



# Examining Michigan's Education Workforce

How to Address the Talent Shortage Facing Michigan's Schools

February 2020





Public Policy Associates, Incorporated is a public policy research, development, and evaluation firm headquartered in Lansing, Michigan. We serve clients in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors at the national, state, and local levels by conducting research, analysis, and evaluation that supports informed strategic decision-making.

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**Suggested Citation:** *Examining Michigan's Education Workforce: How to Address the Talent Shortage Facing Michigan's Schools* (Lansing, MI: Public Policy Associates, Inc., February 2020).

# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Statement of the Problem</b>	<b>6</b>
Diversifying the Profession	6
Educator Pipelines and Shortages	7
<b>Recent Developments</b>	<b>9</b>
Responding to the Crisis	10
<b>Educator Roundtables</b>	<b>11</b>
Methods	11
Attendance and Demographics	12
<b>Findings: In-Person Sessions</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Findings: Online Session</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Considerations</b>	<b>20</b>
Listening to Educators	21
Educator Recommendations	22
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>24</b>



# Acknowledgements

This project was conducted in partnership with the Michigan Education Association, AFT Michigan, and the Middle Cities Education Association. Public Policy Associates, Inc. would especially like to thank Dr. Delsa Chapman (Lansing School District), Dr. Ron Gorman (Grand Rapids Public Schools), Dr. Jennifer Verleger (Mount Pleasant Public Schools), and Dr. Jennifer Martin-Green (Southfield Public Schools) for assisting with recruiting and hosting the listening sessions. We would also like to thank Paullette Gardner, Dana Bialk, and Nancy Zamara for their help with site logistics and ensuring the success of the listening sessions. Finally, our gratitude goes to the Michigan Association of Superintendents & Administrators (MASA) and the Galileo Institute for Teacher Leadership at Oakland University for their feedback and guidance.



## Executive Summary

A marked decline in the number of aspiring educators, mounting departures by experienced and early-career educators, and an educator workforce that lacks diversity have undercut Michigan's ability to provide skilled teachers and support professionals to every student, with dire consequences looming for the future of the state and economy.

While decision-makers continue to grapple with how to handle these challenges, too little effort has been made to appeal to the knowledge and experience of a key resource: *Michigan's educators*. To begin to address this gap, Public Policy Associates, Inc., (PPA) conducted a series of educator listening sessions in five locations around the state plus an online session for those unable to attend the in-person sessions.

The purpose of the sessions was not to re-hash problems facing the educator workforce, but rather to identify, document, and recommend solutions in three key areas: (1) the recruitment of aspiring educators; (2) the retention of the current educator workforce; and (3) diversification of the profession.

A total of 120 educators participated in the sessions, representing different educational contexts and reflecting the backgrounds of the state's educators. Most of the participants were K-12 teachers from traditional public school districts, but participants also included K-12 school and district administrators, education support professionals, representatives from the state's educator preparation institutions, and teachers working in charter schools.

The participants worked collectively in small groups to develop, share, and receive feedback on their ideas to improve recruitment, retention, and diversification of the profession, with more than 300 unique ideas being generated initially. PPA worked to distill these ideas into consensus-driven solutions that could be shared with decision makers.

In follow-up surveys conducted after the in-person sessions, attendees were asked to narrow their top solutions for policymakers to consider. The solutions were grouped into three basic categories: *monetary solutions, non-monetary solutions, and solutions related to teacher preparation*.

*Despite the plethora of ideas suggested by educators, there was consensus on a handful of key areas and ideas.*

**Table 1: Top Educator Solutions Identified**

<b>Monetary</b>	1. Incentives or recruiting bonuses for educators new to the profession or early in their careers
	2. Equity-based funding for school districts
	3. Hiring more support personnel
<b>Non-monetary</b>	1. Greater educator input on working conditions and education reforms
	2. Reducing the reliance on student standardized tests for evaluative purposes
	3. Reducing barriers to and the cost of initial certification and re-certification
<b>Teacher preparation</b>	1. Improving induction and mentoring programs for early-career educators
	2. Paid internships for aspiring educators
	3. Diversifying the experiences for aspiring educators

*A major takeaway from these roundtable discussions was the desire of educators to have a bigger role in the public discussion concerning education reforms.*

In light of these findings, PPA has provided a number of recommendations or next steps for policymakers to consider, including: (1) expanding avenues for input in rural parts of the state; (2) improving data collection related to the pipeline; and (3) fostering better communication among educators, policymakers, and researchers. A complete list is included in the *Considerations* section beginning on p. 20 of this document.



# Introduction

Across Michigan, it is nearly impossible to read the news without seeing stories about local school districts scrambling to fill open positions. Multiple national- and state-level reports have affirmed what Michigan administrators have been saying for nearly a decade—*Michigan is facing a growing staffing crisis that will likely impact just about every school district in the state.*<sup>i</sup>

## **The situation is highlighted by three converging challenges:**

1. A lack of diversity in the educator workforce<sup>1</sup>
2. Not enough individuals going into the education profession
3. A churn of experienced educators either leaving the profession or switching districts

Improving Michigan’s status as a top education state will likely require improvement in the overall quality of education through better educator preparation and continuous development, attracting more skilled educators to the workforce, and retaining current educators, thus providing stability for students. To accomplish this, Michigan will need to respond to the myriad reasons why educators are leaving, establish public awareness of the problem, and restore the public stature of the education profession—all daunting tasks.

Improved educational outcomes will require more equitable access to resources that educators can use to respond to the growing needs of today’s diverse classrooms. Along with more resources and the focused attention of policymakers in Lansing, achieving these goals necessitates a policy-development process that incorporates educator input and stakeholder collaboration.

Decision-makers and educators need more opportunities to join forces to address these pressing issues facing schools. The perspectives of educators, education stakeholder groups, and others will be necessary to crafting a long-term strategy that develops workable systems to better recruit and sustain the best and brightest to enter the profession and ensure a skilled workforce in the most needed areas and subjects.

The process of rebuilding the educator workforce will require ongoing feedback and continuous improvement in coordination with multiple stakeholders, including the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), the Governor’s office, the state legislature, business leaders, and philanthropy, as well as the education and labor communities. It is critically important that educators currently working in schools have a prominent place in this process.

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<sup>1</sup> This is especially relevant because Michigan’s classrooms are more culturally, racially, and socioeconomically diverse than ever before.

## Statement of the Problem

Educator shortages are exacerbated by many Michigan school districts' reliance on long-term substitutes<sup>ii</sup> as well as acute shortages of daily substitutes.<sup>iii</sup> All of this has strained districts' capacity to grow and sustain a stable educator workforce that serves all students and families across Michigan. Equity remains a key concern with the staffing shortage affecting nearly every district in the state, with higher-poverty, rural, and minority-serving districts facing more severe burdens, dilemmas, and difficult choices.

## Diversifying the Profession

According to higher-education enrollment trend data, Hispanic and African-American teacher-preparation graduates continue to trail other groups in both college enrollments and the awarding of bachelor's degrees.<sup>iv</sup> This matters for school districts in Michigan because the diversity of the education workforce does not reflect the racial or socioeconomic demographics found in schools—especially important for school districts in Michigan that have experienced population changes in recent decades.

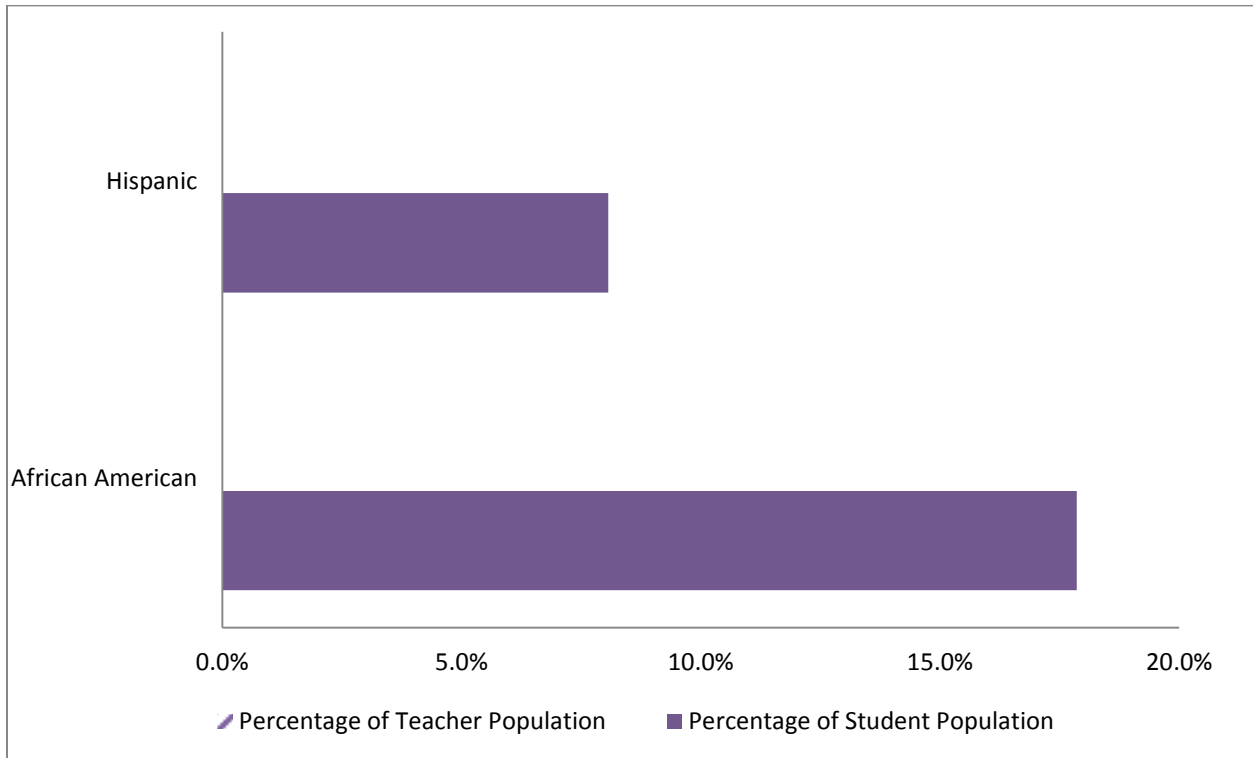
Having the education workforce reflect the student population is just one step toward addressing systemic barriers to racial equity. For example, a 2017 study from Johns Hopkins University established that African-American teachers have a measureable impact for all students but more so for African-American students.<sup>v</sup> The study found that low-income African-American students who had at least one same-race teacher in elementary school were more likely to graduate high school and consider attending college.

In Michigan, the disparity is captured by student and staffing counts reported by the state.<sup>vi</sup> Despite representing nearly 18 percent of the school population in Michigan, only 6 percent of the teacher workforce is African American. Only 1 percent of the teacher workforce population is Hispanic, compared with 8 percent of Michigan students. American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN), Asian-American, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander teachers account for just 1 percent of the total in Michigan.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The race/ethnicity categories listed here represent those reported by the Michigan Department of Education.

**Figure 1: Michigan’s Teacher Disparity**



## Educator Pipelines and Shortages

According to a 2019 report from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), educator shortages around the country are “*real and growing and worse than originally thought.*”<sup>vii</sup> EPI’s research review found that educator shortages are locally determined but more severe in high-poverty schools and areas; that lower pay<sup>3</sup> in comparison to similarly educated workers has likely reduced the attractiveness of education careers overall; and that the current school climate has prompted some educators to retire early or quit the profession altogether—further reducing the supply of experienced educators.

In Michigan, educators experienced a series of policy changes during the past decade (e.g., allowing uncertified teachers to teach in Detroit; Race to the Top; teacher evaluation reform; increased cost-sharing and hard caps on health insurance; the loss of payroll dues deduction; the undercutting of collective bargaining rights; tenure changes; and the passage of “Right to Work”) that were viewed by many as discouraging and detrimental toward the profession.

Another recent report from the Center for American Progress (CAP)<sup>viii</sup> showed that enrollment in educator-preparation programs had declined in almost every state over the last decade but Michigan’s decline was much worse, exceeded only by Oklahoma—a state that has among the

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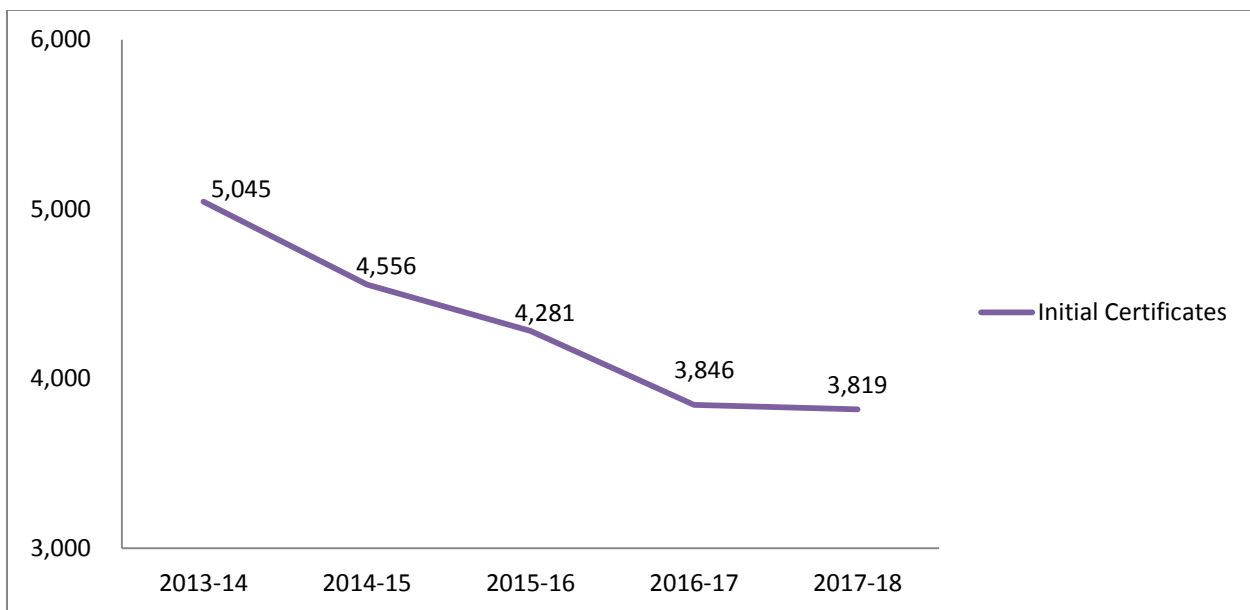
<sup>3</sup> EPI’s report also noted that teachers in high-poverty schools are underpaid compared to those teaching in low-poverty schools.

least competitive compensation systems and has experienced recent statewide educator demonstrations. In terms of the number of students completing educator-preparation programs, Michigan ranked *dead last* in the country from 2010 to 2018 according to the data analyzed from the U.S. Department of Education.

Discussing the decline in enrollment and why college students have been shying away from education as a profession, the CAP report’s authors stated that a *“lack of detailed information prevents policymakers from developing targeted, effective solutions and could result in a misplaced focus on certain aspects of the problem that ignores more pressing issues.”*

Data retrieved from the Michigan Department of Education show that in addition to program enrollment and completion declines, initial certificates<sup>4</sup> awarded to educators have also dropped—diminishing even further the pool of talented educators needed to fill vacancies in Michigan’s hardest-to-teach schools, grade levels, and subjects.<sup>ix</sup>

**Figure 2: Teacher Certification in Michigan**



Initial certificates include provisional (standard), interim (alternative), and interim occupational (for career and technical education or CTE) certificates.<sup>x</sup> Michigan has also seen a decline in the number of specific endorsements in shortage and hard-to-staff areas, including English learner (EL); CTE; Special Education; Early Childhood; and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).<sup>xi</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Teacher certification, also known as teacher licensure, permits educators to instruct students and is the responsibility of the Michigan Department of Education.

## Recent Developments

In February 2019, *Launch Michigan*, a coalition of business, philanthropic, education, and labor groups, conducted an online survey of 16,878 Michigan educators,<sup>xii</sup> including teachers, administrators, and education support professionals.

The findings paint a disturbing picture of how educators perceived their professional status in Michigan, with only 25 percent of Michigan educators (and just 20 percent of the teachers surveyed) reporting they would recommend a career in education to young people they know. These findings match the national *Phi Delta Kappan* (PDK) Poll in 2018, which reported for the first time in its 50-year history that a majority of Americans (54 percent) said they would not want their child to become a public school teacher.<sup>xiii</sup>

Just over one in ten participants (12 percent) in the *Launch Michigan* survey noted that they were considering leaving the profession altogether in the next two to three years. Another 10 percent indicated they were planning to retire soon.

Educators cited dissatisfaction and desire to leave the profession due to inadequate support from politicians; a lack of respect for the profession overall; and excessive workload, bureaucracy, and paperwork. Educators participating in the survey called for increasing pay, reducing class sizes, and expanding access to high-quality preschool as solutions that would lead to improved working conditions and better outcomes for schools.

Building on that groundbreaking work, the Michigan Education Association (MEA) commissioned Public Policy Associates, Inc. (PPA) to examine an open-ended question from the survey: **“Is there any other reason you are thinking about leaving education?”** This question was only asked of those who said they would leave education and was answered by 1,287 respondents.<sup>xiv</sup>

Educators responding to the question highlighted the following as reasons for considering leaving the classroom: (1) inadequate compensation; (2) workload, health, and family considerations; (3) respect, behavior, and discipline; (4) professional rights; and (5) legislative and other requirements.

PPA’s 2019 analysis<sup>xv</sup> of open-ended responses also found that educators were considering leaving the profession for other reasons, including:

- Lacking enough autonomy to tailor their educational approach to the needs of students.
- Feeling constrained by mandated—and sometimes scripted—curricula focused on increasing test scores and lacking the time and resources to address issues other than narrow measures of student performance.
- Resentment over having the evaluation of their professional capabilities tied to student testing when other socioeconomic factors are correlated to such performance.

- Lacking supports to address socioeconomic barriers to learning faced by students (i.e., inability to teach to the “whole” child).

Educators who responded to the question also reported that their efforts in the classroom had not been acknowledged or rewarded sufficiently, that their work-life balance was askew, and that they felt discouraged because they do not believe things will change even after they voice their concerns.

## Responding to the Crisis

Despite being aware of the growing crisis for nearly a decade, a consensus is only now forming among stakeholders in Lansing that Michigan must make meaningful changes. If Michigan is to become a top education state, it must address its looming educator shortages<sup>5</sup> as well as educators leaving the profession (*leavers*) or moving school districts (*movers*).

Responding to the challenge, Governor Gretchen Whitmer has called for listening to and restoring respect for Michigan’s educators, as well as providing them with the necessary resources to be successful.<sup>xvi</sup> In 2019, she announced the formation of an Educator Advisory Commission,<sup>xvii</sup> which will provide an opportunity for some educators to weigh in on recommendations and legislation relevant to Michigan’s education system.

More attention should be focused specifically on issues related to shortages as identified by this report. Beyond simply identifying problems, Michigan needs systematic, ongoing processes that include more educators in generating ideas for solving the educator workforce crisis.

Developing solutions that meaningfully address the concerns of working educators requires that educators have opportunities to constructively engage with each other and with policymakers.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Due in part to enrollment declines for preparation programs in Michigan and nationally.

<sup>6</sup> Educators have meaningful input through their unions, who provide direct interaction for educators and policymakers.

## Educator Roundtables

As a further, focused step toward incorporating educator perspectives in the task of identifying solutions to the educator shortage, PPA partnered with the Michigan Education Association, AFT Michigan, and the Middle Cities Education Association to conduct a statewide listening tour with five in-person meetings and one online session. These sessions documented educator feedback and identified both opportunities and barriers facing educators in the three areas (recruitment, retention, and diversification of the education workforce in Michigan). PPA coordinated, facilitated, and documented the feedback at the six sessions.

Two sessions were held in southeast Michigan (Detroit and Southfield), one in Lansing, one in Grand Rapids, and one in Mount Pleasant. The sixth session, held online over a full week, drew primarily from geographic areas outside the five in-person sessions. Additional work in northern Michigan and in the Upper Peninsula is still necessary to understand and develop solutions to the barriers facing those communities.

### Methods

The sessions, publicized as *Educator Workforce Solution Summits*, were constructed as dialogic, focused roundtable workgroups concentrated on generating solutions to issues facing educators. The sessions paid particular attention to equity and meeting the needs of educators and students in high-poverty, low-resourced schools; this included schools in rural, urban, and suburban areas.

Interest in the sessions was strong, and attendance at the individual sessions ranged from 16 to 28 participants spread across 4-6 groups at tables. The events took place primarily in local schools and were attended and supported by key stakeholders, including superintendents, teachers, preparation professionals, and aspiring educators.

Each in-person session was designed as a single-day, two-hour event with groups considering the same set of topics. The events were facilitated, solutions-focused discussions rather than a directed conversation or open/public forum. The purpose of the sessions was to get practitioners to collaborate on identifying practical solutions that could be considered by state and district leaders.

The sessions were an opportunity for participants to discuss solutions to the educator workforce crisis in an informal setting. There was an agenda, but the ideas generated were based on the responses of the participants in each session. The facilitators, working in two- and three-person teams, had questions prepared in advance. The ideas generated were shared with the group in real time. The process at the sessions was intended to include a wide range of frontline stakeholders and thought partners.

## Attendance and Demographics

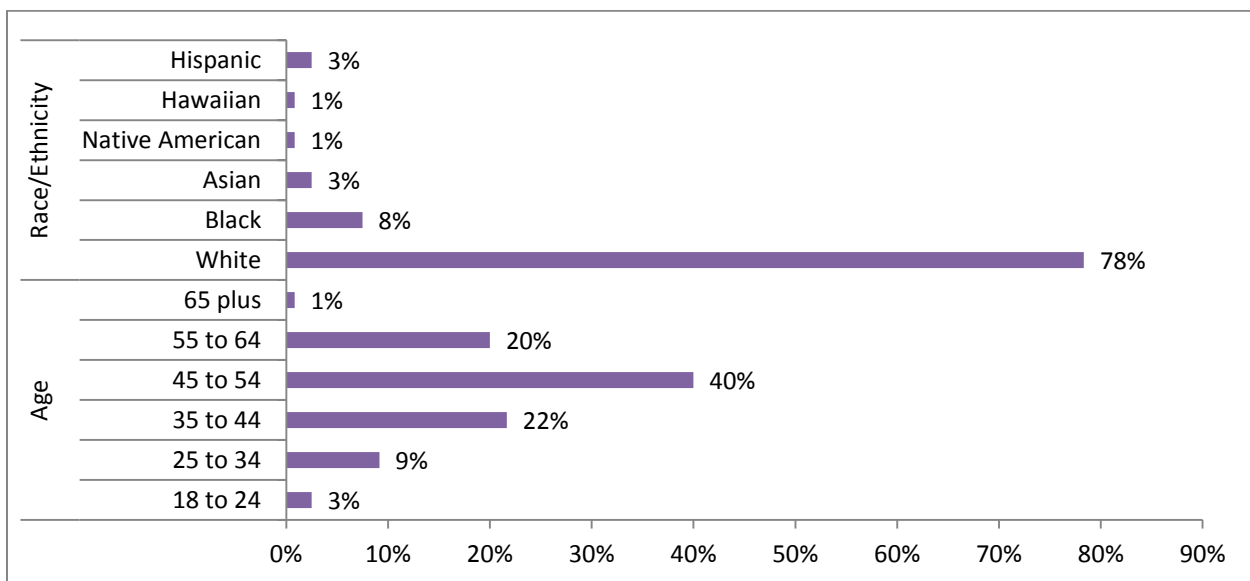
Including the five in-person sessions and the one online, 120 educators participated. There was a broad distribution among the sites with the largest proportions at the Southfield location (21 percent) and in Grand Rapids (22 percent).

Most of the attendees worked in K-12 education, with comparable shares from elementary (29 percent), middle (23 percent), and high school (28 percent). Nearly all worked in traditional public schools (80 percent).

The group was quite experienced, with a majority (53 percent) having 20 or more years of experience, and another 17 percent with over 15 years of experience. As might be expected with such an experienced pool, 60 percent were 45 years of age or older. Most were teachers (65 percent) with graduate degrees (83 percent).

The sessions also included administrators (9 percent), education support professionals (8 percent), and representatives of higher education (5 percent). Reflecting the teacher population overall, the participants were overwhelmingly white (78 percent). Eight percent were Black and 3 percent were Hispanic.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 3: Race/Ethnicity and Ages of Participants<sup>8</sup>**



<sup>7</sup> Totals add up to more than 100 percent because of rounding.

<sup>8</sup> Totals do not equal 100 percent because of missing or unknown/did not choose to answer responses. The Race/Ethnicity categories reflect those used in the registration survey.



## Findings: In-Person Sessions

Educators are saying what they need. The educators who participated in the in-person sessions<sup>9</sup> generated ample solutions to share with policymakers and other education stakeholders, including the following overarching themes:

- Improving both the pay and benefits for both new and current educators
- Paying educators for mentoring and helping with induction (including release time for mentors to work with early-career educators)
- Creating long-term paid apprenticeships for aspiring educators (so they can earn income while they learn)<sup>10</sup>
- Supporting specific recruitment efforts to diversify the profession (e.g., “grow your own” programs and other preparation partnerships in diverse communities)
- Lowering the cost of becoming an educator (testing, fingerprinting, certification fees, etc.)
- Providing debt relief for student loans in exchange for time commitments
- Creating alternative assessments of candidates’ knowledge more closely aligned to classroom experiences than the current Michigan Test for Teacher Certification<sup>11</sup> (MTTC), which is a barrier<sup>xviii</sup> for some aspiring to join the profession
- Creating more opportunities for teacher leaders to stay in the classroom—at least part-time—while taking on other duties in schools (e.g., hybrid or peer-coaching positions focused on literacy or other school-level need)
- Creating opportunities for educators to advise and work in state government (e.g., at the Michigan Department of Education or in staff positions within the legislature or other branches of government) without losing retirement service credit or district-based seniority
- Providing professional development opportunities better aligned with realities they face in their classrooms daily

In addition to the summary list above, educators also cited the rising cost of higher education at many of the sessions. Educators noted that if the cost of earning bachelor’s degrees keeps going up and compensation has not kept pace, it will be increasingly difficult for early-career

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<sup>9</sup> The summary findings from the online session are reported separately later in this document because the format for that session differed substantially from the five in-person sessions.

<sup>10</sup> Student teachers work/learn for 10 weeks or longer without compensation.

<sup>11</sup> The MTTC is required for all candidates who want to obtain Michigan teacher certification.

educators to settle their student loan debt and will discourage potential educators from entering the profession.

*At every session, educators emphasized the need for reforming Michigan's education funding system by establishing more adequate and equitable resources among school districts.*

The issues of educator-pay and working-condition inequities were often tied to funding disparities among neighboring school districts. Often educators at the sessions reported leaving lower-resourced districts for higher-resourced districts, which places increased pressure on high-poverty areas in rural and urban communities. Some district leaders in attendance complained about “*teacher poaching*,” which often puts lower-resourced districts at a disadvantage in hiring and retention.

Educators at the sessions also discussed ways in which their everyday experiences could be improved, such as reducing standardized testing requirements, providing more time to collaborate and more autonomy to be creative in their lesson planning, adding more supports to meet students at their skill level, and cutting paperwork requirements.

### **Description**

Educators who attended the *in-person solutions sessions* were asked to propose solutions to the issues of recruitment, retention, and diversifying the educator-talent pipeline. Each educator was asked to generate at least three workable solutions on their own that could be shared with policymakers.<sup>12</sup> Individuals then worked in small groups of three to six to discuss the merits of their proposed solutions, collaborate, and select three solutions they, as a group, felt were best suited to address the three issues.

The group findings were shared publicly at each session, with the other attendees weighing in on the solutions and making suggestions for refinement. This analysis is organized around the proposed solutions and summarizes key findings.

The solutions are categorized first into the three overarching categories the participants were asked to address at the sessions—recruitment, retention, and diversifying the talent pipeline—across five educator-solutions summits that were held in October and November 2019, with solutions proposed in small workgroups.

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<sup>12</sup> The number of solutions generated by *individual* educators at the in-person sessions totaled more than 300. This report attempts to summarize those solutions along with those generated in small groups.

While all three issue areas were addressed, 125 of the solutions generated were related to retention; 83 were related to recruitment; and just 13 specifically addressed diversifying the pipeline.

**Table 2: Group Solutions Generated**

Total solutions related to retention	125
Total solutions related to recruitment	83
Total solutions related to diversification of the talent pipeline	13
<b>Total small-group solutions</b>	<b>221</b>

### Survey Results

Following each in-person session, the PPA research team surveyed participants using the list of potential solutions mentioned at each in-person session to identify which solutions enjoyed the greatest support.<sup>13</sup> The participants from each in-person session were presented with a list of ideas specific to their session. Because many of the same concepts were mentioned at multiple sessions, similar wording was employed across sessions. In analyzing the results of the surveys, the research team grouped solutions that were comparable across sessions, even when the precise language of the solution might have been slightly different.

Of 99 attendees at the in-person sessions, a total of 71 participants completed a follow-up survey, for an overall response rate of 72 percent. The response rates varied by region but always constituted a majority of attendees (from 56 percent to 96 percent).

Ideas were divided into three basic categories: (1) monetary benefits, (2) non-monetary benefits, and (3) solutions related to preparation. For each category, participants were asked to select the top three concepts that they believed would help address shortages in Michigan. They were then asked to rank their favored solutions in order.

With respect to *monetary benefits*, participants at all five in-person sessions listed incentives to become educators as either their most-preferred or second-most-preferred solution (i.e., ranked #1 or #2). In fact, participants said that incentives were an important solution for shortages. Participants at three of the sessions ranked equity-based funding and support for more personnel in schools in the top three solutions. Participants at two of the five sessions favored loan forgiveness as their top priority. Others mentioned as high priorities included smaller class sizes, free child care for educators, and alternative models of compensation.

Giving educators more input on working conditions and reducing the reliance on student standardized tests were the most commonly preferred *non-monetary* benefits supported by

<sup>13</sup> Only participants who attended the in-person events were surveyed.

participants. These ideas then were ranked in the top three in a majority of the sessions. Two groups of participants also supported reducing the barriers to re-certification (i.e., cost/fees).

*Notably, half of the issues ranked in the top three by the educators involved changes to evaluation procedures and standardized testing.*

Other ideas included: stop evaluating educators only for accountability purposes (shift the focus to improvement and growth and getting better at teaching); fewer required local initiatives (on top of state requirements); more emphasis on the “whole child” in policymaking; more time for job-embedded collaboration; and public service announcements highlighting the importance of teaching.

There was consensus on changes related to *preparation*. Participants at all five sessions supported improvements to induction and mentoring programs, ranking them in the top three of all the ideas considered. A majority of groups also placed a high priority on paid internships and a more diverse set of experiences (including demonstrating an understanding of how to meet the needs of students with disabilities) for future educators.

Participants also mentioned providing more attention to classroom management skills during the educator-preparation process, creating minority-youth cadet programs, reducing the costs of preparation in terms of time and money, and expanding grow-your-own programs.

**Other Solutions Generated at In-Person Sessions.** In addition to the proposed changes that group members were surveyed on, the in-person workgroups also produced other unique suggestions. These are related to improving: (1) access to and the quality of professional development opportunities; (2) educator and student supports; (3) the onboarding and mentoring of new educators to help set them up for success; and (4) the working and learning conditions that makes educating students possible.

#### *Professional Development*

1. Creating or expanding partnerships with colleges and universities so that more school districts partner with colleges and universities to ensure high-quality options are available
2. Monetary incentives for certain professional development activities (such as additional endorsements in high-needs areas or professional distinctions such as being recognized by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards)
3. Professional development that is timely, relevant, and provided outside the school day or at the beginning of the year, when possible, to minimize disruptions to instructional time (which also reduces the need for substitutes during the school year)

### *Student and Educator Supports*

1. More support is needed for general education educators who work with students that have severe mental and behavior needs
2. More support personnel to assist general education teachers (e.g., socioemotional and mental health caseloads), including additional counselors, social workers, and special education teachers or other support professionals
3. Educators need additional training to deal with students experiencing trauma, and educators themselves need counseling after experiencing secondary trauma

### *Recruitment and Onboarding of New Staff*

1. Businesses should supplement the training for career and technical education (CTE) educators (e.g., ensuring there are enough instructors in high-needs CTE shortage areas)
2. More teachers and support professionals should be represented at career days in schools and at college-recruitment events (e.g., educator career fairs)
3. Reallocate resources currently distributed to high-stakes tests and evaluations
4. Reduce redundant procedures for new educators (e.g., additional local districts' time at meetings that diminishes time to prepare for lessons)
5. More exposure to students of all types for pre-student teaching experiences (e.g., a varied experience with students in urban, rural, and suburban settings, as well as LGBTQ students and those with disabilities)
6. Housing incentives for new educators (encouraging educators to live in the communities in which they work)

### *Improving Working Conditions*

1. Additional grant funding should be provided for educators to implement innovative and creative practices
2. More flexibility is needed for existing grant funding (from both the federal and state government)
3. More autonomy to teach in a developmentally appropriate manner with fewer high-stakes tests
4. Promote legislation that is positive for the education profession and stop blaming educators for problems associated with the underfunding of public schools

## **Findings: Online Session**

One online session was held in late November through early December 2019 and included the perspectives of 21 educators, mostly from geographic areas outside the reach of the in-person sessions. The session was asynchronous (i.e., participants were able to respond to prompts and discuss the topics at any time during the week). The format of the session was slightly different

than the in-person sessions. Moderators asked follow-up questions and attendees provided their feedback to four question prompts and were also asked to respond to other comments and interact with each other.

The group was hosted on FocusGroupIt, a secure online tool to conduct qualitative research. The format permitted respondents to respond to questions and interact in ways similar to the in-person sessions. However, because the online session was based on individual reporting and not in groups, the research team chose to not include these findings with the group summaries.

Educators at the online session received the same PowerPoint presentation as was presented at the in-person sessions focused on why educators are leaving the profession. There were four discussion topics included in the online session: (1) the public perception of education professions; (2) solutions to the educator exodus; (3) solutions to diversifying the pipeline; and (4) solutions to educator recruitment.

**Topic 1, the public’s perception of the education profession,** asked respondents to answer the following question: *“What do you think needs to be done to improve the status of education as a profession?”* This question received 17 responses, including the following proposed solutions:

- Eliminating the negativity surrounding education, and recognizing and respecting the profession
- Getting politicians and lawmakers to value and stop attacking the profession
- Improving funding for schools (to make educators’ pay more competitive with other careers)

**Topic 2, solutions to the educator exodus,** asked respondents to answer the following question: *“What suggestions do you have from your perspective as an educator to help or slow the teacher exodus in Michigan?”* This question generated 15 responses, including the following solutions:

- Raising starting compensation for educators
- Creating stronger mentor programs at the district level
- Investing in support services and training for school psychologists, social workers, and other interventionists
- Providing more free and meaningful professional development

**Topic 3, solutions to diversifying<sup>14</sup> the pipeline**, asked respondents to answer the following question: “Which of the following promising practices do you think will help increase the number of educators in the workforce and with retention?” This question provided an opportunity for respondents to select their top solution from a list drawn from the research literature: (a) service scholarship; (b) loan-forgiveness programs; (c) residency programs; (d) university-district partnerships; (e) grow-your-own programs; (f) peer mentorships; and (g) adjusting licensure requirements. Respondents indicated that they felt that the choices could be used for recruitment of all educators, not just for diversity.

The most popular solution selected by this group was *loan-forgiveness programs* with 9 votes (60 percent). *Promoting grow-your-own programs* was the only other response that generated at least 2 votes (13 percent).

Feedback for this question also included other solutions, including encouraging interest in the profession for underrepresented groups, getting schools of education to work more closely with school districts, and creating service scholarships.

**Topic 4, solutions to educator recruitment**, asked respondents to answer the following question: “What can be done in Michigan to better recruit and support teachers who want to become educators?” This question generated 15 responses, including:

- Encouraging current educators not to “bad-mouth the profession.”
- Offering incentives to enter the profession.
- Beginning the pipeline earlier and cultivating interest in prospective students in high schools.

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<sup>14</sup> Increasing the diversity of the educator workforce through meaningful inclusion of historically marginalized groups; includes but is not limited to African-American, Latinx, LGBTQ, and other individuals.

## Considerations

While the *consequences* of Michigan’s educator workforce shortages are widely understood, approaches for *solving* the shortages remain in doubt. Moving beyond identifying problem areas, this report identifies the need for a long-term strategy to attract a sustainable and diverse education workforce. Policymakers and educators should work together closely to address Michigan’s educator talent crisis.

What has been missing in past efforts to address growing educator staffing issues *is the direct contribution of educators.*

The findings from this report add depth to our understanding of the issues and demonstrate the necessity of coming up with responsive approaches to better prepare, recruit, and retain educators in the most needed subjects and areas in every district in Michigan.



Educator shortages are a growing issue that impacts some areas more than others, such as our most underfunded school districts, but the task of alleviating these problems has fallen on local school district leaders. Local school districts have had to pick up the pieces and make the best of the situation. District leaders have responded to the challenges by implementing programs and practices to mitigate the problems, but a more coordinated response to address the overarching problems facing all districts is needed. For many school districts, shortages are an urgent issue that needs to be confronted now.

*Workable solutions to address educator shortages are needed, but until there is a common approach, no approach will have enough impact.*

It is well established that education reforms require buy-in and support from educators for any hope of success. It is therefore crucial to solicit educator and stakeholder input on challenging the status quo. Educators and education stakeholder groups must be invested in the process and be able to assist in identifying the trade-offs inherent in changes.



More importantly, this work has highlighted that educators have critical insights that have been thus far discounted. If Michigan is truly interested in addressing factors causing existing educators to leave the profession and influencing others to choose not to enter, it seems obvious that a next step is to *ask the educators*.

## **Listening to Educators**

This report offers an initial foray into enlisting educators' thoughts on developing and prioritizing solutions to the issues causing the shortages. Instead of relying only on surveys or existing state or national reports, this project identified solutions drawn up by educators currently working in schools across the state.

The solutions proposed as part of this project offer a glimpse into what will be needed to address long-occurring issues (e.g., improving compensation for teachers and support professionals; effective induction and mentoring programs for early-career educators; improving the benefits and reducing the costs of becoming a teacher; and promoting greater equity of resources across districts). Although many of these ideas have been suggested by researchers and policymakers in the past, having educators independently propose them means that they will likely enjoy widespread support.

*Policymakers should note that there is intense educator support for greater input into working conditions as well as a strong belief that the current system of using student standardized tests for evaluation needs to be revisited.*

Aside from the specific solutions advocated by participants at the sessions and outlined in this report, the key takeaway was *the critical importance of improving the public status of educators*. Participants repeatedly mentioned that they have felt unsupported and undermined and this has led to them discouraging others from entering the profession. Some educators indicated that they have sometimes felt attacked by policymakers in Lansing—contributing to the demoralization that has led educators to leave their positions altogether. On occasion, educators who attended the sessions expressed gratitude to the facilitators for the opportunity to share their ideas.

The frequent use of words like “respect” and “control” by participants points to a belief by educators that they have not been treated like professionals, a perception that has contributed to lower morale and a desire to leave the profession. More work remains to be done to fully integrate educator perspectives into solving educator shortages.

## Educator Recommendations

Many questions remain regarding how best to raise the status of teaching and create a sustainable workforce that can educate the next generation of students, making Michigan a top education state. Based on the suggestions generated by educators, Public Policy Associates, Inc. has identified the following practices for policymakers and education leaders to consider as they seek to address educator workforce shortages.

**The solutions identified in this report support the consideration of the following:**

- 1. Compensation.** Overall compensation for educators<sup>15</sup> should be increased across the state with existing resource inequities between neighboring school districts reduced.
- 2. Recruitment.** Incentives (e.g., service scholarships, tax credits, loan-forgiveness programs, housing stipends, or hiring bonuses) should be created to attract more educators to the fields and locations where they are needed most—addressing the availability of educators in specific areas, including educators working with struggling readers, English-learner students, students with disabilities, lower-income students, and students experiencing trauma.<sup>16</sup>
- 3. “Grow-your-own.”** Sustainable career pathways, such as cadet programs for high school students or teacher-leadership opportunities for early-career educators. Programs should be expanded in high-needs settings (e.g., building on successful community organizing models and in collaboration with businesses, philanthropy, and education stakeholder organizations) along with targeted programs that can help candidates with non-education degrees, those with some college, or those currently working in schools (e.g., education support professionals<sup>xix</sup> and long-term substitutes) advance toward degree completion, certification, or additional endorsement areas.
- 4. Marketing.** Dedicated funding should be provided for an innovative statewide marketing and communications campaign<sup>17</sup> to improve and support recruitment activities locally and/or nationally (similar to the *Pure Michigan* or *Going PRO in Michigan*<sup>18</sup> campaigns).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Competitive pay was a key reason cited by educators who were considering leaving the profession in both reports based on the *Launch Michigan* educator survey data in 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Including mental health supports for teachers and support professionals who experience secondary trauma as they work with high-needs students.

<sup>17</sup> At one session, the educators suggested that legislators also participate in the public campaign by sharing the important role that educators played in developing their skills and abilities.

<sup>18</sup> *Going PRO in Michigan* is a state-funded campaign designed to elevate the perception of professional trades and to showcase opportunities in a variety of rewarding careers.

<sup>19</sup> Because educator workforce shortages are not uniform, policymakers in Michigan should target specific subject areas, regions, and locales.

5. **Rural input.** Future efforts should be made to reach out to educators in northern Lower Peninsula communities and the Upper Peninsula,<sup>20</sup> as well as other areas in Michigan, to ensure that the distinct concerns of all settings are included in the public’s dialogue.<sup>21</sup>
6. **Equitable funding.** Rebuilding Michigan’s educator-talent pipeline means Michigan’s education-funding system—the responsibility of the Legislature—should be addressed to establish more adequate and equitable<sup>22</sup> resources and funding among school districts, thus reducing disparities that can cause mobility and retention issues for the lowest-funded districts.
7. **Data coordination.** The Michigan Department of Education along with intermediate school districts and educator-preparation programs should create a better data-collection and reporting system<sup>23</sup> throughout the educator pipeline (on both the demand and supply side) to help guide informed decision-making and provide timely, targeted information with real-time district-level staffing needs in specific shortage concentrations or geographic areas.
8. **Task force.** A statewide task force—such as those convened in South Dakota<sup>xx</sup> and Colorado<sup>xxi</sup>—should be created to study supply and demand data and provide a strategic plan to address recruitment and retention issues facing Michigan over the next ten years.<sup>24</sup>
9. **Partnerships.** Educator-preparation programs and local school districts should expand on existing partnerships to better understand districts’ needs<sup>25</sup> and the unique situations faced by our hardest-to-staff schools.
10. **Annual conference.** Communication<sup>26</sup> between educators and policymakers should be fostered through an annual statewide conference oriented around sustaining the educator workforce and providing opportunities for researchers to share best practices and receive feedback.

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<sup>20</sup> Although demographically similar to the current makeup of all educators in Michigan, most of the sessions for this project were held downstate.

<sup>21</sup> A targeted representative survey of educators in the northern Lower Peninsula and Upper Peninsula could be considered as a means to ensure that the findings are fully reflective of the population of educators in other areas of the state.

<sup>22</sup> The School Finance Research Collaborative report (2018) outlined a need for more equitable distribution of resources AND educators in Michigan.

<sup>23</sup> Data collected in real time provided by local districts that can be used by job seekers, educator-preparation programs, and researchers to identify problem areas.

<sup>24</sup> It has taken ten years or more to reach the current status; it will take considerable time and effort to raise the status of the profession in Michigan.

<sup>25</sup> This suggestion includes producing more educators in high-need fields (e.g., English learners, special education, STEM, and CTE).

<sup>26</sup> More collaboration between stakeholder groups to bring the varied constituencies responsible for the educator pipeline together to come up with workable solutions linked to future staffing needs.

# Endnotes

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<sup>ii</sup> Mike Wilkinson and Ron French, “Michigan leans on long-term substitutes as its schools struggle,” *Bridge Magazine*, August 7, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.bridgemi.com/talent-education/michigan-leans-long-term-substitutes-its-schools-struggle>.

<sup>iii</sup> Nathan Burroughs, Jacqueline Gardner, and Dirk Zuschlag, *There’s No Substitute: Michigan’s Substitute Teacher Shortage*, MAPPR Policy Brief (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, 2019), <http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/sites/default/files/MAPPR/MAPPR%20-%20There%20is%20No%20Substitute.pdf>.

<sup>iv</sup> Lisette Partelow, Angie Spong, Catherine Brown, and Stephenie Johnson, *America needs more teachers of color and a more selective teaching profession*, Center for American Progress, September 14, 2017, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/09/14/437667/america-needs-teachers-color-selective-teaching-profession/>.

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<sup>vi</sup> Michigan’s Center for Educational Performance and Information, “Student Count, Staffing Count [Teachers], All Grades and All Students (2018-19),” <https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StaffingInformation/StaffingCounts3/StaffingCount.aspx> (accessed December 5, 2019).

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<sup>viii</sup> Lisette Partelow, “What To Make of Declining Enrollment in Teacher Preparation Programs,” (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, December 3, 2019), retrieved December 12, 2019 from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2019/12/03/477311/make-declining-enrollment-teacher-preparation-programs/>.

<sup>ix</sup> Michigan Department of Education, *Educator Workforce Annual Report, 2018-19*, accessed December 4, 2019, [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/OEEAnnualReport2018-2019\\_665360\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/OEEAnnualReport2018-2019_665360_7.pdf).

<sup>x</sup> Shannon A. Stackhouse, *Trends in Michigan Teacher Certification: Initial Certificates Issued 1996-2016*, Michigan Department of Education, White Paper, September 2019, accessed January 6, 2020, [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Final\\_Draft\\_5-year\\_certificate\\_trend\\_with\\_endorsement\\_code\\_appendix\\_ada\\_601771\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Final_Draft_5-year_certificate_trend_with_endorsement_code_appendix_ada_601771_7.pdf).

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> Emma White Research, *2019 Educator Survey* (Lansing, MI: Launch Michigan, March 2019), retrieved March 28, 2019, from <https://launchmichigan.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Launch-MI-Full-Report-2019-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>xiii</sup> “The 50th Annual PDK Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools: Teaching: Great Respect, Dwindling Appeal,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 100, no. 1 (September 2018): NP1–24. doi:[10.1177/0031721718797117](https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721718797117).

<sup>xiv</sup> Emma White Research, *2019 Educator Survey*.

<sup>xv</sup> Daniel J. Quinn, Anna Colby, and David McConnell, *Why Educators are Leaving the Profession: Qualitative Analysis of Comments from 2019 Launch Michigan Survey* (Lansing, MI: Public Policy Associates, Inc., October 26, 2019).

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<sup>xvii</sup> Anne Runkle, “Whitmer names appointees to educator advisory council,” *Oakland Press*, May 10, 2019, retrieved December 21, 2019, from [https://www.theoaklandpress.com/news/local/whitmer-names-appointees-to-educator-advisory-council/article\\_44ec4c26-730d-11e9-b443-b75c6d5265f4.html](https://www.theoaklandpress.com/news/local/whitmer-names-appointees-to-educator-advisory-council/article_44ec4c26-730d-11e9-b443-b75c6d5265f4.html).

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<sup>xix</sup> Diana Lambert, “California invested \$45 million in a credentialing program that has transformed 299 support professionals into teachers since 2016,” “California’s effort to turn school staff into teachers starts to pay off,” *EdSource*, January 8, 2020, retrieved from <https://edsources.org/2020/californias-effort-to-turn-school-staff-into-teachers-starts-to-pay-off>.

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