



# Michigan College Access Network Uses StudentTracker® for an Innovative Community Approach to Benchmarking and Improving College Access and Success

## MICHIGAN COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK

The **Michigan College Access Network (MCAN)** is a statewide organization that coordinates

initiatives for improving college readiness, enrollment, and completion in over 54 communities. They support the creation and sustainability of numerous community-based college access alliances called Local College Access Networks (LCANs). Since its inception, they organize a variety of cross-sector leaders around a singular vision: to increase the community's postsecondary education attainment level to 60 percent by the year 2025.

LCANs represent several different counties or regions in Michigan and include a team of leaders in the K-12, higher education, nonprofit, government, business, and philanthropy sectors. Together, they analyze local data to isolate the top priorities for improving college access in their communities.

Michigan has recently experienced a modest increase in their college attainment rate, from 35.6 to 37 percent of residents aged 24 to 64 possessing at least an associate degree. By using StudentTracker® to benchmark college enrollment and completion rates of students, MCAN enables their local alliances to assess and improve education initiatives working toward a common college completion agenda for Michigan residents.

### **Mobilizing Local Communities with Measurements of Success**

"It's fascinating to talk to principals in the state, who had absolutely no idea how their graduates did in college," said Brandy Johnson, Director of MCAN. "It's such an eye opener for them. They see a huge gap between their verified college success rate and what they perceived it to be, learning that 40 percent of them have a college degree versus 90 percent."

So far, 50 different LCANs in Michigan participate in StudentTracker to assess their students' outcomes in college, and the number continues to grow. In their state office, they've found StudentTracker to be a valuable data resource for training the local alliances and keeping them aligned towards a single objective. On a regular basis, MCAN is able to give presentations and provide a biweekly dashboard on FAFSA completion rates community report to their LCANs, keeping them informed of the latest outcome measures.

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In St. Clair County, they achieved a big win — over 2010-12, they've seen a 39 percent increase in Port Huron High School graduates enrolled in college. Historically, it was in the mid-2000s where they first determined the high need for improvement. The national census showed that the U.S. average of bachelor degree holders age 25 and above was 24 percent, and for St. Clair County, it was a low 12 percent. By 2008, after using StudentTracker to track college enrollment, they found 46 percent of their students were enrolling in college, and by 2011, this number had greatly increased to 64 percent. What seems most significant about this achievement is that it reflects the result of a community approach to assessing student outcomes through StudentTracker data and determining what has to change.

Prior to using this solution, MCAN did not have any other source for finding out how their high school seniors did after graduating. Now, they've been able to establish a baseline to benchmark schools and verify their results, which enables them to launch new LCANs to improve other regions in the state.

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*Brandy Johnson, Director of MCAN*

### **Effectively Managing College Access and Scholarships**

"Our goal is to help get students prepared for college and to also help those already in college succeed," said Renee Courier, Program Officer of the Bay Commitment College Access Network (BCCAN), which is one of the LCANs in Michigan who use StudentTracker.

In the Bay Area Community, they use StudentTracker's charts to ensure that they're making an impact and share with all of their area's school districts. Overall, StudentTracker simplifies tracking over 1,150 seniors each year from four school districts, including nine high schools. Like many other communities in their state, the school districts used to survey their high school seniors on their intentions in college. Unfortunately, results did not always match reality.

BCCAN manages 100 different scholarships. StudentTracker enables them to track students, so they can effectively manage the scholarship programs and make sure their awardees are still attending (according to the terms of the program).

“We partnered with the local intermediate school district to measure outcomes. It has helped us better inform students early on,” said Courier. “We can do more to support them in college, like helping out with FAFSA applications, scheduling, and keeping them motivated.”

BCCAN used historical data in StudentTracker to compare their 2006 class against more recent classes, looking at the rate of growth. Also, they were able to even look to see if a student had initially enrolled in a particular program, then ended up graduating from a different one. Some of the real-time data and charts provided on postsecondary progress and the number of students enrolled at the top college picks. For instance, with StudentTracker, they were able to learn that their local Delta College and Saginaw Valley State University were the top choices where students were enrolling.

“We were new to having hard data on our graduates, and it is a valuable asset to prove that our programs are working. It helps all of our high schools get on the same page by having the same data sets,” commented Courier.

### **Multiple Districts Work Together for Collective Impact**

At Muskegon Opportunity (another LCAN in Michigan), it is important to make sure all districts and schools are able to be represented in this statewide effort. They’ve been able to use StudentTracker to track college outcomes for twelve area districts, a total of 16 high schools including public, private, and charter schools.

“It is making a cultural difference, creating collective impact across their district. We can create action through

data, having goals in mind both at the student and the district level,” said Megan Byard, College Access Specialist at Muskegon.

Through providing programs like College Awareness Month and KnowHow2Go Road Show, an interactive presentation aimed at informing juniors about postsecondary education opportunities available to them, Muskegon Opportunity is expanding to improve outreach and counseling provided by their college advisement staff. By learning, for example, that the majority of their seniors are staying in state, they can better counsel them on admissions.

“It is a benefit to us to have all this rich data in one location, all the work done, and we are able to cross reference between schools,” said Byard. “What’s been great for us is tracking persistence data, whether our seniors are succeeding past their first year.”

Their Executive Committee meets once a month, using StudentTracker real-time data to inform their strategic plan for college readiness and assessing new student initiatives. With a mission to increase the number of college graduates, they have the community support and processes for efficiently tackling their biggest challenges. Also, the ability to download or share these reports through the StudentTracker Web tool makes it simple to share for all their districts, providing their superintendents with comprehensive and actionable data.

In the state of Michigan, a collaborative approach to college access and completion has proven to be a highly successful one. “Overall, we’ve found StudentTracker to be essential in goal setting and attacking specific problems, no matter where the school is at,” added Brandy Johnson.



Visit [www.studenttracker.org](http://www.studenttracker.org) to learn more or contact us at [highschools@studentclearinghouse.org](mailto:highschools@studentclearinghouse.org).

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