

## Education cuts: More 'brain drain'

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LANSING — As young professionals continue to leave Michigan, efforts are underway to stop the "brain drain."

Karen Gagnon is program manager for Cool Cities, a state program dedicated to making cities more vibrant and attractive to young professionals and new businesses. She says young people and businesses are looking for specific features.

For example, Cool Cities is helping to equip the restored historic opera house in Traverse City with new technology. The restoration is intended to bring a cultural attraction to the city's downtown that will entice young people, which in turn will lure businesses.

In Cadillac, Cool Cities is working with the city, which will take possession of the historic but vacant Cobbs & Mitchell Building to redevelop it.

"You have to attract businesses, and they want to know where the talent pool is. Youth want to live in a place where they can live, work and play," Gagnon said, adding that keeping college graduates in Michigan is critical because their presence contributes to the economy.

But as such programs try to keep young talent in the state, lawmakers have been looking at cutting educational incentives such as the Michigan Promise Scholarship.

The \$140 million-a-year program offers up to \$4,000 to high school graduates who complete at least two years of post-secondary education in the state.

Currently, 96,000 college students receive Michigan Promise scholarships.

Michael Boulus, executive director of the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan, says education is critical in producing young professionals. He opposes the proposed cuts.

"We must get more 21- to 35-year-olds with degrees and attract knowledge-based industries," he said. "By its very name, it's called the Promise Scholarship, so you can see where the problem lies: Cutting the scholarship means that the state will be going back on its promise to students."

Boulus also said college students are an important part of Michigan's economic future, and that his organization, which represents 15 public universities, is working to bring college students and employers together.

"We just launched Intern in Michigan, a Web site where we're getting employers to sign up and post internships," he said.

The program also has roots in Grand Rapids through the West Michigan Strategic Alliance.

According to Intern in Michigan, about half of Michigan residents who graduate with a four-year degree leave the state, and a survey of recent graduates shows that half of those who are moving cite their inability to find a job as a key reason.

Sen. Jason Allen, R-Traverse City, says the state must make difficult choices because of the high budget deficit.

"Unfortunately, we're approximately \$10 billion in debt," he said. "The challenge is how do we come up with the resources to fund these programs?"

Boulus predicts the state will continue to suffer from a lack of education funding.

"The bottom line is that we must get younger and better educated or we will get poorer," he said.

Allen said, "We're trying to work out a bipartisan solution that works for all."