

Education Peer Group Summary

The discussion focused on the importance of creating a stronger education-to-workforce pipeline by improving foundational K-12 education, increasing career awareness opportunities for students, and encouraging greater collaboration between employers and higher education institutions.

Participants emphasized that students must develop strong literacy and foundational educational skills early in their academic careers. There was broad agreement that students who do not master reading and other basic educational competencies in K-12 education often continue to face challenges throughout their lives, limiting future educational and career opportunities. Ensuring students are academically prepared was identified as a critical first step in workforce development.

A significant portion of the conversation centered on the need for stronger career awareness programs in middle schools. Participants expressed concern that many students are not exposed to career pathways early enough to make informed decisions about their educational futures. A representative from Macomb Community College shared an example illustrating this challenge, noting that some students struggle to gain admission to the U.S. Naval Academy because they were not adequately prepared during their middle school years. This example highlighted the importance of introducing career exploration and academic planning opportunities at an earlier stage in a student's education.

The group also discussed the broader role community colleges play in economic development and workforce attraction. Participants noted that Michigan's 31 community colleges are critical assets that help workers gain new skills and upskill throughout their careers. Beyond workforce training, community colleges were recognized as valuable partners in business attraction efforts. The group suggested that state and federal officials should include community colleges in economic development discussions and investment pitches, as these institutions demonstrate a region's ability to build and sustain a qualified workforce.

Further discussion emphasized the importance of continued investment in educational institutions. Participants agreed that community colleges and other higher education organizations must have the resources necessary to respond to evolving workforce needs. Investing in these institutions was viewed not only as support for education but also as a long-term investment in economic growth and talent development. The group

acknowledged that businesses, communities, and residents ultimately benefit from stronger educational systems and workforce training programs.

The discussion also highlighted the Michigan New Jobs Training Program as an example of an initiative that supports workforce development and helps employers access training resources. Participants viewed programs such as this as important tools for building stronger connections between education providers and employers.

Finally, the group explored ways to increase employer engagement with higher education on institutions. Participants suggested that collaboration between employers and colleges should become an expected component of workforce development efforts. While many organizations actively partner with educational institutions, some companies currently have little or no engagement. The group discussed the need to identify strategies, incentives, and best practices that encourage more employers to participate in educational partnerships, workforce training initiatives, internships, apprenticeships, and other opportunities that help prepare students and workers for future careers.

Key Takeaways

- Strong reading and foundational educational skills are essential for long-term student success.
- Career awareness and exploration should begin in middle school to better prepare students for future educational and career opportunities.
- Community colleges are vital workforce development partners and should be leveraged in business attraction and economic development efforts.
- Michigan's 31 community colleges play a significant role in helping workers upskill and meet changing workforce demands.
- Continued investment in educational institutions produces long-term economic and workforce benefits.
- The Michigan New Jobs Training Program serves as an important workforce development resource.
- Greater employer engagement with higher education should become a standard expectation, with additional efforts focused on encouraging participation from companies that are not currently involved.

Potential Follow-Up Actions

1. Explore strategies for expanding middle school career awareness programs across the region.
2. Develop recommendations for increasing employer participation in higher education partnerships.
3. Highlight community colleges' workforce development contributions in economic development and business attraction messaging.
4. Identify opportunities to further promote and utilize the Michigan New Jobs Training Program.
5. Explore policy and funding opportunities that support continued investment in community colleges and workforce training initiatives.