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Going for Gold:

Setting the Standard for Michigan Achievement

2026 STATE OF MICHIGAN REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MICHIGAN'S PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS BOTH A RESPONSIBILITY AND AN EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY TO ENSURE THAT EVERY STUDENT HAS ACCESS TO THE EDUCATION, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT NEEDED TO THRIVE.

Public education can expand opportunity, strengthen communities, and prepare young people to participate fully in our economy and shared civic life. Michigan, therefore, should aim to become a national leader in educational excellence and equity — one where every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background.

That is what it means to **go for gold**.

Michigan has made important progress toward that goal. Over the past several years, state leaders have increased investments in public education, strengthened literacy policy, expanded college affordability, and invested in student supports. Yet student outcomes remain uneven, post-pandemic academic recovery is slow, and longstanding disparities in educational opportunity still persist.

In EdTrust-Midwest's latest State of Michigan Education report, "Going for Gold: Setting the Standard for Michigan Achievement," we examine Michigan's education system across five major indicators: **Academic Outcomes, College Readiness and Success, Student Well-Being, Opportunity to Learn, and Fair Funding.** Through new analyses, we examine where the state stands today, whether outcomes and opportunities have improved over time, and if that progress is reaching students equitably.

The findings reveal that Michigan is making meaningful progress in several important areas, but overall performance remains low, and progress remains too uneven, particularly for students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and English learners.



Among the report's major findings and cited research:

- **Michigan remains behind in academic achievement**
  - The 2026 Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) scores revealed that only 38.2% of third graders were proficient in reading, and just one-third of seventh graders were proficient in math.
  - Outcomes were even lower for students of color, students with disabilities, students from low-income backgrounds, and English learners. Only 25% of students from low-income backgrounds were proficient in third grade reading and 19% in seventh-grade math. Fewer than one in four English learners were proficient in third-grade reading, while just 12% were proficient in seventh-grade math. Students with disabilities had the lowest proficiency rates of all student groups in both subjects — underscoring the urgent need for stronger, more equitable educational supports.

- **Disparities begin early**
  - More than half of Michigan's young children (ages three and four) are not enrolled in school, and the percentage of young students not in school is far higher for children of color.[1]

- **Too few Michigan graduates are making the transition to college**
  - Just over half — only 54.6% — of Michigan public high school graduates enrolled in college within six months of graduation in 2025.
  - Immediate college enrollment has declined since 2020 across nearly every student group, with students from low-income backgrounds enrolled at rates of 23.6 percentage points below their higher-income peers. The enrollment rate for students of color was 8.4 percentage points lower than white students.

- **Too many Michigan students lack access to the conditions and supports they need to thrive**
  - Michigan's 2026 statewide student-to-counselor ratio is approximately 565 students per counselor — more than double the ratio recommended by American School Counselor Association and higher than the national average in 2025 (372:1).[2] And there are wide disparities. The student-to-counselor ratio is 339 students higher in schools with the highest concentration of poverty.
  - Chronic absenteeism statewide is high at 27.9%, which is 5.3 percentage points higher than the national average (22.6%).[3] The state has vast disparities among school districts. Students of color experienced chronic absenteeism rates approximately 18 percentage points higher than white students, while students from low-income backgrounds experienced rates nearly 23 percentage points higher than their higher-income peers.

- **Michigan's teacher workforce does not reflect the racial diversity of its students; students who are underserved are more likely to have less-experienced teachers**
  - In 2026, students of color made up 38% of the student population, but teachers of color only made up 13% of the teacher workforce. Although this representation gap has narrowed modestly since 2021, substantial disparities remain in districts with higher concentrations of poverty and where students of color make up more than half of enrollment.
  - High-poverty schools have nearly twice the amount of inexperienced teachers than their more affluent counterparts (29.1% vs. 12.4%).

- **Michigan has made progress toward a more equitable school funding system, but major gaps remain**
  - Districts serving the highest concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds received approximately $1,728 less per pupil in state and local funding in 2024 than districts serving the lowest concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds.

- **Targeted funding for students with the greatest needs falls below what research recommends and what is written in state law**
  - Funding for students from low-income backgrounds has increased since 2023, before the Opportunity Index was enacted; however, current estimates indicate that the Opportunity Index is only funded at just over half the levels written in state law. Fully funding the Opportunity Index, which drives more state funding to districts based on concentration of poverty, would require investing approximately $1.31 billion more.
  - Funding for English learners remains below the weighted levels established in state statute and is far below levels recommended by research.[4]
  - Michigan is approximately $1.74 billion below what research states is necessary to fund the needs of students with disabilities.

Across these findings, **equity remains one of Michigan's greatest challenges.** Statewide averages frequently conceal substantial differences in the opportunities available to students. Across academic achievement, attendance, access to experienced teachers, college enrollment, and school funding, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds too often have less access to the opportunities and resources associated with educational success.

> These disparities do not reflect differences in students' potential. They reflect longstanding differences in access to educational opportunities and resources. Michigan cannot become a gold-standard education state while those gaps persist.

At the same time, the data provides optimism. Our report found that recent progress demonstrates what is possible when Michigan invests and sustains attention. Over the past five years,

- Michigan has improved high school graduation rates
- The state has expanded Advanced Placement (AP) participation and dual enrollment participation
- Michigan has increased college affordability and improved access to school counselors

Michigan does not have to start from scratch. Recent investments and evidence-backed reforms — from more equitable school funding and evidence-based literacy policies to expanded college affordability and greater attention to student mental health and well-being — provide a foundation on which the state can build a more equitable future for our students.

The task for Michigan's leaders is therefore twofold: protect the progress Michigan has made and accelerate action in districts where students need the most supports. To accomplish this mission, we provide five policy priorities to advance outcomes for all Michigan students:

1. Protect and Sustain Fair Funding Investments in Public Education

Michigan should build on recent progress toward a more student-centered funding system by increasing investments for students with the greatest needs, including students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and students in rural and geographically isolated communities. Michigan must also reform its approach to special education funding and protect public dollars for public schools.

2. Strengthen Evidence-Based Efforts to Improve Literacy

Improving literacy and reading outcomes requires time, consistency, and strong implementation. Michigan should expand evidence-based literacy reforms while ensuring that educator training, high-quality instructional materials, literacy coaches, aligned interventions, and other supports reach the students and schools that need them most. State leaders should transparently track implementation and outcomes and respond when reforms are not reaching students equitably or producing the intended results.

3. Create Supportive and Well-Staffed School Environments for All Students

Students cannot benefit fully from rigorous instruction if they are not consistently present, engaged, safe, and supported at school. Michigan should strengthen the educator and school counselor workforce through investing in recruitment, retention, compensation, and diversity. The state should also prioritize approaches that strengthen students' connections to school.

4. Build Equitable Pathways to Postsecondary Opportunity

Making college more affordable is essential, but affordability alone is not enough. Michigan must ensure that students are prepared and supported to take advantage of postsecondary opportunities by expanding equitable access to advanced coursework, advising, and opportunities to earn college credit in high school. That includes taking stronger steps to identify students with the potential to succeed in advanced courses rather than waiting for students to find those opportunities themselves.

5. Make Transparency and Accountability a Governing Principle

Michigan cannot improve what it cannot see. Families, educators, policymakers, advocates, and the public need timely, accessible, and disaggregated information about student outcomes, educational opportunities, and how funds are being used. Michigan should strengthen its state data infrastructure, improve school-level fiscal transparency, and safeguard critical education and civil rights data as the federal role in education continues to change. Making data technically public is not enough; Michigan must make transparency usable.

These priorities are deeply connected. Adequate and equitable funding provides the foundation, but dollars alone will not transform student outcomes. Students also need strong instruction, skilled and supported educators, safe and welcoming schools, rigorous pathways into college and careers, and a system capable of determining whether opportunities are reaching the students they intend to serve.

As a new governor and legislature prepare to lead the state, Michigan has an opportunity to raise the bar for what every student should be able to expect from their public education system and become a national leader in educational excellence and equity. That will require sustained commitment, deliberate policy choices, and the willingness to act on what the data reveals.

Michigan students are every bit as capable of achieving at the highest levels as their peers anywhere in the country.

> **Going for gold means setting a standard worthy of that potential — and then building the policies, investments, systems, and accountability necessary to meet it.**

Michigan has made progress. Now its leaders must protect that progress, confront the inequities that remain, and accelerate the work ahead.

Setting the Standard for Michigan Achievement



"...[T]he United States made an important promise to its students: 'All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost.' That promise is rooted in a belief that public education is central to a flourishing future and a cornerstone of our economy, our democracy, and our civic life. It is time we deliver that promise to every Black student. Every Latino student. Every student from a low-income background. Every multilingual learner. Every student with disabilities. It's time we deliver the promise to every underserved student who is stymied by a lack of resources and opportunities. It is time to bring the promise to life." — DENISE FORTE, EDTRUST PRESIDENT AND CEO[5]

This year, as the U.S. marked its 250th anniversary, it is worth reflecting on how dramatically the nation's vision for public education has evolved. At our nation's founding, educational opportunities were largely reserved for those with privilege. Access to schooling was determined by race, wealth, gender, disability, language, or geography. For generations, many children were excluded from educational opportunities through law, policy, or practice.

Over time and through extraordinary advocacy efforts, landmark court decisions, civil rights movements, and public investments, the promise of public education expanded. Our nation gradually dismantled many legal barriers to a quality education. Yet, these hard-fought victories have not always translated into equitable opportunity or outcomes. Differences in school funding, educational resources, and student experiences continue to shape what many children can access and achieve.

As access to education expanded, so too, did the role of public schools. Today, public schools are tasked with educating every student who walks through their doors and providing each child with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities needed to succeed. That responsibility is what makes public education so powerful. Public education is a public good, and it is one that has the power to expand opportunities, strengthen communities, and prepare young people to participate in our shared democracy.

Michigan reflects both the remarkable progress and the unfinished work of that national story. Over the past several decades, our state leaders have expanded educational opportunity through school finance reforms, accountability systems, early literacy initiatives, and investments in student supports. At the same time, Michigan continues to face longstanding challenges in academic achievement, equitable access to educational resources, and persistent disparities that limit student success.

Higher Expectations Require a Clearer Standard

Today's decisions will shape Michigan's next generation of students. Understanding where the state stands and whether recent investments are translating into better opportunities and stronger outcomes is essential for ensuring that every child has access to an excellent public education.

Fulfilling that promise requires not only commitment, but also high expectations. If we believe every student can achieve, then we must also define the opportunities and outcomes that every student deserves. High standards are not about assigning blame to schools, educators, students, or families. Instead, they reflect a belief that Michigan can build an education system capable of providing every student with an excellent and equitable education.

That belief is the foundation of this year's report theme, "setting the standard for Michigan achievement." Progress matters, but progress alone is not enough. This report asks a key question: **What would it take for Michigan to become a national leader in educational opportunity and achievement?** Setting the standard for Michigan achievement reflects that ambition.

Schools cannot tackle these issues alone. Student outcomes are shaped by many factors beyond the classroom, including poverty, housing stability, healthcare access, transportation, community conditions, federal changes and threats, and other structural challenges. Schools cannot solve these issues alone, nor should educational success be interpreted as the sole responsibility of educators. However, education systems do have a responsibility to reduce barriers where possible, direct resources to students with the greatest needs, and ensure that existing inequities are not reinforced within our schools.

Why this Moment Matters

This context is especially important as Michigan continues to recover from the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past several years, students, educators, and communities have worked to rebuild learning, restore opportunity, and reconnect students to school. These efforts persist in the face of attacks against our public schools at the federal level, including the dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education, pulling back on hard-fought opportunities to ensure all students have access to public education, and federal guidance letters that undermine students' civil rights.

While many outcomes remain below where we want them to be, the data reveal meaningful signs of progress compared with five years ago. In some areas, Michigan has experienced academic gains similar to those seen nationally — a reminder that our students and educators are resilient, and that sustained improvement is possible.

This report is grounded in both urgency and optimism. At EdTrust-Midwest, we both recognize the significant challenges ahead but will also maintain high expectations for Michigan's students. Excellence and equity are not competing goals; they are inseparable. By defining what a gold-standard education system should provide and measuring our progress toward that vision, we hope to inform policy, inspire action, and help ensure that every Michigan student has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The promise of public education has always been larger than providing access to a classroom. It is the promise that every child — regardless of race, income, geography, language, or disability — can develop their talents, pursue their aspirations, and contribute to their communities. Setting the standard for Michigan achievement is ultimately about measuring how close Michigan is to fulfilling that promise — and identifying what must come next to ensure every student can thrive.

How our State of Michigan Education Report Has Evolved

Rather than measuring success solely against Michigan's past performance or national averages, this report defines a gold standard for educational opportunity and outcomes and evaluates how close Michigan is to becoming a national leader in student outcomes while closing persistent equity gaps.

To support that vision, EdTrust-Midwest has redesigned our annual State of Michigan report in three important ways. First, we organized Michigan's educational landscape around five core indicators, which we call the Opportunity Five. Together, these indicators recognize that no single test score, rate, or national ranking can fully describe the health of an education system. Instead, multiple research-supported measures across the Opportunity Five provide a more comprehensive and transparent picture of educational opportunity and outcomes in Michigan.

Each indicator represents a critical part of Michigan's route to a gold standard:

- **Academic Outcomes:** Are Michigan students mastering the knowledge and skills they need — and is achievement improving equitably?
- **College Readiness and Success:** Are Mchigan students prepared and supported to access, afford, and complete the postsecondary pathway of their choice?
- **Student Well-Being:** Do Michigan students have the support and conditions they need to attend, engage, and thrive in school?
- **Opportunity to Learn:** Does every Michigan student have access to learning opportunities and effective educators that are necessary to succeed?
- **Fair Funding:** Does Michigan provide every district with adequate and equitable funding resources and does the state provide more resources to support students with greater needs?

Second, we updated the measures used to assess Michigan's progress. We have revised and added new research-based sub-measures that draw on more regularly updated state and national datasets, when possible. Across the five indicators, the report now examines 23 sub-measures of educational opportunity and outcomes.

Third, the report goes beyond highlighting a single statewide average, national ranking, or equity disparity. For each sub-measure, we examine where Michigan stands today, whether conditions have improved over the past five years, and whether progress and opportunities are being shared equitably. With that information, we assess how close Michigan is to the standard we should expect for every student and where must the state make greater progress to get there.

This report defines a gold standard for educational opportunity and outcomes and evaluates how close Michigan is to becoming a national leader in student outcomes while closing persistent equity gaps.

How We Measure Excellence

Statewide averages are important, but they do not tell the whole story. An education system can improve overall while leaving some groups of students behind. For that reason, EdTrust-Midwest considers both statewide performance and whether opportunities and outcomes are shared equitably. Where data allow, each sub-measure examines:

1.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE:
How is Michigan performing relative to the strongest defensible benchmark?

2.

CHANGE OVER TIME:
Has performance improved for all students, students of color, and students from low-income backgrounds over the past five years?

3.

RACIAL AND INCOME EQUITY:
Are there meaningful differences in opportunities or outcomes between students of color and white students and between students from low-income backgrounds and their more affluent peers?

The framework treats equity as a core measure of educational quality — not as a separate or secondary consideration. The strongest results occur when outcomes improve overall, underserved students experience meaningful gains, and gaps narrow because the students who have been least well served are advancing. These comparisons describe differences in access and outcomes and help identify where policies, resources, and educational systems are not yet delivering on Michigan's commitment to all students.

How do you read the labels in this report?

EdTrust-Midwest analyzed the most recent available state and national data and evaluated each sub-measure across up to six data points. Using the report rubric, each data point receives one to four points. Then, all available points are averaged for each sub-measure. The resulting average score determines the overall status label for that sub-measure. These scores provide a structured way to assess Michigan's performance, progress, and equity, but no set of data points can tell the complete story. Data and our understanding of it are complex and continually evolving; therefore, the findings throughout this report should be interpreted alongside the broader policy, historical, and educational context in which they were produced.

KEY TO READ THE SUB-MEASURES

★ **Michigan Meets or is Very Near the Ultimate Aspiration Across the Dimensions Assessed**

● **Results Demonstrate Meaningful Progress, With Some Limitations or Inequities Remaining**

● **Results Are Mixed: Meaningful Strengths or Progress Coexist with Substantial Concerns**

● **Results Are Substantially Below Expectations, Requiring Urgent Attention and Sustained Action**

Going for Gold at a Glance: Advocating for Excellence and Equity

A roadmap to Michigan's educational priorities, highlighting where the state stands today and the actions needed to move every student closer to the gold standard.

Indicator	Why It Matters	What We Found	The Path to Gold
Academic Outcomes	Strong academic achievement opens doors to college, careers, and lifelong success.	Michigan remains far from being a national leader in academic achievement. The state ranks 44th in fourth grade reading and 33rd in eighth-grade math. 2026 M-STEP scores show that only 38.2% of third graders were proficient in reading, and just one-third of seventh graders were proficient in math — with even lower outcomes among underserved students. At the same time, an 84% graduation rate and recent gains among some student groups demonstrate that progress is possible.	Expand and accelerate evidence-based literacy reforms; strengthen math instruction; expand access to high-impact academic supports; and transparently track whether recovery is reaching the students who need the most support.
College Readiness & Success	Every student deserves meaningful opportunities to prepare for and succeed after high school.	Michigan has made progress expanding post-secondary opportunity, including college affordability and expanding access to AP and dual enrollment. Yet, participation in AP and dual enrollment remains too low, and previous EdTrust-Midwest research has found that students of color are under-represented in these courses.[6] These challenges extend into the transition to college: Only 54.6% of graduates immediately enrolled in college in 2025, continuing a decline in college enrollment.	Expand equitable access to AP, dual enrollment, and college advising; identify students with potential for advanced coursework; strengthen FAFSA completion; and protect investments that make college affordable.
Student Well-Being	Students learn best when they are present, supported, safe, and connected to school.	Too many students remain disconnected from the support that helps them thrive. Chronic absenteeism remains high at 27.9%, while Michigan has roughly 565 students for every school counselor. This is more than twice the recommended 250:1 ratio.	Strengthen the school counselor and student-support workforce; address barriers to attendance; invest in mental health and student supports; and prioritize approaches that strengthen students' connection to school.

Indicator *Continued*	Why It Matters *Continued*	What We Found *Continued*	The Path to Gold *Continued*
Opportunity to Learn	Students are best served when their school has access to experienced educators, diverse teachers, and high-quality early learning.	Access to learning and effective and supportive educational environments remain uneven. More than half of young children are not enrolled in school; starting teacher salaries remain relatively low compared to other states in the Midwest. Michigan's teacher workforce does not reflect the racial diversity of its students: the share of students of color is 25.1 percentage points higher than the share of teachers of color.	Expand access to high-quality preschool, strengthen teacher recruitment and retention, improve teacher compensation, and cultivate a diverse teacher workforce.
Fair Funding	An equitable education system provides schools with the resources necessary to meet the different needs of their students.	Michigan has invested more, but its funding system is not yet adequate or equitable. Districts serving the highest concentrations of poverty receive about $1,728 less per pupil in state and local funding than districts serving the lowest concentrations. And Michigan remains billions short of meeting the needs of students with the greatest needs: Opportunity Index funding for students from low-income backgrounds is about $1.31 billion below the level called for in state law, funding for English learners remains well below statutory and leading-state levels, and special education funding is about $1.74 billion below what research recommends.	Fully fund targeted weights for students with greater needs by 2030, including through the Opportunity Index and greater investments for English learners; reform special education funding; protect progress toward a more equitable funding system; and make it easier to track whether resources actually reach the students for whom they were intended.



INDICATOR 1

Academic Outcomes

Are Michigan students mastering the knowledge and skills they need — and is achievement improving equitably?

Academic Outcomes

Are Michigan students mastering the knowledge and skills they need — and is achievement improving equitably?

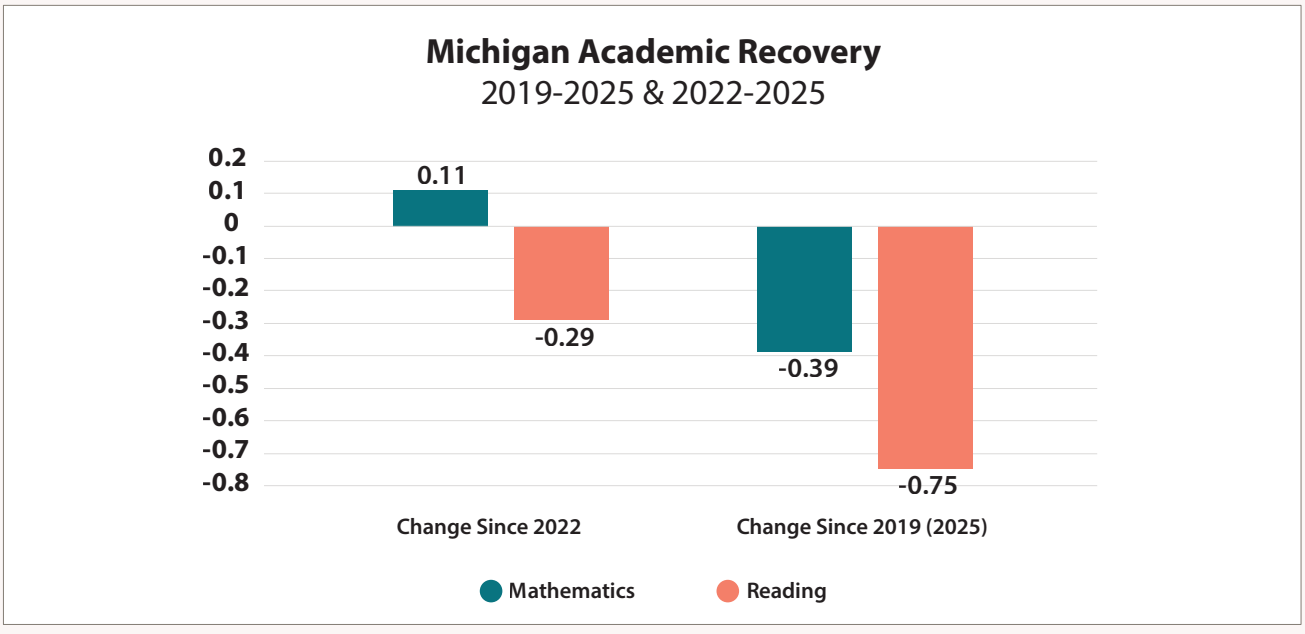
Improving academic outcomes for all students remains one of Michigan's most urgent and persistent educational challenges. For years, Michigan has trailed many other states in key measures of reading and mathematics achievement, while opportunity gaps by race and family income have persisted. These challenges predate the COVID-19 pandemic, but pandemic disruptions intensified barriers already affecting students and schools. Michigan's task, therefore, is not simply to recover what was lost after 2019. It is to accelerate learning while addressing longstanding weaknesses in achievement and persistent inequities.

Michigan's Post-Pandemic Recovery Is Uneven

Michigan's students, educators, and public schools have worked through extraordinary conditions, including interrupted instruction, economic instability, staffing pressures, and persistently high rates of student absence. Schools have made important recovery efforts, but the pace of recovery has varied by subject and across communities.

From 2022 through 2025, Michigan made more progress in mathematics than in reading, yet student achievement remained below pre-pandemic levels in both subjects.[7] The academic recovery chart shows both sides of Michigan's recovery: "Change Since 2022" captures how much achievement has improved or declined during the recovery period, while "Change Since 2019" shows how far current achievement remains below pre-pandemic performance levels. In mathematics, Michigan ranked 25th among 38 states in academic growth. While Michigan students slightly improved in math achievement since 2022, the state has not recovered.

Reading presents a more concerning trajectory: Michigan ranked 32nd among 35 states in academic growth, and reading achievement has been on a persistent decline since both 2019 and 2022.[8]



Source: Education Scorecard, 2026

Growth and Proficiency Tell Different Parts of the Story

Understanding Michigan's academic trajectory requires looking beyond a single test score or proficiency rate. Proficiency shows whether students have demonstrated mastery of grade-level standards at a particular point in time. Growth shows how much academic progress students make over time. Michigan needs to accelerate progress on both measures.

Michigan students are learning at about the same pace as students nationally, but that pace is not fast enough to close existing achievement gaps. Consider that between 2022 and 2025, Michigan students gained an average of approximately 0.97 grade-level equivalents per year across reading and mathematics, compared with approximately 0.96 nationally.[9] Despite students gaining about one year of learning per year, this is not enough to make up lost ground.

Strong growth should be recognized, particularly when schools are accelerating learning for students who started further behind. But growth without eventual mastery of grade-level content is not the gold standard. Likewise, relatively high proficiency without meaningful growth may partly reflect advantages students accumulated before entering their current school. Going for gold requires both: accelerating how much students learn each year while ensuring that those gains ultimately translate into more students reaching and exceeding grade-level expectations.

With this context in mind, this section examines five sub-measures:

01 National NAEP results in fourth grade reading

02 National NAEP results in eighth grade mathematics

03 Statewide M-STEP results in third grade reading

04 Statewide M-STEP results in seventh grade mathematics

05 Statewide high school graduation rates

Strong growth should be recognized, particularly when schools are accelerating learning for students who started further behind. But growth without eventual mastery of grade-level content is not the gold standard.

State Actions & What to Watch Going Forward

Early Literacy

Michigan has made significant investments to strengthen literacy instruction through the Reading for All initiative, expanded high-impact tutoring, literacy coaching, grants to purchase high-quality curriculum and professional development, mandatory Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) professional learning,[10] and improved dyslexia screening and supports.[11] Literacy funding has largely been allocated toward literacy coaches and professional development for early literacy.[12] Together, these efforts represent one of the state's most comprehensive literacy strategies in recent years.

The next phase should focus on implementation and accountability. Policymakers should monitor whether the requirements and supports — created through Reading for All — translate into meaningful change across the state. This looks like consistent implementation of evidence-based literacy practices, bolstered by ongoing coaching, and identifying student needs early so they can equitably access aligned, effective interventions. Public reporting should include both implementation and student outcome data to determine whether these investments are improving reading achievement and narrowing opportunity gaps.

Numeracy

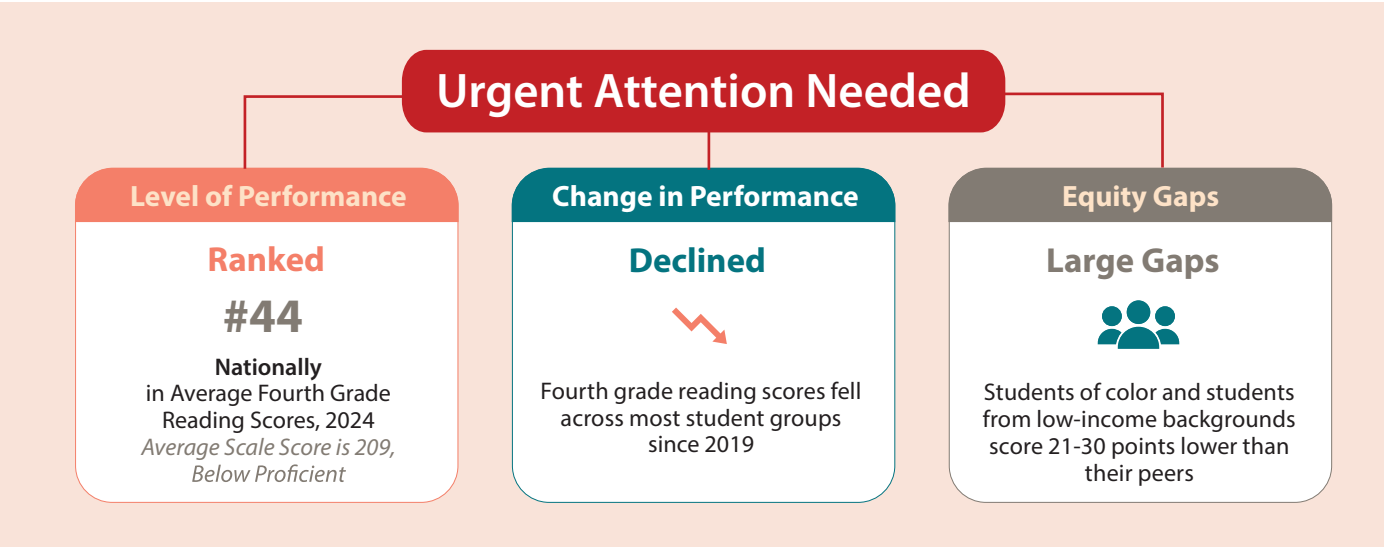
Michigan has expanded science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, career and technical education, and workforce development opportunities, but these initiatives primarily support students after they enter advanced coursework rather than strengthening foundational mathematics learning. In 2026, the Michigan Department of Education introduced the Michigan Mathematics Framework, an interactive resource designed to help educators translate state standards into high-quality curriculum and instructional practices and resources, reflecting the department's long-term commitment to improving mathematics achievement and ensuring student success across the state.[13] As the framework moves toward statewide implementation, Michigan should provide sustained professional learning and technical assistance and ensure that districts have access to high-quality instructional materials.

Future numeracy efforts should continue to strengthen K-8 mathematics, particularly eighth grade math, through high-quality instruction, educator development, timely interventions, and expanded access to advanced coursework. The state should also monitor both mathematics achievement and participation in gateway courses, such as Algebra I by eighth or ninth grade, to ensure that improved outcomes translate into expanded opportunities for historically underserved students.

High School Graduation

Michigan has invested in several initiatives that may contribute to continued improvements in graduation rates, including early literacy, high-impact tutoring, college and career readiness programs, career and technical education, dual enrollment, and student mental health supports. Going forward, policymakers should continue these investments and monitor both overall graduation rates and persistent disparities across student groups. Continued improvement will depend on strengthening the earlier indicators that predict graduation — including third grade reading, middle school mathematics, chronic absenteeism, access to effective educators, and college- and career-readiness opportunities — recognizing that graduation reflects students' cumulative educational experiences across the P-12 pipeline.

Fourth Grade Reading – NAEP



What is this measure?

Reading proficiency is a telling indicator of whether Michigan's students are being prepared for success. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative assessment that provides for long-term comparisons of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. The assessment is given every two years and provides necessary information about student performance and growth for several indicators, including fourth grade reading.

Why does this measure matter?

Reading is a particularly important milestone.[14] As students enter upper elementary grades and beyond, reading becomes the foundation for success across nearly every academic subject. Moreover, students who have not developed strong foundational literacy skills by fourth grade often struggle to access increasingly complex content, making it more difficult to catch up academically over time.[15]

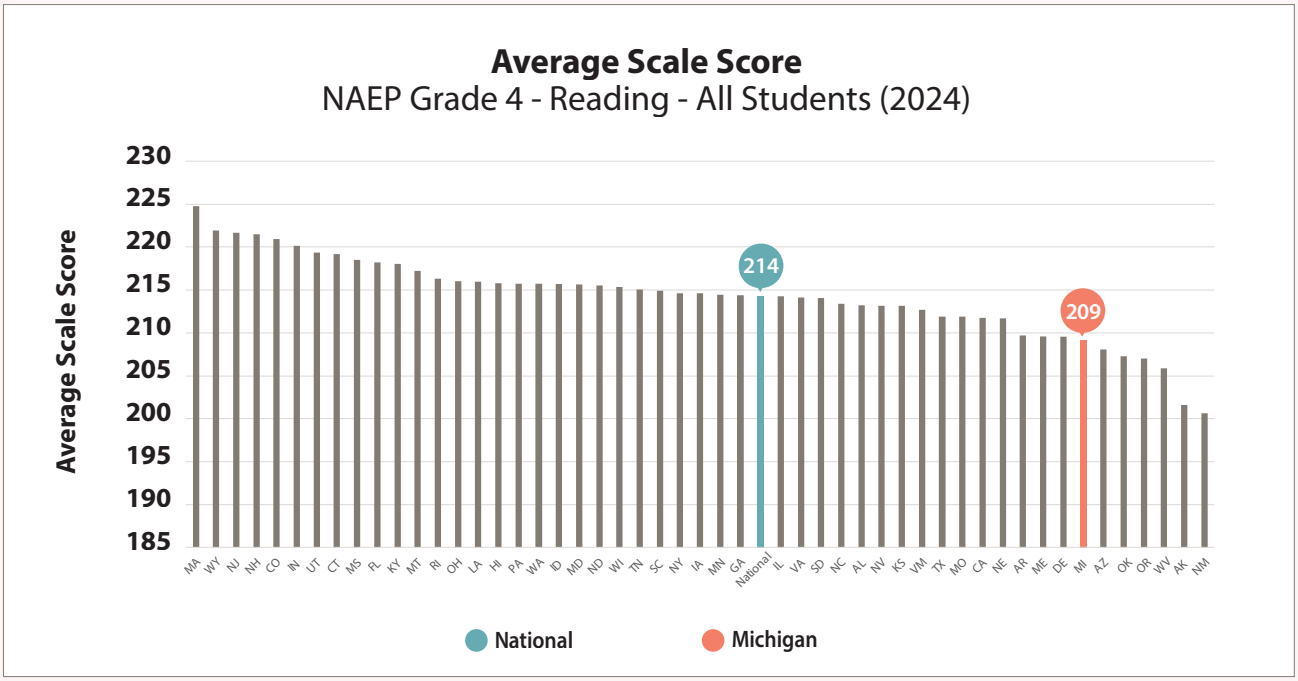
Michigan must drastically improve its early literacy achievement for all students and close the opportunity gaps that keep far too many children from low-income backgrounds and students of color from fulfilling their potential.

Where does Michigan stand?

Going for gold in literacy reflects EdTrust-Midwest's belief that every student can demonstrate proficiency, and Michigan can become a national leader in early literacy. The gold standard is for Michigan to become a top state in reading proficiency.

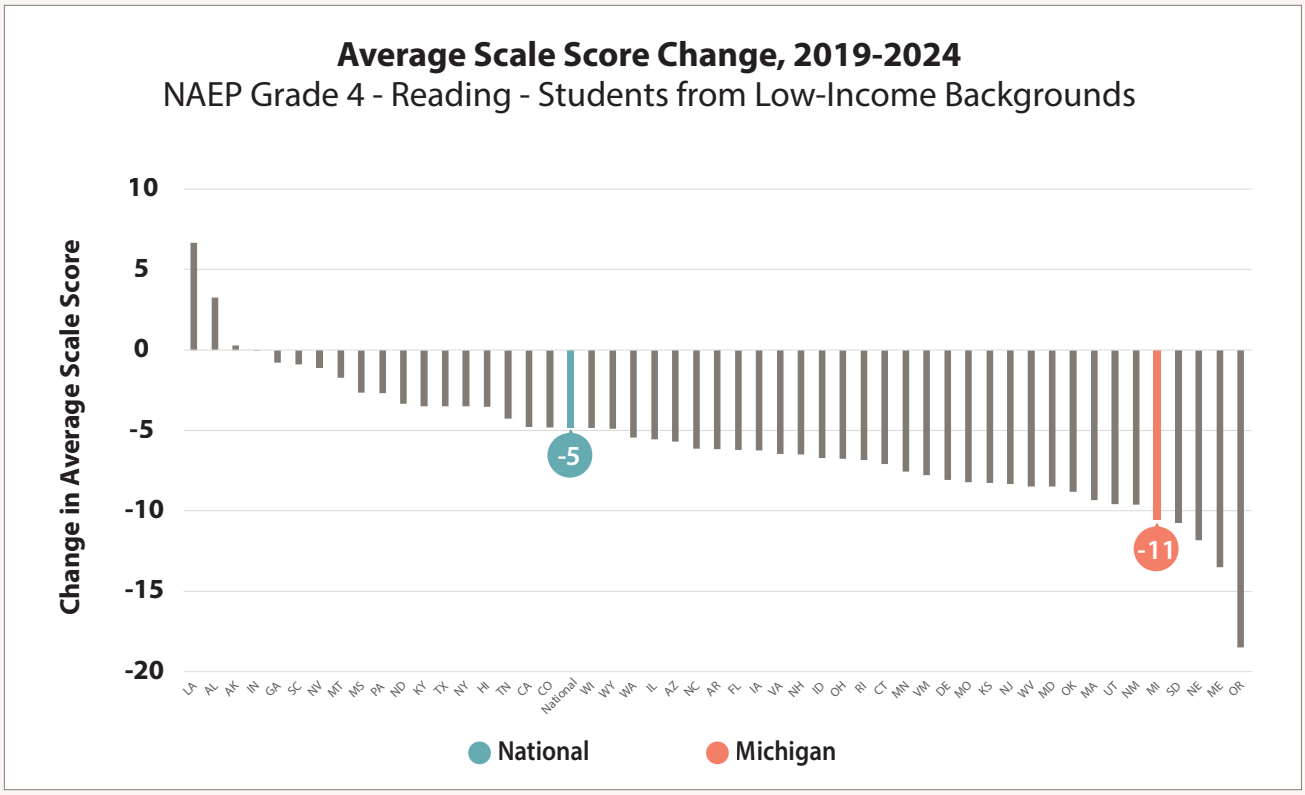
Michigan is ranked 44th in average fourth grade NAEP reading performance. With an average scale score of 209, Michigan is just one point above NAEP's basic achievement level threshold. At the basic level, fourth graders demonstrate skills such as locating and recalling specific information, identifying explicitly stated relationships, making simple inferences and interpretations, evaluating summaries, and demonstrating understanding of vocabulary in context. Michigan's average score falling near the bottom of the basic range signals that many students have not yet demonstrated the stronger comprehension, interpretation, and application of knowledge reflected at the proficient level and above.[16]

Michigan's reading trends over time are equally concerning. Between 2019 and 2024, NAEP reading performance declined for many student groups, suggesting that the state's literacy challenges extend beyond a single population and reflect broader disruptions in student learning. Large disparities are also present within Michigan's averaged fourth grade NAEP reading scores. **Students of color scored approximately 24 points below white students, while students from low-income backgrounds scored roughly 30 points below their higher-income peers. English learners scored 19 points lower than their native English-speaking peers. These differences represent substantial inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes.** From 2019 to 2024, Michigan's average scale score dropped 11 points.



Source: NCES, NAEP Data | Note: Proficient Scale Score = 238; Basic Scale Score = 208

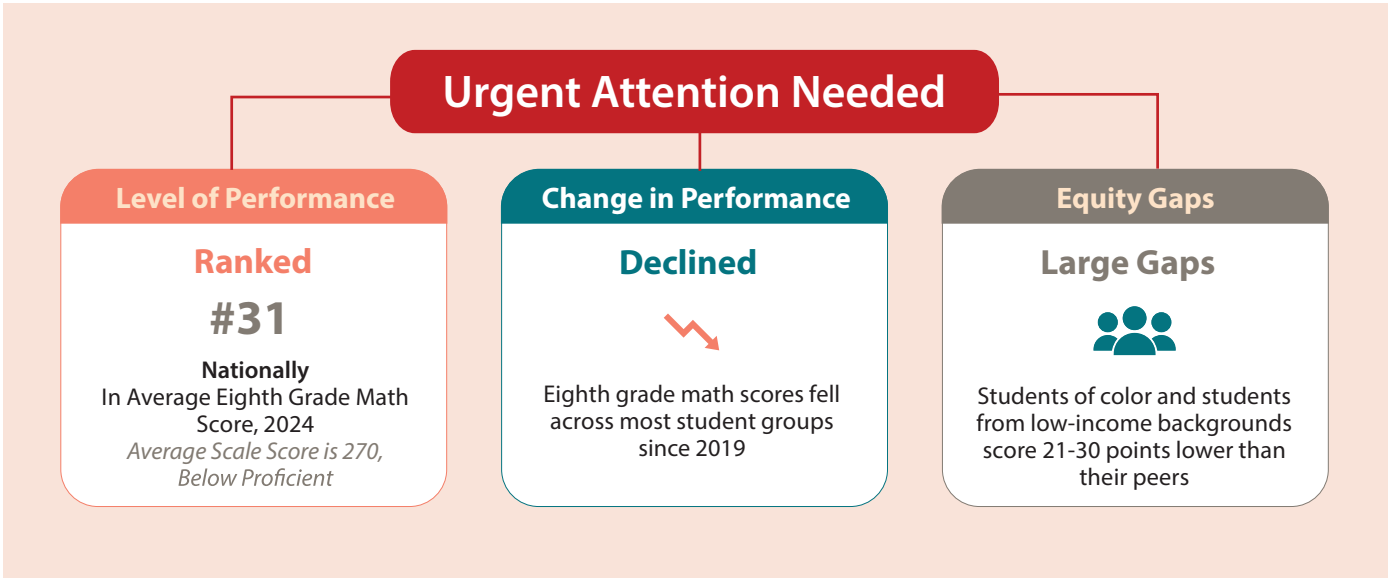
Michigan must drastically improve its early literacy achievement for all students and close the opportunity gaps that keep far too many children from low-income backgrounds and students of color from fulfilling their potential.



Source: NCES, NAEP Data | Note: Proficient Scale Score = 238; Basic Scale Score = 208



Eighth Grade Math – NAEP



What is this measure?

Eighth grade mathematics is a particularly important milestone because it signals whether students have developed the mathematical knowledge and skills needed to succeed in high school and beyond. Eighth grade math is a "gateway" to rigorous, high-level math and STEM pathways.[17] Students who enter high school prepared for rigorous mathematics are more likely to graduate ready for college, pursue STEM fields, and experience stronger early career outcomes.[18] Conversely, students who fall behind in middle school mathematics often face increasingly limited opportunities to access advanced coursework and postsecondary pathways.[19]

Why does this measure matter?

In addition to basic reading skills, math skills are essential for all students. Algebra provides a foundation for advanced mathematics, yet students of color often have less access to rigorous algebra courses at critical points in their education.[20] These inequities can limit students' opportunities to take higher-level math in high school and contribute to pathways that may lead to remedial course placement in college. Math skills are also important beyond college: research shows that along with reading skills, math skills are essential for careers including those in skilled trades (e.g., a plumber, electrician or an upholsterer).[21]

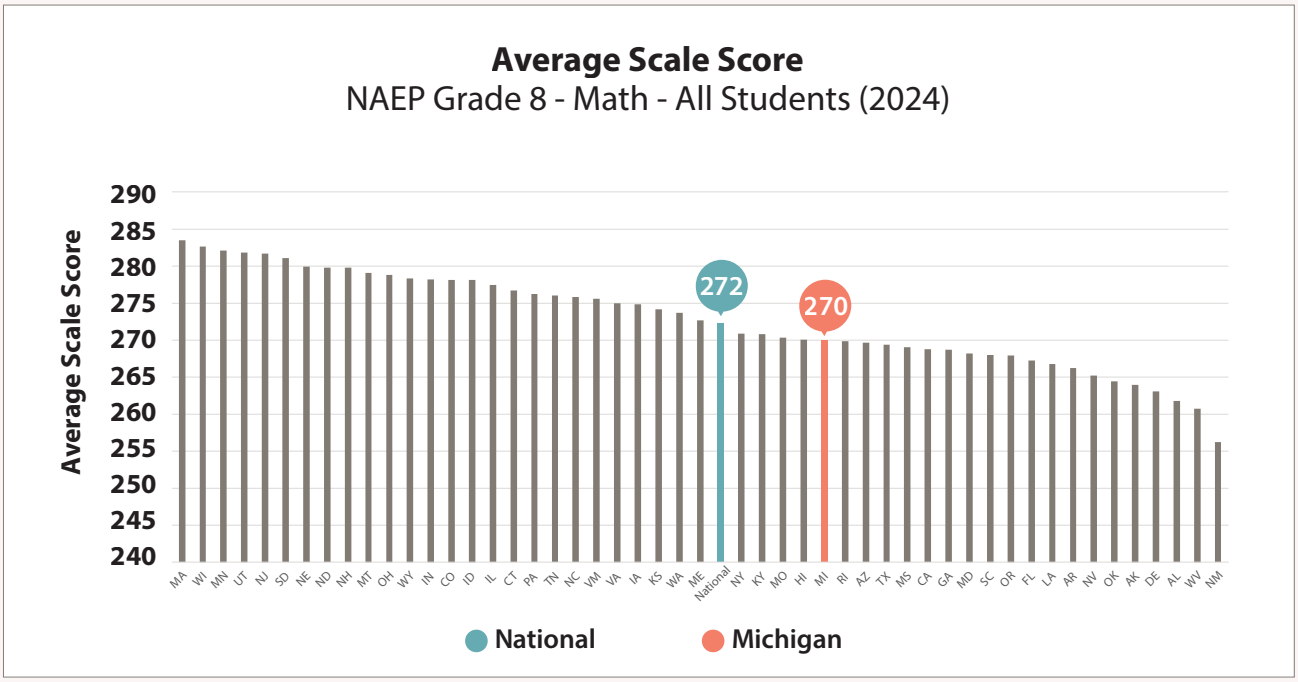
Where does Michigan stand?

Going for gold in math proficiency, or numeracy, reflects EdTrust-Midwest's belief that every student can demonstrate proficiency, and Michigan can be the national leader in numeracy. The gold standard is for Michigan to become a top state in math proficiency.

Michigan is ranked 33rd in NAEP eighth grade math performance. The state's average eighth grade NAEP mathematics score remains below the proficiency benchmark, indicating that many students have not yet developed the mathematical skills expected for success in high school.

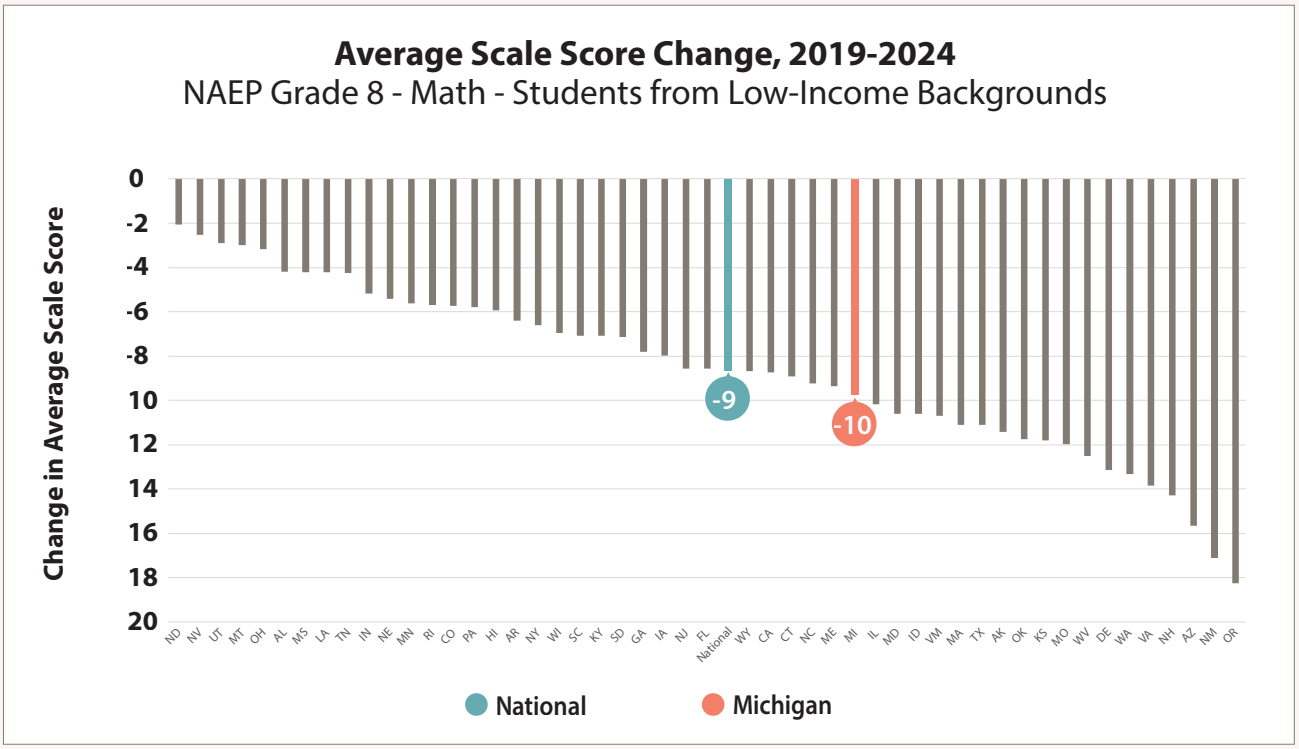
Michigan's NAEP math performance has also declined since 2019. This decline is visible in Michigan's 2024 scale score, which dropped 10 points since 2019. Across all student groups, eighth grade mathematics scores have fallen since 2019. This suggests that Michigan's mathematics challenges are widespread rather than isolated to a single population.

Similar to NAEP fourth grade reading scores, there are significant disparities present in NAEP eighth grade math scores. **Students of color scored approximately 21 points below white students, while students from low-income backgrounds scored roughly 30 points below their peers from higher-income backgrounds.** These large equity and opportunity gaps demonstrate that access to strong mathematics learning opportunities continues to vary substantially across student groups.



Source: NCES, NAEP Data | Note: Proficient Scale Score = 299; Basic Scale Score = 262

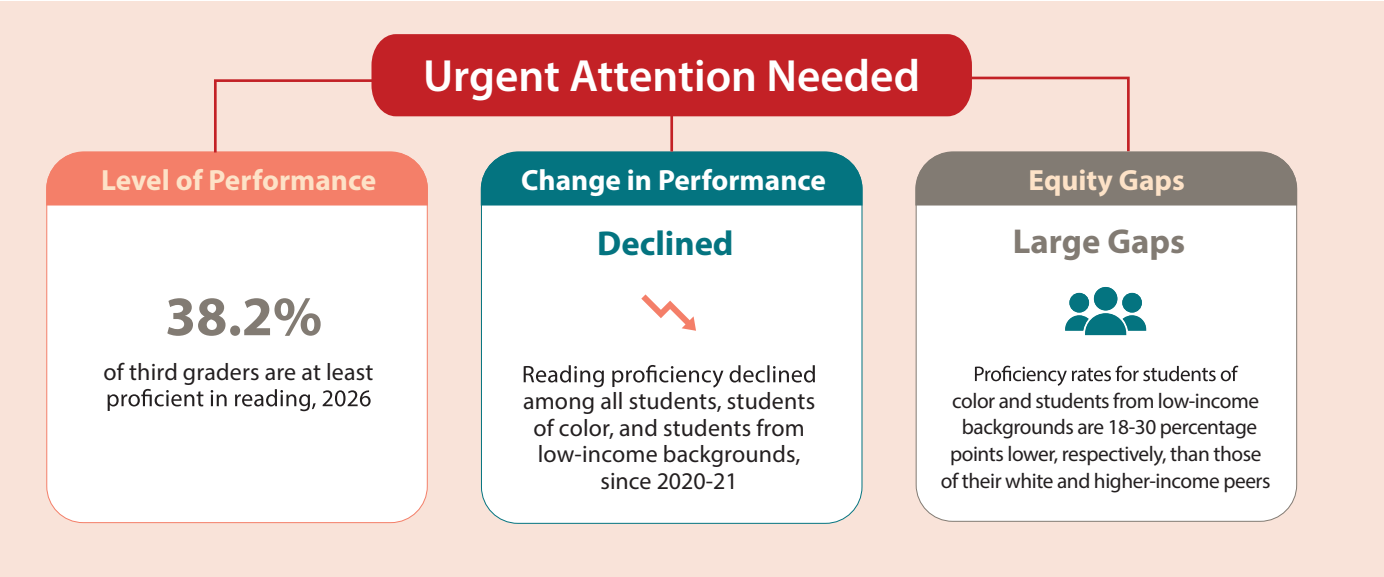




Source: NCES, NAEP Data | Note: Proficient Scale Score = 299; Basic Scale Score = 262



Third Grade Reading - M-STEP



What is this measure?

The M-STEP is a statewide assessment designed to gauge how well students are mastering state standards.[22] This third grade reading sub-measure provides the percentage of Michigan's third graders who scored at least proficient on the 2026 reading assessment. The results can help schools and state leaders better understand which schools and students need the most support, the impact of curricula and other educational resources, as well as how students are performing across the state.[23]

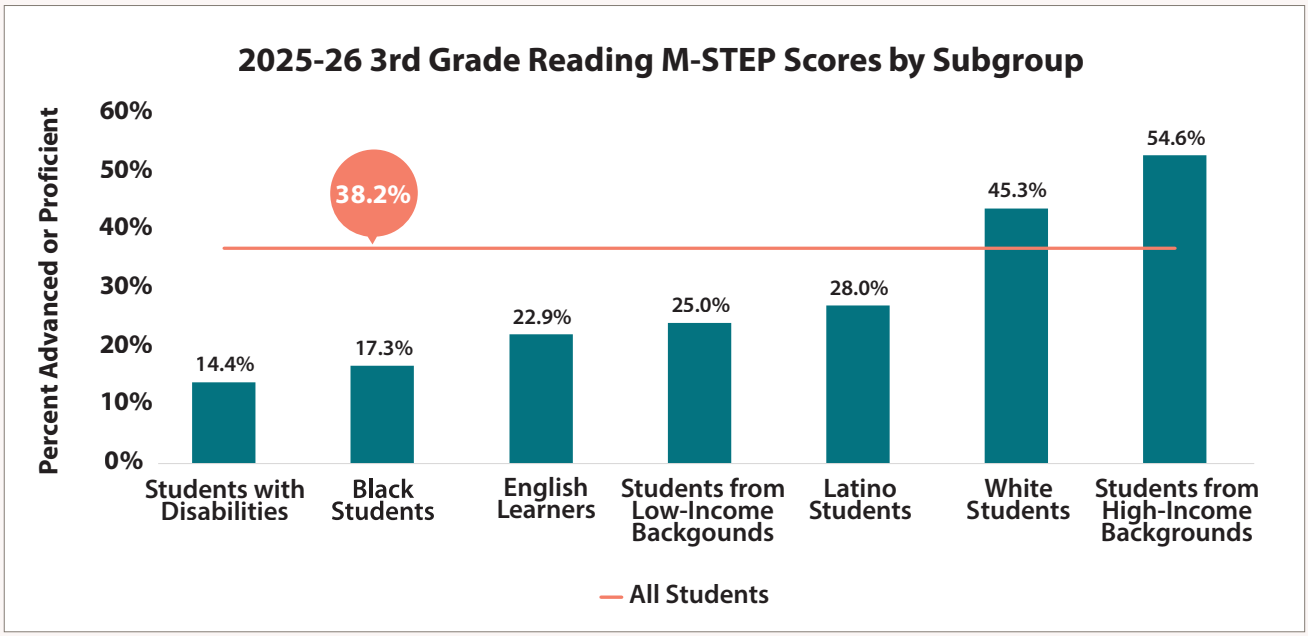
Why does this measure matter?

Literacy is a civil rights issue.[24] Research shows that third grade reading can have significant lifelong implications for students, and non-proficient third grade readers are more likely to drop out of school or not graduate on time.[25]

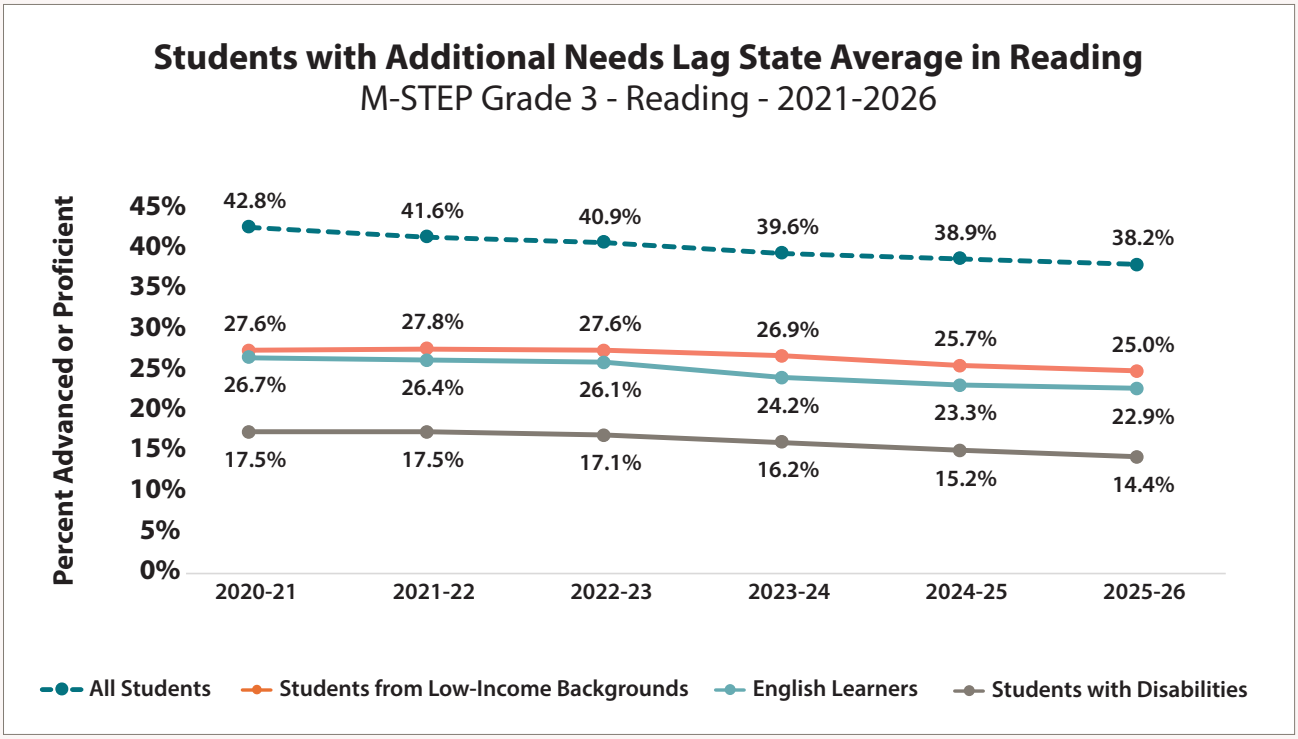
Where does Michigan stand?

Based on 2026 M-STEP data, only 38.2% of Michigan's third graders are at least proficient in reading — and results are declining. Proficiency rates, which fell slightly from the previous year, are 4.5 percentage points lower than in 2021. Large equity gaps continue to persist by race and income, where proficiency rates among students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are 18 and 30 percentage points lower than their counterparts. Additionally, statewide reading proficiency for students of color as a whole and students from low-income backgrounds have declined since 2021. However, disaggregated data by race does show that proficiency rates for Black students and English learners have increased modestly by 1.9 and 1.3 percentage points, respectively, since 2021.

"A student's ability to read is fundamental for their future academic success; however, too many Michigan students are not provided with the supports to build the strong reading skills necessary to unlock their full potential."
-Jeff Cobb, director of government affairs, EdTrust-Midwest

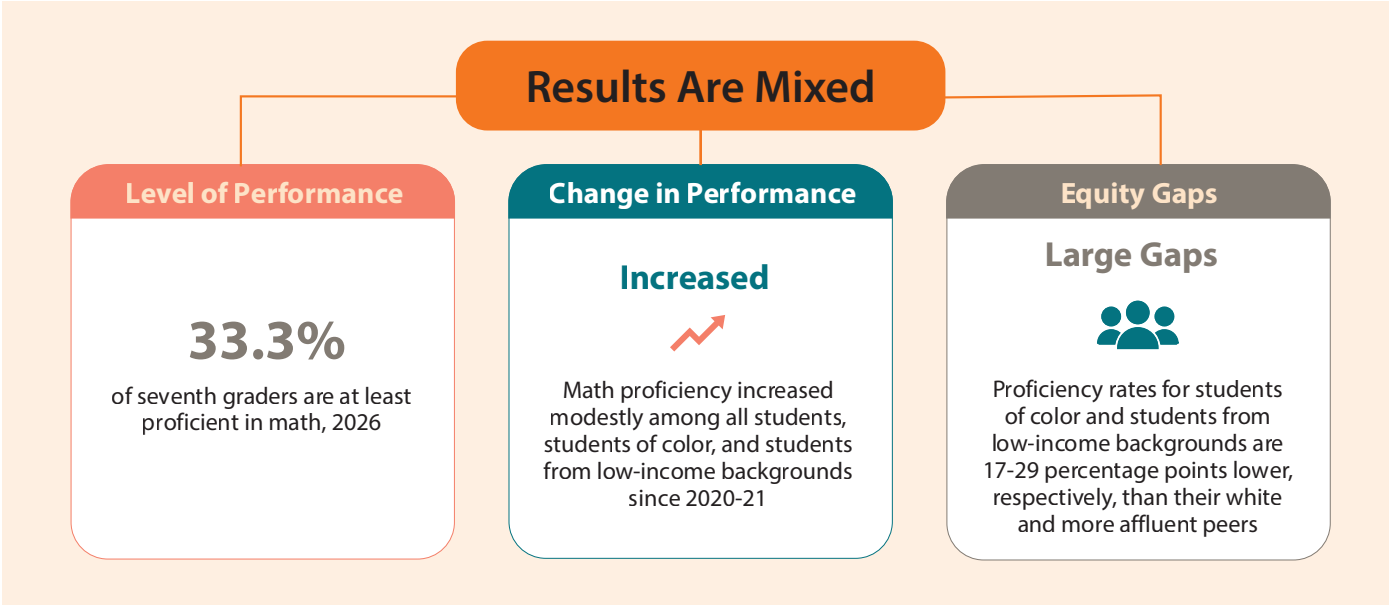


Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data, M-STEP Scores 2025-26



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data, M-STEP Scores 2025-26

Seventh Grade Math - M-STEP



What is this measure?

This seventh grade math sub-measure provides the percentage of Michigan's seventh graders who scored at least proficient on their math assessment.

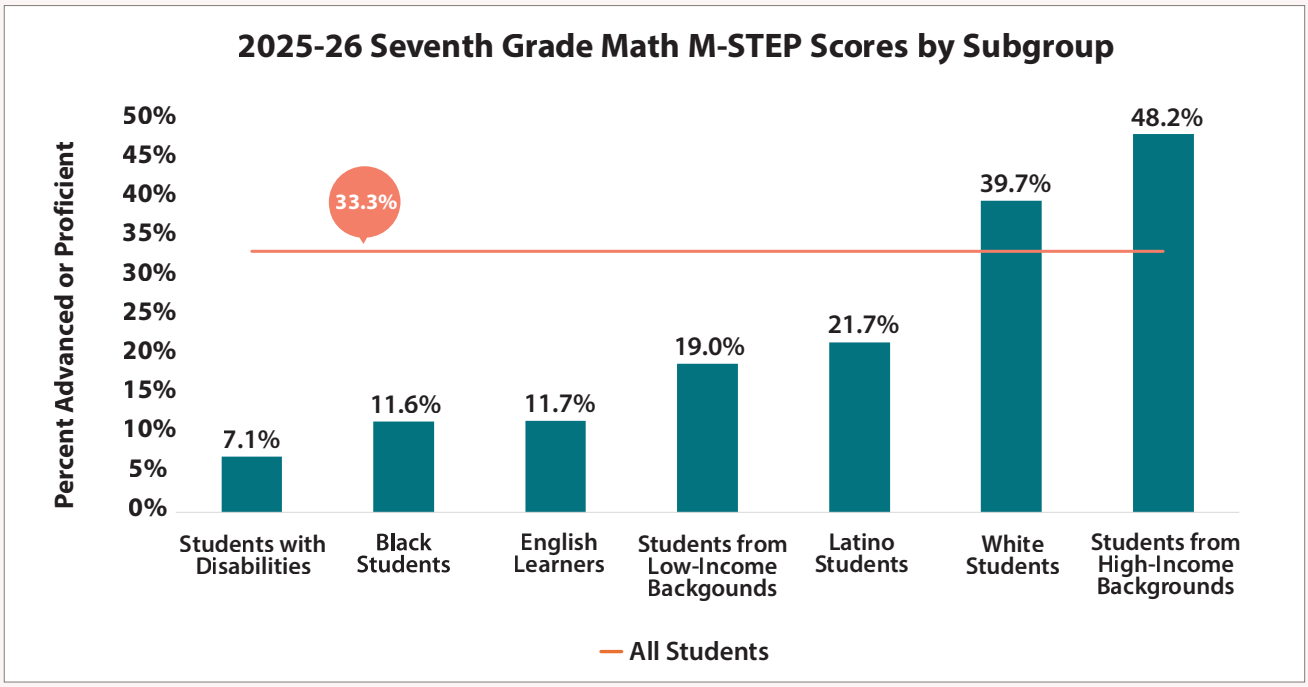
Why does this measure matter?

Strong middle school math skills prepare students for advanced coursework in high school, including algebra, and expand their access to college and career pathways.[26] Seventh grade results can also help schools identify where students need additional academic support before entering high school.[27]

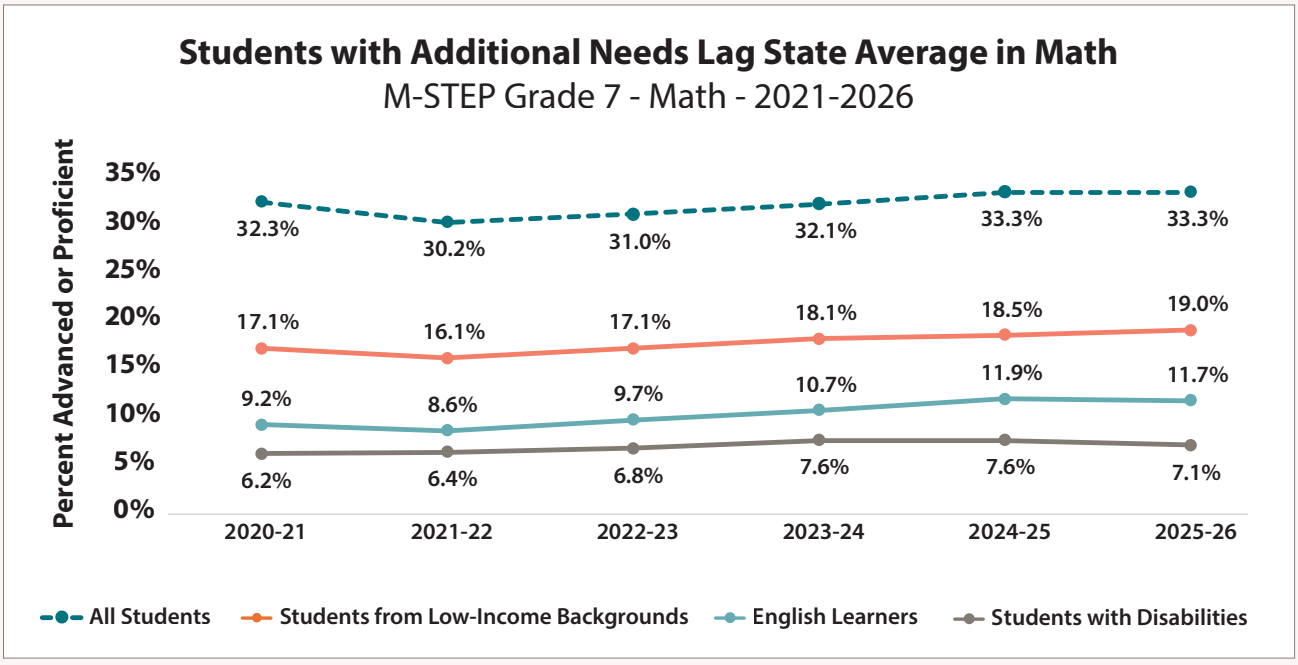
Where does Michigan stand?

Only one-third of Michigan seventh graders are at least proficient in math. Since 2021, proficiency rates have increased modestly, by one to four percentage points, across all student groups.

Despite this progress, large disparities persist by race, income, and disability status. Proficiency rates for students of color are 17 percentage points lower than those of white students, while rates for students from low-income backgrounds are 29 percentage points lower than those of their higher-income peers. Students with disabilities experience the largest disparity, with proficiency rates 30 percentage points lower than those of students not identified as students with disabilities. Despite recent progress, Michigan must accelerate improvement and close persistent opportunity gaps so that many more students develop the math skills needed for success in high school and beyond.

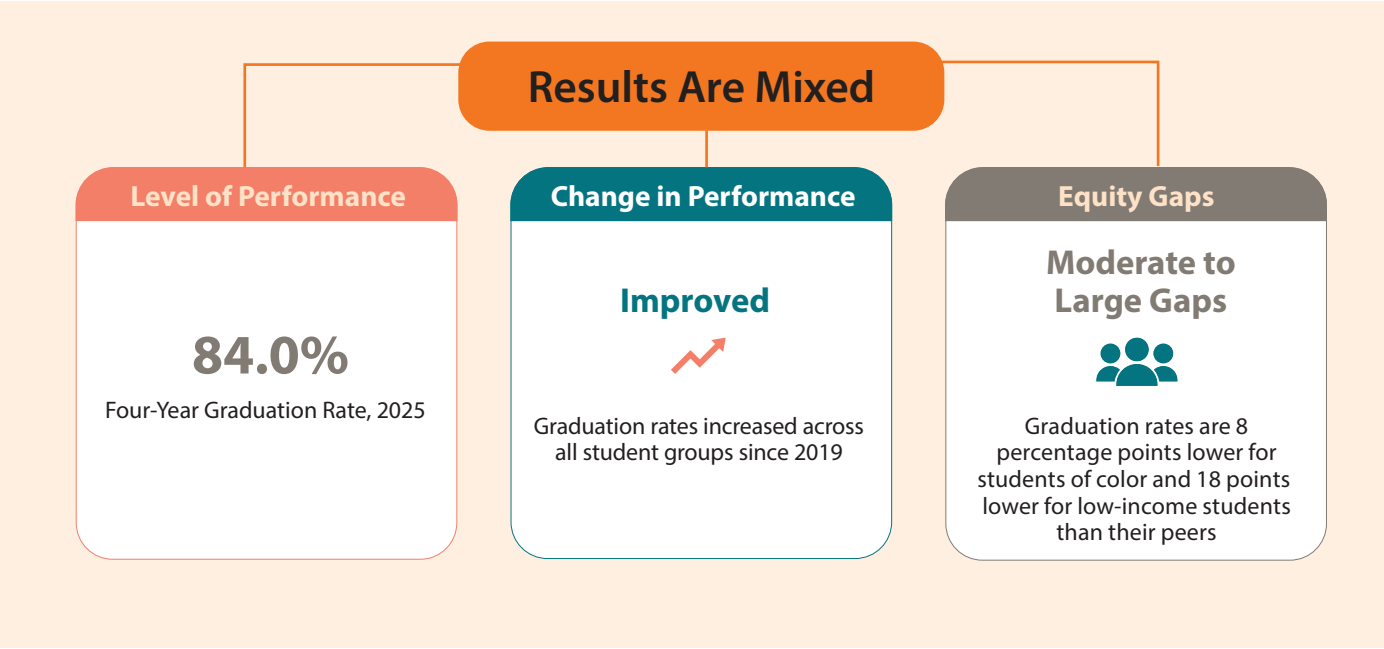


Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data, M-STEP Scores 2025-26



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information, MI School Data, M-STEP Scores 2025-26

High School Graduation Rates



What is this measure?

The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate measures the percentage of students who earn a regular high school diploma within four years of entering ninth grade. It is one of the most important indicators of whether Michigan's education system is preparing students for success after high school.

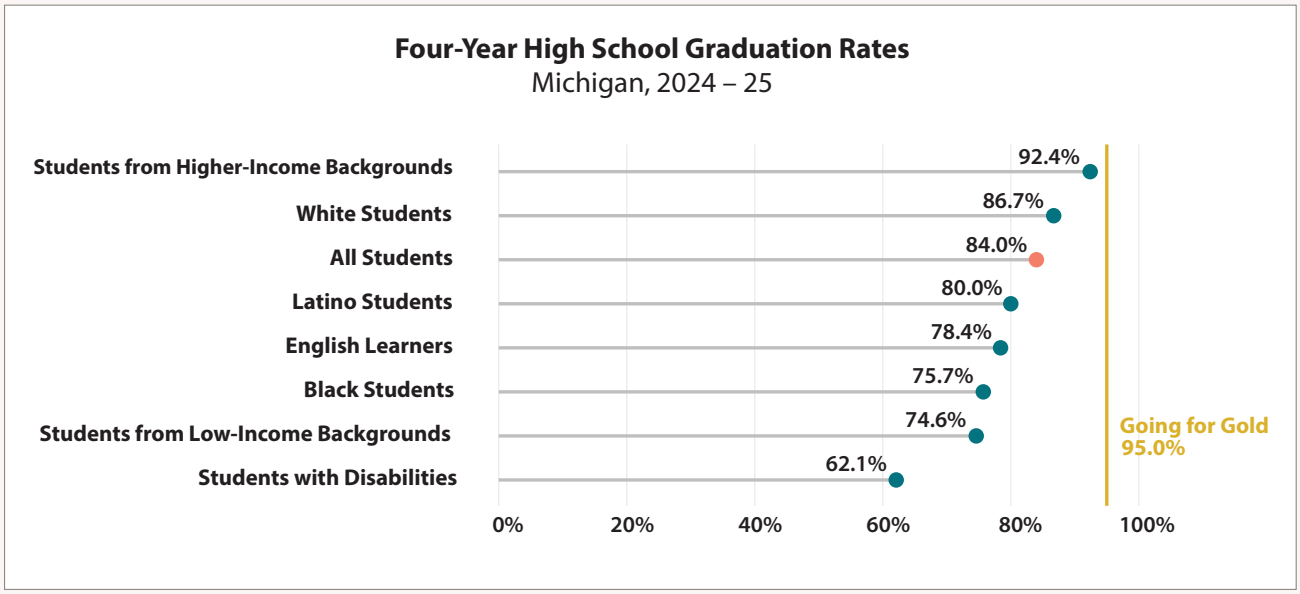
Why does this measure matter?

Earning a high school diploma is a critical milestone that opens the door to college, career training, military service, and stable employment. Individuals who graduate from high school have higher lifetime earnings, better employment prospects, improved health outcomes, and greater economic mobility than those who do not complete high school.[28] High school graduation is influenced by a wide range of factors — including early academic achievement, attendance, school climate, access to rigorous coursework, and family and community supports. This makes high school graduation rates a cumulative measure of students' educational experiences from preschool through 12th grade.[29]

Where does Michigan stand?

The ultimate aspiration is for all Michigan students to graduate on time and reach the range achieved by the nation's top state, with students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds graduating equitably.

In 2025, Michigan's four-year graduation rate reached 84%. This means that most students are graduating on time. Graduation rates have increased across every major student group since 2019, reflecting encouraging progress statewide. Despite these gains, equity gaps remain. **Students of color graduate at rates approximately 8 percentage points lower than white students, while students from low-income backgrounds graduate nearly 18 percentage points below their peers from higher-income backgrounds.** Students with disabilities continue to graduate at rates far below their peers, falling more than 20 percentage points behind the state average. These persistent gaps indicate that not all students are benefiting equally from improvements in graduation outcomes.



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Grad/Dropout Rate, 2024-25



INDICATOR 2

College Readiness and Success

Are Michigan students prepared and supported to access, afford, and complete the postsecondary pathway of their choice?

College Readiness and Success

Are Michigan students prepared and supported to access, afford, and complete the postsecondary pathway of their choice?

College readiness and success go far beyond high school graduation rates: students need access to rigorous academic opportunities, clear and supported pathways into education after high school, and the financial and institutional resources necessary to persist and complete a meaningful credential.

This section examines publicly available data from across the postsecondary pathway:

01 Advanced Placement Participation

02 Dual Enrollment Participation

03 Immediate College Enrollment

04 Remedial Coursework Enrollment

05 Bachelor's Degree Attainment

06 Two-Year College Affordability

07 Four-Year College Affordability

Together, these measures provide a statewide picture of how well Michigan's interconnected K-12 and higher education systems prepare and support students as they move into and through college. They also reveal where racial and economic inequities continue to constrain opportunity.

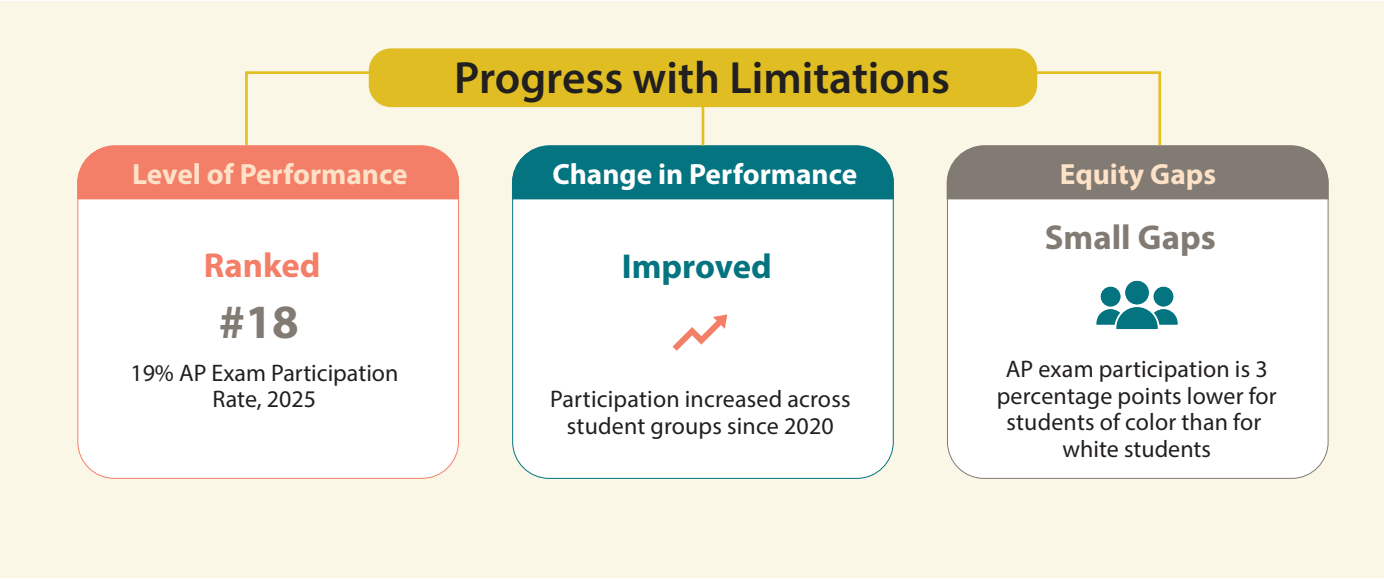
These measures provide only a partial picture of college readiness and success. They do not fully capture course availability, program quality, or the supports students receive, and they do not include emerging non-traditional pathways including short-term and non-degree credentials. EdTrust-Midwest's "Ready for Rigor" report more deeply examines inequitable access to AP and dual-enrollment opportunities. Because outcomes are shaped by both K-12 and postsecondary systems — as well as financial, family, transportation, and economic conditions — the findings should be understood as signals of systemic performance, not judgments about individual students, schools, or communities.

State Actions and What to Watch Going Forward

Michigan has made several recent investments intended to strengthen college readiness, access, and affordability. The state has used the College Board's AP Potential tool to help schools identify students who demonstrate the potential to succeed in Advanced Placement (AP) coursework.[30] Notably, Michigan also has significant investments in college affordability through two key programs over the past five years: Michigan Reconnect[31] and the Michigan Community College Guarantee, which provide financial support to both adult learners and traditional college students.[32] The FY27 education budget builds on this work by providing $40 million to reimburse eligible school districts for dual-enrollment costs — the state's first dedicated investment of this scale. The budget also includes $10 million for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion grants and $2.8 million to support participation in Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) examinations. Finally, Michigan's Early Middle College (EMC) program is a promising pathway that offers an accelerated pathway to post-secondary education.[33] In five years, students can earn a high school diploma and complete either 60 college credits, an associate's degree, a professional certification, a technical certificate, or a registered apprenticeship. These investments represent meaningful steps toward reducing financial and informational barriers, but implementation will determine whether the resources reach the students and communities that have had the least access.



Advanced Placement Exam Participation



What is this measure?

Advanced Placement (AP) exam participation is measured by the College Board's percentage of 10th-12th graders who took an AP exam during high school. This measure reflects graduates' cumulative participation in AP testing during high school. However, it does not fully capture whether AP courses are available, whether students enroll in those courses, or whether all students have equitable access to advanced coursework.

Why does this measure matter?

Expanding access to rigorous high school coursework, including AP courses, is an important strategy for preparing more students for college and careers. Research shows that access to rigorous coursework and high-quality instruction in high school is among the strongest predictors of postsecondary success.[34] AP courses can expose students to advanced subject matter, strengthen their academic preparation, enhance their college applications, and create opportunities to earn college credit while still in high school.

Where does Michigan stand?

The aspiration is for Michigan to lead the nation in AP exam participation while ensuring that students of color and students from low-income backgrounds participate and succeed at rates comparable to their peers.

In the 2024-25 school year, Michigan ranked 18th nationally in AP exam participation with a 19% statewide participation rate. Since the 2020-21 school year, AP exam participation increased by approximately 3 to 5 percentage points among students overall and across the student groups examined. The difference in participation rates between students of color (17%) and white students (20%) was also relatively small.

However, statewide participation rates can obscure significant differences in whether students have AP opportunities in their schools. Those differences are evident across Michigan. In 2024-25, only 42% of Michigan high schools offered at least one AP STEM course, compared to 55% of US high schools overall.[35] EdTrust-Midwest's "Ready for Rigor" report also found that students in the state's wealthiest districts have access to more than seven

times as many AP course options, on average, as students in its highest-poverty districts.[36] Students with the greatest needs also enroll in AP coursework at lower rates than their peers.[37] These disparities have meaningful consequences: fewer AP opportunities mean less exposure to advanced courses and subject areas, as well as fewer opportunities to strengthen college applications and earn college credit.

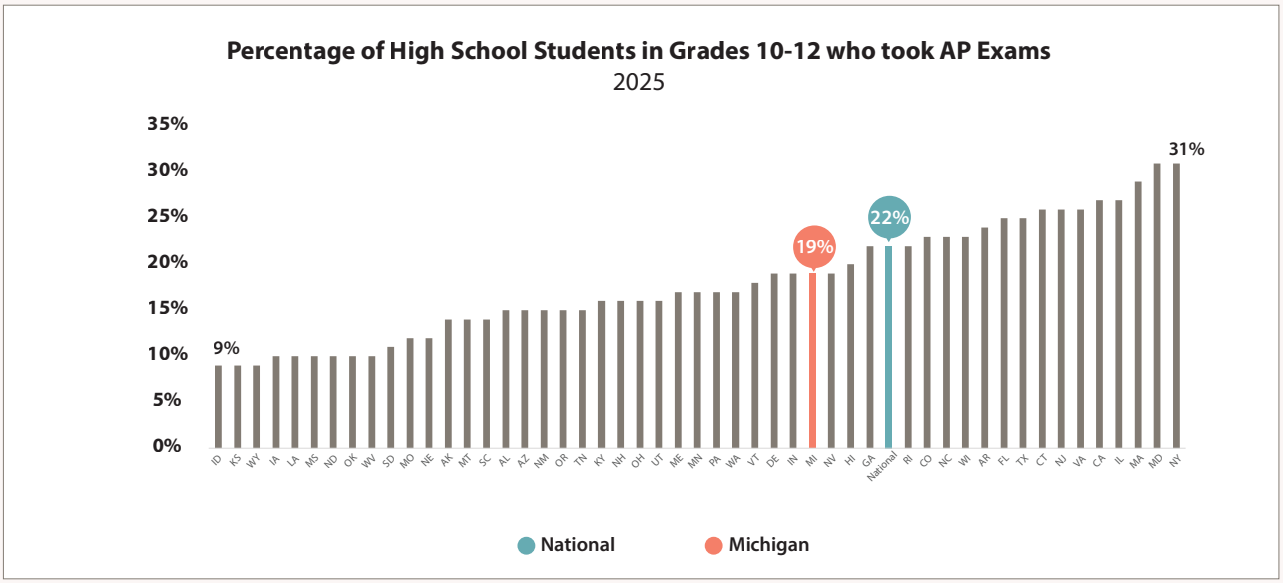
THE LARGER CONTEXT

AP exam participation does not tell the full story of whether students have equitable access to advanced coursework. Research emphasizes that simply expanding AP participation is not enough.[38] Strong and equitable AP programs must ensure that students can access available courses and receive the instruction, preparation, encouragement, and academic support needed to succeed. This includes culturally responsive teaching, inclusive learning environments, appropriate scaffolding, and consistently high expectations for students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Prior EdTrust-Midwest analyses found that Black student enrollment in AP was higher where students could self-select into courses, suggesting that more inclusive enrollment practices can expand opportunity.[39]

The College Board data used for this measure do not allow us to determine whether individual student groups are proportionately represented among AP course enrollees or exam participants. However, EdTrust-Midwest's analysis of 2021-22 federal data found that students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities were under-represented in AP enrollment, while white students were over-represented. Taken together, these findings underscore that a relatively small statewide participation gap does not necessarily mean that AP opportunities are distributed equitably across Michigan's schools and communities.

Michigan's progress in AP exam participation is encouraging, but the state's work is not complete. Leading the nation will require more than raising the statewide participation rate: Michigan must ensure that students in every community — particularly students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and students with disabilities — can access and succeed in a broad range of advanced courses.





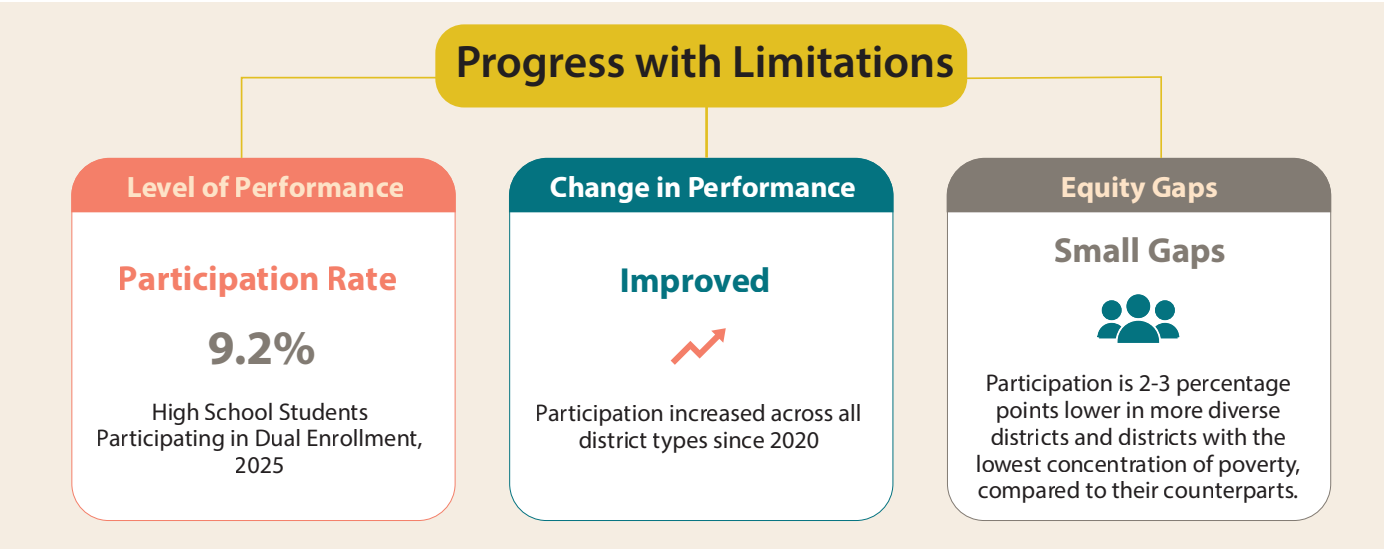
Source: College Board, 2024-25 AP Participation report

Percentage of Michigan High School Students in Grades 10-12 who took AP Exams, 2020-2025			
Student Group	**2020**	**2025**	**5-Year Change**
All Students	15%	19%	+4 percentage points
White Students	17%	20%	+3 percentage points
Latino Students	12%	17%	+5 percentage points
Black Students	5%	9%	+4 percentage points
Students of Color	12%	17%	+5 percentage points

Source: College Board, 2024-25 AP Participation report

AP exam participation has increased across every student group shown. That is a meaningful movement. More students are taking part in an opportunity that can help them prepare for college. Participation still differs across groups, so the work ahead is to build on these gains and make access more consistent.

Dual Enrollment Participation



What is this measure?

Dual enrollment allows high school students to take college-level courses and earn both secondary and postsecondary credit. Dual enrollment participation measures whether students have access to an important form of college readiness and early postsecondary opportunity. Unlike measures based solely on test performance, dual enrollment participation indicates whether students are gaining direct exposure to college-level expectations and potentially accumulating credits before graduating from high school.

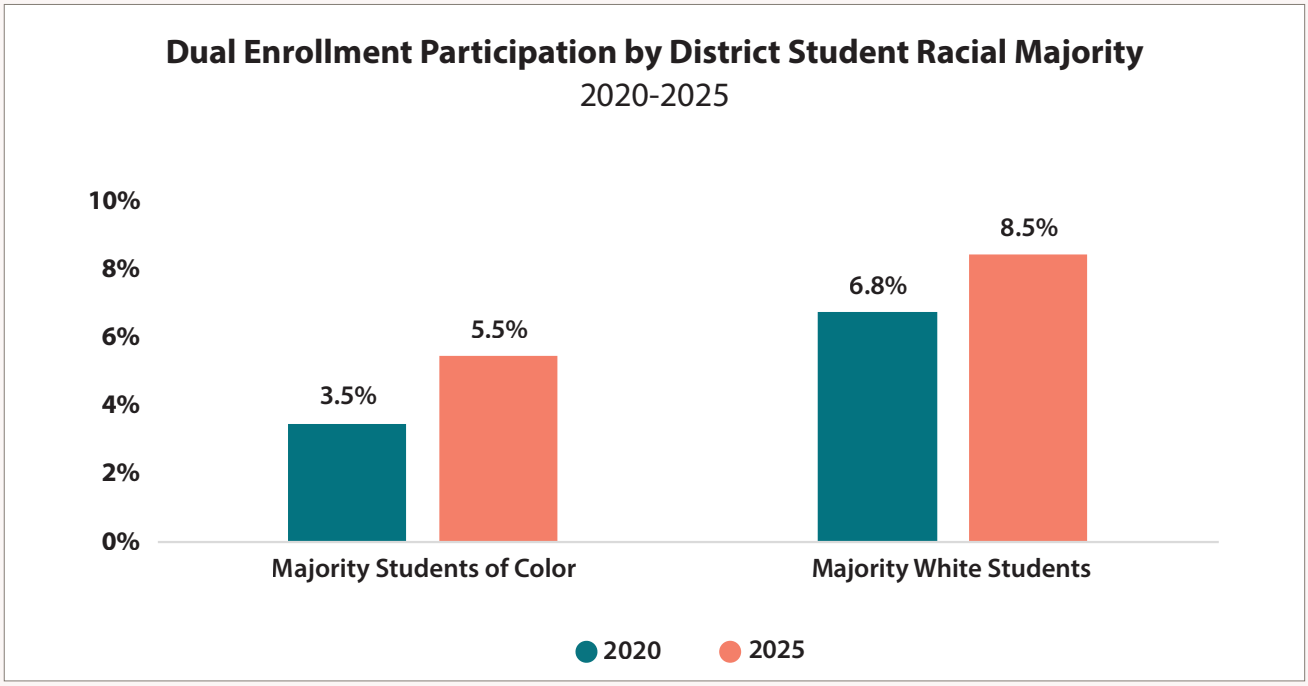
Why does this measure matter?

Dual enrollment is associated with stronger outcomes, such as higher rates of high school completion, college enrollment, college persistence, credit accumulation, and degree attainment. Research from the Community College Research Center found that 81% of students who took dual enrollment courses enrolled in college within one year of high school graduation — 11 percentage points higher than the national average.[40] Other studies suggest that the benefits may be particularly meaningful for students from low-income backgrounds.[41] Dual enrollment can also save students time and money, create more efficient transitions between high school and college, and help connect high school pathways to workforce needs.[42] However, the strength of these benefits depends on course quality, credit transferability, advising, successful completion, and whether students can participate without assuming additional costs.

Where does Michigan stand?

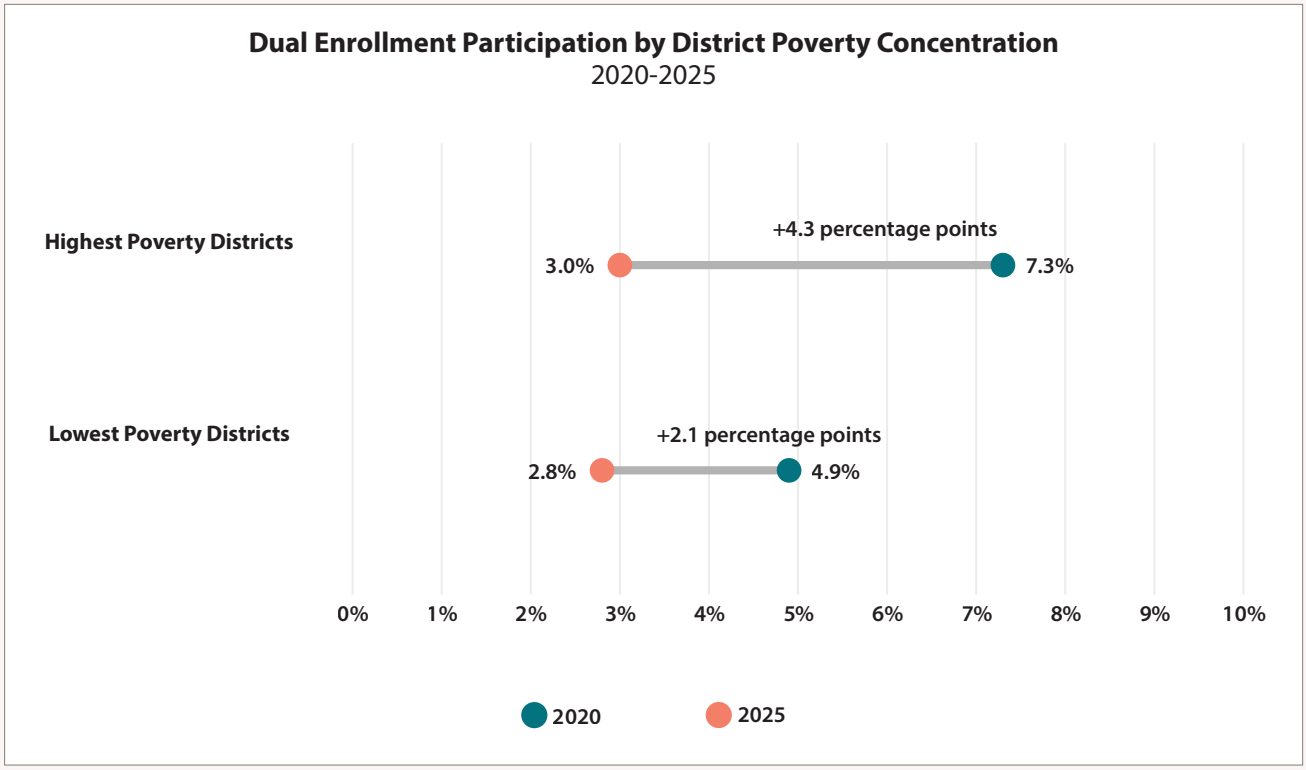
In 2025, only 9.2% of Michigan high school students participated in dual enrollment. Although participation increased over the previous five years across all student groups examined, Michigan continues to have substantial room for growth. When we disaggregate dual enrollment data, we find additional inequities: dual enrollment participation was 8.5% in Michigan's less diverse districts, which is three percentage points higher than participation rates in districts serving more students of color. While recent data is not available to analyze enrollment of the diversity of the student body versus enrollment, Michigan's dual enrollment did not reflect the diversity of students in 2024: students of color made up just 27% of dual enrolled students but comprised 35% of high school enrollment in the 2023-24 school year.[43]

There is a bright spot in the data. Rural schools had a dual enrollment participation rate of 10.2%, exceeding the statewide average. However, participation alone does not mean equitable access. Additional analysis is needed to determine whether students have access to comparable course options, successfully complete their courses, earn transferable credits, and receive adequate advising, transportation, technology, and financial support.



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Student Enrollment Counts & District and School Data Files – Dual Enrollment, 2019-20 & 2024-25

"Dual enrollment isn't simply an extra opportunity for already high-achieving students. It can be an important bridge between high school and postsecondary education - particularly for students from low-income backgrounds."
- Kimberly Clarida, Ph.D., assistant director of policy and research, EdTrust-Midwest

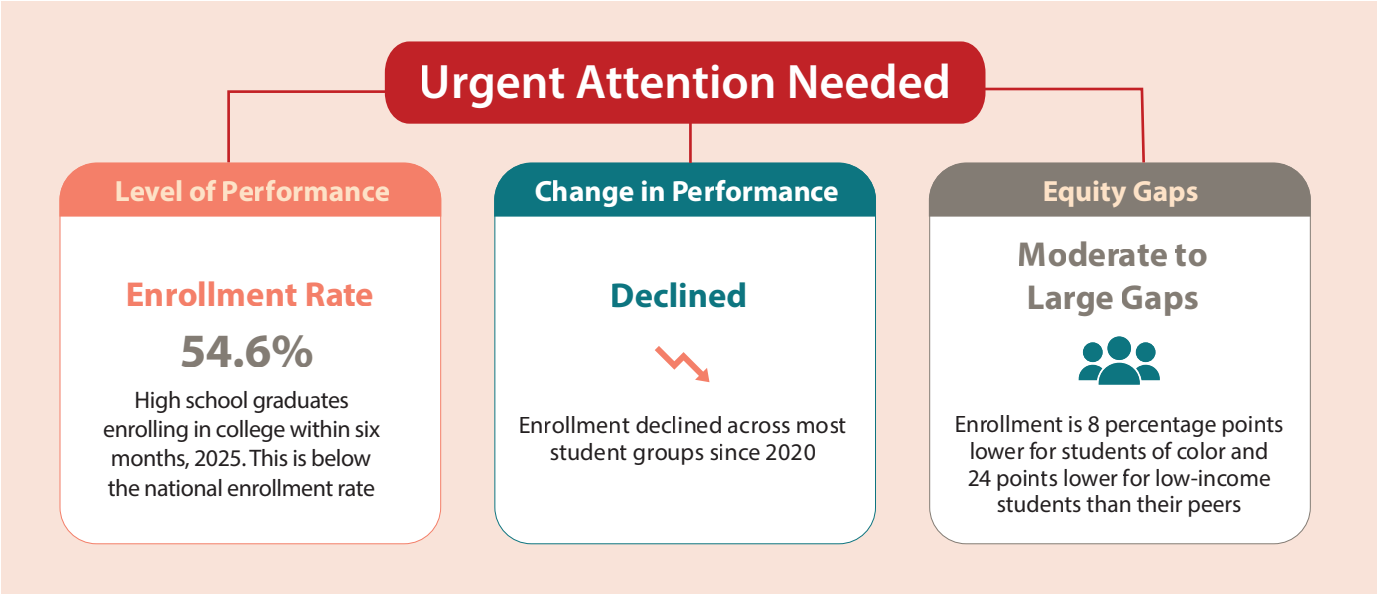


Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Student Enrollment Counts & District and School Data Files – Dual Enrollment, 2019-20 & 2024-25

Note: Disaggregated analyses use CEPI's downloadable data file, which excludes 4,426 participants whose Career and Technical Education Information System (CTEIS) records lacked grade-level information. Therefore, disaggregated counts do not sum to the statewide total



College Enrollment



What is this measure?

Immediate college enrollment represents the percentage of Michigan public high school graduates who enroll in a two- or four-year college within six months of graduating from high school. It captures whether students successfully make the transition from high school into college but does not include graduates who enter apprenticeships, workforce training, military service, or employment.

Why does this measure matter?

Post-secondary education can expand access to well-paying employment, economic security, and greater health and well-being. Individuals with college credentials generally experience higher earnings and lower risks of unemployment and underemployment than those whose education ends with a high school diploma.[44] These benefits also extend beyond individual graduates: communities with greater post-secondary attainment benefit from a more highly skilled workforce, stronger local economies, and increased tax revenue.[45]

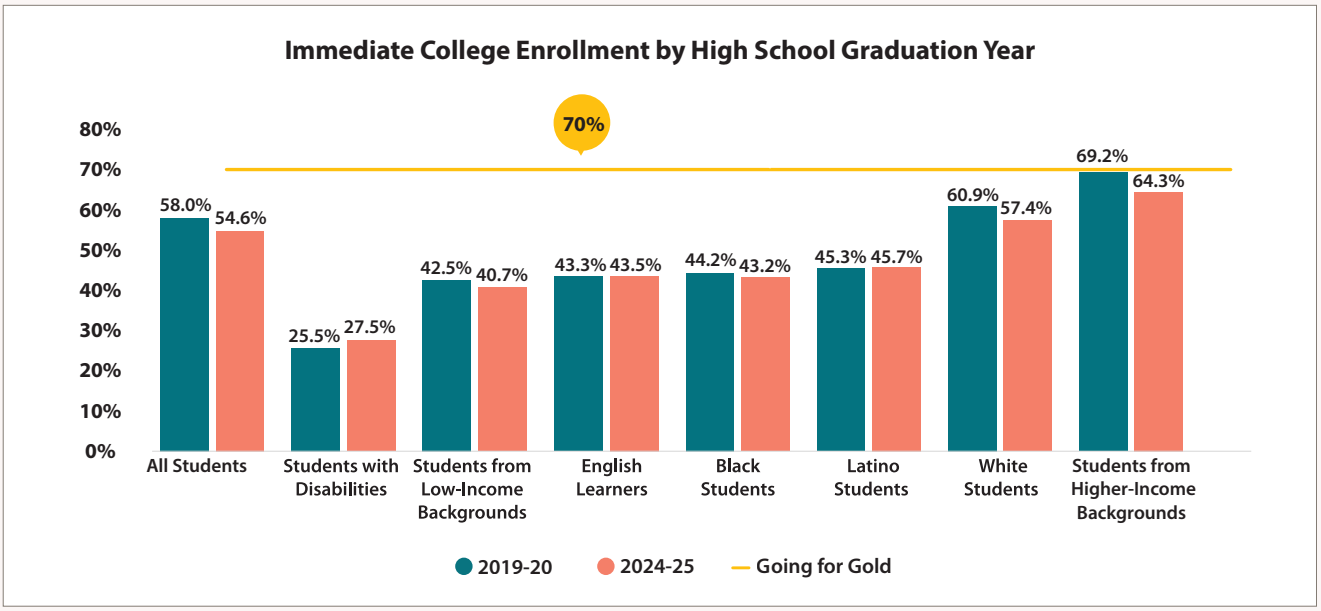
The transition from high school to college is shaped by whether students have access to rigorous academic preparation, effective counseling, clear information about their options, and sufficient financial support. Students with the greatest needs often encounter greater barriers throughout the process — from selecting and applying to college to completing the FAFSA and determining whether attendance is affordable. Immediate enrollment therefore reflects more than students' aspirations; it also indicates how effectively Michigan's K-12 and higher education systems help students translate those aspirations into postsecondary opportunities.

Where does Michigan stand?

A going for gold mindset for college enrollment in Michigan is one that believes that every high school graduate should have access to and successfully transition into a high-quality postsecondary education, training, or career pathway. We also believe that Michigan can become a national leader in college enrollment. In 2022, about 62% of high school completers had enrolled immediately enrolled in college,[46] and other 2024 datasets have shown that some states have higher immediate college enrollment rates that are around 70%.[47] However, in 2025, only

54.6% of Michigan public high school graduates enrolled in college within six months of graduation. Michigan's immediate college enrollment rate has also declined since 2020 for nearly every student group examined. Latino students were the exception, experiencing an increase of 0.4 percentage points. At the same time, substantial inequities remain: the enrollment rate for students of color was 8.4 percentage points lower than the rate for white students. Additionally, students from low-income backgrounds immediately enrolled in college at a rate of 23.6 percentage points lower than their higher-income peers. Only a quarter of students with disabilities immediately enroll in college, and English learners lag the state average by over 10 percentage points.

These results show that Michigan is losing ground overall while longstanding barriers continue to fall most heavily on students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. Improving college enrollment will require more than encouraging students to attend. Michigan must ensure that students receive strong academic preparation, effective college and career advising, support completing the FAFSA, and access to postsecondary options they can realistically afford.

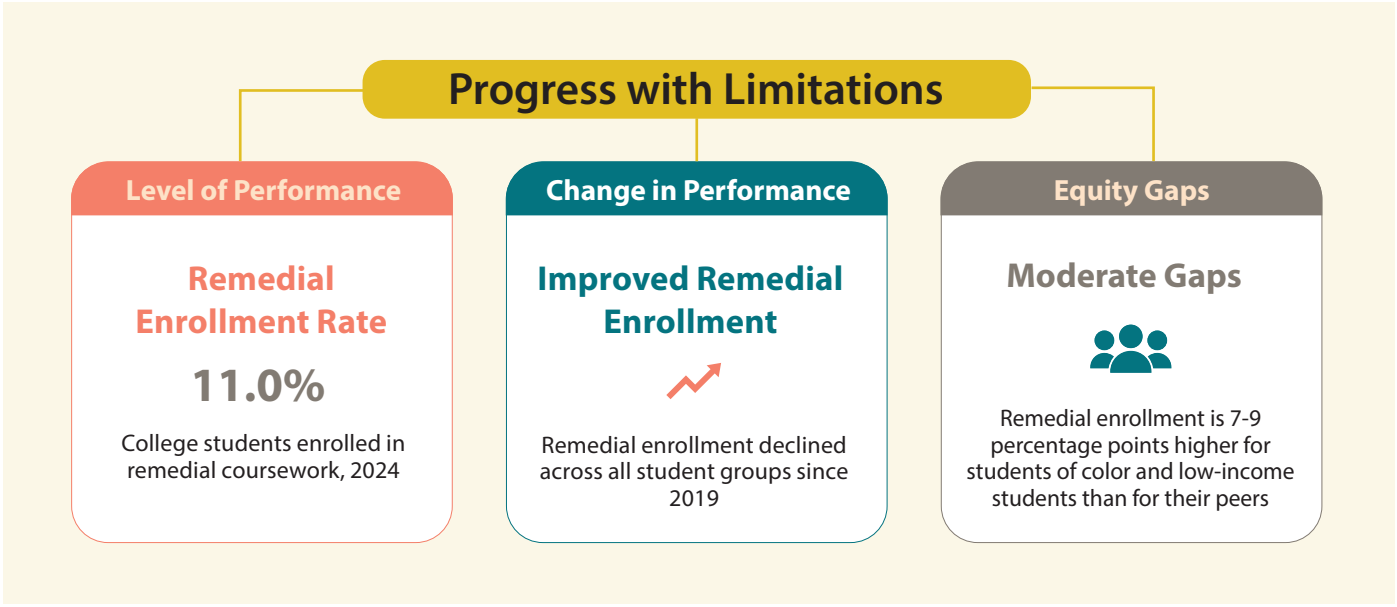


Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, College Enrollment by High School, 2019-20 & 2024-25

Student Groups	Opportunity Gap, 2024-25
Students of Color **White Students**	Students of color enroll in college at a rate **8 percentage points lower** than their white peers
Students from Low-Income Backgrounds **Students from Higher-Income Backgrounds**	Students from low-income backgrounds enroll in college at a rate **24 percentage points lower** than their higher-income peers

Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, College Enrollment by High School, 2024-25

Remedial Coursework Enrollment



What is this measure?

Remedial coursework is intended to provide additional academic preparation for students who are assessed as not yet ready for college-level work in a particular subject. These courses commonly focus on foundational skills in mathematics, reading, or writing that students need to succeed in credit-bearing college courses. However, remedial courses generally do not count toward a degree, even though students may still be required to pay tuition and devote time to completing them.

Why does this measure matter?

Remedial coursework is designed to help students strengthen their academic preparation and succeed in college and the workforce. However, the need for remediation can also signal a lack of alignment between K-12 and postsecondary education systems. When the two systems maintain different expectations for college readiness, students and families may receive confusing or inconsistent information about what students must know and do to enter and succeed in college.[48]

Students placed into remedial courses have historically persisted in college at lower rates than students who begin in college-level courses.[49] Several factors may contribute to this pattern. Students can become discouraged by academic challenges while simultaneously navigating the social and financial demands of college.[50] Placement into remediation may also carry stigma, contribute to frustration, and undermine students' confidence that they belong in college.[51]

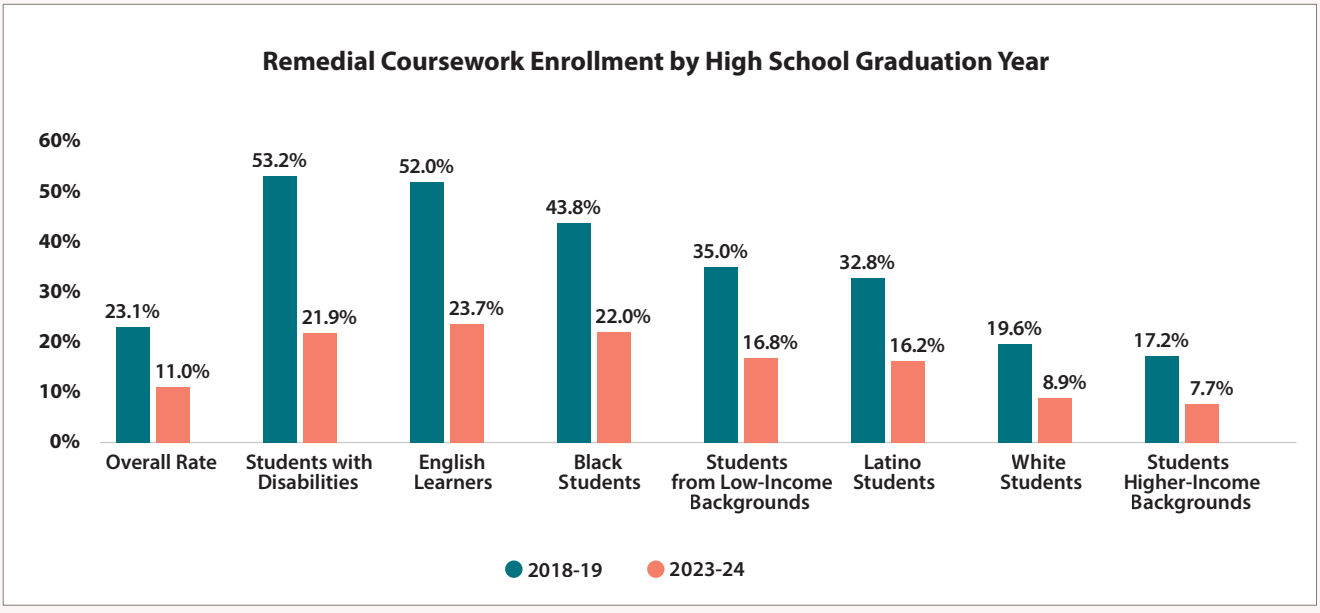
Because remedial courses typically do not count toward a credential, they may also increase the time and expense required to complete college. Longer pathways to a degree can reduce the likelihood of completion, particularly for students already facing financial or institutional barriers.[52] National estimates place the annual cost of delivering remediation in the billions of dollars, including direct costs borne by students, colleges, and states.[53]

Remedial-coursework enrollment should not be interpreted solely as a measure of students' abilities or the quality of their K-12 education. Enrollment can also be shaped by colleges' placement policies, the assessments they use, the availability of academic supports, and whether students are offered additional academic support while taking credit-bearing courses.

Where does Michigan stand?

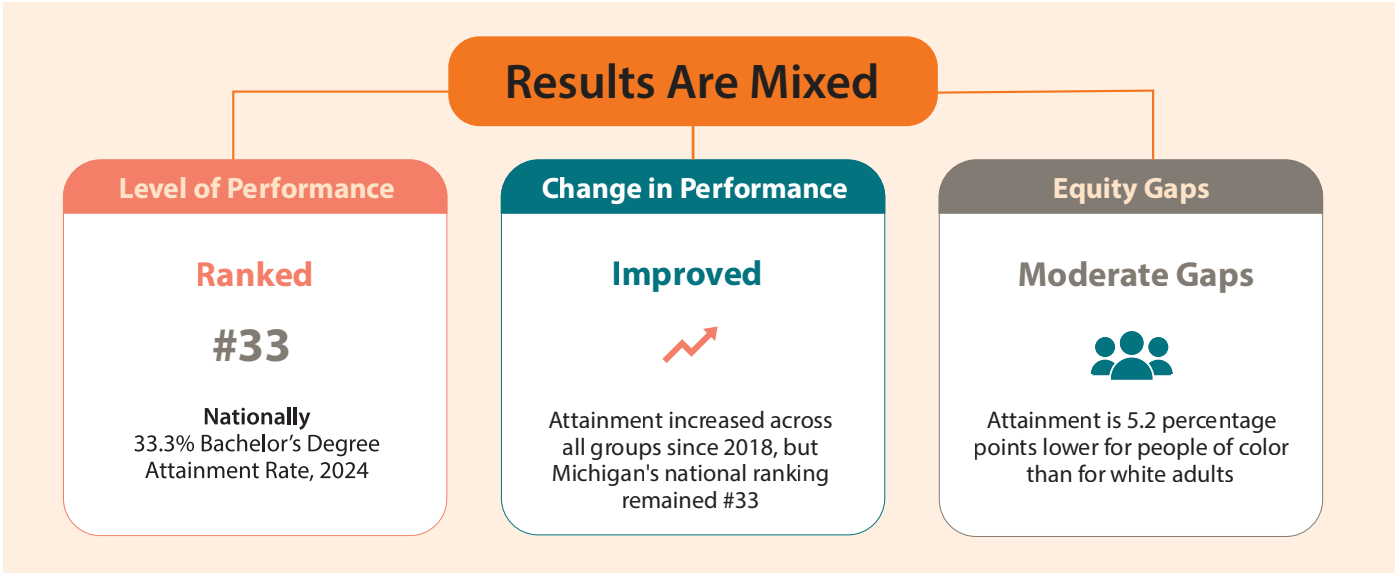
Every Michigan student should enter postsecondary education prepared to succeed in credit-bearing coursework. Yet, in 2024, 11% of Michigan college students enrolled in remedial coursework. Remedial enrollment has declined since 2019, across every student group examined, indicating progress toward helping more students begin college in credit-bearing courses. **Additionally, 2024 statewide data showed that students with disabilities saw the largest decrease in remedial coursework enrollment since 2019. Students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and students with disabilities saw a similar trend of improvement.**

However, that progress does not eliminate equity gaps. Moderate differences remain between students of color and white students and between students from low-income backgrounds and their higher-income peers. For instance, EdTrust-Midwest's "Ready for Rigor" report found that in 2023, Black students' remedial coursework rate the rate was 23% — nearly twice the state average.[54] These disparities suggest that longstanding inequities in access to rigorous instruction, college preparation, advising, and other opportunities continue to shape students' transitions into postsecondary education. And while overall remediation has since declined to 11%, the magnitude of the 2019 disparities underscores the need to examine whether Black students and other underserved groups are benefiting equally from statewide improvement. Reducing remediation requires stronger alignment between Michigan's K-12 and postsecondary systems, equitable access to rigorous high school coursework, and transparent college-readiness expectations. It also requires colleges to adopt placement and support practices that help students enter credit-bearing courses without denying them the academic assistance they need.



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, College Remedial Coursework, 2018-19 & 2023-24

College Attainment



What is this measure?

The college attainment sub-measure represents the percentage of people 25 years or older who have completed a bachelor's degree or greater. This measure captures the college attainment of Michigan's adult population.

Why does this measure matter?

College enrollment alone is not enough. Students must also have the opportunity and support to complete credentials that hold value in the workforce and help them achieve their educational, professional, and personal goals. Bachelor's degree attainment is associated with greater access to well-paying employment and increased economic security. Communities also benefit from higher educational attainment through a more highly skilled workforce, stronger local economies, and increased public revenue.

Completing college can also signal that someone has developed knowledge and skills valued by employers and society.[55] While attitudes on the benefit of post-secondary education are constantly evolving, degree completion remains an important pathway to economic opportunity in the contemporary labor market.

Michigan has established a broader postsecondary attainment goal through its Sixty by 30 initiative: ensuring that 60% of working-age adults hold a college degree or skill certificate by 2030.[56] This goal includes certificates and associate degrees in addition to bachelor's and advanced degrees. It therefore provides important context for this measure but should not be treated as a direct benchmark for Michigan's bachelor's degree attainment rate.

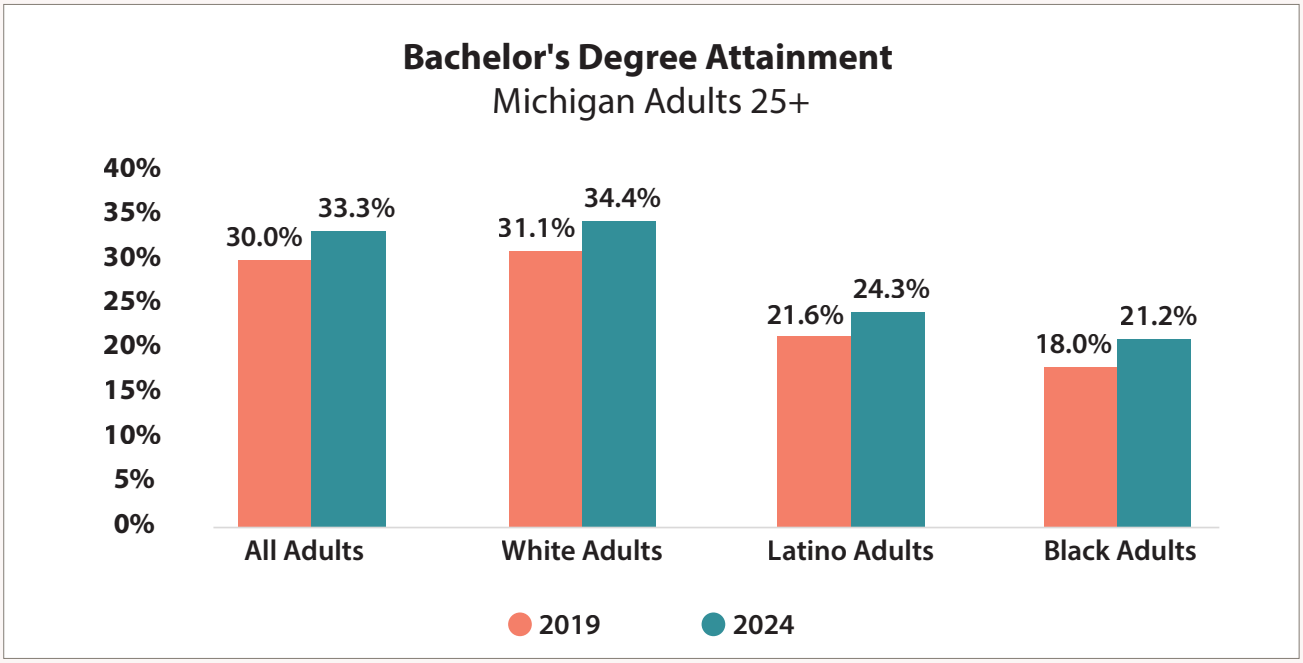
Where does Michigan stand?

Michigan should strive to be a national leader in the number of adults who have a bachelor's degree. Yet, in 2024, only 33.3% of Michigan adults ages 25 and older held a bachelor's degree or higher, which places Michigan 33rd nationally. This represents a small increase from 32.7% in 2023, when Michigan ranked 34th. Michigan's bachelor's degree attainment has increased across every racial group examined since 2018. This is

meaningful progress: more Michigan adults are earning degrees that can expand their economic and career opportunities. However, Michigan's national position has remained largely unchanged, indicating that other states are making similar or greater gains.

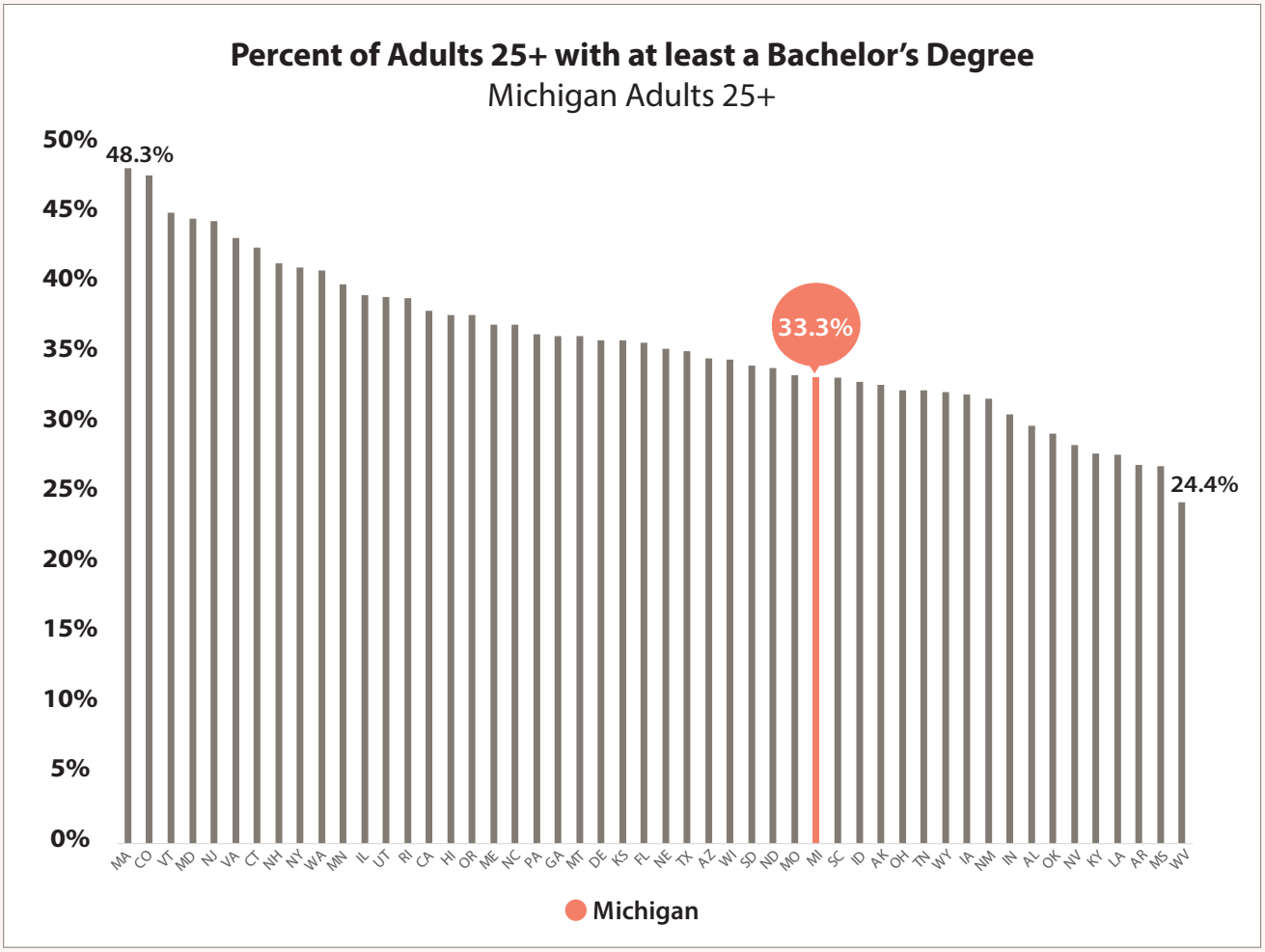
Progress has also not eliminated racial inequities. **In 2024, bachelor's degree attainment among adults of color remained 5.2 percentage points lower than among white adults.** This statewide comparison also masks larger differences for individual racial and ethnic groups. For example, Black and Latino adults have attainment rates of 21% and 24%, respectively.

Michigan's challenge is twofold: accelerate degree completion enough to improve its national standing while ensuring that adults from underserved communities benefit fully from that progress. Reaching that goal will require affordable pathways into higher education, stronger support for persistence and completion, and intentional efforts to address the racial and economic barriers that shape who earns a college degree.



Source: United States Census – American Community Survey – 1 Year Estimates 2024

"Progress that leaves opportunity gaps in place is not enough. Michigan needs to help more students finish college, and it needs to make sure Black and Latino adults are not left behind."
Charlotte Pierce, senior policy analyst, EdTrust-Midwest



Source: United States Census – American Community Survey – 1 Year Estimates 2024



College Affordability

*Only a measure of affordability for students from low-income families (less than $30,000 a year)



Michigan's high national rankings are encouraging. In part they reflect the state's financial aid programs like Michigan Reconnect and Michigan Community College Guarantee. Yet, affordability is ultimately measured by what students can pay - not simply by whether Michigan compares favorably with other states.

What is this measure?

This analysis determines different dimensions of affordability at public two- and four-year institutions. The net price is the average amount that students from low-income backgrounds pay after grants and scholarships are subtracted from the total cost of attendance. Then, we calculate the number of hours per week these students must work at minimum wage to pay the net price. To determine affordability, we rely on Lumina Foundation's "Rule of 10," which states that students from low-income backgrounds should pay no more than what they can earn from working 10 hours a week at the minimum wage (for 50 weeks a year).[57] The difference between the net price and what these students would earn working 10 hours a week is what we call the "affordability gap." A positive gap means that a student would still face uncovered costs, while a negative gap means that 10 hours of weekly work would be enough to cover the average net price. This analysis is an updated replication of college affordability analyses conducted by EdTrust in 2019.[58]

Why does this measure matter?

Getting into college is only one part of the success story. Michigan students must also be able to afford to remain enrolled and complete their certifications and degrees. When financial aid does not cover the full cost of attendance, students may be forced to work longer hours, reduce their course loads, take on additional debt, or leave college without completing a credential.[59]

College affordability encompasses much more than tuition. Even when grants cover tuition and fees, students must still pay for housing, food, transportation, books, technology, and other necessities. These costs are especially consequential for students from low-income backgrounds, who may have fewer financial resources available to cover unexpected or unmet expenses.

EdTrust's affordability framework assumes that students should not have to work more than 10 hours per week at minimum wage to cover their net price.[60] Working substantially more can leave students with less time for coursework, limit the number of courses they can take, and make completing a degree more difficult. An institution should therefore be considered affordable only when students can meet the full cost of attendance without excessive work or unsustainable debt.

Where does Michigan stand?

Michigan's public colleges are considered affordable when students from low-income backgrounds can cover the full cost of attendance through grants, scholarships, and no more than 10 hours of work per week—without relying on student loans.

At Michigan's public two-year institutions, the average net price for students from low-income backgrounds was $3,865, which is more than $3,000 below the national average and ranks Michigan as the top state for two-year college net price. The picture is less encouraging at public four-year institutions. In 2024, the average net price for a student from low-income backgrounds was $8,237, leaving a $3,072 affordability gap after accounting for earnings from 10 hours of work per week. To cover the full net price through minimum wage earnings, a student would need to work approximately 16 hours per week — six hours beyond the recommended benchmark. This affordability gap is substantial. But students from low-income backgrounds in Michigan still pay less, on average, than students in most other states, putting Michigan in the top 10.

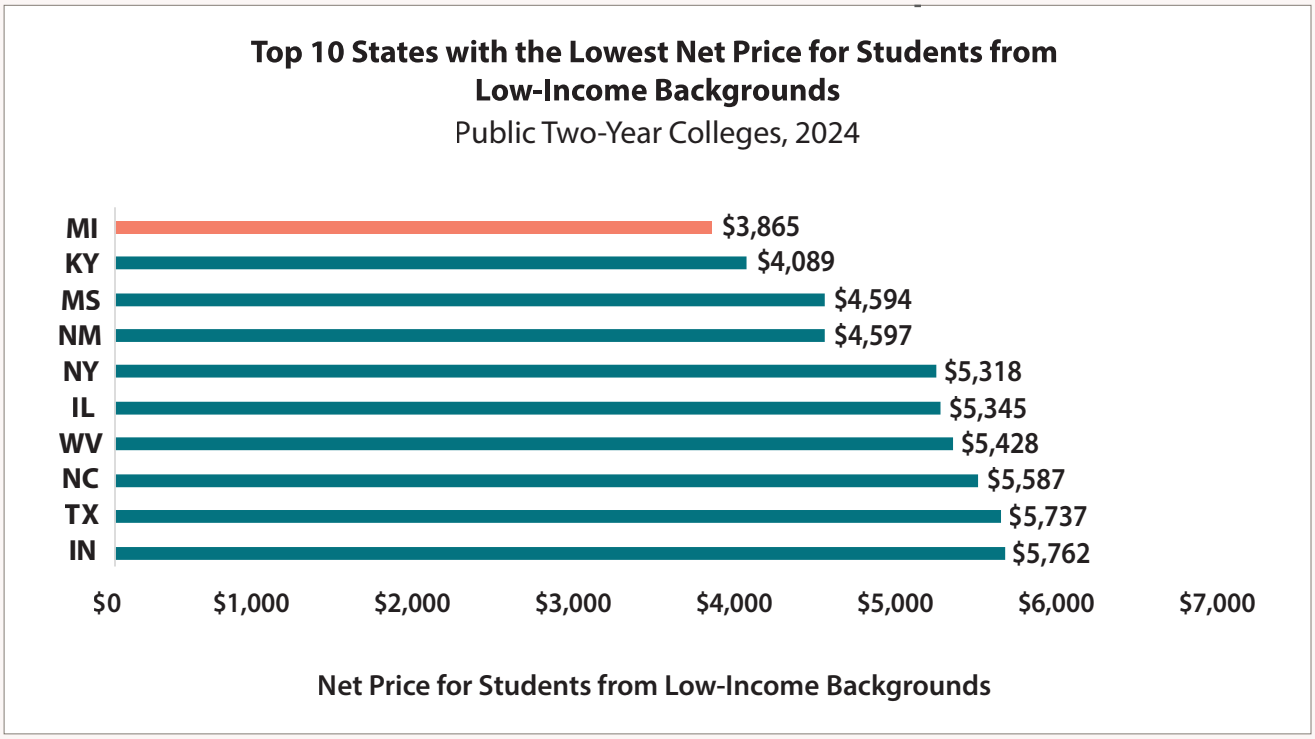
Affordable Does Not Equate to Financial Security

A community college student working 10 hours per week at minimum wage for 50 weeks would earn approximately $1,300 more than the amount needed to cover that average net price of college. Under this framework, Michigan's public two-year institutions meet the affordability benchmark, meaning the average net price could be covered through the level of student work considered reasonable by the measure. However, this does not mean that students are financially secure. Net price does not account for many of the essential costs students face, including housing, food, transportation, healthcare, childcare, and other living expenses. Once these rising costs are factored in, many students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, may still experience significant financial hardship, making it difficult to enroll in college, persist from semester to semester, or complete a credential.

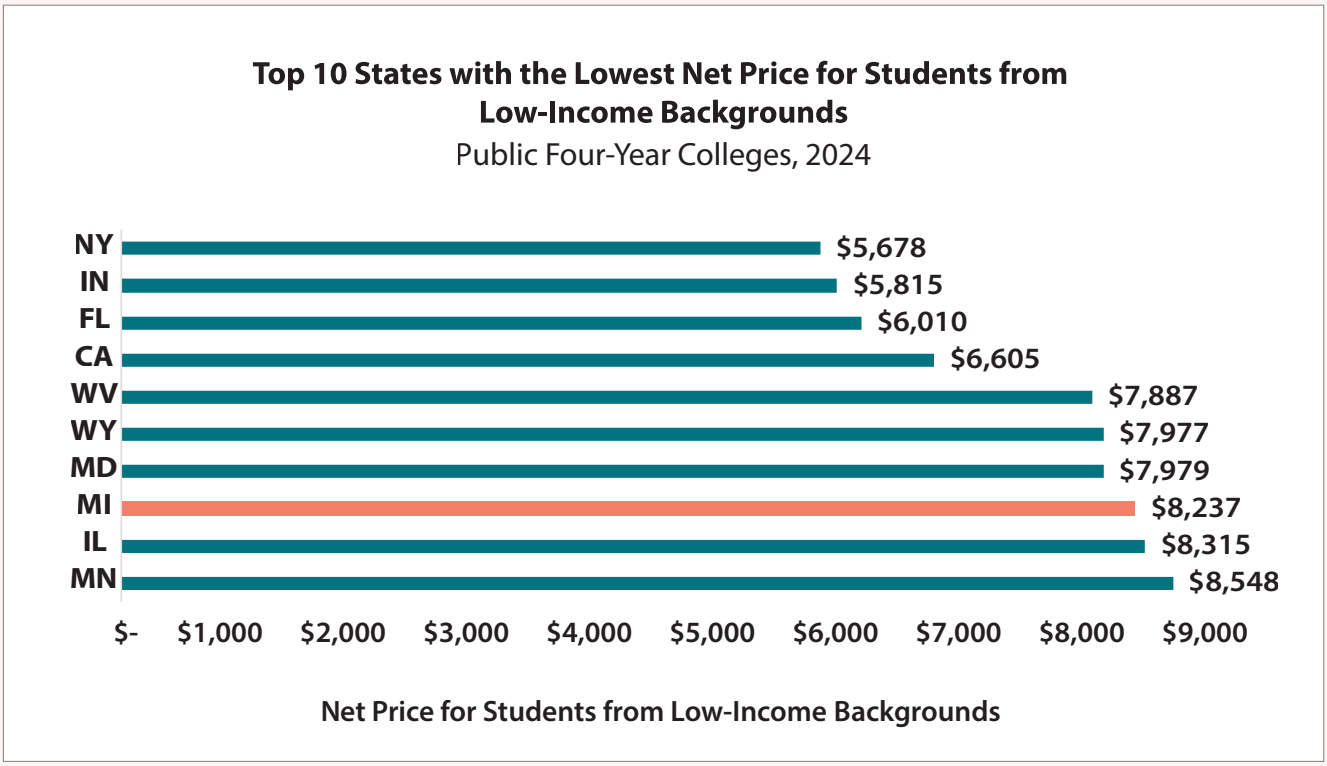
These results represent substantial improvement from 2019. At that time, students from low-income backgrounds needed to work approximately 10 hours per week to cover the net price at Michigan's two-year institutions and 20 hours per week at its four-year institutions. A student working only 10 hours per week would have faced affordability gaps of $203 and $4,655, respectively.[15]

Michigan's high national rankings are encouraging. In part they reflect the state's financial aid programs like Michigan Reconnect and Michigan Community College Guarantee. Yet, affordability is ultimately measured by what students can pay — not simply by whether Michigan compares favorably with other states. The state has reached the affordability benchmark at its public two-year institutions, on average, while students attending public four-year institutions still face a meaningful financial shortfall. Moreover, statewide averages may conceal significant differences across colleges and do not necessarily reflect the experiences of part-time students, student parents,[61] undocumented students, or others who may receive less financial aid and other necessary supports.[62]





Source: NCES, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2023-24 & National Conference of State Legislatures, State Minimum Wages 2024



Source: NCES, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2023-24 & National Conference of State Legislatures, State Minimum Wages 2024

INDICATOR 3

Student Well-Being

Do Michigan students have the support and conditions they need to attend, engage, and thrive in school?

Student Well-Being

Do Michigan students have the support and conditions they need to attend, engage, and thrive in school?

Student well-being is foundational to learning. Students are best positioned to succeed academically when they attend school consistently, feel physically and emotionally safe, experience a sense of belonging, and have access to trusted adults and essential supports. This indicator examines three conditions of student well-being: chronic absenteeism, access to school counselors, and out-of-school suspension rates. Together, these measures provide insight into whether Michigan students are connected to school, supported when challenges arise, and able to fully participate in learning.

What We Measure

01 Student-to-Counselor Ratio

02 Chronic Absenteeism Rates

03 Out of School Suspension Rates

State Actions and What to Watch Going Forward

Michigan policymakers have made student well-being an increasingly important policy priority by expanding school-based mental health services, counseling supports, behavioral health programs, family engagement initiatives, and other resources designed to help students succeed in school. Although relatively little legislation has focused directly on chronic absenteeism or exclusionary discipline this year, many of these investments aim to address the underlying barriers that influence attendance, student engagement, and overall schooling experiences. However, it is important to note that in 2017, Michigan removed zero tolerance policies,[63] and the Michigan Department of Education has provided necessary guidance on non-exclusionary methods.[64]

Recent school aid budgets have continued to invest in student supports through funding for school mental health grants, evidence-based mental health training, and mental health and school safety per-pupil payments.[65] As policymakers continue balancing school safety and student well-being investments, ensuring that sufficient resources are dedicated to preventative mental health services will remain an important consideration.

Beyond budget investments, policymakers have proposed additional initiatives to strengthen student supports, including legislation to improve access to medical and behavioral therapy and streamlining certification for special education teachers.[66]

Michigan has also strengthened the systems used to monitor and improve student attendance. The state requires daily attendance reporting, publicly reports chronic absenteeism through MI School Data, disaggregates attendance by major student groups, and uses the Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System (EWIMS)

to identify students who may need additional support.[67] Additional investments through the School Success Partnership Program and broader Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) initiatives have helped schools expand attendance teams, student support services, and family engagement efforts.[68]

These investments are beginning to show encouraging signs of progress. Improvements in Michigan's student-to-counselor ratio likely reflect the state's increased investments in school mental health and student support services following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, building the educator workforce takes time, and Michigan continues to face shortages of certified school counselors.

Michigan's next phase of work should focus on ensuring that recent investments translate into measurable improvements in student outcomes while reaching the students and communities with the greatest needs.

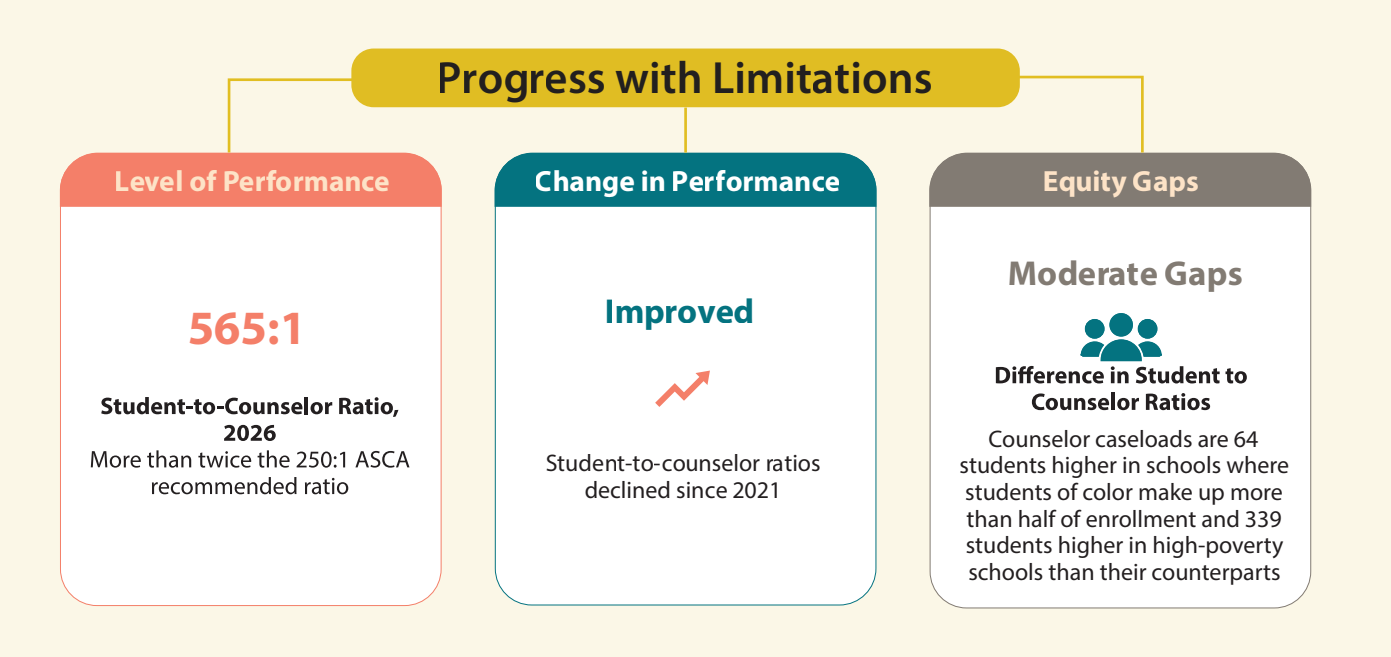
Expanding the student support workforce remains a critical priority. Policymakers should continue monitoring counselor workforce shortages, district hiring capacity, and whether new investments are reducing disparities in counselor access, particularly in schools serving high concentrations of students experiencing poverty. As staffing improves, the state should also evaluate whether increased access contributes to improvements in attendance, graduation rates, college enrollment, school climate, and student mental health outcomes.

Reducing chronic absenteeism will require moving beyond attendance monitoring toward sustained investments in prevention and early intervention. Michigan should continue strengthening its early warning systems while expanding evidence-based strategies such as intensive family engagement, transportation assistance, school-based mental health services, home visiting programs, and partnerships with community organizations. In other words, we must move from data collection to the use of effective and evidence-based interventions. Long-term success will depend on providing districts with sustainable funding rather than relying on temporary pandemic recovery resources.

Finally, policymakers should continue publicly monitoring both chronic absenteeism and exclusionary discipline by student groups. Schools cannot address disparities they cannot see, and inaccurate discipline data may obscure the experiences of vulnerable students, limiting efforts to strengthen student well-being, school connectedness, and attendance. Statewide averages can also obscure persistent disparities, and meaningful progress will require improving outcomes overall while ensuring that improvements are shared equitably across all student populations. This is especially true and important for out-of-school suspension data, which is often behind federal averages. However, our state has a unique opportunity to make that data more accessible for researchers beyond dashboards. Ultimately, ensuring students attend school consistently, have access to trusted adults, and remain engaged in learning is foundational to improving the other outcomes examined in this report.

Schools cannot address disparities they cannot see, and inaccurate discipline data may obscure the experiences of vulnerable students, limiting efforts to strengthen student well-being, school connectedness, and attendance.

Student-to-Counselor Ratio



What is this measure?

The student-to-school counselor ratio measures how many students are assigned to each school counselor and provides an indicator of students' access to academic, college and career, and social-emotional support. Because counselors provide both academic and social-emotional support, this measure reflects students' overall access to the individualized guidance they need to succeed throughout their educational journey.

Why does this measure matter?

School counselors play a critical role in helping students succeed academically and preparing them for life after high school. Research consistently finds that lower counselor caseloads are associated with improved student outcomes, including higher graduation rates, fewer disciplinary incidents, improved attendance, stronger mental health supports, and increased college enrollment.[69] The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a ratio of 250 students per counselor, while the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) reports that students who meet individually with a school counselor are more likely to complete the FAFSA, two to three times more likely to enroll in college, and twice as likely to enroll in a bachelor's degree program.[70]

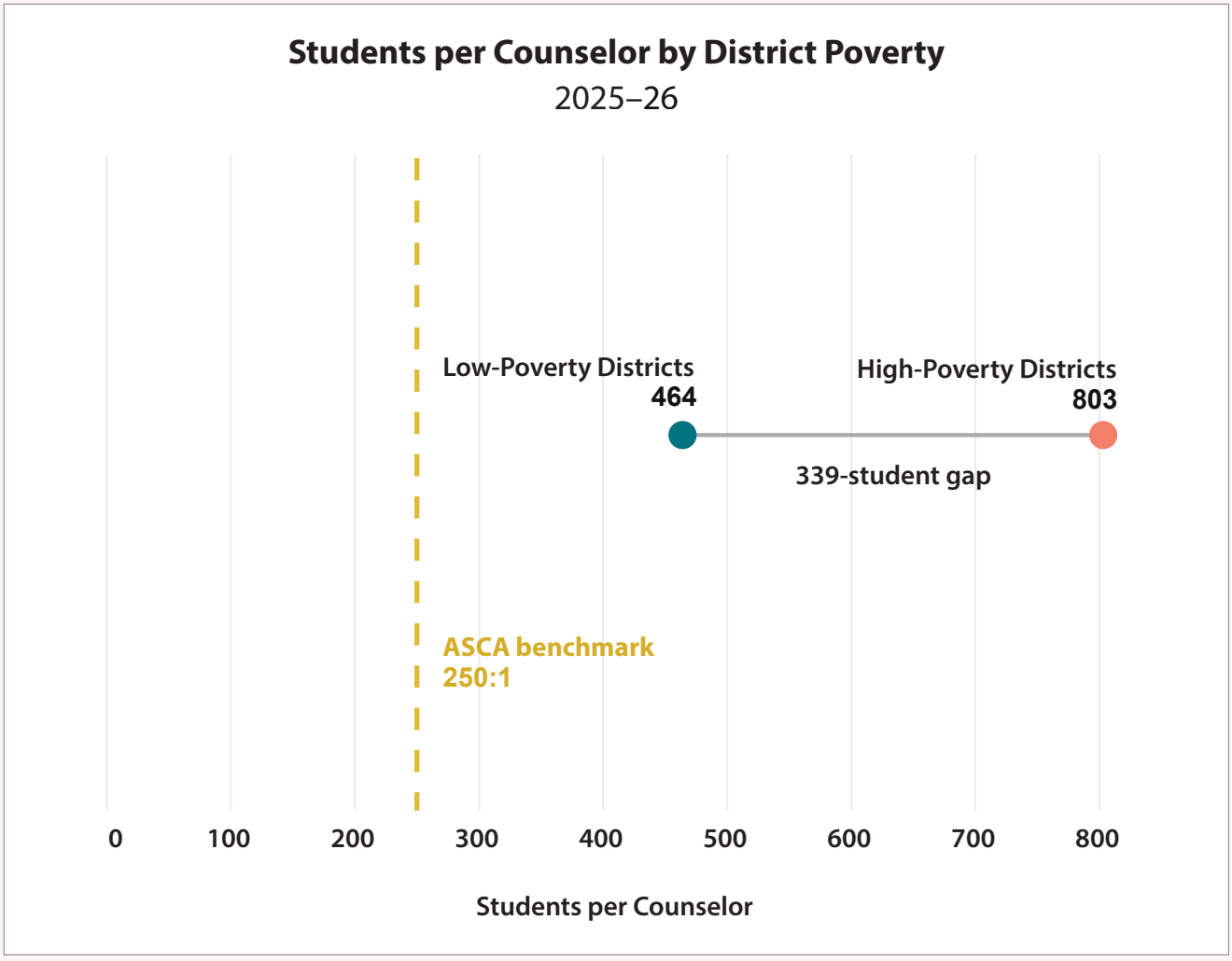
Where does Michigan stand?

Michigan is far below the ASCA's recommended ratio of 250 students per counselor — a ratio that aims to ensure that students have the support needed to succeed throughout their educational journey. Michigan's 2026 statewide student-to-counselor ratio is approximately 565 students per counselor — more than double the ratio recommended by ASCA.

On average, counselors serving in schools where students of color make up more than half of enrollment have substantially larger student caseloads than counselors at majority-white schools. The average student-

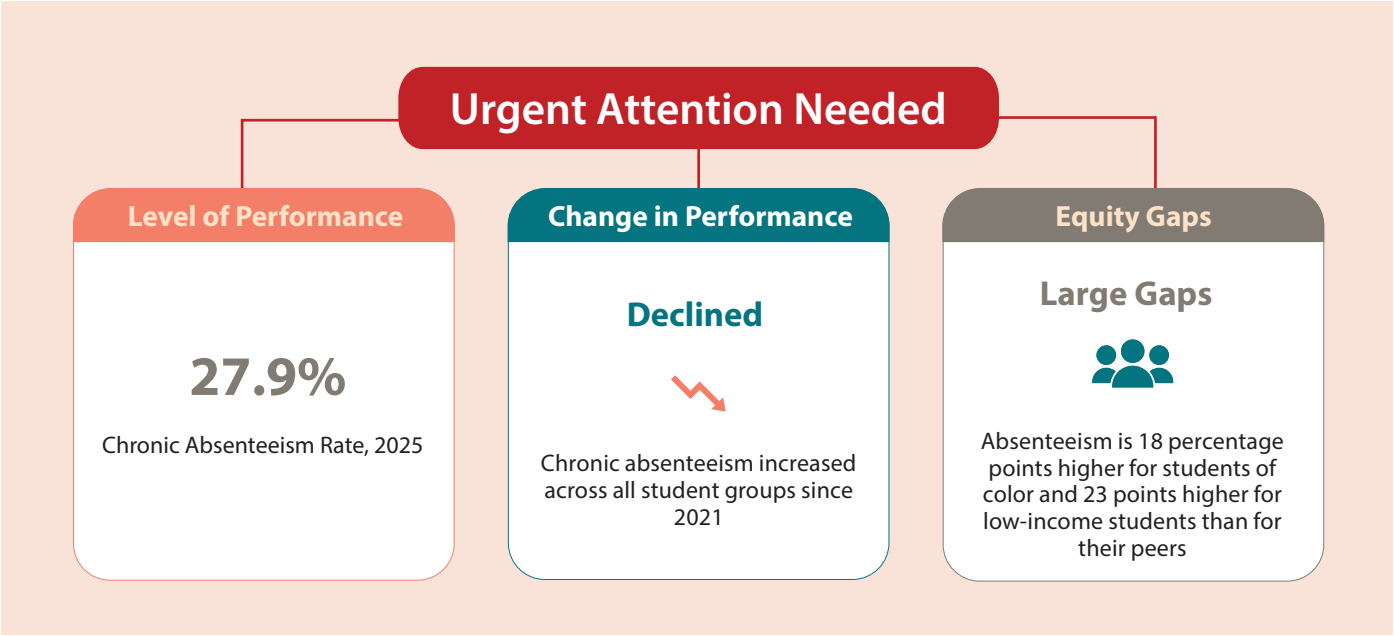
to-counselor ratio is about 64 students higher in schools where students of color make up more than half of enrollment. Larger inequities exist across schools based on levels of poverty concentration, where counselors in the highest-poverty schools experience substantially higher student caseloads than counselors in the state's wealthiest schools. **The student-to-counselor ratio in schools with the highest concentration of poverty is 339 students higher.**

Counselor access also looks different at the high school level, where counseling plays a particularly important role in graduation, college planning, and career exploration. The 2026 high school ratio of 331:1 is much better than the statewide average. High schools have also improved faster than the state overall since 2021. But even here, staffing still falls short of national recommendations.



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Student Enrollment Counts Report 2025-26 & Additional Staffing Data Files 2025-26

Chronic Absenteeism



What is this measure?

This measure represents the percentage of Michigan students who were chronically absent from school, as measured by the Center for Educational Performance and Information. To qualify as "chronically absent," a student must miss at least 10%, or approximately 18 days, of the school year.[71] Unlike average daily attendance, chronic absenteeism identifies students who are missing enough instructional time to place their academic success at risk.

Why does this measure matter?

Students cannot benefit from classroom instruction if they are not in school. Chronic absenteeism is one of the strongest early warning indicators of academic disengagement and is associated with lower academic achievement, lower graduation rates, reduced college readiness, and weakened long-term outcomes. High rates of absenteeism often reflect broader challenges facing students and families, including transportation barriers, housing instability, health concerns, school climate, and mental health needs.[72] Because of this, chronic absenteeism is both an educational issue and a broader indicator of student well-being.

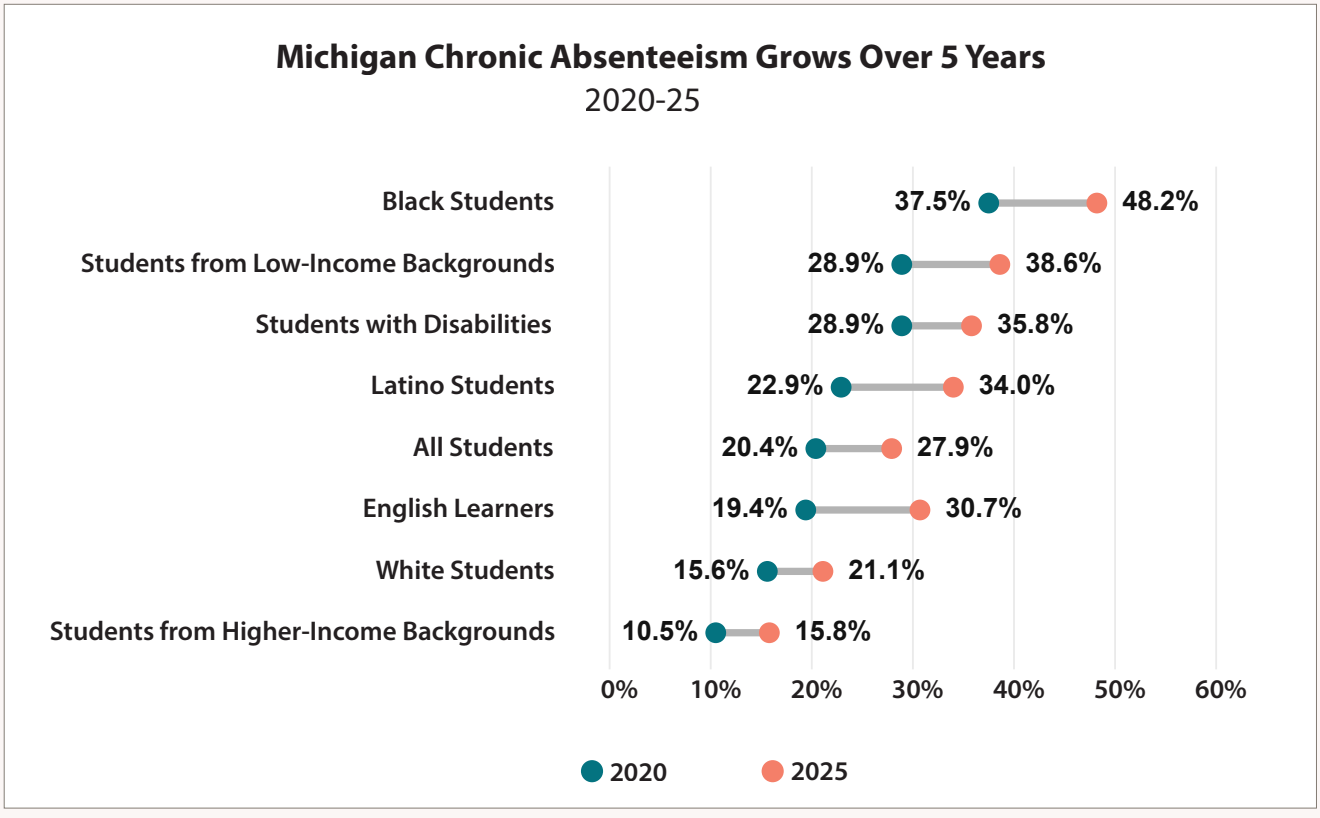
Where does Michigan stand?

Nearly 28% of Michigan students were chronically absent during the 2024-25 school year, meaning more than one in four students missed at least 10% of the school year. While rates have improved from their pandemic peak (38.5%), they remain substantially higher than pre-pandemic levels (19.7%).[73]

Students of color experienced chronic absenteeism rates approximately 18 percentage points higher than white students, while students from low-income backgrounds experienced rates nearly 23 percentage points higher than their higher-income peers. Since 2021, chronic absenteeism has increased across nearly every student group, demonstrating that attendance continues to be one of Michigan's most pressing educational challenges. These disparities are most clearly illustrated in Michigan's Black student population having the highest chronic absenteeism rates at nearly 50%. These racial and income inequities have a profound impact on some

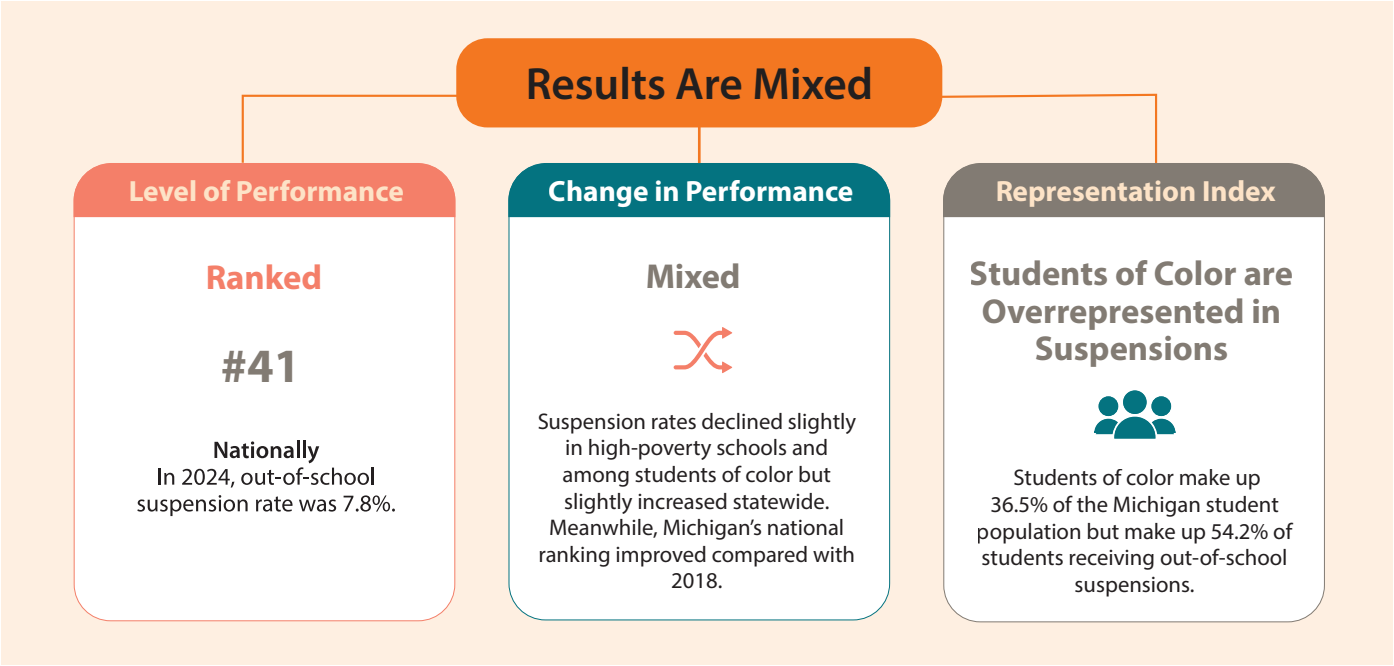
of our most vulnerable student populations. Students cannot recover academically if they are not consistently present in classrooms. Frequent absences can have lasting consequences for student learning: students who miss more school tend to fall further behind their peers academically, and those gaps can persist and grow from one school year to the next.[74] Although Michigan has begun to recover from the unprecedented attendance disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, current attendance levels remain far from where they need to be to support strong academic outcomes for all students.

A Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research (PEER) study serves as a reminder that there is no single solution to chronic absenteeism.[75] Many schools implementing frequent home visits still struggled with high absenteeism rates, and researchers found little evidence that more common interventions like automated calls, letters home, or truancy staffing, taken alone, were strongly associated with improved attendance. Schools making progress were somewhat more likely to use personalized text messages and help families address barriers such as transportation and housing.



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Student Attendance, 2019-20, 2024-25

Out-of-School Suspension Rates



What is this measure?

Out-of-school suspension rates measure the percentage of students who receive one or more out-of-school suspensions during a school year. Suspension removes students from classroom instruction and serves as one indicator of school discipline practices and student access to learning.

This measure uses data from the 2023-24 school year, the most recent release from the federal Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). OCR was slated to release these data in December 2025, but timely federal education data has remained a persistent challenge in the Trump administration.[76] The state of Michigan does not publicly report state-level out-of-school suspension rates outside of school-level data available through the Parent Dashboard, making the CRDC the only comprehensive statewide source for this analysis.

Why does this measure matter?

Research consistently finds that out-of-school suspension is associated with significant academic and life consequences. Students who are suspended lose valuable instructional time and are more likely to experience lower academic achievement, chronic absenteeism, grade retention, and higher dropout rates.[77] Long-term studies have also linked school suspension with lower rates of bachelor's degree attainment and greater involvement with the justice system.[78]

These consequences are not experienced equally. Nationally, students of color, students with disabilities, and students experiencing poverty are suspended at disproportionately high rates, making out-of-school suspension both a school climate issue and an educational equity issue.[79]

Where does Michigan stand?

The goal is for schools to maintain safe, supportive learning environments. A gold-standard education system minimizes unnecessary out-of-school suspensions while ensuring disciplinary practices are applied fairly across student groups, with no persistent racial or socioeconomic disparities.

Michigan's 2024 out-of-school suspension rate was 7.8%, placing the state in the bottom 10 states with a #41 national ranking. Compared to 2018, Michigan's ranking has improved from ranking #45 nationally, and suspension rates have increased overall but declined for students of color and within high-poverty schools.

Despite these improvements, substantial disparities remain. Michigan has increased its overall use of out-of-school suspension over time between 2018 and 2022 by only .5 percentage points. However, reductions have not eliminated longstanding disparities, meaning underserved students continue to be suspended out of school at disproportionately higher rates. Students of color experience suspension rates that are 6.3 percentage points higher than white students. **Likewise, students attending schools with the highest share of poverty experience suspension rates 13.5 percentage points higher than students in the lowest-poverty schools.**

Looking Beyond the Statewide Average

Additional analyses reveal several concerning patterns:

- Black students experience the highest rates of out-of-school suspension and are suspended nearly twice their share of student enrollment.
- Students of color comprise 36.5% of the student body but represented 54.2% of students receiving out-of-school suspensions — a substantial over-representation.

STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Students experiencing housing instability are significantly more likely to face school discipline than their peers. Research in Michigan found that economic insecurity and housing instability are associated with higher rates of disciplinary action, with Black students experiencing particularly disproportionate impacts.[80] These findings illustrate how school discipline intersects with broader social and economic inequities affecting Michigan's students.

Out of School Suspension Rates by Student Race and Poverty, 2024	
Student Group	**Out-of-School Suspension Rate**
All Students	7.8%
Black Students	16.5%
High Poverty Schools	15.6%
Latino Students	7.1%
White Students	5.2%
Low Poverty Schools	2.2%

Source: Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2023-2024

INDICATOR 4

Opportunity to Learn

Does every Michigan student have access to learning opportunities and effective educators that are necessary to succeed?

Opportunity to Learn

Does every Michigan student have access to learning opportunities and effective educators that are necessary to succeed?

Student success depends not only on what happens inside the classroom, but also on the opportunities students have before they arrive at school and the educators who guide their learning once they are there. This indicator examines whether Michigan is providing students with the foundational opportunities and high-quality teaching workforce needed to support long-term academic success.

The measures included in Opportunity to Learn span two critical stages of a student's journey. First, access to early learning opportunities helps prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Once students enter school, their experiences are shaped by the educators who teach them. Competitive teacher compensation influences whether districts can recruit and retain talented educators. Teacher experience reflects students' access to veteran teachers whose effectiveness has developed over time, while teacher diversity examines whether the educator workforce reflects the students it serves. Teacher diversity is a necessity as it benefits all students' social and academic well-being.[81] While these measures cannot fully measure instructional quality, school climate, curriculum, leadership, or the many community factors that influence learning, they can provide some insight into whether Michigan is creating the conditions necessary for all students to learn and thrive.

What We Measure

01 Young Children Not in School

02 Teacher Compensation

03 Teacher Experience

04 Teacher Diversity

What has Michigan done?

Michigan has made significant investments in both early childhood education and educator workforce development in recent years. Through the PreK for All initiative and continued expansion of the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), the state has substantially increased access to publicly funded preschool. As of January 2026, more than 55,000 children were enrolled in GSRP — the highest enrollment in the program's history and more than double the number served in 2021.[82] Eligibility has also expanded beyond income-based requirements, reducing financial barriers for families and advancing the state's goal of universal preschool access.

At the same time, Michigan has invested in strengthening the educator workforce through scholarships, student teaching stipends, mentoring initiatives, and compensation supports. Recent investments include continued funding for the MI Future Educator Fellowship and MI Future Educator Student Teaching Stipend programs, as well as one-time educator bonuses designed to support recruitment and retention.[83] However, funding for Grow Your Own educator preparation programs was reduced in FY27, potentially limiting one pathway for developing local teacher pipelines and educator diversity.[84]

Recognizing that recruiting educators is only part of the solution, the Michigan Department of Education recently adopted its first major update to educator mentoring standards in more than two decades.[85] The revised standards expand mentoring beyond beginning teachers to include school counselors and administrators while emphasizing educator well-being, belonging, and continuous professional growth.[86] Strong induction and mentoring programs have consistently been shown to improve educator retention and effectiveness, particularly during the first years of teaching.[87]

Together, these initiatives demonstrate Michigan's commitment to expanding access to high-quality education through early childhood investments and educator workforce development. However, continued attention will be needed to ensure these investments translate into more equitable access to experienced, diverse, and well-supported educators across all communities.

What should policymakers pay attention to moving forward?

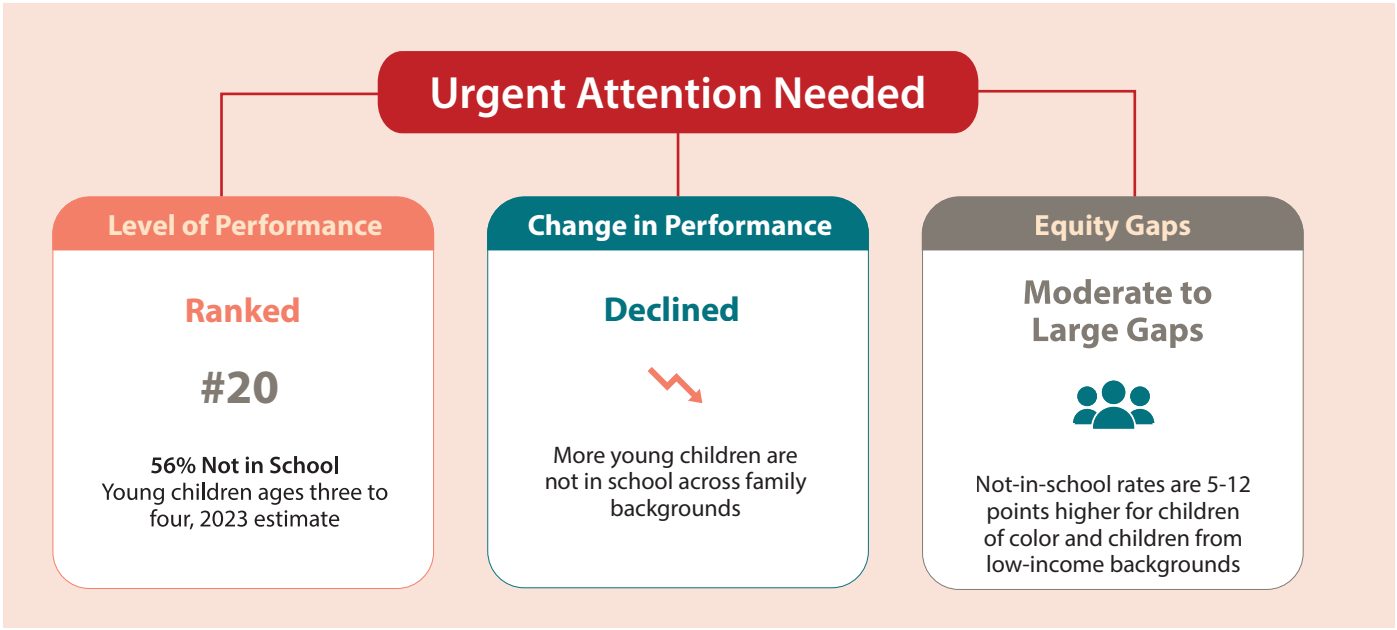
Policymakers should continue to expand access to high-quality early learning while monitoring whether enrollment growth reaches children and communities that face the greatest barriers to participation.

At the same time, strengthening Michigan's educator workforce will require sustained investments in competitive compensation, high-quality preparation, mentoring, and retention strategies. Greater attention should be given to districts serving large concentrations of students experiencing poverty and students of color, where educator shortages, lower salaries, fewer experienced teachers, and larger teacher diversity gaps continue to limit students' opportunities to learn.[88]

Ultimately, improving opportunity to learn means ensuring every Michigan student enters school ready to succeed and has equitable access to excellent educators throughout their educational journey.



Young Children Not in School



What is this measure?

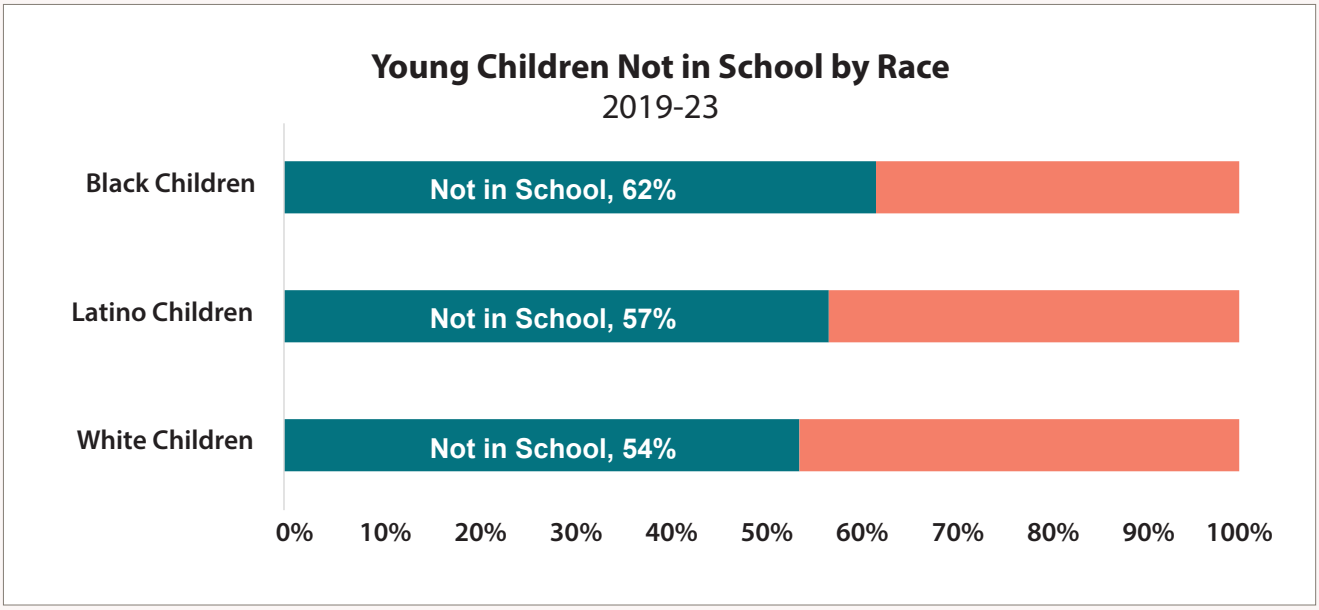
Young children not in school measures the share of children ages three to four who are not enrolled in nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, author of the Kids Count Data Book.[89] Because early learning is voluntary in Michigan, this measure reflects both the availability of high-quality early childhood programs and families' ability to access them. While families make different choices for young children, high rates of non-enrollment may indicate that many children are missing opportunities for early learning before kindergarten.

Why does this measure matter?

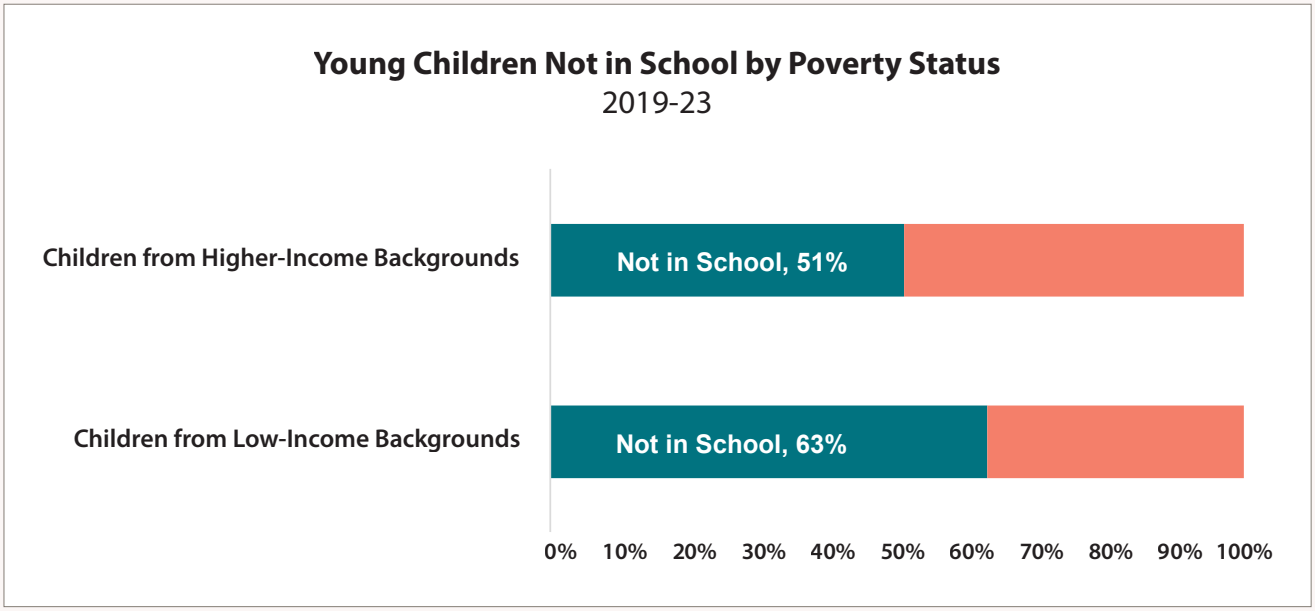
Research reveals that participation in high-quality early childhood education improves school readiness and can produce lasting benefits in early learning proficiency, educational attainment, employment, earnings, and health.[90] These benefits are especially pronounced for children from underserved backgrounds.[91]

Where does Michigan stand?

A gold-standard early childhood system ensures that cost, geography, or program availability never prevent families from accessing high-quality early learning before kindergarten. Michigan must ensure that all children enter kindergarten ready to learn by providing equitable access to high-quality early learning opportunities for every family. Michigan ranks 20th nationally on this measure, with an estimated 56% of children ages three to four not enrolled in school during the 2023 reporting period. Although enrollment has expanded in recent years, the percentage of young children not attending formal early learning settings has increased across nearly every student group since 2018. Opportunity gaps have also widened, particularly for children of color and children from lower-income families — nearly 6 in 10 Michigan children of color are not in school, and almost two-thirds of children from low-income backgrounds are not in school.



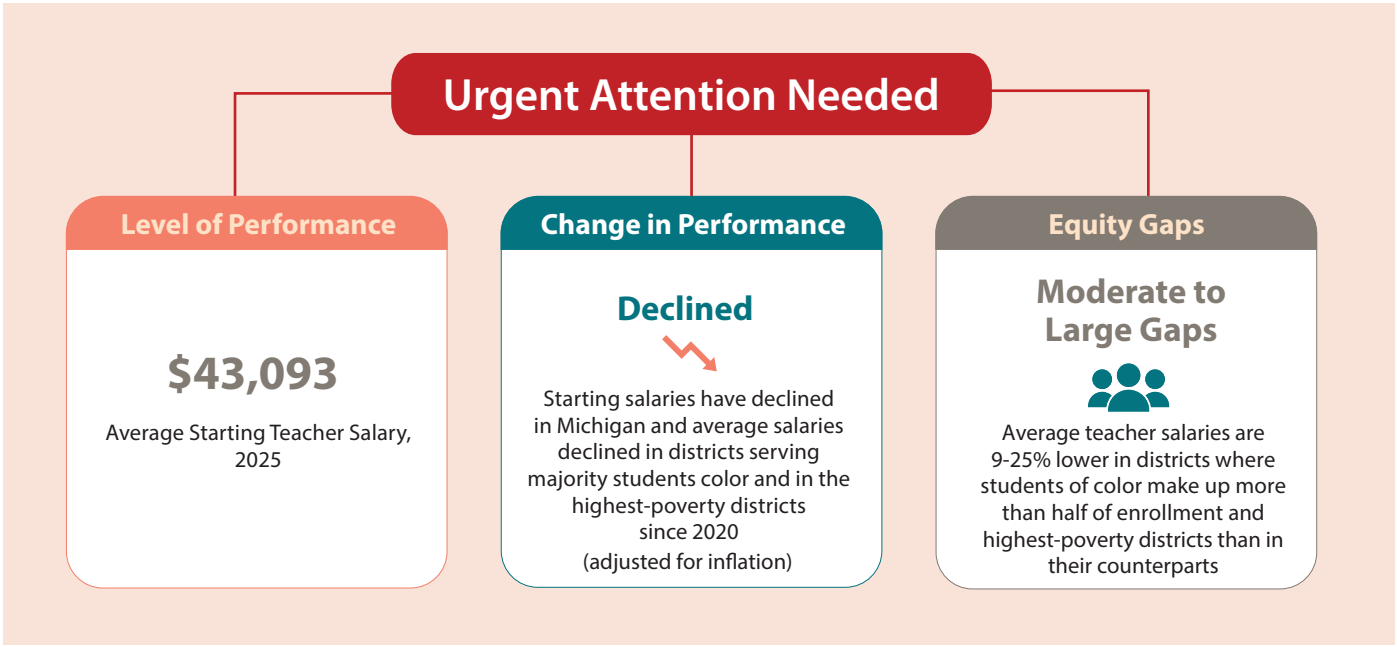
Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2026 Kids Count Data Book: State Trends in Child Well-Being



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2026 Kids Count Data Book: State Trends in Child Well-Being

Note: The Annie E. Casey Foundation distinguishes income status by those living under 200% of the federal poverty level (low-income) and those living at or above 200% of the federal poverty level (higher-income).

Teacher Compensation



What is this measure?

Teacher compensation measures the competitiveness and equity of teacher pay in Michigan. This measure examines the average starting teacher salary compared with neighboring states and differences in average teacher salaries across district characteristics, including student demographics and poverty levels.

Why does this measure matter?

Teacher compensation is one of the strongest policy levers available for recruiting, retaining, and supporting an effective teacher workforce. Competitive salaries influence who enters the profession, where teachers choose to work, and whether experienced educators remain in the classroom. Research consistently finds that higher teacher compensation improves recruitment and retention, while inadequate salaries contribute to teacher shortages and higher turnover.[92]

Compensation also shapes education equity. When districts serving large numbers of students from low-income backgrounds or students of color consistently pay lower salaries, they often face greater difficulty attracting and retaining experienced educators.[93] Competitive and equitable compensation therefore benefits not only teachers, but also the students who rely on stable, high-quality instruction.

Where does Michigan stand?

A gold-standard teacher compensation system provides competitive salaries that attract, retain, and reward high-quality teachers while ensuring teachers serving students with the greatest needs are not paid less because of where they work. Compensation should support a stable teacher workforce and eliminate persistent salary disparities across districts.

In 2025, Michigan's average starting teacher salary was $43,093, placing the state below the Midwest average.[94] Starting salaries, adjusted for inflation, have declined in recent years and overall teacher salaries continue to fall behind what is needed to recruit and retain a strong teacher workforce. Research from Michigan's Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) also highlights how Michigan's average starting salary continues to trail behind the national starting salary from 2017 to 2025.[95]

Average salaries have also declined in many districts serving large concentrations of students of color and students experiencing poverty, suggesting that compensation has not kept pace equally across the state.

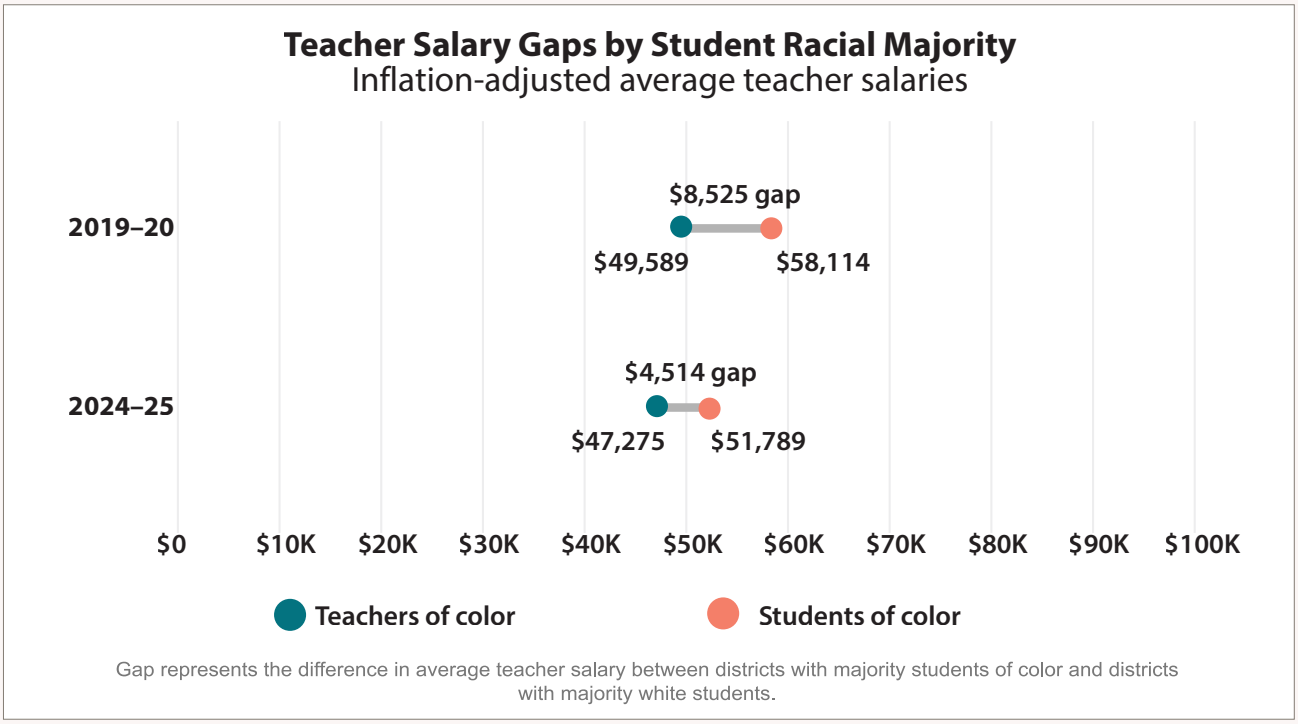
Additionally, teacher compensation varies substantially across Michigan's districts. Teachers working in districts where students of color make up more than half of enrollment earn approximately 9% less, on average, than teachers in districts where white students make up more than half of enrollment — a difference of roughly $4,500 annually.

Disparities are even larger by district poverty levels. Teachers in the highest-poverty districts earn approximately 25% less than teachers in the lowest-poverty districts, a difference of nearly $15,000 per year. These differences may make it more difficult for schools serving the greatest needs to recruit and retain experienced teachers.

WHAT MICHIGAN TEACHERS SAY ABOUT PAY

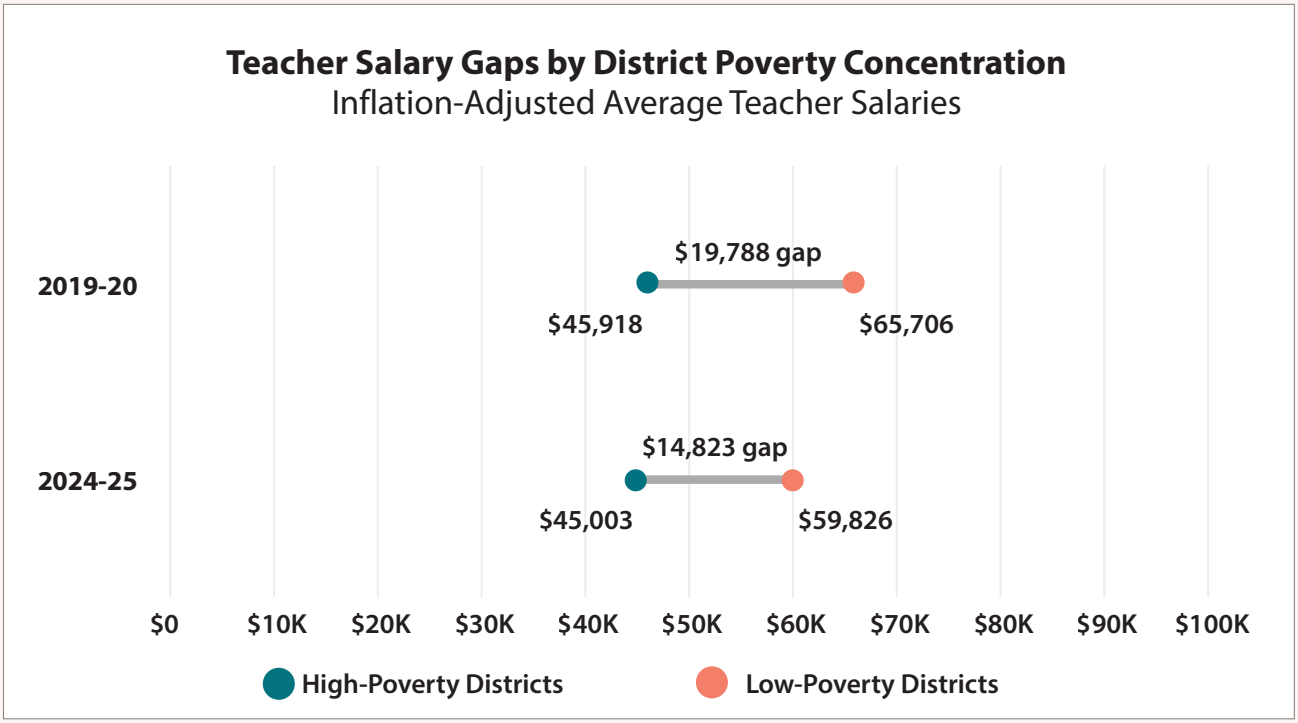
A 2026 statewide survey by the Michigan Educator Workforce Initiative found that only 32% of Michigan teachers strongly agreed that they are fairly compensated for their work. Among teachers considering leaving the profession, 48% identified low pay as a reason — the most cited factor. Only 27% strongly agreed that their salaries provide the same opportunities to buy a home, save for retirement, or invest as similarly educated professionals.[96] Read the full report here.





Source: Michigan Department of Education Bulletin 1011, 2019-20, 2024-25; Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Student Enrollment Counts Report 2019-20, 2024-25; Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Staffing Count 2019-20, 2024-25

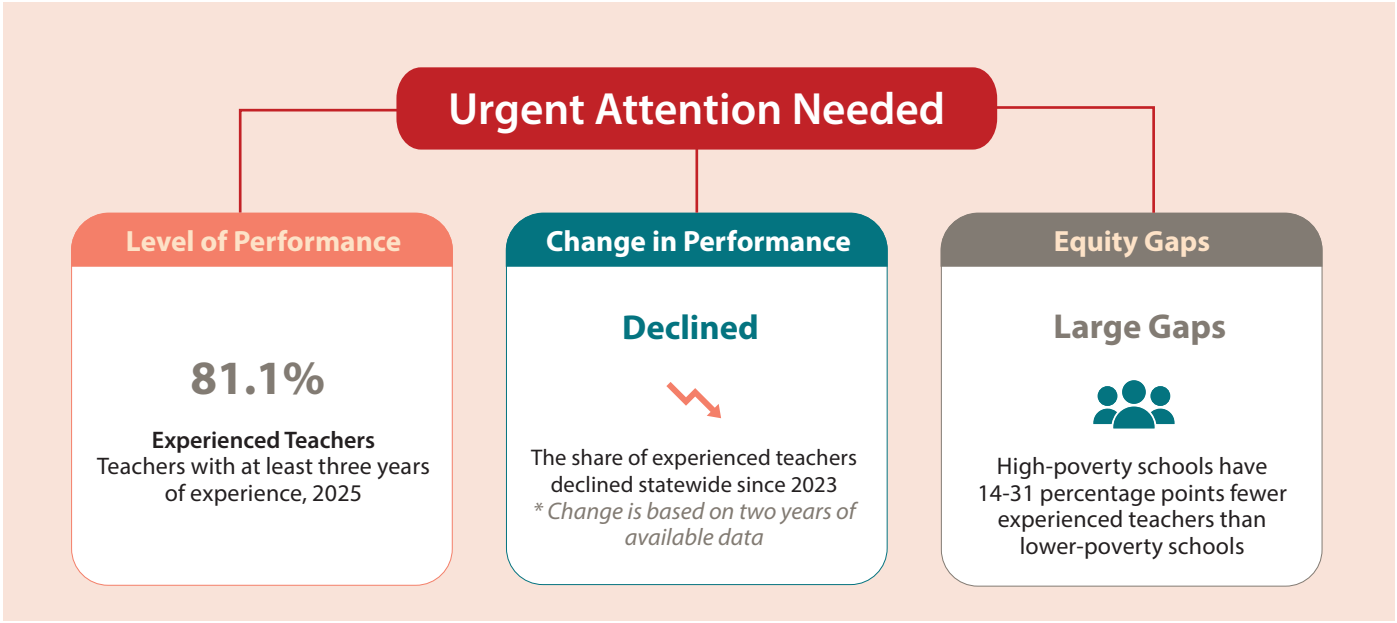
Competitive teacher pay is one of the strongest tools we have to attract and retain effective educators. When districts serving students from low-income backgrounds and students of color pay less, they face greater challenges keeping experienced teachers. Investing in fair, competitive salaries helps ensure every student has access to the stable, high-quality instruction they deserve.



Source: Michigan Department of Education Bulletin 1011, 2019-20, 2024-25; Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Student Enrollment Counts Report 2019-20, 2024-25; Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Staffing Count 2019-20, 2024-25



Teacher Experience



What is this measure?

This measure examines the percentage of Michigan teachers with at least three years of teaching experience. Research suggests that teachers make their greatest gains in effectiveness during their first several years in the classroom, with improvements in student outcomes leveling off after approximately five years of experience.[97] As a result, this measure serves as one measurement of students' access to experienced educators.

Why does this measure matter?

Teacher experience is strongly associated with student success. Research consistently finds that students taught by more experienced teachers demonstrate higher academic achievement, particularly in reading and mathematics, while inexperienced teachers continue developing instructional expertise.[98]

However, access to experienced teachers is not distributed equally. Students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to attend schools with larger shares of early-career teachers, limiting equitable access to one of the most important school-based factors influencing student learning.[99] Ensuring that all students, not just those in affluent communities, have access to experienced educators is therefore both a workforce and an educational equity priority.

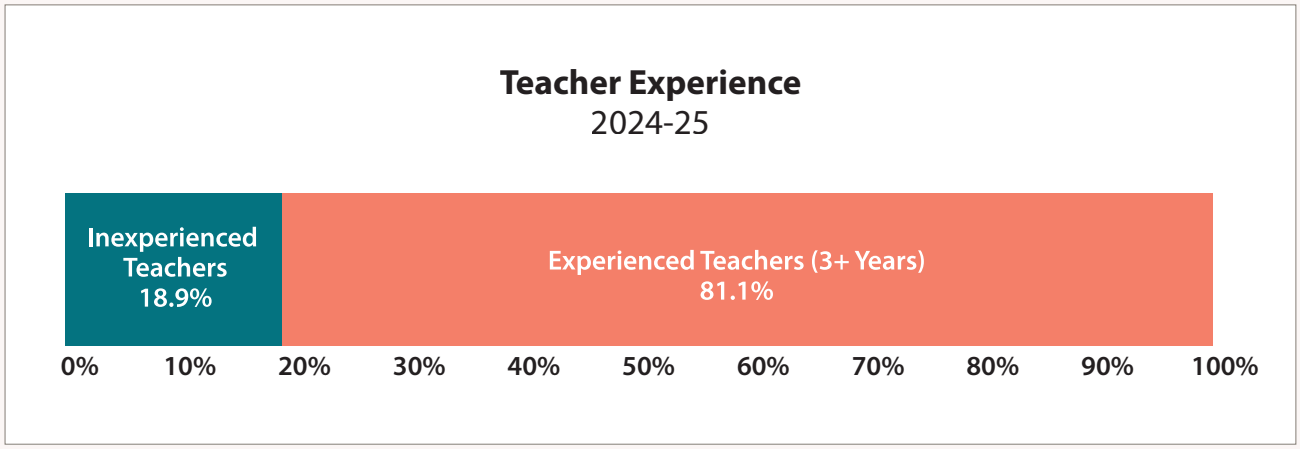
Where does Michigan stand?

A gold-standard educator workforce ensures that every student — regardless of their background — has access to experienced, well-supported teachers. Strong educator pipelines, effective induction and mentor programs, competitive compensation, and successful retention strategies allow schools to build and sustain a stable workforce in which the vast majority of teachers remain in the profession beyond their early career years.

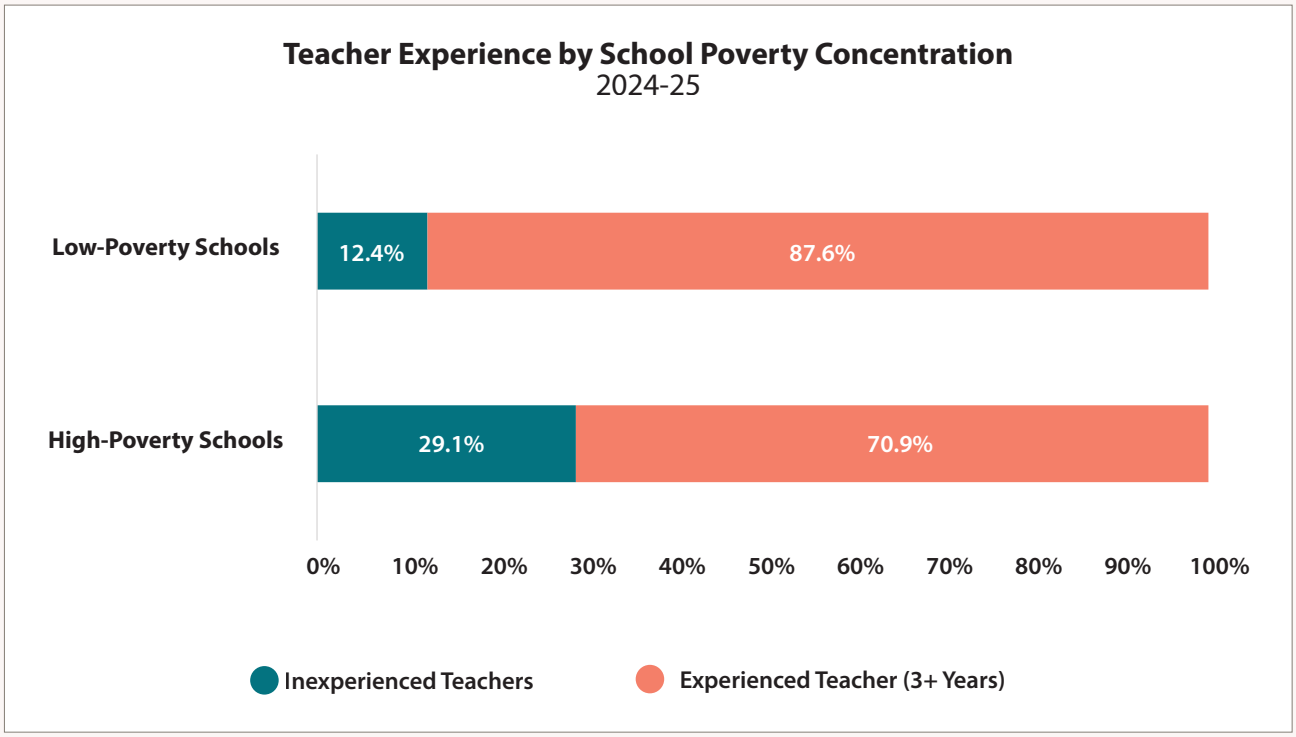
In 2025, just 81.1% of Michigan teachers had three or more years of teaching experience. Compared to 2021 national data, which is the most recent national data, this percent would place Michigan in the middle range for teacher experience.

Schools serving the highest concentration of students experiencing poverty continue to have substantially smaller shares of experienced teachers than their counterparts. In high-poverty schools, the share of inexperienced teachers is more than twice as high as in low poverty schools (29.1% vs. 12.4%).[100]

The substantial salary differences observed across Michigan's districts parallel the inequities seen in teacher experience. Districts serving the highest concentrations of students experiencing poverty not only employ fewer experienced teachers, but also pay substantially lower average salaries, reinforcing longstanding challenges in educator recruitment and retention.



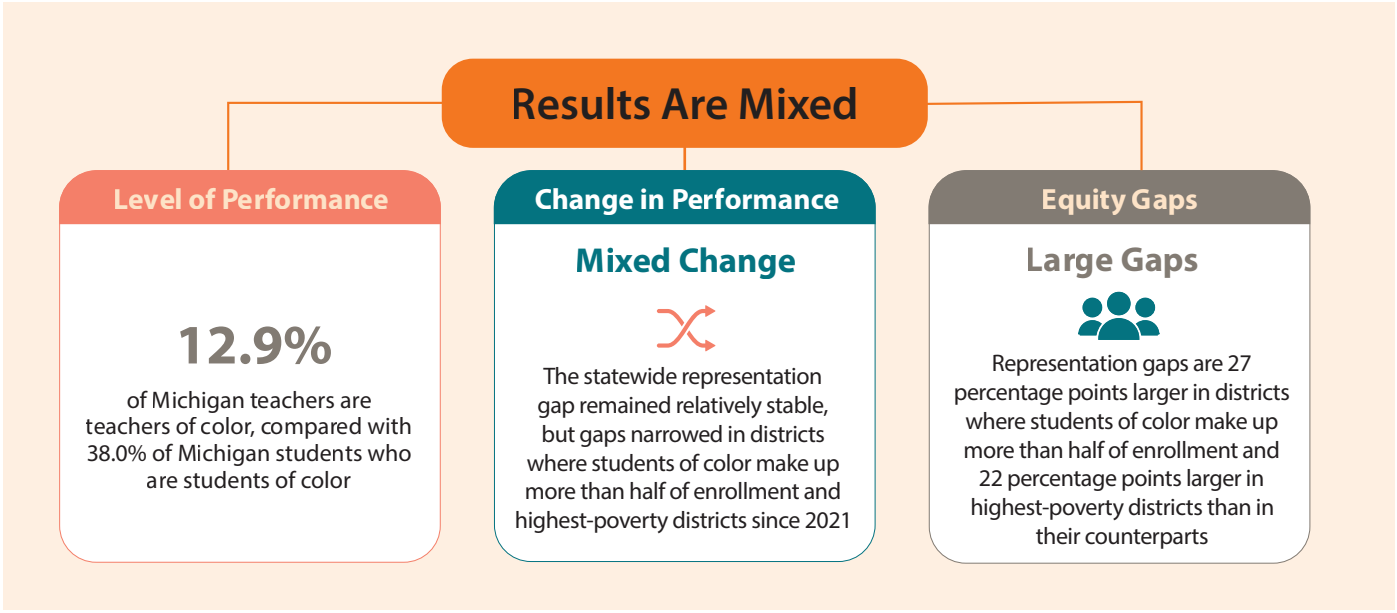
Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Annual Education Report 2025-26



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Annual Education Report 2025-26

Note: The Annual Education Report defines a "low-poverty school" as a school in the bottom quartile of poverty in the state. A "high-poverty school" is defined as a school in the top quartile of poverty in the state.

Teacher Diversity



What is this measure?

Teacher diversity measures the difference between the racial composition of Michigan's student population and its teacher workforce. Specifically, this measure examines the difference between students of color and teachers of color statewide and across different types of school districts. Smaller gaps indicate that the teacher workforce more closely reflects the student body.

Why does this measure matter?

Research consistently shows that all students benefit from a diverse teacher workforce. Students of color experience higher academic achievement, stronger attendance, improved graduation rates, and fewer disciplinary referrals when they have teachers who share their racial background.[101] At the same time, white students benefit from learning alongside educators with diverse perspectives, demonstrating stronger critical thinking, cultural competence, empathy, and preparation for an increasingly diverse society.[102]

Despite these benefits, teacher workforce diversity has not kept pace with the growing diversity of Michigan's student population. Closing this representation gap is not simply about workforce demographics — it is about ensuring all students have equitable access to the educational benefits that a diverse teacher workforce provides.

Where does Michigan stand?

A gold-standard teacher workforce reflects the diversity of the students it serves. Every student should have access to a racially and culturally diverse teaching workforce. Achieving this goal requires strengthening educator preparation pipelines, expanding equitable hiring practices, and improving the recruitment and retention of teachers of color across all regions of Michigan.

In 2026, students of color made up substantially more of Michigan's student population than its teacher workforce, resulting in a statewide teacher diversity gap of 25.1 percentage points. This disparity indicates that the state's teacher workforce continues to fall short of reflecting the student population.

Teacher diversity gaps have remained relatively stable statewide since 2021, although some student groups and district types have experienced modest improvements. These gains suggest that recent recruitment and retention efforts may be beginning to have an impact, but overall progress remains slow.

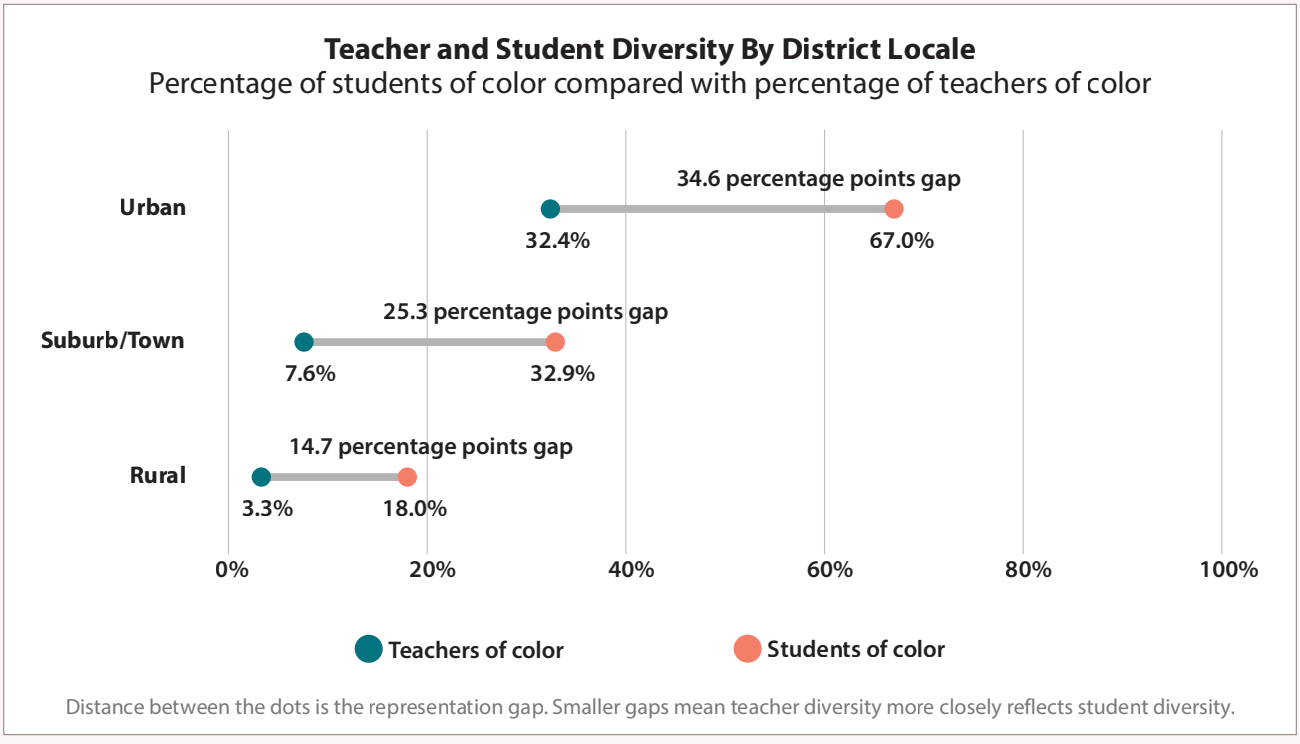
Teacher diversity gaps are largest in districts serving the highest proportions of students of color and students experiencing poverty. In districts where students of color make up more than half of enrollment, the gap between the share of students of color and the share of teachers of color remains substantially larger than in districts where white students make up more than half of enrollment. However, districts with the highest concentrations of poverty have made the most progress in reducing their racial diversity gaps since 2021.

Teacher Diversity Bright Spot

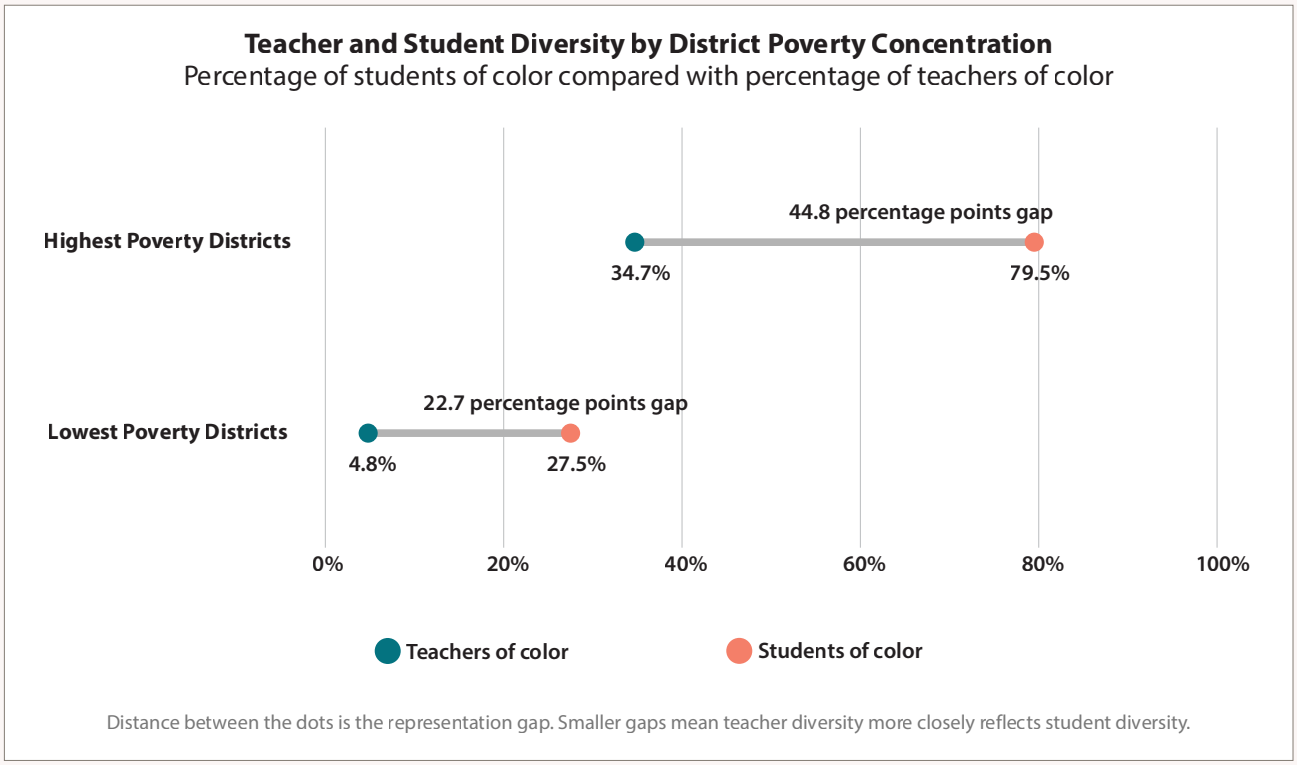
Districts serving the highest concentrations of students experiencing poverty reduced their teacher diversity gap by 10.3 percentage points since 2021, compared with just 2.1 percentage points in the lowest-poverty districts. Although substantial disparities remain, this suggests that progress is possible when recruitment and retention efforts are focused where needs are greatest.

A clear relationship also exists between student diversity and educator representation: the teacher representation gap is most pronounced in districts serving a majority students of color. This means the students with the most diverse classrooms are the least likely to see that diversity reflected at the front of the room.

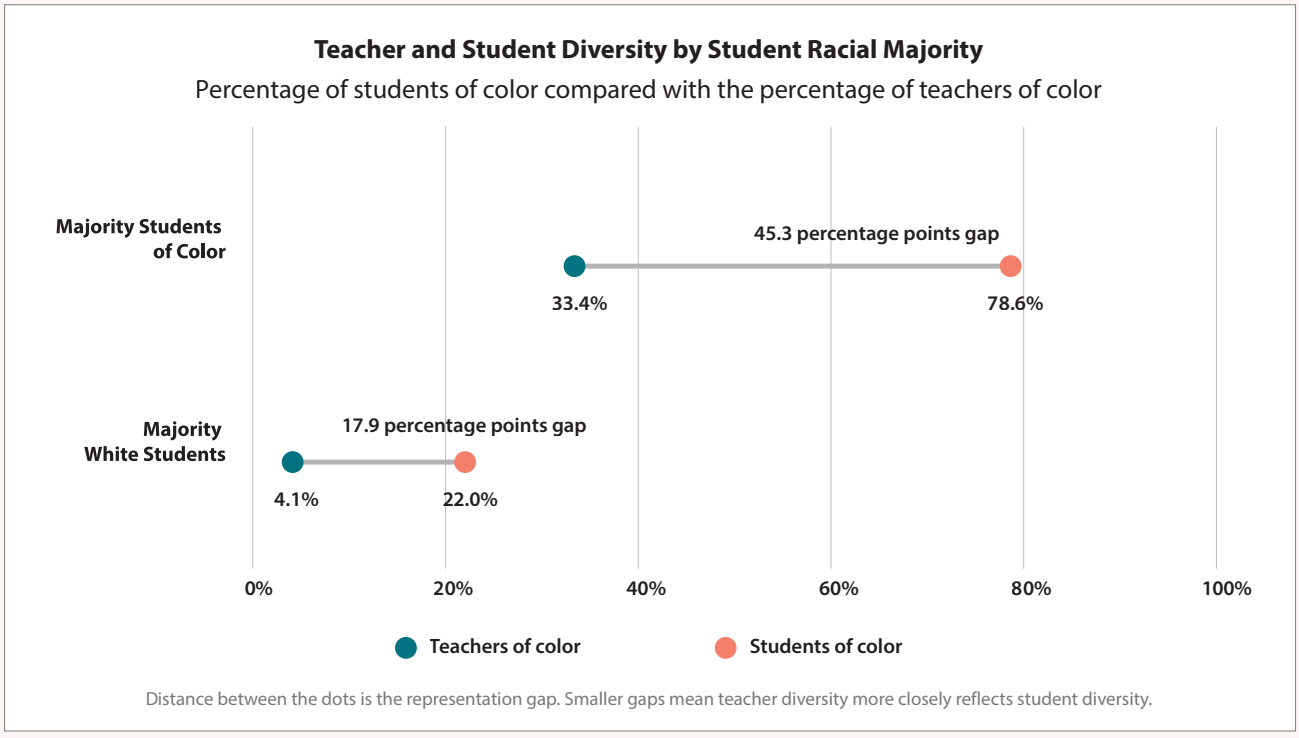
Although urban districts have the largest representation gaps, they also employ the highest rate of teachers of color compared to rural and suburban/town districts. Rural districts have smaller representation gaps largely because they serve fewer students of color, but teachers of color remain considerably under-represented.



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Student Enrollment Counts Report & Staffing Counts Report, 2025-26



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Student Enrollment Counts Report & Staffing Counts Report, 2025-26



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, Student Enrollment Counts Report & Staffing Counts Report, 2025-26

INDICATOR 5

Fair Funding

Does Michigan provide every district with adequate and equitable funding resources and does the state provide more resources to support students with greater needs?

Fair Funding

Does Michigan provide every district with adequate and equitable funding resources and does the state provide more resources to support students with greater needs?

Funding shapes nearly every aspect of students' educational experiences. Districts and schools need sufficient funding to recruit and retain effective teachers, provide counselors and support staff, offer tutoring and academic interventions, maintain rigorous instructional programs, and respond to the various needs of their students.

For decades, Michigan faced a three-part school funding challenge: insufficient revenue growth, inadequate overall investment, and a funding system that did not fully account for differences in student need. Michigan has historically operated one of the nation's more regressive funding systems, providing too little support to districts serving the greatest concentrations of poverty.[103]

Those funding challenges did not affect all students equally. Students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, English learners, students in rural communities, and students of color often require additional resources to access the same opportunities to learn and succeed. Research consistently demonstrates that money matters in education — and that additional investments can be particularly consequential for students from low-income backgrounds.[104]

Michigan has taken important steps toward building a more equitable, student-centered funding system, what EdTrust-Midwest refers to as a fair funding system. Most notably, the state created the Opportunity Index in 2023, which provides additional funding based on student need and directs progressively greater resources to districts serving higher concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds.[105] Michigan has also increased targeted investments for English learners and students with disabilities.

These reforms represent meaningful progress. But adopting a weighted funding formula is not the same as fully funding it. Michigan continues to provide substantially less than the levels established through its own targeted funding formulas and recommended by research. The challenge now is to build on recent progress by ensuring that the state's commitment to greater funding for greater need is reflected in the dollars that actually reach students and schools.

Research consistently demonstrates that money matters in education - and that additional investments can be particularly consequential for students from low-income backgrounds.

What We Measure

01 **Funding Adequacy**: state and local education revenue per pupil

02 **Opportunity Index Funding**: State funding compared with the weights established in statute and research-based funding recommendations for students from low-income backgrounds

03 **Funding for English Learners**: State funding compared with the weights established in statute and research-based funding recommendations

04 **Funding for Students with Disabilities**: State and local funding compared with Michigan Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint funding recommendations

Together, these findings point to Michigan's unfinished funding challenge: the state has increasingly recognized that students with greater needs require greater resources, but its investments have not yet fully matched that commitment.

What has Michigan done?

Michigan's FY27 School Aid Budget continues the state's recent push toward a more equitable funding system by increasing overall education funding and targeted investments for students with greater needs. The budget increased Opportunity Index funding by approximately $259 million, bringing total funding to roughly $1.55 billion — a 20% increase over FY26. It also provided an additional $12.5 million for English learners, bringing total funding to more than $75 million, also an increase of approximately 20%.

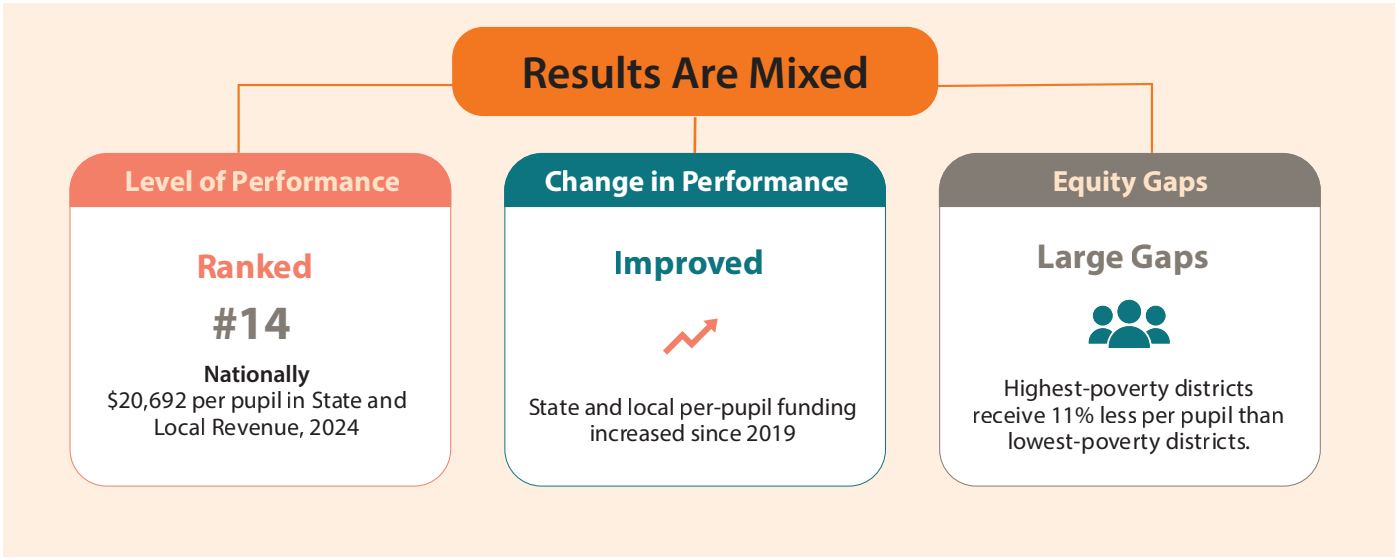
These investments are significant. They build on Michigan's shift toward a weighted funding system that recognizes that equal funding does not necessarily provide equal opportunity. However, because the state's targeted formulas remain substantially below what is written into law, additional investment will be necessary for Michigan to fully deliver on that principle.

Moving Forward: Building a Fair School Funding System

In 2025, EdTrust identified five principles states should follow to build more equitable school funding systems: fund schools adequately to ensure student success, fund schools equitably to meet students' needs, make local school funding fairer, ensure funding systems are transparent and monitor how dollars are distributed, and keep public funds in public schools.[106]

Michigan has made meaningful progress on the first three principles. The Opportunity Index and other weighted investments increasingly recognize differences in student need; the state has taken steps to direct additional resources toward communities with fewer resources; and recent investments have strengthened supports and educational opportunities for students. But Michigan's next challenge is not simply to have an equitable funding formula on paper — it is to fully fund it, ensure dollars reach the students for whom they are intended, and make that investment visible to the public.

Funding Adequacy



What is this measure?

Funding adequacy measures the amount of state and local revenue available to educate each student. This measure examines Michigan's per-pupil funding compared with other states while also evaluating whether funding is distributed equitably across communities with different student needs. Adequate and equitable funding provides schools with the resources necessary to recruit educators, offers rigorous learning opportunities, and provides the supports students need to succeed.

Why does this measure matter?

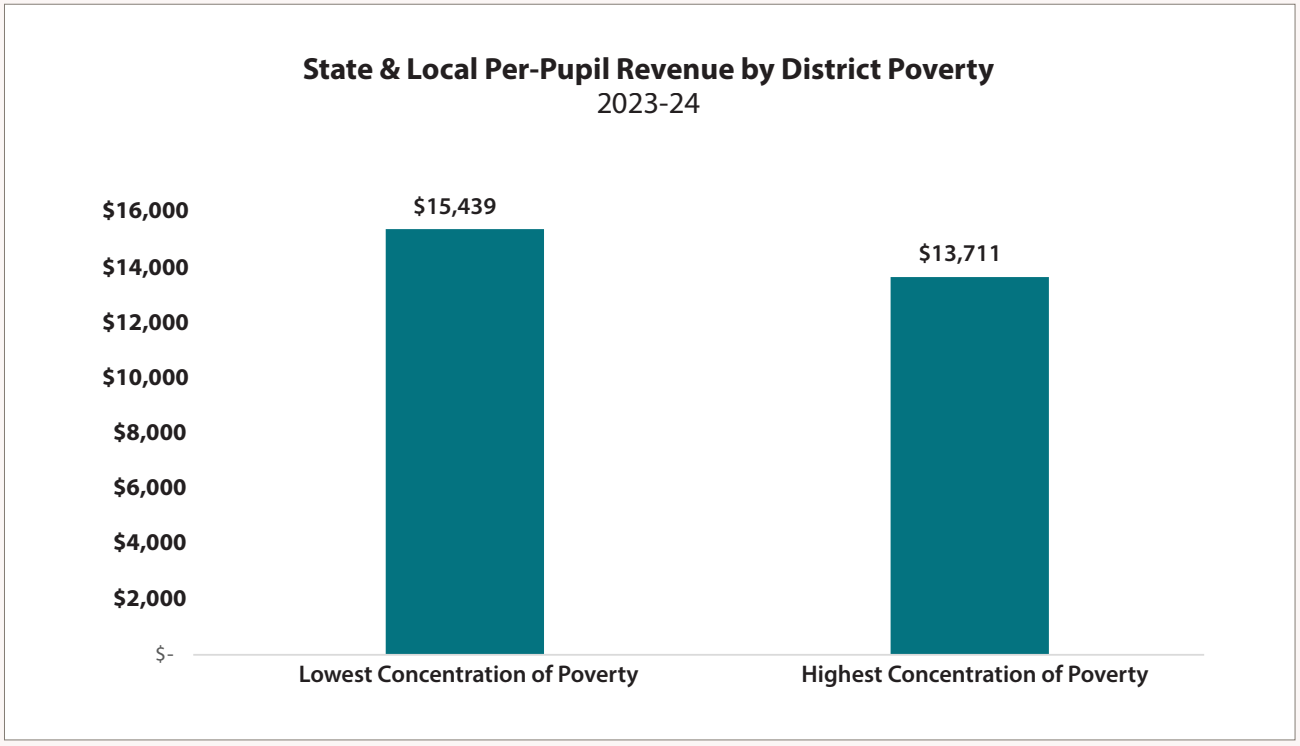
Research consistently finds that sustained increases in school funding — particularly when targeted toward students with greater needs — improve academic achievement, graduation rates, college enrollment, and long-term earnings.[107] At the same time, inequitable funding can limit opportunities for students by making it more difficult for districts serving students with greater needs to provide the same level of educational services as more affluent communities.

Where does Michigan stand?

A gold standard school funding system provides every district with sufficient resources to educate students successfully while directing additional funding to students and communities with greater needs. Funding should be both adequate to support high-quality educational opportunities and equitable so that student need — not local wealth — determines the resources schools receive. As of 2024, Michigan ranked 14th nationally in state and local per-pupil funding, with districts receiving an average of $20,692 per student. Compared with 2019, per-pupil funding has increased (adjusted for inflation), reflecting significant state investments in public education over the past several years. These increases provide districts with greater capacity to support students, though rising costs and inflation have affected the purchasing power of many districts.

This finding aligns with a previous EdTrust-Midwest analysis which found that Michigan's foundation allowance funding, the statewide per-pupil allocation, was the seventh highest among states that use similar funding systems.[108] While that analysis only looked at one type of state funding, it is unsurprising that Michigan's overall state and local funding patterns continue to rank highly against other states.

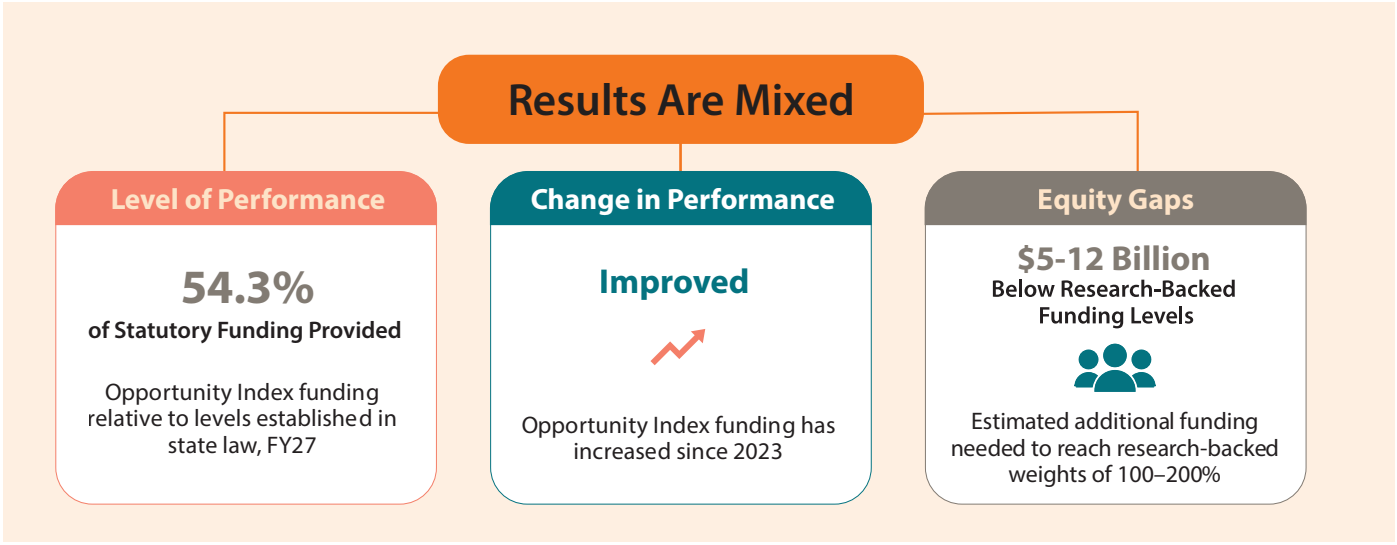
While Michigan's 1994 Proposal A overhauled the state's school finance system and significantly equalized Michigan's base foundation funding, the foundation allowance is only one component of district resources.[109] Despite relatively strong statewide funding levels, funding remains uneven across communities, and disparities remain pronounced by community wealth. **Districts serving the highest concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds receive approximately 11% less state and local funding than the lowest-poverty districts — a difference of nearly $1,730 per student.** This revenue difference is mainly seen at the local level. These inequities limit the ability of high-poverty districts to provide the same opportunities available elsewhere in the state.



Source: United States Census Bureau, 2024 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data



Opportunity Index Funding



What is this measure?

The Opportunity Index funding analysis examines how well Michigan funds the additional educational needs of students from low-income backgrounds in districts serving high concentrations of student poverty. Specifically, this measure assesses how closely Michigan's actual Opportunity Index investment aligns with the funding levels established in state law.

Created in Michigan's FY24 School Aid Budget, the Opportunity Index recognizes districts with higher concentrations of poverty need more resources to support their students' needs — and that the resources should increase as the concentration of poverty in a district increases. The Opportunity Index places districts into six bands based on their concentration of students from low-income backgrounds, with progressively larger funding weights for districts with greater concentrations of poverty. When fully implemented, the additional weighted funding will range from 35% to 47% of the foundation allowance.[110]

However, the Opportunity Index has not yet been fully funded. This measure therefore examines not only how much Michigan invests in students from low-income backgrounds, but also how close the state is to delivering the additional resources envisioned through its own funding formula.

Why does this measure matter?

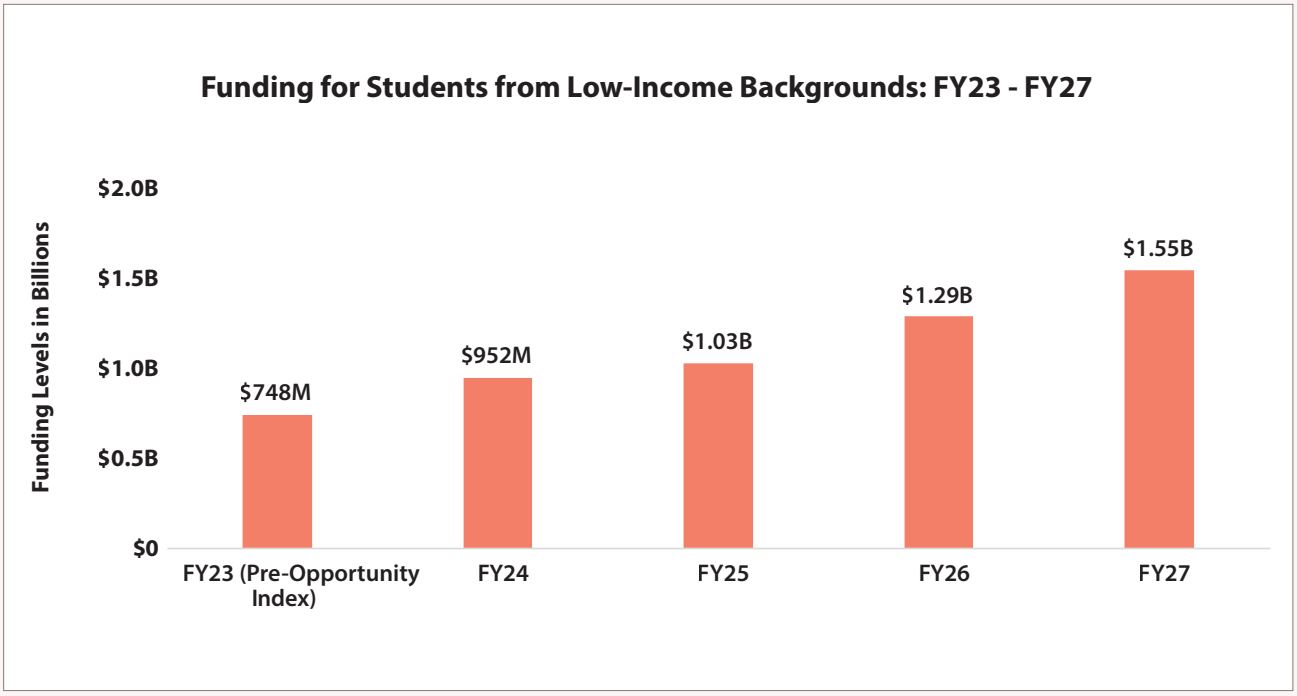
Additional funding can help schools provide smaller class sizes, additional instructional staff and paraprofessionals, high-quality professional development, academic interventions, student support services, and stronger family engagement. [111,112] Importantly, research also suggests that the costs of providing these opportunities increase when poverty is concentrated within a school or district, as schools must respond not only to individual student needs but also to broader community conditions — such as limited access to healthcare, environmental hazards, and exposure to violence — that can affect students' attendance, well-being, and learning.[113] Michigan's Opportunity Index represents an important shift toward recognizing these differences in student need. The question now is how quickly Michigan will provide the resources necessary to fully deliver on that commitment.

Where does Michigan stand?

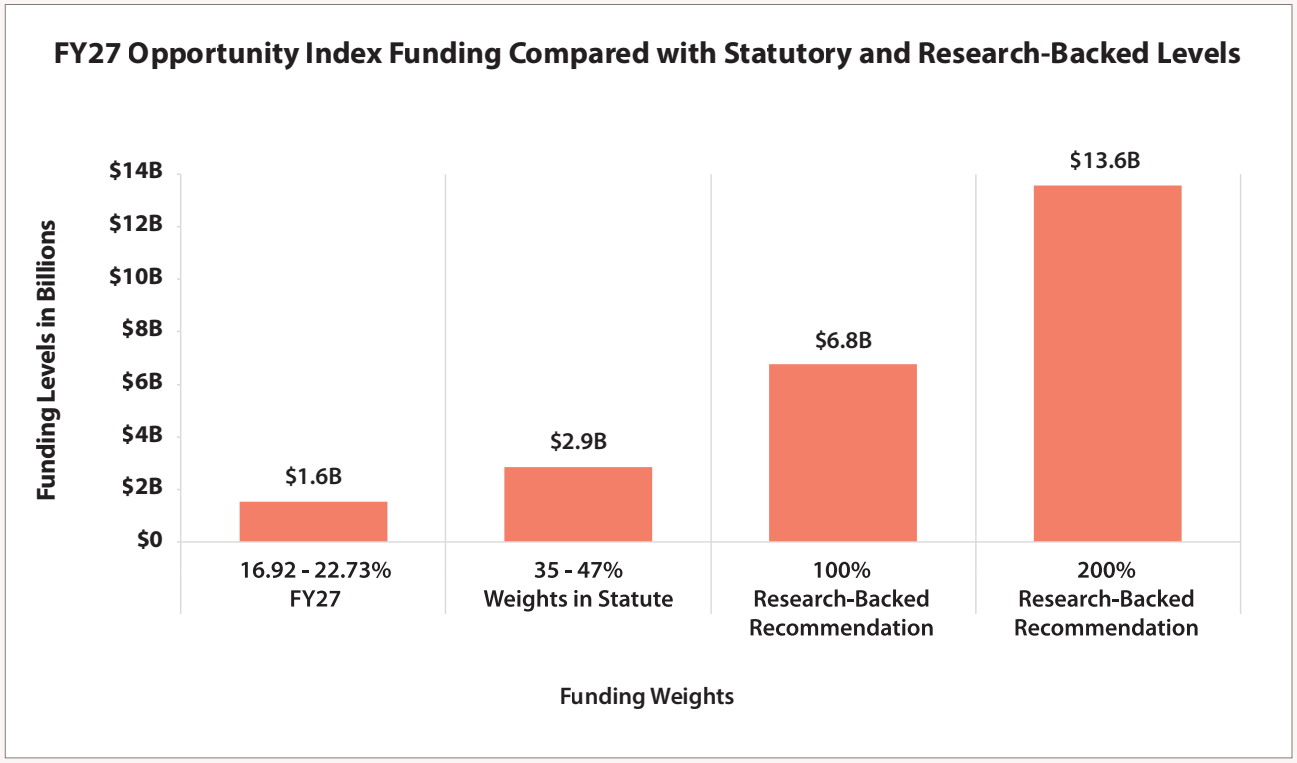
Michigan has made substantial progress in increasing funding for students from low-income backgrounds, but significant implementation and funding gaps remain. For FY27 the School Aid budget allocated approximately $1.55 billion through the Opportunity Index. That is more than double the approximately $747.5 million provided in FY23, before the Opportunity Index was implemented. Since then, funding has increased by approximately $805 million, or 108%. Despite this progress, Michigan is still not fully funding the Opportunity Index established in state law. EdTrust-Midwest estimates that fully funding the statutory weights of 35% to 47% would require approximately $2.86 billion in FY27. That means the Opportunity Index is only funded at 54% of what is in state law, leaving an implementation gap of approximately $1.31 billion.

Fully funding the Opportunity Index should be viewed as an important intermediate benchmark rather than the ultimate goal. Research-backed recommendations suggest substantially larger funding weights for students from low-income backgrounds, ranging from approximately two to three times more depending on student need and the concentration of poverty. At those levels, EdTrust-Midwest estimates that Michigan would need at least $6.8 billion in additional weighted funding.

Michigan has made meaningful progress in directing additional resources toward students experiencing poverty. The next challenge is twofold: fully implement the Opportunity Index already established in state law and consider increasing the weights in statute so that funding ultimately reflects the actual cost of providing equitable educational opportunities for students in communities with concentrated poverty.



Source: Michigan School Aid Budgets FY23–FY27

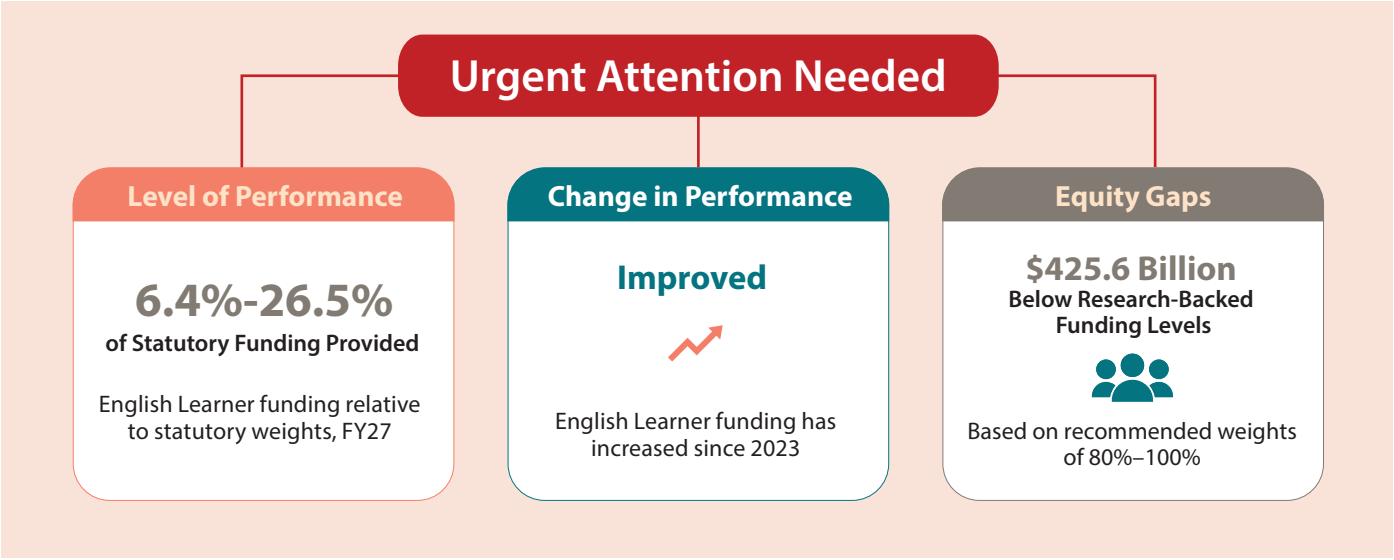


Source: Michigan FY27 School Aid Budget; Duncombe, W. and Yinger, J. (2004). "How Much More Does a Disadvantaged Student Cost?" Center for Policy Research. 103. https://surface.syr.edu/cpr/103/

Note: The FY27 funding column reflects the budget allocation for FY27 using weights ranging from 16.92% to 22.73% in additional funding per low-income student. The weights in statute funding level reflects the funding that would be allocated under a fully funded Opportunity Index using weights of 35% to 47% in additional funding per low-income student. The research-backed recommendation column reflects the amount of funding for students from low-income backgrounds if Michigan provided an additional 100% to 200% per low-income student.



Funding for English Learners



What is this measure?

The English learner funding analysis examines whether Michigan provides sufficient additional state resources to support students learning English. Michigan provides supplemental funding for English learners based on students' level of English language proficiency, recognizing that students at different stages of language development may require different levels of educational support.

Under this approach, students with lower levels of English proficiency receive greater additional funding, while students approaching proficiency receive smaller supplemental amounts. The level of English proficiency is assessed through a "WIDA Screener," commonly referred to as the WIDA and previously known as World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment.[114] Currently, only students with levels 1-3 of WIDA proficiency (the lowest levels) receive additional funding. In the FY27 budget, these weights range from 2.2% to 19.4% for additional funding.[115] When funded to the levels in state law, the weights will range from 35% to 75%.[116] This analysis examines Michigan's investment in these differentiated supports and whether funding reaches the levels established for English learners under the state's funding formula.

Why does this measure matter?

English learners bring valuable linguistic and cultural assets to Michigan's schools while also requiring access to specialized instructional opportunities as they develop English proficiency and master grade-level academic content.[117] In order for Michigan to provide these opportunities, it requires resources beyond those supported through the basic foundation allowance. Additional funding can help districts provide high-quality English language development, bilingual education, appropriately trained teachers, paraprofessionals, smaller instructional groups, professional development, translation and interpretation services, and stronger communication between schools and families.[118]

Research suggests that well-designed programs can produce significant benefits for English learners. Students benefit from both designated English language development and instruction that integrates language development with academic content.[119] Research also finds that well-implemented bilingual approaches can support stronger growth in English language arts, mathematics, and English proficiency over time.[120] Additionally, there is research that highlights how former English learners, or students who have moved beyond needing English language support, perform better on state tests compared to native English speakers.[121] This highlights the importance of providing English learners with sustained, high-quality supports that build language proficiency while ensuring access to rigorous academic instruction.

To fully fund the needs of English learners, the state should ensure that districts and schools can provide students with meaningful access to academic content while supporting the development of English proficiency.

Where does Michigan stand?

Michigan has substantially increased its investment in English learners in recent years, but current funding remains far below both the levels established in state law and research-backed estimates of what students need.

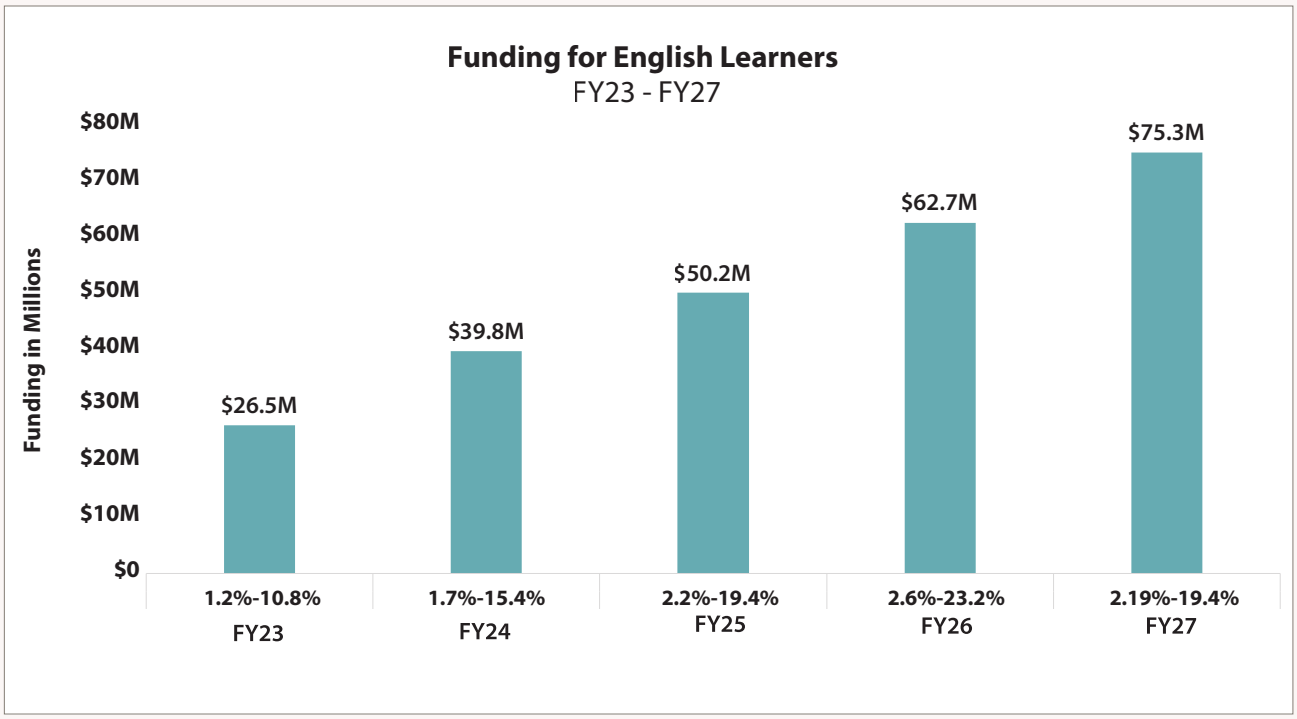
For FY27, Michigan's School Aid budget allocated $75.3 million in supplemental funding for English learners. That represents an increase of approximately $48.8 million, or 184%, since FY23, when the state provided approximately $26.5 million. This sustained increase represents meaningful progress in the state's investment in students learning English.

However, increased appropriations have not translated into full implementation of Michigan's statutory funding weights. For FY27, this funding translates to effective weights of approximately 2.2% to 19.4%, compared with weights of 35% to 75% established in state law. Depending on students' English proficiency level, this means Michigan is providing only about 6% to 27% of the supplemental funding called for under its own formula.

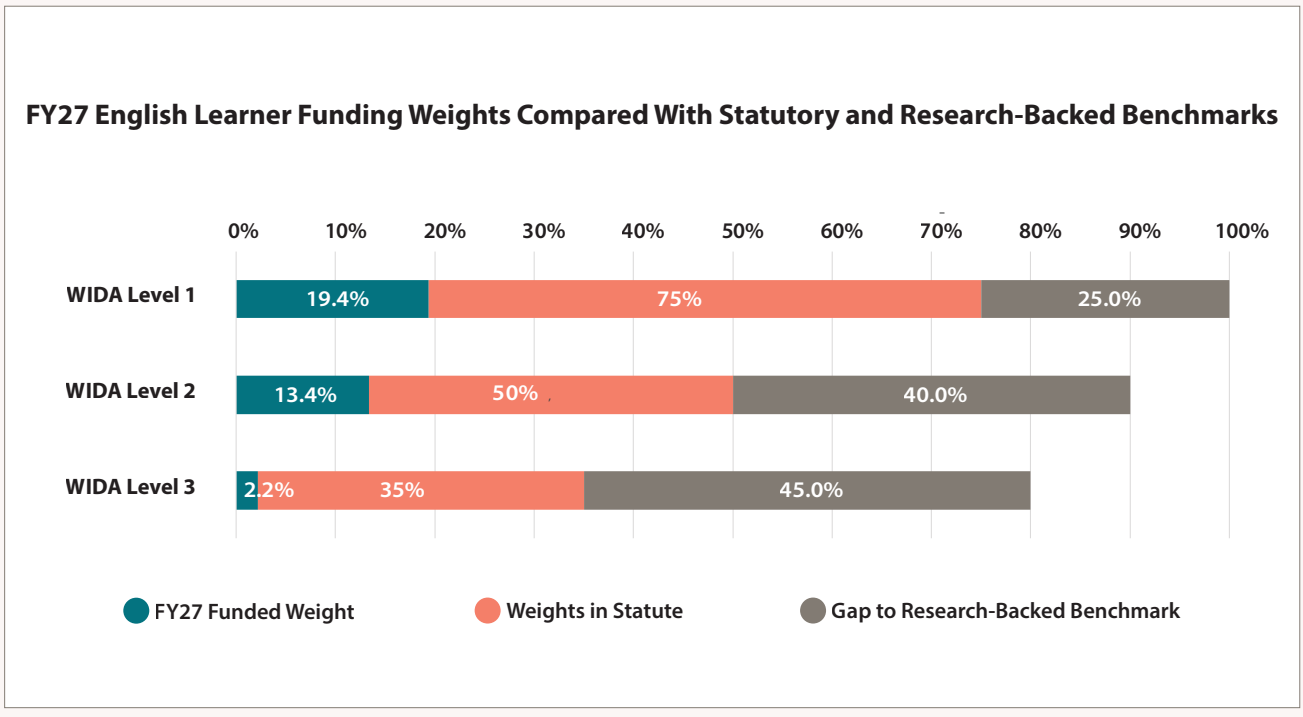
The gap is even larger when Michigan's investment is compared with research-backed funding standards. EdTrust-Midwest research from 2023 identified weights of approximately 80% to 100% as appropriate benchmarks for supporting English learners at different levels of English proficiency.[122]

A 2023 EdTrust-Midwest analysis estimated that meeting these research-backed standards would require approximately $500.9 million, compared with the approximately $75.3 million expected in FY27. Current investment therefore represents only about 15% of the estimated research-backed funding level, leaving an adequacy gap of approximately $425.6 million.

"Fair funding is one of the most important levers to improve student outcomes, yet Michigan remains far off from what research says is necessary for students with the greatest needs," said Brian L. Love, state director of EdTrust-Midwest. "If Michigan wants to be a top ten state for education, we have to ensure that students who need more support receive more resources."

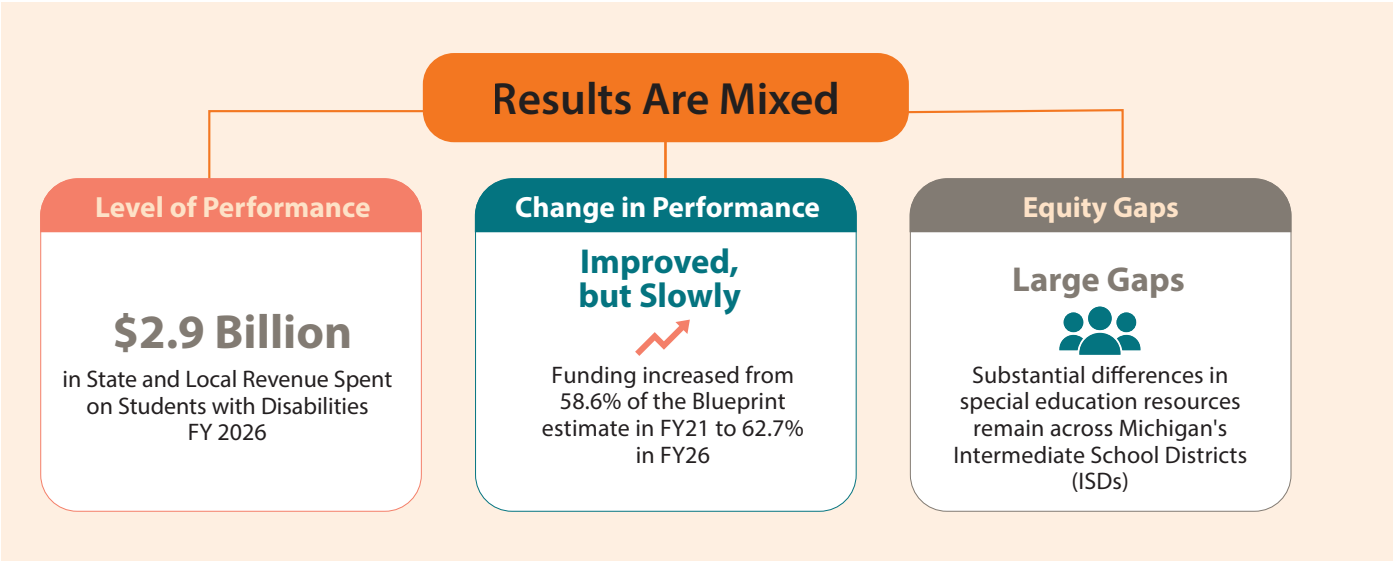


Source: Michigan School Aid Budgets FY23-FY27



Source: FY27 Michigan School Aid Budget; EdTrust-Midwest "Eliminating the Opportunity Gaps: Creating a Truly Fair and Equitable Funding System"

Funding for Students with Disabilities



What is this measure?

This measure examines whether Michigan provides adequate and equitable funding to support students with disabilities. Specifically, it compares actual state and local special education funding with the level estimated to be necessary under the Michigan Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint model. The Michigan Blueprint outlines a "student-centered, needs-based, and transparent funding system designed to ensure that every child with a disability in Michigan has the resources and support necessary to thrive."[123] A Blueprint model assigns different funding weights based on the disability and associated cost of providing services.

Why does this measure matter?

Districts are legally required to provide students with disabilities the services and supports necessary to access a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Yet Michigan's current special education funding system does not consistently align resources with student needs.

Michigan's system has been shaped by the Headlee Amendment, Proposal A, court decisions, and locally approved Intermediate School District (ISD) special education millages. ISD millage capacity is tied in part to local property values and historical tax rates, meaning communities can have substantially different capacities to generate special education revenue.[124] As a result, where a student lives can influence the resources available to support their education.

These funding challenges have become increasingly important as the number and needs of Michigan students receiving special education services have grown.[125] Districts also face shortages of qualified special education personnel, rising service costs, and the responsibility of using general education resources when dedicated special education funding does not cover the full cost of required services.[126] Adequate and equitable special education funding is therefore about more than meeting a financial target. It is about ensuring that students with disabilities have access to qualified educators, appropriate instructional settings, individualized services, and the resources necessary to fully participate and succeed in school.

Where does Michigan stand?

A gold-standard special education funding system in Michigan provides sufficient resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities and distributes those resources based on student need rather than local property wealth or geography. This approach shifts from reimbursing districts for costs after they are incurred to providing predictable resources aligned with the needs of the students they serve. Additionally, Michigan would fully fund an adequate, needs-based system while ensuring that students with similar needs have access to comparable educational resources and supports regardless of where they live.

In 2026, approximately 226,800 Michigan students received special education services, representing roughly 16% of the state's student population.[127] This is an increase of about two percentage points since the 2020-21 school year.

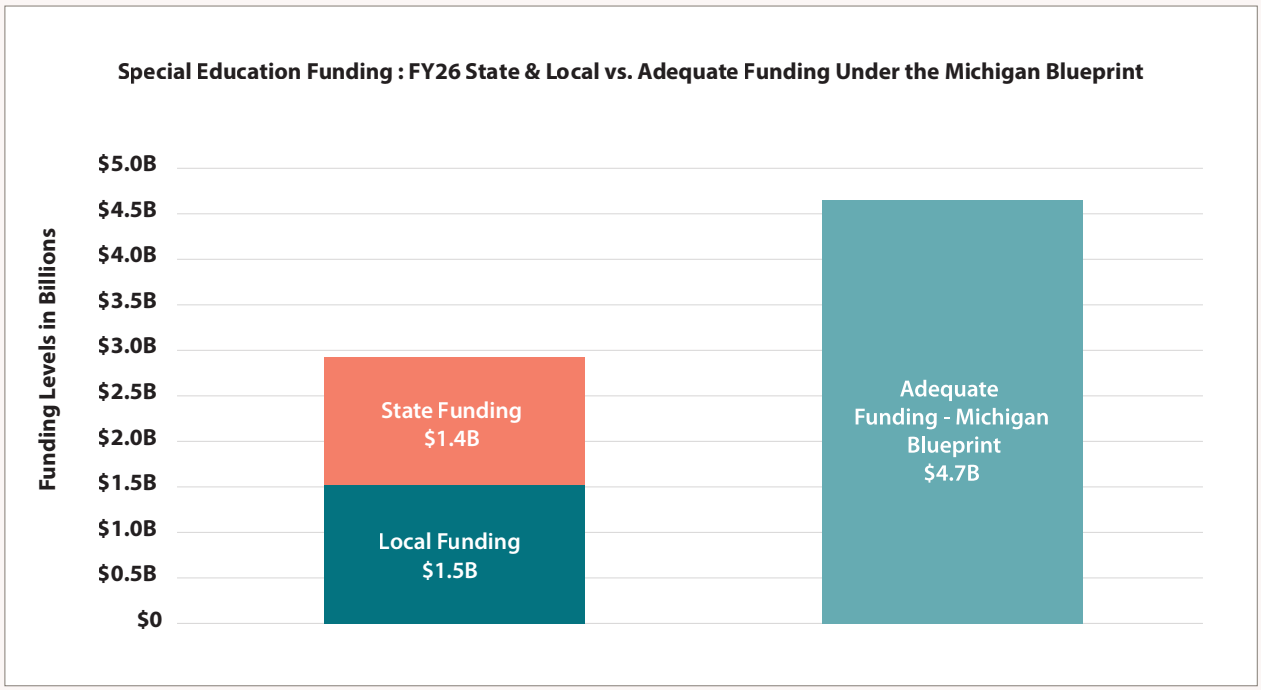
Michigan has increased its investment in special education, but funding remains substantially below the level identified in the Michigan Blueprint. After adjusting FY21 values for inflation, state and local special education funding equaled approximately 58.6% of the what the Michigan Blueprint recommends to deliver best practices. In FY26, there was an improvement of about 4.1 percentage points in the special education funding adequacy. This means that Michigan's state and local special education funding equaled approximately 62.7% of the blueprint recommendations [128]

Despite this improvement, Michigan remains approximately $1.74 billion below the Blueprint estimate in FY26. In other words, the state currently provides less than two-thirds of the state and local resources estimated to be necessary under the Blueprint model.

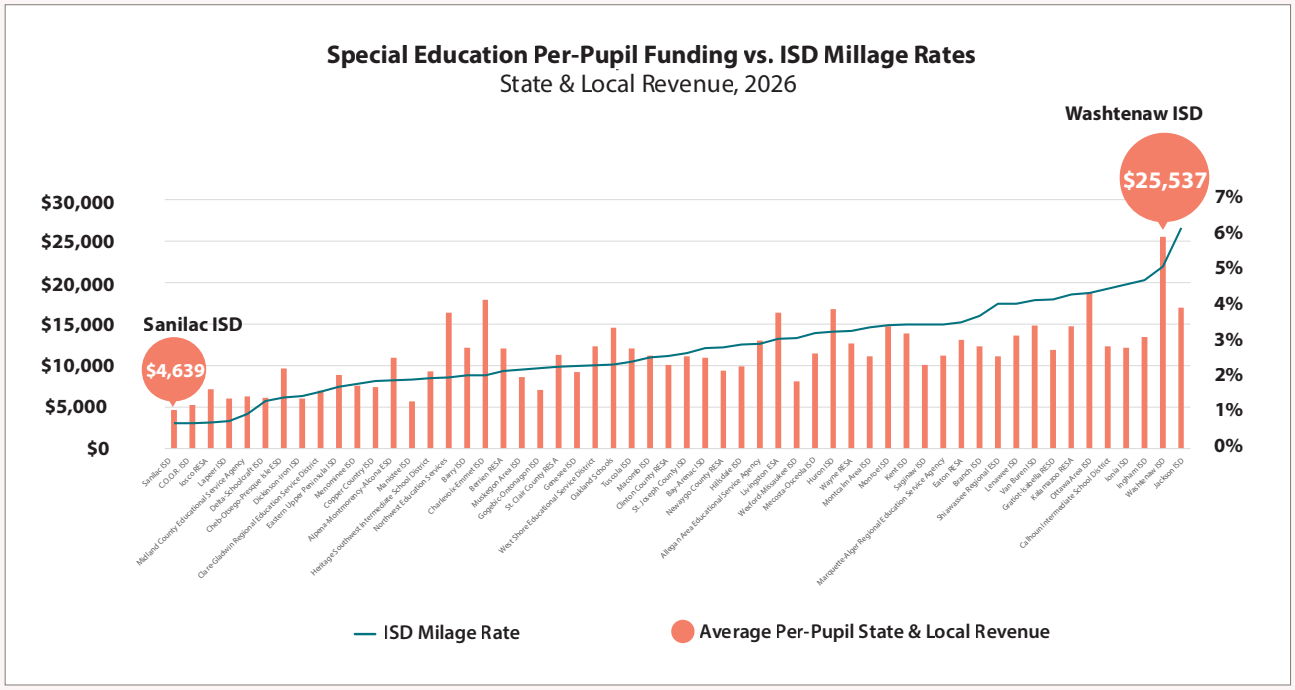
The statewide average also masks substantial differences across Michigan's ISDs. Because local special education revenue depends partly on property wealth, taxable value, and historically authorized millage rates, ISDs differ considerably in the resources they can generate for students with disabilities. As a result, where a student lives can shape the level of resources available to support their education, even among students with similar needs. These differences mean that students with similar needs may be supported by substantially different levels of resources depending on where they attend school.

FY26 State Funds	FY26 Local Funds	FY26 State + Local Funds	Blueprint Estimated Cost	Funding Gap
$1.39 Billion	$1.52 Billion	$2.92 Billion	$4.66 Billion	**$1.74 Billion**

Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), Financial Information Database, SE-4096; Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, 2025-26 Special Education Counts; Autism Alliance of Michigan, Michigan Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), Financial Information Database, SE-4096; Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, 2025-26 Special Education Counts; Autism Alliance of Michigan, Michigan Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint



Source: Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), MI School Data, 2025-26 Special Education Counts; Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), Financial Information Database, SE-4096

Going for Gold: A 2026-2027 Policy Roadmap

Going for Gold question: What must Michigan leaders do now to place the state on a credible path to gold?

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Five Priorities for Michigan's Next Chapter

Throughout this report, we have examined new data and research to better understand the state of educational opportunities and outcomes in Michigan. The findings point to meaningful progress in some areas, persistent inequities in others, and substantial work still ahead.

Michigan now stands at an important moment of transition. As a new governor and legislature prepare to lead the state, Michigan has an opportunity to protect recent progress while setting a higher standard for what students should be able to expect from their public education system. Becoming a national leader in educational excellence and equity will require sustained commitment and deliberate policy choices.

Grounded in the findings of going for gold, EdTrust-Midwest identifies five priorities for Michigan's state leaders:

01 Protect and Sustain Fair Funding Investments in Public Education

02 Strengthen Evidence-Based Efforts to Improve Reading

03 Create Supportive and Well-Staffed School Environments for All Students

04 Build Equitable Pathways to Postsecondary Opportunity

05 Make Transparency and Accountability a Governing Principle

Protect and Sustain Fair Funding Investments in Public Education

Every student deserves a well-funded public school with the resources necessary to meet their needs and provide a high-quality education. To achieve this, Michigan's school funding system must be adequate, equitable, and responsive to the different needs of students and communities.

After decades of inadequate investment, Michigan has taken important steps in recent years toward a more equitable, student-centered funding system. Recent increases in the foundation allowance and targeted investments through the Opportunity Index and English learner funding represent meaningful progress. Yet, as the Fair Funding Indicator in this report demonstrates, the work is unfinished. Michigan ranks 14th nationally in state and local per-pupil funding, while substantial funding gaps remain for students and communities with additional needs. For students with disabilities alone, Michigan remains approximately $1.74 billion below the level of investment estimated by the Michigan Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint. Despite significant

recent investment in the Opportunity Index, it remains underfunded by $1.31 billion. To address longstanding opportunity and achievement gaps, the state should commit to fully funding The Opportunity Index by 2030.

As Michigan enters a period of political transition, state leaders should protect this progress while continuing the work toward adequacy. Michigan should sustain and increase targeted investments for students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and students in rural and geographically isolated communities. These investments should be paired with strong fiscal transparency and accountability to ensure that additional resources reach the students for whom they are intended.

Michigan must also protect its commitment to funding public schools with public dollars. At a time when the state's public education system continues to face significant unmet needs, policymakers should avoid programs that divert public resources away from public schools and undermine the state's ability to adequately and equitably fund the students they serve.

Finally, Michigan must reform how it funds services for students with disabilities. The state's partial-reimbursement model has contributed to substantial and inequitable funding gaps across communities. The Michigan Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint provides a roadmap toward a more adequate, equitable, and sustainable student-centered funding system, including weighted funding based on student need and creating a fair cost-sharing structure to ensure that high poverty communities receive the support needed to deliver high-quality services.

Michigan has made important progress toward a fairer funding system. State leaders should build on that progress — not reverse it. Without sustained and targeted investment, persistent inequities will remain and Michigan risks losing momentum toward providing every student the resources they need to succeed.

Strengthen Evidence-Based Efforts to Improve Reading

Every Michigan student, regardless of race, income, home language, or where they attend school, should have access to rigorous, evidence-based literacy instruction and the opportunity to become a strong reader.

As this report demonstrates, Michigan still has substantial work ahead. State and national assessments show persistently low reading performance and significant disparities in outcomes for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. But there is hope. Michigan has made significant policy changes and financial commitments to improving literacy, but lasting improvement in reading achievement requires consistent implementation of research-based practices over time. Michigan should not retreat from this work. State leaders should stay the course with evidence-based literacy reforms while demanding strong, equitable implementation and transparent reporting.

That means protecting the infrastructure Michigan has begun to build. State leaders should prioritize adequate funding for literacy, professional learning for educators, literacy coaches and other implementation supports, access to high-quality instructional materials, and continued alignment among curriculum, instruction, materials, assessments, and evidence-based practices. Michigan must also ensure these resources reach districts and schools equitably so that the students who need the greatest support benefit from that support.

At the same time, staying the course does not mean standing still. Michigan's next phase of literacy work should strengthen implementation from early childhood through adolescence. State leaders should ensure schools provide equitable, differentiated assessments, interventions, and supports for students who need additional help becoming strong readers.[129] Specifically, these supports must be responsive to students' specific needs, including the additional or specialized instruction that English learners, students with dyslexia, and older students who are still developing foundational reading skills may require. Michigan should continue building educator expertise in evidence-based reading instruction, including strengthening support for adolescent literacy. High-quality materials should provide students with rigorous learning opportunities while connecting to their identities, experiences, and interests. Families and communities should be authentic partners, with clear information about students' reading performance, strengths, areas for growth, and how they can support learning.

Michigan has made significant investments in improving literacy, but policy adoption and investment alone will not produce better outcomes. The state must transparently track implementation and outcomes, identify where students and districts are not receiving the supports they need, and respond accordingly. Sustained commitment, strong implementation, and accountability will be essential if Michigan is to become a national leader where every student develops the literacy skills necessary to succeed in school and beyond.

Create Supportive and Well-Staffed School Environments for All Students

Students need access to safe, inclusive, and supportive school environments that are adequately staffed with effective educators, counselors, and other professionals who help students learn and thrive. Strong academic outcomes depend not only on what students are taught, but also on whether they are present, engaged, supported, and connected to well-prepared adults at school.



As this report demonstrates, access to these conditions is not equally distributed across Michigan. Too many students experience chronic absenteeism, limited access to school counselors, exclusionary discipline, or exposure to experienced educators. These challenges are particularly pronounced for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, reinforcing inequities in students' opportunities to learn.

Michigan has taken important steps to invest in student mental health, school safety, and the educator workforce. State leaders should protect these investments while ensuring that education dollars are directed toward evidence-based approaches that strengthen students' connections to school rather than creating unnecessary burdens for districts. As Michigan considers approaches to school safety, policymakers should resist an overreliance on punitive or school-hardening strategies and prioritize supportive, preventative approaches that foster safe and welcoming learning environments.

Michigan must also support the people who make welcome and nurturing schools possible. State leaders should strengthen investments in educator recruitment, retention and diversity, including expanding high-quality Grow Your Own programs and improving educator compensation. Michigan should continue building school counselor capacity and move toward ensuring that students have meaningful access to counselors and other support professionals. These efforts should be targeted to schools and communities where staffing challenges and student needs are greatest.

Finally, Michigan must address disparities in students' experiences at school. Students of color continue to be disproportionately represented among students receiving out-of-school suspensions. State leaders should monitor these disparities and support districts in reducing reliance on exclusionary discipline through evidence-based, non-punitive approaches that address student behavior while keeping students connected to their school communities.

The stakes extend beyond student well-being. Students cannot benefit from strong instruction if they are not consistently present, engaged, and supported at school. Failing to build supportive and well-staffed learning environments threatens both students' well-being and Michigan's broader efforts to improve academic achievement. Becoming a national leader will require ensuring that every student has access to the adults, relationships, and conditions they need to learn and thrive.

Build Equitable Pathways to Postsecondary Opportunity

Preparing students for college and careers begins long before high school graduation. Michigan students need equitable access to rigorous coursework, clear information and advising, and opportunities to earn college credit while enrolled in high school. These experiences can prepare students for the transition to postsecondary education and put a college degree or credential more within reach.

As the college readiness and success findings in this report demonstrate, Michigan has made important strides in expanding college affordability and opportunities such as dual enrollment. Yet a disconnect remains between preparing for college and successfully transitioning from high school into postsecondary education. Too many Michigan students are not making that transition, and access to the opportunities that prepare students for postsecondary success remains inequitable.

Michigan should protect investments that are beginning to address these barriers, including investments in dual enrollment and programs that make postsecondary education more affordable. But affordability alone is not enough. State leaders must ensure that all students, especially students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, have equitable access to the rigorous preparation necessary to take advantage of these opportunities.

As EdTrust-Midwest outlined in "Ready for Rigor," Michigan should expand access to advanced coursework and take stronger steps to identify and enroll students who demonstrate the potential to succeed. This should include piloting automatic enrollment, or opt-out, approaches that place qualified students into advanced courses unless they choose not to participate. Michigan should also address barriers within its dual enrollment funding system that can limit access based on where students attend school or the resources available in their communities.

These investments are critical to Michigan's broader educational and economic future. Without stronger and more equitable pathways from high school to postsecondary education, Michigan risks falling short of its Sixty by 30 attainment goal and limiting students' opportunities for long-term economic mobility. Building a stronger talent pipeline is also essential to Michigan's economic competitiveness. The state's postsecondary goals cannot be achieved only through making college more affordable if too many students never have an equitable opportunity to prepare for and successfully make the transition to college in the first place.

Make Transparency and Accountability a Governing Principle

Families, educators, policymakers, and the public deserve honest, timely, and accessible information about student learning, educational opportunity, and how public resources are being used. Transparency is essential to accountability and Michigan's ability to identify inequities, evaluate progress, and respond when students are not receiving the opportunities and resources they need.

Despite progress over the past few years, gaps remain in state and federal education data. Some information is released years after it is collected, limiting the ability of family members, researchers, policymakers, and educational leaders to identify and respond to emerging challenges. Other information is technically public but difficult to access or analyze. For example, Michigan reports important educator workforce information through individual district Annual Education Report PDFs, making it exceedingly difficult to assess statewide patterns or inequities across districts. Other critical information — including detailed data on teacher vacancies and some measures of educator experience, assignments, and turnover — has historically been unavailable or incomplete. These limitations matter because EdTrust-Midwest's analyses have found significant inequities in students' access to experienced and appropriately credentialed educators.

Michigan's next chapter must build on the progress we've made with a sustained commitment to fair funding, strong literacy instruction, supportive schools, and equitable pathways to college and careers. Our next state leaders must pair these investments with transparency and accountability so families can see whether commitments translate into better opportunities and outcomes for every student.

Similar challenges exist in understanding whether targeted education dollars ultimately reach the students and schools for whom they are intended. Michigan should continue strengthening MI School Data and other state data systems; protect regular, disaggregated reporting of student achievement, growth, educational opportunities, and resources; and maintain public reporting that allows families and policymakers to understand how education dollars are being spent.

But making information technically public is not enough. Michigan should make transparency usable. State leaders should build stronger data infrastructure that allows information to be accessed, downloaded, connected across systems, and analyzed over time. Michigan should also strengthen school-level fiscal transparency so the public can determine whether funding intended for students with additional needs is reaching the schools and students those dollars are intended to support.

These protections are especially important as the federal role in education data, oversight, and accountability continues to be under threat. Michigan should identify critical information currently dependent on federal collection or reporting requirements and ensure that state systems and policies preserve the data necessary to understand student outcomes, monitor access to resources and supports, safeguard civil rights, and hold public investments accountable.

Without strong systems of transparency and accountability, Michigan risks losing its ability to track progress and respond to challenges in a timely manner. Even more concerning, when data disappears, inequities become harder to see and address. Michigan's next generation of leaders should make honest, accessible information a fundamental expectation of how the state's education system is governed.



Conclusion

Michigan has many reasons for hope. Parents, educators, advocates, and policymakers want the best for our state's students, and there is growing momentum to build upon and invest in evidence-backed research to improve outcomes for Michigan's students.

The power to provide every student with the schooling experience and outcomes they deserve resides in the policy decisions of state leaders who can shape educational performance, progress, and inequities. Better outcomes require consistent and evidenced based policy decisions that can strengthen public schools and place every student on a path to thrive. Going for gold is ultimately a commitment to public education as a shared public good: an institution through which Michigan can build better communities, create a healthier future for our state, and expand opportunity for every student — regardless of race, background, or zip code — so that they have the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential and be prepared for postsecondary success.



Endnotes

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