

# Extended Year Graduation Rates in Michigan\*

Nancy Martin, National Youth Employment Coalition, June 2011

In Michigan, an on-going and intentional dialogue between the state education agency and various education groups, including alternative education advocates, supported by early data system improvements, value drivers, current funding policy, and assistance from the experts has led to implementation of five- and six-year graduation rates.

When the No Child Left Behind Act passed and all schools started receiving report cards, alternative education groups in Michigan were concerned with the unintended consequences to alternative high schools and the impact of the report card on district and school AYP resulting from the high numbers of students below grade level upon entrance to the program or school. The time-sensitive graduation target seemed particularly punitive to them, as many

students in alternative education programs had experienced breaks in their education and took longer than four years to complete high school. The push to standardize the graduation rates (and data) had led to a push for a definition of on-time graduation

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as four years; but this begged the question: what do you call a graduate who takes five or six years? If a student is successful in graduating in five or six years, how do you account for that student EXCEPT as a success? Michigan has made the decision *not* to define these students as failures. It was agreed that learning does not have a deadline, that, in fact, many students can finish high school but will take longer to do so; that it is important to prepare all students for postsecondary and careers; that academic standards must be high for all students; and every school needs to be held accountable for student outcomes.

In 2002, Michigan, like all states, had to re-do their Accountability Workbook, filling out a lengthy worksheet describing how they were calculating graduation. This worksheet allowed states to choose a five- or six-year graduation rate, and Michigan was ready because it had already had all the data discussions needed ahead of time. Wanting to give school recognition, not barriers, when they stepped up to provide an education for students who have many struggles, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) petitioned the U. S. Department of Education for permission to use an extended graduation cohort in addition to the four-year grad rate and the state agency's data unit (the Center for Education Performance and Information) agreed they could do the additional reporting without much added effort once MDE was able to calculate a four-year cohort.

In Michigan, schools can receive state education funding for students up to 20 years of age. Since this aligns well with four-, five-, or six-year cohorts, it makes sense for the state to capture extended year graduation rates.

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\* Based on interviews with MaryAlice Galloway, Michigan Department of Education and Michele Corey, Voices for Michigan's Children, Dec. 2010-March 2011.