utilize the school setting to ensure that children, youth and families who face the most challenges at home and at school have access to supplemental supports that stop equity gaps from growing through the school year and in the summer months through integrated student services and expanded learning opportunities. When schools are able to connect families with other community resources, there are more chances to find and address the causes of school absence, behavioral issues and academic problems – be they related to physical and behavioral health issues, unstable housing, bullying or



Source: 2011 Before-and After-School Summer Expansion Grant Fact Sheet Michigan State University, January 2012.

disengagement by parents or students. High quality after-school and summer learning programs that take advantage of community, post-secondary and workforce partnerships offer opportunities to enhance school day content and provide the supports that students need. They can help students get motivated and engaged, and can help them catch up when they get behind. There is ample evidence documenting the impact of quality afterschool and summer learning programs on attendance, achievement, behavior and eventual high school graduation.

**Give Young People Multiple Chances to Succeed.** There is strong research that allows us to predict which students are at-risk of school failure and high school dropout. Not surprisingly, students facing personal and educational obstacles are much more likely not to complete school. Increasing numbers of students need more than four years to complete high school and graduate; but when young people fall behind in credits, there are limited options for credit recovery and a traditional high school setting is not always successful in reengaging them, yet few alternatives exist. School discipline policies often contribute to student disengagement and lost credits. Michigan must use existing funding mechanisms better and expand those mechanisms so that more young people have access to additional time and flexibility toward high school completion. Current school discipline policy and its disproportionate impact on youth of color must be reviewed, and schools must be provided with incentives to create discipline alternatives.



Source: Four-year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Reports, 2015. michigan.gov/CEPI

**Lead Cross-System Efforts That Build Educational Success.** Decision-makers at all levels are better understanding the research and experience illustrating that children, youth and families face barriers to educational success, and that a coordinated approach is needed to leverage resources from all sectors to bolster that success for more Michigan young people. Schools alone cannot and should not be responsible for addressing those challenges but can be a great access point for critical services. Proven effective partnerships exist between schools, community colleges, workforce partners, other agencies, parents and many others can strengthen curriculum and instruction. In addition, they can increase parent involvement; meet children's health, developmental and social needs; increase school attendance and reduce the achievement gap. The Department of Education is uniquely situated to lead and encourage these cross-systems efforts.

Michigan has big educational challenges, including some of the largest achievement gaps in the nation, consistently poor showing compared with other states on education measures, and limited improvement on state assessments just to name a few. In our necessity of moving forward and working toward larger, quicker gains, we also need to not lose ground where progress has been made, including the unprecedented expansion in our investment in four year-old preschool, the Department of Education's focus specifically on the needs of African American boys, and initiatives to look more closely at attendance and school discipline policy at all levels. Continuing to expand current work being done in partnership between educators, community-based partners, families, employers, post-secondary and other interests to broaden methods of attaining, measuring and documenting school readiness, third grade reading proficiency, and college and career readiness skills will be game changers in preparing all young people, including the most struggling students, with the skills needed for 21<sup>st</sup> century careers.

Maintaining current progress, while expanding investments into the six areas mentioned above, will help move Michigan on the right trajectory. Committing significant attention and resources in these areas over the next ten years would help shrink the education achievement gap while re-positioning Michigan as an education leader in the nation.