



April 20, 2017

**Recognizing Students' Needs to Improve High School Graduation Rates**  
*2015-16 School Year Update*

**We know a lot about who is dropping out of school in Michigan.**

- ✓ The good news: Significantly fewer young people are dropping out before completing four years of high school.
- ✓ Despite improvements, more than one in every ten students who should have graduated in 2016 left high school without a diploma. Rates remain higher for Black, Hispanic and American Indian students than for white students, and higher for students facing a variety of challenges, like poverty, disability and homelessness.
- ✓ Increasing numbers of students are remaining in school for more than four years to keep moving toward a high school credential. Fortunately, higher shares of youth of color and those facing specific challenges like disability are still connected to school after four years, but need more time to finish. Others are not as likely to remain connected, but still benefit from additional years of high school, including those experiencing economic disadvantage and homelessness.

	On-Track Graduated			Dropout			Off-Track Continuing		
	2007	2016	2007-16 % Change	2007	2016	2007-16 % Change	2007	2016	2007-16 % Change
All Students	75%	80%	6%	15%	9%	-41%	9%	10%	22%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	66%	67%	1%	19%	17%	-12%	13%	15%	12%
Asian	85%	90%	6%	10%	5%	-50%	4%	4%	-2%
Black or African American	56%	67%	19%	28%	15%	-48%	15%	17%	14%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	78%	78%	0%	13%	9%	-30%	6%	13%	135%
White	82%	83%	2%	11%	7%	-35%	7%	9%	29%
Hispanic or Latino	58%	73%	26%	29%	14%	-52%	12%	12%	4%
Multiracial	69%	74%	7%	17%	11%	-33%	10%	14%	36%
Economically Disadvantaged	57%	67%	18%	25%	15%	-40%	17%	17%	-5%
Limited English Proficient	70%	72%	3%	20%	13%	-35%	10%	13%	38%
Migrant Education	57%	66%	16%	31%	17%	-46%	11%	n/a	n/a
Students with Disabilities	61%	55%	-9%	19%	14%	-28%	19%	25%	32%
Homeless*	51%	54%	5%	17%	20%	15%	30%	24%	-18%

\*Trend for homeless students, 2011-2015

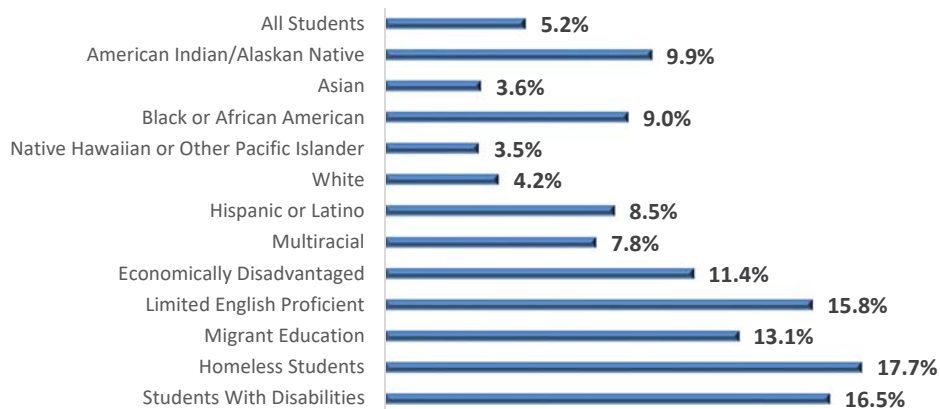
Source: Four-year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Reports, 2017 CEPI [www.michigan.gov/cepi](http://www.michigan.gov/cepi)

**Definitions:** *On-Track Graduated:* Students who completed high school with a regular diploma in four years or less. *Dropout:* Students who left high school permanently at any time during the four-year cohort period, or whose whereabouts are unknown; *Off-Track Continuing:* Students who did not complete high school in four years and are still continuing in school. Percentages do not add to 100 due to Other Completers (GED, etc.) who are not included in this analysis.

**There is strong research that allows us to predict which students are at-risk of dropping out.**

- ✓ Students facing personal and educational obstacles are much more likely to not complete school. When young people fall behind in credits, there are limited options for credit recovery and a traditional high school setting is not always successful in reengaging them, yet few alternatives exist.
- ✓ School discipline policies and lack of trauma informed practice in schools often contribute to student disengagement and lost credits.

**Percent Increases in Graduation Rates  
When the 5th and 6th Year of High School Are Included  
Graduates From the Cohort Class of 2014 by 2016**



Source: Four-year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Reports, 2017 CEPI [www.michigan.gov/cepi](http://www.michigan.gov/cepi)

**Additional time in high school improves graduation rates for everybody.** Graduation rates increased for all groups after a fifth or sixth year of high school. Those additional years are significantly more important for students of color and those with other challenges.

**High school graduation must be part of this year's state and federal budget conversation.** A high school diploma is essential to future educational attainment, employment opportunities and lifelong success. With decisions being made in Lansing and Washington, DC about how we invest in young people's success, it is important for all policymakers to commit to building paths to success for struggling students, schools and communities. Decision makers at all levels should:

Support multiple pathways to graduation that provide more time and flexibility for students. Michigan law allows state payment for educating young people toward a high school diploma until they are 20 years old (under certain circumstances, until age 22), allowing additional time beyond a traditional 4-years of high school. Improve support for the paths we currently employ, including alternative, adult and community education options, community college and workforce partnerships.

Invest in integrated student services strategies from cradle to career. Young people face barriers to graduation that education alone cannot remove. Investments are necessary not only in the quality of K-12 systems, but also in family literacy, parent support, high quality early education, expanded learning programs in K-12, physical and mental health services, and meaningful education reform through career or post-secondary.

Promote policy and practice that recognize student trauma. Any efforts to improve graduation rates will be hampered by the challenges students and their families face. This includes basic needs outside the classroom, but also other unresolved or continuing issues including mental and behavioral health, including their own and that of their caregivers; family and neighborhood violence and loss; and other traumatic experiences that clearly impact their ability to excel in the classroom. Effective trauma training leads to diminished disciplinary actions and better outcomes for students.

Stop diminishing services. Actions that have diminished services for at-risk young people through cuts in the state and federal budgets over the last decade or so are counter-productive. Disinvestment in the very communities most in need does not promote innovation, partnership or reform. Evidence-based support programs will need to be expanded in order to see real, sustainable improvement in school success for those most challenged schools, communities and young people.