



MICHIGAN PARTNERSHIP FOR

Equity and Opportunity

Thank you for your leadership in our state at a crucial time for public education in Michigan. Like you, we care deeply about the future of the Great Lakes State and the future of its children. In the spirit of partnership, we would like to introduce ourselves – and our key policy proposals and guiding principles. The **Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity** is a statewide coalition focused on advancing opportunity and improving learning outcomes for all of Michigan’s students, especially its most underserved students; including students of color, students living in poverty, English Learners, students with disabilities, and rural students.

We are leaders who span Michigan’s diverse spectrum of civil rights, business, community-based non-profits, parent organizations and other sectors. What brings us together is a shared commitment to evidence-based, research-driven education policy and investment in Michigan – and a relentless focus on closing achievement and opportunity gaps by ensuring every student has access and opportunity to the educational resources and support that they need to achieve, from pre-K through postsecondary.

There is a very real crisis facing Michigan students. Michigan has underfunded public education for much of the past 25 years. As a result, student performance is plunging in the wrong direction and students are falling behind at a faster rate than before. In some districts, students experienced a year or more of learning loss, and these losses often fell hardest on historically underserved students, including students of color. Research shows that it will take billions in new investment to make up for these losses and to close the achievement and opportunity gaps that have plagued our state for decades.

We need your leadership to drive real change for our students. We are committed to working hand in hand with you along the way.

We propose Michigan pursue some immediate opportunities and advance an opportunity agenda that includes the following focus areas:

1. Truly Equitable and Fair School Funding System

We propose Michigan look to the nation's leading education states such as Massachusetts for models of closing opportunity gaps for students and fair funding systems.

Funding for Students of Color and Students Living in Poverty

Massachusetts addresses equity by targeting dollars based on concentration of poverty. In Michigan, accounting for concentrations of poverty would address significant funding inequities across the state. We recommend a model called the Opportunity Index. Instead of a flat weight being spent on all at-risk

students, students in districts with higher poverty should receive a higher weight than those in wealthier districts. Specifically, we propose:

- A weighted funding formula more acutely focused on equity with weights of 35% to 100% spread across twelve bands determined by concentration of poverty.

English Learners

The level of additional funding that Michigan provides for English Learners is simply inadequate. Compared to states like Maryland which is phasing in a weight of 85% more, and Georgia which now allocates 159%, Michigan has not prioritized investing in these students. Rigorous empirical research recommends English Learners receive at least twice as much funding as native English speakers to provide them with the additional resources and instructional supports necessary for language acquisition. Therefore, we propose increasing the weights for English Learners based on their language proficiency as determined by World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) testing.

- 100% WIDA 1 multiplier
- 90% WIDA 2 multiplier
- 80% WIDA 3 multiplier

Funding for Students with Disabilities

Michigan has historically underfunded services for students with disabilities. Only 57% of special education students obtain a diploma--leaving them at a disadvantage after high school. Due to Michigan's partial reimbursement system, Michigan districts were left to shoulder most of the funding responsibility for students with disabilities with varying capacities to cover these costs. As a result, both students with disabilities and typically developing students have been shortchanged.

Schools need sufficient resources to address the learning needs of ALL students for them to meet their greatest potential. In the recent budget, the Governor and legislature made investing in students with disabilities a priority and shifted toward addressing the disparity by increasing special education reimbursements and to a portion of the foundation allowance. However, there remains an annual shortfall of over \$343 million and more needs to be done. Therefore, we propose:

- Increasing weights and reimbursements to fully fund students with individualized education programs (IEP), including funding for special education expenses and specialized transportation costs. This will address the remaining shortfall and ensure vulnerable students receive the education they deserve.

Rural and Geographically Isolated Students

Rural and isolated students often face significant poverty challenges, and their schools often are under resourced. Recent data shows that many rural students were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and are falling behind at an alarming rate. An Opportunity Index as described above is essential to addressing these students' needs. In addition to the Opportunity Index, we also support investments in rural education transportation costs, particularly for high needs school districts.

2. Equitable Access to Effective and Diverse Teachers and School Leaders

Every student deserves a highly effective teacher and principal who reflect the community and state's diversity, and who provide standards-aligned, culturally responsive instruction. Black students, Latino students, and other students of color especially need educators who look like them and reflect the great diversity of their local communities, families, and all of Michigan. We are supportive of investments and strategies that advance these goals.

3. Strong System of Fiscal Transparency and Accountability

Leading education states pair major new investment in public education with strong, evidence-based systems of accountability and transparency, not simply for student outcomes and learning but also for fiscal outcomes and accountability. It is critical that funding intended to be spent on high-needs students reach the students for whom those dollars are intended.

We would like to propose recommendations for a thoughtful statewide system of fiscal transparency and accountability based on the best practices and lessons learned from states that have overhauled their school funding systems over the last decade. We welcome further conversation with state policymakers on this topic.

4. Provide Investment and State Leadership to Advance Educational Recovery for Students most left behind by the Pandemic

Overwhelming evidence shows while all students were impacted by the pandemic, some students were dramatically affected – and continue to be a year or more behind in terms of academic learning. Indeed, Harvard and Stanford Universities' most recent work not only shows the great disparities between school districts' learning losses but also how many school districts nationwide are underinvesting in students' educational recovery.

Leading education states are addressing this crisis head on -- and Michigan should, too. With more than \$2 billion in state dollars and the nearly 80% of ARP ESSER (American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) federal dollars unspent by Michigan school districts, there is a great opportunity for state leaders and district leaders to make a difference for students who most need educational recovery and support which includes students of color, low-income students, rural students, English Learners, and students with disabilities. We would like to share recommendations for a three-year effort to ensure all students have the chance to recover educationally from the pandemic.

5. Accountability for Student Outcomes

Along with supporting a more equitable funding system, we are also committed to transparency and accountability for student learning outcomes. Every student should be supported through a single accountability system that is easy to understand, focused first on student learning and outcomes, and is regularly updated to inform parents, educators, community leaders and policymakers.

Student learning should be assessed and publicly reported so that parents understand whether their child is reaching national college- and career-ready standards – and so that parents, guardians, educators, and policymakers can ensure resources are directed where they are needed most.

Again, thank you for your leadership and service to our state. Together we can meet this challenge by fully investing in all students and ensuring they have the opportunity and resources they need to succeed.