

Fixing Michigan Schools

**Providing Michigan's students a better education using programs
that work**

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Introduction

Gov. Rick Snyder, in his April 26, 2011 education reform speech, called Michigan schools “a broken system.” Hard statistics underpin Snyder’s harsh words: 17 percent of students qualify as college-ready by ACT standards,¹ and Michigan ranks 21st in per-pupil spending but ranks 46th in overall quality.²

The statewide average for college readiness in 2011 was 17%; however this does not mean most school districts actually boast positive college-readiness numbers. In fact, the divide between districts that have a population well above the readiness standard and districts that fall painfully short is so wide that it makes the average, low as it is, misleading.

At least 15% of students in Michigan are from districts where the number of graduates who are college-ready is significantly (10 points or more) below the state average. These include: Detroit, 75,263 students, 1% readiness; Flint, 10,557 students, 2% readiness; and Lansing, 13,013 students, 4% readiness.³

Alternatively, some districts in the state boast a college-readiness rate of more than double the state average. Bloomfield Hills School District, with 5,654 students, is the best performing district in the state. It has a 59% readiness rate, which is more than triple the state average. Other school districts exceeding the average include: Northville, 7,005 students, 40% readiness; Ann Arbor, 16,496 students, 41% readiness; Novi, 6,260 students, 45% readiness; and Birmingham, 8,057 students, 48% readiness.⁴

It is not a coincidence that the best performing districts in the state are also some of the most affluent, while the lowest performing districts are among the poorest. Detroit and Flint have widespread poverty and violence. In Detroit from 2007 to 2011, for example, 36.2% of people live below the poverty level; in the state of Michigan, 15.7% of people live below the poverty line.⁵ Indeed, numerous studies show a strong relationship between academic success and family

¹ French, Ron. "See how your local schools do on college remediation." Bridge Magazine. <http://bridgemi.com/2012/05/see-how-your-local-schools-do-on-college-prep/>.

² Ladner, Matthew, and Dan Lips. "Report Card on American Education: Ranking State K-12 Performance, Progress, and Reform." American Legislative Exchange Council. <http://www.alec.org/publications/report-card-on-american-education/>.

³ French. "See how your local schools..."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ United States Census. United States Government. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/2622000.html>.

income.⁶

Unemployment and a lagging economy compound the problem. Education is ubiquitously acknowledged as the way for the individual to achieve the coveted American Dream, a dream grounded in the possibility of social mobility. But when the education system becomes inadequate and the possibility of social mobility slips away, the students of the broken system are left on the wrong side of an achievement gap that is near-impossible to overcome. Many become trapped in roles of generational poverty that are as irreversible as they are tragic. Governor Snyder, in his speech, calls the education system's shortcomings a result of "natural evolution." The poorest communities – Detroit, especially – show a marked lack in achievement compared to the rest of the state.

There exists solid evidence to suggest that the saying "college isn't for everyone" is at least a partial truth, and that the emphasis on attending a four-year institution yielded poor results. A February 2011 study by Harvard's Graduate School of Education challenges the notion that all students should go to a university. The study noted that, "27 percent of people with post-secondary licenses or certificates – credentials short of an associate's degree – earn more than the average bachelor's degree recipient."⁷ Additionally, the study posits that "too many [students] can't see a clear, transparent connection between their program of study and tangible opportunities in the labor market."⁸ The data appeals to common sense. Students who cannot see a reason to be in school are less likely to care about school. This is troubling because high school should not be the end of the road. Post-secondary education of some kind – whether it is community college, trade school, or a university – is a necessity, and students must be armed with critical thinking and creative skills that currently the system just isn't giving them.

Growing income disparity intensifies the issue. The canyon-sized gap in performance is now wider between classes than races.⁹ Creating a true "level playing field," to quote a popular

⁶ DeParle, Jason. "Affluent Students Have an Advantage and the Gap Is Widening." *New York Times*, December 22, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/12/22/education/Affluent-Students-Have-an-Advantage-and-the-Gap-Is-Widening.html?ref=education>.

⁷ William C. Symonds, Robert B. Schwartz and Ronald Ferguson, February 2011. *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. Report issued by the Pathways to Prosperity Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education. pg. 3. http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news_events/features/2011/Pathways_to_Prosperty_Feb2011.pdf

⁸ Ibid. pg. 10-11

⁹ DeParle, Jason. "For Poor, Leap to College Often Ends in a Hard Fall." *New York Times*, December 22, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/23/education/poor-students-struggle-as-class-plays-a-greater-role-in-success.html?pagewanted=4&_r=1&hp.

phrase, and one used by Snyder in his speech, would mean equalizing all family incomes and ensuring every child is raised in a caring, two-parent household. This is far beyond the reach of this proposal. But through good teaching and effective programs, it is possible to give all students similar opportunities. Such programs already exist; they simply require optimization.

The dismal state of the education system coupled with the new challenge of educating students for a globalized world creates a polarizing issue of astounding complexity. A simple fix is impossible. The solution lies in the implementation of a variety of changes. The following proposal offers amendments to the Michigan state education system because of their efficacy as determined through relevant, empirical findings. The amendments include:

- A stronger focus on early childhood development.
- A shift in teaching methods to include more discussion and community-based learning
- The creation of more viable avenues for mentorship and vocational training.

These suggestions will cost the state more money. Providing all children with good early childhood education alone will cost about \$275,100,800. Given budget constraints, this proposal offers a modest, fiscally responsible solution to funding.

Funding

In a time of recession, the idea of pumping more money into the public education system seems unlikely, and the notion of raising taxes is certainly unpopular.

Regardless of the current circumstances, the need exists for additional support. Massachusetts, the state with the most top-ranked public schools in the country, spends the 11th most per pupil.¹⁰ Michigan ranked 46th in quality and 21st in per-pupil spending. From these figures, it would seem funding is not the issue. But if family income is the soundest predictor of academic success, the rankings prove indicative of research finding. Massachusetts may spend 11th most, but it has one of the highest per-capita incomes in the country, at \$53,471, while Michigan's is only \$36,264, ranking well below the national average of \$41,560.¹¹ The widespread urban and rural poverty that plagues Michigan is not endemic to Massachusetts. To truly create a "level playing field," as Gov. Snyder suggests, the state, unable to raise per capita

¹⁰ Ladner, Lips. "Report Card on American Education." <http://www.alec.org/publications/report-card-on-american-education/>.

¹¹ Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Univer. "Per Capita Personal Income by State." December 22, 2012. <http://bber.unm.edu/econ/us-pci.htm>.

incomes or equalize income disparity, must make up the difference with funding for the school system if it wants its students to be successful.

Instead of smaller, less likely ways to produce revenue, one small change, with the money garnered earmarked for education, would leave Michigan's schools with a windfall. An increase in income or property tax could cripple some Michigan residents in hard economic times by raising rent and reducing take-home income. An increase in taxes on gambling, tobacco, or alcohol, would be laden with administrative costs and might not produce the revenue the system needs.

The state should increase the sales tax. Michigan now has a sales tax of 6%. We propose an increase of the sales tax to 7%. The additional 1% increase in sales tax would be dedicated to funding the programs highlighted in this proposal.

The tax is the fairest because of its ubiquity: everybody benefits from education, so everybody should pay for it. The offhand effect of this increase, too, will be that tourists from outside the state will be required to chip in with every purchase, thus taking some of the burden off of Michigan taxpayers.

But the benefit to the School Aid Fund will be enormous. For instance, the total School Aid Fund Revenue for FY2012-2013 was \$12,755,900,000 and the projected 2013-2014 School Aid Fund Revenue is \$13,060,600,000 (House fiscal Agency). But if the earmarked 1% Sales Tax increase was implemented in the FY2012-2013 budget, it would have grossed \$1,175,180,000 for the School Aid Fund; increasing the FY2012-2013 School Aid Fund to \$13,931,080,000. Then if the 1% increase was applied to the FY2013-2014 budget it would gross \$1,209,350,000 in sales tax revenue for the School Aid Fund; increasing the fund's FY2013-2014 total revenue to \$14,269,950,000.

This additional money for the School Aid Fund will enable the state education system to allocate more funds for the Great Start Readiness Program so that all of Michigan's four year olds will be able to attend preschool and to give schools incentives to improve teaching methods and implement vocational and career training into their curriculums. Of the additional \$1,209,350,000 revenue: \$275,100,800 (at \$3,400 per pupil) would be set aside for the Great Start Readiness Program; \$100,000,000 will be allocated for incentives for better teaching, and the remaining \$834,249,200 will be allocated for vocational and career training.

Early Childhood Development

The start of “college readiness” begins before many students are able to conceptualize what college is or have any inkling of thought about a future career path. But many students and families do not realize the importance of early childhood development until too late in their academic careers. The research illustrates that one of the most important indicators of success in postsecondary education, and in life, is a quality early childhood education and that the key to success—academic, social, and economic—is early reading proficiency.^{12 13} Furthermore, research argues that a reputable early childhood education is a formidable step in the success of an individual. This is a step that will be the most likely to lead a student to have a higher average income, avoid prison and be a contributing member of society as an adult.¹⁴

During the first five years of a child’s life, she undergoes some of the most tremendous and substantial growth.¹⁵ On a whole, students who receive a quality early childhood education are shown to benefit in a number of ways, including but not limited to: higher rates of high school completion, lower rates of juvenile arrests, less instances of grade retention, and a lessened need for special education.¹⁶ This is due to early childhood programs developing a child’s cognitive abilities. These abilities, more than anything, improve their capacity to think and reason, which enables students to learn more in school¹⁷ and is vital for the acquisition of much needed and currently lacking skills in the job market, including critical thinking and reasoning, and the ability to adapt. The academic advantages provided by early childhood development also increase student motivation and support from teachers and parents at an early age. This leads to higher confidence and encouragement throughout a child’s education.¹⁸ Students who are afforded these benefits, on a whole, are higher academic achievers and are

¹² Children’s Leadership Council of Michigan. "The Michigan Early Childhood Business Plan."

¹³ AFT . "Fighting for Michigan's Future: It's Dollars and Sense." Accessed January 9, 2013.

¹⁴ "Fighting for Michigan’s Future: It’s Dollars and Sense”

¹⁵ Rolnick, Art., Grunewald, Rob. “Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return” pg. 7

¹⁶ Reynolds, Arthur., Temple, Judy., Robertson, Dylan., Mann, Emily. “Long-term Effects of an Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest”. American Medical Association 2001.

¹⁷ Gomby, Deanna, Mary Larner, Carol Stevenson, Eugene Lewit, and Richard Behrman. "Long-Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs: Analysis and Recommendations." *The Future of Children* 5, no. 3 (December 1993): 6-24. JSTOR.

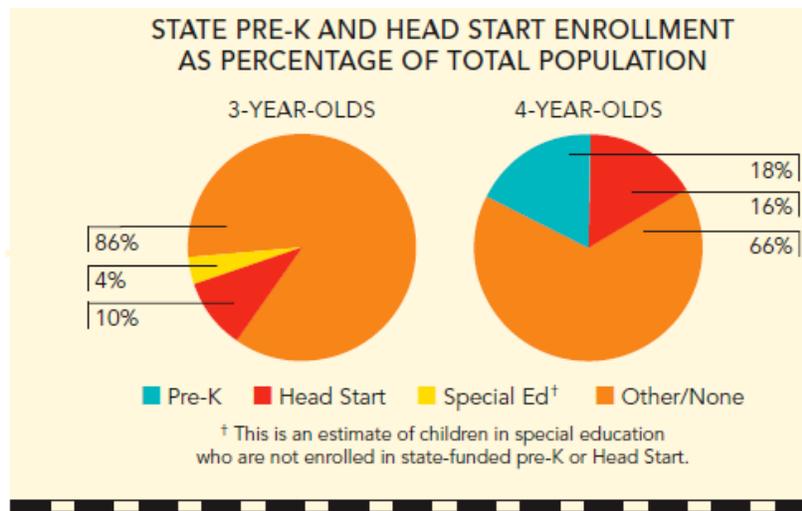
¹⁸ Gomby, Deanna, Mary Larner, Carol Stevenson, Eugene Lewit, and Richard Behrman. "Long-Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs: Analysis and Recommendations." *The Future of Children* 5, no. 3 (December 1993): 6-24. JSTOR.

more likely to graduate high school, especially compared to students who did not receive a good early education.

Investments in early childhood development programs are considered by many as the best human capital investment a state can make. As many studies have shown, state funded investments in early childhood programs such as preschool yield enormous returns. For example, a study of the Perry Preschool Project found a benefit-cost ratio of 17 to 1, or for every one dollar invested in the program it returned 17 dollars to society (\$12.90 for the general public and \$4.17 to participants of the program).¹⁹ Another study by the National Institute for Early Childhood Research found that the 1972 Carolina Abecedarian Project had a return of “roughly four dollars for every dollar invested.”²⁰ Although the exact return differs from region to region and study to study, the data proves at least one thing: early childhood development is the safest, most lucrative investment that can be made.

The Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) is the state funded early childhood development program that provides preschool funds to Intermediate School Districts for at-risk four year olds.²¹ This program, serves about 35,000 children each year, and is considered to be one of the best programs in the country, and “has been found to produce significant, meaningful improvements in children’s readiness to enter kindergarten.”²² Despite the program’s success, its major problem is that it cannot accommodate all of the students that are eligible for the program. In 2011 the state only was able to fund 18% of its 4 year old eligible population, 80,912 went without funding—up only 2% from 2010.²³ Additionally, in 2012 alone 6,382 children, many of whom were at-risk students, applied and were turned down due to lack of funding in 2012.

¹⁹ "Early Childhood Education." *Citizens Research Council of Michigan* (February 2011): 1-63. pg 26
²⁰ "Early Childhood Education." *Citizens Research Council of Michigan* (February 2011): 1-63. pg 27
²¹ "Early Childhood Education." *Citizens Research Council of Michigan* (February 2011): 1-63. pg. 35
²² "Early Childhood Education." *Citizens Research Council of Michigan* (February 2011): 1-63. pg vii
²³ NIEER. "Michigan Scorecard on Early Childhood programs." 2011. <http://nieer.org/sites/nieerfiles/Michigan.pdf>.



Source: National Institute for Early Education Research 2011 State Profile

As a result, one of the best ways to ensure that Michigan students are college ready is to focus on development during their earliest years of life--preschool and kindergarten. To accomplish this, the state must increase the amount of funding by \$275,100,800 (at \$3,400 per pupil to provide for the 80,912 four year old students to be able to attend preschool.²⁴ Because of the proven impact of this program, and the numbers of students it must turn down every year, a major step to making all Michigan students ready to face the challenges of the 21st century is to make this program available for any student who applies for it. This will be especially effective in some of the most poverty-stricken areas of the state, where students who are turned down in their early years and may not have the best situation at home start out at a severe disadvantage, and end up composing a large number of those who are the most deficient in the skills the education system is charged with equipping them with.

The state needs to increase funding so that the program can accommodate the 66% of Michigan 4 year olds who are unable to attend preschool. Since only 18% of Michigan four year olds were able to attend GSRP funded preschool—due to funding limitations—and only 16% of Michigan four year olds were able to attend Head Start (federally funded) preschool in 2011, the program was not able to have as expansive of an impact on the state as it could have.²⁵ For example, a 2009 cost analysis study of school readiness in Michigan found that an “ongoing cost burden of not investing in school readiness for all disadvantaged children is an estimated \$598 million per year.”²⁶ While based on past participation, GSRP has had an estimated positive economic impact of \$1.3 billion dollars annually from adults (ages 18-29) who benefited from

²⁴ Information based on 2012 per pupil allocation and 2011 four year old population

²⁵ NIEER. "Michigan Scorecard on Early Childhood programs." 2011. <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Michigan.pdf>.

²⁶ Wilder Research. "Cost savings analysis of school readiness in Michigan." http://media.mlive.com/grpress/news_impact/other/Wilder%20Study%20-%20Executive%20Summary.pdf.

school readiness programs as children.²⁷ The study concluded: “those benefits will rise if the state sustains its current level of investment and will increase exponentially as a result of increased investment in the Great Start Readiness Program.”²⁸ This is the clear reason for the state to increase GSRP’s funding by \$275,100,800 (at \$3,400 per pupil) so that the other 66% of the state’s four year olds are able to attend preschool. The GSRP would essentially be providing available funding so that Intermediate School Districts all over the state can provide services to the 66% of four year olds who go without state funded preschool.

High School: Teaching Methods that Work

The Problem

Although increasing available Pre-K programs in Michigan will enhance high school graduation rates and college readiness, the modification of the Michigan school system cannot stop there. While the investment in early childhood development has lifelong effects on student success, the state of Michigan needs to begin implementing policies that promote classroom engagement, student motivation, and responsibility in secondary schools.

One of the largest problems facing educators is the lack of motivation, classroom engagement, and responsibility of many students. Research suggests that student motivation declines not only throughout a single school year but also between grades six and twelve.²⁹ As a student declines in motivation, they become much less engaged in the classroom and take less responsibility for their work. In “Towards a Theory of Learning” the researchers claim that “individuals cannot learn without motivation to do so, [and] without the sense that it has a purpose...”³⁰ They also claim that education reform needs to move away from “learning for economic interest” alone, because that is not what motivates students anymore.³¹

What is important

²⁷ Wilder Research. "Cost savings analysis of school readiness in Michigan." http://media.mlive.com/grpress/news_impact/other/Wilder%20Study%20-%20Executive%20Summary.pdf.

²⁸ Wilder Research. "Cost savings analysis of school readiness in Michigan." http://media.mlive.com/grpress/news_impact/other/Wilder%20Study%20-%20Executive%20Summary.pdf.

²⁹ Penn, J. "MOTIVATIONAL THEORY AND THE MIDDLE SCHOOL." *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs* (April 2002).

³⁰ Ranson, Stewart. "Towards a Theory of Learning." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 44, no. 1 (March 1996): 9-26. pg 16

³¹ Ibid. pg. 25

The researchers assert that learning is most effective when students are enabled to “find themselves through making their communities.”³² Specifically, they claim that the antiquated lecture based teaching methods no longer work, and that educating needs to transform into a process that (1) creates lifelong learning, (2) allows students to discover their identities, (3) pushes students to reach out to create something of value, and (4) to challenge students in a desire for excellence.³³ These four ideas will not only create students that are college ready but, develop individuals into lifelong learners and contributors to society.

The Solution

The two most effective pedagogies available to support these needs are the “flipped-classroom” and service learning models. The “flipped-classroom” is a model that emphasizes class discussion and completion of course work during class periods, while lectures and readings of course material are done at home. The classroom transforms into a co-operative setting where the students and teacher engage in discourse and problem solving activities together. Students can work on homework, have discussions, and ask questions in the classroom where either their peers or instructor can assist them. This practice of discussion and collaboration in the classroom focuses primarily on the idea that “Conversation is at the heart of learning...”³⁴

Through using this model, teachers will be able to create an environment that is receptive to student engagement and responsibility. The anecdotal evidence of an Australian mathematics classroom that implemented similar strategies of discussion based learning supports this claim. In this classroom, the teacher created a “classroom of inquiry” where he created a co-operative setting by posing general questions to the students and allowed them to discuss the question with each other while he provided help to those who needed assistance. The results of this method were significant, by about one-third of the way through the school year the students showed increased maturity in participation, were willing seek out help, and strived for a deeper understanding of the material.³⁵ In all, this pedagogy created an environment that increased student engagement and responsibility of learning and allowed students to explain their own ideas and communicate these ideas with the students around them.³⁶

³² Ibid. pg. 25

³³ Ibid. pg. 14

³⁴ Ibid. pg. 17

³⁵ Goos, Mairilyn. "Learning Mathematics in a classroom of Inquiry." *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* 35, no. 4 (July 2004). 274-276

³⁶ Ibid. pg. 270

With the addition of the second pedagogy of service learning teachers will be able to create better understanding of material, more classroom engagement, and motivate students to do well in school. Service learning is prominent in many universities and colleges across the United States, but it is also a practice that can be implemented in secondary schools throughout Michigan. The idea behind service learning is to promote student engagement in their classroom and community by placing students in the voluntary—non-profit—sector of their community where they have an “opportunity to develop their moral voice and sense of community.”³⁷ While service learning has not been tested in secondary school environments it has proven to be effective at the post-secondary level. A study on the effectiveness of service learning on college campuses found that real-world experiences have influential effects on content absorption, has statistically significant increases in critical thinking skills, and have immediate and significant effects on student learning.³⁸

The idea that high school students need to integrate learning experiences in the classroom with real life tangible outcomes is the same. Rather than placing students voluntary after school opportunities, instructors need to implement teaching practices that link classroom materials with tangible products that are tied to their community. This idea of service learning and creating something tangible for students to view has proven to work in postsecondary institutions, and while it has not been tested in secondary settings it has the potential to greatly enhance the learning experiences of high school students.

To achieve the goal of college readiness for all students in Michigan, the state should keep the Common Core State Standards, as the baseline for what needs to be taught in schools. But in an effort to enhance learning the state should provide \$100 million in total funds for school districts across Michigan to receive if their secondary schools begin to implement “flipped-classroom” and service learning classroom models in conjunction with each other. This linkage between interactive student discussion within group problem-solving and service learning will create an educational experience that will keep students engaged during class, motivated, and responsible for their education. For school districts to receive these funds, they must have all of their departments adopt these two teaching methods in their classrooms, and

³⁷ Spiezio, Kim, and Karrie Baker. "General Education and civic Engagment: An Empirical Analysis of Pedagogical Possibilities." *The Journal of General Education* 54, no. 4 (2005): 273-92. 274

³⁸ *Ibid.* pg. 286

then provide evidence to the state school board that they have created tangible outcomes through class discussion and projects.

Vocational Training

The Problem

One study suggests that many students drop out of high school or fail to develop readiness in high school because they do not see a clear connection between the classroom and the workplace. The study goes on to state, “Our current system places far too much emphasis on a single pathway to success: attending and graduating from a four-year college after completing an academic program of study in high school.”³⁹ And a considerable number of people who get an associate’s degree or some other kind of post-secondary license or certification earn more than people with a bachelor’s, as stated previously.

A study published by the Center on Education and the Workforce out of Georgetown University discusses “middle jobs,” which are positions requiring certification higher than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor’s degree and “secure middle class earnings.”⁴⁰ The study states, “There are 29 million middle jobs in the United States today. In a labor market with roughly 139 million jobs and 61 million jobs that pay at least middle-class wages, one in every five jobs and nearly half of all jobs that pay at least middle-class wages are middle jobs.”⁴¹ Almost half of all middle-class jobs require a kind of certification less than a bachelor’s degree.

If so many well-paying, middle-class jobs call for certification less than a bachelor’s degree, then Michigan should not be pushing all or even most of its students toward a four-year degree.

Successful Models

The Vocational-Technical Education (VTE) program in Massachusetts has met enormous success. VTE students have lower dropout rates and higher test scores. Over 50 percent of the program’s graduates enroll in postsecondary education, and special education students in the

³⁹ “Pathways to Success.” pg. 24.

⁴⁰ Carnevale, Anthony P., Tamara Jayasundera, and Andrew R. Hanson. "Career and Technical Education: Five Ways that Pay Along the Way to the B.A." *Georgetown Public Policy Institute* (September 2012). <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/CTE.FiveWays.FullReport.pdf>. pg. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pg. 3.

program have among the highest graduation rates.⁴² The program is successful because of “a blend of operational autonomy, choice, rigorous instruction and effective relationships with local businesses.”⁴³ The VTE program pays attention to the approximately 50 percent of students who many not plan to enter a baccalaureate program after high school, instead choosing to pursue a two-year degree program, technical school, military service, or the work place. Every student in Massachusetts is, by law, eligible for these programs.

Schools like the ones in Massachusetts, which provide career and technical training along with academic training, exist in Michigan. Some are very successful. Cass Technical High School in Detroit is one example of a public magnet school with exemplary programs. Data shows, for example, 63% of students at Cass Tech scored “Proficient” or better on the English Language Arts section of the Michigan Merit Exam, compared with the state average of 55.9%. This is especially impressive because 25.1% of students in the district, Detroit, scored “Proficient” or better.⁴⁴ This is no doubt one of the reasons Cass Tech was named one of the Michigan Department of Education’s award schools for “Beating the Odds” (BTO), which gave out awards to schools that scored high on a ratio of student performance to traditional risk factors.⁴⁵

Washtenaw Technical Middle College in Ann Arbor is a public charter school that allows students to earn an associate’s degree or technical certificate while completing a high school diploma. Students take classes at Washtenaw Community College and attend Washtenaw Middle College, with tuition paid for by the state.⁴⁶

The problem with this is that, while these schools have proven themselves to be successful and beneficial to students, space is limited, and students must apply. If such programs are truly good for students looking to pursue a path other than a four-year degree (especially in

⁴² Fraser, Alison L. "Education in Massachusetts." *Pioneer Institute* (October 2008).

<http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/vocational-technical-education-in-massachusetts/>. pg. 1.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Detroit Public Schools. "School-Level Student Assessment Data for Wayne RESA, Detroit City School District, Cass Technical High School." August 16, 2012. http://detroitk12.org/schools/reports/2011-2012_annual_education_report/00554.pdf. pg. 2.

⁴⁵ Detroit Public Schools. "Congratulations DPS’ Bates, Cass Tech, Chrysler, Harms, Kettering West Wing and Ludington Magnet – among the Michigan Department of Education’s “Beating the Odds” Schools Added Today to the List of Re." November 20, 2012. <http://detroitk12.org/content/2012/11/20/congratulations-dps-bates-cass-tech-chrysler-harms-kettering-west-wing-and-ludington-magnet-among-the-michigan-department-of-educations-beating-the-odds/>.

⁴⁶ Michigan Department of Education. "Washtenaw Technical Middle College." http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-43092_51178-199629--,00.html.

the case of Cass Tech, where students show outstanding performance in Detroit, which is a poor and underperforming district), then one step to making all students prepared for college and the 21st century workforce is to make these kinds of schools more available and accessible to a greater number of students.

The Proposal

The state should give economic incentives to schools that offer viable career and technical training options for students. It should also mandate that vocational and technical programs be available for any interested students.

Extra money should be given to schools that find ways to integrate vocational training – such as computer science, engineering and woodshop – into their curriculum. Money should be provided to districts that want to hire faculty to teach in these areas; the Michigan Common Core Standards should be amended to accommodate technical and vocational training.

To encourage the growth of extant programs, such as Washtenaw Technical Middle College or Cass Tech, the state should offer economic incentives which can, in part, be drawn from the pool of money raised by levying the aforementioned taxes, for schools that increase the maximum capacity of students by updating facilities, hiring more staff, and recruiting more students. These incentives should be steady and contingent on the continued success of the programs.

Conclusion

The problems of educating Michigan's youth are numerous and complex. Students do poorly in school for a variety of reasons, and, as it has been shown, some districts severely underperform. Many students cannot see a connection between the classroom and the workplace. Even more are being taught in ways that do not engage them in discussion or challenge their problem solving abilities – abilities that are essential in the 21st century workplace.

Fortunately, the solutions that work well enough to remedy many of the problems facing the education system already exist. A quality education starts with early childhood, and there is an extant program with proven success in improving school performance. Methods of teaching

that engage students in the classroom and in their communities can easily be adopted. Schools and curriculum that focus on training students for technical and occupational certification while still equipping them with the critical thinking and problem solving skills employers require are producing exemplary students.

But these programs are not available to everyone. The Great Start Readiness Program has limited spots. Teachers are not strongly encouraged to adopt pedagogy focused on active participation and community engagement. Schools such as Cass Technical High School and Washtenaw Technical Middle College have selective admission. To make all students in Michigan prepared for the postsecondary education they need, these options must be viable for all students.

A proposal on how to fund at least some of this has been made. If the appropriate taxes are levied, the state would be able to raise enough money to make the Great Start Readiness Program available to all children, with money left over to offer economic incentives for better teaching methods and better vocational and technical education.

If the state wishes to adequately prepare all of its students for the global society, it must take action, and put its stock into programs that work.