



Everything Michigan

Key to fixing education is 'stopping the leaks,' expert says

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It's no secret that Michigan's education statistics are lagging many other states'. But instead of asking, "What can we do?" Michigan needs to focus on "What must we do?" Shirley Robinson Pippins, senior vice president for the American Council on Education, told attendees at the West Michigan Policy Forum Thursday afternoon.

"It's clear that we need to take a look at what's happening within the pipeline and work to improve the post-secondary educational attainment levels," Pippins said. "And how do we do that? Stop the leaks. Stop losing students."

Although the "brain drain" has been a problem for Michigan in recent years, there are other places throughout the education system where leaks occur and students are being left behind, Pippins said.

Pippins provided multiple examples of other states' efforts to plug these leaks, starting with early childhood education programs. No matter the educational stage, a key component of most successful programs is the support students receive from those within the education system.

One area Michigan should focus on is preparing students for the transition to college. In one successful program, high school juniors tested for college readiness. Those who needed remedial courses could then take them while still in high school instead of playing catch-up while in college, Pippins said.

"So we see improvements in the numbers, and these small incremental changes have a large impact on the system, in terms of the number of students who end up in remedial courses," she said.

There are many approaches that help improve the rate of success while students are in college, as well. Pippins has seen success with programs that are technology-based and self-paced yet provide support for students throughout the program.

Also, education is a life-long process, so programs should also target those adults "who almost made it," Pippins said. In addition to targeting working adults with classes offered at a variety of hours, Pippins also advised targeting special populations, such as veterans.

"I'm sure you all know people or have people in your families who almost graduated, almost got that certificate," Pippins said. "And what we found is if we go back and find those individuals and bring them back (into educational programs), many of them persist to securing those degrees."

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