

We Can Do MORE With Less

Michigan can harness innovation as a way to do more with less in K-12 education, even though that challenge may seem overwhelming. At a time when new investments in our K-12 education system are not likely, Michigan must face the daunting task of improving student achievement and increasing graduation rates with fewer financial resources.

To date, K-12 education has yet to realize the full potential of using online learning to improve how educators teach and how students learn. Nearly every sector of our economy is now turning to information and communications technologies to reduce costs and improve efficiencies. Public education is not alone in its need to manage scarce resources, maintain relevance and succeed in today's new global economy.

Research has shown that online learning is academically effective and can provide meaningful alternatives for students who have a need for greater flexibility with their education due to individual learning styles, health conditions, employment responsibilities, lack of success with traditional school environments or desire to be working early at the college level. Online learning needs to be part of the broader policy discussion related to restructuring public education in Michigan during this prolonged budget crisis. Economic arguments in addition to the latest research on student learning support this position.

Last year, the *Michigan Virtual School*[®] provided more than 18,000 online enrollments in courses ranging from AP Physics to Mandarin Chinese to Algebra. In addition, more than 20,000 K-12 educators and support staff received high quality online professional development programs, which helped reduce school district expenses and improve efficiencies. Even so, Michigan is only scratching the surface given the potential of online learning as a cost effective delivery method to serve both students and educators.

Every Michigan school district should develop a comprehensive plan for online learning that focuses on:

- Cost-effective online delivery models that support student motivation, achievement and retention.
- Policies that encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning.
- Opportunities for students to enroll in online courses offered by accredited, Michigan-based schools, colleges, universities and nonprofit organizations.
- Strategies that utilize online learning to extend the school day and provide quality instructional resources during weather-related school closings, after-school hours and during the summer.
- Ongoing teacher and school employee online professional development programs that promote student achievement and encourage innovation.

Our children need a world class education system to ensure Michigan's long-term global competitiveness. As the state economy changes, education must advance to include the newest and strongest of teaching and learning innovations. Effective leaders in all sectors know that successful organizations continue to innovate even in the face of fiscal challenges

Michigan has a rich history of innovation and excellence in many sectors, including public education, and we can draw upon our entrepreneurial spirit to transform teaching and learning by harnessing the power of online delivery systems.

Neil Marchuk

Executive Vice
President of Human
Resources, TRW
Automotive

Chairperson, *Michigan
Virtual University*[®]
Board of Directors

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Michigan Virtual University is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation established by the State of Michigan in 1998 to serve as a champion for online learning.

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