



Fixing the Leaky Pipeline: Why Adult Education and Skills Training Matters for Michigan's Future

In the last couple of decades, Michigan has seen a dramatic change in the nature of its workforce. This is due partly to the globalization of business and the rise of outsourcing, and partly to technological advancements. Because manufacturing has been a staple of Michigan's economy, the national economic downturn has hit the state particularly hard. Michigan continues to experience layoffs and job losses, and many skilled workers who previously had secure, well-paying jobs in the manufacturing sector now find themselves either unemployed or able to find only part-time work. Others who have found full-time employment are now working at jobs with low skill requirements, low wages and low employment security. Many working families in Michigan have fallen below the poverty line:

- In 2005, 7.7 percent of all working families in Michigan were below the federal poverty level, and 25 percent were "low-income" (their income level was between 100 percent and 200 percent of the poverty line).
- 43 percent of poor families with children in Michigan had at least one parent with a job, as did 66 percent of low-income families with children.¹
- 18 percent of all jobs in Michigan in November 2004 paid wages that would not lift a family of four out of poverty.²

Clearly, for many families, simply having a job is not enough; what is needed is employment that enables such families to support themselves and to build a future for their children. For some workers, the barrier to such employment is often a lack of skills. In many parts of the state, the only jobs that are available for an unskilled worker are low-paying jobs that do not increase the worker's skill level or marketability so that he or she can seek better employment. For many unskilled or low-skilled workers, the key to leaving dead-end jobs and poverty wages is to acquire work skills through vocational training or postsecondary education.

For skilled workers, the problem is often what is termed a "skills mismatch." In this case, the demand for the skills possessed by the worker has decreased due to technological innovation or outsourcing. Opportunities to upgrade skills or acquire new skills through education and training give such workers a chance to restore their previous standard of living.

The jobs that are expected to be most in demand in the near future tend to be either unskilled, low-paying service sector jobs, or better-paying jobs that require education or training beyond high school. Many jobs, including those in the shrinking manufacturing sector, require advanced skills even at entry level. As technology

¹ U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2005. Microdata compiled by the Working Poor Families Project.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics, 2004.

and workplace efficiencies are brought into play, workers who now feel secure in their employment may find themselves having to upgrade their skills in order to maintain their value as employees. The skills demanded by the emerging job market are often represented by a credential such as a degree, license or certificate. Increasingly, the credentials most sought are those obtained through college, such as an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or higher.

Michigan Falls Short of its Skills Requirements

High unemployment and an underskilled workforce drain money from the economy by decreasing consumer spending and tax revenue while increasing the need for social services and public assistance. Conversely, having a workforce that is prepared to meet the skills that are high in demand not only increases revenues and spending,

Key Occupations in Michigan—2012

Job Title	Education	Projected Growth (2002-2012)		Hourly Wage
		Number	Percent	
Registered Nurses	Associate's	14,870	18.9%	\$27.50
Carpenters	Long Term OJT	5,540	14.5%	\$19.36
Computer Systems Analysts	Bachelor's	5,450	31.5%	\$34.51
Electricians	Long Term OJT	5,425	20.5%	\$25.99
Accountants and Auditors	Bachelor's	5,205	14.4%	\$27.38
General and Operations Managers	Work exp + Bachelor's	4,940	12.3%	\$44.66
Cooks, Restaurant	Long Term OJT	3,850	15.6%	\$9.50
Computer Software Engineers, Applications	Bachelor's	3,510	36.5%	\$35.73
Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	Long Term OJT	3,175	17.4%	\$22.95
Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	Long Term OJT	2,995	15.9%	\$23.69
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	Postsecondary Vocational Trg	2,785	10.8%	\$18.92
Computer Support Specialists	Associate's	2,745	21.5%	\$20.14
Management Analysts	Work exp + Bachelor's	2,710	24.9%	\$38.42
Sales Managers	Work exp + Bachelor's	2,300	26.3%	\$44.52
Machinists	Long Term OJT	2,220	9.8%	\$19.21
Mgrs of Construction Trades & Extraction Workers	Work exp in Related Occup	2,115	11.8%	\$30.48
Computer and Information Systems Managers	Work exp + Bachelor's	2,085	28.5%	\$46.35
Self-Enrichment Education Teachers	Work exp in Related Occup	2,040	38.3%	\$16.18
Dental Hygienists	Associate's	2,025	24.7%	\$26.62
Industrial Engineers	Bachelor's	1,995	14.4%	\$33.72
Network and Computer Systems Administrators	Bachelor's	1,945	30.2%	\$28.24
Managers of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	Work exp in Related Occup	1,915	13.0%	\$28.21
Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	Postsecondary Vocational Trg	1,875	25.6%	\$14.40
Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	Long Term OJT	1,815	11.0%	\$18.60
HVAC Mechanics and Installers	Long Term OJT	1,805	27.0%	\$21.85
Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses	Postsecondary Vocational Trg	1,720	9.5%	\$18.13
Public Relations Specialists	Bachelor's	1,675	25.2%	\$24.55
Medical and Health Services Managers	Work exp + Bachelor's	1,625	22.3%	\$36.88
Pharmacists	Doctor's	1,555	20.7%	\$43.40
Training and Development Specialists	Bachelor's	1,540	22.7%	\$25.86
Cost Estimators	Work exp in Related Occup	1,380	16.6%	\$29.34
Physical Therapists	Master's	1,350	27.3%	\$31.79
Fire Fighters	Long Term OJT	1,325	15.0%	\$17.63
Loan Officers	Bachelor's	1,210	18.3%	\$25.19
Purchasing Agents, Exc Wholesale, Retail, Farm	Work exp in Related Occup	1,160	11.0%	\$28.32
Automotive Body and Related Repairers	Long Term OJT	1,025	10.3%	\$21.28

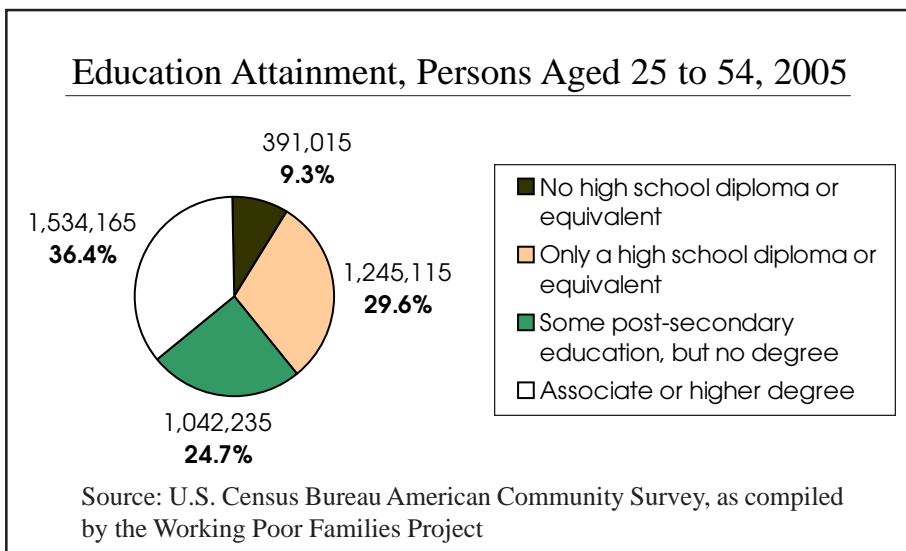
Source: Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Office of Labor Market Information

but can attract new businesses into the state. It is clear that Michigan's workforce must be prepared to meet the emerging skills needs of businesses in order for the state to thrive in the new economy.

While two of the most commonly sought credentials signifying specialized skill are the two-year and four-year degree, only 26.1 percent of Michigan adults aged 25 or older possess a bachelor's degree, ranking Michigan 36th among the states.³ Of Michigan adults aged 25 to 54, 36.4 percent have an associate's degree or higher, ranking 31st among states.⁴

While increasing the number of college graduates is a necessary goal for state education policy, a large percentage of Michigan's residents are not yet college-ready or work-ready. Forty-four percent of Michigan residents have a low or very low level of literacy.⁵ 10.8 percent of adults aged 18 to 64, and 9.3 percent of adults aged 25 to 54, do not have a high school diploma.⁶ The 2000 decennial census indicates that there are approximately 110,287 Michigan adults with limited English proficiency (and it is reasonable to assume this number has increased since the survey was taken).⁷ These troubling numbers indicate that many Michigan workers, including those with high school diplomas, lack even basic job-readiness skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Being under-skilled in one or more of these areas not only blocks access to many jobs, but blocks access to the postsecondary education or specialized on-the-job training that is often needed to advance in a job.

The Granholm Administration recognizes that Michigan has a long way to go to meet the skills demands of the new economy. It has stated explicitly that postsecondary education must no longer be seen as an option but as a necessity, and that higher education must be made universal. It has committed to building the overall work-readiness of Michigan's labor force by significantly increasing the number of workers with two- or four-year degrees. Finally, it has acknowledged that to do this, Michigan must work to ensure that a sufficient number of its non-degree residents possess the basic skills and college readiness necessary to satisfactorily complete the degree programs in demand.⁸ To help accomplish this, the Administration has proposed a program called No Worker Left Behind program, which will help displaced workers by providing up to two years free tuition at any Michigan community college or other approved training program and allow them to receive training while receiving unemployment benefits.



³ U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, *Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Over, by State*, 2006

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2005. Microdata compiled by the Working Poor Families Project.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics, *National Adult Literacy Survey*.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2005. Microdata compiled by the Working Poor Families Project.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census, 2000.

⁸ The Lt. Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth, *Final Report*, December 2004, p. 12.

The Leaks in the Pipeline

Efforts to build the skills of its present and future workforce depend on Michigan's ability to address the various "leaks in the pipeline" of the educational and skill-building sequence. According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 70 out of 100 Michigan ninth graders graduate from high school within four years and 41 go on to college immediately. Twenty-nine are still enrolled in their sophomore year and 18 graduate within 150 percent of time (i.e. graduate with an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years).⁹ In other words, 82 percent of ninth graders are lost at one of the "leakage points" in the educational sequence and thus do not graduate from postsecondary education.

When dealing with any pipeline with multiple leaks, the obvious starting point for repair is to slow the leaking where it first occurs—in this case, by reducing the number of high school dropouts. Michigan is making some progress toward this end, as shown by the decrease in dropouts during the past several school years.¹⁰ However, significant attention needs to be paid to those who have dropped out and are now unemployed or working in dead-end, low-wage jobs. Workers without a high school diploma are most likely to experience long-term unemployment or to work in low-wage jobs without opportunities for advancement.

While possession of a high school diploma is important, it is less useful in finding a job than it has been historically. A high school diploma does

Michigan's Leaky Educational Pipeline

Success Rate Per 100 Ninth Graders

In Ninth Grade	Graduate from High School on time	Immediately Enter College (2- or 4-Year Program)	Still Enrolled Sophomore Year	Graduate Within 150% of Time
100	70	41	29	18
	▼	▼	▼	▼
	30	29	12	11
	(HS Students Who Dropped Out Before Graduation)	(HS Graduates Who Did Not Go to College the Following Year)	(College Students Who Dropped Out Before Their Sophomore Year)	(College Students Who Began Sophomore Year But Did Not Graduate Within 150% of Time)

Source: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *The Educational Pipeline: Big Investment, Big Returns*, April 2004.

Chart Produced by Michigan League for Human Services

⁹ National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *The Educational Pipeline: Big Investment, Big Returns*, April 2004.

¹⁰ Michigan Department of Education; U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

not indicate that the graduate has vocational skills required by the labor market; for that, a postsecondary degree, certificate or other standardized credential is needed. For this reason, it is important to consider the large number of high school graduates who do not pursue further study or training as a leakage in the pipeline. A successful adult education system will not only enable a significant number of dropouts to complete their GED, but will prepare them for postsecondary skill-building opportunities as well.

Family income is a major predictor for whether a student will be lost at this point in the pipeline. The Education Commission of the States estimates that while the rate of ninth graders entering college right after high school (called the “Chance for College”) is around 39.5 percent for the general population, it is only 23.3 for Michigan’s low-income students.¹¹

At the next major leakage point, between the first and second years of college, there is some positive news for Michigan. In 2002, only 47 percent of Michigan’s first-year community college students returned their second year.¹² Two years later, however, this rate improved to 57 percent.¹³ Also positive is that Michigan has reversed its previous decline in the percentage of first-year, full-time Michigan college students that complete a bachelor’s degree within six years. In 2005, 58 percent of such students completed their degree within that time, which is considered a high score for Michigan but falls short of the highest states (67%).¹⁴ It is important to take steps to ensure that these trends continue.

To increase the number of workers who meet the skills demands of the new economy, Michigan needs to approach the various leakage points in a

comprehensive way. The challenge for state policy development is to significantly decrease the percentage of ninth-graders who do not graduate from high school on time, and to increase the percentage who enroll in and complete a program of postsecondary study. There are several reasons why, despite the apparent long-term benefits, many high school graduates do not enroll in further education, and why a significant number who do enroll do not finish their programs:

1. *Cost*—For some individuals, tuition costs and other expenses—including the opportunity costs associated with not working full time—are prohibitive. For low- and middle-income students in Michigan, the net cost (tuition, room and board after financial aid) of attending a community college consumes 37 percent of family income, and the net cost of attending a four-year public college or university represents one-half of family income.¹⁵ While tuition costs are rising around the country, federal financial aid is not stepping in to fill the need. Pell grants cover a much smaller percentage of tuition costs than they used to, and students who take non-credit courses or even for-credit courses without the intention of completing a full degree or certificate program are typically not eligible for Pell aid.¹⁶ Moreover, while the federal government offers two higher education tax credits, approximately 130,000 low-income high school students in Michigan cannot expect to benefit from those credits because their household income is too low. (Families whose incomes are not high enough to generate sufficient federal income tax liability do not benefit from the two federal credits because the credits are

¹¹ The Education Commission of the States, *Closing the College Participation Gap*, April 2003.

¹² The Education Trust, *State Summary Reports*, 2004, using data from the National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis.

¹³ The Education Trust, *State Summary Reports*, 2006, using data from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

¹⁴ The Education Trust, *ibid.*

¹⁵ National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Measuring Up: Michigan*, 2006.

¹⁶ The Workforce Alliance, *Training Policy in Brief: An Overview of Federal Workforce Development Policies*, 2007

nonrefundable.)¹⁷ All of this has implications for college and university administrators as they consider changes to tuition rates, and for state budget decisions regarding higher education appropriations.

2. *Competing time commitments*—Many adult students have difficulty juggling the time and energy demands of work, school and family. While for this reason many students with dependents choose to go to school only part-time, between 1994 and 2004 the percentage of Michigan’s working-age adults that were enrolled part-time in college-level education or training declined by 18 percent (compared with a nationwide decline of 12 percent).¹⁸ This might indicate that there is more need in the postsecondary education system for supports to help students who are parents or who for other reasons have competing time commitments.
3. *Length of time needed to complete programs*—Time is often the most challenging factor facing adults who are trying to increase their skills through education and training. Staying engaged in a program that takes several years to complete often requires forgoing thousands of dollars in wages and a considerable investment in child care. There are also quality-of-life sacrifices, such as the decreased time available to spend with children or in other activities considered important. Many workers enthusiastically begin a program that is expected to yield wider job opportunities upon completion, yet later find the length of training time to be prohibitive.

4. *Inadequate preparation*—A very significant cause of the attrition among college students is that many high school and GED graduates are not sufficiently prepared for postsecondary education. In 2000, 42 percent of freshman entering public two-year colleges nationwide enrolled in one or more remedial courses in reading, writing or mathematics, and a full 35 percent enrolled in remedial mathematics courses.¹⁹ It has been shown that, nationally, 15 to 17 percent of postsecondary students have reading proficiency at below Level 3 literacy—in other words, below that of the average GED graduate).²⁰ In 2005, only 51 percent of the American high school students who took the ACT were ready for college-level reading.²¹

Adult Education as a Solution to the Leaky Pipeline

Adult education is the means to bringing students who have dropped out of high school, or even students who have graduated from high school but lack the skills associated with a high school diploma, back into the pipeline of skill-building and career development. There are two kinds of adult education provided in the adult education system: GED preparation, which gives the student a credential equal to high school completion, and adult basic education (ABE), which prepares students who have skills below the eighth grade level for entry into a GED completion program. Both types of adult education have as their primary objective the attainment of a high school graduation credential, which has traditionally opened up many job opportunities to those who had previously dropped out of high school.

¹⁷ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *A Significant Number of Students in Every State are Shut Out of Federal Higher Education Credits*, June 1, 2007.

¹⁸ National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Basmat Parsad, Laurie Lewis, and Bernard Greene, *Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions in Fall 2000*, National Center for Education Statistics, November 2003.

²⁰ Stephen Reder, *Adult Literacy and Postsecondary Education Students: Overlapping Populations and Learning Trajectories*, National Center for the Study of Adult Education and Literacy, 1998.

²¹ ACT, *Reading Between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals About College Readiness in Reading*, 2006.

It is time to rethink the purpose of adult education in Michigan. As indicated previously, a high school diploma no longer ensures stable employment. There is a growing need for college and vocational training credentials, yet such credentials are out of reach to a large number of low-skilled or low-literacy workers including those who have graduated from high school. High school graduates who find themselves unprepared for postsecondary training need to be able to access and finish adult education programs that help them to build the skills they need for college. Hence, the focus of adult education should move from attainment of a high school diploma to readiness for postsecondary education and training.²² A strong adult education system will not only increase the number of workers with high school diplomas, but will fill an important role in improving the retention and completion rates of adult postsecondary students.

Likewise, adult education needs to be accessible for employed workers who need to upgrade or expand their vocational skills but lack the basic skills necessary to successfully complete on-the-job training. A lack of knowledge of basic math functions or the inability to write coherently are major stumbling blocks for many workers who would otherwise be able to move up in their places of employment.

One obvious leak in the pipeline appears to be the decline of access to adult education by those who need it. The total number of adults entering ABE, GED and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs has fallen from 75,988 in 2001-2002 to 32,024 in 2005-2006. Adult secondary education enrollment hit its peak of 21,452 in 2002-2003 but plummeted to 2,616 in 2005-2006—a decrease of 88 percent.²³

It is reasonable to attribute these drops primarily to a reduction in the overall number of classroom seats available in Michigan that resulted from recent deep cuts in state adult education funding. State funding went from \$80 million annually in Program Years 1997 to 2001 to \$20 million annually from 2004 to 2006.²⁴ As a result, some programs have had to discontinue altogether, while others have had to reduce the number of learners served. There are currently fourteen counties in Michigan that do not have any adult education programs at all, and very few programs exist in the Upper Peninsula (see Appendix 1).²⁵

Leaks occur within the adult education system as well. Of the 18,766 individuals that participated in adult basic education (ABE) programs during the 2005-2006 school year, only 23.7 percent completed their programs. While this is only a slight decrease from the prior year, and an increase over the two school years before that, it indicates conversely that 75 percent of students continue to leak from these beginning programs. Other programs had higher rates of completion—32.4 percent for adult secondary education and 46.3 percent for ESL—but the fact that the completion rate of any program level rarely exceeds 50 percent warrants attention (see Appendix 2).²⁶

DLEG has looked into the reason behind the lagging performance outcomes in adult basic education and has listed several causal factors:

- lack of post-testing (when segregated, those students who are post-tested have significantly higher outcomes than the students taken as a whole);
- lack of funds to provide the necessary resources, especially one-on-one to the very low literates;

²² Reder, *ibid.*

²³ Michigan Adult Education Reporting System (MAERS) data from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

²⁴ For more information on the cuts in state funding for adult education, see the Michigan League for Human Services, *Michigan's Weak Link: Unemployment, the Skills Gap, and the Declining Support for Adult Education*, April 2005.

²⁵ Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, *Adult Education Programs in Alphabetical Order by County* (<http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd>)

²⁶ Michigan Adult Education Reporting System (MAERS) data from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

- the increased number of low reading participants that need more support services;
- lack of skills and knowledge on the part of instructors to deal with adults with learning disabilities;
- insufficient data quality and management²⁷

Identifying these problems is a positive first step in addressing the leak, but it remains to be seen what succeeding actions will be taken to ensure adequate resources and trainer preparation to meet the needs of the increasing number of students with significant barriers.

The State Role in Plugging the Leaks

State government has a major role in strengthening the educational opportunity system for adults and in addressing the problems that lead to the leakage in the adult education system. As the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) points out, while the federal government provides funding and administrative guidance via regulations, and local governments tend to be primarily concerned with administration and implementation, states combine all of these functions by playing important policy, funding and administrative roles. As a result, states have three basic choices: a) they can be relatively passive administrators of earmarked federal and local dollars; b) they can perform a creative governance role by combining divergent funding streams for greater efficiency and maximization of revenue; and/or c) they can be policy leaders that set goals for service systems and seek to use or even create various revenue streams and administrative systems to achieve those goals. Effective state practices usually have some combination of the three.²⁸

Michigan actively plays the second and third roles in its various capacities of involvement with K-12 and postsecondary education. In 2004, the Governor announced the formation of the Lieutenant Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth, which was charged with identifying strategies to double the number of Michigan residents with degrees and other postsecondary credentials within ten years. The commission released a series of recommendations for state policy, including commitment to universal higher education, expanding access to baccalaureate institutions and degrees, and creating community compacts to increase college participation rates by 5 percent each year in areas with low rates of enrollment.

Regarding adult education, Michigan often seems to be limiting itself to a primarily managerial role rather than a policy leadership role. In terms of financial support, the state played a strong "creative governance" role when it provided more than 80 percent of the total funding for adult education, as opposed to the current 55 percent. Although it might be argued that Michigan continues to play that role to the degree that it exceeds the federal matching requirement of 25 percent, the funding cut beginning in Program Year 2004 has decreased overall adult education funding by more than half, with the resulting setbacks discussed previously. Moreover, the state's shifting of the funding burden onto the federal government was especially unwise in light of indications that future federal support may significantly decrease.²⁹

Kentucky is one state that has actively sought to combine diverse funding streams and implement innovative statewide policy in order to help low-skilled workers obtain both basic and career skills. When faced with a significant shortage of skilled

²⁷ Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, *Amendment and One-Year Extension to the Michigan Adult Education State Plan*.

²⁸ Chisman, Forrest, *Leading from the Middle: The State Role in Adult Education and Literacy*, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, August 2002.

²⁹ The Bush Administration's 2006 budget, for example, proposed cuts that would have eliminated 75 percent of federal funds to Michigan's adult education program, which in turn would have led to an estimated 5,181 students being denied services. Fortunately, most of the money was restored by Congress. (Strawn, Julie and Amy-Ellen Duke, *President's Budget Sabotages Pipeline of Skilled Workers*, Center for Law and Social Policy, February 2005.)

workers in the late 1990's, the state committed to expanding adult and postsecondary education for the specific purpose of building a better skilled workforce. It leveraged funding and knowledge from diverse education, workforce development and economic development sources to create the Kentucky Workforce Alliance, and created policy requiring adult education to meet the needs of both employers and employees and to be delivered at the workplace.³⁰

Some states have created statewide policies that assist in the tuition costs for those who transition from adult education to postsecondary education in the community colleges. Mississippi and Kansas, for example, address that challenge by offering free tuition for the first semester of postsecondary community college studies to students who receive their GED through those colleges. Although Michigan does not have any current policies that specifically target adult education participants with help in this area, Jackson Community College offers a tuition voucher for free classes at the college for all completers of its GED programs, and Michigan is exploring ways to integrate adult basic education into its No Worker Left Behind program.

Michigan has also demonstrated some policy leadership in adult education in its Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program, which attempts to make Family Independence Program (FIP) cash assistance recipients more work-ready. The program expands the allowed education activities, and allows flexibility in their duration and scope, for parents who are receiving cash assistance through the FIP program. This provides more flexibility for low-skilled workers receiving cash assistance to participate in ABE, ESL and GED activities. JET's effectiveness in encouraging adult education participation by those who need it will depend on the state's willingness to increase its accessibility and availability, particularly in remote areas.

New Approaches to Adult Education

There are two distinct but related approaches of helping low-skilled workers that are becoming widely recognized and implemented, and depart from the traditional way of delivering adult education services. The *bridge program* model helps students successfully transition from adult education into employment or into postsecondary education that leads to employment. Bridge programs assist adults with or without a high school diploma or GED whose reading and mathematics skills are below the ninth grade level. They are designed for individuals who have been out of the classroom for an extended period of time or who have been unsuccessful in traditional educational settings. Bridge programs typically involve several players, including community colleges, adult education providers, local businesses, unions, one-stop career centers (i.e. Michigan Works Agencies), community centers and social services agencies.³¹

Career pathways programs differ from bridge programs in that they combine education or training with job opportunities in a particular sector. Often, however, bridge programs are a component of career pathways systems or are linked with them in order to provide a continuous learning sequence. Although the programs are not limited to workers with low basic skills or language barriers, adult education plays a significant role in helping participants with these challenges.

The role of adult education in both types of programs is to enable adults to acquire basic skills for the primary purpose of moving out of low-wage, dead-end jobs into jobs with more security, more opportunities for advancement, and a living wage. Hence, adult education in such a context is designed in order to connect the learner to both employment and further education or training. This has implications for where and how the adult education is presented, and for this reason some bridge

³⁰ Radha Roy Biswas, Jack Mills and Heath Prince, *Building Skills, Increasing Economic Vitality: A Handbook of Innovative State Policies*, Jobs for the Future, January 2005.

³¹ Women Employed, the Chicago Jobs Council and the University of Illinois at Chicago's Great Cities Institute, *Bridges to Careers for Low-Skilled Adults: A Program Development Guide*, 2005.

Some Key Features of Bridge Programs

- Curriculum defined in terms of competencies needed to succeed in postsecondary training leading to career-path employment and further learning in a target field.
- Focus on the basics of communication, problem-solving, applied mathematics, technology applications, and technical fundamentals taught in the context of training for employment and further learning in the given field.
- Instruction emphasizing learning by doing through projects, simulations, labs, and internships.
- Exposure of students to opportunities and requirements of employment and education in the target sector through career and college exploration and planning, in-class projects and simulations, field trips, job shadowing, internships and other means.
- Programs offered at times and places and through media convenient to working adults.
- “Wrap-around” support services, including assessment and counseling, case management, child care, financial aid, job and college placement and follow-up.
- Active cooperation between degree-credit and non-credit divisions within colleges and between colleges and outside partners such as community groups, social service agencies and high schools to recruit students and provided needed supports.

Davis Jenkins, *Bridge Program Planning Guide*, University of Illinois at Chicago, April 2004.

programs offer their adult education classes in close geographical proximity to college classes and vocational training, or even to employment sites.

One characteristic of a successful bridge program is that it has multiple entry, exit and re-entry points. As “time is the enemy” for many adult learners, this flexibility allows them to take time off from their studies if necessary without losing credit for their work. It also enables the program to serve

as many diverse student needs as possible, including those with low basic skills who need adult basic education or ESL instruction in order to advance in the workforce.

Several community colleges in Michigan are using the bridge model to develop a seamless learning pathway between adult basic education, postsecondary education, and career entry. The fact that community colleges in the state are institutionally independent of one another and are not linked under a formal policy-setting umbrella structure is both a blessing and a curse for this endeavor. On the one hand, the independence makes it easier for individual colleges to develop creative programs and policies suited to local and regional needs, which can then be shared through informal networks and replicated at other colleges at program directors’ discretion. At the same time, the formal independence of two-year colleges makes it more difficult to develop state policy that would streamline adult education policies or facilitate replication of successful programs among the community colleges. In 2001-2002, 6 percent of the adult education providers in Michigan were community colleges, and 57 percent of the state’s community colleges were providers of adult education.

Community colleges and other institutions of higher education have a unique ability to strengthen the adult education component of bridge programs because they have more than one means to provide basic skills education. They can do so as a partner in the traditional adult education system, which currently receives 55 percent of its funding from Michigan’s general fund and 45 percent from the federal government through Title II of the Workforce Investment Act. (In 2001-2002, eleven states had over half of their adult education population enrolled in community colleges for part or all of their courses.³²) They can also do so through developmental or remedial education programs that are funded by state higher education earmarks. This gives community colleges much flexibility to combine multiple funding streams in

³² Vanessa Smith Morest, *The Role of Community Colleges in State Adult Education Systems: A National Analysis*, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, April 2004.

ways that enable them to efficiently use their dollars to reach as many low-skilled learners as possible.

Some Key Features of Career Pathways

- Regional partnerships of community colleges and other educational institutions, workforce, human service and economic development agencies, and employers working in concert to support worker advancement and meet employer needs.
- “Road maps,” jointly produced by educators and employers, showing the connections between education and training programs and jobs in a given sector at different levels.
- Easy articulation of credits across educational institutions, and clear connections among remedial, academic and occupational programs within institutions, to enable students to progress “seamlessly” from one level to the next and earn credentials while improving their career prospects.
- Curriculum defined in terms of competencies required for jobs and further education at the next level, and, where possible, tied to industry skill standards, certifications or licensing requirements.
- *Bridge programs* for educationally disadvantaged students which teach basic skills like communication, math, and problem-solving in the context of training for job advancement.
- Programs offered at times and places (including workplaces) convenient to working adults and structured in small modules or “chunks,” each leading to a recognized credential, to allow learners to enter and exit education as their circumstances permit.
- “Wrap-around” support services, including career assessment and counseling, case management, child care, financial aid, and job placement.

Davis Jenkins, *Career Pathway Planning Guide*, University of Illinois at Chicago, Rev. February 2005.

One question sometimes debated is whether and how much to charge for tuition in these types of programs. On the one hand, adult education services are primarily targeted toward low-income persons for whom access to needed services is made vulnerable by financial limitations. On the other hand, charging a nominal fee to students, besides helping programs to meet their costs, might help to ensure that scarce resources go primarily to highly motivated students, i.e. those who make a small monetary investment in their education. Often, the fee for remedial education at a community college is equal to that of for-credit classes, which can be expensive for low-income students, while classes provided at the colleges through the adult education system often have significantly lower fees.³³

Two examples of Michigan colleges that offer bridge programs currently connected with the adult education system are Wayne County Community College and Mott Community College. Wayne County Community College has a solid program to “feed” adult basic education students directly into the community college system. All students in its ABE/GED program enroll in the college, and in 2003, 45 of the 55 GED graduates enrolled in postsecondary courses at the college the following year. One of the reasons for its effectiveness is that the college helps students stay in college by helping them meet the work, transportation, housing and parenting challenges that often hinder successful completion of basic or postsecondary education programs. It does this using case management by social work interns, extracurricular academic support programs in areas such as test-taking and budgeting, and peer tutoring.

Mott Community College also provides adult basic education and GED preparation on its campus. It enrolled 122 students in these programs during 2005, 20 percent of which were adult basic education. Because it has an open entry/open exit format that allows students to take their classes at a pace that works for them, 56 percent of those students regularly participated and/or obtained a

³³ Michigan has taken steps toward alleviating college expenses by establishing the Michigan Adult Part Time Grant, which provides assistance for qualified adults who enroll in degree-granting Michigan colleges on a part-time basis. Grants of up to \$600 per academic year are available for not more than two years of study.

GED, while the remaining students were carried over into the new program year. The college has recently started a new pilot program in which cash assistance recipients who are single parents or are in their third trimester can study at home and report weekly to the GED instructor; the most recent session of this program had 22 students. Mott Community College is participating in a national, multi-year initiative called *Breaking Through: Helping Low-Skilled Adults Enter and Succeed in College and Careers*, which seeks to increase the number of low-skilled adults who enter and complete occupational and technical degree programs in community and technical colleges.³⁴

As noted earlier, Kentucky has developed statewide policy to establish occupationally relevant career pathways systems and has awarded funding to each community college district for this purpose. The Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) requires its participating colleges to develop bridge programs to address remedial needs of the low-skilled students in the career pathways, and allows the colleges to utilize either their own remedial education systems or the adult education system for this purpose. It also facilitates efforts to bring faculty from degree programs, adult basic education, developmental education and non-credit workforce development into the bridge programs.³⁵

Additionally, Kentucky has implemented the “Ready-to-Work” program that encourages cash assistance recipients to participate in these programs by providing them with case management, support services, and work-study employment that does not count against the participant’s welfare check. The outcomes of this program are striking: 8.8 of its cash assistance population is enrolled in college, compared with 6.6 percent of the state’s general population. Moreover, during the spring semester of 2004, grade point averages for

Kentucky students not affiliated with Ready-to-Work averaged 2.59, while those of Ready-to-Work participants averaged 2.66.³⁶

An example of a statewide career pathways program involving adult education to a considerable degree is the Massachusetts Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative. Initially developed to improve the quality of care in nursing homes, it also aims to improve career mobility among nursing home staff through the implementation of career ladders and promotion of skill development. It targets entry level Certified Nursing Assistants, who are not required to have a high school diploma in Massachusetts, and helps them to progress from the first to the second level and, in some cases, the second to the third and highest level of employment in the field. The state is also trying to increase the number of programs that provide a bridge from CNA training to Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) training. Some sites provide ABE and ESL training to workers who are not yet ready to participate in the career ladder, and the state is currently attempting to increase the number of such sites as well by making English language training a requirement in its requests for proposals. As the need for nursing assistants will increase with the aging of baby boomers, a similar program in Michigan would address a potential shortage of a much needed service while providing a viable career option for many unemployed or low-wage workers in the state.³⁷

As has been noted, although several community colleges in Michigan have implemented bridge and career pathway programs and there is a movement underway to increase the number of such programs, there is currently no state policy guiding or encouraging this process, nor are there any statewide programs as such. The State of Michigan can learn from the innovations from these community colleges, and from other states, as it formulates policy to build the skills of its workforce.

³⁴ *Breaking Through* is supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and managed by Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education.

³⁵ Women Employed et al., *ibid*.

³⁶ For more information, see the Ready-to-Work section of the KCTCS website at <http://www.kctcs.edu/readytowork>

³⁷ More information on the Massachusetts CNA program and other career pathway programs can be found in Amy-Ellen Duke, Karin Martinson, and Julie Strawn, *Wising Up: How Government Can Partner with Business to Increase Skills and Advance Low-Wage Workers*, Center for Law and Social Policy, April 2006.

Conclusion

Michigan's leaky educational pipeline needs repair. The state cannot afford to let a large number of its unskilled workers continue to leak from the various education and training systems and be left behind as the skill demands of employers advance. A strong adult education system that simultaneously meets both the needs of

businesses and low-skill workers is the best means to fixing a significant portion of the leaks. Such strength will come from an increased monetary investment by the State of Michigan, and from a willingness to design state policy that is informed by the success of local programs in the state and statewide programs in other states.

Adult Education Programs in Michigan, by County

County	Adult Basic Education (ABE)	High School Completion	GED	English as a Second Language (ESL)	English Literacy/ Civics	Literacy Council
Alcona	0	0	0	0	0	1
Alger	0	0	0	0	0	0
Allegan	2	6	5	2	0	0
Alpena	1	1	1	0	0	1
Antrim	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aranac	0	2	2	0	0	0
Baraga	0	2	1	0	0	0
Barry	1	1	1	0	0	1
Bay	0	3	3	0	0	1
Benzie	2	2	2	2	0	0
Berrien	4	4	8	2	0	2
Branch	1	0	1	1	1	1
Calhoun	2	0	2	2	2	1
Cass	2	2	2	1	0	0
Charlevoix	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cheboygan	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chippewa	0	2	4	0	0	0
Clare	2	2	1	0	0	2
Clinton	0	0	0	0	0	0
Crawford	1	0	1	0	0	1
Delta	1	1	1	0	0	0
Dickinson	0	3	3	0	0	0
Eaton	2	3	4	0	0	0
Emmet	0	0	0	0	0	0
Genesee	1	9	10	1	1	2
Gladwin	2	1	1	0	0	0
Gogebic	4	2	2	0	0	0
Grand Traverse	2	2	2	2	0	1
Gratiot	2	2	1	2	0	1
Hillsdale	0	1	1	0	0	1
Houghton	0	0	0	0	0	1
Huron	9	0	9	0	0	0
Ingham	2	2	3	4	4	1
Ionia	0	3	4	0	1	2
Iosco	0	0	0	0	0	1
Iron	0	0	0	0	0	0
Isabella	1	3	1	1	0	1
Jackson	1	4	3	0	0	1
Kalamazoo	3	5	5	1	3	1
Kalkaska	1	1	1	1	0	0
Kent	4	9	4	8	4	2
Keweenaw	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lake	1	1	1	0	0	0
Lapeer	3	3	3	3	0	0
Leelanau	0	1	0	0	0	0

Adult Education Programs in Michigan, by County

County	Adult Basic Education (ABE)	High School Completion	GED	English as a Second Language (ESL)	English Literacy/ Civics	Literacy Council
Lenawee	0	0	0	0	0	0
Livingston	0	3	3	2	0	0
Luce	0	1	1	0	0	0
Mackinac	0	0	0	0	0	0
Macomb	11	13	12	10	9	1
Manistee	4	4	4	4	0	2
Marquette	3	3	3	3	0	0
Mason	1	1	1	0	0	0
Mecosta	0	0	0	0	0	2
Menominee	2	2	2	0	0	0
Midland	5	4	4	5	2	0
Missaukee	0	0	0	0	0	0
Monroe	1	2	2	2	0	0
Montcalm	4	4	4	0	0	1
Montmorency	0	0	0	0	0	0
Muskegon	10	11	11	9	3	1
Newaygo	2	5	5	3	2	1
Oakland	13	15	12	17	12	1
Oceana	3	3	3	2	2	0
Ogemaw	0	0	0	0	0	1
Ontonagon	0	0	0	0	0	0
Osceola	0	2	2	0	0	0
Oscoda	1	0	1	0	0	1
Otsego	0	0	0	0	0	2
Ottawa	1	0	2	6	0	0
Presque Isle	0	0	0	0	0	0
Roscommon	2	2	2	0	0	2
Saginaw	0	5	0	1	1	1
Saint Clair	3	3	3	2	1	1
Saint Joseph	3	3	3	2	2	1
Sanilac	1	7	7	0	0	1
Schoolcraft	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shiawassee	1	5	3	0	0	1
Tuscola	0	2	0	0	0	1
VanBuren	3	4	4	2	2	0
Washtenaw	2	4	5	5	1	0
Wayne	15	12	12	11	4	9
Wexford	2	2	2	1	0	0
Statewide	1	0	0	1	1	0
Total	151	205	206	121	58	57

Source: Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, *Adult Education Programs in Alphabetical Order by County* (<http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd>)

Produced by Michigan League for Human Services

Educational Gains by Program Year

Educational Functioning Level of Participants ¹	2000-2001				2001-2002				2002-2003				2003-2004				2004-2005				2005-2006			
	Entering	Completing	State goal		Entering	Completing	State goal		Entering	Completing	State goal		Entering	Completing	State goal		Entering	Completing	State goal		Entering	Completing	State goal	
	#	#	%	%	#	#	%	%	#	#	%	%	#	#	%	%	#	#	%	%	#	#	%	%
<i>Adult Basic Education</i>																								
Beginning Literacy	2,816	348	12.4%	15%	4,437	617	13.9%	19%	4,797	813	16.9%	20%	3,119	600	19.2%	21%	2,449	519	21.2%	22%	2,541	467	18.4%	22%
Beginning Basic	4,514	641	14.2%	16%	5,169	1,099	21.3%	20%	7,214	1,406	19.5%	21%	6,383	1,317	20.6%	22%	5,255	1,212	23.1%	23%	5,333	1,056	19.8%	23%
Low Intermediate	4,332	767	17.7%	17%	4,818	1,403	29.1%	21%	7,547	1,829	24.2%	22%	7,723	1,623	21.0%	23%	6,398	1,624	25.4%	30%	5,813	1,584	27.2%	30%
High Intermediate	18,508	6,245	33.7%	18%	28,827	9,355	32.5%	22%	7,983	1,931	24.2%	23%	7,056	1,689	23.9%	24%	6,458	1,597	24.7%	33%	5,079	1,346	26.5%	34%
ABE Subtotal	30,170	8,001	26.5%		43,251	12,474	28.8%		27,541	5,979	21.7%		24,281	5,229	21.5%		20,560	4,952	24.1%		18,766	4,453	23.7%	
<i>Adult Secondary Education</i>																								
Low	3,625	750	20.7%	20%	5,067	1,577	31.1%	29%	16,272	1,428	8.8%	30%	6,002	1,944	32.4%	31%	1,794	525	29.3%	32%	1,470	463	31.5%	33%
High	6,176	2,738	44.3%	N/A	5,408	2,201	40.7%	N/A	5,180	2,042	39.4%	N/A	4,689	2,060	43.9%	N/A	1,571	519	33.0%	N/A	1,146	384	33.5%	N/A
ASE Subtotal	9,801	3,488	35.6%		10,475	3,778	36.1%		21,452	3,470	16.2%		10,691	4,004	37.5%		3,365	1,044	31.0%		2,616	847	32.4%	
<i>English as a Second Language</i>																								
Beginning Literacy	3,189	830	26.0%	15%	3,450	1,347	39.0%	19%	2,791	1,250	44.8%	27%	1,885	872	46.3%	28%	1,336	697	52.2%	46%	1,708	665	38.9%	47%
Beginning	6,058	1,319	21.8%	16%	8,002	2,637	33.0%	20%	8,070	2,894	35.9%	23%	4,572	2,118	46.3%	24%	3,647	1,816	49.8%	37%	3,184	1,663	52.2%	46%
Intermediate Low	1,753	557	31.8%	19%	3,591	1,631	45.4%	23%	3,782	1,686	44.6%	34%	2,269	1,240	54.6%	35%	1,947	1,147	58.9%	45%	2,388	1,198	50.2%	55%
Intermediate High	2,460	723	29.4%	20%	3,589	1,277	35.6%	24%	3,704	1,452	39.2%	30%	2,480	1,298	52.3%	31%	1,934	996	51.5%	40%	1,598	825	51.6%	52%
Low Advanced	1,681	246	14.6%	18%	2,722	503	18.5%	22%	2,891	561	19.4%	23%	1,688	392	23.2%	24%	1,767	485	27.4%	25%	1,564	478	30.6%	25%
High Advanced	889	307	34.5%	18%	908	275	30.3%	22%	662	204	30.8%	23%	407	127	31.2%	24%	212	73	34.4%	32%	200	100	50.0%	33%
ESL Subtotal	16,030	3,982	24.8%		22,262	7,670	34.5%		21,900	8,047	36.7%		13,301	6,047	45.5%		10,843	5,214	48.1%		10,642	4,929	46.3%	
Total	56,001	15,471	27.6%		75,988	23,922	31.5%		70,893	17,496	24.7%		48,273	15,280	31.7%		34,768	11,210	32.2%		32,024	10,229	31.9%	

Core Indicators	2000-2001		2001-2002		2002-2003		2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	Percentage	State Goal	Percentage	State Goal	Percentage	State Goal	Percentage	State Goal	Percentage	State Goal	Percentage	State Goal
Placement in Postsecondary Education or Job Training	--	--	35.5%	30%	51.0%	31%	50%	32%	49.40%	40%	Unavailable	46% (proposed)
Placement in Unsubsidized Employment	--	--	53.6%	32%	56.9%	34%	45%	36%	58.33%	40%	Unavailable	43% (proposed)
Retention in Unsubsidized Employment	--	--	48.5%	50%	46.7%	53%	56%	56%	31.90%	40%	Unavailable	43% (proposed)

¹A participant is an adult who receives at least 12 hours of instruction. Work-based project learners are not included.
 Sources: Data--Michigan Adult Education Reporting System (MAERS) data from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth Office of Adult Education; Goals--Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Amendment and One-Year Extension to the Michigan Adult Education State Plan, FY 2006 – FY 2007.
 Chart produced by Michigan League for Human Services

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