



Michigan Association
of Community and
Adult Education



Public policy
in the best interest
of children

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Immediate release

Seeking to Improve Family Stability, Adult Ed Students Speak Out for Expanded Programming on March 11 in Kalamazoo

KALAMAZOO, MI – “Closing the skills gap” has been touted by Republicans and Democrats alike as a necessary step for moving Michigan’s economy forward, and recently was cited as a critical goal in Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s first State of the State address.

Now the renewed fight to resolve the state’s [education crisis](#) - with a focus on literacy, workforce and talent development - is being championed in a series of statewide adult education forums labeled *Students Speak*, and hosted by the [Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education \(MACAE\)](#) and [Michigan’s Children](#).

On Monday, March 11, adult learners from Kalamazoo, Comstock Park, Battle Creek and Paw Paw and will meet with state Lawmakers, school superintendents and other community leaders to make the case for expanded opportunities for basic skills learning and literacy needed for career development and individual and family security. They will share personal stories of struggle, triumph and what it’s meant to have another chance at a high school diploma and brighter future.

The forum is from **9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Kalamazoo Community Education Center, 714 S. Westnedge Ave. in Kalamazoo**. It is among a host of meetings taking place in Oakland, Kent, Jackson and Hillsdale counties, Detroit and out-Wayne County, with at least a half dozen others planned at programs across the state. U.S. Sens. Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters are sending representatives. Also sending representatives are State Sens. John Bizon, R-Battle Creek, and Sean McCann, D-Kalamazoo. State Rep. Jim Haadsma, D-Battle Creek, plans to attend.

In Calhoun and Kalamazoo Counties, “closing the skills” gap in Michigan would be greatly helped by closing another gap – the gap in programming and funding for adult education, advocates say. The region that gave birth to the “Kalamazoo Promise” to fund scholarships for high school grads moving on to college and career training has another lesser-known story to tell – the decline of adult education for people who don’t have a high school diploma, as well as immigrants seeking to learn English.

In the past decade, nearly every school district in Calhoun and Kalamazoo counties operated an adult education program, but today most have closed because of funding issues and today there are just two – in Kalamazoo and Comstock Park, despite an increase in demand for such programs, said Patrick Brown, a MACAE spokesman.

“There are a myriad of reasons for people dropping out of school. Sometimes people simply fall through the cracks, and often they’re upended by life’s circumstances – personal or family illness

or trauma, pregnancy, unmet learning disabilities,” he said. “One of our presenters on Monday will share her journey of struggling through school with a learning and physical disability. Today she’s overcoming her challenges with support through her adult education program and that’s helping her find employment. She saw this as her last hope.”

MACAE President Bob Steeh said that’s the kind of educational programming – basic skills, literacy education followed up with career training - that Michigan needs more of and will make a certain difference in the state’s future prosperity.

“Michigan will have over 811,000 career openings through 2024. Who’s going to fill those jobs openings when 1 in 10 Michiganders over 18 do not have a high school diploma? Steeh said. “We are at a critical stage. Adult education can play an important role in workforce development and in closing that basic skills gap.”

While education advocates see adult/career education as an obvious element for the state’s prosperity, Steeh said, the number of accessible programs for Michiganders who need them has declined statewide with access compounded by barriers in reading/literacy, transportation and child care. This creates sometimes overwhelming hardships for many low-wage, working parents who yearn to create family stability and move ahead.

Michele Corey, Vice President for Programs for Michigan’s Children, added the need for additional resources for adult education is significant for another reason: There is strong and consistent evidence linking how well children succeed in school and their parents’ educational attainment.

“There’s nothing that impacts a kid’s educational success more than their parents’ educational attainment,” Corey said. “With more than 42,000 adults of child-bearing age in our state who don’t have more than a 9th grade education, and if we want to improve school-age literacy, then helping parents is a great way to do that.”

For the first time in years, the previous Snyder Administration recently added state funds for basic education and ESL support to help adults qualify for workforce development programs, although the amount was inadequate overall. Funding problems have led to a decline in adult education programs for over 20 years in Michigan, even while the need for a highly skilled workforce has skyrocketed in the face of fewer low-skill, high-paying manufacturing jobs, Steeh said. Program numbers have been cut in half with 97 adult education programs in Michigan today, compared to nearly 200 programs 15 years ago, Steeh added.

***The Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education** works to provide a cohesive framework for community education through collaboration and guidance at the local, state and federal level. MACAE’s vision is to engage in partnerships, provide member support and advocate for lifelong learning, leading to employment and self-sufficient families. For more information about MACAE, email macaeoffice@gmail.com, visit macae.org, or call 517-492-1367.*

***Michigan’s Children** is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children from cradle to career and their families, with a specific focus on the needs of children, youth and families with the most challenges in their lives – children of color, children from low-income families, and children served by the foster and juvenile justice systems. For more information about Michigan’s Children, email michele@michiganschildren.org, or visit michiganschildren.org*