



MICHIGAN[™]
VIRTUAL

Improving Learning, Improving Lives



Strategic Plan: 2018-2020



***"Strategy is a coordinated set of actions designed to create and sustain a competitive advantage in achieving a nonprofit's mission."
- David La Piana***

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Dear Friends and Supporters,

2018 marks the 20th anniversary for *Michigan Virtual University*® (*Michigan Virtual*™). In our first 20 years we have witnessed unparalleled growth of new technology tools that leverage the power and reach of the Internet to address business, entertainment, education, and communication needs. The adoption of smart phones, mobile apps, and tablet devices has exploded worldwide, creating new opportunities, as well as disruptions for most organizations.

It is hard to believe that more than 10 years have passed since Michigan became the first state in the nation to adopt an online learning requirement for high school graduation. Likewise, young people today do not know a world without Google, YouTube, Facebook, and Wikipedia.

The next two decades will likely prove to be as turbulent, unpredictable, and exciting as the past 20 years. It is impossible to plan for the future with a high degree of certainty. However, not planning because it is a difficult task does not make sense for any organization. In an effort to guide our next three years, we took considerable time to conduct an environmental scan, listen to our stakeholders in new ways, and reflect on our vision, mission, and core strategies.

As part of our planning activities, we were able to answer a fundamental question regarding the purpose of *Michigan Virtual*. We are proud and passionate about our answer: Improving Learning, Improving Lives. This simple, yet powerful phrase defines our purpose as an organization. We believe the only way to accomplish this lofty undertaking is by working with Michigan's K-12 community in new and deeper ways. Working together, we can realize the full potential of technology to personalize learning for students and educators.

This document serves as a general roadmap for *Michigan Virtual's* Board of Directors and employees; it establishes a framework that reaffirms our vision, mission, values, goals, and areas of strategic focus. We look forward to growing our partnerships with policy leaders, school administrators, and teachers to ensure that every person can use digital learning to reach his or her full potential.



Jamey Fitzpatrick
President & CEO

WHO WE ARE

Michigan Virtual is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that supports the growth and development of digital learning in Michigan's K-12 schools. We initially served to demonstrate and document the benefits of online learning. More recently, we have invested significant time and resources to build awareness of, and access to, effective online learning opportunities for Michigan's K-12 schools and students.

OUR HISTORY

2018 marks *Michigan Virtual's* 20th year of leadership in online learning. The organization was established in 1998 to provide online workforce development services. Shortly thereafter, *Michigan Virtual* began serving Michigan's K-12 community with online instructional services upon the state's adoption of Public Act 230 of 2000. The act focused *Michigan Virtual* on developing online courses and advancing digital learning opportunities for Michigan's K-12 students. *Michigan Virtual* was awarded accreditation by the North Central Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation in 2005 and was re-accredited by AdvancED in 2010 and 2015.

Michigan Virtual has a long history of providing support services to help schools implement online and blended learning programs. This includes professional development programs for all Michigan K-12 education personnel, with both innovative online courses and face-to-face offerings. In this capacity building role, *Michigan Virtual* partners with schools to provide educator training, develop and implement blended learning models, and identify and implement best practices in technology integration.

Michigan Virtual also has a long history of working with Michigan's K-12 community and policy leaders to help make Michigan a leader in innovative education and forward-thinking policies. Early on, *Michigan Virtual* served primarily as a change agent when most school leaders and parents were not familiar with online learning. This work continues today with leadership from the *Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute®* (MVLRI®), which was formed in 2012 to expand Michigan's capacity to support new learning models, engage in active research to inform new policies in online and blended learning, and to strengthen the state's infrastructures for sharing best practices.

OUR MISSION

Advance K-12 digital learning and teaching through research, practice, and partnerships.

OUR VISION

Every person can use digital learning to reach his or her full potential.

OUR VALUES

Put Learners First

Learners are central to our purpose, mission, and vision; we *do what is best for students and practitioners*.

Act with Integrity

We are respectful, accountable, and honest with each other and our stakeholders to *build strong partnerships* as a strategic advantage.

Keep Learning

We listen to our stakeholders and pursue new knowledge to *advance the art of learning* through the application of technology.

Create New Opportunities

We actively seek new opportunities to *develop value-added solutions* and build partnerships that improve learning.

Pursue Excellence

We take pride in our work and provide valuable and effective products and services that *deliver best-in-class outcomes*.



"Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline."

- Jim Collins



SOLUTIONS AND IMPACT

Today, *Michigan Virtual* is a national leader in the research, development, and provision of online and blended learning solutions. Our Student Learning Services team serves Michigan's education community, providing online courses for students. Our Professional Learning Services team provides professional development for educators in face-to-face programs and through our online Professional Learning Portal. We also provide research and thought leadership through the *MVLRI*.

STUDENT LEARNING SERVICES

The Student Learning Services team provides students in grades 6-12 with virtual learning opportunities. Our online courses challenge students who want to learn in a different way, using the latest in technology to explore core and high-interest elective courses in a flexible, personalized environment. All of our online high school and middle school courses are taught by highly-qualified, Michigan-certified teachers who continually engage in rich professional development programs. *Michigan Virtual* does not award credit or diplomas, but students receive a completion certificate that local schools recognize and use to award credit and diplomas.

With a collection of more than 200 online courses, *Michigan Virtual* offers school partners a variety of supplemental curricular options, including seven world languages, 23 Advanced Placement courses, and electives ranging from computer science to health. Each course is carefully evaluated to ensure a high level of quality and effectiveness, and *Michigan Virtual* course completion rates are routinely higher than most other providers. Today, our enrollment levels exceed 25,000 annually and we draw students from more than 500 schools across Michigan. We are also working on collaborative partnerships to enable district-wide virtual learning programs and to expand our offerings for middle schools.



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SERVICES

Michigan Virtual's Professional Learning Services team provides training to advance educator effectiveness and to facilitate the integration of digital resources into the classroom. We are a leader in blended and online learning and mentor training, developing strategic partnerships and innovative methods that work to support and improve the educational system through an intentional focus on statewide support for professional learning.

Our Professional Learning Services team is dedicated to creating and providing robust, high-quality professional learning experiences. We are building professional learning programs with statewide education organizations, Intermediate School Districts, local education agencies, and the Michigan Department of Education. These programs serve educators across Michigan, from district-provided professional development options to alternative certification programs to individual professional learning opportunities.

To that end, our staff are engaged in building innovative, scalable, and sustainable professional learning opportunities for Michigan educators. Our solutions leverage the use of online and blended learning delivery models to personalize professional learning, provide experiences requiring participants to demonstrate competencies, allow the education community to achieve new efficiencies, and provide more job-embedded professional learning opportunities.

MICHIGAN VIRTUAL LEARNING RESEARCH INSTITUTE

MVLRI is expanding Michigan's capacity to support new learning models through active research that informs new policies in online and blended learning. Research is conducted throughout the state, nation, and internationally to incorporate a global perspective.

Each year, *MVLRI* staff reports a summary of *Michigan Virtual* specific findings in its Report to the Legislature. Further research, including focus groups of teachers, administrators, and other school officials, provides continuous feedback regarding the effectiveness of education policy as it is implemented in districts across Michigan. The effectiveness of all online learning programs in Michigan is tracked in *MVLRI's* annual Effectiveness Report. Many times this report uncovers important aspects of online learning implementation that are not working, once again informing policy to ensure that Michigan's students are receiving the best online education possible.

MVLRI's research and the research of others in the field of K-12 online and blended learning underpins many of *MVLRI's* resources that assist schools with reflecting upon and improving their virtual offerings. Examples of such resources include a Student Guide to Online Learning, a Parent Guide to Online Learning, and a guide for those who provide mentoring support to online students.



MARKET SITUATION AND OPPORTUNITIES

Online learning in Michigan, as delivered by *Michigan Virtual* and others, has exploded in recent years. The number of K-12 students taking at least one virtually delivered course jumped from just over 36,000 in 2010-11 to nearly 91,000 in 2015-16. During the same time period, the total number of virtual courses taken by Michigan K-12 students soared from nearly 90,000 to more than 453,000. In 2011, approximately 650 schools had at least one student take a virtual course. By 2015-16, more than 1,000 Michigan schools had at least one student enroll in an online course.

This growth highlights the success that *Michigan Virtual* and others have had in promoting online learning across Michigan, yet underscores the work that still needs to be done. Thirty-seven percent of Michigan districts did not have a single student take a virtual class in 2015-16, and only 6% of all K-12 students in the state took a virtual course. The statewide completion rate for all virtual enrollments has dropped from 66% in 2010-11 to 58% in 2015-16. So while online course participation has increased, it is still a small share of the overall market. Further, educational outcomes have declined, leaving opportunity for improvements in quality and online learning program implementation. This, combined with statewide efforts to make Michigan a leading education state, provides new opportunities for *Michigan Virtual* to advance K-12 digital learning and teaching through research, practice, and partnerships.

ASSESSING THE MARKET

This strategic plan began with an extensive research and stakeholder outreach effort. This was designed to enhance our understanding of demographic and economic conditions, education policies and priorities, competitors and technology trends, stakeholder wants and needs, and views and perceptions of *Michigan Virtual*.

We interviewed or surveyed more than 425 individual stakeholders, including *Michigan Virtual* teachers, staff, students, and board members; the leadership and membership of leading educational organizations such as the Education Alliance of Michigan, the Virtual School Leadership Alliance, MASA, MAISA, MEMPSA, MASSP; and other leaders in education across Michigan. We also consulted research and data on technology trends, K-12 enrollment projections, state and national economic forecasts, education policies and priorities, and the competitive landscape.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- It is expected that the Michigan economy will see modest growth in coming years. This will help state revenues remain relatively stable, but it is not expected that there will be significant growth in tax revenues available for increased spending on programs including K-12 education.
- The Michigan Department of Education's Top 10 in 10 strategic plan was developed with input from a broad group of stakeholders and is expected to remain a guiding document, along with the state's ESSA plan and the 21st Century Education Commission's report "The Best Education System for Michigan's Success," in coming years. Education priorities at the federal level are not as clear, though we expect an expanded focus on choice and options for parents and their students.
- Technology infrastructure is built out to extend high-speed Internet access to the majority of schools and citizens in Michigan, though in-home access is still not fully available in some lower income or rural areas.
- Users of online programs and websites have come to expect instant access and user-friendly designs and interfaces that they can access on any device.
- There is growing acceptance and use of online courses across Michigan, though there remains a need to identify and demonstrate best practices, communicate benefits, and ensure quality standards are adopted to improve student outcomes.
- There is growing competition among online course providers, with many focusing on low-cost solutions that are appealing to budget-constrained schools, but that may not adhere to best practices and quality standards that are demonstrated to improve student outcomes.
- The false perception persists among some that *Michigan Virtual* is a for-profit organization that competes with traditional schools.
- Poverty and related issues, including mental health and behavior, were cited by educators from across the state as being the most significant student-related issues facing their schools.
- The need for, and adoption of, online and blended professional development will increase as educators increasingly see the value of integrating digital resources into their traditional classrooms.
- While educators see the value of integrating digital resources into their traditional classrooms, many do not know how or where to start. Most schools and districts also lack the expertise to develop and implement blended learning programs on their own.



ADVANTAGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The market assessment illustrates that new opportunities await, and this strategic plan is focused on aligning our strengths and competitive advantages to advance K-12 digital learning and teaching through research, practice, and partnerships. Our competitive advantages are partners, people, and position.

PARTNERS

With nearly 20 years of leadership in online learning, *Michigan Virtual* maintains an unmatched network of partnerships with customers, thought leaders, education organizations, policy makers, and content providers. We are uniquely positioned at the intersection of content development, instructional delivery, research and policy development, and technological advancement. From here, we can build and strengthen partnerships to benefit Michigan's educational community and improve outcomes for all of our stakeholders.

PEOPLE

Michigan Virtual is comprised of nationally-recognized leaders in instruction, curriculum development, research, education policy, technology, and nonprofit operations with diverse experience and backgrounds. Our people display technical excellence in their areas of focus as well as a passion for advancing learning and teaching through research, practice, and partnerships. We are constantly learning and building on newly-acquired knowledge to develop solutions to the challenges facing K-12 education in Michigan. We are committed to excellence and that starts with our people.

POSITION

Michigan Virtual, thanks to the foresight of Michigan policy makers, is uniquely positioned as a leader in all aspects of online learning, from course development and student instruction, to professional development and blended learning strategies, to research and policy advancement. We do not operate as a school district, higher education institution, state agency, or for-profit business. We play a unique role in working closely with stakeholders from all sectors to identify challenges, develop solutions, advance policy, and research best practices. In a market with a growing private sector presence, our 501(c)(3) nonprofit status allows us to make business decisions that prioritize learner outcomes over profits. We take pride in doing what's best for learners while making efficient use of financial resources. As an integrator, we partner with public and private organizations to grow healthy ecosystems for online and blended learning that positively impact student achievement.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

"Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work."

- Peter Drucker

Michigan Virtual will build partnerships and remain a leader in digital education over the coming years by pursuing goals focused on service, growth, and efficiency.

GOAL 1: DELIVER AN AWESOME EXPERIENCE

Our stakeholders will experience positive relationships with us as we provide highly satisfying interactions and outcomes. Success will be measured by the share of stakeholders that are highly satisfied with their interactions and outcomes with *Michigan Virtual*.

STRATEGIC FOCUS

- ***Remove impediments to highly satisfying relationships between Michigan Virtual and stakeholders.***
While partnerships are one of our competitive advantages, we can do more to ensure our stakeholders find it easy and rewarding to collaborate with *Michigan Virtual*. To do so, we will better communicate our services and value proposition, focus more on the user experience, improve post-sales support, and modify policies and procedures that may be unnecessarily complicated.

- ***Demonstrate authentic interests in, and thankfulness for, our relationships with stakeholders.***
We value each and every opportunity to work with educators, students, policy makers, and other stakeholders. Our work is not transactional, and the creation of value and positive outcomes is significantly influenced by the emotional investment of those involved. We will strive to exhibit how much we value and appreciate our stakeholder relationships to deepen these investments, build strong relationships, and work more passionately together to solve persistent challenges in K-12 education across Michigan.

- ***Be the employer of choice in digital learning to attract and retain great employees.***
Our employees, our people, are one of our competitive advantages. Our ability to deliver on our mission and realize our vision is in the hands of our employees, so we will work to attract and retain the best of the best through staff development, maintaining a positive company culture, and rewarding hard work.

- ***Provide products and services that are effective, easy to use, and accessible to all learners regardless of disability.***

A learner using a *Michigan Virtual* product or service will be able to intuitively access and advance through our educational content with a focus on understanding the content and not on navigating through the material or troubleshooting a course element. All learners, regardless of disability, will be able to use our products and services. Our web-based content will be built using World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) standards for design and accessibility, available across a range of browsers and devices, built with the user experience in mind, and incorporate best practices in curriculum development and student instruction.



GOAL 2: SCALE AND GROW SUCCESS

We will be recognized as the partner of choice in Michigan's K-12 community for providing statewide solutions that improve learning and tackle critical challenges. Success will be measured in terms of our ability to serve more schools across Michigan with both student learning and professional learning services.

STRATEGIC FOCUS

- ***Build partnerships to encourage lasting business relationships.***
Our greatest successes come when we work closely with partners over extended periods, researching and developing comprehensive solutions to both student and professional learning challenges. We recognize that strength comes in numbers and that we will better achieve our mission when working with partners across the state to help drive their success, which translates into our success. These partnerships will be built through customer appreciation, relationship-based marketing, and enhanced efforts to gather and act on the voice of the customer.
- ***Continually improve existing products and services to align with customer needs and expectations.***
Our products and services are designed to provide value to users, and the greatest value is delivered through meeting and exceeding customer expectations. This begins with understanding that the challenges faced by our customers are evolving over time. As such, we will commit to the continuous improvement of our existing products and services such that they continue to provide our customers with a comprehensive and valuable solution.
- ***Develop new products and services to address critical challenges facing K-12 education in Michigan.***
Technology and education face continual change driven by a number of factors. This creates an environment filled with new challenges and opportunities. We will stay attuned to these challenges through research and stakeholder outreach and develop new solutions with our partners across the state.
- ***Research and communicate the value of online learning and related best practices to increase acceptance and adoption.***
While awareness and acceptance of online learning have grown significantly under *Michigan Virtual's* leadership, there remains significant opportunity for further adoption across Michigan. Our team will advance as a leader in researching and developing best practices, as well as demonstrating effectiveness and partnering in implementation to build capacity throughout Michigan's K-12 education system. In doing so we will scale both our success, the success of our partners, and most importantly the success of learners throughout Michigan.



GOAL 3: BE AN EFFECTIVE FINANCIAL STEWARD

We will generate value by effectively using the resources afforded us. Success will be measured by increased efficiencies, growth in funds, and our ability to invest in products and services that advance our mission as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

STRATEGIC FOCUS

- ***Refine internal operations to deliver more value to stakeholders.***
Our ability to deliver value for customers requires us to develop affordable and timely solutions to their challenges. We will do so by focusing on internal efficiencies that translate to improved stakeholder experiences and maximize the value we provide with the resources we are afforded.
- ***Increase impacts from our products and services.***
Our existing products and services have demonstrated effectiveness and a base of loyal customers, yet there are many learners across the state not yet aware of, or using, *Michigan Virtual*. We can enhance value and generate more positive impacts through wider adoption of our current services and products. We will do so through new partnerships, offering more flexible solutions, and through better communication and demonstration of our value.
- ***Pursue grants and partnerships to build capacity and generate value for our partners.***
We can expand our expertise and positive impacts by pursuing grants and other funding for projects that build capacity for *Michigan Virtual* and our partners. We will seek partnerships with public and private sector entities that are committed to improving K-12 education, extending access to digital learning, and developing a 21st-century workforce. We will do so through relationship building, applying for targeted grant opportunities, and demonstrating our positive impacts.
- ***Strategically invest in new products and services that advance technology in education.***
Our development of new products and services to address critical K-12 challenges in Michigan will be done using processes that emphasize financial sustainability, user feedback, scalability, and an increased speed to market. We will focus on opportunities that will advance our mission over the long-term, and that can be financially self-sustaining such that additional funds can be available for investing in solutions to new challenges.



CONCLUSION

Today's digital-learning landscape could not have been predicted when *Michigan Virtual* was founded in 1998, or even when our last strategic plan was developed in 2014. Some areas of digital learning have been frustratingly slow to advance, while others have perhaps grown too quickly at the expense of effectiveness and student outcomes.

This plan was intentionally designed with an unpredictable landscape in mind. The plan printed here is static, but the actions to implement the plan are dynamic. Tactics for each strategy and goal will be evaluated at least annually to stay aligned with ever-evolving challenges and opportunities. However, the goals, when taken together, provide a formula for success regardless of how the landscape evolves. We will provide an awesome experience for internal and external stakeholders alike, build partnerships to scale and grow our success, and operate efficiently and as good stewards of our resources to ensure our financial viability. Doing this, in alignment with our mission to advance K-12 digital learning and teaching through research, practice, and partnerships will bring us to a point where our vision (every person can use digital learning to reach his or her full potential) is a reality.

We are excited as we move forward in our mission, and grateful to the countless individuals who participated in the strategic planning process. Specifically, we thank Stephen Y. Nose and S Y N Associates for facilitating our steering committee meetings and the strategic planning process. We also thank each member of our steering committee, our board of directors, and all of the external stakeholders who so generously shared their time and knowledge during our stakeholder feedback process.

STRATEGIC PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE OF MICHIGAN VIRTUAL STAFF:

Peter Arashiro
Paula Coulier
Jamie DeWitt
Gina Engler-Burton
Joe Freidhoff
Andrea McKay
Thomas Soria

Raymond Batt
Sarah Cook
Ken Dirkin
Jamey Fitzpatrick
Tracy Giesecking
David Myers (retired)
Scott Watkins

Tamara Bashore-Berg
Anne Craft
Christopher Ebsch
Kristin Flynn
Royce Humm
Shannon Smith
David Young

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Michigan Virtual is governed by an independent board of directors that shares our organizational goals and aspirations as we strive to improve education and improve lives. The board is comprised of leaders from business, industry, higher education, K-12 education, and state government.



John L. King, Chair
Professor, School of Information
University of Michigan



Robert L. Filka, Vice Chair
CEO, Michigan Association of
Home Builders



Jamey Fitzpatrick
President & CEO
MVU



Brian Broderick, Audit
Committee Chair
Executive Director
Michigan Association of
Non-public Schools



Darrell Burks, Secretary/
Treasurer
Former Partner
PricewaterhouseCoopers



Prentiss Brown, J.D.
Attorney
Prentiss M. Brown, PC



John Butler
Senior Vice President
Human Resources
& Shared Services
Consumers Energy



Gretchen Dziadosz
Executive Director
Michigan Education
Association



Daniel F. Kiblawi
President & CEO
Egelhof Controls Corporation



James Lorensen
President
Gogebic Community College



Neil Marchuk
Executive Vice President
Human Resources
TRW Automotive



Barbara Markle, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean of K-12
Outreach,
College of Education
Michigan State University



Kevin Oxley
Superintendent
Jackson County
Intermediate
School District



Dr. Rossi Ray-Taylor
President & CEO
Ray.Taylor and
Associates, LLC



Brian J. Whiston
Superintendent of
Public Instruction
Michigan Department
of Education



Wendy Zdeb
Executive Director
Michigan Association of
Secondary School Principals



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www.MichiganVirtual.org
Toll-free: 888.532.5806

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