



Consensus Principles for Education

A Focus on the K-12 Education System

Approved by GRACC Board of Directors
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Dear Friends:

The *Consensus Principles for Education - A Focus on the K-12 Education System* is the first of a series of documents meant to address education policy issues. This document, created by a committee of business and education members, focuses on the challenges and opportunities within the K-12 education system directly impacting the quality of our workforce. Additional consensus principles documents with recommendations will be developed, covering other critical issue areas such as early childhood, post-secondary, and adult education.

This document is intended for use by the following groups:

- Elected Officials
- Educators
- Business Leaders
- Families
- Communities

The *Consensus Principles for Education* was developed to create a working road map for addressing public policy issues related to the K-12 education system. The following guidelines were considered while forming this document:

- A holistic approach to education;
- Inclusiveness;
- Support for entrepreneurship and economic vibrancy;
- Forward thinking and innovation;
- Performance and accountability.

We hope this document will challenge individuals to think differently about K-12 education issues and provoke an essential discussion on this important topic.

Sincerely,



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Executive Summary

The most valuable asset employers have today is their workforce. An educated, innovative, flexible and skilled workforce is imperative for the health of our businesses and sustainable economic development.

The forces of technology, globalization and a knowledge-driven economy have dramatically changed the way we must approach education. To survive and thrive, Michigan must be able to quickly adapt to diverse and changing markets.

Numerous studies, such as the 2006 Michigan Future, Inc. report, “A New Agenda for a New Michigan,” underscore that the number one economic development priority for a community, region and state, is to prepare, retain, and attract talent. A knowledge-driven economy is centered on the cultivation of talent and making key public investments to support this goal.

Educated young people are leaving the state and Michigan currently faces a lack of qualified applicants for high-skill and high-wage jobs. This highlights the severe disconnect between the skills of high school graduates and the needs of employers necessary for a thriving economy.

Nationally less than 70 percent of young people on average are graduating from and 43 percent of the adult population does not possess any form of post-secondary education. To compete in a growing marketplace, we must respond to these challenges by promoting policies which prepare Michigan’s workforce and change the way students, workers and citizens perceive the value of learning.

There are five principal stakeholders in the education delivery process. They are individuals and families, community, educators and schools, state government and employers.

Stakeholders must insist on the following strategies for change:

- Invest appropriately in lifelong learning;
- Businesses and education should partner in meaningful ways, with a long-term view and for mutual benefit;
- Restructure the delivery of education. From using new technologies and best practices for delivering instruction and inspiring learning, to meeting the individualized needs of learners, and using achievement data effectively;
- Change how all citizens perceive the value of, and the need for, education, lifelong learning and skill development.

CONSENSUS PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATION A Focus on the K-12 Education System

Fundamental questions must be considered in the development of sound public policy regarding education and workforce development. The Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce has considered the following questions and adopts the following principles:

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL'S EDUCATION?

Every person is primarily responsible for his or her own education. However, it is the mutual responsibility of individuals, families, communities, schools, teachers, employers and government to play appropriate roles in the delivery of education. Only through collective and coordinated efforts will needed reform occur.

WHAT SHOULD DETERMINE A QUALITY EDUCATION?

A quality education system is measured by job creation and long-term economic growth. Michigan's economic success is dependent on the ability of a person to positively contribute to society with his/her acquired skill sets, education, service and leadership.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE EXPECTED LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT?

Education and training beyond a high school diploma should be the expected and accepted level of educational attainment. Acknowledgment of the need for post-secondary education to obtain quality work remains underdeveloped in Michigan's culture and should shape the focus of public policy initiatives.

WHAT IS THE NECESSARY INVESTMENT NEEDED IN EDUCATION?

Education funding is an investment in appreciable assets that will yield a high rate of return and cannot be viewed as a single source of monetary funding. Just as a business cannot operate without the appropriate infrastructure, our state cannot thrive without an appropriate workforce infrastructure. Therefore, the education system requires incentives for public private partnerships and creative use of investment resources.

Data-driven funding decisions and holding school districts accountable is essential in leveraging investments to make the greatest impact. A lack of early investment in our system will result in continuous remediation costs in the future.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF VARIOUS PARTIES TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Creating the highest quality education system in the nation requires collaboration, participation and cooperation by every stakeholder. We must challenge basic assumptions about education and curriculum delivery if the problems are to be solved. There are five principal “players” in the education delivery process. They are individuals and families, community, educators and schools, state government and employers. The responsibilities of each are described as follows:

1. Responsibilities of Individuals and Families

Summary: Passive association versus participatory involvement is becoming the accepted norm. We must, with a sense of urgency, develop individuals capable of finding gainful employment and positively contributing to society in order to compete in a knowledge-based economy.

- a) Individuals and families are primarily responsible for a child’s or individual’s education.
- b) Individuals are responsible for upholding accountability and performance standards from educational institutions. Accountability should be viewed and accepted as common practice.
- c) Adults are responsible for communicating to local school boards how state funding should be allocated for their child’s educational needs and priorities within their individual school programming.
- d) Individuals and families should seek additional resources within the community to gain awareness of fiscal health and achievement levels, and an understanding of their interconnectedness within the education system.
- e) Individuals and families should personally invest in early childhood development. Developmental screenings encourage ongoing healthy development and can intercept costly learning disabilities before they develop.
- f) Individuals and families should actively engage in schools in a volunteer capacity, meeting school leaders and/or attending events and conferences.
- g) Individuals and families should seek learning opportunities outside of the classroom and exemplify the value of education through continuous professional and skill development training.

2. Responsibilities of Communities

Summary: The lack of equal access to a quality education based on socioeconomic status, lack of parental involvement and the expectation that government will find a solution has attributed to the acceptance of status quo.

- a) Communities should use their resources to serve as a link in developing partnerships between the education system and the business community, with the intention to create behavioral change.
- b) Communities, including the faith-based community, should use their resources as a supplement for unmet needs of community members.
- c) Communities should provide access to preventative and developmental screenings.
- d) Communities should provide alternative resources for education, such as learning centers or mentor tutoring.
- e) Communities should utilize the talent of untapped volunteer resources.
- f) Communities should develop and nurture school board members.

3. Responsibilities of Educators and Schools

Summary: Education and training is delivered in much of the same way as it was fifty years ago; students sit in rows, listen to lectures and take notes by hand.

Producing highly knowledgeable students in traditional academic subjects is important however, the method of delivery should also focus on providing “portable skills.” Schools should invest in producing global citizens, encouraging creative problem solving, innovation, critical thinking, and teamwork. Having the ability to manage, interpret, and act on data is critical to competing in a changing marketplace.

Teaching is a highly regarded profession, but with the protection of labor unions, teacher compensation packages are viewed as an entitlement. There is a need to change our views about compensation from rewarding time of service to rewarding classroom performance.

In order to deliver the best education possible, schools must emphasize leadership structures appropriately designed to individual school districts and remove reliance on system structures for decision making.

- a) Educators and schools should improve their governance structure to support student achievement. There should be increased authority to base compensation on performance and allow for greater decision making in daily operations.

- b) Administrators should adjust employee compensation packages and incentives based on performance, aligning more with the private sector.
- c) Educators should be practitioners of lifelong learning and continue ongoing professional development linked to student achievement outcomes. This includes training on gathering, analyzing, and interpreting performance data.
- d) School boards should be accountable for and implement sound fiscal practices through long-term financial planning based on data-driven decision making.
- e) Schools should adapt curriculum to the changing workforce. Teachers and administrators should seek the assistance of businesses in developing and delivering curriculum supportive of the private sector.
- f) Educators and schools should align health care benefits and pensions with the private sector.
- g) Educators and schools should implement cost-saving reforms to eliminate inefficiencies through identifying areas of redundancy and consolidation.
- h) Educators and schools should actively seek grants and philanthropic support for innovative programming.
- i) Educators and schools should integrate principles of technology into all aspects of the curriculum to engage, inform and prepare students for employment.
- j) Schools should build the capacity to focus on student-centered instruction by increasing teaching and support staff.
- k) Educators and schools should dedicate individuals to help students develop a post-secondary readiness plan, serving as a career road map.
- l) Educators and schools should voluntarily develop a tracking mechanism to follow student progress throughout K-12 and beyond.
- m) Educators and schools should foster public and private partnerships.
- n) Educators and schools should market their attributes and their needs to the community.
- o) Schools should support the advancement of career preparation by developing career counselor positions.

4. Responsibilities of State Government

Summary: Responsible government reforms in investment, infrastructure, and delivery are necessary for Michigan's education and workforce development system. State education policy and funding decisions have had a profound effect on Michigan residents' ability to access a quality education and obtain affordable post-secondary education. Michigan public schools are facing monumental challenges, as system changes and improvements have been slow, incremental, and political.

Due to bureaucratic barriers and a lack of incentives, school districts are working independently of each other and missing opportunities to exchange best practices and cost savings associated with collaboration.

- a) Government should adequately and consistently invest at all levels of education.
- b) Government should deliver a timely budget, allocate resources effectively and coordinate streams of revenue.
- c) Government should adopt policies supportive of competitive bidding for educators' health care insurance premiums.
- d) Government should move public school employees out of a defined benefit retirement plan to a contribution style retirement plan.
- e) Government should encourage the use and practical integration of technology with increased funding to enhance curriculum in the K-12 system and beyond.
- f) Government should restructure the existing K-12 system delivery model, extending the amount of learning time each year in order to provide continuity in learning achievement.
- g) Government should provide flexibility in allowing innovations for alternative delivery systems by supporting schools of choice, collaboration and valuing performance in education and training.
- h) Government should modify rules and regulations to reduce barriers and create incentives that encourage consolidation and the sharing of services.
- i) Government should develop policies to strengthen and support urban school districts.
- j) Government should repeal the "prevailing wage" law for school consolidation projects.
- k) Government should adapt and implement a portable credential certificate, such as the Career Readiness Certificate.

- l) Government should appoint a task force or commission to analyze best practices and recommend ways education delivery must evolve to remain relevant and competitive in the global economy.

5. Responsibilities of Employers and Employees

Summary: Successful communities have an engaged business community that recognizes social and cultural needs, while applying resources to address challenges.

Engagement goes far beyond the products or services a business provides. As the knowledge-based economy continues to emerge, the business community should spend more time and effort on educating our population to alleviate an impending shortage of talent.

- a) Employers and employees should embrace a culture emphasizing lifelong learning, by supporting continuous professional development training opportunities. Employers should provide resources for employees to learn new skills applicable to the changing demands within a knowledge-based economy.
- b) Employers and employees should make community outreach a regular practice by investing time for volunteerism, allowing flexibility, and fostering a corporate attitude of community giving as part of the operating standard.
- c) Employers should maintain a relationship with educators and communicate their needs, so the education system can deliver a talented workforce. A concerted effort should be made to educate teachers on the dynamic between content and application.
- d) Employers and employees should offer ongoing business support and information to educators. There is an opportunity to share best practices, labor market trends and actively participate in the development of learning programs and curriculum to reflect the workforce.
- e) Employers should consider tuition reimbursement incentives as a business necessity rather than a fringe benefit. In times of a highly transitional workforce, this can be used as a retention tool, loyalty strategy or springboard to a higher position.
- f) Employees should take advantage of employer-sponsored continuing education opportunities.
- g) Employers and employees should foster respect for other cultures/ethnic groups, ages, genders, religions, disabilities, and social differences through intentional on-going diversity training and development.

- h) Employers should integrate modifications for flexible work arrangements when applicable. Voluntary lifestyle benefits positively contribute to the overall productivity of a worker.
- i) Employers and employees should pool resources for making financial contributions to causes impacting real change.

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