



Fact Sheet: Increasing the Basic Skills of Michigan's Workers

In order for Michigan's economy to grow and thrive, we must have a workforce that is prepared for jobs in the knowledge-based economy. Even with initiatives such as No Worker Left Behind, which has helped more than 100,000 workers enter into occupational training or obtain an associate's or bachelor's degree, there are many Michigan adults who are not yet prepared to enter into such training due to low skill attainment.

The Untapped Human Capital

It is estimated that one out of every three working-age Michigan adults, or 1.7 million people, lack the basic skills or credentials needed to secure a family sustaining job. Of these, approximately 692,000 do not have a GED or high school diploma. In addition:

- In 2003, 44 percent of Michigan residents had low or very low literacy.
- Just over 9 percent of Michigan adults aged 25-54 do not have a high school diploma.
- Community colleges estimate that at least 60 percent of all entering students need remedial courses before enrolling in college-level courses.
- Thirty two percent of adults aged 18-64 have an associate's degree or higher, ranking Michigan 30th among the states.
- Of the approximately 28,000 individuals who participated in adult basic education programs in the 2008-2009 program year, only 40 percent completed or improved their educational functioning level.
- The completion rate of any adult basic education program rarely exceeds 50 percent.

These troubling statistics show the amount of human capital Michigan has but cannot utilize due to low skill attainment. In order to make use of

these resources, Michigan must continue to take steps to transform its adult learning infrastructure to ensure Michigan residents can and will obtain employment in an ever changing, knowledge-based economy.

Benefits of an Educated Workforce

Not only does higher educational attainment equal higher earnings and lower rates of poverty and unemployment for workers, it also increases levels of civic engagement and fiscal contribution. A better-educated workforce also increases the speed with which jobs are created as employers know there is talent available to fill positions.

The Needed Transformation

Michigan needs to reduce the number of workers lacking the basic skills needed to secure family-sustaining employment. To accomplish this goal, in 2008 a diverse group of representatives from community colleges, literacy councils, adult education programs, Michigan Works! agencies, community-based organizations, state government, and the advocacy community came together to examine the state's adult learning system.

Following a series of meetings and information-gathering sessions throughout the state, these recommendations were put forth and adopted by the Council for Labor and Economic Growth, the

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state's federally mandated Workforce Investment Board:

- Transform Michigan's adult learning system to create a unified, strategic approach to increasing levels of basic skills and education and training beyond high school.
- Include a diverse mix of partners in delivering services to adult learners to help meet their broad needs.
- Make clear connections between learning and the promise of good jobs.
- Use accelerated learning and develop clear transitions between courses and programs that will help students reach their career goals.
- Increase access to adult learning programs.
- Utilize all funding sources that will allow for adult learning and make it a priority.
- Measure student outcomes at the regional level and hold regional partnerships accountable for success.
- Work with a diverse coalition to communicate the urgent need to improve adult basic skills.

Current Efforts

Since the above recommendations were put forth and adopted, there has been progress, but it has been slow. To date, an emphasis has been placed on helping communities work together through the creation of regional partnerships. Also, work has begun towards improving the skills of low-skilled workers more quickly by changing the way actual adult education programs work. This is being done by accelerating the time required to complete programs and making classroom work relevant to the students' area of study.

Overall, Michigan needs to have a strong workforce if the state is to attract employers, decrease its unemployment rate, and increase earnings of Michigan residents. The only way to do this is to ensure that all Michigan workers obtain training and skills beyond that of high school to prepare them for the jobs of the future.

For a detailed discussion of this work and the above recommendations, please see the Adult Learning Work Group report: Transforming Michigan's Adult Learning Infrastructure available at: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdcd/MI_Adult_Learning_Report_288772_7.pdf