

# Public Safety, Public Savings And A Better Economy For All

Michigan's Community Colleges Strengthen the Public and Private  
Sectors While Generating Revenue and Savings for Taxpayers



## Acknowledgements

**Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** is a national, bipartisan, nonprofit, anti-crime organization. The organization has a membership of 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors. The members take a hard-nosed look at what approaches work—and what don't—to prevent crime and violence. They then recommend effective strategies to state and national policymakers. **ReadyNation** is the nation's preeminent business leader organization, whose more than 1,400 members work to strengthen business through effective policies for children and youth. Both organizations operate under the umbrella of the non-profit Council For A Strong America.

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## Michigan's Community Colleges are Training the Future Public- and Private-Sector Workforce

Ask a CEO to tell you what he's looking for in his workforce, and you're apt to hear about the importance of strong industry-related knowledge coupled with the ability to think critically, solve problems and enhance the profitability of his company.

"Michigan's community colleges are helping to prepare current students for the workforce, but not if they don't get the support that's necessary to ensure that students succeed and that our state's future economy thrives," states Milton L. Scales, a ReadyNation member. "As a product of Lansing Community College, and now a successful businessman, I am a living example of how Michigan's community colleges are preparing students for the workforce."

Ask Fight Crime: Invest in Kids member, Kent County Sheriff Larry Stelma the same question, and you're apt to get a remarkably similar answer.

"Today's police officers face unprecedented challenges in protecting public safety – from being able to quickly assess dangerous situations and de-escalate threats, to operating high-tech crime-fighting technology, to writing reports that will stand up in court," explains Sheriff Stelma. "I know we're going head-to-head with the private sector in our need to recruit young men and women who are academically accomplished and prepared for the demands of the job. Like any other CEO, I'm looking for the best and brightest."

Unfortunately, private-sector employers and law enforcement agencies face a similar problem – a significant "skills gap" between the number of jobs that are available and the number of people who are prepared to do them. Specific improvements to today's community colleges, including increased academic counseling, the implementation of better performance metrics, and increased access to dual enrollment opportunities, will be a powerful step toward a solution.

## SPOTLIGHT

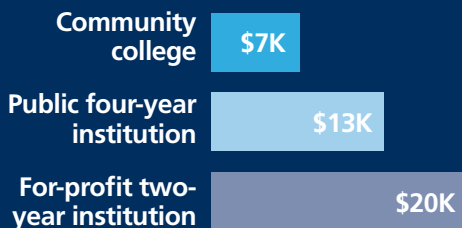
### Grand Rapids Community College, A Shining Example

Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) is greatly contributing to Michigan's public and private sectors. GRCC, Careerline Tech Center, and Herman Miller (a furnishings provider headquartered in West Michigan) recently announced they are partnering to create a new early college program for Ottawa Area Intermediate School District high school students. A group of high school juniors has been selected to participate, and "will begin work experiences at Herman Miller this spring and continue that work for two summers. During fall of their senior year, students will start college coursework at GRCC's Lakeshore Campus."<sup>1</sup>

During their 13th year, these students will work at Herman Miller and attend classes at GRCC. If they successfully complete their 13th year, the students will graduate with "a high school diploma, an Industrial Maintenance Certificate from GRCC, and an official transcript with up to 30 transferable college credits."<sup>2</sup>

Not only is GRCC partnering with local business and providing dual enrollment courses, it is training our state's future law enforcement officers. In fact, the GRCC Police Academy is the only one in the state that offers a night academy, in addition to a day academy.<sup>3</sup> The academy also has an extremely high pass rate for those who take the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standard's written licensure exam: 31 of the 32 graduates taking the exam in 2015 passed the test.<sup>4</sup>

## Cost discrepancies among the 3 types of institutions



Source: The College Board; Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce

**Community colleges also provide a pathway for many who would not otherwise be able to access postsecondary education.**

Reason for optimism abounds: Today’s community colleges are already a prime place for gaining skills and knowledge needed to succeed in today’s multifaceted workforce. And they are particularly important to public safety. In Michigan, these colleges operate 13 of the 20 police training schools that prepare young men and women for demanding law-enforcement jobs.<sup>5</sup>

### Michigan Community Colleges Help Close the Skills Gap, While Increasing Earnings and Decreasing Unemployment

By 2020, 70 percent of jobs in Michigan will require at least some postsecondary education. However, time is of the essence – based on current projections, only 61 percent of those in our state will have acquired some level of postsecondary education.<sup>6</sup>

Michigan employers are counting on community colleges to play an important role in filling this gap, since 40 percent of these jobs, while not requiring a four-year college degree, will require workers with some college, an associate degree, or a postsecondary vocational certificate.<sup>7</sup>

Community colleges also provide a pathway for many who would not otherwise be able to access postsecondary education. Approximately half of community college students have an annual household income below \$30,000.<sup>8</sup> These students especially benefit from the relatively low cost of community colleges. Compared to traditional public four-year institutions and two-year for-profit institutions, the cost of attending a community college is significantly less.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to providing an affordable path to postsecondary education, community colleges can increase earnings and employment rates for attendees. When compared to a high school graduate, those who complete a postsecondary certificate - half of which are completed at community colleges - earn 20 percent more. This amounts to an increase of \$240,000 in their lifetime earnings.<sup>10</sup>

The outcomes for those completing an associate degree are even more promising when compared to high

## Six Steps Michigan Leaders Can Take to Strengthen Michigan's Community Colleges and Its Public and Private Sectors

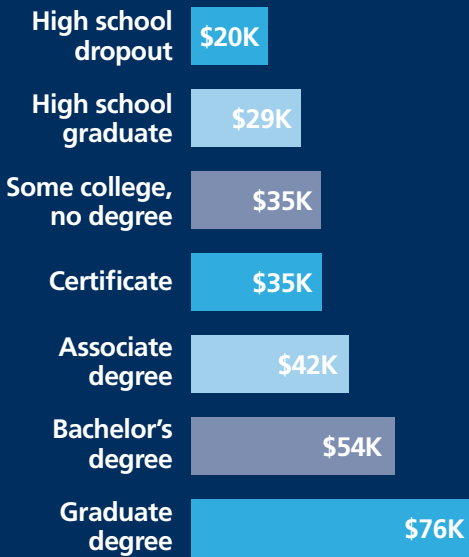
Michigan's state policymakers can:

- 1 **Make advising more readily accessible and continuous for those who enroll at a community college** – Community college students stand to benefit from strong advising.<sup>11</sup> Advising should begin early and continue throughout a student's time at the institution. Advising should also integrate academic and career counseling so that students may “develop an academic plan that will help them progress toward the professional goals they have identified.”<sup>12</sup>
- 2 **Continue to improve community college performance metrics** – Current metrics should be expanded to provide increasingly accurate measures of community college students' performance. Such measures could include: the percentage of both full- and part-time community college students who transfer to and complete a degree at a four-year institution and tracking the percentage of students retained from the first to second term.<sup>13</sup>
- 3 **Increase support and access for dual-credit taking and Career and Technical Education** – Research shows that increasing access to dual enrollment and Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities in high school can increase students' chances of success at a community college. In one study involving California students, CTE students who participated in dual enrollment were not only more likely to enroll in college, but also 43 percent more likely to pursue a bachelor's degree.<sup>14</sup>

Federal policymakers in Michigan can:

- 4 **Simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** – Simplifying the FAFSA, could increase students' college attendance. In addition, evidence suggests that creating incentives for companies and individual tax preparers to help fill out the forms could increase college attendance by as much as 30 percent over two years.<sup>15</sup>
- 5 **Make summer Pell Grant funding available to students** – Lawmakers should make additional funding available for students to receive a second Pell Grant award to allow them to enroll in classes during the summer term. Recent random assignment studies have shown that year-round grant aid increases community college students' enrollment and persistence.<sup>16</sup>
- 6 **Support continuous financial counseling** – Student counseling should be expanded to include not only academic and career advising, but to also include systemized financial counseling at regular intervals throughout a student's time at a community college

## Average Annual Earnings by Level of Education



Source: Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees; Georgetown University (2012)



school graduates. Associate degree-holders earn 33 percent more than a high school graduate - an increase of \$450,000 in their lifetime earnings. In addition, they are 34 percent less likely to be unemployed.<sup>17</sup>

## Community Colleges Generate Almost \$2.5 Billion in Benefits for Michigan's Taxpayers

Community colleges also benefit our state's taxpayers. One study found that each associate degree granted from a community college generates an average of more than \$87,000 in benefits to taxpayers over the lifetime of the associate degree holder. This is due in part to higher income tax payments and savings to government programs (ex. health and welfare).<sup>18</sup>

During the 2012-2013 year, public institutions awarded a total of more than 28,500 associate degrees in Michigan. This means that one academic year will result in almost \$2.5 billion in net benefits to taxpayers over the lifetime of the students who received degrees from just these institutions.<sup>19</sup> In addition, private non-profit and private for-profit institutions awarded another 5,600 associate degrees.<sup>20</sup>

Using the above benefits projection, if the number of associate degrees awarded in Michigan from only public institutions increased by just 25 percent - approximately 7,100 degrees - Michigan taxpayers would reap almost \$618 million in additional net benefits.

## Conclusion

Michigan business leaders and law enforcement officials are united in their concerns about the state's future workforce. They see a looming gap between available positions and workers with the skills to fill those positions. Not only can community colleges help close this gap, but these institutions also benefit taxpayers and help train our public safety officers. Michigan's state and federal lawmakers should support strategies that expand access to and encourage completion at community colleges. Doing so will help train and strengthen Michigan's future workforce, while bolstering the state's economy in the years to come.

## Endnotes

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