

Michigan Higher Education Public Policy Agenda

**Higher Education Policy Priorities for Strengthening the
State Universities' Ability to Serve Michigan**



January 2023

Executive Summary

Michigan's 15 public universities serve approximately 255,000 students annually, illuminating their role as integral partners with government, business and industry, and the philanthropic and non-profit sectors to build a better Michigan. They are *public institutions* serving the *public interest*.

The high quality and global reputation of Michigan's public universities are rooted in the state's unique form of higher education governance. State constitutional autonomy granted to the universities allows the gubernatorial-appointed and statewide elected governing boards of these institutions to ensure strong accountability and stewardship of university resources and programs.

Representing the collective views of the state's public universities, the policy statements presented in this Michigan Higher Education Public Policy Agenda represent a guiding framework within which these institutions can successfully fulfill their missions while ensuring public accountability, academic quality, research excellence, and fiscal integrity. The statements are tailored to Michigan and its unique policy-setting context and are reflective of contemporary issues in the state's public policy domain. This guide to state-level higher education policy issues can serve as a resource for ensuring that Michigan's 15 public universities continue their historic achievements in shaping the state's rich legacy while fully realizing the promise of its future.

Sound public policy and sustained fiscal support for Michigan's state universities take on even greater importance in 2023 and in the years to follow. As with all other aspects of society, our economy, and our state's educational ecosystem, these institutions are traversing a new landscape shaped by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Working collaboratively with a variety of stakeholders to address K-12 student learning loss, innovating instructional delivery systems, and graduating more high-quality health care professionals are among the many areas of institutional focus as our society emerges from the pandemic.

Looking forward, Michigan's public universities will continue to serve as pivotal assets in helping Michigan's economy transition to one that is powered by the highest levels of workforce talent and that is fully prepared to attract and retain the employers that will drive our state's future and ensure competitiveness on a global scale. Advanced manufacturing, vehicle electrification, healthcare delivery, and environmental sustainability are just a few of the areas in which these institutions are producing the research that creates new knowledge, leading to new inventions, company start-ups, and jobs. They are producing tens of thousands of graduates annually who serve as a much-needed new source of entrepreneurial innovation and provide the pipeline of talent for virtually every industry and occupation imaginable.

Higher education is critical to the long-term future of the State of Michigan. Our overall economic, civic, and social prosperity is inextricably tied to the health and vitality of our 15 public universities. Communities, households, and families, down to the individual level are all impacted in countless ways by the missions of these institutions. Ensuring strong public investment and informed public policy is vital to ensuring that our universities continue to serve the public interest and the State of Michigan to the fullest extent possible. Toward that end, this Higher Education Public Policy Agenda is intended to serve as a guiding resource.

Higher Education State Policy Priorities

College Affordability

State Operating Support

- Increase state operating support for Michigan's public universities to maintain college affordability.
- Promote a state higher education funding model that provides sufficient, predictable, and sustained public university operating support.

Utilization of a State Funding Formula

- Involve all 15 public universities in any discussions about how to systematically allocate state appropriations to institutions if a funding formula is utilized in the future.
- Continue adding new funding for universities to close funding gaps rather than redistributing base funding among the institutions.

State Need-based Student Financial Aid Programs

- Increase overall state investment in need-based student aid programs that promote access for low-income students.
- Continue to increase investment in the new Michigan Achievement Scholarship program through 2028 as is statutorily required.
- Exercise caution in consolidating the state’s existing portfolio of financial aid programs to avoid unintended consequences for college affordability among affected students.

Tuition-Setting (Tuition Caps/Tuition Price Controls)

- Eliminate the use of legislatively-imposed tuition price controls, which harm Michigan’s public universities’ ability to maintain affordable net costs of attendance, to strategically invest in programs designed to boost student outcomes, and to make other strategic investments.
- Reinforce recognition that full authority in setting tuition policy at Michigan’s public universities is best determined locally and is the constitutional responsibility of the governing boards of these institutions.

Capital Outlay and Asset Preservation

State Investment in Campus Facilities and Infrastructure

- Support a state capital outlay process that is conducted annually, is consistent and predictable, and provides the public investment needed to ensure continued world-class academic programs and applied research at Michigan’s public universities.
- Remove the hard dollar caps in the state’s share of funding university capital outlay projects.
- Reinstigate state payments for infrastructure, technology, equipment, and maintenance at university facilities, helping these state institutions lengthen the lifespan and functional utility of the state’s investment for many more years.

Student Success

Rigorous Postsecondary-aligned K-12 Education Standards

- Promote state-led collaboration among all stakeholders along Michigan’s elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education continuum to ensure that academically rigorous standards are available to guide instruction for all K-12 students.
- Ensure that any changes to statewide student assessments are implemented with the involvement and input of the state’s public universities.

Workforce Alignment and Professional Development

- Promote collaboration among institutions and state officials to strengthen collegiate teacher preparation and professional development programs.
- Caution against using student test scores in evaluating teachers, and teacher preparation and professional development programs.
- Continue state investment in the MI Future Educator Fellowship and MI Future Educator Stipend programs to rebuild our K-12 teaching profession pipeline.

Health Programs and Clinical Education

- Provide tax incentives and regulatory changes that create more clinical education opportunities for students.
- Align Michigan’s health practitioner licensing requirements with those of surrounding states.

Collaboration versus Duplication as the Model for Michigan Public Higher Education

Community College Bachelor’s Degrees

- 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 between the two higher education sectors.

Seamless Student Transfer

- Support voluntary efforts to refine a streamlined, simplified and transparent process by which students can determine the transferability of credit-bearing courses from and among the state’s community colleges and its public universities.
- With an emphasis on two- and four-year degree program alignment and the maintenance of rigorous academic standards, promote recognition that final determination on discipline-specific credit acceptance lies with university departmental faculty.

Campus Safety

Campus Sexual Assault Prevention

- Ensure that any state legislation that seeks to address issues related to campus sexual assault complements existing or impending federal legislation and is grounded in the following principles: respect for the wishes of the victim, proactive support to students, and fairness for all involved in a given incident. In addition, such legislation should maintain the longstanding educational nature of the university discipline system.

Guns on Campus

- Oppose state legislation that seeks to diminish or eliminate institutional authority to regulate guns on campus.

Unfunded State Mandates

Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver

- Advocate for the state to continue fully funding its mandated Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver program.

State Reporting Burdens

- Reduce unfunded state reporting mandates.
- Streamline state reporting requirements to eliminate wasteful duplication of efforts.
- When state policymakers are considering new reporting requirements, universities should be involved at an early stage to ensure that the desired information is not already available in other collections, is possible to collect, and data elements are clearly defined.

Academic Governance

Institutional and Faculty Expertise on Academic Matters

- Educate stakeholders on the benefits of the principles of academic freedom.
- Oppose state efforts to micromanage academic decisions regarding admissions criteria, the faculty, curriculum and instruction at public institutions.
- Oppose legislative interference with research and the academic peer-review process.

Campus Free Speech

Continue the Uninhibited Diversity of Thought, Speech, and Expression

- As enshrined in the Michigan Constitution, ensure university governing board oversight of campus free speech policies in protecting First Amendment rights.
- Oppose state legislation that seeks to place mandates on institutional campus free speech policies.

Institutional Governing Board Authority over Campus Operations

Board Oversight of Fiscal, Personnel and Operational Issues

- Promote understanding and recognition among stakeholders of the authority governing boards have over public university strategic and operational matters.