

# Perspectives

Community College  
Leadership for the  
21st Century

**MARCH 2018**

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The nation faces an urgent and growing need for talent. To meet that need, many more people must earn college degrees, workforce certificates, industry certifications and other high-quality credentials.

- Lumina Foundation

Expanding higher education degree attainment is clearly an essential and powerful strategy for economic development in a state... Postsecondary degree attainment clearly results in higher earnings for the vast majority of individuals in all 50 states.

- Katie Zaback,  
Andy Carlson, and  
Matt Crellin

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## Michigan's Attainment Goals: A Call to Transform

### Conway A. Jeffress, PhD

President

Schoolcraft College  
Livonia, Michigan

In 2017, I had the pleasure of serving on a committee entitled, A Path to Good-Paying Careers for all Michiganders: A 21st Century State Policy Agenda. It was the position of both Governor Rick Snyder and committee members that there was certain urgency to Michigan's condition and a need to act quickly. A great deal of data was collected, comparisons with other states were made, and unlike many such efforts, the data did not always confirm expectations. I will start by quoting a section of the Executive Summary.

*The urgency could not be greater. While it is difficult to face, the data are clear: Michigan children are falling behind. As early as fourth grade, Michiganders underperform their peers, ranking 41st on fourth-grade reading performance nationally. Michigan is one of only three states that has seen a decline in fourth-grade reading achievement since 2003. In eighth-grade, we continue to see a trend of low performance and slow growth. In 2015, Michigan ranked 37th for eighth-grade math performance.*

*Results are worse for students of color, students in special education, and students living in poverty. On any performance metric, at-risk students in Michigan underperform their peers in other states. Perhaps the most jarring finding is that black fourth graders in Michigan have the lowest reading performance in the country. Our system must recognize and address this disparity and do much more to reverse the connection between learning outcomes and race/ethnicity, disability status, and socioeconomic status.*

*Some may think that these unacceptable state-wide outcomes are a result of changing demographics, but that is simply not true. Michigan's higher-income and white students are also among the worst performing in the country. When we remove our lowest-income students from the data set, Michigan's performance falls in comparison to other states. For example, in fourth-grade reading, higher-income Michigan students (those who do not qualify for the means-tested free and reduced lunch program) rank 48th among their peers. That is seven slots lower than our state's overall ranking. Even among schools with a low number of students participating in free and reduced lunch—a proxy for wealthier schools— Michigan ranks near the bottom, 36 out of 42 states reporting (21st Century Education Commission, 2017).*

As the report states, there is a "call to transform, not tinker." The report sets forth four ambitious goals.

- ▲ By 2025, 70 percent or more of our 25-year-olds will have completed a college degree, occupational certificate, apprenticeship, or formal skill training.
- ▲ By 2025, Michigan children will score in the top ten among U.S. states on the bi-annual National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading, math, and science.
- ▲ By 2025, the high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment gap between low-income and middle-income children in Michigan will have disappeared.
- ▲ By 2025, Michigan children will surpass the scores of Ontario school children on the Programme for International Student Assessment in reading, math, and science.

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### **Employers look for a talented workforce when they consider places to grow and locate, creating more and better jobs.**

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In our collection of data from other states, Massachusetts stands out. A few statements from the report, Michigan Future Inc., A Catalyst for Prosperity, rips apart some conventional political wisdom.

- 1) Michigan has become less prosperous as our taxes have gotten lower.
- 2) Racial discrimination is an ongoing reality in employment, education, housing and the criminal justice system; but class is now the main dividing line in the American economy. Increasingly, class is defined by college attainment.
- 3) Twenty-five percent of households with at least one adult with a four-year degree are doing well, the remaining 75 percent have stagnant or declining incomes.
- 4) In 2015, Massachusetts had the highest tax rates, the highest number reaching college attainment, and the highest per capita income...Michigan was 32nd in per capita income and 32nd in college attainment.

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### **Colleges, especially community colleges, should be bursting at the seams to accommodate the training necessary to fill these positions.**

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The bottom line appears to be that the problem is not in higher taxes but in how they are spent and that lower taxes seem to result in lower income for many.

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## EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

Research confirms that a state's ongoing economic development can be linked to attainment goals, or the percentage of adults possessing high-quality postsecondary degrees and credentials, including associate's degrees and certificates leading to further education or employment. Postsecondary attainment yields economic and social benefits for graduates and for the entire state. Today, leaders are working diligently to establish and revise postsecondary attainment goals, despite ongoing challenges. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

### Mary Ann Blakeley, MBA

Executive Director for Human Resources  
Diocese of Cleveland  
Cleveland, Ohio

Ramping up the number of graduates and credentialed contributors to satisfying, dignified, and meaningful work opportunities is a daunting yet exciting challenge. Along with the student success agenda and the prescriptive directions that were borne from that, here are some additional thoughts on increasing degree and certificate attainment.

#### Recognize what "community" college means to your local economy.

Leaders that are well and continuously connected to their business, non-profit, and governing counterparts create and sustain relationships that result in flourishing partnerships. This translates to mutual, balanced, and trusted investment in the success of all stakeholders. Advisory board members can define a skilled workforce, assist in the development of innovative, accelerated pathways, and engage students in the success of business and non-profit communities. Colleges then can shape an attainable vision for careers and fill a pipeline of skilled labor for the employers.

**Partner with K-12 institutions to achieve preparedness.** Our nation's goal to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world can only be achieved with highly effective use of the years before college work gets underway. The discouraging conditions of increased time to degree have extinguished the attainment goals of many students before they even begin. College Credit Plus in Ohio and dual enrollment programs in other states have been successful in accelerating achievement.

**Imbed apprenticeships into the curriculum.** For second-year students or those who have mastered the foundations of the coursework and training, applying the learning in ways that support their chosen industry advances the goals of all. A Cleveland model partners students with journeymen as part of the regular curriculum. If successful, there is automatic entry to a job. And the student possesses a lifelong credential.

**Hold STEM program recruitment in local state-of-the-art work sites.** Manufacturing centers, engineering, IT, and edgy design facilities are now clean, safe, and pleasant environments in which to chart a future. Build awareness and enthusiasm by connecting students and their families to the CEOs and employees at these sites, in tandem with college leaders. Testimonials from craftsmen will reveal their contributions to the local economy and quality of life. Details of client portfolios from major employers indicate future longevity. They will enlighten prospects that there is a vast labor shortage for jobs which net nearly \$38 per hour plus full benefits. Continue to stress that these vocations present long-term fulfillment and financial security.

Solutions can be labor intensive and high-priced, but we already know the cost when achievement, attainment, and potential are lacking or wasted. Our competitiveness as a nation, and the health of each local society, relies on eliminating both the logistical and psychological barriers to attainment.

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**How can community college leaders help to ensure that college attainment and the number of degrees and certificates earned increase from current levels?**

### Cynthia Olivarez Rooker, MBA

Director of Auxiliary Services  
Lansing Community College  
Lansing Michigan

If our goal is to increase the current number of certificate and associate degrees, then we may need to change how we determine which programs offered are related to our local economic demands. We may need to shift our thinking from college attainment

to college alignment. Are we providing the right educational pathways for our students to have high quality general competencies such as problem solving, critical thinking, and time management for employers to pay them above-poverty wages? Or are we offering programs to get students through completion without considering the economic aspect of industry sector needs, local economic demands, or attaining employment? This issue challenges our institutions to rethink how we evaluate our programs. It also challenges our leadership to think forward and implement changes needed to align programs with high-demand, high-wage careers and equip students with the necessary skills to attain a job on that profession.

Do we have students who receive certificate and associate degrees in specific programs, then get jobs after graduation with wages below poverty level? If so, then why continue to offer those programs? If our programs need to be adjusted to include courses to meet the needs of the market demands, then this could be done by strategically aligning certificates, associates, and transfer programs within our institutions with the local job market demands. This may require evaluation of courses and curriculum to align with employer needs that could establish apprenticeships or employment before or after graduation. Additionally, program evaluations will inform the college to make necessary program, certificate, and degree adjustments to continue aligning with industry demand changes. Our communities would benefit as more students graduate and obtain jobs from local employers where they can then help grow business in the local economy by spending time and money in the community.

The transfer programs would work with the college's staff to identify the top ten to fifteen bachelor degree programs with the highest rate of employment after graduation. Then, create a marketing strategy based on the highest ranked degree programs to gain student interest to transfer to those career paths that meet job market demands. By building a system of businesses and community institutions that sync with supply and demand as noted by Garmise (2009), employers will benefit from human capital investment.

The way to help increase the number of certificate and associate degrees earned would be to strategically rethink the way we align programs with our local employers and industry sectors. Connecting college programs, occupational pathways, and earnings with local employers will provide community college leaders the flexibility to respond to the labor market demands and work toward filling almost six million vacant positions within our economy as reported by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017).

Mary Ann Blakeley is Executive Director for Human Resources for the Diocese of Cleveland. Previously, she was Chief of Staff and Senior Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Development at Lakeland Community College, Kirtland, Ohio. She was chair of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges HR Officers and a member of the Ohio Community College Performance Funding Task Force. She holds an MBA from Cleveland State University and is enrolled in the Ferris State University DCCL program.



Cynthia Olivarez Rooker, MBA, is the Director of the Auxiliary Services Department within the Administrative Services Division at Lansing Community College in Lansing, Michigan. In this role, she oversees mail, shipping, and print services, as well as contracted services for food services, Conference Services, and the Early Learning Children's Community Center. Cynthia received her MBA from Northwood University, Midland, Michigan, and is currently enrolled in the DCCL program at Ferris State University.



## NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

Research confirms that a state’s ongoing economic development can be linked to attainment goals, or the percentage of adults possessing high-quality postsecondary degrees and credentials, including associate’s degrees and certificates leading to further education or employment. Postsecondary attainment yields economic and social benefits for graduates and for the entire state. Today, leaders are working diligently to establish and revise postsecondary attainment goals, despite ongoing challenges. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders. Their answers appear below.

### The role of community colleges in reaching state attainment goals - A Washington perspective

**Rachelle Sharpe, PhD**

Deputy Executive Director  
Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC)  
Olympia, Washington

What do state policy makers, educational leaders, and business executives in Washington and elsewhere all care about? For starters, developing a healthy and vibrant economy that expands opportunities for local residents. A well-educated population meets the workforce needs and helps drive economic productivity. To address this challenge and collectively measure and influence progress, nearly 30 states have goals for the educational attainment levels of the population.

**QUESTION OF THE MONTH:**

*How can community college leaders help to ensure that college attainment and the number of degrees and certificates earned increase from current levels?*

attainment gaps among our adult population and communities of color. This requires renewed commitment across the state – with leaders from education linking arms with employers and community partners in each region. Washington’s potential is spring-loaded with strategies both well-established and newly emerging – the state benefits from a collaborative and high quality two- and four-year public and private higher educational system; an unwavering commitment to affordability; strong

policies supporting academic acceleration including dual credit, academic credit for prior learning, and transfer; a statewide adult learner initiative; and engagement and interest from key employers and community partners.

While every educational sector is needed to meet the workforce needs, the state’s 34 community and technical colleges are a well-positioned and critical player in this endeavor. The colleges have long-standing relationships with local businesses and community groups; offer diverse program options; and understand the needs of adult students. Yet, meeting the share of the state’s attainment goal is a tall order that requires new innovations to meet the complex and changing training demands of employers and to offer the comprehensive and flexible supports needed by students. Reaching the attainment goal requires eliminating the opportunity gap, new efforts to support individuals not currently in the system, and strengthening supports to enable more students to complete their programs. The two-year system has developed many innovative practices, including integrating college readiness skills with job training (I-BEST), offering Guided Pathways with a strong emphasis on degree and certificate completion, and taking a holistic approach to assessment, all which will support student success and ultimately, our workforce. Washington’s community and technical colleges are an integral component of the complex education and workforce ecosystem.

*A well-educated population meets the workforce needs and helps drive economic productivity.*

Washington’s ambitious attainment goals are that every adult hold a high school diploma and 7 in 10 earn a postsecondary credential. While 90% of Washingtonians hold a high school diploma, only 52% of those age 25-44 have earned a credential (Washington Student Achievement Council, 2017a). And opportunities to share in the benefits of education are not distributed equally among sub-populations and geographic regions. While students from racial and ethnic minority populations represent the entirety of the growth in the K-12 population over the next two decades, attainment gaps persist; among adults, the Hispanic population is dramatically over-represented among those without a high school diploma and not surprisingly, the inverse is true for postsecondary attainment.

We know education is a catalyst for prosperous individuals and communities. We know that those jobs are not only the backbone of our economy, but the folks who get those jobs will benefit and improve their lives. Individuals with more education enjoy higher wages when working and are less likely to be unemployed, even during economic downturns. Educated adults often lead healthier lives, are civically engaged, and demand fewer resources from the communities in which they live and work.

Many industries thrive in Washington – from Amazon and apples to Weyerhaeuser and wheat. The state’s dynamic economy produces jobs, the majority of which require education beyond high school. Washington is not producing enough graduates to meet employer demand. In short, there will be 25,000 too few mortarboards with tassels in our state to meet the needs of the workforce in the next five years (Washington Student Achievement Council, 2017b). Our educational system is falling short of meeting the workforce needs, with gaps among all credential levels from certificates to graduate degrees, with a slightly higher rate of growth among jobs requiring mid-level credentials of associates degrees, short-term certificates, and apprenticeship training completions. This has long-term consequences for our residents and our state overall.

For our residents to economically compete, we must keep laser-focused on our state’s attainment goals – with particular attention toward closing

*For our residents to economically compete, we must keep laser-focused on our state’s attainment goals - with particular attention toward closing attainment gaps among our adult population and communities of color.*

Raising the educational levels of our working-age neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family will require commitment and leadership from across sectors. Intentional, coordinated and sustained regional partnerships – in concert with a statewide focus on equity and innovation – will ultimately strengthen the talent pipeline that our residents deserve and employers demand.

**Dr. Rachelle Sharpe** serves as the Deputy Executive Director with the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) – a cabinet-level agency focused on strategic planning, oversight, and advocacy to increase student success and higher levels of attainment in Washington. Rachelle has worked for WSAC for over 12 years and has helped to create an affordability framework, initiate an adult reengagement initiative, and administer student financial aid programs. Previously, Rachelle worked in higher education student services in college access, admissions, and financial aid at Cascadia Community College, Green River Community College, The Evergreen State College, and as TRIO Upward Bound advisor for Oregon State University. Rachelle earned her master’s degree from Oregon State University and completed her PhD with Walden University.



**QUICK TAKES  
Highlights  
from the Field**

**Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving the National Postsecondary Degree Attainment Goals**

by Michael T. Nettles

*Established U.S. government college degree attainment goals call for 60% of 25- to 34-year-olds to earn an associate's or bachelor's degree by the year 2020, with the aim of placing the U. S. in a global leadership position and addressing the growing labor market demands for postsecondary education and training. This report analyzes the college degree attainment performance of the U.S. population and provides forecasts of long-term progress toward achieving these goals. Access this work here: <http://bit.ly/2GuINtB>*

**It's Not Just the Money: The Benefits of College Education To Individuals and To Society**

by Philip Trostel

*The value of a college education is often presented in purely monetary terms, probably because the substantial financial rewards are well documented, benefitting individuals and society. Yet the "other" benefits of college education appear to be at least as important, with the total value of a college education being considerably greater than just the higher earnings. This report provides a more complete picture and presents frequently unmeasured and ignored benefits of college attendance. Access this work here: <http://bit.ly/1XvPgFq>*



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**Michigan's Attainment Goals: A Call to Transform** *(continued from page 1)*

Another disturbing trend related to the attainment issue is the jobs/employment slump which has been in effect for the last 17 years. While the auto industry takes the hit for the state's economic slump, there are a number of moving parts in what seems to be a singular event.

Michigan was at its employment peak in 2000. There has been job growth and a resurgence in sales of autos, but we still have 250,000 less jobs than we had in 2000. The decline mirrors the decline in the number of people looking for work. A Detroit Free Press article describes the period as "Michigan's lost decade," and attributes this to a working population that is "too young to retire (but) unable to work." Interestingly enough, this same period coincides with a decline in property values (from about 2008), a decline in college attendance (especially community college attendance), and a slide in attainment which is clearly related to employers complaining that they have jobs but no workers. This is an interesting collection of trends that generally don't coincide.

**Michigan is facing a talent shortage across multiple industries. That shortage is the single greatest threat to the state's continued economic recovery.**

What is the primary trigger here? The perfect economic storm seems more than a collection of coincidences. There are causal relationships here but which has the most power?

As with many of these reports, there is a danger that they will become shelf documents. However, in this case, the Governor and many involved in the project are determined that this will not happen. Attainment is being taken seriously. Evidence can be found in the newly released, Marshall Plan for Talent. The Marshall Plan for Talent is a "partnership between educators, employers and other stakeholders to transform Michigan's talent pipeline and redesign the ways we invest, develop and attract talent in our state."

Employers look for a talented workforce when they consider places to grow and locate, creating more and better jobs. Michigan is facing a talent shortage across multiple industries. That shortage is the single greatest threat to the state's continued economic recovery. The state's recent experience with Amazon is a prime example of when opportunities meet the reality of shortages.

The state's Workforce Intelligence Network (WIN) has identified 90,000 job postings in information technology; 109,410 jobs in manufacturing; 212,247 jobs in healthcare; 162,421 in business careers and another 56,281 in other professional trades. If these numbers are even close to true, the unemployment rate in Michigan should be approaching zero. Colleges, especially community colleges, should be bursting at the seams to accommodate the training necessary to fill these positions.

Michigan's Marshall Plan suggests more than a dozen projects or plans designed to address these shortages. It is rare that suggestions have been so concrete with estimated investment costs attached. The major agencies of the state government, including the Department of Education, the State Budget Office, Michigan Economic Development Office, the Talent Investment Agency, and others, are all united in providing direction and support

for this effort. This new effort does not abandon prior effort, which is quite encouraging given the tendency to yield all attention to the newest work and disregard past labors even if successful.

***If you review all the attempts at improving attainment at your institutions, you will no doubt be surprised at how many work.***

Colleges and universities also have individual plans designed to increase attainment or completion rates. These range from improved retention strategies, to better and faster support programs, as well as changes in curriculum and teaching techniques. None of these should be abandoned in favor of something new simply because it is new. If you review all the attempts at improving attainment at your institutions, you will no doubt be surprised at how many work. You may not have any award winners but you may not be carrying any losers either. Students differ and what works for one, may not work for another. What do you consider critical mass for a program or project?

A recent program we have taken on is Guided Pathways. It addresses the issue of unregulated choice. The short version is that we have given students too many choices resulting in unclear direction, wasted time, and a decreased likelihood that they will complete anything. Being more prescriptive may be contrary to the values of many, but who values wasting time and money to go nowhere?

Another set of categorical improvements from *Michigan Future Inc., A Catalyst for Prosperity*, is a short list entitled, What Needs to Change?

- |                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Standards      | Talent             |
| Assessments    | Funding            |
| Pedagogy       | Segregation        |
| Accountability | Unregulated Choice |

The last category, Unregulated Choice, is one that we chose to focus on. All of the other categories have merit and your choice, whatever it is, will not be in vain.

**Dr. Conway A. Jeffress, PhD**, is the fourth president of Schoolcraft College, a comprehensive community college of 30,000 credit and non-credit students with its primary campus located in Livonia, Michigan. Dr. Jeffress has been at Schoolcraft for more than 30 years, first joining the college as Vice President of Instruction, then serving as Vice President of Instruction and Student Services, and finally, as President for 17 years. Prior to Schoolcraft, he served as Vice President of Strategic Planning at the Community College of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.



He is an officer within the Michigan Community College Association and also serves as spokesperson to legislators for community college budgets and other legislative issues.

He was appointed by Governor Snyder to serve as a Commissioner on the 21st Century Education Commission, where he served as a member of its structure and governance committee. He is also a member of a number of other state and national education organizations.

He earned both his MEd and PhD degrees from the University of Pittsburgh.