

A photograph of two students in a classroom, both focused on writing in their notebooks. The student in the foreground is a young Black male, and the student in the background is a young white female. The image has a warm, orange-toned overlay.

RAISING READERS

IMPROVING
LITERACY EDUCATION
for MICHIGAN'S
MOST VULNERABLE
STUDENTS





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RAISING READERS: IMPROVING LITERACY EDUCATION FOR MICHIGAN'S MOST VULNERABLE STUDENTS

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This report is the culmination of work by a team of literacy experts convened by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Michigan. The experts, who include teachers, professors, and literacy consultants, were organized into working groups (parent/community, early childhood, elementary, and secondary) headed by group leaders specialized in the working group areas.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Michigan schools consistently fall in the bottom ranks of national testing metrics and college readiness, in spite of the fact that the Michigan Constitution and state law require districts to ensure that students are meeting state literacy standards.

SECTION I

Reading is a Fundamental Right

“This case, simply put, is about the right of children to read, a right guaranteed under the constitution and laws of this state.”

Kary Moss, executive director of the Michigan ACLU

In 2012, eight students in Highland Park, Michigan, took the dramatic step of suing the State of Michigan and their school district for failing to provide them with the basic literacy education necessary for them to pass the state’s reading assessment.

The situation in Highland Park is far from unique. While Michigan once rested comfortably on its respectable education outcomes, today the picture is quite different. Our schools consistently fall in the bottom ranks of national

testing metrics and college readiness,¹ in spite of the fact that the Michigan Constitution and state law require districts to ensure that students are meeting state literacy standards.

Improvements are being made, but aren’t impacting the state’s poorest children.

Of course, many entities and individuals—from the Department of Education (MDE) to rank-and-file teachers—are working hard to ensure that all children in Michigan receive the quality literacy instruction that’s crucial to their success in life.

A number of policy and program improvements being made (see the orange text below and on the following page) will have a subtle and steady impact on statewide numbers, but not necessarily in the state’s poorest districts, where the test scores are lowest. Michigan’s current standing in national academic rankings and the persistent poverty-related achievement gap suggest that these laws and the state’s current literacy plan are not being implemented equitably, if at all.

Some of the significant investments in Michigan education, which may have long-term payoffs:

- *PA 118 and 32,² Mi Lit Plan*
- *Adoption of the Common Core State Standards*
- *Free access to an English Language Arts curriculum for K–12 developed by the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA)*
- *Expansion of early childhood education with the Great Start Readiness Program*
- *Increased availability of full-day kindergarten statewide*
- *Implementation of a September 1 cutoff date for kindergarten enrollment³*

A roadmap leading to improved literacy for ALL children

The causes and consequences of literacy challenges in Michigan's poorest school districts are numerous and complex. Some are unique to Michigan; many are not. But all need to be critically examined and accounted for when seeking to improve the literacy proficiency of all Michigan children.

This report leverages evidence-based and innovative strategies to improve literacy instruction and intervention in Michigan's most impoverished school districts. All of these recommendations are built around a nationally tested Collective Impact model, which brings together the leaders of a variety of stakeholder organizations who then commit

to working together regularly to address a common goal. As research from our own state and other states demonstrates, only through a shared commitment to joint capacity-building will we be able to address the complex challenge before us.


There is tremendous intelligence and potential in all Michigan children, and there is equally tremendous goodwill among the adults who work with them. Together, we can join forces to create a better future for Michigan.

By adopting a Collective Impact framework to tackle the literacy challenges facing disadvantaged communities, we stand the best chance at reversing the dismal literacy scores for too many of our children, thereby equipping them—and our state—for brighter futures.

A current focus on third-grade reading milestones could yield important gains.⁴

A recent legislative workgroup report on third grade reading⁵ has identified a number of key elements to improvement, including, among others:

- *A literacy oversight commission*
- *Parent information and support*
- *Evidence-based practices*
- *Training for teachers and leaders*
- *Intensive targeted interventions for students who are behind in reading*



The tremendous intelligence and potential in all Michigan children, combined with goodwill among adults, can enable stakeholders to join forces to create a better future for Michigan.

Children in Michigan's poorest school districts—where parents, schools and communities are under constant pressure to do more with less—are bearing the brunt of Michigan's literacy crisis.



SECTION II

Improving Literacy Education will Improve Communities and the State as a Whole

Six key parties:

Working together among entities is the only way we can accomplish real and lasting change for children and our state. That's why the overarching recommendation of this working group is that the state should convene and fund a Collective Impact framework involving six responsible parties:

- **The Governor and the State Board of Education (SBE)**
- **The State Legislature**
- **The Michigan Department of Education and the State School Reform/Redesign Office (SRO)**
- **State universities and other teacher education providers**
- **Intermediate school districts (ISD)**
- **Local districts and schools themselves**

Parents and other interested community members are also key players, but the six groups charged with this work are education professionals and policy makers who are responsible for the learning outcomes of children and youth in our state.

Seven key responsibilities:

Just as the state's literacy problems are complex, the best strategy for getting the state back on track involves multiple approaches. This working group recommends that the Collective Impact team take responsibility for these seven tasks:

- 1 **Adopt a Collective Impact framework**
- 2 **Increase literacy leadership at the state level**
- 3 **Provide adequate and appropriate learning materials, tools, and resources for all students**
- 4 **Select and/or develop appropriate, meaningful, and engaging curriculum**
- 5 **Develop a strong professional teaching force**
- 6 **Attend to the needs of a diverse student population and the special learning needs of individual students**
- 7 **Provide wraparound supports to address broader community economic, social, and cultural needs**

Collective Impact

Collective Impact (CI) is a model through which community stakeholders work together to solve deeply entrenched social problems. Effective CI is more than just another program. Done correctly, CI is a process involving residents, government agencies, businesses, nonprofits, healthcare and philanthropy together identifying goals, aligning their resources, tracking data, and monitoring progress that they frequently report out for community input.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION 1

Michigan should adopt a Collective Impact framework as the overarching approach to improving literacy education, with program evaluation an integral part of every initiative.

The Governor, together with the State Board of Education, the SRO, and the MDE, should adopt and fund a Collective Impact framework to coordinate the improvement of literacy outcomes in Michigan's most vulnerable schools by convening a broad coalition of stakeholders.

These stakeholders should include the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the leader of the SRO, the MAISA Executive Director, key liaisons to the university and philanthropic communities, and others.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION



Michigan's schools occupy that bottom tiers of numerous national rankings for both academic achievement and educational spending.

Schools with High Rates of Poverty are Farthest Behind

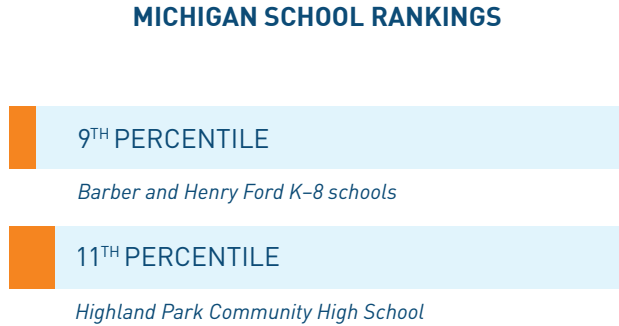
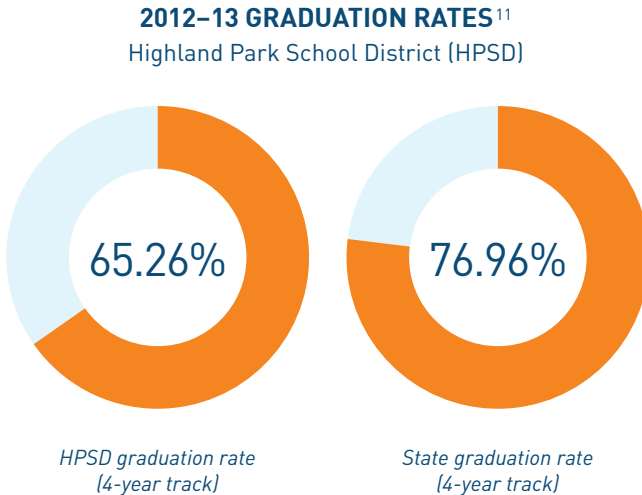
Michigan students once outperformed the national average,⁶ but today the opposite is true. Michigan’s schools now occupy the bottom tiers of numerous national rankings for both academic achievement and educational spending.⁷

At the same time, these outcomes and shortcomings are not evenly distributed across districts. Children of color and/or from communities with high rates of poverty all too often fall behind in literacy metrics, not for lack of ability, but for lack of quality literacy instruction.

Although Michigan’s Constitution recognizes the obligation of the state to provide free public education⁸, and the Michigan legislature enacted a law to ensure that struggling young readers receive literacy intervention needed to put them on the path of reading at grade level,⁹ thousands of Michigan children are denied the resources that we know can put them on the path to achievement and prosperity.

In spite of widespread agreement about the vital role that literacy plays in the lives of individuals, communities, and the state:¹⁰

Michigan has yet to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to improve and sustain literacy education in schools with high rates of poverty.



In the State of Michigan’s Top-to-Bottom Ranking for 2013–14, Barber and Henry Ford K-8 schools—both in HPSD—were ranked in the ninth percentile, i.e., 91% of schools in Michigan provided a higher quality education than did these two schools. Highland Park Community High School was ranked in the 11th percentile of all schools in Michigan.¹²

Case Study: Highland Park

“My name is [redacted] and I go too barber Focus school. The thing I whis the govern could do for my school is fix our bathroom, get us new computers, help us get more books, and more learning programs.”

Eighth-Grade Student from Barber Focus Elementary School (2012)

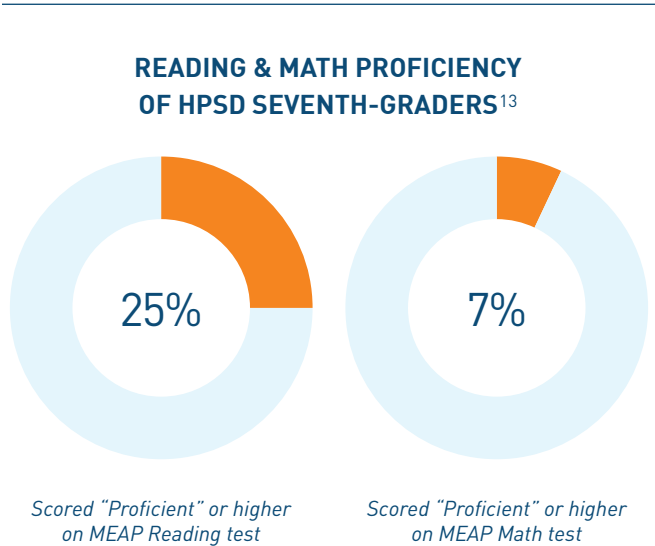
In 2012, eight elementary, middle and high school students from Highland Park School District (HPSD) sued the State of Michigan and various school district actors for denying them the instruction they needed to gain basic literacy skills. The students—all of whom had failed to score “proficient” on the state’s annual proficiency exam, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP)—read several levels below their actual grade levels in school.

They were hardly alone. According to their complaint, the MDE data for the 2011–12 school year showed that only 35% of fourth-grade students in HPSD scored “Proficient” or higher on the MEAP Reading test, and fewer than that, 13%, were “Proficient” or higher on the MEAP Math exam.

Under Michigan law, each and every child who does not pass the fourth or seventh-grade reading portion of the MEAP is entitled to “specialized assistance reasonably expected to enable the pupil to bring his or her reading skills to grade level within 12 months.”¹⁴ Yet, as documented by Dr. Elizabeth Moje, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor in the University of Michigan’s School of Education, despite the appalling literacy test scores in HPSD, the district and schools (which are now operated by a for-profit education management organization called The Leona Group (TLG)) lacked the requisite planning and resources to bring their students—the vast majority of whom were not proficient in reading—up to grade level.¹⁵

So dismal were the instructional conditions in their classrooms that the eight Highland Park children and their families felt that they had only the courts—not their schools, not their legislators—to turn to for help.

In November 2012, the Michigan Supreme Court dismissed the children’s suit. As a result, these eight students and their many classmates continue to lose vital access and opportunity by being denied the literacy instruction and intervention entitled to them by law.



Among the findings of Dr. Elizabeth Moje, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor in the University of Michigan's School of Education:

- **There is no systematic plan in place to improve the state of literacy instruction or intervention in HPSD.** *HPSD schools lack the specialized skill among teachers, the professional development to propel teachers to become experts, the curricular resources, and the systematic approach necessary to provide HPSD students the opportunity to read at a proficient level.*
- **Teaching staff in HPSD has not been properly vetted or trained to meet the demands of literacy intervention.** *The District is in "turnaround" mode, yet only one literacy coach across three buildings and grades K–12 has a specific endorsement as a literacy specialist. In addition, classroom teachers and interventionists had inconsistent and/or insufficient skill in assessment analysis, a vital component of any successful literacy intervention program.*
- **HPSD relies a great deal on paraprofessionals for small group instruction and intervention,** *yet paraprofessionals are not required to have college degrees or specialized training of any kind in education. Dr. Moje's on-site interviews demonstrated inconsistent distribution of intervention program materials and insufficient teacher training in HPSD.¹⁶*
- **The State is not properly monitoring the activities of TLG or making adjustments to support struggling readers.** *Dr. Moje reported that "[t]he [HPSD] System/State has not developed a structured plan or supplied the requisite literacy experience necessary to turn around students' literacy achievement, let alone to do so within twelve months. What is more, they have provided minimal resources and have not woven literacy instruction throughout the curriculum at every grade level. Finally, there is no evidence of state oversight or monitoring."¹⁷*

These vignettes reflect realities in Michigan schools in the past two years. Names have been withheld to protect the identities of schools and personnel.

VIGNETTE

A successful plan, thwarted by budget cuts

A large district decides its mediocre reading performance on state assessments can be improved. As a result, a district literacy coordinator is appointed and an ambitious district-wide literacy plan and curriculum is phased in over three years.

The strategy involves intensive professional development for teachers, including training sessions, building-level leadership roles, and coaching. Teachers are trained to collect student data on an ongoing basis, and report cards are revised to include student progress on reading benchmarks. A system for identifying students at risk of falling behind is created; students exiting kindergarten and second-grade with weak reading and math performance are incentivized to enroll in a month-long summer intervention program, with transportation provided.

As the plan is implemented, highly skilled teachers work with students and provide a demonstration site for college interns under the supervision of university faculty onsite. Students who continue to read below grade level are placed in small intervention groups in first-grade with a reading specialist, in which most quickly rise to grade level. The majority of middle/high school teachers are trained to support reading and writing in their content area classes for all students. High school students who continue to struggle are placed in reading intervention classes, and special education resource room teachers are trained to use interventions for students with learning disabilities.

As the new literacy plan becomes embedded, the district sees scores rise by 26%, but shortly thereafter, budget cuts reduce the literacy coordinator's full-time position and increase the elementary reading specialists' caseloads.

**“BY MOST MEASURES,
MICHIGAN IS NOW AMONG THE
BOTTOM TIER NATIONALLY IN
PREPARING ITS STUDENTS FOR
LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL.”**

*Bridge Magazine*¹⁸

The Michigan Context

Statistics show an alarming statewide trend

The plight of Highland Park students is hardly unique within Michigan. As a state, we continue to, at best, “tread water” in national academic rankings and, at worst, slide back.

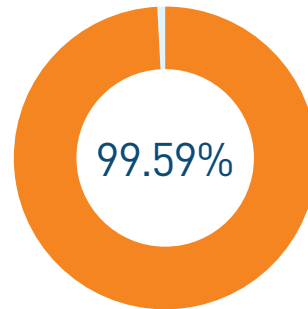
Consider that between 2003 and 2011, Michigan fell from 28th to 35th place in rankings for the fourth-grade reading portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and from 27th to 41st on the fourth-grade mathematics portion of the exam.¹⁹ During that same timeframe, the state slipped from 27th to 28th place in rankings for the eighth-grade reading portion of the NAEP and from 34th to 36th place for the eighth-grade mathematics portion of the exam.²⁰

While these trends can be seen in communities across the state, students of color and those affected by poverty bear the brunt of the lack of quality literacy instruction.

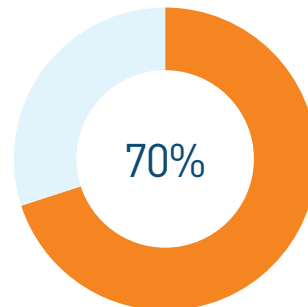
In 2011, Michigan’s African-American fourth-graders, who are disproportionately affected by poverty, ranked dead last among the 50 states on the reading portion of the NAEP.²¹ On the 2012–2013 MEAP, only 55% of “economically disadvantaged” fourth-graders scored proficient on the reading portion of the MEAP as compared to 81% of their “not economically disadvantaged” counterparts. In writing, only 26.5% of African-American and 39.9% of Native-American students were proficient, compared to 52% of white students.²²

The number and proportion of Michigan students who are economically disadvantaged is staggering. Nearly half of Michigan students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (48.6% in 2013),²³ and one in four Michigan children live below the poverty line.²⁴ Schools with high proportions of children living in poverty exist in every region of our state, both rural and urban, and their plight will eventually affect the economic and social well-being of every part of the state.

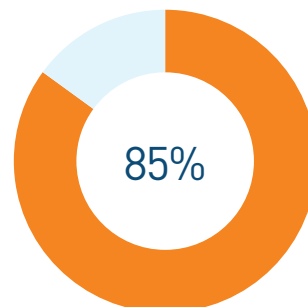
HIGHLAND PARK STUDENTS



Students identify as African-American



Over 70% are considered “economically disadvantaged”



Students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunches²⁵

School funding disparities

Although a full analysis of educational funding disparities is beyond the scope of this report,²⁶ there are several key metrics that illustrate just how much Michigan is shortchanging its neediest districts.

- The Education Law Center's 2015 National Report Card on school funding fairness awarded Michigan a "C" relative to other states when it comes to the distribution of school funding among poor and wealthy districts.²⁷
- According to the most recent available data, Michigan's "fairness ratio"—which measures the predicted difference in funding between a high-poverty (30%) and low-poverty (0%) district—is .98. This means that there is little difference between the average \$9,759 per student that high-poverty districts received and the \$9,914 that low poverty districts received. Although this is a very slight improvement from 2007, 2008 and 2010, when Michigan's funding distribution was deemed "regressive," (meaning that its poor districts were receiving less funding than wealthy districts), the state today is at best "flat" (meaning that poor and wealthy districts receive close to the same amount of funding on average).²⁸
- A separate study by The Education Trust placed Michigan 42nd out of 47 states in funding equity, making it one of the most regressive school-funding states in the nation.²⁹

Regardless of the precise ranking system, it is clear that Michigan is not funding its schools equitably. Considering the increased demands of providing education in poverty-ridden districts, Michigan's policy and practice of funding such districts at or below rates at which it funds wealthy districts makes little sense. Even though the focus of this report is policy recommendations specific to improving literacy instruction and intervention in poor school districts, we join the growing calls statewide for greater equity in school funding throughout Michigan.³⁰

Without a commitment to equity, Michigan is unlikely to bolster the performance of its schools, the strength of its communities, and the health of its economy.

STATE FUNDING EQUITY



A separate study by The Education Trust placed Michigan 42nd out of 47 states in funding equity

Attempts to turn around scores can actually hurt some districts

To complicate matters, attempts at school "turnaround" have sometimes hindered rather than helped struggling districts. A rapid succession of state and national educational policies have had unintended consequences on the ground. Shifting mandates and assistance from various state and philanthropic organizations, exacerbated by turnover of teachers and principals, have rarely resulted in improved literacy achievement.

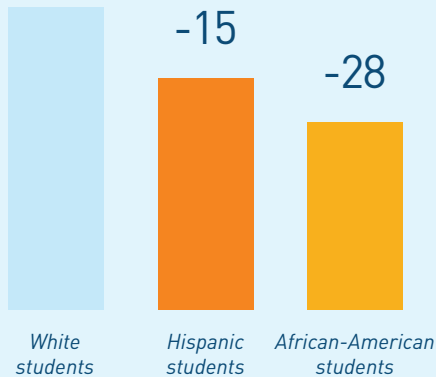
While our nation's and state's relatively recent determination to improve low-performing schools is admirable, our ability to do so productively through policy and practice has proved problematic.

Regular programmatic changes create an ongoing sense of limbo, especially in already struggling districts.

Some of the recent changes schools have faced include:

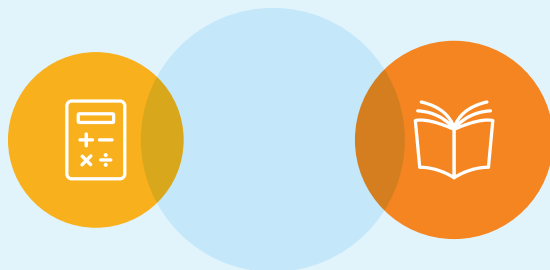
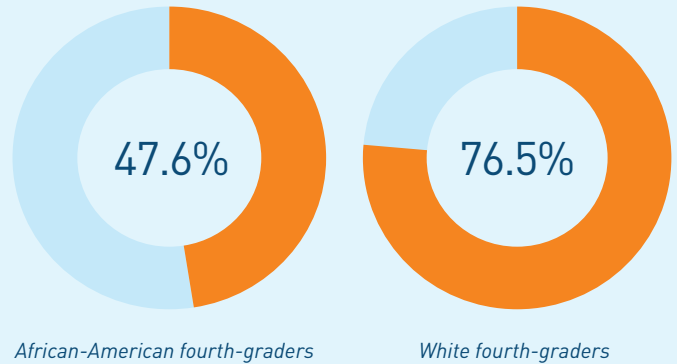
- *The adoption of the Common Core State Standards*
- *The Smarter Balance assessments*
- *The shift from the ACT to the SAT as a required state high school assessment*
- *A temporary M-STEP assessment*
- *A permanent M-STEP assessment*
- *Teacher evaluation requirements*
- *Changing terminology and metrics for Focus schools, High Priority Schools, Persistently Low Achieving Schools, Mi Excel Schools, SIG schools, etc.*

ACHIEVEMENT GAPS IN TEST SCORES BY RACE AND INCOME LEVEL

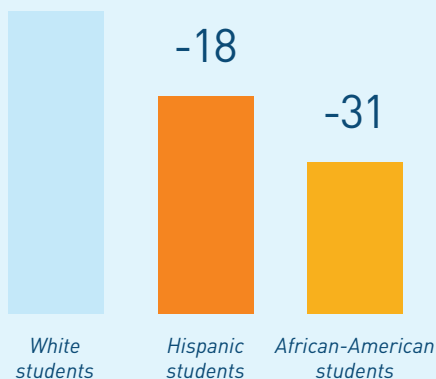
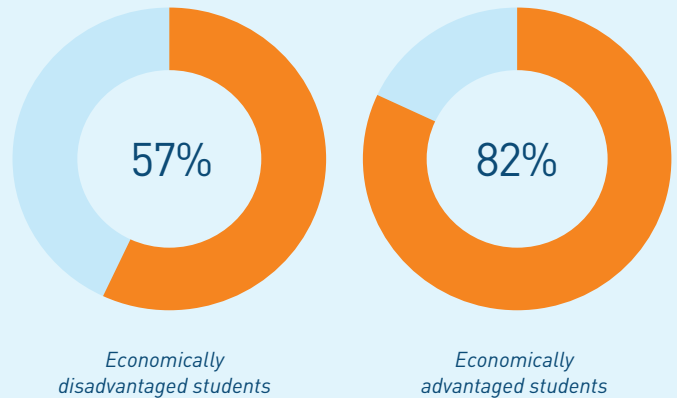


On the reading portion of the 2013 NAEP, African-American fourth graders in Michigan scored on average 28 points lower than their white counterparts. Hispanic fourth graders scored 15 points lower than White fourth graders.³¹

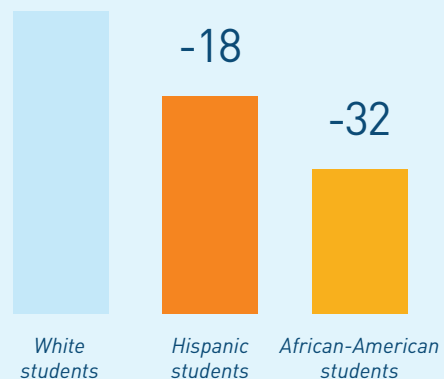
On the 2013-2014 MEAP, 47.6% of African-American fourth-graders scored "proficient" in reading as compared to 76.5% of their white counterparts; just over 57% of economically disadvantaged students were proficient versus over 82% of those who were not.³⁴



On the 2013 NAEP, Michigan fourth graders eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch scored 25 points lower than those who were not eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch on the reading portion³², and 28 points lower on the mathematics portion.



The achievement gap on the reading portion of the 2013 NAEP was even wider among older students, with African-American twelfth-graders scoring on average 31 points lower than white twelfth-graders and Hispanic twelfth-graders scoring 18 points lower than their white counterparts.³³



On the mathematics portion of the 2013 NAEP, Michigan African-American fourth-graders' average scores were 32 points lower than those of white fourth-graders and Michigan Hispanic fourth-graders' scores were 18 points lower than those of their White counterparts.



"Strong reading comprehension skills are central, not only to academic and professional success, but also to a productive social and civic life." – US Dept. of Education report



VIGNETTE

Good intentions are not enough to help students succeed

A new urban charter high school opens with enthusiastic promises and plans for college readiness, but reality delivers a crushing blow to those aspirations.

Freshmen come from widely differing prior experiences, and their reading levels range from first-grade to college, with the majority reading at the elementary level. The MDE, the authorizer, and the management company do not require a school-wide reading plan to address these issues. First-year teachers are frustrated by the online curriculum's lack of detail, and its access is limited by technology breakdowns and not enough computers. An online reading intervention program is purchased, but no one knows whether it is evidence-based or has a track record of success.

A succession of teachers leaves for other positions throughout the year, so that students rapidly lose pace and trust. Replacement teachers are not informed about the online curriculum or the reading intervention, so they begin to write their own new curriculum. Students are not allowed to take home the few books in the school. No supports are in place for reading in the content area classes. The special education teacher leaves and is not replaced due to budget constraints. An intervention teacher is hired to work with the lowest performing students, but has no specific training in reading.

When enrollment falls even further, the reading intervention classes are cancelled in favor of retaining the music program, in hopes of attracting new students.

OUR FAILURE TO INVEST
SUFFICIENTLY IN LITERACY
DEVELOPMENT IN OUR MOST
VULNERABLE DISTRICTS
HAS **ENORMOUS LONG-TERM
FINANCIAL AND SOCIAL COSTS
FOR MICHIGAN.**

The Multifaceted Costs of Not Investing in Literacy Proficiency

It is readily accepted that the consequences of not being able to read at a young age can burden a child for life.

“Strong reading comprehension skills are central not only to academic and professional success, but also to a productive social and civic life.”³⁵ The MDE has explicitly recognized the far-reaching benefits of literacy, noting:

“In this global economy, it is essential that Michigan students possess personal, social, occupational, civic and quantitative literacy. Mastery of the knowledge and essential skills defined in Michigan’s Grade Level Expectations will increase students’ ability to be successful academically, contribute to the future businesses that employ them and the communities in which they choose to live.”³⁶

According to 2011 research conducted by sociologist Donald Hernandez, “children who do not read proficiently by the end of third-grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers.”³⁷ In addition, “children with the lowest reading scores account for a third of students but for more than three-fifths (63 percent) of all children who do not graduate from high school.”³⁸ The importance of writing skills has increased dramatically as the demand for knowledge workers continues to rise.³⁹

When children do not graduate from high school, the economic and social costs reverberate far beyond their households. “Every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity. High school dropouts also are more likely than those who graduate to be arrested or have a child while still a teenager, both of which incur additional financial and social costs.”⁴⁰

The consequences of not being able to read at a young age can burden a child for life.

The State of Michigan pays a steep price in the area of criminal justice for failing to graduate more students from high school. These costs include “medical care for victims, loss of victim income and lost tax revenue, rising police payrolls and court operating budgets, and most significantly the cost of incarcerating convicted criminals.”⁴¹

The consequences that flow from the non-completion of high school cannot be overstated: Individuals who fail to earn a high school diploma are at a great disadvantage, and not only when it comes to finding good-paying jobs. They are also generally less healthy and die earlier, are more likely to become parents when very young, are more at risk of entanglement with the criminal justice system, and are more likely to need social welfare assistance. **Even more tragic, their children are more likely to become high school dropouts themselves, as are their children’s children, and so on, in a possibly endless cycle of poverty.**⁴²

In other words, our failure to invest sufficiently in literacy development in our most vulnerable districts has enormous long-term financial and social costs for Michigan.

Michigan isn't Living up to its Legacy of Supporting Literacy

Despite widespread consensus on the importance of literacy to individual lives, families, communities, and our state, Michigan has not yet leveraged the required capacity to successfully deliver high quality literacy instruction to students in districts with high levels of poverty.

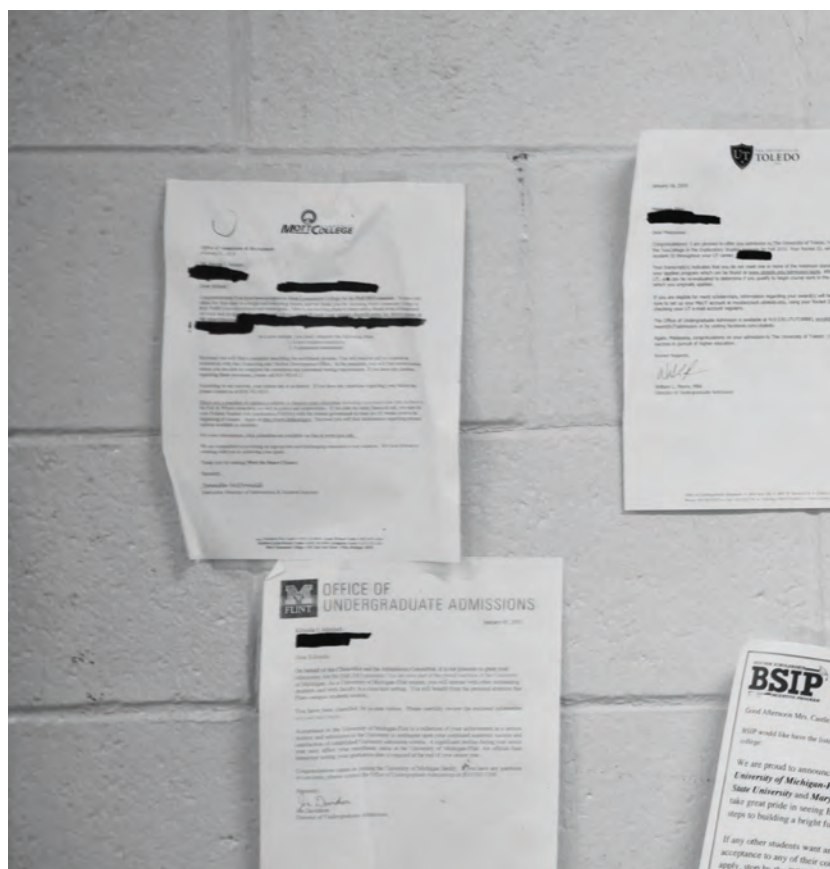
As our public schools are increasingly called upon to prepare our children for a more complex economy, we must develop and support districts, schools and teachers who can teach literacy at consistently high levels. Educators in districts with high rates of poverty need particular supports and resources.

Despite its stated commitment to provide all children in Michigan with high-quality literacy instruction, the State's increasingly poor national test scores and persistent achievement gap indicate that not all students are receiving the levels of instruction or intervention needed to attain and maintain grade-level literacy proficiency.

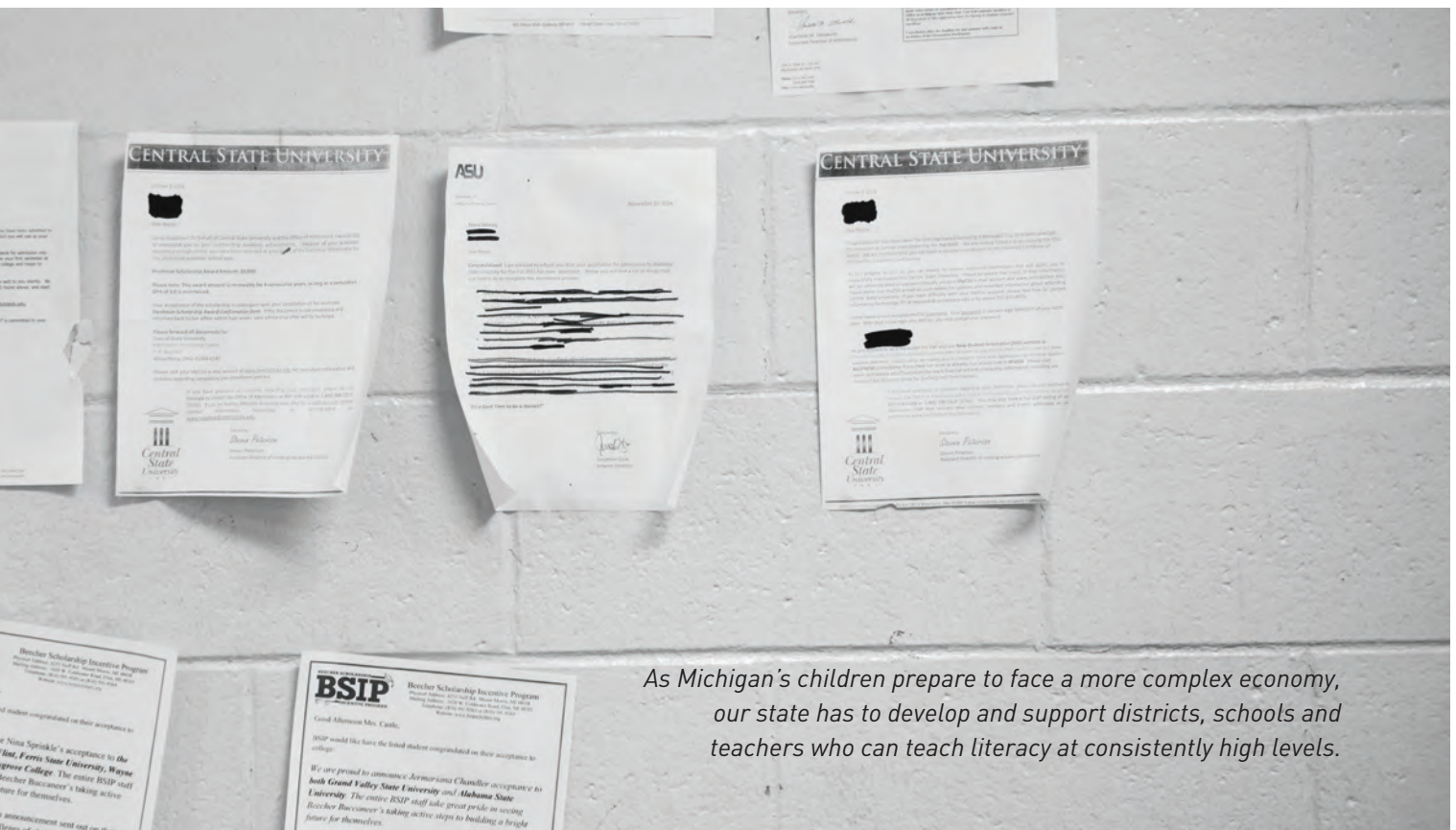
A look back at some of the initiatives that established Michigan's long tradition of recognizing the central importance of literacy:

- In 1985, the MDE and state educators developed a *New Definition of Reading* “which continues to be the basis for [the state’s] expanding view of literacy and provides a conceptual framework for educators.”⁴³
- The right to read was firmly enshrined in the *Revised School Code* in 1993, when the legislature amended it to provide that “a pupil who does not score satisfactorily on the fourth- or seventh-grade Michigan educational assessment program reading test shall be provided special assistance reasonably expected to enable the pupil to bring his or her reading skills to grade level within 12 months.”⁴⁴
- As recently as 2011, the state recognized “literacy as a human right” in its statewide literacy plan—*MiLit*—which aims to increase and sustain literacy achievement for all Michiganians.⁴⁵

In addition to not receiving adequate resources, poor communities and communities of color often have literacy needs that differ from those in more affluent school districts within Michigan. Although *MiLit* provides a comprehensive framework for the improvement of literacy instruction and intervention for all students in Michigan, it does not dedicate attention to the urgent needs of schools with high rates of poverty. A concerted analysis of these needs is essential to designing, implementing and sustaining a plan that ensures all children’s right to read.



Although no school can compensate for the ravages of inadequate food, housing, medical care, public safety, and other challenges faced by children affected by poverty, schools can provide students with the ability to read.



As Michigan's children prepare to face a more complex economy, our state has to develop and support districts, schools and teachers who can teach literacy at consistently high levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Electronegativity
an element's ability to attract an electron in a compound
• High electronegativity
• Most electronegative element is Fluorine (F)
Electron affinity -
the energy change when an electron is added to a neutral atom to form a negative ion
• If a stable ion results, E_A is negative
• If less stable, E_A is positive
• Decreases left to right, increases top to bottom

Tera- (T-) 10^{12}	Giga- (G-) 10^9	Mega- (M-) 10^6	Kilo- (k-) 1000	Deca- (da-) 10	Base Unit Grams Liters Meters	Deci- (d-) 0.1	Centi- (c-) 0.01
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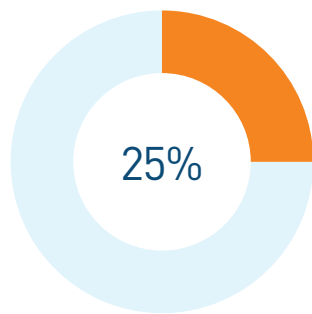
EMERGENCY
SHOWER &
EYEWASH

With about a quarter of Michigan children mired in poverty, many of the state's schools struggle to address the myriad challenges that complicate literacy education under such conditions.

A Myriad of Social, Cultural and Political Challenges Complicate Literacy Instruction

Although all schools in Michigan are grappling with how to best educate children, schools located in high-poverty areas face unique challenges that often have very little to do with the abilities of their students. In these areas, more children are likely to arrive at elementary school from homes without children's books, from neighborhoods without libraries, from families under economic strain, without adequate healthcare or nutrition, and from early childhoods without preschool. As a result, they often arrive at school with greater literacy needs than their counterparts in more affluent areas.

Simply put, the root causes of literacy learning differences among Michigan youth are less likely to be individual than social, cultural, economic and political.



Approximately 25% of Michigan children live in poverty

Given that approximately 25% of Michigan children live in poverty,⁴⁶ many of our school districts are struggling to attend to the myriad challenges complicating literacy instruction under such conditions. In communities such as Highland Park, literacy education has stalled to the point where over two-thirds of entire grade levels were not reading proficiently. As a result, these students, schools and communities now find themselves in peril.

With every complex challenge, there is also possibility

The more we analyze the issues complicating literacy education for children in high-poverty areas, the more it becomes clear that there are major issues plaguing literacy education, embedded within a complex set of problems—a chain to which literacy learning is bound.

Yet we cannot simply define people through the narrow prism of crisis. With each challenge mentioned in the orange text below, there are tremendous possibilities to be appreciated. Youth, teachers, school leaders, and parents who are well resourced, respected, and connected through a common goal can, and often do, forge strong learning environments that support literacy learning and development, even in the midst of limited resources.

As such, we recognize the power and potential of families, youth and teachers throughout Michigan who are doing literacy work and encouraging pathways to reading and writing in ways often ignored in formal educational settings. Our aim in doing so is to involve the voices, the interests, and grand commitments of these various community members in decision making to overcome the challenges of literacy education too many in Michigan face.

Although MiLit, the state's literacy plan, mentions intervention for students in need of specialized literacy instruction, it does not address the systemic needs of entire schools and districts serving children in high-poverty areas.

The unique challenges facing impoverished districts warrant coordinated statewide support that is tailored to their special circumstances.

When three-quarters of an entire district's seventh-graders cannot read at grade level—as was the case in Highland Park in 2011—something more than a single intervention is called for ...

Learning is never separate from the context in which it occurs:

- *Children are less likely to learn if they are bored, hungry, disrespected, angry, absent, tired, or afraid.*
- *Teachers cannot teach without students present, adequate resources, ongoing professional growth, and community support.*
- *School leaders cannot organize rich contexts for literacy learning in the midst of instability, fragmentation, and the constant threat of diminished classroom resources.*
- *Parents and community members cannot support their children's literacy learning if they feel little sense of trust and respect from the people charged with educating their children.*

**TO GIVE ALL OF OUR CHILDREN
THE BEST POSSIBLE CHANCE TO
SUCCEED, WE MUST MAKE STRONG
COMMITMENTS TO ERASING RACIAL
AND SOCIOECENOMIC BARRIERS, AND
MUST RELY ON EVIDENCE-BASED
DECISION-MAKING AND COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS**



Strong commitments to erasing racial and socioeconomic barriers to success, through evidence-based decision-making and community partnerships, will aid the quest to provide freedom of opportunity for all Michigan children.



VIGNETTE

Grants alone don't always solve the problems

At a small, rural elementary school, reading and writing scores are dangerously low and budgets incredibly tight, but the school receives a grant to supplement professional development.

Unfortunately, curriculum is out-of-date, but the grant funds cannot be used to purchase curriculum. With many novice teachers, professional development is needed to create a comprehensive approach to reading and writing instruction.

Coaches recommend an intensive focus on reading and writing professional development for 3 to 5 years to bring the school up to best practice standards, but the principal worries about requirements to show immediate progress in reading, writing, science, and math simultaneously and divides the professional development time between math and reading. In the second year, grant funding is abruptly cut by 50%, while teachers show signs of exhaustion and are rumored to be searching for jobs elsewhere.

The call for coordinated literacy intervention in Michigan

So severe and pervasive are the literacy challenges facing our state that we call for the adoption of a Collective Impact framework to coordinate action on literacy intervention in Michigan. As MiLit recognizes, literacy instruction and interventions must be initiated and coordinated at the school level and supported by the state.⁴⁷

Policies that focus on individual schools and individual teachers are not capable of bringing about whole-system improvements. We must focus on improvement across the entire system.⁴⁸

Recommendations for literacy instruction, intervention, innovation, and change

These recommendations are evidence-based, innovative, and pragmatic. It's important to remember, however, that although all children—even those living in poverty—are more than capable of becoming strong readers, provided that they are given high-quality literacy instruction, schools can only do so much. Therefore, truly improving literacy outcomes in Michigan's poorest districts requires not only the following recommendations, but also a broader array of reforms: equity of funding, class-size reduction, extended-year calendars, and health interventions (vision, sleep, nutrition, exercise).

The seven recommendations outlined in this report are predicated on the belief that, first and foremost, **educators and citizens should commit firmly to addressing the issues of race, poverty and exclusion that impact children's ability to learn.** Although these challenges seem daunting, a look back 50 years should encourage us that dramatic change is possible.

There is still much to be done, but strong commitments to erasing racial and socioeconomic barriers to success, through evidence-based decision making and community partnerships, will aid us in **our quest to provide freedom of opportunity for all Michigan children.** We can begin by equalizing the quality of literacy instruction and intervention provided to low-income versus high-income children, using evidence-based methodologies.⁴⁹

As laid out to the right, the first and overarching recommendation of this working group is that the state should advance a Collective Impact framework with additional goals to be brought to life by six responsible parties:

- **The Governor and the State Board of Education (SBE)**
- **The State Legislature**
- **The Michigan Department of Education and the State School Reform/Redesign Office (SRO)**
- **State universities and other teacher education providers**
- **Intermediate school districts**
- **Local districts and schools themselves**

Parents and other interested community members are also key players, but the six groups charged with this work are education professionals and policy makers who are responsible for—and should be held accountable for—the task of making a collective impact on the learning outcomes of children and youth in our state.

Recommendations directed to local districts and schools refer to both traditional public schools and charter schools. The full set of recommendations for which these six key parties should be responsible are:

1

Adopt a Collective Impact framework

2

Increase literacy leadership at the state level

3

Provide adequate and appropriate learning materials, tools, and resources for all students

4

Select and/or develop appropriate, meaningful, and engaging curriculum

5

Develop a strong professional teaching force

6

Attend to the needs of a diverse student population and the special learning needs of individual students

7

Provide wraparound supports to address broader community economic, social, and cultural needs

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION 1

Adopt a Collective Impact Framework

Michigan should adopt a Collective Impact framework as the overarching approach to improving literacy education, with program evaluation an integral part of every initiative.

Many educational reform initiatives have been shown to be remarkably ineffective, spawning titles such as *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform*⁵⁰ and *So Much Reform, So Little Change*.⁵¹ And yet, encouraging progress is being made in some places within the United States.

One important leader is Cincinnati's Strive Network, which utilizes an emerging strategy called Collective Impact.⁵² The network gathers the leadership of over 300 organizations working toward a variety of social and civic improvements and coordinates their efforts based on a set of common metrics that gauge progress.

Since the network's inception in 2006, Cincinnati has seen educational improvements in 40 of 53 targeted educational outcomes, including an 11% increase in high school graduation and a 10% increase in college enrollment.⁵³ The national Strive Together network has expanded rapidly throughout the United States and some Michigan communities have already become affiliated, including the Wayne County Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.⁵⁴

An important part of the Collective Impact framework is

program evaluation: continual monitoring of a "dashboard" of measurements that show movement toward the goals. ISDs, districts, universities, foundations, parent groups and other organizations would collaborate in these efforts.

Although literacy instruction cannot cure all educational ills, a Collective Impact framework would align key resources and actions around literacy, which could then pave the way for action in other areas. This type of collaborative work is even more important given the separation of the SRO from the MDE, placing low-performing schools under the jurisdiction of two government entities.

With the power of a Collective Impact approach, Michigan will be positioned to take action on the seven recommendations that will improve literacy outcomes for our most vulnerable students.



Literacy instruction alone cannot cure all educational ills; a Collective Impact framework would align key resources and actions around literacy that could pave the way for action in other areas.

VIGNETTE

Literacy impacts success in all areas of study

At a comprehensive urban high school, a principal investigates how to improve her students' reading skills, which are often low—up to 90% of students are reading below grade level and struggling to understand and write about their science and history texts. With 1,200 students, that's well over a thousand students who may need intervention in small groups and intensive support in their content classes.

The core English Language Arts curriculum is fragmented and out-of-date, with little or no coordination among teachers. Content-area teachers need training on how to support the reading and writing in class on a daily basis, and special education teachers need training in order to serve students with severe reading disabilities.

With just two in-service professional development days available per year, the principal feels there is no way to even begin to address the multiple staff development needs within the reading and writing arena, especially with pressure to show results within one year.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Increase Literacy Leadership at the State Level

This report calls for the State to strengthen the infrastructure that provides expertise and support for schools with high levels of poverty. Beginning with a Collective Impact framework that will coordinate action among the primary educational stakeholders, the next key step will be for the leaders of the framework to work with a **State Literacy Advisory Panel** with ongoing advisory capacities.

The panel should play a significant role in the Collective Impact framework's work, meeting at least once per quarter to review data provided by the MDE and other stakeholders and make specific recommendations regarding the continuing improvement of literacy education in the State of Michigan. Although Michigan's statewide literacy plan, MiLit, calls for collaboration through state and regional literacy teams, these efforts have been limited and sporadic. A State Literacy Advisory Panel would offer evidence-based direction to the literacy teams, ISDs, districts, and schools.

The panel should be comprised of:

- Classroom teachers who have demonstrated the ability to foster high levels of growth toward Michigan K–12 Standards in English Language Arts (ELA)
- Principals who have demonstrated the ability to foster high levels of growth toward Michigan K–12 Standards in English Language Arts
- District-level personnel who have demonstrated the ability to foster high levels of growth toward Michigan K–12 Standards in ELA
- Representatives of organizations and members of the community who have a track record of fostering literacy development
- Chair of the House Education Committee
- Bipartisan representation of state legislators
- University faculty who are nationally recognized experts in literacy education
- MDE personnel responsible for literacy assessment and instruction

Across the panel, members should include those with expertise in serving populations with high levels of poverty, and each of the following must be represented: birth-to-five, elementary, middle, and secondary settings, community and parent.

Under the guidance of the Collective Impact leadership and the State Literacy Advisory Panel, **the State should fund a team of literacy specialists** who support high-quality literacy education for all Michigan schools, with particular responsibilities to high-need schools. With this funding, the MDE and the SRO will be able to recruit a team with expertise in working with children affected by poverty, birth-to-five literacy education, elementary literacy education, secondary literacy education, post-secondary literacy education, and home and community initiatives regarding literacy development.

This funding will further enable these offices to recruit highly-qualified personnel, including experts with significant field experience, a master's or doctoral degree focused on literacy education, and a deep understanding of evidence-based literacy programming.

WHO CAN HELP



Governor and State Board

- Establish a State Literacy Advisory Panel, with membership specified later in this section, to lead state literacy work.

Legislature

- Provide representatives of both parties to serve on the State Literacy Advisory Panel.
- Appropriate funding to support a team of literacy specialists to work at the state level.

Michigan Department of Education and the School Reform/Redesign Office

- Provide personnel responsible for literacy assessment and instruction for service on the State Literacy Advisory Panel.
- Recruit, hire and oversee a team of literacy specialists with qualifications described below.

Universities and other Teacher Education Providers

- Upon request, provide university faculty who are nationally recognized experts in literacy education for service on the State Literacy Advisory Panel.
- Be available to the team of literacy specialists to provide information about recent research on literacy education.

Intermediate School Districts

- Upon request, provide personnel who have demonstrated the ability to foster high levels of growth toward Michigan K–12 Standards in English Language Arts for service on the State Literacy Advisory Panel.
- Make use of the services of the team of literacy specialists with the aim of improving literacy education and outcomes.

Local Districts and Schools

- Upon request, provide personnel who have demonstrated the ability to foster high levels of growth toward Michigan K–12 Standards in English Language Arts for service on the State Literacy Advisory Panel.
- Employ specialists to improve literacy education and outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Provide Adequate and Appropriate Learning Materials, Tools and Resources for All Students

One of the first tasks addressed by the Collective Impact initiative and the Statewide Literacy Advisory Panel will be the lack of adequate learning resources in many high-need schools.

Those who frequently visit both affluent and high-need schools in Michigan will notice a stark difference between the quality and abundance of books, magazines and textbooks available, as well as access to functioning computers and tablets with reliable internet access. For students who may not have access to reading materials at home or a nearby library, it is essential that they be able to borrow and take home textbooks and a wide variety of interesting and age-appropriate reading material. This is often not the case in high-need schools, and a **benchmark for minimum adequate learning resources should be established.**

Once minimum adequate learning resources have been determined, the Statewide Literacy Advisory Panel should work in conjunction with the MDE, the SRO, and AdvanEd (the primary accrediting body in Michigan for K–12 schools) to require, as part of accreditation and/or school turnaround plans, an audit of books/reading resources available to students.

The legislature should then fund resource grants to be distributed by the MDE to all districts and schools (including charter schools) not meeting minimum requirements for books, texts, technology, and related supports.

WHO CAN HELP



Governor and State Board

- Convene the State Literacy Panel for the purpose of guiding work on this recommendation.
- Allocate funding to the MDE to provide resource grants to schools not meeting the minimum resource requirements.

Legislature

- Charge the MDE/SRO, universities, ISDs and local school districts with collaborating on the determination of what constitutes minimum adequate learning resources.
- Appropriate funding to the MDE to provide resource grants to schools not meeting the minimum resource requirements.

Michigan Department of Education and the School Reform/Redesign Office

- Collaborate with advisory board and literacy specialist team to determine what constitutes minimum adequate learning resources.
- Collaborate with literacy experts to determine what constitutes appropriate learning resources for students from a range of backgrounds and with a range of literacy learning needs and goals.
- Require, as part of accreditation and/or school turnaround plans, an audit of books and other reading and writing resources available to students.
- Provide resource grants to schools not meeting minimum requirements.
- Require resource improvement proposals as part of School Improvement Plans (SIP).

Universities and other Teacher Education Providers

- Consult with the MDE/SRO to determine what constitutes minimum adequate learning resources for all schools.
- Consult with the MDE/SRO and ISDs and local districts to determine what constitutes appropriate learning resources for students from a range of backgrounds and with a range of literacy learning needs and goals.
- Assist local districts in enacting the audit of books and other reading/writing resources as mandated by the MDE/SRO.
- Serve as consultants to districts in preparing proposals that focus on resources shown to support literacy development (e.g., high-interest books rather than the latest untested computer program). Include them in School Improvement Plans.

Intermediate School Districts

- Distribute resources equitably to the schools. (Note that equitable distribution does not necessarily mean equal distribution; greater resources may be needed in some communities than others.)
- Collaborate with literacy experts to determine what constitutes appropriate learning resources for students from a range of backgrounds and with a range of literacy learning needs and goals.
- Assist local districts in enacting the audit of books and other reading/writing resources as mandated by the MDE/SRO.
- Support local school districts in preparing evidence-based proposals for the MDE/SRO resource grants.
- Support local school districts in preparing SIPs to include attention to allocating for literacy learning resources.

Local Districts and Schools

- Distribute resources equitably to classrooms. (Note that equitable distribution does not necessarily mean equal distribution; greater resources may be needed in some communities than others.)
- Use resources appropriately. (see Recommendation 5)
- Carry out the audit of books and other reading/writing resources as mandated by the MDE/SRO and report results.
- Coordinate teacher-led committees to develop proposals.
- Integrate planning for resource needs into SIPs.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Select and/or Develop Appropriate, Meaningful and Engaging Curricula

Those who aim to improve literacy in communities of the highest need too often turn to curricula and assessments that are overly focused on low-level skills, misaligned with current standards and research, unresponsive to students' backgrounds, and ultimately disengaging. Such curricula and assessments prepare students for the past, not the future.

All stakeholders should intensify efforts to identify and create appropriate, meaningful, and engaging literacy curricula across disciplines, preparing students for the future, not the past.

For example, when the school curriculum makes a place for students' out-of-school literacies, interests, and experiences, it leads to more engaged students and increased literacy.⁵⁵

However, too many school definitions of literacy discount the varied ways students use texts to make meaning and engage in valued social activities outside of school, such as reading and writing visual texts, movies, films, social media, text messaging, lyrics, graphic novels, and so on.⁵⁶ These activities are often not viewed as "literate," shutting out the kinds of knowledge many students bring to the classroom that are critical for literacy success.

By respecting and valuing students' language skills, we can create a culturally expansive pedagogy with many pathways to literacy, including rapidly expanding digital literacies. This must be done in all disciplines, giving attention to multiple literacies (reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and creation skills) required by the fields of science, math, technology, and history, as well as ELA.

Guided by skilled teachers, inquiry-based curricula provide one possible approach to appropriate, meaningful and engaging literacy instruction. Inquiry-based curricula give students a reason to read and write as they explore issues of concern to them, resulting in raised achievement and better prepared students who are able to find meaningful ways to inquire about real issues, utilize critical thinking skills, and expand their content and strategy knowledge.⁵⁷

Approaches like this engage disadvantaged and advantaged youth alike, preparing them for their futures by showing them how **reading and writing are powerful tools to make change in their lives and the lives of others.**⁵⁸

In conjunction with efforts to enact the highest-quality curriculum, MDE and the SRO should require low-performing schools (or start-up schools serving high numbers of students affected by poverty) to have substantive, research-based literacy plans within their school improvement or start-up plans. Youth affected by poverty are bright and capable, but they have often been denied crucial literacy experiences and advantages, as well as excellent curriculum and instruction.

Unfortunately, school turnaround efforts in Michigan often neglect literacy improvement strategies in favor of broad structural reforms.⁵⁹ Michigan should require substantive literacy plans as part of any new school or school turnaround plan, including training and accountability for principals overseeing such work.



School turnaround efforts in Michigan often neglect literacy improvement strategies in favor of broad structural reforms. Substantive literacy plans should be part of any new school or school turnaround plan.

Educators must also take care to improve core reading instruction and content area reading without reducing science and social studies instruction, the lack of which can harm reading comprehension and achievement in those disciplines. Michigan has multiple initiatives to support this intensive literacy work, which should be examined, coordinated and scaled up as appropriate. Work in this area would be assisted by the State Literacy Advisory Panel and a team of Literacy Specialists, in addition to existing district, ISD, and university support.

As we improve curriculum, we must design and implement literacy assessment that is right-sized for the maximum benefit of all stakeholders. Most experts understand that standardized tests provide—at best—a limited view of a student’s capabilities and where they are facing challenges. High stakes assessments pressure schools and teachers to focus on test preparation, which can often be counterproductive, stealing time from instructional practices that do work. A great deal of research focuses on alternate forms of assessment, especially formative measures, which lead to “feedback that is non-evaluative, specific, timely, and

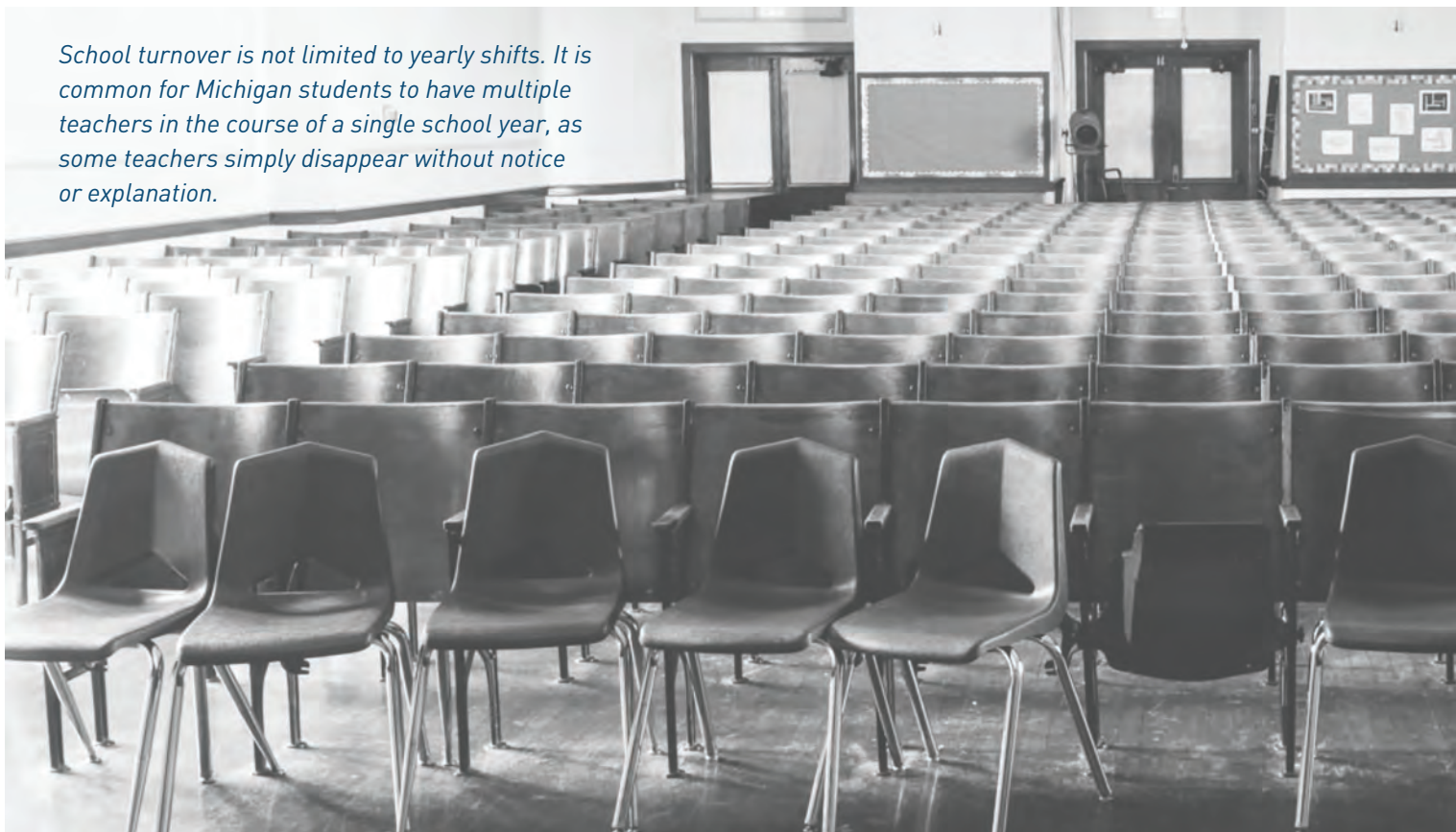
related to the learning goals, and that provides opportunities for the student to revise and improve work products and deepen understandings.”⁶⁰

Michigan should also evaluate its spending on standardized testing and weigh the costs and benefits to students. The rapid changes in standards and testing, from Common Core State Standards to Smarter Balanced to M-STEP to SAT, are costly and disruptive to schools. We must be certain that the benefits will outweigh the costs when mandating significant changes, while also recognizing that assessment is not limited to standardized testing.

The assessment measures that prove most beneficial to students combine:

- teacher-base formative assessment
- diagnostic measures
- informal daily assessments
- more formal summative measures
- an assessment of both high-level and low-level skills⁶¹

School turnover is not limited to yearly shifts. It is common for Michigan students to have multiple teachers in the course of a single school year, as some teachers simply disappear without notice or explanation.



Current literacy assessment programs, which tend to favor standardized testing, limit our full understanding of what it means to be literate and “proficient.”



The top priority for low-performing schools should be the implementation of an evidence-based, three-tier (Response to Intervention or RTI) model of literacy instruction, which includes the following:

- *Excellent, universal core instruction in reading and writing as well as content area literacy (Tier 1)*
- *Rapid identification and intervention for struggling readers and writers (Tier 2)*
- *Specialized support for severe learning disabilities related to reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Tier 3)*

Better assessments result in more useful data

The MDE and the SRO should monitor the amount of instructional time diverted to testing and test preparation, with a comparison between top- and bottom-performing schools, so that disadvantaged students are not further delayed compared to affluent peers with fewer testing disruptions.

They should also encourage schools to administer testing audits to determine the relevance, cost, benefits, overlap, and time commitments required by multiple testing initiatives and their related preparations.

Better curriculum and assessment will both encourage and enable Michigan to collect better data and conduct further research. We need to know more about what is really happening for kids and teachers and communities around literacy teaching and learning. Literacy research pertaining to challenged communities tends to dwell on what students cannot do as opposed to what they can do—skewing teacher perceptions toward a greater focus on the students’ flaws and deficits.

In addition to better assessment and data collection, we need more research that enables educators and policymakers to:

- support teacher development in meaningful and strategic ways
- build literacy education based on what students can do and where we would like them to be, and
- create literacy education reflective of all Michigan students, including underrepresented children such as those living in poverty

Literacy teaching, learning and related policies should be based on local and contingent conditions of kids, teachers, and communities Michigan schools serve. We must listen to parents, students, teachers, and others, and conduct case studies in the schools of representative low-income Michigan communities. Enhanced partnerships between K–12 schools and universities will be fundamental to this work.

The cultivation of high-quality local assessments can create rich feedback systems that are almost seamlessly integrated within the classroom, while at the same time generating data and pushing quality instruction.

An example of this would be school-wide writing portfolio systems that are developed by teacher teams. These can be aligned to high standards across the content areas, provide ample preparation for standardized tests, and excellent preparation for college, all while being deeply meaningful to students. Portfolios can provide crucial feedback for individual students as well as valuable cohort data when compiled and assessed over time. This is the type of sophisticated literacy and assessment work that is highly beneficial to low-performing schools, given the stability and expertise to develop it.

WHO CAN HELP



Governor, Legislature and State Board

- Allocate funding for the selection and/or development of appropriate, meaningful, and engaging curricula to districts in need of additional funding.
- Allocate funding for and launch a competitive grants program for research on appropriate, meaningful, and engaging K–12 literacy curricula.
- Mandate and allocate funding for the development of a secure and accessible statewide student record database.
- Allocate funding for development of appropriate, meaningful, and culturally responsive assessment programs.

Michigan Department of Education and the School Reform/Redesign Office

- Under the leadership of the Literacy Specialist team, collaborate with the State Literacy Advisory Panel to identify and/or create appropriate, meaningful, and engaging curricula across disciplines.
- Organize and lead competitive grants program and collaborative curriculum development, enactment, and research in partnership with all stakeholders.
- Partner with university-based statisticians to build a secure and accessible student record database that can be available to researchers to support the evaluation of curricular efforts and other studies of literacy development in Michigan.
- Require all K–12 low-performing schools or start-up schools serving high numbers of students affected by poverty to present substantive, research-based literacy development plans within their school improvement or start-up proposals.
- Design and implement appropriate, meaningful, and culturally responsive literacy assessment programs that are right-sized for maximum benefit to all stakeholders.

Universities and other Teacher Education Providers

- Collaborate with the MDE/SRO and intermediate and local districts to identify and/or create appropriate, meaningful, and engaging literacy curricula, across disciplines.
- Partner with state agencies and school districts to conduct research on the feasibility, usability, and the learning outcomes of curricula.
- Partner with the MDE/SRO to build a secure and accessible student record database that can be available to researchers to support the evaluation of curricular efforts and other studies of literacy development in Michigan.
- Offer consulting to ISDs and LEAs on the development of substantive, research-based literacy development plans.
- Provide consultation to ISDs and local school districts,

and schools on appropriate, meaningful, and culturally responsive assessment programs; offer analyses of the assessment data from various programs.

Intermediate School Districts

- Collaborate with the MDE/SRO and universities to identify and/or create appropriate, meaningful, and engaging literacy curricula across disciplines.
- Partner with researchers to conduct research on the feasibility, usability, and learning outcomes of curricula.
- Support local schools in developing substantive, research-based literacy development plans.
- Work with university researchers and local schools to help teachers and school leaders understand and enact with fidelity appropriate, meaningful, and culturally responsive assessment programs.

Local Districts and Schools

- Collaborate with intermediate and district personnel to locate or develop and to enact appropriate, meaningful, and engaging literacy curricula, across disciplines.
- Actively participate in research on the feasibility, usability, and learning outcomes of curricula.
- Develop substantive, research-based literacy development plans particular to the local needs of each school.
- Enact assessment programs rigorously.

Maintain a Strong, Professional Teaching Force, Particularly in Literacy Education

A strong teaching force is critical to literacy development for underserved students. The first step in this journey is to stabilize chronic turnover of teachers and principals in low-performing schools so that substantive, multi-year teaching training and literacy plans can be implemented.

Michigan schools serving high populations of at-risk students are particularly hurt by staffing instability. *Bridge Magazine* found that high-poverty schools in Michigan had double the rates of inexperienced teachers, compared to suburban schools.⁶² **Students facing the challenges of poverty need the most skilled teachers, and yet they have the least experienced.**

Turnover is not limited to yearly shifts—it is not uncommon for students to have multiple teachers in the course of a single year. Teachers simply disappear in some schools, without notice or explanation. Principal turnover is similarly chronic, including the ongoing recruitment of talented principals from high-needs schools by affluent districts.

The effects of this instability on all aspects of a child's education are profound,⁶³ but the impact on literacy is particularly debilitating. Building a quality literacy program within a single school often takes years, even in favorable conditions with a stable principal and teaching staff. Amidst the uncertainty, schools are simply unable to build the critical expertise required in their teachers, and students' literacy capacity—and their trust—wither in the absence of the expert instruction of a teacher who knows them well.⁶⁴

In addition to remedying high rates of turnover, we must strengthen and require pre-service/in-service training that provides intensive and ongoing professional development in literacy for all teachers, with an equivalent literacy training component for administrators.

The most crucial in-school factor in literacy development is the presence of a skilled teacher.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, many teachers are not highly skilled in literacy for various reasons. Intensive professional development is typically needed to bring all teachers to a common and consistent level of professional skill in reading and writing instruction across the grade-range and content areas. Many of our most challenged schools are staffed by inexperienced, underprepared, or non-certified teachers. This problem is compounded by the lack of highly trained literacy specialists to work with students, or coaches to work with teachers.

Michigan should supply better prepared teachers by:

- *Requiring teachers to spend more, not less, time in formal teacher education*
- *Breaking down certification requirements to specify developmental periods more closely (e.g., 6–8, 9–12), thus allowing teachers to develop more focused expertise*
- *Requiring all teachers to advance their education in specific areas of pedagogical specialization (e.g., literacy teaching, mathematics teaching, etc.).*
- *Developing and funding structured teacher residencies for pre-service teachers, modeled on the federal government's funding of physician residencies*
- *Providing comprehensive professional development for new statewide mandates, such as standards, assessments and teacher evaluation measures*



VIGNETTE

Literacy specialists are critical in the district planning process.

A mid-sized district has just one assistant superintendent to oversee all issues related to curriculum, instruction and evaluation. As a former science teacher, she has little training specific to literacy.

Teachers and principals are asking for new reading and writing curricula, but the assistant superintendent is unsure of the best direction—an expensive curriculum with multiple features and supports, or a no-frills, free curriculum that might leave funding for coaching and additional resources? The countywide ISD has no literacy specialist to assist with the process.

Literacy teaching, learning and related policies should be based on local and contingent conditions of the students, teachers and communities served by Michigan schools.

EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT IS NOT SIMPLY
“TRAINING” THAT DELIVERS
INFORMATION; IT IS ONGOING,
JOB-EMBEDDED COLLABORATION
THAT ENABLES PROFESSIONALS
TO SOLVE DIFFICULT PROBLEMS
OF PRACTICE.

Effective professional development is not simply “training” that delivers information; it is ongoing, job-embedded collaboration that enables professionals to solve difficult problems of practice. Districts and schools must radically revise their approaches to professional learning to reflect these new demands. For rapid scale-up of sophisticated literacy programming schools should expect teachers to engage in 50 or more hours of in-service professional development and coaching per year, with multiple years of program development in each school.⁶⁶

As many Michigan schools have discovered, instructional coaching is a key component of effective professional development. The MDE has invested in building coaching capacity throughout the state in recent years, but most schools lack the funding to employ coaches. **Michigan should fund, over a ramp-up period of five years, the equivalent of a minimum of one full-time literacy instructional coach per 20 classroom teachers and a minimum of one per school.**

When done well, instructional coaching has been associated with strong student gains in literacy. An Institutes of Education Science study of K–2 programming focused on guided reading with intensive instructional coaching supports found significant improvements: Students’ average rates of learning in grades K–2 increased by 16% in the first implementation year, 28% in the second implementation year, and 32% in the third implementation year; teacher expertise increased substantially and the rate of improvement was predicted by the amount of coaching a teacher received.⁶⁷ Other states are supporting literacy coaching in recognition of such results.

In tandem with efforts to improve instruction through professional development, educational leaders should **tailor teacher evaluation to include a specific concern with the quality and effectiveness of literacy education**, and train district or school administrators to effectively assess best practices in literacy education. Researchers from the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement offer a model that has been used to examine effective literacy instruction that is culturally relevant.⁶⁸

Professional development should reflect the following attributes:

- *Guided by leadership and staff developers with a comprehensive plan informed by an ongoing strengths and needs analysis*
- *Ongoing, cohesive, practical, and evidence-based*
- *Focused on knowledge and practices rather than on programs or packages*
- *Collaboratively designed and led by teachers and literacy experts*
- *Inclusive of instructional coaching that is focused on classroom implementation*
- *Integrate issues of cultural competence, including teaching with an asset-based approach, employing culturally responsive pedagogy and developing self-awareness*
- *Build upon evidence-based knowledge of language and literacy development, including print, digital, visual, and discursive development*

Teacher evaluation should assess the following:

- *Evidence-based instructional practices in literacy across the curriculum*
- *Culturally responsive literacy instruction*
- *Classroom management that facilitates literacy learning*
- *Relationships with students and families*
- *Practices to support students’ literacy learning out of school*
- *Collaboration with other educators around literacy instruction*
- *Appropriate use of literacy assessments, including the ability to interpret assessments and plan instruction accordingly*
- *Literacy growth in all groups of students*
- *Continuous improvement as a literacy educator*

As we improve the quality and reach of professional development, we must not neglect children's first teachers: their parents and other early caregivers. We should **invite all primary caregivers and childcare providers to early childhood professional development based at school districts and ISDs**. Many in-home and family care providers are eager to help but unsure of the role that they might play or how to help the children in their care to learn.

Professional development sessions for caregivers should include topics such as:

- *Engaging children in play-based experiences to scaffold language, social skills, and general cognitive development*
- *Identifying developmentally appropriate ways to support children through interactions with reading and writing print that includes a variety of interesting topics and genres*
- *Interacting with children around texts that build phonemic awareness (e.g., rhyming), comprehension, and vocabulary*
- *Engaging in rich verbal interactions to build language skills and world knowledge*
- *Creating print-rich environments (e.g., labels around the room, name labels, a posted alphabet) and training on the administration of screening surveys and self-assessments*

Annual assessment measures for licensed care providers and teachers:

- *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) Pre-K (for preschool settings)*
- *Child/Home Environmental Language and Literacy Observation (CHELLO) (for home-based settings)*
- *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (either Infant, Toddler, or Pre-K)*
- *Assessments should be provided at no cost to caregivers and teachers*
- *Assessments used universally throughout the state to promote high-quality literacy programming for our youngest learners*
- *Licensed care providers or teachers can partner with a colleague to administer and complete the assessments and then create an action plan for further growth based on the results*
- *To support their growth in identified areas, these providers should access local ISD annual professional development sessions, with resources made available to providers to address any areas of need*

WHO CAN HELP



Governor and State Board

- Allocate funding for incentives to recruit and retain high-quality teachers, instructional coaches, and school leaders for the communities most in need.

Legislature

- Appropriate funding for incentives to recruit and retain high-quality teachers, instructional coaches, and school leaders for the communities most in need.
- Increase certification requirements for pre-service and in-service teachers to include additional literacy coursework and field experience that is aligned with current research and standards.

Michigan Department of Education and the School Reform/Redesign Office

- Revise testing requirements for certification (Professional Readiness Examination or Michigan Test for Teacher Certification) to focus on knowledge and skills that have been shown in research to predict student growth.
- Specify certification grade bands at grades PK–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12 to ensure that teachers of different developmental periods possess the requisite literacy teaching knowledge and practical skill to serve the students they teach.
- Improve process for reviewing and approving professional development offerings to satisfy clock hour requirements.
- Tailor teacher evaluation to include a specific concern with the quality and effectiveness of literacy education, and train district and school administrators to effectively assess the quality of literacy education.

Universities and other Teacher Education Providers

- Aggressively recruit prospective teachers for undergraduate and masters-with-certification programs who have a commitment to work in communities most in need.
- Expand pre-service/in-service training that provides intensive and ongoing literacy professional development for all teachers, with an equivalent literacy training component for school leaders and instructional coaches.
- Provide high-quality, low-cost continuous professional development to districts and schools through long-term university-school partnerships including, but not limited to, the Michigan Standards, state testing measures, and teacher evaluation measures.

Intermediate School Districts

- Implement evidence-based strategies to reduce chronic turnover of teachers and principals in low-performing schools so that substantive, multi-year professional development and literacy plans can be implemented.
- Provide high-quality, low-cost continuous professional development to all teachers, including but not limited to, the Michigan Standards, state testing measures, and teacher evaluation measures.

Local Districts and Schools

- Implement evidence-based strategies to reduce chronic turnover of teachers and principals in low-performing schools so that substantive, multi-year professional development and literacy plans can be implemented.
- Provide high-quality, low-cost continuous professional development to all teachers including, but not limited to, the Michigan Standards, state testing measures, and teacher evaluation measures.

Attend to the Needs of a Diverse Student Population and the Special Learning Needs of Individual Students

Students in American schools are not valued equally.⁶⁹

While some adolescents are treated as valued members of the school community, others are treated as “throwaways.”⁷⁰ When they struggle to learn literacy, these students—who are disproportionately low-income and minority—are shunted to “remedial” courses that are not tied to their actual learning challenges (which often have been determined on the basis of a single test score).⁷¹ Attempts to remediate are weak at best and are demeaning and demoralizing at worst. They often result in pushing kids out of school, miseducating kids in schools, and disregarding the learning rights of students perceived to be uneducable.⁷²

There is a substantial body of evidence that suggests formal literacy initiatives implemented over the last 30 years have not succeeded because they have failed to address the impact of poverty on school performance and student learning.⁷³

A small but growing number of public schools have devised and begun implementing strategies designed to mitigate the effects of poverty on students and schools, such as:

- *Increasing the amount and quality of academic and social support that students receive outside of school;*
- *Increasing access to tutors, summer enrichment camps, homework support, etc.; and*
- *Implementing community-based programs to improve the health, nutrition, safety, overall psychological and emotional well-being of students and their families.⁷⁵*

For the last 20 years, most social scientists and urban planners who have studied poverty alleviation have argued that **poverty and the variety of the social issues that frequently accompany it (e.g., housing instability, substance abuse, inter-personal violence, etc.) have an impact on literacy learning.** In an attempt to explain the lack of progress made in efforts to close the so-called achievement gap over the last 15 years, this research has explained how low-wage jobs, unemployment, the absence of books, and the elimination of efforts to combat the effects of poverty in distressed neighborhoods have all contributed to lower literacy outcomes for low-income and minority children.⁷⁴

It is imperative that policymakers and educators recognize that adolescents are still children and attend to their developmental needs. Districts and schools must offer students high-quality programs that are respectful of adolescents’ needs, desires, struggles, and potential. These programs should start where children are and help them build the talents they have, by adding the skills and knowledge they need (known as “expansive pedagogies”). Instruction should recognize that literacy development and learning depend on developing the whole person.

State and district leaders should provide teachers with professional learning opportunities to instill within them the knowledge, skills and practices necessary to address the role of race/ethnicity, social class, gender, and other qualities of difference in teaching and learning.

WHO CAN HELP



Michigan Department of Education and the School Reform/Redesign Office

- Expand certification requirements for both novice and expert teachers to gain coursework and field experience that specifies how to enact culturally responsive teaching practice.
- Require coursework on meeting the individual learning needs of all students.

Universities and other Teacher Education Providers

- Expand certification requirements for both novice and expert teachers to include coursework and field experience to develop culturally responsive teaching practices.
- Conduct and disseminate research on culturally responsive interventions.
- Expand coursework and field experiences for both novice and expert teachers that specifies how to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners.
- Continue to conduct and disseminate research on general education interventions that respond to students' individual differences.

Intermediate School Districts

- Provide professional development and collaborative networks that explore how to validate and build on students' cultural strengths.
- Build professional development and collaborative networks that explore how to meet the needs of individual learners.
- Invite primary caregivers and childcare providers to early childhood professional development based at school districts and ISDs; offer self-assessments.

Local Districts and Schools

- Provide professional development and collaborative networks that explore how to validate and build on students' cultural strengths.
- Build professional development and collaborative networks that focus on meeting the needs of individual learners.
- Collaborate with researchers to develop and evaluate interventions that address the learning needs of individuals.
- Invite primary caregivers and childcare providers to early childhood professional development based at school districts and ISDs; offer self-assessments.

How identity relates to learning:

One of the great oversights of the current educational reform movement is the failure to understand the politics of identity as it relates to learning. More often than not, the identities most central to schooling processes are assumed to be white and/or male. Non-white identities are the least likely to be considered, and the very real social, historical and communal differences that stem from race get ignored.⁷⁶ Teachers—who, more often than not, have no history of connection to other races—attempt to help devise plans and educational strategies without ever consulting or engaging those who will be most directly affected.⁷⁷

RECOMMENDATION 7

Provide Wraparound Supports to Address Broader Community Economic, Social and Cultural Needs

Educators should collaborate with civic organizations and families to improve programs that teach parents how to support meaningful learning at home, particularly reading and writing skills.

Engaging parents and community members effectively in the life of schools is both complex and vital to the success of students in the system. By developing partnerships with businesses, civic organizations, and other community groups, schools can better provide parents with the individualized assistance required to understand their child's curriculum and help their child at home. Curriculum-based workshops, family literacy nights, and other activities can recognize the diversity in parental perspectives, beliefs and abilities, and ensure that tasks and activities are compatible with parents' capabilities.

Benefits of collaboration include:

- increased student attendance
- higher achievement and report-card grades
- a sense of greater security
- fewer behavioral problems
- an increase in positive attitudes about school⁷⁸

The evidence in support of early intervention is strong.

"Rigorous scientific research has demonstrated that early childhood interventions can improve the lives of participating children and families in both the short run and longer run."⁷⁹

We must improve the **quality and reach of prenatal-to-5 and out-of-school programming** so low-income children do not lose ground to their more affluent peers. Stakeholder organizations should continue to work together to expand evidence-based prenatal-to-5 programming, as well as summer and after-school programming that reduces achievement gaps for children from high-poverty areas.

Efforts to bring children to school ready to learn should also consider providing low-income parents with basic home libraries of children's books and "print kits" to increase exposure to reading, environmental print, and writing. Some families struggle to afford even the basic human needs of shelter, food and water, setting aside money for books may simply be out of the question. We cannot rely on schools or programs such as Great Start Readiness (GSRP) and Head Start to provide the necessary time with books because children often do not enter these programs before the age of three or four, at which point valuable years have passed, and because not all eligible children enroll in these programs.⁸⁰

One example is the landmark High Scope research out of Ypsilanti. High Scope demonstrated the positive impact of high-quality preschool programming on markers including school achievement tests, highest level of schooling completed, and significantly higher lifetime earnings.⁸¹ The MDE is already cognizant of the importance of early identification and intervention for all Michigan children, as evidenced by Great Start, Great Investment, Great Future: The Plan for Early Learning and Development in Michigan.⁸²

**WE KNOW THAT ENGAGING
EARLY LITERACY EXPERIENCES
ARE KEY TO FOSTERING
THE EXPRESSION OF IDEAS,
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS,
BOTH ORALLY AND ON PAPER.**

Tools to support parents in sharing books and promoting language development are critical as well

It is important to provide books for young children, but it is equally important to recognize that many of these children come from homes where their parents are illiterate or functionally illiterate.

We know that engaging early literacy experiences is key to fostering the expression of ideas, thoughts, and feelings both orally and on paper.⁸³ For this reason, **all young children in Michigan should have access to a print-rich environment**, a library containing a variety of books and other reading materials, and an assortment of writing tools and paper/surfaces on which to write.

Collective Impact leadership should also work to ensure that all families, child care providers, and teachers have access to book borrowing through public libraries. Dynamic public libraries are a feature of many affluent communities; they should be supported by all.

Communities with crumbling infrastructures and tax bases often lose their libraries and further damage their children's abilities to ensure a successful future. Highland Park is a prime example of this. A Collective Impact framework addressing literacy will invite civic organizations and communities to join together to address these challenges, especially for communities that are sparsely populated or too devastated economically to support a public library.

Finally, a Collective Impact framework should partner with the Department of Community Health to ensure that all parents are provided with a no-cost **Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)** to complete with every immunization visit, by health care providers prepared to analyze the results and guide parents to appropriate resources when issues arise. Michigan needs a system for identifying children with developmental delays or exceptional learning needs as early as possible. Once a delay or exceptional learning need is identified, families can immediately be connected with the state's Early On development evaluation program, and appropriate agencies so that children can receive support and services.

The ASQ is a developmental screening tool easy to administer and score, valid and reliable, and based on parent knowledge of his/her child. Once purchased, unlimited copies of the ASQ can be made without further charge. Universal access to the ASQ is needed by all families in order to ensure that all children are screened early on and regularly for potential developmental delays and are referred to the appropriate agencies for support when such delays are flagged.

Since there is no one agency with whom all families of children under five connect, the MDE should partner with pediatricians and local health departments to have ASQ administered and reviewed at doctor's office visits. The ASQ should also be offered in the top five languages spoken in Michigan so that as many children and families as possible have access to this tool.

WHO CAN HELP



Governor and State Board

- Allocate funds to improve the quality and reach of prenatal-to-5 and out-of-school, afterschool, and summer enhancement opportunities for at-risk children and youth.
- Allocate funding for the provision to low-income parents of basic home libraries of children's books and "print kits" to increase exposure to reading, environmental print, and writing.
- Ensure that all families, child-care providers, and teachers have access to book borrowing through public libraries.

Legislature

- Appropriate funds to improve the quality and reach of prenatal-to-5 and out-of-school, afterschool, and summer enhancement opportunities for at-risk children and youth.
- Appropriate funding for the provision to low-income parents of basic home libraries of children's books and "print kits" to increase exposure to reading, environmental print and writing.
- Ensure that all families, child-care providers, and teachers have access to book borrowing through public libraries in their own community.

Michigan Department of Education and the School Reform/Redesign Office

- Work with partners to ensure all parents complete the Ages and Stages Questionnaire.

Universities and other Teacher Education Providers

- Provide quality prenatal-to-5 and out-of-school, afterschool, and summer enhancement opportunities for at-risk children and youth.

Intermediate School Districts

- Teach parents how to support meaningful learning skills at home, particularly reading and writing.
- Provide quality prenatal-to-5 and out-of-school, afterschool, and summer enhancement opportunities for at-risk children and youth.
- Route parents to proper and timely interventions for children with developmental issues.

Local Districts and Schools

- Teach parents how to support meaningful learning skills at home, particularly reading and writing.
- Provide quality Prenatal-to-5 and out-of-school, afterschool, and summer enhancement opportunities for at-risk children and youth.
- Route parents to proper and timely interventions for children with developmental issues.

One possible way to ensure that our most at-risk children have books in their homes is to send carefully curated books and print kits to all Medicaid-eligible children on a regular basis, along with recommendations for how parents can best share the books with their children and ideas to extend learning beyond the book. Print kits should include papers, scissors, glue, letter charts, stickers, etc. Non-Medicaid-eligible children who meet two or more GSRP or Head Start eligibility requirements should also be invited to apply and participate. Any parent or care provider, regardless of need, should be offered access to electronic versions of the reading recommendations handouts.

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- 4 National Governors Association. (2013). A governor's guide to early literacy: getting all students reading by third grade. Washington D.C.
- 5 State of Michigan. (2015). Third grade reading workgroup report. Retrieved from: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/snyder/3rd_Grade_Reading_Workgroup_Report_490977_7.pdf.
- 6 To compare Michigan NAEP data over time: see <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/chartsview.aspx?-jur=MI&sbj=RED&gr=4&sample=R2&yr=1992&st=MN&acc=false&SGrayScale=c>.
- 7 Michigan's national academic standing will be detailed below. In March 2015, Michigan was one of 23 states identified by the U.S. Department of Education "where districts with the highest percentage of low-income students spend less state and local money per pupil than districts that have the least poverty." Schoff, R. (2015, Mar. 13). Duncan says congress should address growing inequity in school funding. Sun.com. Retrieved from: http://www.sunherald.com/2015/03/13/6120579_duncan-says-congress-should-address.html?rh=1.
- 8 Const., art. VIII, §2.
- 9 MCL 380.1278(8).
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- 11 Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information. (2015). Graduation/dropout rate. Retrieved from: <https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles/StudentInformation/GraduationDropoutRate2.aspx>.
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- 14 MCL § 380.1278(8).
- 15 See generally Affidavit of Dr. Elizabeth Moje, Amended Ex. 1 to Plaintiffs' Supplemental Brief in Opposition to Defendants' Motions for Summary Disposition, SS v Michigan, No. 12-009231-CZ (Cir Ct Wayne Co Jun 27, 2013).
- 16 ELIZABETH MOJE, PH.D., REPORT ON THE URGENCY OF LITERACY TURNAROUND IMPLEMENTATION, ¶18 (July 5, 2013) [hereinafter Moje Turnaround Report]; Report of Prof. Elizabeth Moje Pursuant to the January 8, 2013, Order of the Wayne County Circuit Court, Ex. 1 to Plaintiffs' Brief on Appeal, ¶¶ 32-34, SS v Highland Park School District, No. 317073 (Mich Ct App Jan. 27, 2014).
- 17 ELIZABETH MOJE, PH.D., REPORT ON THE URGENCY OF LITERACY TURNAROUND IMPLEMENTATION 1 (July 5, 2013).
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- 44 MCL §380.1278(8).
- 45 Michigan Department of Education. (n.d.) Michigan's statewide comprehensive literacy plan (MiLit Plan). 1. Retrieved from: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/MiLit_Plan_2-12-12_482094_7.pdf ["The Plan adopts as a central tenet UNESCO's Literacy as Freedom platform, which views literacy as a human right."].
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