



DETROIT **DRIVES DEGREES**

ENGINES OF PROGRESS:

Building Longitudinal Postsecondary Data
Infrastructure for Degree Attainment,
Equity, and Opportunity in Detroit

Authors:

Sam Comai and Michelle Foley of ResearchEd

MAY 2026

in partnership with

 **ResearchEd**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Detroit's 2030 Attainment and Equity Goals	4
The Challenge: Shared Accountability Without Shared Data	5
Investing in the Data Infrastructure Needed to Achieve Detroit's 2030 Goals	6
The D3 Data Collaborative CoP	7
Key Insights from the CoP	7
Recommendations for Continued Progress	9
Conclusion	10
Endnotes	11

Executive Summary

Detroit's economic prosperity and competitiveness depend on increasing educational attainment and closing equity gaps across the Detroit Region. Understanding this imperative, the Detroit Regional Chamber created the **Detroit Drives Degrees (D3)** initiative.

The **D3** initiative set two ambitious goals for 2030:

raise the postsecondary credential attainment from

45% → 60%

and

Cut in half

the racial equity gap.

While meaningful progress has been made in the decade since these goals were set, more substantial headway has been hindered by limited regional capacity to track student progress and outcomes due to fragmented data systems.

To help overcome these challenges, the Chamber launched the **D3 Data Collaborative**, bringing together 13 regional colleges and universities to leverage the National Student Clearinghouse's **Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP)**.¹ This national data collection initiative aims to build a shared, longitudinal data system that empowers institutions and stakeholders to benchmark performance, identify gaps in student outcomes, and drive student success strategies.

To support the Detroit Region's participation, the Chamber partnered with ResearchEd,² an education research and policy organization with expertise in the PDP, to convene a Community of Practice (CoP) in Fall 2025. Institutional researchers from participating schools met monthly to connect PDP

participation to institutional and regional goals and to address common challenges in data quality, governance, and strategic data use. The purpose of this white paper is to highlight key insights from the CoP and to emphasize the need for regional alignment of postsecondary data in Detroit.

Key insights from the CoP:

- Connecting PDP participation to institutional KPIs, equity goals, and strategic decision-making motivates adoption.
- Limited staff capacity, uneven data literacy, and concerns about duplicative reporting are key constraints to PDP participation.
- The potential to use the PDP for regional benchmarking and deeper insights into student transfer data is highly valuable to institutions.

Recommendations for continued progress towards regional data alignment:

- **Design for adoption:** Minimize institutional burden, align with existing systems, standardize metrics and definitions, and facilitate peer learning opportunities.
- **Strengthen governance:** Ensure leadership prioritizes data use, accountability, and alignment with institutional and regional priorities.
- **Invest in capacity:** Provide staff support, professional development, and technical assistance to enable meaningful data use.

Regional data infrastructure only works when governance, capacity, and systems are intentionally aligned to reduce burden and enable use. By pursuing these strategies, Detroit's postsecondary ecosystem will be positioned to realize its attainment and equity goals — driving regional prosperity and opportunity for years to come.

Introduction

Over the past 50 years, Michigan's economy has faced persistent challenges from industrial restructuring, widespread job losses, population decline, and stagnant income growth. In 1953, per capita income in the state ranked ninth in the nation — nearly 18% above the national average. Today, Michigan ranks 40th in per capita income, with the typical resident earning 13% less than the national average.³

No other city captures the depth of the state's enduring economic challenges like Detroit. Once the fifth-largest city in the country, Detroit lost 65% of its population between 1950 and 2020.⁴ This population decline has contributed to widespread social and economic strain, as evidenced by high poverty rates and limited job opportunities. A lag in educational attainment has compounded these challenges and is closely linked to the Region's ability to maintain economic competitiveness and growth potential.

Despite national discourse that has challenged the value of higher education, receiving a postsecondary degree or credential remains associated with better economic outcomes for individuals and communities.

In the U.S.:

5x higher

net worth in adults with a bachelor's degree or higher than that of individuals with only a high school diploma.⁵

In the Detroit Region:

12 percentage points

lower poverty rate than those with only a high school diploma.⁶

They also exhibit stronger labor market outcomes, including lower unemployment, higher labor force participation, and

83% higher

median earnings.⁷

Table 1. Poverty Rate and Labor Market Outcomes by Educational Attainment in the Detroit Region (2024)

Metric	High School Diploma Only	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Poverty Rate	17%	5%
Unemployment Rate	6%	2%
Labor Force Participation	73%	88%
Median Earnings	\$39,130	\$71,434

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau. "Educational Attainment." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, [Table S1501](#). Accessed on 10 Dec 2025; U.S. Census Bureau. "Educational Attainment by Employment Status for the Population 25 to 64 Years." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, [Table B23006](#). Accessed on 17 Dec 2025.

The link between educational attainment and economic outcomes cannot be ignored. Improving the social and economic well-being of Detroit hinges on building and retaining a robust talent pipeline to meet the needs of a rapidly changing labor market. Without increasing postsecondary attainment, the Region will continue to face hurdles that inhibit its stability and competitiveness.

Detroit's 2030 Attainment and Equity Goals

In the face of this persistent lag in educational attainment, the Detroit Regional Chamber put forth a bold vision in 2015. D3, the Chamber's collective impact initiative, established two goals for the Region:

1. Increase the number of residents with a postsecondary credential or degree to 60% by 2030; and
2. Close the racial equity gap by half in that same period.

The Challenge: Shared Accountability Without Shared Data

In 2020, the Detroit Region formalized its commitment to increasing educational attainment and closing equity gaps through the **Detroit Regional Talent Compact**, signed by 50 educational institutions, businesses, nonprofits, and philanthropic organizations.⁸ The compact signaled a recognition among the Detroit community that achievement of these goals was not solely in the hands of educational institutions, but would require coordinated, cross-sector action.

Source: Detroit Regional Chamber. (n.d.). The Detroit Regional Talent Compact Signers. Retrieved on November 24, 2025, from <https://www.detroitchamber.com/education-talent/compact/signers/>

To guide this collective work, the Chamber developed a strategic action plan that identified priority areas and actionable strategies to improve student outcomes.⁹ Throughout the planning process, a consistent challenge emerged: the Region lacked the integrated data infrastructure necessary to track student progress across institutions and over time. Institutions relied on multiple, inconsistent data sources, making it hard to measure outcomes, disaggregate results, or compare performance across the Region.

For example, while gateway-course placement and completion rates are the preferred indicators for evaluating the success of developmental education reform, inconsistent availability of these data across institutions forced the Region to rely on less precise measures, such as overall educations in remedial course placement. As a result, regional leaders faced limited ability to assess the true impact of reforms, identify high-performing practices, or target interventions where they are most needed.

Table 2. Detroit Regional Talent Compact Signers by Sector

Sector	Number of Compact Signers
Postsecondary Education	19
Business	9
Nonprofit	9
Philanthropy	6
K-12 Education	5
Government	2

Investing in the Data Infrastructure Needed to Achieve Detroit's 2030 Goals

To address these challenges, the Chamber launched the D3 Data Collaborative and made the strategic decision to support regional participation in a national data-collection and analytics initiative known as the PDP. Maintained by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), the PDP standardizes student-level postsecondary data and returns it to institutions as dashboards and analysis-ready

(AR) files.¹⁰ In the Detroit Region, the PDP offers particular value through standardized benchmarking dashboards, robust national transfer tracking, and frequent reporting with fast turnarounds. These features deliver a near “real-time” view of student enrollment, progression, transfer, and completion to institutions and regional stakeholders.

Table 3. Regional Postsecondary Representation in D3 Data Collaborative

Regional Postsecondary Institution Group	Number of Institutions	Undergraduate Enrollment (Fall 2024)	Undergraduate Enrollment as a Percentage of all Regional Colleges
Participating in the D3 Data Collaborative	12	90,017	70%
Not Participating in the D3 Data Collaborative	6	39,157	30

Note: While Grand Valley State University and Central Michigan University are additional D3 Data Collaborative participants, they are not represented in this table because their main campuses are located outside of the Detroit Region.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS): Undergraduate Fall Enrollment. Custom data file. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data> on April 16, 2026.

To support PDP participation, the Chamber partnered with ResearchEd, an education research and policy organization with expertise in the PDP, to convene a Community of Practice (CoP) in Fall 2025. Institutional researchers from participating schools met monthly to connect PDP participation to institutional and regional goals and to address common challenges in data quality, governance, and strategic data use.

Table 4. Institutions Participating in the D3 Data Collaborative and CoP

Institution Name	Institution Type	Undergraduate Enrollment (Fall 2024)
Grand Valley State University	4-Year, Public	19,002
Macomb Community College	2-Year, Public	16,300
Wayne State University	4-Year, Public	16,012
Oakland University	4-Year, Public	15,587
Oakland Community College	2-Year, Public	15,287
Henry Ford College	4-Year, Public	11,410
Eastern Michigan University	4-Year, Public	10,470
University of Michigan - Dearborn	4-Year, Public	6,187
Jackson College	4-Year, Public	5,086
Davenport University	4-Year, Private	3,741
University of Detroit Mercy	4-Year, Private	3,422
St. Clair County Community College	2-Year, Public	3,317
Monroe County Community College	2-Year, Public	2,210

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS): Undergraduate Fall Enrollment. Custom data file. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data> on April 16, 2026.

The D3 Data Collaborative CoP

In August 2025, institutional stakeholders from 13 colleges met virtually with ResearchEd and Chamber leaders to launch the CoP. Together, the D3 Data Collaborative established the following priorities to enable and sustain regional PDP participation:

1. Enhance understanding of PDP reporting processes and insights to support broader interpretation and utilization.
2. Align PDP metrics with institutional key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure relevance to existing performance goals.
3. Strengthen cultures of data-informed decision-making across campuses.

4. Identify opportunities for ongoing regional collaboration and shared learning across institutions.

To advance conversations aligned with these identified priorities, ResearchEd convened the group six times between August and December 2026, including one in-person session in October.

Key Insights From the CoP

The CoP surfaced critical insights into what Detroit-area colleges and universities value in a regional longitudinal postsecondary data system, what motivates engagement, and the supports institutions need to sustain participation. These insights highlight how an integrated data system anchored in shared

metrics, aligned reporting, and regional collaboration can enable the Detroit Region to advance both postsecondary attainment and equity goals.

Framing the value of participation

Institutions consistently emphasized that engagement depends on seeing concrete benefits for their own priorities, even while recognizing regional value. Connecting PDP participation to institutional KPIs, equity goals, and strategic decision-making motivates adoption and ensures institutions see tangible returns on their time and resources.

One participant explained:

"I think a lot of the stuff that we are doing here, to be very frank, is probably going to be recognized as somewhat duplicative to things we have already built internally. But we recognize the important part of this was trying to connect it with the work the Chamber was doing."

Another highlighted the importance of understanding student experiences across institutions:

"Knowing more about where our students come from and where they go is a top priority. Understanding outcomes as students transfer is essential."

By highlighting the link between institutional priorities and regional objectives, the PDP

can position itself as a tool that serves both campus-level decision-making and collective progress toward Detroit's attainment and equity targets.

Enhancing understanding of PDP reporting

Participants valued structured guidance to interpret PDP dashboards and AR files, which is essential for translating regional data into actionable strategies on campus.

One CoP member shared:

"One of the things I'm most excited about is the more deep and nuanced look at transfer... This is the juicy stuff that we're really excited about."

At the same time, limited campus-wide data literacy constrains broader use of these insights:

"We have a big data literacy issue. Limited capacity impedes our ability to educate the broader campus community."

These insights underscore the need for training and technical assistance to support institutions in fully leveraging the PDP, enabling accurate interpretation of longitudinal data to inform campus strategies and regional collaboration.

Aligning PDP metrics with institutional KPIs

Some institutions expressed concern that PDP reporting could feel duplicative of internal systems.

As one participant explained:

"We are submitting to PDP as part of the D3 partnership and have not had any internal conversations about using this at the institution. We are small offices and do not have the bandwidth to take on major data projects."

Support that helps institutions map PDP metrics to internal KPIs can reduce perceived duplication, ensure relevance to existing performance goals, and increase adoption across campus teams. When metrics are aligned, institutions can use PDP data to enhance both campus-level student success strategies and regional benchmarking for attainment and equity outcomes.

Strengthening cultures of data-informed decision-making

The CoP highlighted that meaningful data use depends on both capacity and confidence.

One IR staff member described:

"I often find myself writing executive summaries that build a narrative around the data so that institutional leaders can make the most informed decisions."

Limited staffing is a widespread barrier, with some institutional research and effectiveness (IR/IE) offices operating with just one staff

member, echoing national trends.¹¹ Investing in staff capacity, professional development, and technical support is critical to ensure that longitudinal data is translated into effective campus interventions, which collectively drive regional attainment and equity progress.

Leveraging benchmarking, transfer data, and peer learning

Institutions consistently highlighted the value of regional benchmarking and transfer data, which provide insights that internal systems alone cannot offer.

One participant noted:

"Having comparison data is the dream. We do a good job already segmenting and sharing internal data."

Another emphasized the value of peer learning:

"I love the idea of an exemplary institution that's already doing it ... Our IE team is loving the conceptual, but something more applied would really resonate."

Benchmarking and aligned transfer data allow institutions to identify best practices, replicate successful strategies, and understand student pathways across campuses. CoP discussions also underscored the value of ongoing regional knowledge-sharing, which sustains institutional capacity and strengthens a collaborative culture of evidence-based practice. These mechanisms are crucial for achieving regional attainment and equity goals, as they allow data-informed strategies to be shared and scaled across institutions.

Recommendations for Continued Progress

Institutional Recommendations

To fully leverage the PDP and participate meaningfully in a regional longitudinal system, institutions should:

- **Invest in Staff Capacity:** Expand IR/IE teams and dedicate time for data initiatives.
- **Provide Targeted Training:** Build data literacy across campus stakeholders and train staff on PDP reporting and dashboards.
- **Enhance Data Interpretation Support:** Offer ongoing assistance to interpret and act on data efficiently.
- **Strengthen Data Governance:** Clarify roles, responsibilities, and processes for managing, sharing, and engaging with data for inquiry.

Regional Recommendations

To ensure the shared system drives impact across the Detroit Region:

- **Align Metrics, Definitions, and Reporting Timelines:** Establish standardized outcomes (e.g., completion, transfer, equity), disaggregation variables (e.g., race/ethnicity, Pell status, enrollment type), and coordinated reporting schedules so all institutions track the same measures consistently.
- **Identify Peer Institutions for Benchmarking:** Define comparable groups of institutions to enable meaningful regional benchmarking and shared learning.

- **Create Interoperable Systems:** Build secure, seamless platforms for exchanging data across campuses, reducing silos, and enhancing usability.
- **Coordinate Regional Investments:** Pool financial, technical, and human resources to ensure all institutions, regardless of size, can participate fully and equitably.

By adopting shared metrics, definitions, timelines, and benchmarking structures, Detroit's postsecondary ecosystem can build a collaborative and sustainable data infrastructure that supports institutional effectiveness, strengthens data-informed decision-making, and accelerates progress toward 2030 attainment and equity goals.

Conclusion

Detroit's path to greater economic prosperity and social equity depends on the Region's ability to boost educational attainment, a necessary precursor that requires aligning postsecondary data systems.

By investing in staff capacity, technical support, and governance, and by pursuing regional alignment in metrics and systems, Detroit's postsecondary community can leverage data as a powerful tool for continuous improvement. The findings and recommendations detailed in this paper provide a foundation for collaborative action, one that requires sustained commitment from higher education institutions, regional partners, and policymakers alike.

Ultimately, success will be measured not only by increased credentials and narrowed equity gaps, but by the Region's ability to create a

culture of data-informed decision-making that benefits all Detroiters. Through continued partnership, Detroit is poised to set a new standard for regional collaboration in postsecondary attainment and opportunity.

Endnotes

1. Detroit Regional Chamber. (n.d.). Detroit Drives Degrees Data Collaborative. Retrieved on November 20, 2025, from <https://www.detroitchamber.com/education-talent/detroit-drives-degrees/detroit-drives-degrees-data-collaborative/>
2. ResearchEd. (n.d.). Our Work. Retrieved on November 24, 2025, from <https://www.research-ed.org/ourwork>
3. U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, “SAINC1 State annual personal income summary: personal income, population, per capita personal income” (accessed 11/24/2025).
4. Citizens Research Council of Michigan. (2021, August 19). Detroit’s Population Decline Should Prompt Property Tax Reforms. <https://crcmich.org/detroits-population-decline-should-prompt-property-tax-reforms>
5. Owens, R., III, Rossi-Hansberg, E., & Sarte, P.-D. (2018). Rethinking Detroit: Supplementary material and data appendices. Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. <https://shorturl.at/0N0AO>
6. U.S. Census Bureau. “Educational Attainment by Employment Status for the Population 25 to 64 Years.” American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, [Table B23006](#). Accessed on 17 Dec 2025.
7. U.S. Census Bureau. “Educational Attainment.” American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, [Table S1501](#). Accessed on 10 Dec 2025.
8. Detroit Regional Chamber. (2020). Detroit Regional Talent Compact. Retrieved on December 3, 2025, from <https://www.detroitchamber.com/education-talent/compact/>
9. Detroit Regional Chamber. (2020). Detroit Regional Talent Compact Roadmap to Prosperity: A Masterplan for Postsecondary Credential Attainment in Detroit. Retrieved on December 3, 2025, from https://www.detroitchamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Regional-Master-Plan_9.28-2-Updated-2025.pdf
10. National Student Clearinghouse. (n.d.). Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP) Knowledge Base. Retrieved on November 24, 2025, from <https://help.studentclearinghouse.org/pdp/article-categories/using-analysis-ready-files/>
11. Jones, D. and Keller, C. (2024). AIR National Survey: IR/IE Office Staff [Report]. Association for Institutional Research. www.airweb.org/National-Survey; Jones, D. and Keller, C. (2024). AIR National Survey: IR/IE Office Work [Report]. Association for Institutional Research. www.airweb.org/NationalSurvey