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# Understanding and Supporting Adult Learners

## Our objectives for today:

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- 1** Make the case for why adults learners are key for building a more prosperous, equitable Michigan
- 2** Uplift priorities to equitably serve adults, including strategies and actions
- 3** Create space for participants to learn from one another on how they serve adult learners and ways they can improve their support.

# Defining Adult Learners

Adult learners tend to be defined as those at or over the age 25 beginning or restarting their path to their first credential

- **Nontraditional-learners** have one or more characteristics that are considered “non-traditional” in higher education
- **Post-traditional learner** is a term that offers more humanizing language and acknowledges that students with “nontraditional” characteristics are now the norm in postsecondary education.

**Who do we mean by “adult”?** Individuals with high school diploma or equivalency and are one year or more removed high school and, for data purposes, usually use 25 and older



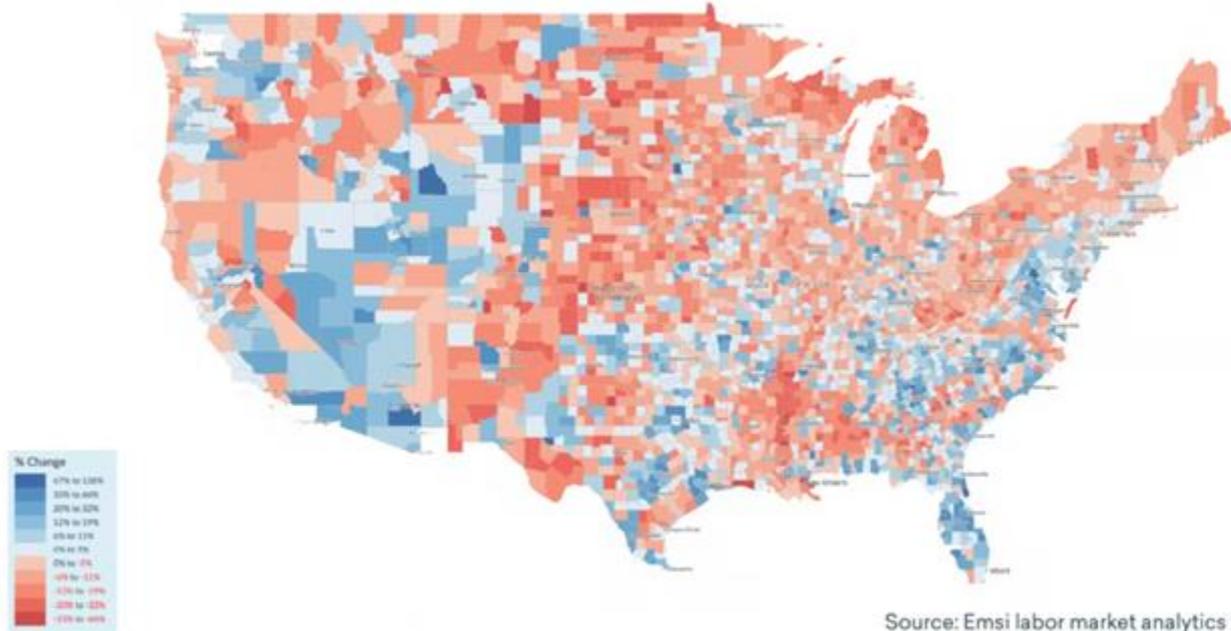
# The Diverse and Multifaceted Adult Learner



Perhaps the tie that binds this diverse population of learners together most aptly is a **nearly universal desire to strive for themselves and their families.**

# Demographic trends suggest adult learners will be even more critical to our workforce

The population under age 25 declined in 61% of US counties 2001-2011

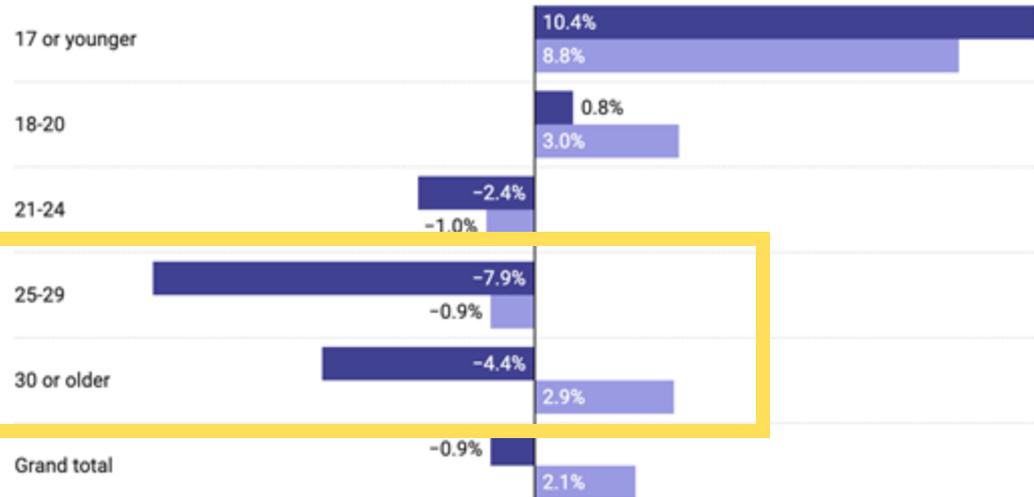


# And in the last year, adult learner enrollment in postsecondary has increased

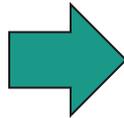
## Undergraduate enrollment was mixed across age groups

Year-over-year percentage change in undergraduate enrollment by age group

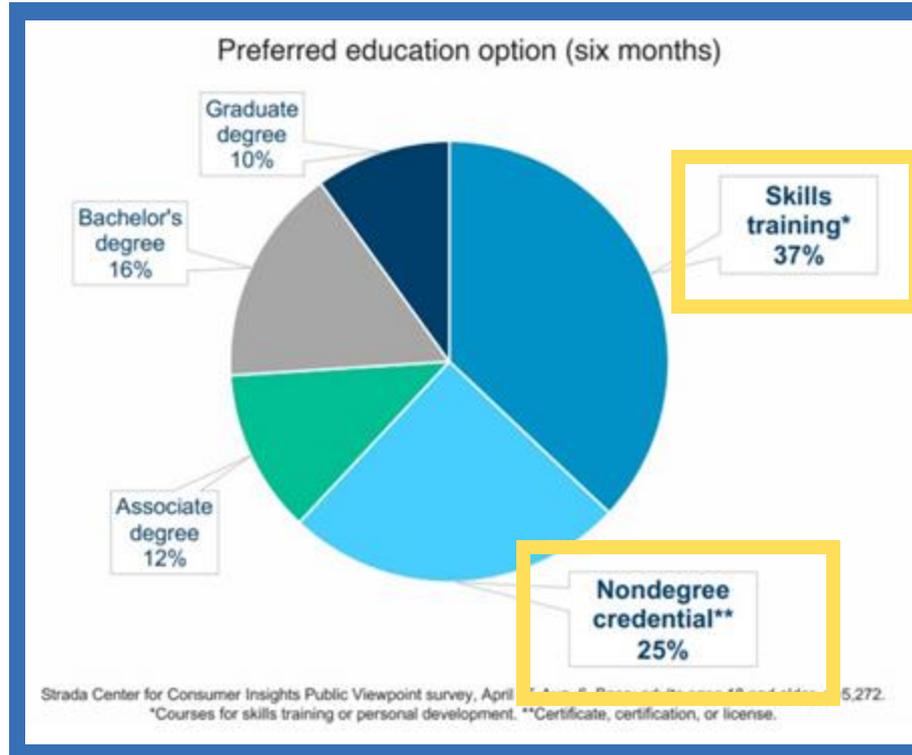
Fall 2022 Fall 2023



Enrollment is growing for learners over the age of 30.

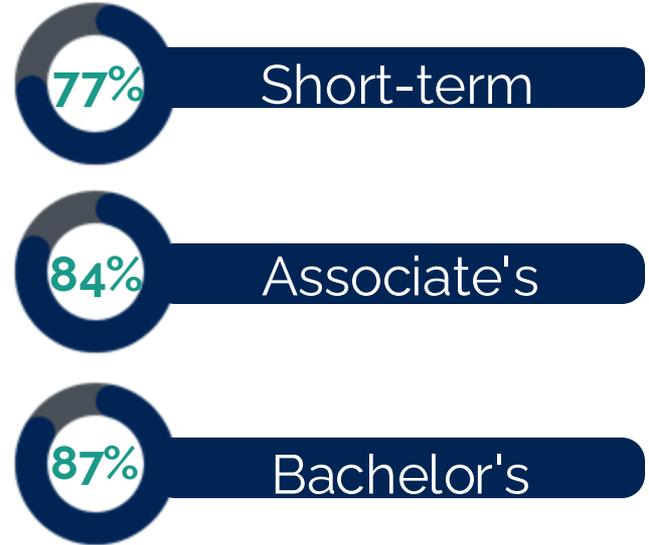


# But learners are specifically interested in short-term training...



...yet we know longer-term training tends to lead more reliably to employment and better wage outcomes.

## Employment rates



(New America, 2021)

# Why Adult Learners Matter in Michigan

## Education = Economic Opportunity

2021 poverty rates for working-age Michiganders (25-64),  
by education level:



Less than  
high  
school



High school  
diploma



Some  
postsecondary  
experience/  
associate degree



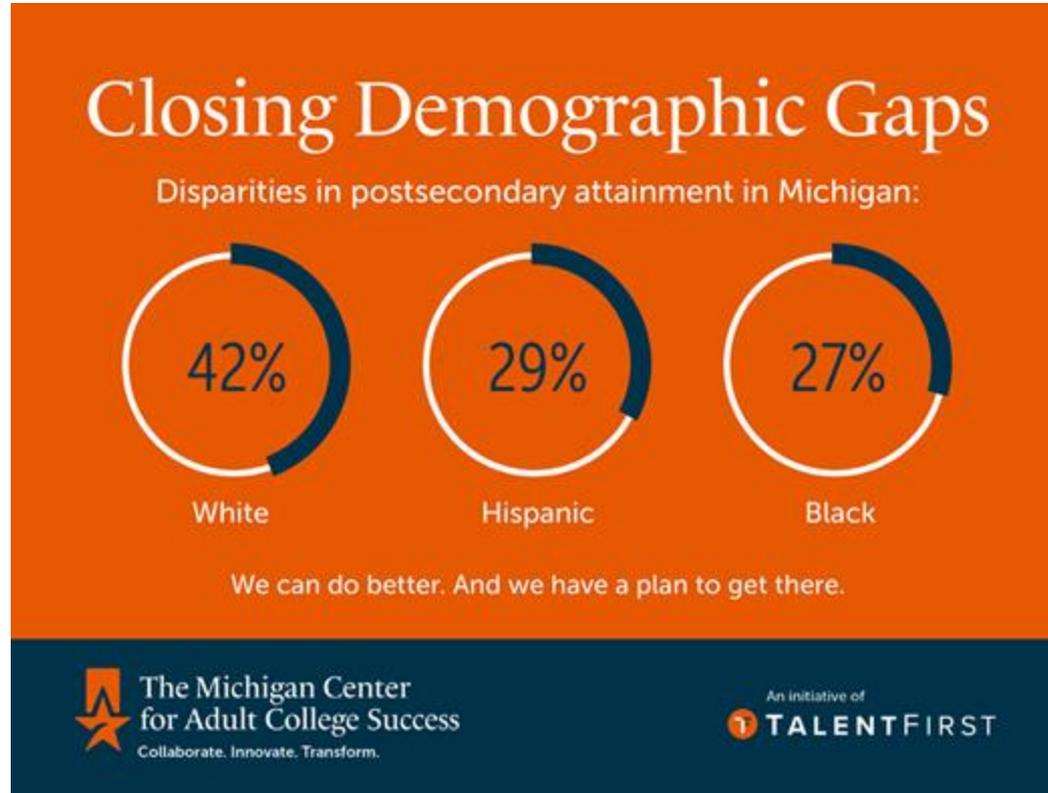
Bachelor's  
degree



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# Why Adult Learners Matter in Michigan



# Why Adult Learners Matter in Michigan

## What a Difference 2% Makes

Here's what is possible by 2030 with a 2% annual increase in Michigan's adult postsecondary credential attainment:

+79,155

more  
credentials

+\$4.3

billion more  
earnings accrued

+\$183

million more in  
tax revenue



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# Priorities for Adult-Ready Transformation

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**ACCESSIBILITY:** Post-traditional learners effectively access and move through postsecondary programs.



**PROGRAM CHANGE:** Post-traditional learners thrive and feel engaged within postsecondary classrooms.



**OPERATIONAL CHANGE:** Post-traditional learners easily navigate postsecondary advising and administrative systems.



**DATA:** Post-traditional learners are authentically measured through data and used as a subject for ongoing improvement.



**PARTNERSHIPS:** Post-traditional learners seamlessly interface between higher education systems and trusted community/industry partners.



## **ACCESSIBILITY: Post-traditional learners effectively access and move through postsecondary programs.**

Strategy #1: Ensure institutional and state aid works for adult learners

Strategy #2: Use financial levers to increase postsecondary engagement and progression for key post-traditional populations

Strategy #3: Conduct comprehensive outreach to all post-traditional learners



## **ACCESSIBILITY: Post-traditional learners effectively access and move through postsecondary programs.**

Strategy #1: Ensure institutional and state aid works for adult learners

Strategy #2: Use financial level engagement and progression

*Conduct broad and targeted outreach to make clear the value of a postsecondary education and the range of programs and financial aid opportunities available.*

Strategy #3: Conduct comprehensive outreach to all post-traditional learners



**PROGRAM CHANGE: Post-traditional learners thrive and feel engaged within postsecondary classrooms.**

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Strategy #1: Deliver program content in adult-friendly ways

Strategy #2: Design programs for flexibility and convenience

Strategy #3: Develop pathways that leverage and support all skill and preparation levels



## PROGRAM CHANGE: Post-traditional learners thrive and feel engaged within postsecondary classrooms.

Strategy #1: Deliver program content

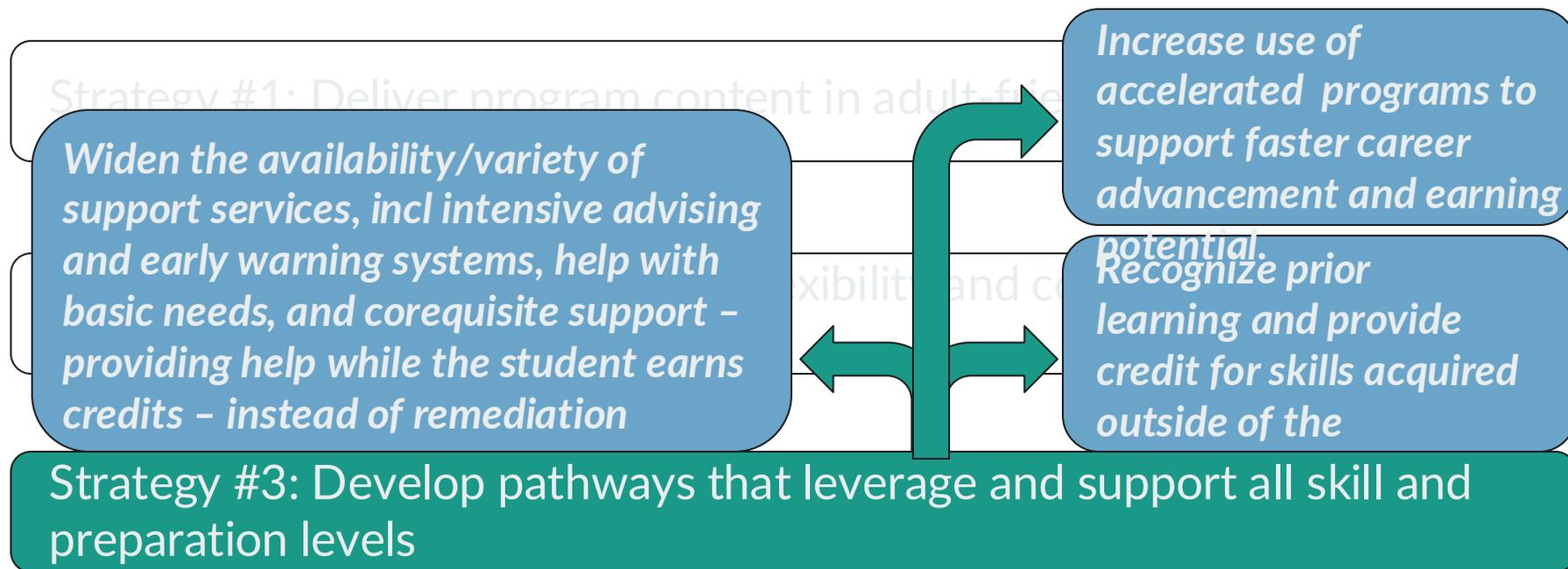
*Implement flexible scheduling, including synchronous and asynchronous options. Flexible scheduling also applies to employer strategies for upskilling current employees.*

Strategy #2: Design programs for flexibility and convenience

Strategy #3: Develop pathways that leverage and support all skill and preparation levels



## PROGRAM CHANGE: Post-traditional learners thrive and feel engaged within postsecondary classrooms.





**OPERATIONAL CHANGE: Post-traditional learners easily navigate postsecondary advising and administrative systems.**

Strategy #1: Create a one-stop student experience

Strategy #2: Develop efficient systems for tailored student advising



# OPERATIONAL CHANGE: Post-traditional learners easily navigate postsecondary advising and administrative systems.

Strategy #1: Create a one-stop student experience

Strategy #2: Develop efficient systems for tailored student advising

*Eliminate barriers to transfer through reverse-transfer programs and inter-institutional partnerships and program alignment.*



**DATA: Post-traditional learners are authentically measured through data and used as a subject for ongoing improvement.**

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Strategy #1: Strengthen data measurement and collection systems to better monitor and evaluate post-traditional learner outcomes



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Strategy #1: Strengthen data measurement and collection systems to better monitor and evaluate post-traditional learner outcomes

*Leverage high-quality data systems to monitor program success and adjust services to meet the needs of adult learners.*



**PARTNERSHIPS:** Post-traditional learners seamlessly interface between higher education systems and trusted community/industry partners.

Strategy #1: Engage employers and workforce systems to promote program relevance

Strategy #2: Partner to provide critical wrap-around supports



**PARTNERSHIPS:** Post-traditional learners seamlessly interface between higher education systems and trusted community/industry partners.

Strategy #1: Engage employers and workforce systems to promote program relevance

Strategy #2: Partner to provide

*Partner with employers to create guided, career-aligned pathways through postsecondary education to simplify progression and ensure degrees and credentials meet the educational and career goals of adults.*

# Doing now? Do Differently? Obstacles?

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## Next Steps

**Complete** your individual self-assessment before your institutional reflection session

**Schedule** your institutional self-assessment reflection session before December 20th (60-90 minutes for your core team)

**Come** to your reflection session ready to schedule a January design sprint kick-off meeting with Sova

**Hold** January 23 10am-3:30pm for in-person convening and February 13 12n-1:30pm for virtual convening, and invite your core team to both

