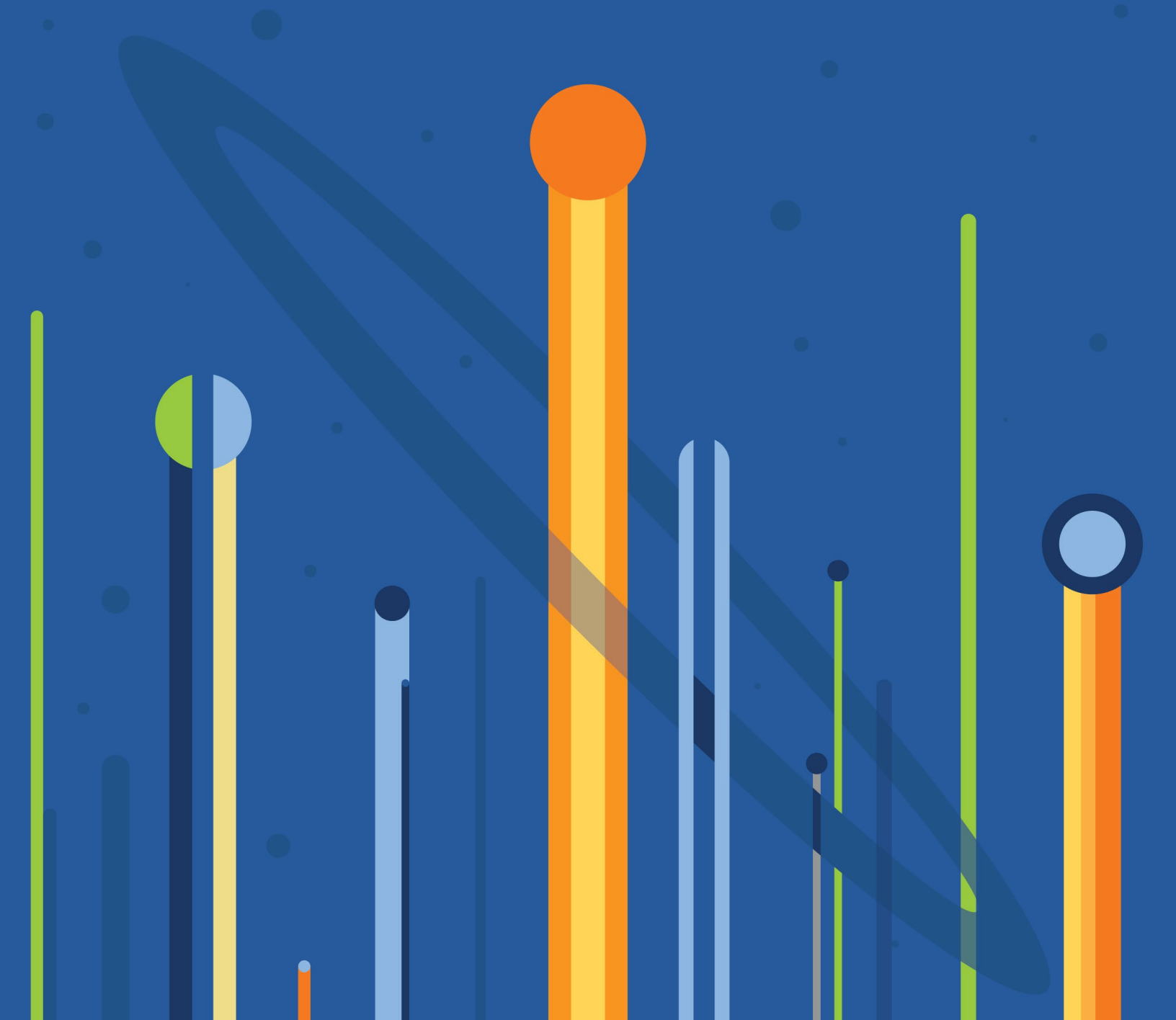


A FULLY-INFORMED FUTURE:

Recommendations for Better
Implementation of Michigan's Career
Development Model



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is both teacher-led and teacher-written. All authors are members of the Transition To Post-Secondary Working Group of the Michigan Teacher Leadership Collaborative 2021-22 Cohort. The findings and recommendations within this brief are solely the authors'. The Michigan Teacher Leadership Collaborative (MTLC) is a highly selective leadership opportunity for outstanding Michigan teachers looking to share their expertise around equity-focused instructional practices, deepen their knowledge of education policy, and gain a voice in decisions that affect historically underserved students and the teaching profession. [The Education Trust-Midwest](#) and [Teach Plus](#) co-convene the MTLC.

About The Education Trust-Midwest

The Education Trust-Midwest is the Michigan-based office of the national nonprofit, The Education Trust, that works to close opportunity gaps that disproportionately affect students of color and students from low-income families. As a nonpartisan, data-driven education policy, research and advocacy organization, we are focused first and foremost on doing what is right for Michigan children, working alongside partners to raise the quality of teaching and learning in our public schools.

About Teach Plus

The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that affect their students' success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning, to create an education system driven by access and excellence for all.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a vital role in helping students navigate their future college and career options and find their paths forward. For many Michigan students, school is the only place where they can receive targeted support and guidance that will set them up for success in post-secondary education and careers. As members of the [Michigan Teacher Leadership Collaborative \(MTLC\)](#) and teachers who work with diverse student populations in schools across Michigan, we are deeply invested in our students' future. To that end, we wanted to know if the state's guidance around post-secondary education and career, the Michigan [Career Development Model \(MI CDM\)](#)¹, was being implemented with fidelity.

Released in December 2018, the MI CDM is intended to “provide all students (K-12) in the Michigan educational system with the necessary knowledge and skills for success in a career of their choice and lifelong learning.”² To achieve this, the model provides guidance to districts, counselors, and educators on how to introduce students to post-secondary education and career pathways, organized across grade level bands. To better understand how schools in our state are implementing the MI CDM, we conducted research with school counselors in southeast Michigan. In this memo, we present our findings and recommendations for policymakers. We hope that the Michigan Department of Education and the state legislature use our recommendations to improve the implementation of the MI CDM. Michigan students deserve to make fully-informed choices about their future. It's our job to give them that opportunity.

METHODOLOGY

In order to learn more about the implementation of the MI CDM in schools, we interviewed six school counselors, including those serving grades seven through twelve at suburban and urban middle schools in southeast Michigan. Student populations in these schools range from a suburban school with a primarily White student population that minimally qualifies for the federal Free and Reduced Priced Meals program to urban schools serving primarily students of color with almost all or all of the student population qualifying for the federal Free and Reduced Priced Meals program.³

We developed four core research questions that drove our inquiry:

1. How is the Career Development Model implemented across school districts?
2. How are portfolios managed or updated when students change schools and districts?
3. What should schools be doing to ensure that each student leaves high school with a viable post-secondary plan?
4. Do students complete their talent portfolios before leaving high school?⁴

FINDINGS

1. Implementation of the CDM is inconsistent across districts.

Implementation of the MI CDM varies from school to school, within districts, and from district to district. Counselors we interviewed for this study use various platforms, including *Naviance*, *Career Cruising*, *Xello*, and counselor-created activities to help students create post-secondary plans (known as Educational Development Plans or EDPs), a major goal of the MI CDM. However, two shared challenges emerged across our interviews: inadequate technology and Covid-19 complications.

Counselors felt that the platforms used to implement the MI CDM and to help students create EDPs were inadequate. As one middle school counselor said:

*"I think a big chunk of our frustration here is...the software we use...We don't feel it is appropriate for this age group. It is just too detailed and kids get lost. So we've actually gone back to using just the Michigan Department of [Education] career pathways and introduc[ing] it to them [students]. They're not actually creating their EDP that they'll be using in high school...And they can't save information because...the subscription we have [is designed to support the high school]."*⁵

Covid-19 has led to additional challenges when implementing the MI CDM. As one high school counselor put it, *"All four grade levels had to do this [initial career exploration activities and EDP work] because Covid-19 prevented counselors from being able to enter classrooms of upper grade levels prior [to this year]."*⁶

Counselors also discussed how overwhelmed students are due to the pandemic, as summarized by this high school counselor:

*"Some of the challenges include getting students to understand the importance of [the] EDP. Some students are already sure what they want to be so they shut down at the idea of exploring other options. Also, students who don't want to pursue college shut down when there are questions in modules regarding college. Getting lessons and materials to teachers effectively is also difficult and follow-through on both ends [student and staff] is hard to coordinate. Timing and clarity are also issues. There's pressure to get things done which can lead to incompleteness because they [students] are overwhelmed. Outside of grades, students have a hard time realizing the importance of their education."*⁷

2. Student data does not transfer across resource platforms, between schools in a district, or across districts.

All of the counselors we interviewed for this project work in districts that have chosen either *Naviance* or *Xello* to implement the MI CDM and monitor student work. However, students who transfer into the district are not able to use their previous work if the old and new districts use different digital platforms. When students are unable to build upon their work from earlier grades—because their previous school did not implement an objective or due to the use of a different digital platform—counselors and students must spend additional time redoing prerequisite work prior to completing current work. A school counselor summarized this:

“Starting earlier than high school on the MI CDC and EDP would've been more helpful, by having everything on [one] document and having it carry on with them, eventually that could have changed once they hit high school. If the system really keeps up with the student it could be effective.”⁸

Some counselors shared that students changing schools within their district are not always able to use their previous work even though they remain on the same platform. Furthermore, middle and high school counselors within a district are not always aware of the others' work:

“We do certain things in 7th grade and other things in 8th grade and then we transfer it to [the] high school. I don't know what happens at the high school level. I don't know if they continue with Career Cruising [Xello]. I believe they are using something new in [name of district] called [different program]...We need to be on the same page as the high schools as well. Most of our kids go to school in the greater Detroit area. The high schoolers are not using Xello for some reason. I ask former students and they tell me nothing is going on.”⁹

3. Counselors lack time to fulfill their duties, which limits equitable access to career and college preparations for students.

Counselors we interviewed for this study said that they feel solely responsible for ensuring their districts meet the MI CDC requirements even though they do not have dedicated time with students. Exacerbating this problem is the fact that during the 2020 - 2021 school year, [Michigan ranked 48 out of 50 states](#) for the ratio of students-to-school counselors with a ratio of 628 students per counselor, more than double The American School Counselor Association's recommended ratio of 250 students per counselor.¹⁰ For the MI CDC to effectively support students' post-secondary planning, counselors recommended that the MI CDC activities become the responsibility of the whole school community and be incorporated consistently into instructional time and across all subjects.

As one middle school counselor put it, *“In my case, the teachers probably won't allow me the time to cover everything about careers so I steal some hours here and there but it is not as consistent as it would be in a class setting...The teachers do not have enough time to give us so we can do what we want because we're testing throughout the year and have a curriculum to cover...The main advice would be embedding it into the curriculum.”¹¹*

Counselors also noted their districts' emphasis on the college portion of the MI CDC and are concerned that students uninterested in college are not being sufficiently supported in developing post-secondary career and/or trade plans. One high school counselor said, *“Students who don't want to pursue college shut down when there are questions in modules regarding college.”¹²*

4. Student completion of their talent portfolios, a major component of the MI CDM, is inconsistent.

Counselors responded to questions about completion of talent portfolios in several ways, including disbelief and confusion. One high school counselor said, *“I haven’t seen students complete it...I have not seen a talent portfolio completed. I don’t know what that would include.”*¹³

Another high school counselor shared:

*“From my experience, it hasn’t really been about the experience of Xello or at the time, Career Cruising. It has been about the completion. I feel the counselors are driven to hit the right benchmarks, as far as numbers, but it [the MI CDM] hasn’t been utilized in a way to help students engage with Xello, or Career Cruising, for the CDM. We are pushing them to complete [assignments], just to click the buttons, to show 100% completion for that assignment depending on the grade level but they are not really digging deep or engaging [the platforms and material] because of how it was implemented within the schools. There is a curriculum but there is no time to do the curriculum in the school day.”*¹⁴

In Summary: What’s Working?

Even though our four findings largely illustrate the problems of the MI CDM implementation, the counselors we spoke with also noted what they liked about the guidance and what has worked well. They agreed that some of Michigan’s recommended career exploration and preparation resources (e.g., Naviance and Xello) offer attractive features such as modules with lessons aligned with students’ post-secondary interests and accessible storage space to file students’ college application documents (i.e., letters of recommendation). The counselors highlighted that these tools aid in students’ early awareness and exposure to potential college and career opportunities, which they feel is vital to students’ successful post-secondary transition. According to one middle school counselor:

*“I think it is definitely necessary. It opens their eyes to the future. Kids sometimes can’t really see long term and I think it helps them think about careers and jobs. Learning about careers helps them find a direction.”*¹⁵

Though the counselors realize students’ post-secondary desires might change over the course of MI CDM’s awareness, exploration, and preparation phases, they stand by their belief that students should get started on this path during the onset of their educational journey and that they should have a viable EDP and talent portfolio upon graduating from high school.

In Summary: What’s Not Working?

The school counselors we interviewed also gave insight into what is not working when it comes to MI CDM implementation, beyond what we captured in the findings above. Counselors, much like educators, find themselves in a perpetual race with the clock to meet building, district, and state mandates; those we spoke with have resorted to meeting the MI CDM objectives by any means necessary, even if it means students are shortchanged of the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in all their schools’ career exploration and preparation resources. One high school counselor said:

*"I feel the counselors are driven to hit the right benchmarks, as far as numbers, but it hasn't been utilized in a way to help students engage in Xello, or Career Cruising, for the CDM."*¹⁶

Even though the MDE recommends school use improvement teams to implement the MI CDM, our interview participants underscored that guidance counselors bear much of the responsibility for meeting the model's grade level targets, which often leaves them no choice but to interrupt the instructional flow of teachers to fulfill their duties. Whether met with acceptance or opposition from teachers, these counselors find themselves bargaining with educators to permit interference of their classroom agendas because their schools' curriculum fails to factor in the scheduling of quality time toward meeting the EDP and talent portfolio targets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adopt one digital platform statewide at no cost to districts and schools.

The state should adopt and fund a single digital platform to use across districts. Educators could then be trained on a common platform and they would not have to get retrained if they move districts. This change would likewise provide more consistency to students who change schools within a district or between districts.

2. Use student state ID numbers to ensure data follows students through high school graduation and beyond.

The state should ensure that students are able to log in to a single digital platform using the student ID number assigned to them by the state, a number that all Michigan students already have. Streamlining the process in this way would lead to more consistency across schools and districts. From speaking with counselors and teachers, it seems that students who moved from district to district do not have access to their information through Xello so they will need to start over. Or Xello is not the career development platform was used in the past

3. Identify and connect the MI CDM with state content standards through activities and lessons.

The MI CDM should better align with Michigan's content standards, so that teachers can weave mini-lessons and activities into their lessons. Connecting content standards with opportunities to explore post-secondary college and career options would allow students to better understand what they are learning and how it is applicable to their everyday lives, now and into the future. More student buy-in would also help increase the likelihood of talent portfolio and EDP completion.

4. Roll out clear, consistent MI CDM implementation guidance with roles and responsibilities for all school personnel.

Finally, our state should provide more explicit guidance around who, within schools and school districts, should implement the MI CDM. Currently, the model suggests that districts use their school improvement teams. However, some schools do not have a consistent school improvement team to carry out this task. Without a team, this responsibility is left to counselors or teachers, or a combination of both. Responsibility for implementing the MI CDM needs to be shared more widely to include counselors, administrators, educators, and instructional support staff. Furthermore, accountability measures must be put in place for each responsible adult on campus, to ensure that the MI CDM is implemented with fidelity.

CONCLUSION

All Michigan students deserve the chance to be better informed about their education and career choices. Not every student has the same access to support when it comes to post-secondary education and career exploration. Our recommendations for improving the implementation of Michigan's Career Development Model drive towards equity by working to meet the needs of all students. If Michigan is to meet its workforce [goals](#), and if the state is to be home to well-informed citizens, we must do better by our K-12 students to prepare them for transition to post-secondary education and careers.

ENDNOTES

1 Michigan Career Development Model (2018). Michigan Department of Education. Retrieved from: https://www.michigan.gov/mde/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/CTE/Tool-kits/MI_Career_Development_Model_-_Dec_18_2018_641266_7.pdf?rev=248c9cab6cb74215900af642f10f6387

2 Ibid.

3 To conduct this research, members of the Michigan Teacher Leadership Collaborative (MTLC) conducted virtual interviews with six counselors across four Michigan School Districts. Counselors worked in both middle and high schools, supporting students in grades 7 through 12.

4 Please see attached Appendix

5 Question: What has been your experience with students completing the CDM at your school?

6 Question: How do you retrieve the EDPs of your students when they enter as Freshmen?

7 Question: For students who appear to be struggling to complete their Educational Development Plan or Talent Portfolio, what are some of the challenges you believe they are facing?

8 Question: What else would you like to say about your experience with the CDM that you haven't shared already?

9 Question: What has been your experience with students completing the CDM at your school?

10 Student to School Counselor Ratio 2020-2021. (2021). American School Counselor Association. Retrieved from: <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/238f136e-ec52-4bf2-94b6-f24c39447022/Ratios-20-21-Alpha.pdf>

11 Question: For students who appear to be struggling to complete their Educational Development Plan or Talent Portfolio, what are some of the challenges you believe they are facing?

12 Ibid.

13 Question: What has been your experience with students completing the CDM at your school?

14 Ibid.

15 Question: What else would you like to say about your experience with the CDM that you haven't shared?

16 Question: What has been your experience with students completing the CDM at your school?

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

1. What has been your experience with students completing the CDM at your school?
2. For students who appear to be struggling to complete their Educational Development Plan or Talent Portfolio, what are some of the challenges you believe they are facing?
3. **For high school counselors only:** How do you retrieve the EDPs of your students when they enter as Freshmen?
4. What system is your school using to implement the Career Development Model? (For example: Xello, Naviance?)
5. What is your impression of the system your school or district uses to implement the CDM?
6. What resources are available to students as they complete their EDP or Talent Portfolio?
7. What preparation did you receive as a school counselor to support students in completing their CDM requirements?
8. As policymakers and school leaders consider making adjustments to policies related to the CDM, what advice would you give them to make it more effective for students and educators?
9. What else would you like to say about your experience with the CDM that you haven't shared already?