

Coalition of Michigan Business and Education Leaders Awarded \$300,000 Grant to Lead State Scholars Initiative in Michigan

The Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence (MBLEE) will receive up to \$300,000 from the Center for State Scholars to lead a business and education pilot project designed to motivate students to complete a more rigorous set of academic courses in high school. Three districts in Michigan have been selected to be a part of the Michigan Scholars Initiative in the first year and the group hopes to expand the initiative in the next three years.

"All students, not just those going to college, need to complete a rigorous high school course of study because the skills necessary to be successful after high school have changed so dramatically in the past 10 years," said Jim Sandy, MBLEE Executive Director. "Math, science, communication skills and foreign language are increasingly in demand in our technology-based economy that reaches beyond Michigan's borders and around the world."

The Michigan effort is part of the national State Scholars Initiative introduced by President Bush in 2002 to strengthen students' academic course of study so they are better prepared for higher education and the world of work. The recommended course of study also reflects and supports the recommendations of the Lieutenant Governor's Report on Higher Education and Economic Growth, commonly known as the "Cherry Commission." The report highlights research that demonstrates the fact that rigorous coursework is the best predictor of college and workplace success. Students who complete Algebra 2 rather than stopping at geometry, for example, are nearly 40 percent more likely to complete two- and four-year college degrees.

The Cherry Commission has also recommended the creation of a more rigorous high school assessment in order to measure how well prepared students will be in the future.

"Students will need to take a more rigorous course of study that includes higher level courses in mathematics, science, English language arts and social studies in order to do well on the proposed Michigan Merit Exam," adds Sandy. "This has the potential to completely change how high schools in Michigan prepare students for future success."

The three districts selected are Saginaw City Schools, Howell Public Schools and Lansing Public Schools. These districts will work with the Michigan Scholars and business volunteers to increase the number of students completing math, science and foreign language courses in high school. Trained business volunteers will visit eighth grade classrooms in partner districts before students enroll in high school courses. These volunteers will discuss careers, wages and how employers value education. Business and education leaders will also work together to create academic supports, arrange scholarships and other rewards for students who successfully complete the program.

The project is expected to be rolled out to other school districts around the state. The Michigan Scholars Course of Study is closely aligned with the President's Council, State Universities of Michigan. The Michigan Scholars will also work to establish graduation standards and assist the Department of Education in preparation of a set of clear and consistent course content expectations.

MBLEE is the only statewide business organization that has education improvement as a sole focus. Members of the organization represent some of Michigan's largest employers, the Office of the Governor, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The State Scholar Initiative creates public/private partnerships to motivate high school students to take courses that prepare them for college and careers. Based on research that shows a direct relationship between challenging high school courses and college completion rates, State Scholars promotes a core course of study that emphasizes math, science, language arts and social studies. The Center for State Scholars is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) established in 2002 to increase the percentage of high school students completing a rigorous course of study. The Center receives funds from the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, US Department of education, and private sources. For more information, log on to <http://www.centerforstatescholars.org/>.

SOURCE: Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence

CONTACT: Jim Sandy, Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence,
+1-517-371-2100

Web site: <http://www.michamber.com/>
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