



For Immediate Release

Largest Education Partnership in Michigan’s History to Develop Innovative Teacher Certification Pathways

Michigan, Dec. 6, 2022 — A consortium of 39 Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) has formed an innovative partnership to address the teacher shortage crisis in Michigan. Dubbed “Talent Together,” the partnership includes districts spanning 63 counties—from the Upper Peninsula to Southeast Michigan—that collectively serve over 1,019,000 students. To date, this is the largest education collaboration of its kind in state history.

“This is a historic opportunity to innovate for quality in a cooperative way,” said Naomi Norman, superintendent of Washtenaw Intermediate School District.

The partnership will include pathways for aspiring teachers of all education levels, including those who do not yet have a bachelor’s degree.

“We must invite more people to join the profession and do it in a way that is financially barrier-free,” added Eric Hoppstock, superintendent of Berrien RESA.

Focused on teacher quality, this innovative model will also make use of apprenticeships, a way to develop educators that is newly recognized by the United States Department of Labor. Program fellows who are seeking certification will be required to meet federal apprenticeship guidelines, which means at least one year of “practice” in classrooms and fully paid at a competitive wage.

Jack Elsey, founder of the Michigan Educator Workforce Initiative, a non-profit supporting Talent Together, stressed the importance making teaching a strong career option.

“The more we can make sure that starting a career in education is a financially viable career - from the moment training begins - the more likely we are to convince the workforce of the future to consider becoming a teacher,” Elsey said.

Michigan’s teacher pipeline has been challenged in recent years, exacerbated by the impact of the COVID pandemic. State data shows that from 2008-2016, enrollment in teacher preparation programs fell by more than 66%, and during that period Michigan also led the nation in attrition from those programs. Now, many teachers’ licenses are classified by the Michigan Department of Education as

“high needs,” including special education, early childhood, elementary, and secondary math and science.

“The pandemic has changed education and it’s important that districts and educators continue to evolve in response. Talent Together is an innovative and collaborative program that will rely on education experts across the state to alleviate the current teacher shortage crisis,” said Dr. Daveda Colbert, superintendent of Wayne RESA.

Talent Together will identify pathways for each of these certifications. On Dec. 1, the consortium launched a request for proposal (RFP) asking Michigan colleges and universities to offer proposals that would meet the partnership’s needs. In this RFP, Talent Together has spelled out a set of principles they are committed to achieving. These include:

- 1. Quality.** We are committed to setting high standards for teacher preparation, the candidate experience, and the inner workings of the partnership between the consortium, local districts, universities, and supporting organizations.
- 2. Affordability.** We are committed to eliminating the financial barriers to becoming a teacher. Aspiring teachers should be certified for free while being paid to do so.
- 3. Address Critical Vacancies:** We are looking for our university partners to provide cost-effective bachelor’s degrees and certification opportunities for high-needs certification areas including secondary math, secondary science, and elementary education (birth to kindergarten, PK - 3 and 3-6). We may also consider partnerships with universities that offer special education programs.
- 4. Improved Preparation:** We are committed to eliminating the concept of a first-year teacher. We must ensure classrooms receive teachers who are prepared to teach through extensive, authentic field-based experiences.
- 5. Apprenticeship:** Better preparation will result from leveraging the apprenticeship model. Our goal is for every one of our teacher pathways to be an approved registered apprenticeship with the USDOL.
- 6. Diversity:** We must improve educator diversity in our state and move toward a teacher population that more accurately reflects students in the communities we serve.
- 7. Serve Rural, Urban, and Suburban Schools:** Our children attend school in all parts of our state, from the Upper Peninsula to Detroit. We will ensure our teachers are well-prepared for their specific context.

The Talent Together consortium has been working together since early summer 2022 but began to pick up steam as the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) announced an upcoming Grow Your Own

grant based on the legislature's allocation of \$175M for that purpose. The group has been working with education talent experts at the Michigan Educator Workforce Initiative, to design the innovative program. Talent Together expects to expand its reach to become a certifying body, similar to what Detroit Public Schools Community District's "On the Rise Academy" has been able to do with MDE approval.

Talent Together believes this program will produce hundreds more teachers in the next five years. The program is being built for sustainability, so that even when initial Grow Your Own grant dollars are exhausted, Talent Together can continue to provide opportunities for interested candidates to become teachers.

"I'm excited by the focus on sustainability," adds Greg Nyen, superintendent of Marquette-Alger Regional Education Service Association in the Upper Peninsula, "and the fact that the partnership is a truly statewide effort ensures voices that are often not at the table are included, like those of our educators here in the U.P."

The program plans to welcome its first cohort of teacher candidates in the fall of 2023.

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