Newsletters

Good Morning, Randi
Subscribe

Opinion

Opinion: Who is accountable for K-12 educational outcomes? Here's a wake-up call to change the system.

By Ron Hall , Mike Jandernoa



Credit: Getty Images

Reprints Share

April 16, 2024 09:01 AM | 22 MINUTES AGO



Ron Hall (left) and Mike Jandernoa

Our K-12 public education system is not doing right by our kids. The crux of this crisis is unfolding in our own backyards.

A new analysis comparing Michigan public school district performance against peer districts in top-performing states shows that nearly every district isn't keeping up with the competition. From the Upper Peninsula to the southern corners of the state, and from suburbs to rural communities, Michigan students are trailing their peers.

Without a strong educational foundation, Michigan will continue to struggle to grow, and our children will lose out on what we all want most for them — opportunity.

Related →

Good Morning, Randi
Newsletters
Subscribe
Want to fix Michigan's worker shortage? Make college make sense again.

The first-of-its-kind District Comparison Dashboard, released by Launch Michigan, sheds light on the severity of the problem: 88% of Michigan districts underperform in math, 70% of Michigan districts underperform in reading, and 71% of Michigan districts underperform in graduation rates.

The crisis within Michigan's K-12 system has been brewing for decades. Local debates deflect attention from the core issue: Michigan school districts are underperforming their peers in critical areas. Without a clear understanding of the problem or its severity, previous attempts to improve the K-12 public education system in Michigan lacked the urgency or fortitude needed to truly stick.

One of the reasons previous reform efforts have stalled is a lack of accountable leadership. The state superintendent functions independently from the governor and legislature, disconnected from crucial aspects like policy and funding. Michigan lacks the all-hands-on-deck approach necessary for genuine transformation and often abandons reforms before results can take hold.

Today, Michigan is unable to guarantee that a high school diploma represents 21st century skills, competencies, or preparation for career success. Moreover, students in poverty, those with special needs, and English language learners haven't been given the resources to reach their full potential. Ultimately, we're endangering the future prosperity of our state, hurting our ability to grow family incomes and close equity gaps, and depriving our children in the process.

While this situation is daunting, there is a solution.

Launch Michigan, a nonprofit organization bringing together top state business, education, labor, and philanthropic leaders, has a comprehensive framework that reimagines the K-12 public education system. It's a three-pronged approach that includes setting high performance standards, overhauling governance, and optimizing resources that ensure equitable funding in the classroom. These interconnected strategies pave the way for transformative change.

While some improvements can be made within the current structure, the most significant impact on genuine K-12 reform lies in the hands of voters. This is done through the people they elect and the issues they support.

It's time to stop giving lip service to education transformation. It is a disservice to our children and to our state's future. Making systemic improvements will take a bipartisan, collaborative – and yes, Herculean – effort, and we must focus on all three prongs of the solution for it to be effective.

There's a common saying that knowledge is power. We sincerely hope that parents and guardians, policymakers and educators will see the power of this dashboard and use it as a tool to demand real change.

Ron Hall, President and CEO of Bridgewater Interiors, is an executive committee member on the Business Leaders for Michigan board and is on the Launch Michigan Board of Directors. Mike Jandernoa, founder of 42 North Partners, is an executive committee member on the Business Leaders for Michigan board.

By Ron Hall , Mike Jandernoa

Opinion, News, Education, Politics & Policy