



# AIDING ATTAINMENT

## Leveraging State Financial Aid FOR ACCESS AND SUCCESS

### A New Approach to Aid in Michigan

In 2019, Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced a statewide goal in Michigan to increase the percentage of working-age adults with a postsecondary credential to 60 percent by 2030 in order to meet projected workforce demands and talent shortages. Recognizing the importance of expanding access to postsecondary education to achieve its “60 by 30” attainment goal, the Michigan Legislature passed Senate Bill 842 in 2022 to create the Michigan Achievement Scholarship.

The Michigan Achievement Scholarship has been praised by state officials for its extensive reach, both in terms of aid eligibility and the wide range of institutions where it can be utilized. Unlike the Michigan Opportunity and Michigan Competitive scholarships, which both had need and merit eligibility components and which have since been sunset, the Achievement Scholarship is based solely on financial need as calculated by FAFSA’s Student Aid Index (SAI). The goal of the new, streamlined aid program has been to broaden the reach and impact of financial support in the state. To receive the Michigan Achievement Scholarship, graduating high school seniors need to have an SAI between  $-\$1,500$  and  $\$30,000$ , which would make approximately 94 percent of community college students and more than 75 percent of students at four-year institutions eligible. Students can use the scholarship at any community college, private college or university, public university, or career training program in the state.

Michigan Achievement operates in conjunction with other aid programs, including programs focused on adult students and Medicaid recipients.

The Michigan Reconnect Scholarship is a need-based last-dollar scholarship program for adult learners that covers up to the in-district tuition cost of an associate degree or skills certificate at a Michigan community college or training school. An acknowledgment that the “60 by 30” goal can only be achieved if there are state investments in adult education, this program was originally aimed at individuals aged 25 and older, and in 2023, Michigan leveraged pandemic relief funding to expand the program’s reach to include adults aged 21-24.<sup>1</sup> The Michigan Center for Adult College Success, in partnership with Education Strategy Group, also launched the MI-RAISE Design Lab, which is engaging a cohort of postsecondary institutions seeking to design and develop innovative solutions to increase academic persistence and degree



<sup>1</sup> Michigan Reconnect. (n.d.). *Michigan Reconnect for Ages 21 to 24*. <https://www.michigan.gov/reconnect/community-college/michigan-reconnect-for-ages-21-to-24>

completion among adult learners in Michigan. Another significant investment in Michigan's suite of aid programs is the Tuition Incentive Program (TIP), which provides first-dollar tuition assistance to approximately 25,000 students annually who have been on Medicaid for at least two years from age nine to high school graduation.<sup>2</sup> The administration of TIP relies on a strong partnership between MI Student Aid and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to identify students with qualifying Medicaid participation.

Data and communications have been two key levers for ensuring access to student aid in Michigan, especially with the introduction of Achievement Scholarship in 2023. On the communications front, MI Student Aid has invested heavily in communications to disseminate information about the new scholarship program and to support FAFSA completion efforts, as FAFSA is the primary application for student aid in Michigan. For TIP, students begin receiving early outreach materials via an annual mailer about their eligibility as early as age 12. Leveraging data has also been key to aid access in the state. High school counselors are able to access a data portal to see whether their students have filed the FAFSA, meet the SAI eligibility for the Achievement Scholarship, or are identified as TIP-eligible. To increase transparency between stakeholders, MI Student Aid also produces public-facing data dashboards on state aid disbursements which help to keep the legislature informed of each program's uptake.

By aligning financial aid programs and initiatives with the needs of specific student populations and its workforce demands, Michigan has made strides toward streamlining its programs' eligibility processes and enhancing its communications practices. In doing so, Michigan has positioned itself as a model for other states aiming to boost economic growth and educational attainment.



Check out the full suite of *Aiding Attainment* resources, including the state aid benchmarking tool, state spotlights, student aid scenarios, and more at [edstrategy.org/resource/aiding-attainment](https://edstrategy.org/resource/aiding-attainment).

<sup>2</sup> Steel, M., Brown, C., Smith, D., & Granville, P. (2021). *Primer And Equity Analysis: Centering Students In Michigan's Financial Aid Programs*. The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) & The Century Foundation. <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Centering-Students-in-Michigans-Financial-Aid-Programs.pdf>.