



*A Union of Professionals*

**AFT Michigan**  
AFL-CIO

# **Higher Education:**

## **A Michigan Platform**

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## **Higher Education: A Michigan Platform**

### **Overview:**

The opportunities for a quality higher education in the United States has been the envy and model of the world. Michigan, with its excellent public universities and community colleges, has played a major role in helping to establish that reputation.

Michigan has traditionally supported world class research facilities; provided students with innovative, effective instruction and measurable learning; served the needs of Michigan's workforce and employers in an increasingly technical and global economy; advanced the arts and cultural life of Michigan communities and residents; and prepared Michigan citizens to participate in the civic discourse and decisions of our times. Michigan's higher education institutions collectively award over 140,000 degrees and certificates each year.

This is a wide and daunting array of responsibilities, but with respect to higher education, Michigan's citizens expect and deserve no less. We should rise to the challenges presented by Lieutenant Governor John Cherry's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth. The first goal of the Cherry Commission was to outline a plan to double the percentage of residents who attain post-secondary degrees or other credentials that link them to success in Michigan's new economy.

To address the higher education needs and expectations of Michigan's citizens, AFT Michigan (AFT/AFL-CIO) urges consideration of the following principles and measures:

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## Opportunity and Access

### The Issue

All Michigan citizens have a right to a high-quality education that carries them as far as their ambitions, talents, and hard work will permit. Access to post-secondary education is a central part of this right.

Public higher education should be affordable to everyone. No Michigan citizen should be forced to give up on college for financial reasons or take on an unmanageable debt to attend a public community college or university in Michigan. As a recent *Senate Fiscal Agency* report demonstrated, when the state provided more money to fund community colleges, tuition remained stable and enrollment increased. Additionally, Michigan's public universities received no funding increase in last year's budget, in contrast to a 6% average nationwide increase. This year's increase was 3% -- only half of the national average. We can and should do better than that.

Michigan students should have a broad variety of choices for educational advancement after high school and throughout their lives. From technical education to an associate or bachelor's degree, as well as graduate study and lifelong learning.

### Action Steps

- Tuition:** Provide adequate state funding that does not result in spiraling tuition increases;
- Funding:** Necessary funding requires the state adopt a revenue structure that is fair, stable and adequate. The K-16 Coalition funding ballot initiative should be supported. (<http://michigank16.org>)
- Up Out of Poverty:** Citizens on public assistance should be able to utilize the maximum federal allowance to gain access to higher education and training, thus enabling their permanent transition into the workforce. It is important that both transportation and childcare needs be met while these students work to improve their lives for the benefit of themselves and their children.
- Michigan Merit Awards:** Michigan Merit Awards should be income sensitive so that these valuable state monies continue to reward achievement and also expand higher education opportunities to those who might otherwise not have it. It is also important to structure these awards to create incentives for students to complete their post-graduate education.

**Expansion of Access:** Universities that currently grant applied baccalaureate programs should develop partnerships with community colleges to enhance access. Additionally, Michigan’s higher education institutions should create a website containing course articulation and transfer information for all Michigan institutions. Policy makers and institutions must work to increase credential and degree completion by adult residents who have already completed some post-secondary education. Finally, to meet the needs of students and the state’s economy, Michigan should develop a connected data system that tracks K-12, Higher Education and adult job training and re-employment program students.



## Quality Teaching and Learning - Faculty

### The Issue

Every student has a right to expect high-quality teaching by well-educated and prepared faculty in every course. *A quality college or university must have a corps of full-time, permanent, tenured faculty working on the academic curriculum and teaching most of it.* Courses should be taught only by highly qualified people — whether full-time or part-time — who are included in academic processes, particularly curriculum development and professional development.

Faculty must be personally available to students for advice and guidance. Students need opportunities to talk to their professors and advisors about their plans and ambitions, as well as their coursework and research. Technology should not be allowed to turn professors into mere faces on a screen or names on a computer.

Research, scholarship and creative activity are essential to the success of American higher education. For ideas to flow between students and teachers and reach society at large, knowledge must be continually expanded as well as transmitted. Colleges and universities differ greatly in their research activity, but good teaching always draws on new scholarship, and vice versa. Scholarly

and creative activity is the engine that keeps America on top in commerce, medicine, science and technology. It enriches our culture and generates breakthroughs in every walk of life. Academic Freedom must be retained and strengthened.

### Action Steps

•**Professional Development:** The state should support training in effective teaching for new faculty and professional development opportunities for all faculty;

•**Part-time/Adjunct Impact:** As a first step in assessing appropriate faculty staffing patterns, the state should conduct a study of the conditions under which part-time/adjunct faculty function at the state's institutions of higher education and the impact of these conditions on student access to faculty, student conferencing, knowledge of curriculum, accrediting agency standards, curriculum development, and professional development. With over 50 percent of the teaching in Michigan's higher education institutions done by part-time/adjunct faculty, such a study is long overdue.

•**Academic Freedom:** State policy makers should oppose the deceptively named “Academic Bill of Rights” which would have the reverse impact suggested by its name. For scholarly and creative activity to continue to prosper, we must preserve the line between indoctrination of students and appropriate pedagogical authority. The best way to accomplish that goal is to continue to have the faculty rather than college administrations or the courts interpret and apply scholarly and professional standards.



## Quality Teaching and Learning - Students

### The Issue

Students must be held to high standards of achievement. Today, too many students are coming to college unprepared to handle college-level work. Colleges and universities have established hundreds of programs to bring students up to par, but the real solution is to raise public school students' achievement levels.

Michigan's higher education institutions must become full partners in K-12 education reform, working closely with the schools on curriculum, graduation and college entry standards.

In addition, a college's own program of study must be coherent and challenging, with high grading standards. A certificate or degree from an occupational or academic program should always be a mark of achievement and readiness to assume new responsibility.

Students must be given access to the technology and skills they need in today's information age. It is unacceptable to create classes of "have" and "have-not" colleges when it comes to training in technology.

### Action Steps

•**State Funded Partnerships:** The state should endorse and fund K-12 education reform measures for partnerships between K-12 systems, community colleges, and four year institutions in teacher training\*;

•**Restore Michigan Department of Education:** To ensure ongoing, coordinated, and productive partnerships among school districts and higher education institutions, state agencies, which provide services and scholarships to higher education, should not be diffused across state government. Further steps should be taken to restore functions to the Michigan Department of Education.

*\*Building a Profession: Strengthening Teacher Preparation and Induction, an American Federation of Teachers publication outlines such reform and is available upon request.*

## Quality Teaching and Learning - Institutional Resources

### The Issue

The vast majority of campus resources should be directed not to administration, but to the classroom and activities that support student success and enhance the economic future of the state. This is not just a matter of paying teachers and researchers and buying supplies. It is equally important to provide adequate support to the front-line staff who, among other things, see that students are registered properly, taking the right courses, and receiving financial aid; to specialists who operate college libraries, communication systems and laboratories; and, now more than ever, to those responsible for on campus health, safety and security.

### Action Steps

•**Resources:** To assess the appropriate allocation of resources in higher education, the state should conduct a longitudinal study of the changing allocation of resources by the state's institutions of higher education to full-time faculty instruction, part-time/adjunct faculty instruction, instructional administration, instructional clerical support, general administration, general administration clerical support and other support services;

•**NCAA Mandates:** The state should conduct a study on the impact of mounting and

ever-changing North Central Accrediting Agency mandates on each higher education institution's human and fiscal resources;

•**Economic Priorities:** When the state does not adequately fund community colleges and universities, it creates a disincentive for them to expand offerings in high demand health and technology fields. Not only does this limit student's prospects, but also it negatively affects the state's economy.

•**Technology:** The state funding of two-year and four-year institutions should take into account the spiraling costs of instructional technology, management information systems and the electrical infrastructure supporting instructional and support services. These must be continually updated to provide quality instruction and process student data;

•**Campus Safety Measures:** State support for campus safety, including fire and emergency services, needs to be fully funded. Communities that have extraordinary costs as a result of hosting public universities should not have to draw away dollars for campus safety that ought to be spent on instruction.

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