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Advocates say Michigan should put more money toward adult education



Photo by: FOX 17

FILE

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LANSING, Mich. — After decades of declining funding for adult education in Michigan, advocates are calling for more money and a change in how the funding is allocated.

In the late 1990s, the state gave upwards of \$80 million a year to GED and high school completion programs. In recent years, it's been as low as \$20 million, according to the [Michigan League for Public Policy](#). As a result, some 20 adult education programs across the state have closed, which has had a particularly strong impact on students in rural areas

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“The funding has not kept pace with the need that’s out there and the changing landscape of delivering services,” said Patrick Brown who works as an outreach associate with Michigan’s Children, an advocacy group based in Lansing.

But the need is still significant. More than one in 11 Michiganders doesn't have a high school diploma.

Brown explained that much of the money that initially went towards adult education funding has been re-allocated to other programs that focus on career readiness.

“While they’re very helpful in their very career, post-secondary focus, the educational component is still really critical and important for folks so that they can be successful in the workplace,” he said.

The money that is allocated towards adult education is funneled through the K-12 school districts. Advocates say, in many instances, it would work better to channel that money towards institutions that already instruct adults like community colleges.

“The funding really doesn’t come to community colleges,” said Mike Hansen, president of the Michigan Community College Association. “If we had more

Independent adult education programs like the Capital Area Literacy Coalition are also left out of state funding, left to rely on individual donations.

“Much of our funding at this time is private donations, so that gets a little tricky,” said Barbara Schmidt, director of the Literacy Coalition. The coalition also receives grant funding however, “it’s a very hard time with so many people competing for money. It’s been a very hard year and a half, it’s really changed the finances to a huge degree.”

The organization provides English as a second language courses, reading literacy, and GED programs along with other adult education courses. Students are allowed to work at their own pace outside the classroom, which has been especially useful in the pandemic.

The state does not recognize their programs because they are not part of the K-12 system. Schmidt said even a little money from the state would help.

“Anything that they could help us with, would be a godsend because it's very difficult to try to balance what we need to do for [students] and do it financially. Most of the people we have that come here literally can't afford to do it any other way,” she said.

Hansen agreed.

“I think it's safe to say that it's generally underfunded in Michigan and if we had more money, we could provide more services to adults that need a high school diploma or equivalent, he said.

Fox 47 News reached out to members of committees in the Michigan House and Senate that address education funding but received no response.



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