



### **MICHIGAN EFFORTS TO COMBAT DROPOUT CRISIS SHOULD INCLUDE FOCUS ON EXPANDING EDUCATION OPTIONS**

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Each year, roughly 35,000 students in Michigan drop out of high school before earning their diploma. And a new report suggests that, in order for the state to regain its economic strength, it must find ways to recapture that lost talent and energy, and improve educational outcomes for all youth.

*“Financing Education Options for Struggling Students and Out-of-School Youth in Michigan: Report and Recommendations for State Policy”* highlights the challenges facing at-risk and disconnected youth in the region, as well as strategies for connecting those young people to educational opportunity.

The report, funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in Flint, was released on October 20. It was produced by the Washington DC-based National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC).

Nancy Martin, Director of Capacity Building Initiatives at NYEC, notes that the impacts of the dropout crisis on states and the country are significant.

For example, students who drop out of high school are three and a half times more likely to be incarcerated than those who earn their diploma. Studies show that dropouts are also more likely than graduates to need public assistance and that they contribute to the state tax rolls at about one-half the rate of those who complete high school.

Stemming that grim tide in Michigan is vital to the state’s future, notes Martin.

“Michigan has demonstrated a clear desire to address the dropout crisis,” she said. “But while there are some promising models and programs in place for reaching at-risk and struggling students, much more needs to be done.”

Specifically, the report calls for education finance-related reforms that could help Michigan improve learning options for struggling students and disconnected youth. Those reforms are:

- **Ensure that existing education funds are able to flow to support students in a range of education programs in a variety of settings.** Martin notes that easing the flow of state funds to educational options that work, including those offered outside of traditional public school settings, is key to helping students stay in -- or reconnect with -- their education. The report also points to the importance of

making public education funding available for adult high school completion programs for high school dropouts under the age of twenty. Current funding policies do not support students aged 16-to-19 in such programs.

- **Provide additional education funds to directly encourage public school districts to expand options for secondary education.** The report suggests that Michigan establish and extend statewide dropout prevention and recovery programs, and increase resources to schools and programs helping the hardest to serve students.
- **Ensure that state policy is flexible enough to allow for various educational approaches.** Specifically, say the report's authors, Michigan must allow non-traditional education programs to have greater access to state education funds. They also note that the state should support the development of a variety of education options for struggling students.

Collaboration between local and intermediate school districts, other youth-serving systems and community-based organizations is also key to high quality alternative education programs, says Martin. She points to the state's role in helping those partners identify and blend various sources of funding -- workforce development, juvenile justice, health and human services, as well as private and foundation dollars -- to support struggling and disconnected students.

“What is needed is a much broader range of educational opportunities, enough programs and ‘slots’ to meet the needs of students, and the resources and public will to back it all up,” said Martin.

“Michigan must recognize the lost potential in the many young people who currently leave its education system without a diploma or its equivalent, and redouble its efforts to increase high school graduation rates.”

*Financing Education Options for Struggling Students and Out-of-School Youth in Michigan* was prepared for the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation by the National Youth Employment Coalition.

**A full copy of the report is available at:**

[http://www.nyec.org/content/documents/Financing\\_Ed\\_Options\\_in\\_Michigan.pdf](http://www.nyec.org/content/documents/Financing_Ed_Options_in_Michigan.pdf)

The National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC), a nonprofit national membership network based in Washington, DC, improves the effectiveness of organizations that seek to help youth become productive citizens. Toward this end, NYEC sets and promotes quality standards; tracks, crafts and influences policy; provides and supports professional development; and builds the capacity of organizations and programs.