

on Michigan's Communities

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Pathways to Graduation: Engaging Michigan's Youth Through Innovation

The goal of this publication is to illustrate the need for educational options that lead to equity for high school students. As part of the *Pathways to Graduation: Engaging Michigan's Youth Through Innovation* conference, four programs that strive to meet the needs of youth in their communities are highlighted.

THE NEED FOR OPTIONS

Too many young people in Michigan aren't making it to high school graduation in 4 years. More than 35,000 Michigan young people did not receive a high school diploma in the spring of 2009 – nearly one-quarter of the students who began high school four-years earlier. In 2007, 155,000 young adults aged 18-24 did not have a high school diploma in Michigan. Young people of color or those from economically disadvantaged families remain the least likely to graduate “on-time” with their peers.

The economic consequences of dropping out are high. Adults with no high school credential have significantly less earning power, and much higher likelihood of unemployment, substance abuse, incarceration and poor health. Communities, which lose tax revenue and take on higher monetary and social costs, can be economically vibrant only when their residents are engaged in life-long learning beginning with a high school diploma. Employment rates of high school dropouts 16-19 years old in Michigan are substantially below their peers who graduate from high school. Their annual earnings will be less than half of what their peers with just some college can expect, and they will not be in the labor market for as many years.¹

Many young people need more time or different paths to reach a diploma. Of the students who failed to graduate in four-years in Michigan, fully 19,000 were still on a path toward high school completion. The share of students in this group who are not getting through in the traditional time-frame has increased more than 50 percent since 2007, illustrating the need for increased attention to programs that serve young people who may need more time or different paths to graduate.

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, innovation in Michigan and around the nation, and renewed public sector attention provide an opportunity. It is in everyone's best interest to succeed in graduating more young people from quality high schools, and we have many models of this success around the state and nation.

OPTIONS THAT LEAD TO EQUITY

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

¹ Sum, A. (2008). Center for Labor Market Studies, Boston, Mass.

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.

Once students have left school before diploma, for whatever reason, they need different options to re-engage. Program models that seek to recover dropouts are being developed to meet students' needs across Michigan and the nation. The barriers to success vary for students across Michigan depending on their circumstances, and communities are best positioned to formulate options that address local needs.

Innovative programs seek to work around the barriers the students encountered in the traditional school setting by including options like flexible scheduling, online courses, smaller classes, mentoring, and career and workforce training options that include a path towards a high school credential. Although program structure varies, a common goal remains consistent throughout programs: all students should have the opportunity to enter adulthood ready for post-secondary success in either college or a career.

Additional time and varying strategies improve equity – maintaining kids in the 5th and 6th year of high school (and beyond) is more important for low-income and students of color, improving their overall graduation rates significantly.

The programs highlighted here seek to recover students who have dropped out, and seek to meet the needs of students for whom the traditional high school model does not work.

High School Diploma Completion Initiative

Clinton, Eaton and Ingham Counties

The High School Diploma Completion Initiative (HSDCI) at Lansing Community College (LCC) has developed program for disconnected youth to complete their high school diploma while preparing them for additional post-secondary education leading to a career.

In response to the Cherry Commission report and the needs of the LCC service area, the HSDCI was created in the Spring of 2006 by LCC in partnership with Ingham Intermediate School District (IISD). The HSDCI started enrolling students in 2006 to address several needs:

- To provide a comprehensive program (academic and technical) to meet the social, emotional and economic needs of the community's dropout population.
- To provide the business community in the LCC service area a steady supply of workers with high technology skills.
- To prepare students with authentic instruction that reinforces skills needed in a contemporary work place.

This initiative is an example of collaboration between education, business, and the private sector to address the needs of youth in the mid-Michigan area. The HSDCI program offers a second (third or fourth) chance to students who have disconnected from high school. They have access to comprehensive career counseling, work- based learning experiences, and career and technical education training. The youth participating in this initiative are simultaneously earning credits toward their high school diploma and a technical certificate and/or associates degree.

The college's partners include the Ingham, Eaton, and Clinton County Public Schools and various local and regional businesses. Enrollment is open to any student in the college's service area with the cost of

enrollment paid by the student's home school district supplemented with funds from LCC and the Mott Foundation. The home school district issues the student's diploma upon completion of required credits.

The program is designed for high school dropouts ages 16-19 (unless an active Individualized Education Plan is on file) who have been out of school for six months or more who wish to complete their high school diploma and begin career training and their college education. Each student's program is guided by a Life Development Plan (LDP) which is an action plan for completing a high school diploma with the opportunity to work toward attainment of a certificate or associates degree concurrently; career and employability preparation; and personal development skills. The academic coursework designated in the LDP is comprised of English Language Arts Science, Social Studies and Mathematics for students needing to attain grade level skills and opportunities to meet high school graduation requirements through taking select LCC coursework.

The curricula are made up of existing LCC courses and students earn LCC credit for their HSDCI work. They have an LCC transcript that reflects course work identical to the transcripts of traditional college-age students taking similar programs on the main campus.

The uniqueness of the program is the partnership that exists between the community college and local school districts (27) which provides an early college high school experience. This proven model and process is a template that community colleges and school districts can adopt; a model that offers concurrent high school and college enrollment leading to a high school diploma and / or a technical certificate or associates degree.

In addition to coursework, work experience is an integral component of the HSDCI program, which incorporates business, industry, and labor into the curriculum and the daily lives of students. Students have the opportunity to engage in mentorships, internships, apprenticeships, and other employment training offered through LCC. Students can also participate in job shadowing, field trips, and special job skill seminars as part of their learning experience.

The goals of the project and the Mott Foundation include expanding the program and developing policy manuals and guidelines to ensure that it can be replicated across the state and to include enrollment. To date HSDCI has enrolled a total of 187 students between 2006-2011, 65 students have graduated for a 35% graduation rate.

For more information about the High School Diploma Completion Initiative, please contact Dr. Peg Lamb, Program Director, via e-mail lambm7@lcc.edu or phone 517-483-9715.

Widening Advancement for Youth – Washtenaw

Washtenaw County

Widening Advancement for Youth (W-A-Y) -Washtenaw is a year-round voluntary educational program for 16-19 year old youth who have either dropped out or are falling behind in the traditional high school because of many issues, including health or behavioral problems that affect school attendance. Washtenaw County sees 650 students dropping out annually with even more students in jeopardy of not graduating within four years based on their age and number of credits earned.

The W-A-Y model was developed in 2007 after an extensive international search for effective methods of educational personalization for disenfranchised youth. The United Kingdom based NotSchool.net. was

chosen. NotSchool² is a 100% virtual learning experience and services disengaged students who are reluctant to learn, have dropped out of school, pregnant or parenting, in care, those that are phobic, sick, or can no longer attend school due to traveling or exclusion. Notschool.net is a product of the Inclusion Trust, a non-profit organization from the United Kingdom. The NotSchool Program has a 98% reengagement rate, has serviced more than 6,000 students and has over 10 years of documented success.

Opened in 2010, W-A-Y Washtenaw is one of 11 W-A-Y programs in Michigan and Florida serving over 70 school districts. Now in their second year of students, W-A-Y Washtenaw currently enrolls 409 students (up from 233 in 2010), of whom 27 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch and over half identify as non-Caucasian. A third of the students enrolled in 2011 had previously dropped out of school and two-thirds were either recommended to the program because they were off-track to graduate within four years or have health issues that impact their ability to attend a traditional school. Of the 233 students enrolled in 2010, almost 200 completed the school year.

W-A-Y Washtenaw is a blended, project-based learning model allowing students (called researchers) access to learning 24-hours per day, 365 days per year. Students are assigned to a support team consisting of an online mentor and a team leader: both certified teachers with whom the researcher communicates every day. Additionally, students have ongoing communication with highly qualified subject matter experts.

Each student is equipped with an iMac computer workstation and internet connectivity in their home, and must schedule time in the on-site learning lab a minimum of two days a week. Student projects and courses are individualized to meet their learning needs in order to achieve their high school diploma.

The program offers project-based on-line learning experiences. Students must access a technology center, at Stone School in Ann Arbor, a minimum of twice a week, and have additional face-to-face meetings with project managers and mentors, to ensure students remain engaged their learning. Students are responsible for their education and collaborate and negotiate meaning with peers and experts to broaden their understanding, to construct individual knowledge, and solve real-life problems. Students determine their pace and how they will accomplish their learning activities.

Mentors and experts serve as facilitators of student learning rather than a dispenser of information. With their mentor, students develop standard-focused learning plans and projects. Experts evaluate the student's progress and work each week based on the Michigan High School Graduation Requirements.

For more information about W-A-Y Washtenaw, please contact Monique Uzelac, Program Director, W-A-Y Washtenaw via e-mail muzelac@wash.k12.mi.us or phone 734-719-0321.

Mott Middle College

Genesee County

Now in its 21st year, Mott Middle College (MMC), in Flint, Michigan, provides an alternative education option for students in the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD). Among the first of its kind in the country, MMC started as an experiment to help students at risk for dropping out to stay in school. MMC has since graduated over 650 students and is a dropout prevention, general education high school with an "early college" design and requirement. Students attempt to overlap up to 60 Mott Community College dual enrollment credits with a five-year high school graduation plan, starting in their freshman year.

² <http://www.notschool.com/>

Mott Middle College is devoted to breaking economic and social barriers for youth. With one of the nations' highest unemployment rates, negative crime statistics, high infant mortality rates and failing schools, MMC is attempting to provide successful work and educational futures through the integration of high school, community college and workforce experience for their students.

MMC has grown from 120 students in its first year (1991) to over 400 per year. Transitioning from a traditional middle college to an early college in 2002-3 school year, MMC has grown from 14 students dual enrolling and earning 68 college credits upon graduation to 348 students dual enrolling earning 1,595 college credits upon graduation. MMC has a goal of 70 percent of its graduating class earning at least 24 or more college credits. The graduating class of 2011 earned an average of 23.7 credits per student with an average of a 2.9 GPA in those courses.

The structure of the traditional school is a problem for many students – school hours, lack of personal connection, time on task, length of the semester, and health, family or learning issues can all lead to loss of credit. MMC has structured the school such that:

- All students commit to a 5 year high school graduation plan.
- The school year is divided into five marking periods that are approximately eight weeks in length.
- Students have the opportunity for a fresh start toward a successful future by the practice of wiping their 9th grade GPA clean.
- The school subscribes to the Mastery Learning concept that grades students with A, B, C, I (Incomplete) or N/C, (No Credit). Students who receive an Incomplete grade have four additional weeks to earn a passing grade. To replace a No Credit, students must successfully retake the class. This grading system assures that no grade lower than a 2.0 is ever awarded.
- The school's grading system is based on two principles: Grades are never used as punishment, and grades reflect cumulative learning.
- The school is research-driven and uses instruments that measure personal and academic growth. These instruments are given as pre- and post-assessments (post-assessments are required to graduate) to measure student growth over the duration of their attendance in the school, and to provide data to the school's ongoing research to identify best practices.
- The school assesses all students individually to determine their learning style and left/right/whole brain tendency. This helps them better understand how they think and learn, and assists teachers in designing and delivering appropriate curriculum and instructional approaches.
- Every staff member is a teacher, and every teacher serves as an advisor for a small group of students.

For more information about Mott Middle College, please contact Chery Wagonlander, Ed.D, Principal, via e-mail cwagonla@geneseeisd.org or phone 810-232-8531.

Education ReConnection

Kalamazoo County

In September 2007, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation received a planning grant from the C.S. Mott Foundation to support a 24 month project to develop an agenda for out-of-school youth in the county. Education Re-connection was formed with the primary goal of clearly defining how disconnected youth can enter or re-enter a program that will lead to high school completion. The project included representation from several sectors including community, education, advocacy, business, government and philanthropy.

As a result of this planning grant, Education ReConnection (ER) has built a partnership between the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, Greater Kalamazoo United Way, Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency (KRESA), Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), Big Brothers Big Sisters, and Michigan Works! Education ReConnection provides access to education and workforce development for disconnected youth in Kalamazoo County when the traditional school models have not worked for them.

Education ReConnection worked with 28 participants during the first year of implementation (2010-11). Seventeen are currently enrolled in a GED program. Eight are in a high school setting. Ten have adult mentors. The following results illustrate the value of the services provided. (Note: Five individuals are identified twice due to multiple services provided).

- 17 participants who had dropped out of school are currently taking GED classes
- 3 participants have obtained their GED
- 5 participants on the verge of dropping out of school have remained in high school following program intervention
- 5 participants are currently employed after having received job search assistance and employability skills training

The Education ReConnection model is unique in that it provides workforce (YOU) and educational opportunities along with a mentoring program offered through Big Brothers Big Sisters. Education ReConnection is uniquely funded through a combination of grants and supported through a combination of workforce resources from KRESA, MI Works! and federal workforce development programs targeted for youth. Students have the ability to recover credits through NovaNet.

The Education ReConnection Leadership Council recognizes that high schools do not work well for some students. The ER Leadership Council will begin to explore additional alternative pathways and invite additional partners to join the scanning, research and planning process. Creation of alternative pathways would also require the cooperation of at least some of the nine school districts in Kalamazoo County. The ER Leadership Council is exploring what incentives may exist for districts' cooperation.

For more information about Education ReConnection, please contact Amy Slancik, Community Investment Officer, at the Kalamazoo Community Foundation via e-mail aslancik@kalfound.org or phone at 269-381-4416.

If you would like to find out how your community can be profiled for your innovative work in any arena of child and family services, contact Michele Corey via email michele@michiganschildren.org or phone 517-485-3500.