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MiCHEP Receives \$2.6 Million Investment to Expand Higher Education Opportunities for Incarcerated Students Across Michigan

Ascendium Education Group grant will strengthen statewide collaboration, student supports, and program capacity

Lansing, Mich. – August 31, 2026 – The Michigan Consortium for Higher Education in Prison (MiCHEP) has received a \$2.6 million investment from Ascendium Education Group to expand and strengthen higher education opportunities for incarcerated students across Michigan.

The three-year grant will support MiCHEP's growth from a coordinating consortium into a statewide support organization focused on improving student success, strengthening partnerships, sharing resources, and building sustainable infrastructure for higher education in prison programs.

"Michigan's colleges and universities have demonstrated a deep commitment to providing incarcerated learners with high-quality educational opportunities," said Molly Lasagna, Director at Ascendium Education Group. "This investment will help MiCHEP build the statewide infrastructure these programs need to collaborate, improve student outcomes, and create more durable pathways through college and beyond."

Today, 12 Michigan colleges and universities provide degree programs inside correctional facilities, serving more than 1,300 incarcerated students pursuing degrees in fields including business, theology, social work, liberal arts, and other disciplines. Students complete rigorous coursework, collaborate with faculty, conduct research, and meet the same academic expectations as students on traditional college campuses.

Demand for these programs continues to grow, with more than 2,000 prospective students currently waiting for the opportunity to enroll.

This investment recognizes that higher education in prison is not only an educational opportunity, but also an investment in public safety, workforce development, and stronger communities. Graduates return to their communities with the skills, confidence, and experience needed to contribute as employees, mentors, parents, and leaders.

The Ascendium investment will help MiCHEP and its member institutions:

- Expand academic and reentry supports for students;
- Develop shared systems to measure outcomes and strengthen programs;
- Provide professional development and resources for faculty and staff; and
- Elevate the experiences and perspectives of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students.

Research has shown that participation in postsecondary education while incarcerated is associated with improved employment outcomes after release and substantially reduced rates of recidivism. The benefits extend beyond individual students, strengthening families, communities, and Michigan's workforce.

“Michigan's higher education in prison programs have demonstrated what is possible when institutions work together toward a shared goal,” said Jeff Abernathy, President of MiCHEP. “With this new investment, MiCHEP will continue expanding collaboration, strengthening student support, and advancing a statewide model for educational opportunity and success.”

About the Michigan Consortium for Higher Education in Prison (MiCHEP)

The [Michigan Consortium for Higher Education in Prison](#) (MiCHEP) brings together colleges and universities, correctional partners, advocates, and stakeholders committed to expanding access to quality higher education for incarcerated students throughout Michigan. MiCHEP works to strengthen collaboration, share resources, and advance student success through education.