

INVEST IN WHAT WORKS: AN EDUCATION ROADMAP FOR MICHIGAN LEADERS



FOCUS ON
IMPLEMENTATION
AND QUALITY



EFFECTIVE TEACHING
AND SCHOOL
LEADERSHIP



RIGOROUS
CURRICULUM FOR
ALL STUDENTS—AND
SUPPORT FOR ALL
TEACHERS



SCHOOL
ACCOUNTABILITY
AND SUPPORT



SCHOOL
FUNDING
FORMULAS



RELATIONSHIPS
WITH PARENTS AND
COMMUNITIES



The Education Trust—Midwest

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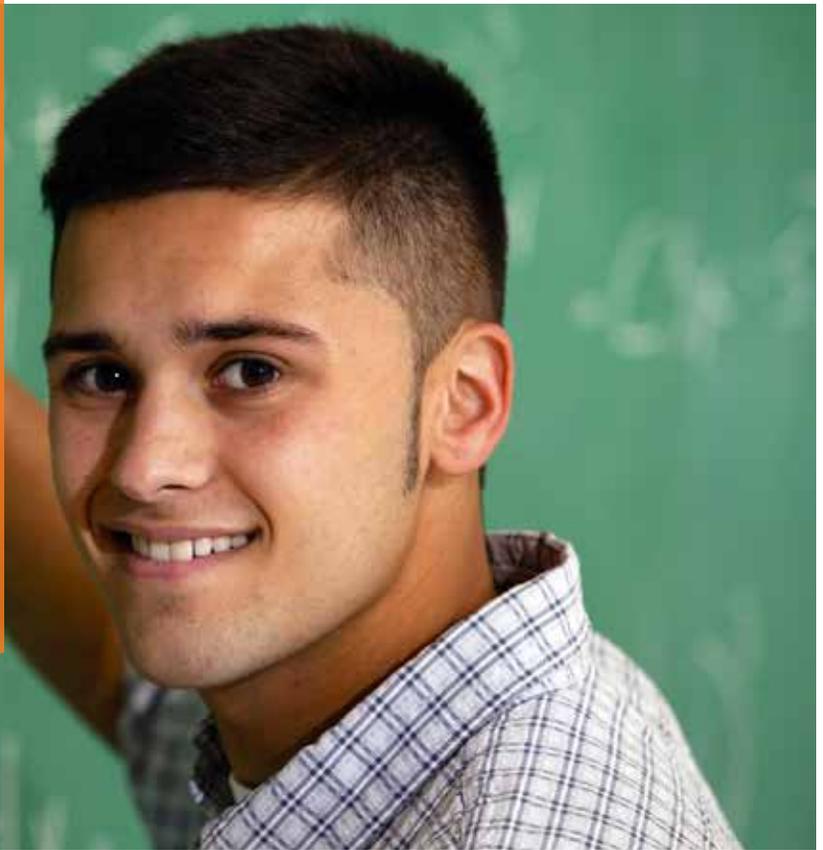
BY SARAH W. LENHOFF, AMBER ARELLANO AND DAVID ZEMAN

As an organization made up of Michiganders, we know well how our parents once prided themselves on the quality of our state’s public schools. Sadly, we have little to be proud of today. Our state’s educational performance is lackluster by practically any reliable measure. In this report, we lay out a common-sense agenda to raise Michigan’s achievement, and share some best practices from around the country. For years, Michigan has lacked a comprehensive education agenda and strategy to improve teaching and learning. This is a call to sensible action in a state that desperately needs it. We need to get to work on making the Great Lakes State a top 10 state for student learning. It’s essential to our children’s future – and the state’s economic renaissance.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: Sarah W. Lenhoff is the director of policy and research; Amber Arellano is the executive director, and David Zeman is the managing director of content and communications at The Education Trust-Midwest.

MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE: REMAINING LOW

Michigan's educational performance has remained low relative to other states, according to a key national assessment. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is our country's only comparative state-by-state measure of academic learning among American students. It's an important measure, because it gives us a sense of how Michigan students are doing compared with their peers in other states. The results are sobering.



For example:

- In 4th-grade reading, Michigan ranks 35th out of 50 states for all students. It ranks absolutely last for African-American students - 45th out of 45 states that have data for this group. (See charts to the right.)
- In 8th-grade math, Michigan ranks 36th out of 50 states based on overall performance. Once again, it ranks near the very bottom for African-American students - 42nd out of 43 states that have data for this group.

And the problem isn't just with performance. A new Education Trust-Midwest (ETM) analysis shows that Michigan is also near the bottom of the nation for improvement over time.

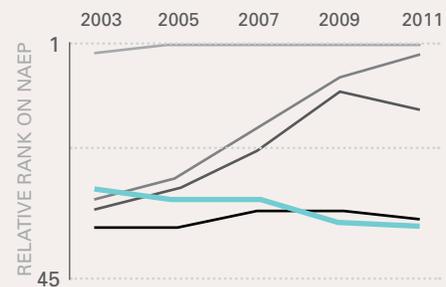
- In 4th-grade reading, Michigan ranks 39th of 50 states in overall improvement for students between 2003 and 2011. We did not gain ground during this period. For African-American students, the state's improvement ranked 30th out of 41 states that have data for this group.
- In 8th-grade math, Michigan is 41st out 50 states in overall improvement. For African-American students, its improvement ranks 35th out of 40 states that have data for this group.
- Michigan's white students did not show any growth on the national assessment in 4th- and 8th-grade reading between 2003 and 2011, ranking 48th and 49th, respectively, for those grades.

MICHIGAN'S RANK DECLINED OVER TIME

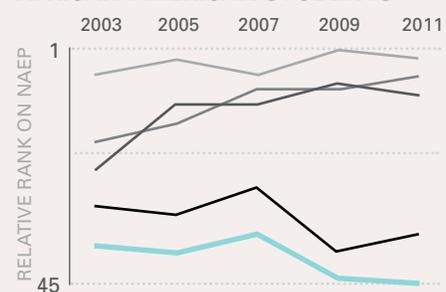
4TH-GRADE NAEP READING

The first chart below shows Michigan's rank in 4th-grade reading dropped from 28th in 2003 to 35th in 2011. Over this same period, Maryland's rank rose from 30th to 3rd. The second chart shows performance for African-American students.

ALL STUDENTS



AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS*



— MASSACHUSETTS — FLORIDA — MICHIGAN
— MARYLAND — ILLINOIS

* Note: In 2003, only 41 states had enough African-American students to report data for this group; this rose to 45 states in 2011.

The result of low improvement coupled with low performance? Michigan continues to fall further behind states that are improving student outcomes. For example:

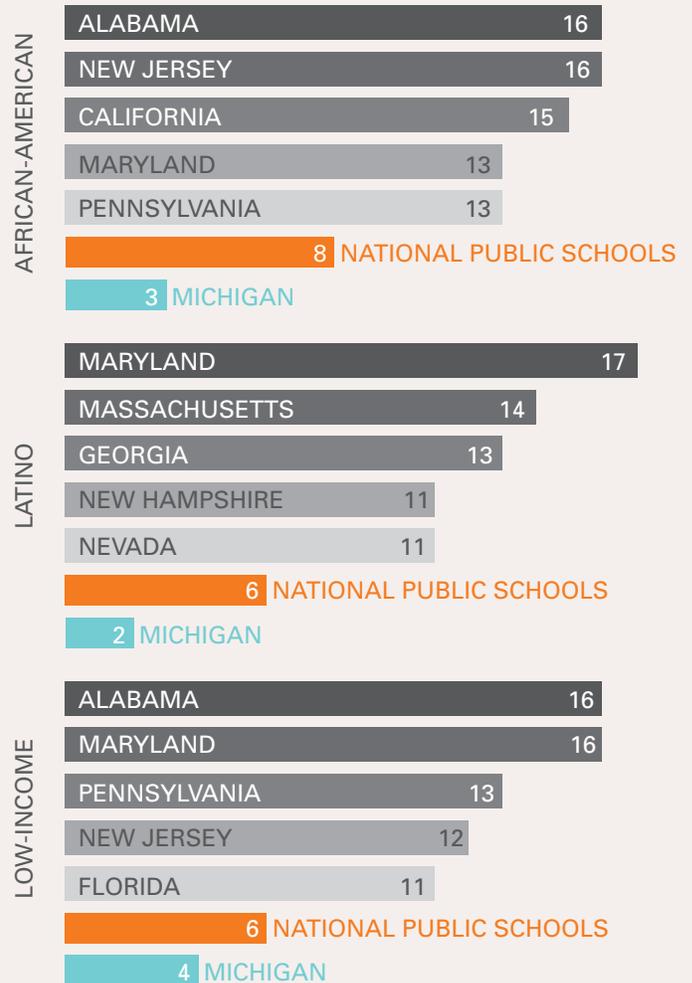
In 4th-grade reading and math and 8th-grade math, Michigan's rank compared with all other states has fallen for students overall and for African-American, Latino, white, low-income, and higher-income students between 2003 and 2011. In 8th-grade reading, it fell overall and for African-American, white, and higher-income students. (The charts to the right show how little Michigan's low-income and minority students improved relative to students in other states over this period.)

And what about performance on our own state assessment, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP)? While overall MEAP scores increased slightly between 2011 and 2012, only 40 percent of Michigan students across all grades met standards in math, and only 67 percent met standards in reading. In science, a dismal 15 percent of students met standards in 2012.

The results for some student groups are even worse: Only 17 percent of African-American students across all grades met standards in math in 2012 and less than 45 percent met standards in reading. Just 3 percent of African-American students across the entire state met standards on the MEAP science exam.

MICHIGAN'S POOR, MINORITY STUDENTS SHOW LITTLE GROWTH COMPARED WITH PEERS IN OTHER STATES

NAEP GRADE 4 READING



CHANGE IN MEAN SCALE SCORE, 2003-2011

WHAT HAPPENED? HOW DID WE FALL SO FAR BEHIND?

Some might blame our state's dramatic educational decline on our kids. After all, more and more are living in poverty. Michigan's gone through a tough decade of job losses and higher unemployment. Budget cuts have been painful to schools, as well. But in truth, states that have far higher poverty rates or larger enrollments of students of color have managed to produce strong improvements in recent years. For example, approximately 59% of Alabama's students come from low-income families. In Michigan: 48% of students come from low-income families. Yet Alabama posted among the nation's largest improvement in student performance for fourth-grade reading between 2003 and 2011, with gains of 13 points. By contrast, Michigan's performance was stagnant.

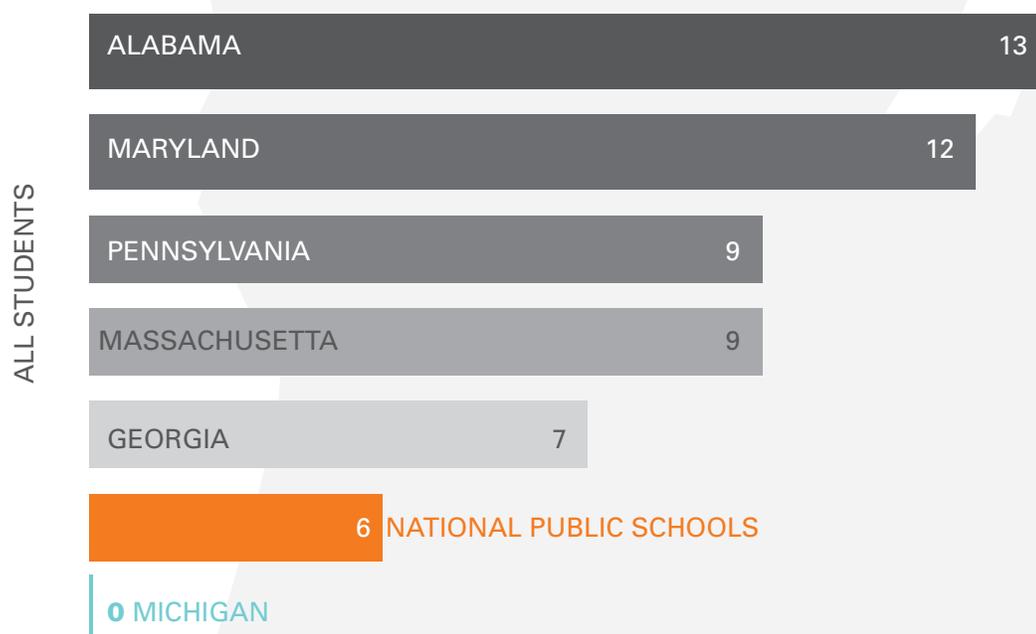
Why have our schools been stuck? For starters, for much of this period Michigan had low standards with a low-level state test that told most of our kids and schools that they were doing just fine, even though they really weren't. We didn't get around to setting more rigorous standards until recently. This meant Michigan parents and leaders didn't realize how much trouble our schools were in – and how urgently we needed to act.

But low standards weren't the only problem. For years, our school accountability and public reporting system was weak, sending unclear signals to educators about what was expected of them. We've allowed far too many of our children—especially those who are poor or of color—to be taught by teachers in subjects outside their areas of expertise. And when it came to evaluating our teachers, we told them they were all great. More recently, while our state moved early to adopt the new Common Core State Standards—something we support wholeheartedly—we have lagged in providing teachers the supports they need to effectively teach the new standards.

While leading states were developing a more comprehensive approach to education, Michigan's primary strategy has been to expand school choice by allowing charter and virtual schools to proliferate, regardless of quality. Michigan has largely counted on choice to dramatically raise achievement – and that strategy hasn't paid off. Charters and virtual schools have experienced explosive growth, but they haven't come close to matching their promise.

SOME STATES HAVE MADE BIG IMPROVEMENTS, WHILE MICHIGAN REMAINS STAGNANT

NAEP GRADE 4 READING



CHANGE IN MEAN SCALE SCORE, 2003-2011

CHARTERS AND CYBER SCHOOLS: CHOICE WITHOUT QUALITY

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Almost 20 years ago, the charter school movement began in Michigan, promising to deliver better academic outcomes than traditional public schools. In return for more flexibility and less regulation, charter leaders said they would offer better school choices than what families could find among traditional public schools.

Charter school expansion has been a politically popular educational improvement strategy. By the 2012-2013 school year, approximately 130,000 Michigan students attended a charter school. Today, the state pays about \$1 billion dollars in taxpayer money annually to charter operators, both for-profit and nonprofit.*

That number is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years due to current and newly proposed measures that call for Michigan to invest millions more dollars in charter and cyber schooling. Among the changes: In 2011, the Michigan Legislature voted to remove the state cap on the number of university-authorized charter schools that could open in our state.

But here's the problem: Nobody is minding the store. There is little, if any, monitoring of charter school performance. And, when the cap was removed, there was no provision for quality, so even the lowest-performing charters can expand wherever they want.

It's time we got honest about Michigan's charter school performance. We are investing more and more taxpayer dollars in charters on the assumption that choice alone will produce better quality options. Too often, that's simply not the case.

In fact, our charter schools often under-perform our traditional public schools. Defenders of the charter status quo in Michigan – sounding a lot like their traditional school district counterparts – blame their low performance on the fact that charter schools serve so many poor and African-American children. But the truth is that charter schools often perform below traditional public schools that serve exactly the same kinds of students. Charters to the right show how many low-income charter elementary schools in Detroit performed no better in 2012 than traditional public elementary schools.

When we analyzed performance among Michigan charter schools and their operators, we found:

- Seventy-three percent of charter schools performed below the average Michigan public school in 2012.
- Though the state average for low-income students is far lower, almost half of the charter school operators in Michigan performed below even that level in 2012.
- Charter schools are disproportionately represented among our state's lowest-performing schools, with approximately 4-in-10 charters performing worse than 75 percent of Michigan public schools.
- Today, almost half of Michigan charter operators do not meet even a minimal standard of school performance. Of the 48 charter operators with schools in the state's 2012 school accountability system, 23 (48 percent) run most of their schools below the state average for low-income students. This means tens of millions of Michigan taxpayers' dollars are going to under-performing charter schools.

(Continued on page 7)



CHARTER SCHOOLS

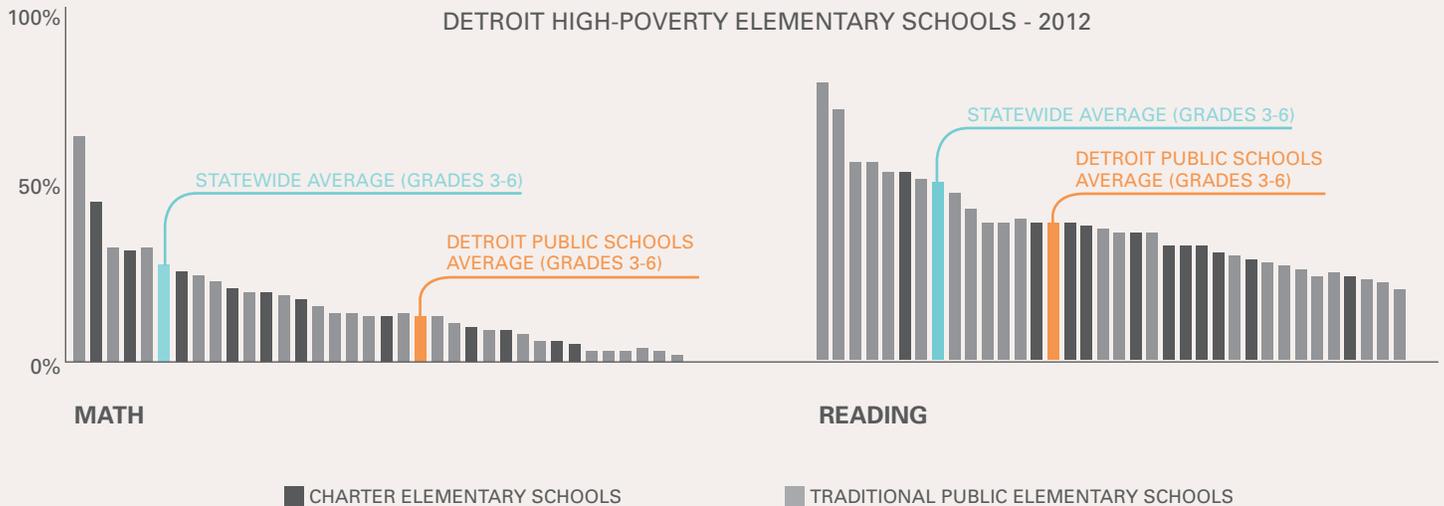


CYBER SCHOOLS

*David Arsen and Yongmei Ni, "Is Administration Learner in Charter Schools? Resource Allocation in Charter and Traditional Public Schools," (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Education Policy Center, 2012).

LOW-INCOME CHARTER SCHOOLS OFTEN PERFORM AS POORLY AS, OR WORSE THAN, LOW-INCOME TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DETROIT HIGH-POVERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS - 2012



NEW RESEARCH ON MICHIGAN CHARTER PERFORMANCE

BY DREW JACOBS

Recent research from Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) is particularly noteworthy because it compared similar Michigan charter school students to traditional public school students based on free and reduced lunch status; race and ethnicity; gender; English as a Second Language status; special education status; and grade level. This means Michigan leaders and families have a more nuanced comparison of student performance than we've had in the past.

CREDO found there is wide variation in the quality of our state's charter schools. Among its findings:

- Some Michigan operators do better on average than traditional public schools, and others do worse. For example, CREDO found that National Heritage Academies and University Preparatory Academy posted higher-than-average performance for their students, whereas Mosaica, Leona Group, and K12, Inc. posted lower than average performance.
- Michigan's worst performing charter operators are growing faster than better performing charter operators.

- Early performance of charters predicts later performance. Indeed, 80 percent of schools in the bottom 20 percent of performance remain low performers through their fifth year.
- Debunking a widely held myth that we must wait several years to see high performance in charters, CREDO found that charter schools can be excellent from day one.
- Finally, charter operators tend to open schools that replicate their current performance. If a charter operator has six low-performing schools open, it's likely that any additional schools will also be low performing.

So what does this mean for Michigan? First, we must acknowledge that there is a range of performance when it comes to charter operators – some do a great job and many others produce the same or worse results for kids. Second, we must act on this information to ensure that low-performing operators do not continue to expand in our state.

Emily H. Peltason and Margaret E. Raymond, "Charter School Growth and Replication, Volume I," Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2013. <http://credo.stanford.edu/documents/CGARGrowthVolumeIN.pdf>

James L. Woodworth and Margaret E. Raymond, "Charter School Growth and Replication, Volume II," Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2013. <http://credo.stanford.edu/pdfs/CGAR%20Growth%20Volume%20II.pdf>

Drew Jacobs is a data and policy analyst at The Education Trust—Midwest

CYBER SCHOOLS

We see similar problems when it comes to so-called “cyber” schools, where students work on home computers through online lessons and assignments. Though Michigan’s first cyber school opened in 2010, the sector is growing fast. But early evidence from cyber schools in Michigan and other states indicate that these schools often perform much worse than traditional public schools.

The largest charter cyber school in Michigan, the Michigan Virtual Charter Academy, is run by a for-profit operator called K12, Inc. The Michigan Virtual Charter Academy’s performance shows that its students are not reaching high levels of academic achievement. Only 33 percent of white students met standards in math, compared with 47 percent of white students statewide. In reading, the school performed below the state average for students overall, as well as for low-income, higher-income, and white students. African Americans are the rare exception, but though they best the state average for African-American students, proficiency rates remain shockingly low. The cyber school’s low-income 11th graders scored lower in reading in 2012 than students in the Detroit, Grand Rapids and Flint school districts.

THE IMPACT IS CLEAR. Though charter and cyber schools have all the flexibility they want and none of the constraints that slow change in traditional school districts, this sector continues to replicate the same, dismal performance patterns of many of our traditional public schools. And Michigan taxpayers are subsidizing the expansion of failing charter schools, many of which end up destabilizing higher performing charter and traditional public schools. That’s especially true in our most vulnerable communities such as Detroit, where charters have been growing most rapidly.

Please see page 8 for a profile on Detroit’s high-performing University Preparatory Math and Science Academy, a strong charter school that is struggling to compete with an infusion of low-performing charter schools in the city.

Investing public dollars in failing and struggling charter schools is simply ineffective. It’s not smart policy, it’s not good for our students, and it’s not working for our state.

Advocates for unlimited charter and cyber school growth say that, with time, “the market” will force Michigan’s low-performing charters to improve or close. Unfortunately, that is rarely the case. Neither time nor competition has produced a strong charter sector in Michigan. Stanford’s CREDO report, “Charter School Growth and Replications,” found that, with some exceptions, charter schools that start strong are likely to stay that way, just as low-performing schools usually remain at the bottom. The researchers studied charters in 25 states, and ranked them by five levels of performance. Eighty percent of schools at the bottom performance level during their first year remained there for five years.

To be clear, Ed Trust-Midwest supports high-performing schools, regardless of governance structure. There are great schools in both the traditional public school and charter school sectors in Michigan – and we highlight some of this work later in this report. We believe all students should be taught at high levels. That’s why we supported the lift in the state cap on charters, on the condition that truly rigorous standards be put in place to ensure high-performing charters are growing, while low-performers are not allowed to expand or be renewed.

But unlike leading states, Michigan’s lawmakers neglected to enact this safety net. Today in our state, practically any charter school can be approved – even if its operator has a long and dismal track record of performance.



MARGARET TRIMER-HARTLEY
SUPERINTENDENT
UNIVERSITY PREP SCIENCE &
MATH, DETROIT



PHOTOGRAPHY: DAYMON HARTLEY, UPREP STUDENTS

HIGH-PERFORMING CHARTERS IMPACTED BY LOW PERFORMERS

GIFT CERTIFICATES TO FOOT LOCKER, OTHER INCENTIVES, ATTRACT FAMILIES TO STRUGGLING SCHOOLS

BY DAVID ZEMAN

The flood of new charter schools into Detroit – including those run by companies with poor track records – presents serious challenges for the city, its students, and even for the city’s highest-performing schools.

Students at University Prep Science and Math charter academy (UPrep), for instance, far surpass average scores for Detroit’s students on the state MEAP exam.

Yet Superintendent Margaret Trimer-Hartley said she finds herself scrambling to recruit students – and keep the ones she has – citing an influx of lower-performing charters.

“There’s more competition, and that can be a good thing,” she said. “But if I’m going to lose a student, how does losing a kid to a low-performing charter that offers a great gift certificate to Foot Locker help that kid, or help improve the market?”

UPrep’s academic success would suggest waiting lists – not empty seats.

Its students are mostly low-income and nearly entirely African American. Yet in math, UPrep students, who have slightly longer school days and operate on a year-round

calendar, beat statewide proficiency rates for all students – not just poor students or children of color.

Trimer-Hartley attributes the charter’s success to several factors:

- Hiring strong principals and giving them broad authority to run the charter’s middle and high school;
- Intensive training and collaboration among teachers;
- A rigorous, college-focused curriculum,
- And a supportive, quality-conscious charter authorizer in Grand Valley State University.

And yet, “we have to fight for every kid.” Last year, she said, roughly 25 students left UPrep, with half going to low-performing charters that offered students’ families gift certificates or other incentives.

Competition alone does not necessarily drive schools to improve performance, given that so many schools in the city are struggling or failing – yet their doors remain open. Trimer-Hartley said the volume of low-performing charter schools actually makes quality charter schools less apt to share innovative teaching strategies.

“Charters are supposed to be laboratories of innovation,” she said. “This is not how we should be operating.”



1. FOCUS ON
IMPLEMENTATION
AND QUALITY

INVESTING IN WHAT WORKS



2. EFFECTIVE
TEACHING AND
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP



3. RIGOROUS
CURRICULUM FOR
ALL STUDENTS—AND
SUPPORT FOR ALL
TEACHERS



4. SCHOOL
ACCOUNTABILITY
AND SUPPORT



5. SCHOOL
FUNDING
FORMULAS



6. RELATIONSHIPS
WITH PARENTS AND
COMMUNITIES

It's time for our leaders to be honest about what isn't working to raise Michigan's student learning. We need to invest in what works: common-sense strategies rooted in what research and experience tells us matters.

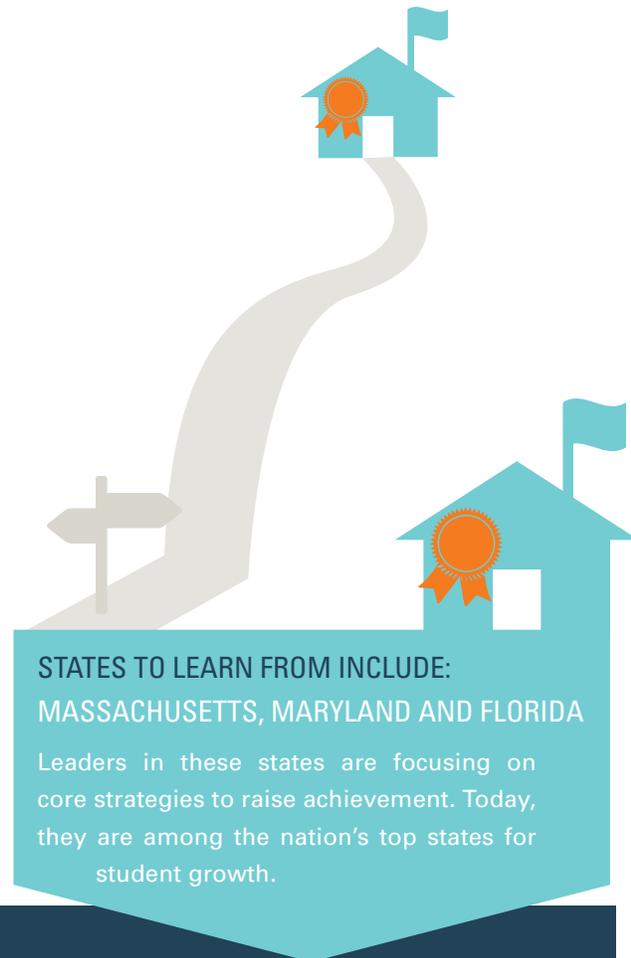
Thankfully, Michigan can benefit from many years of research on what helps improve teaching and learning, as well as from work in leading states. Massachusetts, Maryland and Florida, for example, have made impressive gains in achievement, including for African-American, Latino and low-income students. They show that state leadership matters – and can deliver results for students.

PRIORITIES FOR MICHIGAN

1. SUSTAINED FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION AND QUALITY

Sustaining state leadership will require our educational and policy leaders to stop careening from one policy change to the next – and expecting choice alone to transform our schools. We must instead invest in proven, comprehensive strategies, and then keep our focus long enough to ensure they are properly implemented. To its credit, Michigan has already adopted new standards, re-made its accountability and public reporting system, and passed significant changes in teacher evaluation and tenure laws. But these reforms will accomplish little without significant state assistance for schools to make the necessary changes in practice in classrooms.

In the end, a state's success is less about the boldness of reform than the quality of implementation. This is where Michigan has been weak for years. That has to change. Our state leaders need to provide leadership, build capacity and make smart investments to properly jump-start or sustain implementation on important, sensible strategies.



MASSACHUSETTS

Students in Massachusetts posted some of the highest achievement scores on the national assessment in 2011. But they didn't just perform at high levels; they've also improved over time. For instance, Massachusetts' fourth-grade Latino students gained 14 percentage points in reading proficiency between 2003 and 2011 on the national assessment. In comparison, Michigan's Latino students only gained 2 points during the same time period. Massachusetts didn't become a high-performing/high-improving state by accident. It set high standards early on and held to them over time. The state made major investments in its public schools, including more generous funding for schools serving the poorest children. Education leadership has been stable, and there has been a unique partnership between the state and its largest urban schools districts. The current work in Massachusetts may be instructive. Like Michigan, Massachusetts has a new school accountability system, but the Bay State provides greater support to low-performing schools. For example, it ensures only high-quality external partners work with schools undergoing turnaround work.

State leaders in this state also have taken a thoughtful approach to charter school growth. The Massachusetts State Department of Education closely regulates charter schools in order to ensure new charter schools are strong, proven performers. Charter schools that seek to open in the lowest 10 percent of districts in Massachusetts must meet a "proven provider" standard, which requires evidence of strong academic performance. Indeed, to ensure high charter performance, the department is the sole authorizer for charters in the state.

TRANSFORMING MICHIGAN'S TEACHING PROFESSION

GRAND BLANC TEACHERS SAY NEW EVALUATIONS HAVE IMPROVED TEACHING CULTURE

BY DAVID ZEMAN AND DREW JACOBS

When Grand Blanc High School adopted a more rigorous teacher evaluation system last school year, the response from teachers was more wary than enthusiastic.

Some wondered whether one bad classroom observation could cost them their jobs. Others rolled their eyes at the disruption to their routines.

Fast forward to today. Teachers say they are not only believers in the new evaluation process, but they want even more feedback in the future. The experience, they say, is transforming the culture at Grand Blanc High. Teachers are more thoughtful about their lessons, and more collaborative in a profession where teachers aren't always comfortable asking colleagues for help.

"People became more conscious of what they were doing," said teacher Todd Babaisz, who chairs the school's social studies department. "All teachers want to be successful. They are now more open to going outside the classroom and getting more feedback."

That's precisely the kind of transformation envisioned by state leaders who supported the 2011 educator evaluation and tenure reforms, measures championed by The Education Trust–Midwest to better develop and support teachers so they could be more effective at raising Michigan students' achievement.

Though a statewide system of professional development and support is still being developed, Grand Blanc teachers say their experience bodes well for Michigan.

"Teachers come to school every day wanting to do their best job, and now we have an evaluation tool to help them grow their skills," Principal Jennifer Hammond says. "Teachers were surprised about the amount of growth that low-performing students showed. This is changing the culture of the profession at our school."

The more intensive evaluation model was negotiated between Grand Blanc Community Schools and the local teacher's union. Overseeing its rollout in the high school is Hammond, whose interest in the program extends beyond Grand Blanc. Hammond sits on the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, the state-appointed group of experts that is designing Michigan's first statewide system for evaluating and developing educators.

Hammond, like her teachers, is thrilled with the results so far. She said teachers take pride in exceeding performance goals and are talking more about their craft than she can ever recall in more than two decades as an educator.

The more demanding evaluation process challenges her schedule. She evaluated roughly 100 of Grand Blanc's 140 teachers last year (a deputy principal handled the rest), while running a bustling high school of 2,700 students.

But, she said, the rewards are worth it.

(Grand Blanc continues, opposite page)

2. FOSTER EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP



Decades of research tell us that the single most important in-school predictor of student achievement is the quality of classroom teaching. That's why ETM made the development of effective teachers and school leaders our most important priority when we opened in Michigan three years ago, and why we will continue to prioritize this issue. (See sidebar on Grand Blanc)

Despite its critical importance, our state still lacks a coherent set of policies, systems and, most of all, practices to improve teacher effectiveness — from improving teacher preparation, to providing high-quality feedback, support and coaching in the classroom, to more effective recruitment, placement and compensation.

Yes, as noted earlier, Michigan has passed educator tenure and evaluation reform. Yet most Michigan school districts do not have the resources or expertise to properly implement these systems. They need state support. Soon, a state-appointed group of education experts is expected to share evaluation recommendations that should provide much-needed guidance to struggling districts, as well as a state data system that should allow Michiganders to compare educator performance across districts.

But developing systems to more reliably evaluate teachers is only part of the solution. (Certainly, districts will need real support to do evaluations right: these are big changes from how districts have done business in the past.) The state also needs to work closely with districts to build real professional development and support to help educators get better. State leaders also need to take their oversight role in teacher and principal preparation seriously, expanding programs that produce the most effective educators, and shrinking or closing those that consistently turn out weak performers.



STATES TO LEARN FROM INCLUDE: MARYLAND, FLORIDA

Maryland's student achievement improved at one of the highest rates in the country for low-income, Latino, and African-American performance between 2003 and 2011 in national testing. The state is now working to implement a robust educator evaluation system with statewide training and support for evaluators. In Florida, which today ranks among the top states in student performance, state leaders award bonuses to teachers who improve student learning on Advanced Placement tests.



JENNIFER HAMMOND
PRINCIPAL
GRAND BLANC HIGH SCHOOL



TODD BABAISZ
SOCIAL STUDIES CHAIR
GRAND BLANC HIGH SCHOOL

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARVIN SHAOUNI



ALYSSA ROTH
ENGLISH TEACHER
GRAND BLANC HIGH SCHOOL

(Grand Blanc continued)

MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK

In Grand Blanc, as in most schools, evaluations were historically pro forma affairs, with the principal often simply checking off boxes on a form. That was pretty much it. As math teacher Sarah Johnson summarized the process: "It's been 'Great job,' and sending you on your way."

Teachers rarely received the kind of rich feedback, support or tailored professional development that allowed them to improve their instruction. As one teacher put it, while school leaders said they wanted good teachers, "no one had a sense of what it took to get there."

That changed during the 2011-2012 school year.

Under Grand Blanc's more rigorous evaluation process, every teacher is observed at least once a year, with younger teachers visited in their classroom every month. Faculty members are evaluated on their classroom management, professionalism, and on their ability to meet student academic growth goals. Hammond records her observations in an iPad app, which sends results immediately to teachers so they can determine steps for improvement with their evaluator.

Teachers are encouraged to spend more time talking to, and learning from, colleagues.

"We now know the specific categories that we're going to be rated on," said Tanya Russian, a science teacher. "And it gives new teachers a place to start in terms of knowing what a highly effective teacher looks like."

While Grand Blanc teachers said they interacted in the past, the new, more intensive evaluation system makes it more acceptable to engage in deeper professional conversations.

"It has not always been in our culture for a teacher to say, 'My kids didn't do well on this, can you help me?'" Hammond said.

There are times, she said, when a teacher will learn more from a colleague than from the principal. "I don't always know all the content. I can't go into French 4 and know the content she's teaching, if it's correct. We need peers to provide some feedback, too."

Joanne McKelvie, a special education teacher, said she benefited from more collaboration. "I steal every idea I can that I think can be meaningful in the classroom."

Hammond recalled a 12-year veteran who acknowledged feeling stale about her teaching. Hammond urged her to watch a colleague, even arranging for a substitute to handle the veteran's classes. The teacher later told Hammond that visiting her colleague's classroom was the best half day she'd spent in years.

It was the kind of creative solution that boosts teacher morale while, more importantly, improving instruction for students.

Several teachers said they hope the state's evaluation system, when it's announced later this year, will also include a plan for "master teachers" – instructors who are recognized for great teaching and can help principals shoulder evaluation work and mentor new or struggling colleagues.

In the meantime, the teachers interviewed said they remain hungry for more feedback.

"Honestly, said Alyssa Roth, a second-year English teacher, "I wish we had met a little bit more."

3. PROVIDE A RIGOROUS COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY CURRICULUM TO ALL STUDENTS—AND COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT TO ALL TEACHERS

Both common sense and academic research tell us that students who are challenged more in school will be better prepared upon high school graduation, whether for work or for college. Though Michigan was slower than some states to act on that knowledge, our state has made a series of reforms in the past decade to strengthen standards. That started when the state threw out its old, low-level high school exam and substituted the ACT; it continued when the state adopted the Michigan Merit Curriculum for high school students, a much tougher set of course requirements than previously existed. Now Michigan is among 45 states adopting the rigorous Common Core State Standards, while working with other states to develop tests that align with these standards, which students will begin taking in 2015.

But adoption of these policies is not enough. All students, rather than just some, need their coursework to align with these new standards. And teachers and school leaders need to be adequately prepared to teach in deeper ways – that includes a high-quality curriculum to help students meet these standards. That’s where our state needs to get its act together. Instead of providing the in-depth preparation and curricular resources our educators need to help students meet these tougher standards, our educators have received maybe an hour or two of training and a hand-out. Michigan can do better. We need to better prepare and support educators if our students are to benefit from these higher standards – and educators in our highest poverty schools need to be first in line.

Fortunately, there’s a lot we can build on. Because 45 states have adopted Common Core, Michigan can take advantage of pooled resources – and cost-savings – to develop materials and other collaterals related to teaching the Common Core, and helping all students succeed in the Michigan Merit Curriculum. There’s no time to waste.



A STATE TO LEARN FROM:

MARYLAND

Maryland has been working on full adoption of the Common Core standards to raise the level of rigor in its schools. [See Maryland profile, following page.](#)



MICHIGAN SCHOOLS PROVE THEY CAN DO THE JOB

BY DREW JACOBS AND SARAH W. LENHOFF

Some Michigan charter and traditional public schools are dramatic exceptions to statewide patterns, rapidly improving achievement for historically low-performing students. Here are two examples. The strategies they employ can be adopted by any school in Michigan.

At Detroit's **University Preparatory Science and Math (UPrep)**, a charter near the city's riverwalk, students performed better than citywide Detroit scores in all subjects on the 2012 MEAP test, for students overall and for African-American and low-income students. In fact, the school beat the state proficiency rates on MEAP in math, overall and for African-American and low-income students. In reading, UPrep beat the state for African-American students by over 20 points. UPrep attributes its success to investing in intensive training and collaboration among teachers; strong school leadership with broad authority; and a rigorous, college-focused curriculum. **See related article on page 8.**

At Harms Elementary in the Detroit Public Schools, students demonstrated more improvement than the state average in reading and math. In addition, not only did the school perform significantly higher than Detroit as a whole, it also beat statewide averages for some groups on the 2012 MEAP. For example, Harms' Latino students beat the state proficiency rate for Latino students in reading and math. Leaders at Harms say they invest time in making sure students are getting rigorous reading training as early as kindergarten, including appropriate support, through the Accelerated Reading program. Principal Dr. Karen White says a strong commitment to early childhood programs at the school; a stable teaching force with years of expertise; community partners, and family literacy programs also help make the school successful.

"We offer family literacy programs since our school serves a large ELL (English language learners) population," says White. "Classrooms have seating for parents and on a normal school day you will see parents in the school building learning alongside their children. It helps to have parents understand what their kids are learning. This program was so popular that we now have morning and afternoon sessions four days a week."

MARYLAND

Maryland improved at one of the highest rates in the country for low-income, Latino, and African-American performance between 2003 and 2011 on the national assessment. In 2012, Education Week ranked the public education system in Maryland first in the country for its commitment to ensuring that all students have quality teachers and for preparing high school students for college and career. Maryland did not reach the top overnight. The state benefited from very capable and stable leadership, generous funding formulas, with extra funding for high-poverty districts. It also has a manageable number of school districts, many of which are high capacity.

Despite its high ranking, Maryland is not standing still. It's aggressively implementing the new Common Core State Standards, which build on best practices in other states. As part of its implementation strategy, Maryland has invested in academies that bring school teams together to train on Common Core instructional strategies and lesson development. More than 200 teachers have been trained, and are running lessons through, a quality control process developed by Washington, D.C.-based ACHIEVE. This process will be made available to teachers across the state.

Maryland is also working on educator evaluation, with statewide training and support for classroom evaluators. State and district leaders are working together to integrate evaluation reforms with the Common Core implementation.

4. IMPROVE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT



All schools – traditional public, charter, and cyber – must be held accountable for fulfilling their ultimate purpose: improving student learning. This belief has been a tenet of the Education Trust for more than two decades, and it is more important than ever in Michigan.

With more schools to choose among every year, but achievement levels still far below those in many states, it is hugely important that all Michigan schools be held accountable for meeting ambitious improvement goals. This requires state-level monitoring of student performance and close examination of the performance of our most vulnerable students.

In recent months in Lansing, concerns about low-performing schools are often dismissed with, “That’s the job of the Education Achievement Authority.” Well, for a handful of schools, that’s right. But Michigan has many more consistently low-performing schools – run by charters and traditional districts – that, for many reasons, will never enter the EAA. Those schools also need support for improvement based in research and proven expertise, rather than wishful thinking.

Michigan also must build a stronger accountability framework for chronically low-performing charter operators, and the authorizers who continue to allow these operators to open more schools.



STATES TO LEARN FROM: MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts has a rich accountability system that provides greater flexibility and support to low-performing schools. The Massachusetts State Department of Education also closely regulates charter schools to ensure that new charter schools are strong, proven performers. **See Massachusetts profile, page 10.**

FLORIDA

Florida has been a national leader in elementary reading. Between 2003 and 2011, the state’s low-income fourth graders made more improvement on the reading NAEP than low-income students in 45 other states. In 2011, Florida ranked 4th of 50 states in reading for low-income fourth graders.

Some of that success springs from a serious investment to boosting the skills of Florida’s elementary teachers in teaching reading. One of the state’s major universities played a leading role in that training, and worked hard to keep the quality of teacher supports high.

But Florida’s success is also attributable to an established school accountability system that sets clear expectations and generates useful information to parents and the public. Florida schools are held accountable for how students perform each year on statewide tests in reading, math and science, as well as for how much progress students make over time. High schools are also held accountable for important measures of college and career readiness, such as participation and success in AP and IB courses and student performance on the ACT or SAT.

Performance on these indicators is included on publicly-available school report cards, and each school is given an A-F grade that is the basis of decisions about whether schools receive autonomy for high performance and growth, or support and - ultimately - intervention for low performance and growth.

5. REVISE SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULAS

In recent years, Michigan has cut its education budget, as it has cut many other state functions. Clearly, these cuts have hurt. While money isn't the most important predictor of student learning, its absence makes it difficult if not impossible to prepare students to meet the demands of a rigorous curriculum and a rapidly changing world. And when schools serving the poorest kids end up with less funding—from local, state or federal resources—we can be pretty sure those children won't catch up.

Michigan has not yet conducted a serious enough review of education funding—in terms of its adequacy, or in whether money is distributed equitably. It's time to do that. We need a finance system that makes “just-right” investments in schools, while not wasting money on strategies that don't work. Moreover, schools that serve our most needy children need extra resources, not fewer.





PHOTOGRAPHY: DAYMON HARTLEY

6. HELP SCHOOLS STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

For schools to truly be successful, they must work together with parents and communities. Schools that establish strong connections to their communities improve student learning more than other schools.

Sometimes this is easier said than done, and our educator preparation programs don't always equip future principals and teachers with the skills and tools they need to engage parents as partners in their children's education. Educators need help, including materials they can use and training in how to use them. Parents, meanwhile, need honest, simple-to-understand information on how their children are performing. Providing that information for parents, and that help for educators, ought to be at the top of the to-do list for the Michigan Department of Education, intermediate school districts, school districts, and civic and community leaders.



A STATE TO LEARN FROM: FLORIDA

Florida has implemented an easy-to-understand, closely followed, statewide A-F accountability system. Though the system has a flaw – it awards some schools A's even though they have wide achievement gaps – it has rallied parents and communities around school performance.

CONCLUSION

This six-part agenda may be common sense, but no piece of it is easy. Successfully implementing Common Core, overhauling our preparation and development of teachers, and helping schools to better engage with parents are each complicated undertakings that require considerable effort to do well.

But school choice alone isn't going to get us anywhere. Michigan families have many options when it comes to schools. The problem is that we have so few choices that are actually good – high-performing schools that deliver better teaching and greater learning for our students.

It's time Michigan develops a coherent, common-sense strategy to raise achievement and then devotes the planning and resources to ensure it's implemented effectively. Other states are on their way. Michigan can be, too.

ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST–MIDWEST

The Education Trust–Midwest works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, from pre-kindergarten through college. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement for all children, particularly those from low-income families or who are African American, Latino, or American Indian — in Michigan and beyond. As a statewide education policy and advocacy organization, we are focused first and foremost on doing what is right for Michigan students. The Education Trust–Midwest is affiliated with the national organization, The Education Trust, based in Washington, D.C. Ed Trust–Midwest is the second state office of The Education Trust.



The Education Trust–Midwest

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