

# Dropouts: One is Too Many



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Contact: Doug Pratt  
Michigan Education Association  
Director of Communications  
Cell: 517-896-4465

Partner organizations:



## MISSION:

To conduct hearings gathering input on how to stem the dropout crisis and present those findings to Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature to assist in their development of education policy.

## Community action critical to dropout prevention

*Hearings identify ideas to lower dropout rates  
Resources needed from Lansing to help communities act*

**Lansing, Mich., Monday, Oct. 20, 2008** – A coalition that held a statewide series of hearings assessing Michigan’s dropout crisis released its findings at a briefing held before the Dropout Leadership Prevention Summit in Lansing on Monday, Oct. 20.

The “Dropouts: One is Too Many” coalition set out to jump start community conversations about the problems stemming from the approximately 21,000 students who drop out of school in Michigan every year. The hearings were held in Grand Rapids, Clinton Township, Detroit, Lansing, Flint, Traverse City, Ishpeming, Saginaw, Wayne, Ferndale and Kalamazoo between May and October.

Testimony was collected from more than 500 people who attended the hearings or shared ideas online at [www.mea.org/dropouts](http://www.mea.org/dropouts). About 1,600 pages of testimony were collected.

According to the organizers of the hearings – the Michigan Education Association, the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, the Kent Intermediate School District, Michigan’s Children, Michigan’s Charter Schools, Michigan’s Promise and Michigan Future, Inc. – four key themes were identified as areas that need attention in all efforts to keep students in school until graduation:

- Students need caring relationships.
- One size doesn’t fit all students.
- Tackle the problem early – high school is too late.
- This isn’t just a “school” problem – community collaboration is critical.

“We heard from many students that they were encouraged to stay in school and do better in their studies when they had meaningful relationships with parents, teachers and role models,” said Ron Koehler, Kent ISD’s assistant superintendent for organizational and community initiatives.

Students, parents and teachers who testified at the hearings said alternative education programs, training for teachers, and mentoring and community programs inside and outside of the school showed successes in building student/adult relationships. The need for smaller class and school sizes and more guidance counselors also were advanced at the hearings.

-continued-

The state's new high school curriculum was a constant topic of conversation at the hearings, drawing both positive and negative comments.

"We heard an outcry for support and flexibility to help young people succeed with the rigorous curriculum. Participants around the state talked about multiple education pathways that were working to move young people toward a diploma and post-secondary success," said Jack Kresnak, president and CEO of Michigan's Children.

Attendees shared stories about students struggling with the new requirements as well as schools successfully making changes to meet the new standards, including working to prepare students throughout their education for the more rigorous requirements. Relating curriculum content to students' real-world experiences was an often-cited key to success, in settings ranging from the traditional classroom, to career and technical training, to alternative education programs for at-risk youth.

There was also a call for greater focus on early childhood programs to help young children – and their parents – prepare for a successful academic career.

"Tackling this issue at the high school level is too late – learning begins years before children step foot in kindergarten," said Dan Quisenberry, president of Michigan's Charter Schools. "We heard about some excellent programs that do a great job of preparing kids for school, but not all families have access to them or take advantage of them. But if we don't identify and work with at-risk students in the early years, they'll become discouraged, never catch up, and never be prepared for high school, let alone graduation."

Others emphasized the need for community programs that increase parental involvement, tackle discipline issues, provide alternatives to out-of-school suspensions, decrease juvenile crime, and eliminate barriers to student attendance, especially for economically disadvantaged students.

"This isn't just a school problem," said MEA President Iris K. Salters. "Our teachers, administrators and other school employees often have to deal with students whose problems stem from external factors before they can get on with the job in the classroom."

"We also heard from community, business and law enforcement leaders who have a vested interest in reducing crime and demands on social services while developing an educated workforce. Some of them are involved with some great out-of-school programs to meet these challenges."

An executive summary, full audio and written transcripts of the hearings and video highlights of testimony are available at [www.mea.org/dropouts](http://www.mea.org/dropouts).

"Our hope is that all of these findings will give both our political leaders in Lansing and the hundreds of people who are attending the Dropout Leadership Prevention Summit a better understanding of the challenges some of our students face and what is – and isn't – working in our schools and communities in order to rectify this problem," Salters said.

Added Kresnak of Michigan's Children, "Schools and communities need resources from Lansing in order to engage in the critical, local work that can end our dropout crisis and get all students ready for a bright future."