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**The Michigan Center
for Adult College Success**
Collaborate. Innovate. Transform.

Adult Learner Summit

February 4-6, 2026

#ALSummit26



Adult Learner Success Data in Michigan

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Our “why”

48.2%

adults in Michigan lack postsecondary credentials



- Bolster enrollment and success of postsecondary institutions
- Reduce the cost of state’s social safety net programs
- Increase tax revenues
- ***Lift Michiganders out of poverty and help them thrive!***

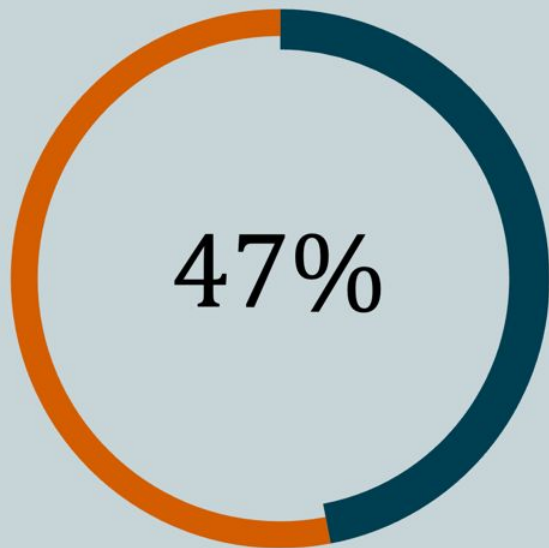


Closing Demographic Gaps



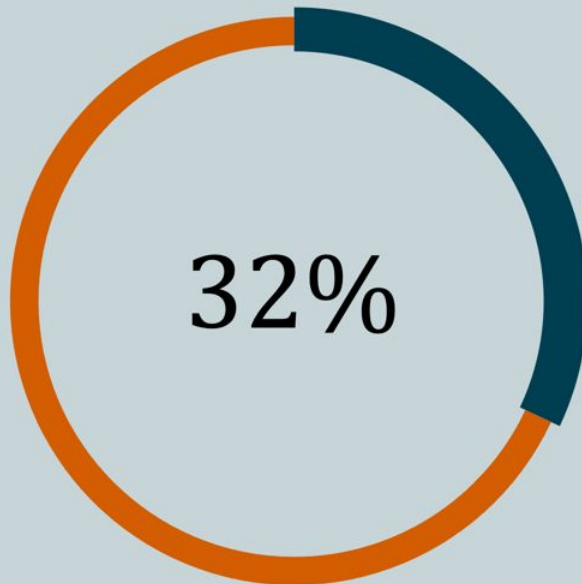
Disparities in postsecondary attainment in Michigan

White



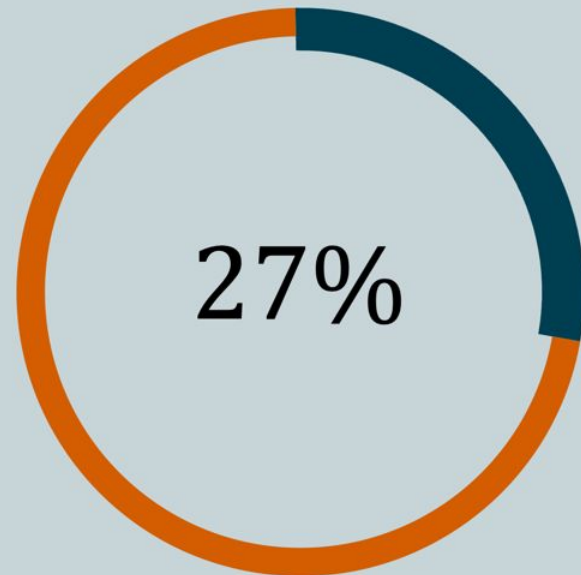
47%

Hispanic



32%

Black



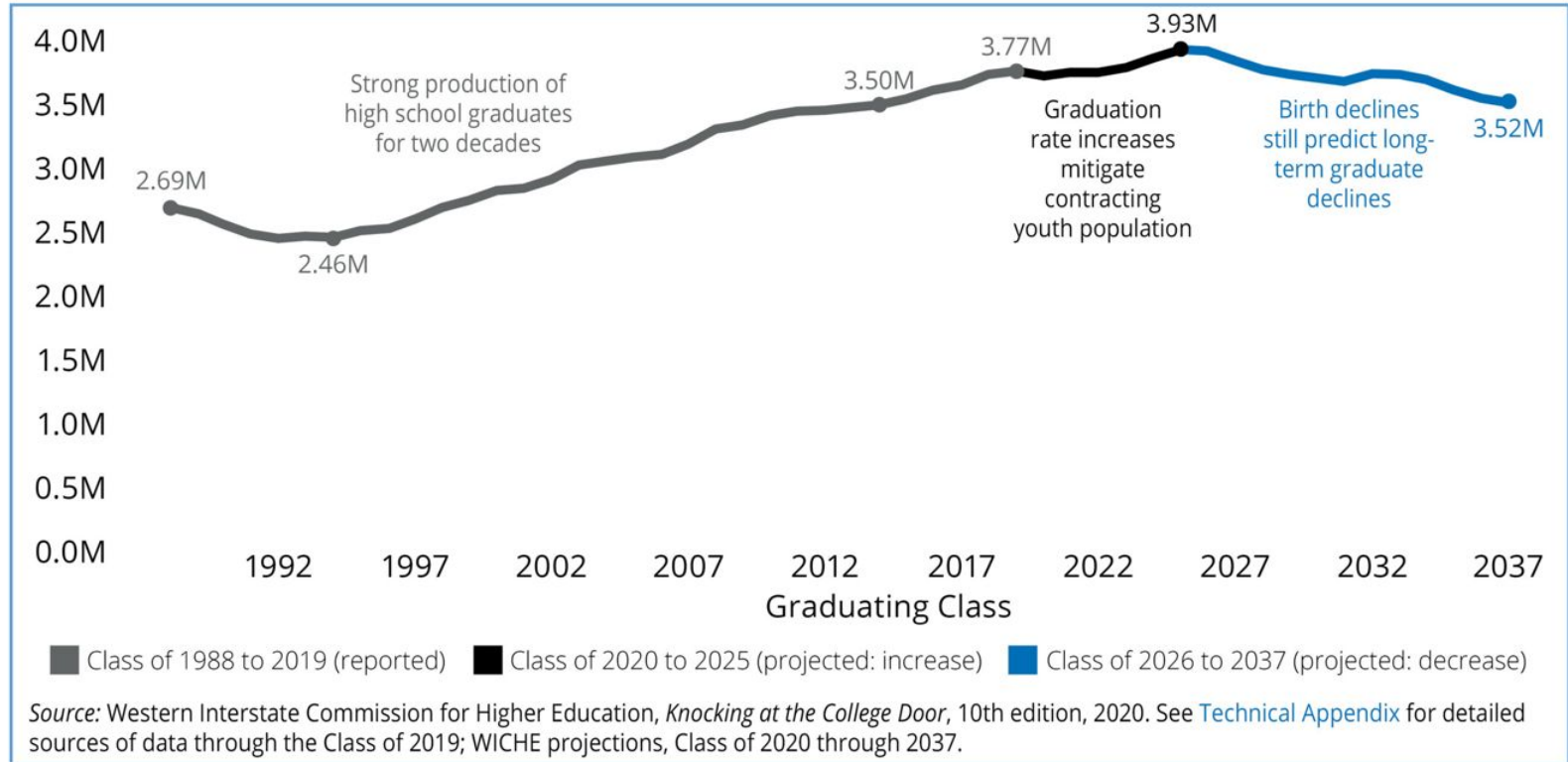
27%

We can do better. And we have a plan to get there.





Figure 1. Slowing Growth in Number of U.S. High School Graduates, then Decline (U.S. Total High School Graduates)





Potential Adult Learners in MI

2.9 million Michiganders without a degree have at least a moderate interest in going/returning to college.

75% of that 2.9 million have an estimated income below \$75,000

1.6 million of those are between the ages of 25 and 44

Nearly 430,000 of those between 25 and 44 have children at home

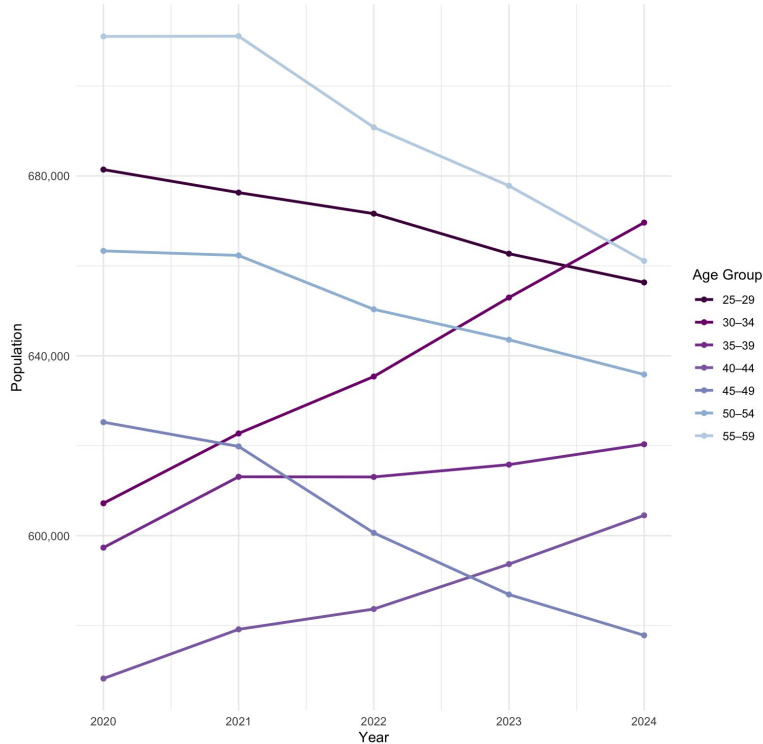
Source: CollegeAPP



What do we know about our
adult learners?

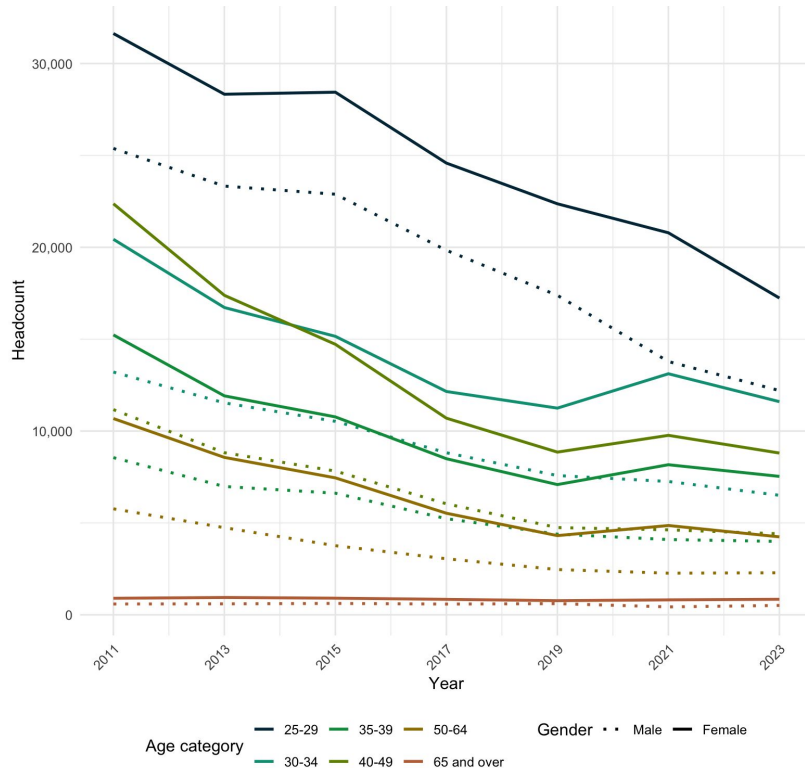
Michigan Adult Population by Age Group

Michigan Population Ages 25–64 by Age Group
ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2020–2024



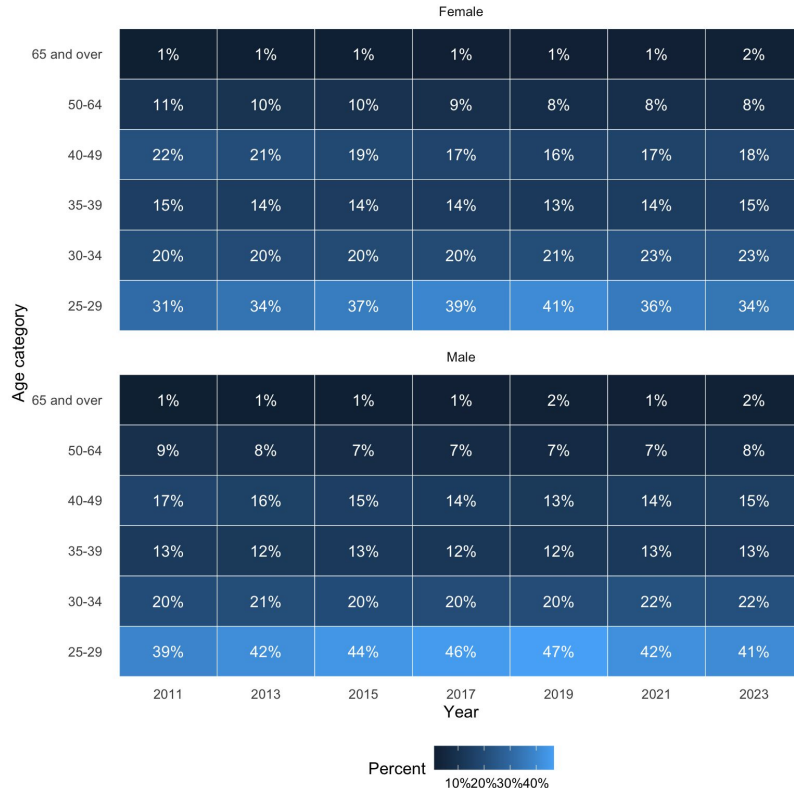
- Michigan's core working-age population (25–39) is shifting, with growth in the early 30s offset by declines in the late 20s.
- Older working-age cohorts (45–59) are steadily declining, signaling longer-term constraints on the adult learner pipeline.
- Near-term population stability masks meaningful age-cohort churn that affects who institutions can realistically serve.

Undergraduate Headcount by Age



- Undergraduate enrollment among adults has declined across nearly all age groups since 2011.
- Declines are most pronounced among adults ages 25–39, historically the largest adult learner cohorts.
- Female enrollment remains higher than male enrollment, but both have trended downward over time.
- Recent stabilization does not offset the longer-term contraction in adult undergraduate participation.

Age Distribution by Year and Gender



- Adult undergraduate enrollment is increasingly concentrated among younger adults (ages 25–34), for both women and men.
- Older adult age groups (40+) now make up a smaller share of total adult enrollment than a decade ago.
- Despite overall enrollment declines, the *age composition* of adult learners has shifted toward the youngest adult cohorts rather than older returners.



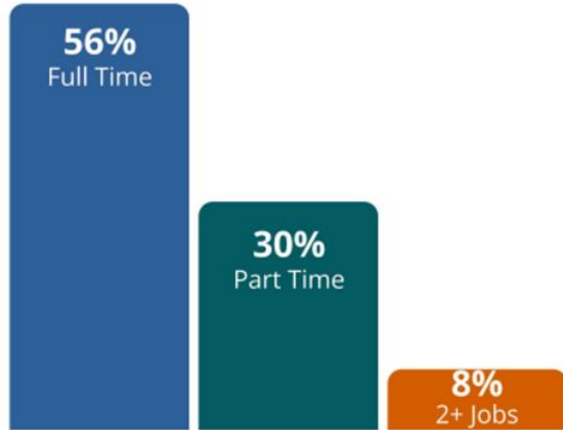
Barriers Adult Learners Face

- Personal Responsibilities
- Work Obligations
- Belonging & Confidence
- Navigating Higher Ed
- Access & Awareness of Support
- Financial
- Academic
- Mental Health



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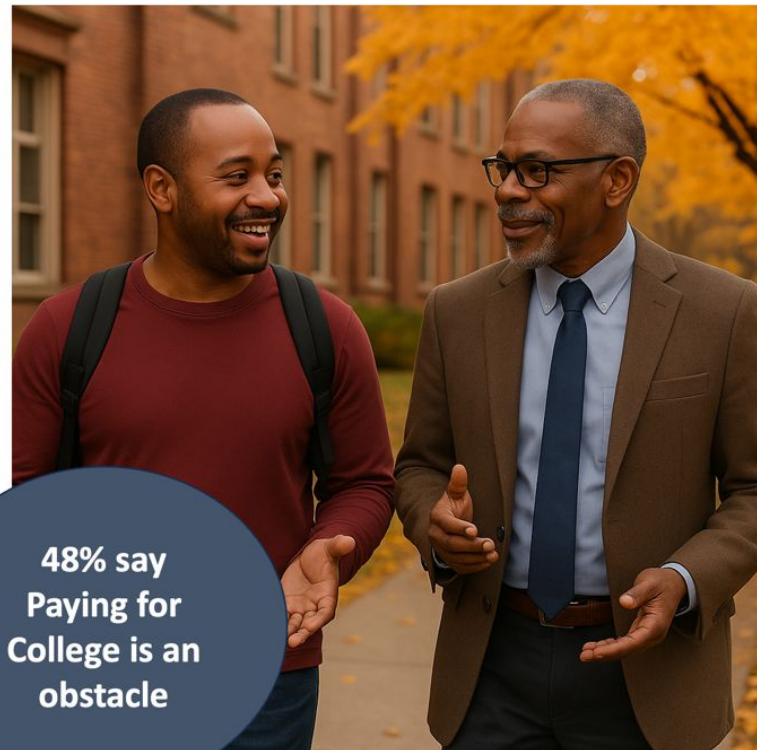
60%+ cite the need to balance full-time or multiple jobs.



Student Loan Debt and Paying for College are Major Concerns

37.5%
hold debt

40.2%
need support navigating loans



**48% say
Paying for
College is an
obstacle**

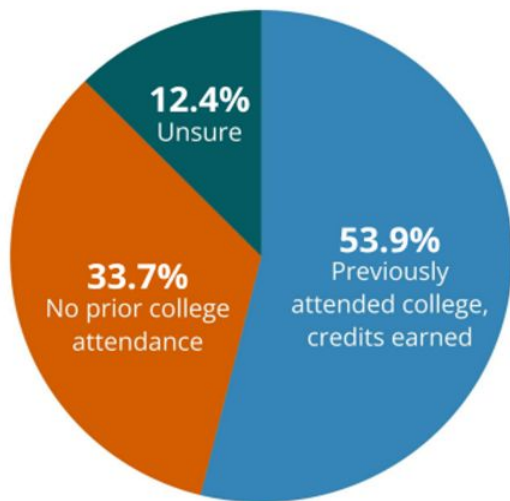


Supporting the basic needs of Reconnectors would help them overcome barriers to completion.

- 40% Mental/Physical Health
- 32% Caregiving for Children
- 31% Housing Insecurity
- 31% Food Insecurity
- 26% Physical Health
- 14% Transportation
- 9% Caregiving for Others

How do you support students' basic needs concerns?

More than 50% of Reconnectors have some college experience with no credential.



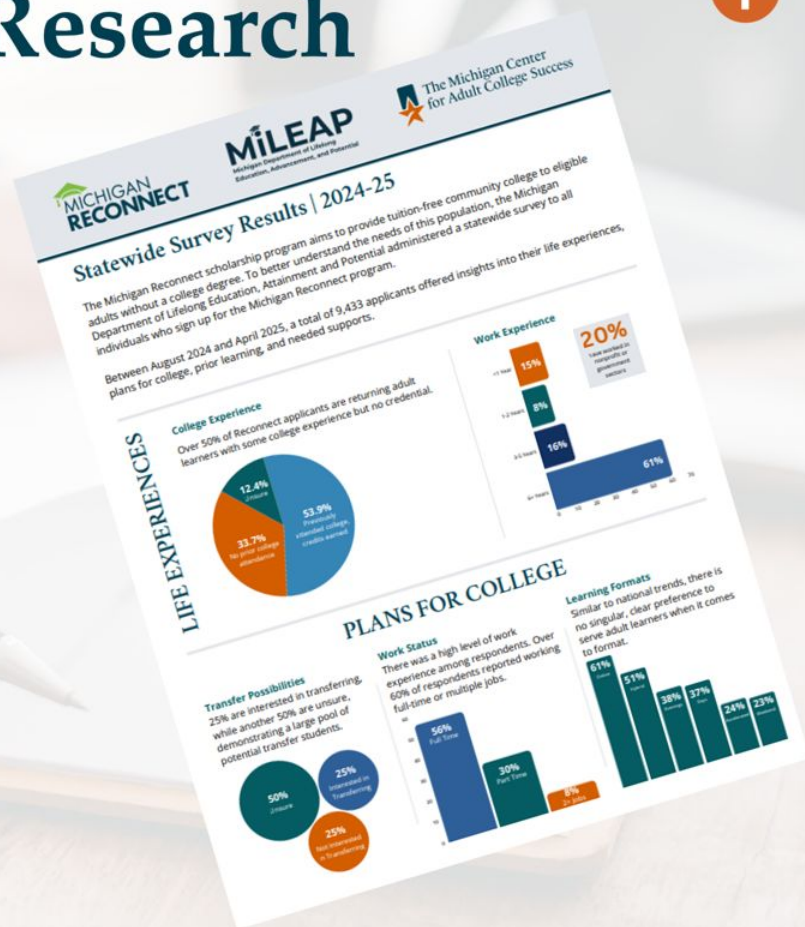
Plans for College

- Only 25% of applicants say they are interested in transferring to a four-year institution, while 50% are unsure. This presents a huge opportunity: up to 75% could potentially transfer with the right advising, credit pathways, and support.
 - Institutions should not wait for students to bring it up—advisors must lead.
- Adult learners prefer flexibility. Sixty-one percent want online classes, 51% prefer hybrid options, 38% prefer evening courses, and 37% want daytime classes.
 - There is no single preferred model—programs must offer multiple formats and design course schedules that align with working learners' lives and caregiving responsibilities.



Upcoming Research

- **New research and data on national norms**
 - Updated landscape analysis
 - Reconnect annual report findings
 - Best practice guides
- **Reconnect enrollment barriers**
 - Mixed methods study exploring the barriers of those who apply for Reconnect but never matriculate
- **New Dashboards**
 - Adult learner populations, labor market alignment, and better understanding of dropout/stopout mid-





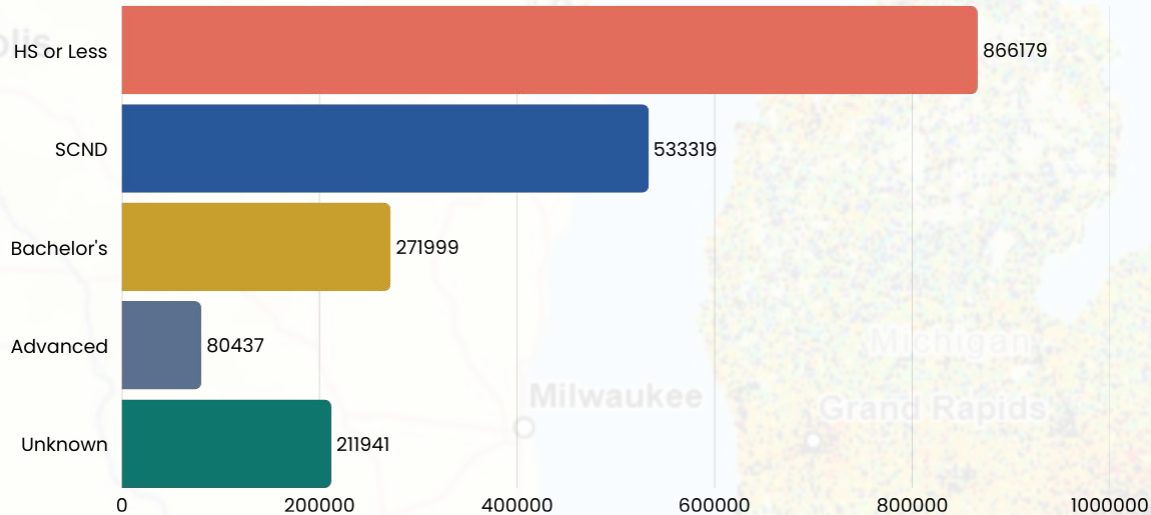
CollegeAPP Prospects for Michigan

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Furthering the data on Adult Learners in MI

1.96M Michigan Adults (age 18+) have a high intent to enroll in education or training within the next 2 years.

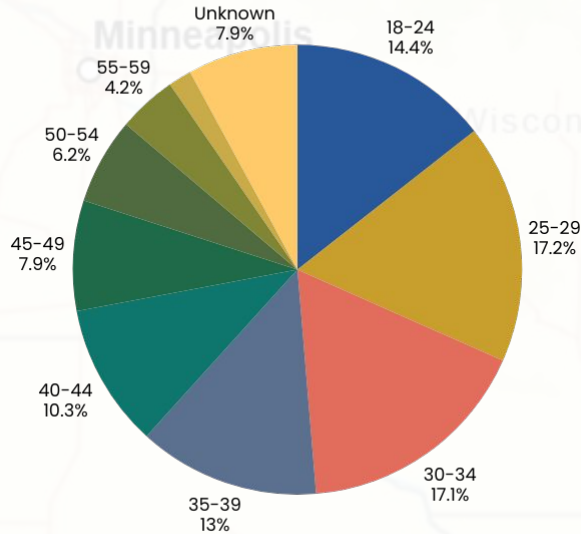
Current Education Attainment of High Intent Adults



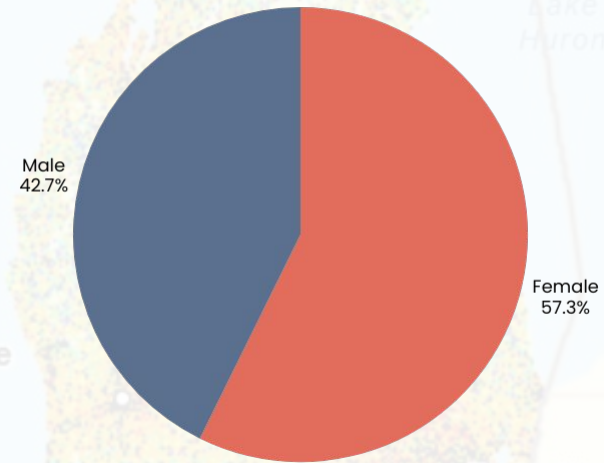
Furthering the data on Adult Learners in MI

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Distribution of Ages of Adults with High Intent



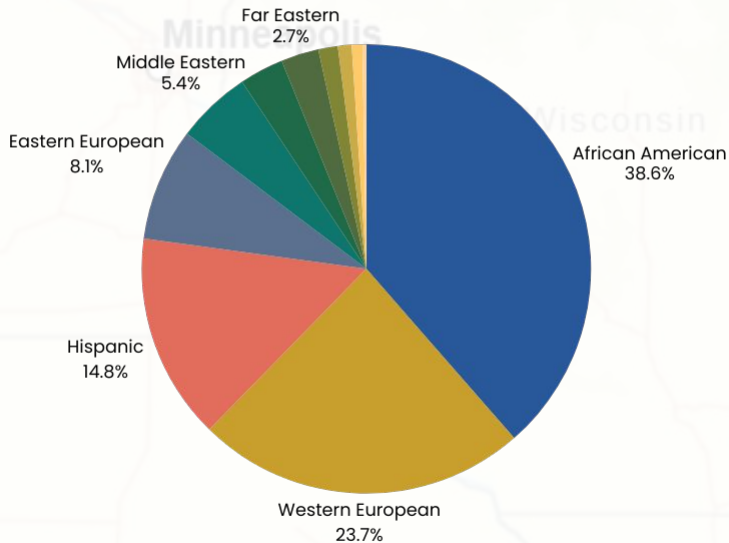
Distribution by Gender of Adults with High Intent



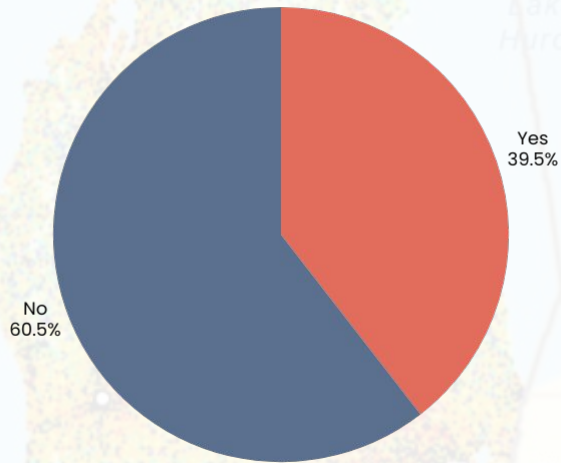
Furthering the data on Adult Learners in MI

1.96M Michigan Adults (age 18+) have a high intent to enroll in education or training within the next 2 years.

Distribution of Ethnic Identities of Adults with High Intent



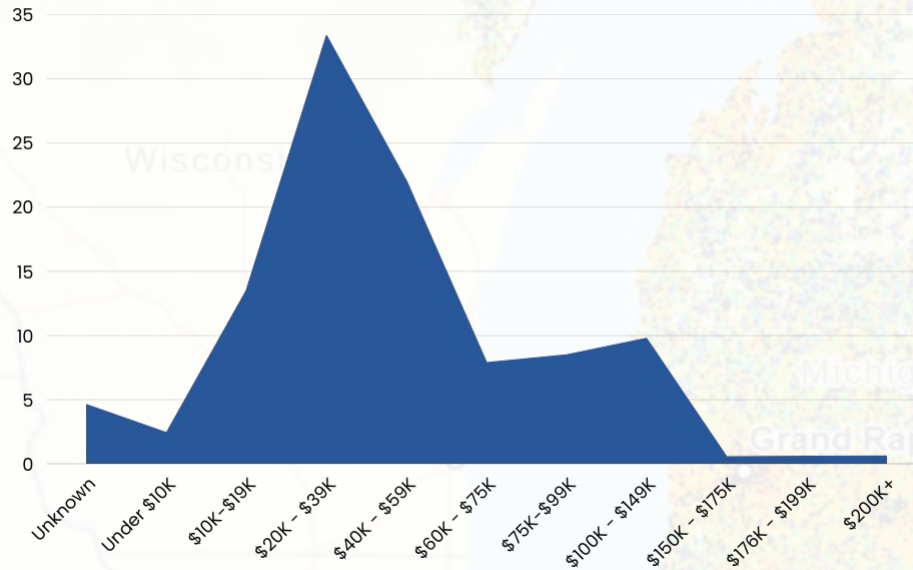
Presence of Children in Household



Focusing on High Intent Learners with SCND or Less

1.67M Michigan Adults (age 18+) with High Intent and Less than a Bachelor's Degree

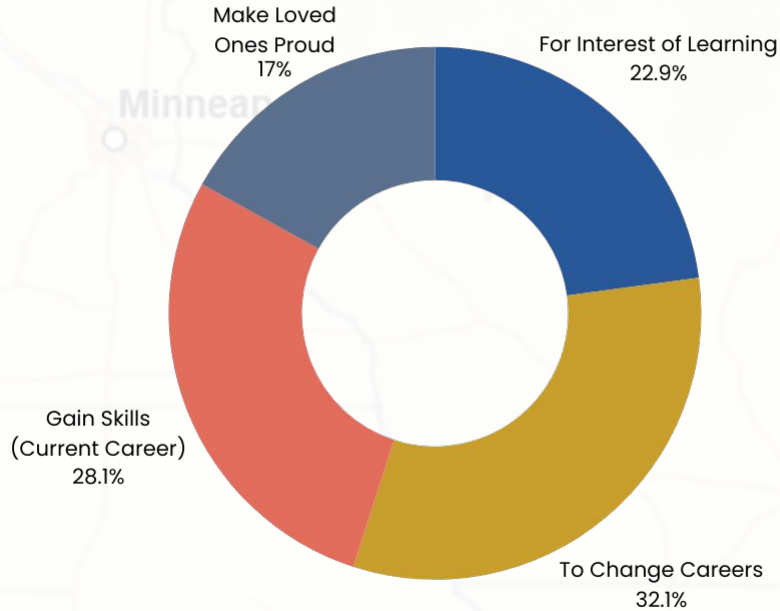
Distribution of Household Income of Adults with High Intent



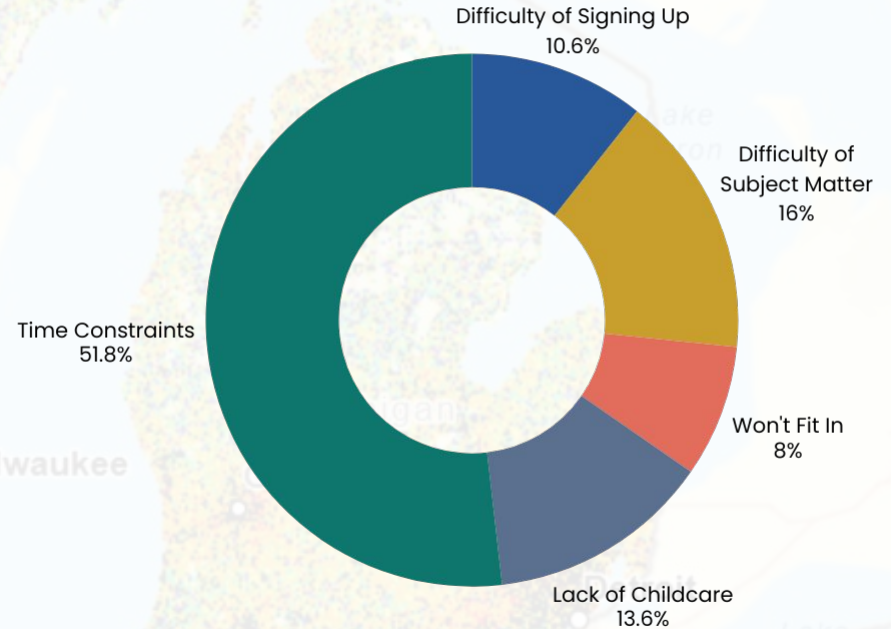
Understanding Motivations and Obstacles

of High Intent Adult Learners with SCND or Less

Main Motivations to Enroll

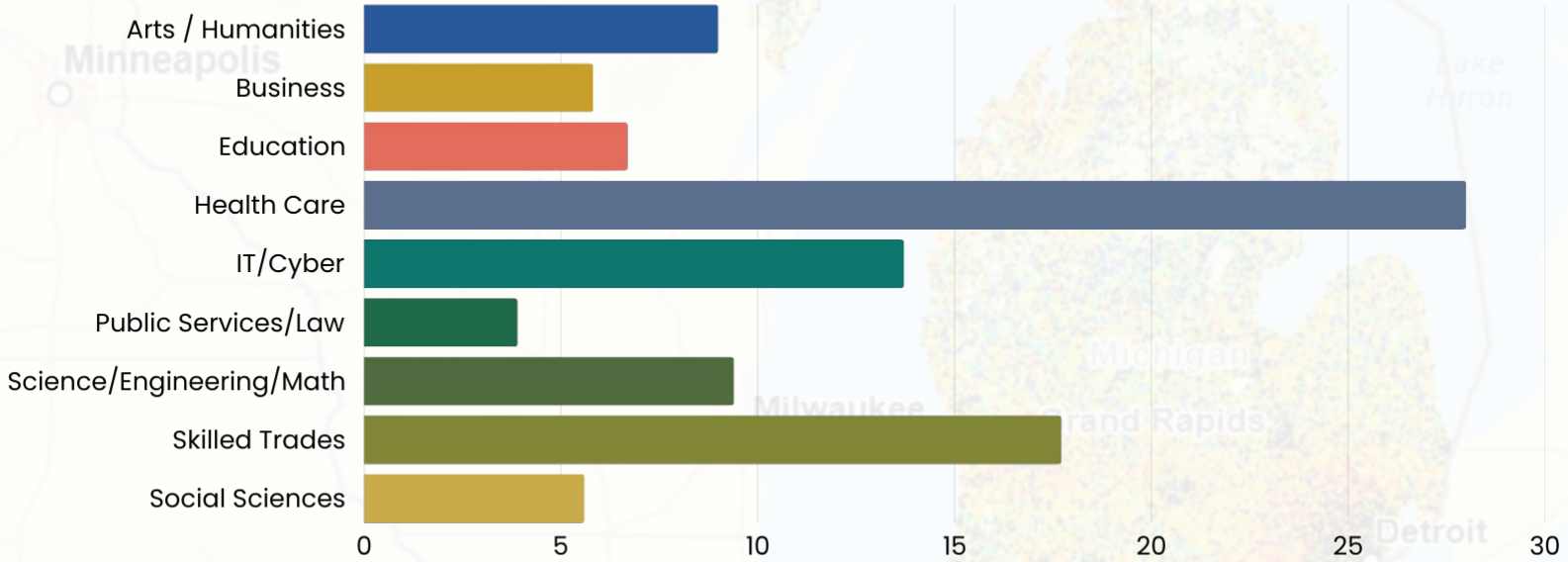


Main Obstacles (Beside Costs)



Focusing on High Intent Learners with SCND or Less

1.67M Michigan Adults (age 18+) with High Intent and Less than a Bachelor's Degree
Program Interest Areas



New to Michigan

Over **240,000** High Intent Adults (18+) with SCND or less have moved into Michigan within the past two years

24.5% are between 25 and 29 years old

Highest program area of interest: **Health Care**
(Followed by Skilled Trades and IT/Cyber)





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Questions?

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