

Business Community Feedback on MI Opportunity Scholarship and Michigan Reconnect

Accountability: Student success is key to the value proposition of this proposed investment in higher education. Central to that is a meaningful accountability and coordination system. To achieve accountability and greater coordination, Michigan needs a comprehensive state strategy such as that implemented by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, including a database that is robust, statewide, and public, to track student progress and achievement. Every institution should be required to publish their enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates by degree or certificate program annually.

The accountability program should have success metrics for all institutions receiving public resources, including community colleges, universities, trade schools, and other certificate programs. The program should maintain the ability to shift resources away from educational institutions or certificate programs that do not achieve a high level of student completion (or in some cases successful transfer). Michigan should invest in institutions that help students finish.

Michigan should pursue innovative strategies to reduce remediation for recent high school graduates, including co-requisite remediation and providing supplemental development coursework in high school. The proposed programs should not pay for remediation or developmental courses for recent high school graduates. That should be the responsibility of the school district that allowed them to graduate without the level of proficiency needed to avoid these courses in college. Michigan's taxpayers should not pay twice.

Student Support: Student success depends on access to varying degrees of needed support, including mentoring, career counseling and academic advising. To ensure high levels of program completion, the MI Opportunity Scholarship and Reconnect proposals should require that participating educational institutions adopt a support/success model based on researched best practices, not repackaged existing programs (unless they can substantiate program effectiveness).

The cost of this student mentoring/counseling/advising should be a commitment by the institutions to use existing funds toward evidenced-based strategies. Student support should not be an additional state cost beyond the scholarship support, which will generate a substantial increase in new tuition dollars from both federal and state funds.

Student Ownership: While the aim of these proposals is to put education within reach of more Michiganders, students should have some ownership in their education. First, the program requirements should specify that students must remain continuously enrolled with very limited exceptions (i.e. military deployment, illness, etc.). Next, the concept of these programs providing "last in" money should be adhered to in a meaningful way. While completion of the FAFSA should be considered a minimum requirement, the advisors/mentors that facilitate student support should also help students explore all possible options to help cover the cost of their education. Finally, much like Tennessee requires, students should maintain satisfactory academic progress (2.0 GP) at their respective institution and provide at least 8 hours of community service each term, validated by the institution receiving the support or the student mentor/advisor.

Economic Alignment: The MI Opportunity Scholarship and Reconnect proposals should integrate, not eliminate, "Going Pro." Furthermore, it is important that the higher education system have a regular and meaningful interface with the business community to ensure that courses, programs and certificates that lead to a high probability of employment are offered. That interface should also provide students with an opportunity to explore career options and have access to information in one place on high demand technical fields (including career profiles with wage/demand data).

Tuition Cap Requirements: Institutions receiving public resources for the MI Opportunity Scholarship and Reconnect programs should abide by tuition restraints on annual increases.

Maintain Business Climate Competitiveness: No business tax increase should be tied to or associated with these proposals. State funding should come from existing reallocated dollars.