

Michigan talent pipeline key to economic turnaround

Students must stay focused, recommit to their post-secondary education; goal of '60 percent by 2030' test of public resolve

Unlike the financial meltdown 12 years ago, the current precipitous economic downturn is caused by a public health crisis, not a fundamental failure of the economic system.

Just several months ago, the Michigan economy was strong and growing, supported by the ongoing development in advanced manufacturing, technology, mobility, healthcare and service industries.

In past years, this would be the time high school graduates and college students would be planning attend school in the fall, and play a vital role in further building the state's talent pipeline.

Today, however, because many families suffering from the economic impact and widespread uncertainty from the COVID-19 crisis, students might be putting their education plans might be put on hold.

College students are key to a thriving Michigan talent pipeline and are critical to the region's economic health.

Now is not the time for prospective and enrolled college students to back away from their future, and put their education on hold. While the coronavirus pandemic has caused many closures, closing the door to the future opportunity shouldn't be among them.

High school students have faced disruptions to their postsecondary planning, and adult workers have been displaced from jobs, and face additional uncertainty. Many of those who face the most significant barriers to college, even before the pandemic, have been cut off from support systems through school and work and lack guidance more than ever on how to navigate through college.

There is no looking past the profound personal, social and economic devastation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Too many families have suffered the pain and grief from the sudden illness and death of a loved one. And, too many individuals and families are struggling with an uncertain financial future.

April's surge in unemployment with 20.5 million jobs lost was the largest decline since the federal government began tracking employment data in 1939. In comparison, more than

twice as many jobs have been lost in the last two months than were lost during the great financial crisis of 2008-09.

Pursing a college degree is as valuable and needed as ever.

The first step is to support the state's public universities, and recognize how they play a role as an investment in both an individual's and the state's economic future. Secondly, it must be clearly understood that a postsecondary education increases worker resilience to recession and economic downturns.

Even before the Great Recession of 2008-09, there were wide gaps in employment rates between individuals with bachelor's degrees compared to those with high school diplomas. Similar trends, which disproportionately disadvantage people of color, are emerging from COVID-19.

In response to the pressing need to continued post-secondary education, the region's colleges and universities are stepping up, providing more generous and flexible financial aid, pushing back enrollment deadlines, and advising displaced adults looking to return to school.

While it may be difficult to imagine a post-pandemic world, this much is clear: People with postsecondary education will play a vital role in the economic recovery, and more college degrees and certificates are needed in the Detroit region.

The Detroit Regional Chamber and their partners are championing postsecondary access and success efforts through [Detroit Drives Degrees](#), which aims to increase postsecondary attainment in the Detroit region to 60 percent by 2030.

In addition to increasing postsecondary attainment, there is a pressing need for a regional strategy aimed at upskilling adults, including employer-led adult education initiatives such as tuition support and adult-friendly course scheduling.

As we head into summer, it is increasingly likely that the "reopening of Michigan" will be a phasing in of business openings and regulated social distancing in public gathering places. The days and months ahead will look nothing like what we have experienced before.

While there are many variables, there is one challenge that remains fixed: The future is a test of our resolve and ability to be prepared.

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