



The Governor's Office of FOUNDATION LIAISON

A partnership between the
State of Michigan and the
Council of Michigan Foundations

Convening Public and Private Partners to Support Education Success in Michigan

Michigan's nonpartisan Office of Foundation Liaison (OFL) was created in 2003 at the suggestion of Michigan philanthropic leaders. The Office — the first of its kind in the nation — works to foster partnerships between state government agencies and philanthropic organizations that are likely to result in policy and programmatic reforms to improve the lives of children and families in Michigan. Since its inception, OFL has brokered more than \$150 million in foundation investments for initiatives to increase Michigan's economic competitiveness through reforms in P-20 education, economic and workforce development, health, and land use.

OFL works within three priority issue areas: prenatal to postsecondary education, workforce development, and health. A long-standing education issue that OFL is working to address through public-private partnerships is chronic absenteeism. Recently, OFL planned a state-wide summit on chronic absenteeism called Attendance Matters that brought together foundations, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, teachers, school administrators, school districts, elected officials, and private citizens to provide recent research and actionable resources to help facilitate change in educational policies and practices across the state.

Chronic Absenteeism: A Long-Standing Issue Gains Statewide Attention

In 2015, legislators began discussing how to improve third-grade reading success in Michigan. During this same time period, the federal government reauthorized funding for elementary and secondary education through the Every Student Succeeds Act. To access this funding, states needed to create their own school improvement accountability systems and define specific metrics to measure. Michigan opted to use school attendance as one of these measures as it has been proven to be a reliable indicator and has been linked to student academic success, including reading proficiency.

As the state began to take interest in school attendance, OFL noticed that the philanthropic community had flagged it as an issue to watch as well. Recognizing the potential for a public-private partnership that could help strengthen Michigan's education system, OFL sought to obtain more information about the subject of school attendance and connected with education expert Hedy Chang of Attendance Works.

Through conversations with Chang, OFL learned that Michigan has the highest rates of chronic absenteeism in the country. According to a recent data set from the Office for Civil Rights that Chang shared with OFL, nearly one-third of Michigan schools experienced high (20–29%) or extreme (over 30%) rates of chronic absence. The City of Detroit alone tops the nation's chronic absence list, with most schools hovering around a 58% chronic absence rate and some with staggeringly high rates upwards of 60–70%. If students are not present in the classroom, then educational achievements, like reading proficiency, cannot be effectively met, leaving Michigan's children without the tools to access a better, brighter future.

In addition to providing recent research and data, Chang showed OFL that chronic absenteeism does not exist in a vacuum. Underpinning chronic absenteeism are issues around poverty, health, workforce development, transportation, teacher and parent engagement, and even data quality, as Michigan does not have a standard state definition for absenteeism.

Armed with this new knowledge, OFL knew Michigan's policymakers and funders would appreciate digging deeper into the issues as well.

Igniting a Statewide Conversation through Attendance Matters

OFL set to work and planned the state's first summit around school attendance called Attendance Matters, partnering with

the Detroit Public Schools Community District, Attendance Works, the Michigan Department of Education, Scholastic, the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA), Liberty Ellen Consulting, and the Council of Michigan Foundations P-20 Education Affinity Group to bring it to life. OFL spearheaded the facilitation of the Attendance Matters Planning Team, the development of the summit's program, and the outreach to statewide partners.

Initially, the summit's attendance goal was around 100 people. However, thanks to OFL and its planning team's strategic outreach, the summit brought in more than 300 people, including representatives from foundations, state agencies, school districts, and nonprofit organizations along with teachers, school administrators, elected officials, and private citizens. Such a swell in attendance showed OFL and its partners that school attendance was an important issue to many around the state.

In bringing such a wide variety of participants to the table, the one-day summit provided attendees with valuable peer-to-peer exchanges. In fact, because of the summit, OFL managed to re-establish an important relationship with the National Governors Association that provides free and low-cost issue-based support to states across the nation. In addition to forging connections among peers, Attendance Matters gave attendees a deeper insight into the issues behind chronic absenteeism, like poverty, and offered resources that could help improve school attendance.

Above all, Attendance Matters showed attendees that they are not alone — that chronic absenteeism is a statewide problem, not just one concentrated in certain pockets of the community.

Continuing the Conversation to Improve Education Success

Conversations around Michigan's chronic absenteeism issue that sprouted at the summit have continued to gain momentum. In Detroit, for instance, partners like Attendance Works, the Skillman Foundation, and the Michigan Community Service Commission, have come together to address the city's dire attendance problem. The city was even recently awarded AmeriCorps grants to help support data systems enhancement and the creation of attendance teams in every Detroit school.

As the issue continues to be top of mind for organizations and schools across the state, OFL is keeping in touch with the Department of Education and other partners to identify ways to bring together the public and private sectors around viable attendance improvement models.

OFL's Key Roles in Addressing Chronic Absence in Michigan's Schools

- ▶ Recognizing the potential for public-private partnerships to help strengthen Michigan's education system
- ▶ Gathering important information about the issues grounding school absenteeism (such as poverty) to better educate both state and philanthropic partners
- ▶ Convening education partners from across the state and nation to launch Michigan's first summit around school attendance
- ▶ Facilitating meetings between summit planning team members and outreach to public and private partners to ensure a successful, relevant, and inspiring summit
- ▶ Keeping a finger on the pulse of work in both private and public sectors around school attendance improvement initiatives in Michigan

One new statewide effort that has emerged since Attendance Matters is called Launch Michigan and is comprised of a multi-disciplinary group that includes partners like the Council of Michigan Foundations/OFL, Public Sector Consultants, Business Leaders of Michigan, and the Education Trust-Midwest. MEMSPA is also beginning a new effort with partners to attack early literacy. These exciting, new initiatives are committed to working toward a statewide education system where every child in Michigan receives access to a high-quality, student-centered learning environment.

Work around addressing education issues in Michigan has only just begun and Michigan faces a long, arduous road ahead. But thanks to OFL's convening power that resulted in a successful Attendance Matters summit, many foundations, state agencies, policymakers, nonprofit organizations, and school districts are more equipped than ever before to tackle Michigan's school attendance issue and school achievement gap.

