

Collaboration versus Duplication as the Model for Michigan Public Higher Education

The longstanding collaboration evident among Michigan's public universities and community colleges has been foundational to ensuring a state public postsecondary ecosystem that is cost- and operationally-efficient, responsive to student-consumers and employers, and is of high academic quality. The state's public two- and four-year sectors of higher education partner extensively to meet state labor market needs and to optimize the missions and capacities that are unique to each sector and their respective institutions.

Community College Bachelor's Degrees

The state universities and the Michigan Association of State Universities have been steadfast in their opposition to the offering of bachelor degree programs by the state's community colleges. Allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees will result in higher costs for students and taxpayers. In duplicating already-existing four-year programs available at the state's public universities, community colleges will incur costs for salary and benefits of additional faculty and support staff, as well as operating costs for administration, materials and supplies, travel, information technology, meeting accreditation requirements, and providing other support services. Capital expenses related to equipment and facilities may also be incurred. Significant increases in community college tuition prices and local taxation would result from community college bachelor degree programs. The cost of offering these programs will be covered through tuition increases, higher local millages, and requests for higher state appropriations. What appears on the surface to be lower priced tuition at community colleges hides the fact that these institutions are subsidized *twice* by taxpayers: once through local property taxes (\$554.6 million in 2019¹) and again through state appropriations (\$425.7 million in 2021). The state has disinvested hundreds of millions of dollars in support of its public colleges and universities during the past decades; investing future state monies in a duplicative set of programs is a remarkably inefficient use of taxpayer-provided state revenues.

Allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees will incur wasteful spending to address no unmet need. It will result in the creation of 28 additional public four-year degree granting institutions in Michigan, representing an enormous legislatively-directed expansion of institutional mission creep through a mass duplication of existing programs and services. In a state with a near nation-leading forecasted decline in the number of high school graduates in the decade ahead, such a profound expansion in the number of public four-year degree institutions is completely counter to prudent state fiscal policy.

State policy should seek to build upon the tremendous collaboration taking place between the state's public and independent four-year colleges and universities and its public two-

year institutions, providing even more ladder degree programs and further enhancing the ease of student transfer among institutions—rather than encouraging programmatic duplication that will only serve to increase costs borne by students, families, and taxpayers. The state’s public universities, through the Michigan Association of State Universities, will continue to collaborate with our community college partners to provide new baccalaureate or degree completion programs for which there is a sufficient labor market need within a reasonable proximity of a community college district.

Policy Actions:

- Oppose legislation that authorizes Michigan’s community colleges to offer four-year degree programs.
- Reinforce the respective and distinct missions of the state’s public universities and community colleges and promote continuance of the historical model of programmatic collaboration, not duplication, between the two higher education sectors.

ⁱ Source: Michigan Community College Data Inventory Report, Center for Educational Performance and Information. Available: <https://mischooldata.org/postsecondary-data-inventory/>