



Michigan Association
of Community and
Adult Education



Public policy
in the best interest
of children

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Immediate release

Need for Expanded Adult Ed, Literacy and Gov. Whitmer's Call for 'Closing the Skills Gap' Featured in Statewide Education Forums by MACAE, Michigan's Children

Kent County ISD Hosts Legislative Visits in Grand Rapids, March 4

GRAND RAPIDS, MI – “Closing the skills gap” was a bipartisan goal for boosting Michigan’s workforce and talent potential in the Snyder Administration, and this month Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced that it’s 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 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](#). **One of the first, the MACAE-Kent County *Student Speak* forum, is planned for the Kent ISD Adult Education- Wyoming Center, 3600 Byron Center Ave, on Monday, March 4 from 10 a.m. to noon.** It is among others in Oakland, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Jackson and Hillsdale counties, Detroit and out-Wayne County, with at least a half dozen others planned at programs across the state.

Kent County students from the GED, ESL and High School Completion program will address state House and Senate members to make the case for expanded opportunities for basic skills learning and literacy needed for moving ahead in their career development and individual and family security. Other invited guests include officials from city government, and school and community college leaders.

With two locations in Grand Rapids and Wyoming, the Kent ISD Adult Education program is the **largest provider in the county with 600 students**. This month, it launched a **new CTE program (Career and Technical Education) with training courses in phlebotomy, welding, and IT fundamentals** – an example of the comprehensive nature of adult education services meeting individual needs and local employment demands, advocates say.

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? MACAE President Bob 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.”

Hollin De La Cruz, spokesman for the ISD at the Beckwith Adult Education Center in Grand Rapids, said their students are excited to share their stories about personal challenges and triumphs with state representatives and senators in order to raise awareness and spread that word about what adult education can do for Michigan.

“Students from our program are some of the most hard-working and determined individuals I have ever met. Every single one of them have overcoming large, and at times, seeming insurmountable barriers to get into class and gain the skills they need to provide for themselves and their families,” De La Cruz said.

Serving a diverse population, including immigrants from across the globe, the Kent ISD program offers a robust ESL program for beginning English literacy learners that’s particularly critical for those moving on to naturalization interviews and U.S. citizenship. There are 50 dual-enrolled students pursuing GED credentials while getting the training to become certified in high-demand careers. For daytime GED students, this means coming to their GED class five days a week while committing to two evenings a week to their CTE training.

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 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*