



Michigan Association
of Community and
Adult Education



Public policy
in the best interest
of children

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Need for Expanded Adult Ed, Literacy and Gov. Whitmer's Call for 'Closing the Skills Gap' Featured in Statewide Education Forums beginning in Troy, Monday, Feb. 25

TROY, MI – “Closing the skills gap” was a bipartisan goal for boosting Michigan’s workforce and talent potential in the Snyder Administration, and last week Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced it as one of her goals, too, in her first State of the State address.

Now the renewed fight to resolve the state’s [education crisis](#) - with a focus on talent development and literacy - is being championed in a series of statewide forums hosted by the [Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education \(MACAE\)](#) and [Michigan’s Children](#). The first *Students Speak* event takes place at **Troy Athens High School, 4333 John R Road, at 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 25, 2019** with students joining from **Huron Valley, Romulus, Royal Oak, West Bloomfield and Rochester**. Other forums will follow in Kent, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Jackson and Hillsdale counties, Detroit and out-Wayne County, with at least a half dozen others being planned at programs around the state.

Featuring MACAE “ambassadors” from adult education programs, students will make the case for expanded opportunities for basic skills learning and literacy before an audience of state and federal lawmakers, policy-makers, business and foundation leaders. With an unprecedented number of first-time state lawmakers and members of Congress from the region, the timing is right for getting the adult education message across, said MACAE President Bob Steeh, who serves as Director of Community Education for Novi Schools.

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

Adult education programs are critical for family stability, agreed Michele Corey, Vice President for Programs for Michigan's Children, adding there has been 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. Investing in those parents becomes a dual investment, a two-generation investment that benefits school-age children and family self-sufficiency."

Steeh said the forums will feature success stories like that of Stephanie, 27, a parent of two sons, who attends the Walled Lake Education Center in suburban Detroit. She credits her "second chance at a high school diploma" for renewing her motivation and hope for improving her family's finances and future. As a youngster, her family moved multiple times, and she struggled to keep up academically, becoming so discouraged that she left school. Later as a young mother, she found it was impossible to earn a living wage without a diploma. "I hit a wall," she said. Today, she looks forward to graduating with a high school diploma and moving into a career training program with the promise of a good salary.

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. In addition, program numbers have been cut in half. Today, there are 97 adult education programs across Michigan, compared to nearly 200 programs 15 years ago. Last year, 17,000 people were enrolled in programs (with 12 or more hours of instruction), but five years ago there were 30,000 served, Steeh said.

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