



# MICHIGAN MERIT CURRICULUM Flexibility Conference Survey Executive Summary

## Attendees and Respondents

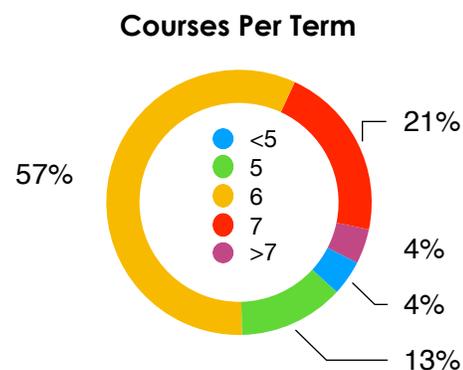
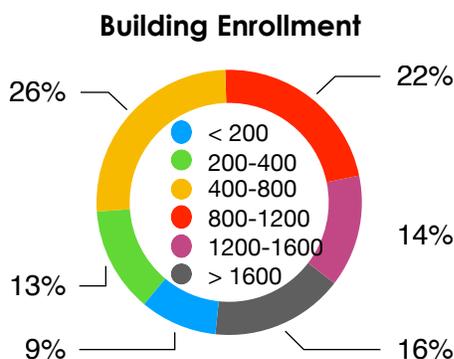
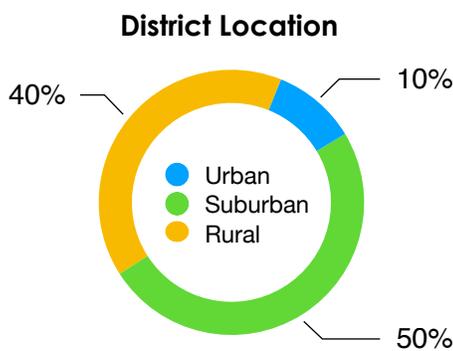
295 people registered for the MMC Flexibility Conference, including 25 staff from MDE who came to offer their expertise and answer attendees questions. Attendees represented 165 different buildings and at least 38 different ISDs across the state from Gogebic-Ontonagon to Monroe.

Conference attendees were asked to complete two different surveys. Prior to the conference, attendees were asked to answer questions by building about the current situation in their schools including things like course failure rates the usage of personal curricula as well as some demographic information. During the conference, attendees were asked individually about potential changes to the MMC law or additional supports.

This white paper summarizes the key findings from each of those surveys and includes a brief discussion of the methodology used in compiling results.

## Pre-Conference Survey

In total, MASSP collected 117 responses to the 13 question pre-conference survey. Based on the survey results, responses reflect a demographic breakdown that includes a wide variety of perspectives in terms of district location, enrollment, and schedule structure (see detailed charts) and included districts from at least 38 different ISD regions. Additionally, based on comments offered in open-ended survey questions, respondents included traditional public and charter schools, brick-and-mortar and cyber schools, career and technical education programs and more traditional high schools.



# Key Findings

In addition to demographic information, the survey asked about courses with the highest failure rates, how buildings handle personal curriculums, and whether teacher shortage impacted a district's ability to deliver the MMC. Our analysis broke down each of these questions using the available demographic information to look for variation and trends.

## Course Failure

Respondents were asked which courses in their buildings had the highest failure rates and what those failure rates were if they knew. Of the 117 total respondents, 108 answered this question and, while few provided their actual failure rates, the course names listed provided a consistent picture of where students are struggling across the state.

Of particular note:

- Three of the five courses identified as having the highest failure rate are mathematics courses (algebra I, geometry, and algebra II).
- Three of the five courses identified as having the highest failure rate are courses traditionally taught in 9th grade (algebra I, biology, and English 9).
- Five of the top seven courses identified as having the highest failure rate are STEM courses.

The rankings change somewhat when disaggregated by demographic groups, but these trends hold reasonably consistent regardless of disaggregation. For example, in rural districts the seven courses identified as having the highest failure rate are (in order): Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, English 9, and Biology/Chemistry/World Language (all tied). For urban districts, those courses are: Algebra II, Algebra I, English 9/Geometry/World Language (all tied), and Biology/Chemistry/Physics (all tied). And suburban districts: Algebra II, Algebra I, Geometry, Biology, Chemistry/English 9 (tied), and World History.

Course Failure by Course Title

	%	Rank
<b>Algebra II</b>	51.3%	1
<b>Algebra I</b>	44.4%	2
<b>Geometry</b>	28.2%	3
<b>Biology</b>	22.2%	4
<b>English 9</b>	17.9%	5
<b>Chemistry</b>	17.1%	6
<b>World Language</b>	13.7%	7
<b>World History</b>	9.4%	8
<b>English 11</b>	6.0%	9
<b>Physics</b>	6.0%	9
<b>English 10</b>	5.1%	11
<b>U.S. History</b>	5.1%	11
<b>Physical Science</b>	2.6%	13
<b>English 12</b>	0.9%	14
<b>Government</b>	0.9%	14

## Personal Curriculum

The percentage of students with a personal curriculum (PC) in Michigan is consistently low across all buildings represented by these data. This seems particularly true for rural respondents who more frequently indicated that 10% or less of their student body had PCs

% of Students with PCs by District Type

	Urban	Suburban	Rural	TOTAL
<b>0-10%</b>	75.0%	70.7%	83.0%	76.1%
<b>10-20%</b>	25.0%	22.4%	12.8%	18.8%
<b>20-30%</b>	0.0%	1.7%	4.3%	2.6%
<b>30-40%</b>	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%	1.7%
<b>40-50%</b>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Greater than 50%</b>	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.9%

than either urban or suburban respondents.

*% of Students with PCs by Courses Per Term*

	<5	5	6	7	>7	TOTAL
<b>0-10%</b>	60.0%	80.0%	73.1%	84.0%	80.0%	76.1%
<b>10-20%</b>	40.0%	13.3%	20.9%	16.0%	0.0%	18.8%
<b>20-30%</b>	0.0%	6.7%	1.5%	0.0%	20.0%	2.6%
<b>30-40%</b>	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%
<b>40-50%</b>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>&gt; 50%</b>	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%

Buildings in which students take a traditional six-hour course schedule more frequently indicated a higher percentage of students in their buildings had PCs than those with most other numbers of courses per term (those respondents who indicated that students take fewer than five courses per term is discussed in the data limitations section). One possible interpretation of this finding is that students with more or fewer than six

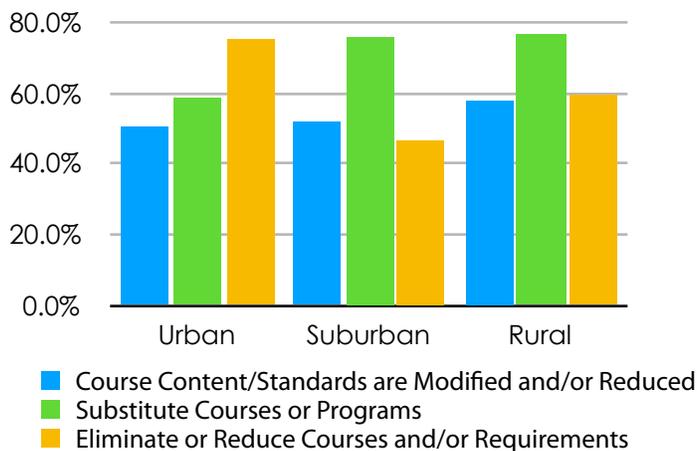
courses per term take more total courses during high school because of their schedule structure, which may accommodate elective courses or credit recovery without the need to modify MMC requirements through a PC. In other words, students who take a 6 course per semester schedule will typically complete 24 credits over a four-year high school career compared with 28 credits for a student taking a 7 course per semester schedule, 30 credits for a student taking a typical 5 course per trimester schedule, or 32 credits for a student with an 8 credit per term block or modified block schedule.

As to the impetus for developing and approving a PC, more respondents indicated that their building approves PCs for students with individualized education plans (IEPs) than any other reason. Fewer than half of total respondents indicated that their building approves PCs for students pursuing CTE coursework and even fewer that PCs are approved for students pursuing specialized schedules in alignment with their EDP. These three findings largely hold true regardless of building demographics.

*Students Approved for PCs*

	%
<b>Special Education Students</b>	82.1%
<b>Students pursuing CTE coursework</b>	41.0%
<b>Students pursuing specialized schedules in alignment w/ EDP goals</b>	27.4%

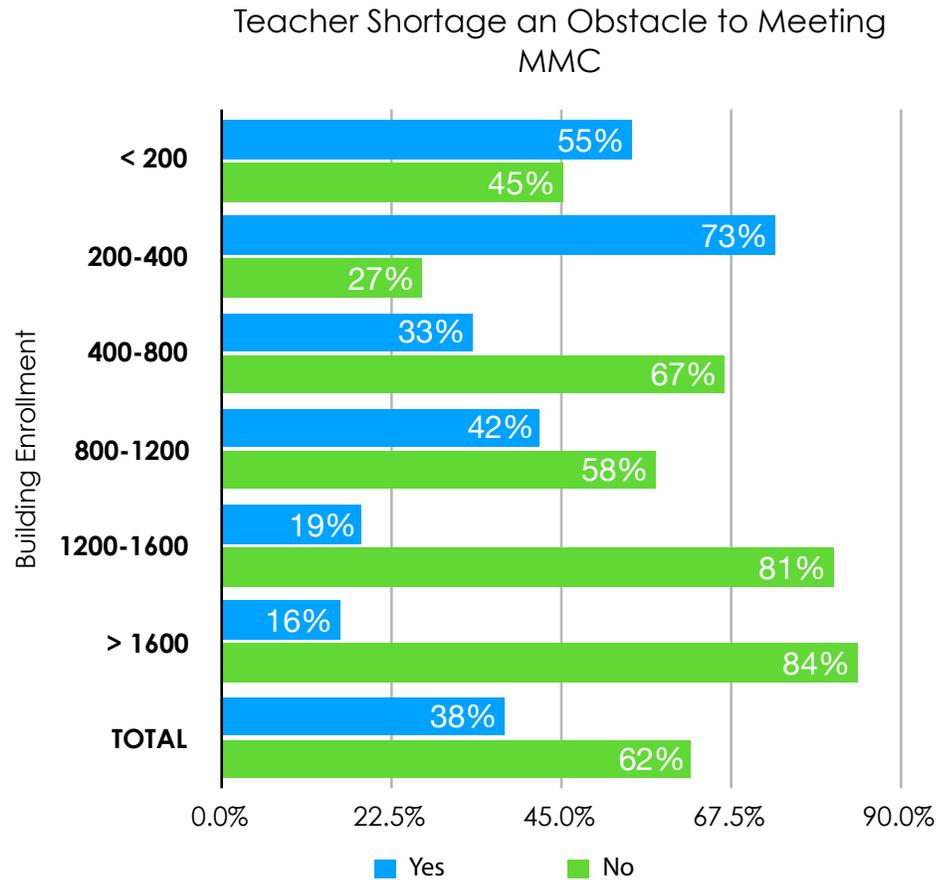
*Type of PC Modifications by District Location*



When students are approved for a personal curriculum, the types of changes made seem to depend at least somewhat on district location. Comparable percentages of respondents from urban, suburban and rural districts indicated that they will approve PCs that modify course content or standards. But if you are in a suburban or rural district, the most frequently approved PC modification involves course substitution, while in urban districts the most frequently approved modification is the elimination or reduction of courses or requirements.

## Teacher Shortage

Given the growing focus on teacher shortage in Michigan, it should come as no surprise that roughly 38% of total respondents indicated that their difficulties in finding a properly certified teacher pose difficulties when it comes to meeting MMC requirements. However, it is noteworthy that this problem seems to be the most pronounced in smaller buildings. In particular, a majority of respondents who indicated a building size of fewer than 400 students also indicated that teacher shortage was an obstacle to meeting MMC requirements. This was not true for respondents from buildings larger than 400 students. Indeed, fewer than 20% of very large buildings (those with enrollment greater than 1,200 students) indicated that teacher shortage posed difficulties in meeting the MMC requirements. No other disaggregation of these results showed such a stark variation.



## Post-Conference Survey

The conference closed with participants responding to a series of surveys designed to collect participant feedback on what – if any – changes they would like to see made to the Michigan Merit Curriculum law. For brevity sake, the surveys asked primarily yes or no questions. In total, there were seven 16-question surveys – one each for the seven major discipline areas that have credits requirements in the MMC. The total number of responses collected varied by discipline with more participation for English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies than for health & physical education, visual/performing/applied arts (VPAA), and world language. ELA garnered the most responses at 177. VPAA the fewest at 55.

Given the limitations of the survey format and tool, demographic information was not collected with these results.

## Key Findings

The survey's most striking findings came in response to questions about how many credits students should be required to take in each discipline in order to graduate high school, the level of specificity around course names and content that should be in the MMC law, what additional supports educators would like to see from MDE or the state, and the process for modifying the MMC.

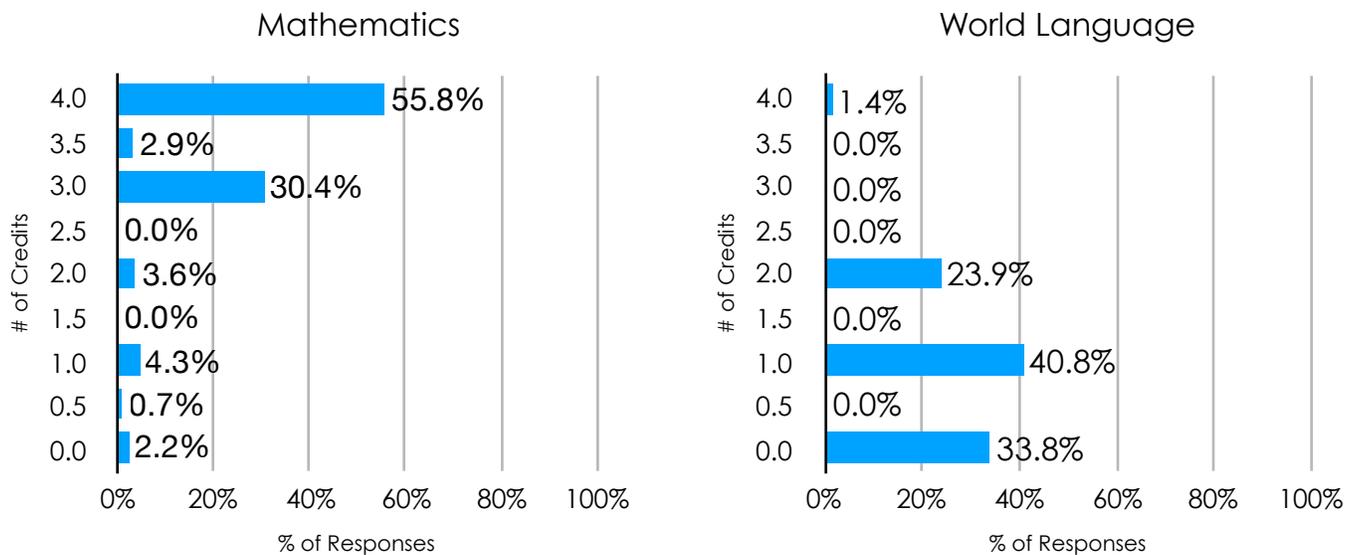
## Credits By Discipline

With the exception of world language, a majority of respondents in each subject area indicated that they believed that the number of credits students should have to complete in order to graduate high school were the current credit requirements of the MMC. In most disciplines, the results were overwhelmingly in support of current requirements.

Mathematics and world language were the only two disciplines to buck the trend of overwhelming support for the credits requirements in the current law. Of the two, the results for world language were perhaps more striking in that an overwhelming majority (74.6%) of responses were in favor of lowering the credit requirements and a greater percentage of responses supported eliminating the world language requirement entirely than maintaining current law.

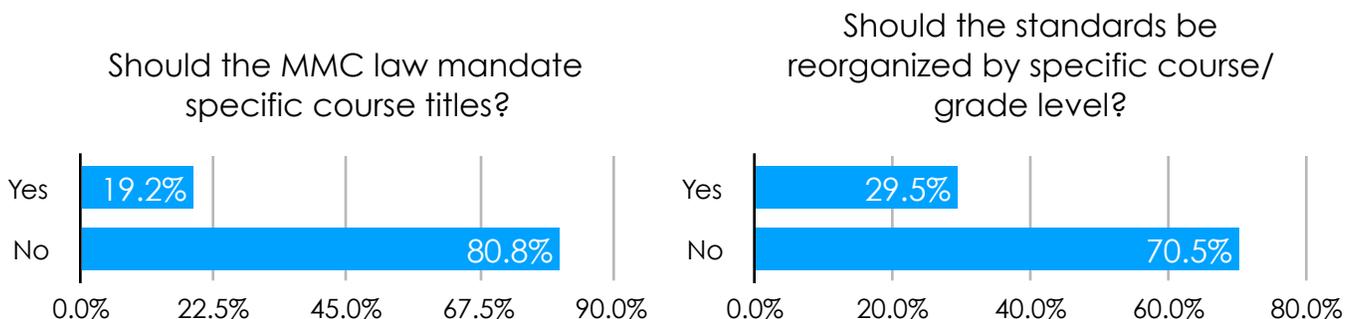
% of Responses Supporting Current MMC Credit Reqs.

<b>ELA</b>	84.2%
<b>Mathematics</b>	55.8%
<b>Science</b>	76.2%
<b>Social Studies</b>	80.7%
<b>Health &amp; PE</b>	77.1%
<b>VPAA</b>	67.3%
<b>World Language</b>	23.9%



## Course Titles and Standards

In advance of working through survey questions, conference attendees engaged in a discussion about the current disconnect between Michigan's content standards, the course titles referenced in the MMC law, and the difficulties faced by local districts in marrying these conflicting requirements. Two questions in each survey were aimed at garnering attendees thoughts on how to resolve this conflict. The combined results of all seven surveys: respondents would overwhelmingly prefer that the MMC law not list course titles and do not



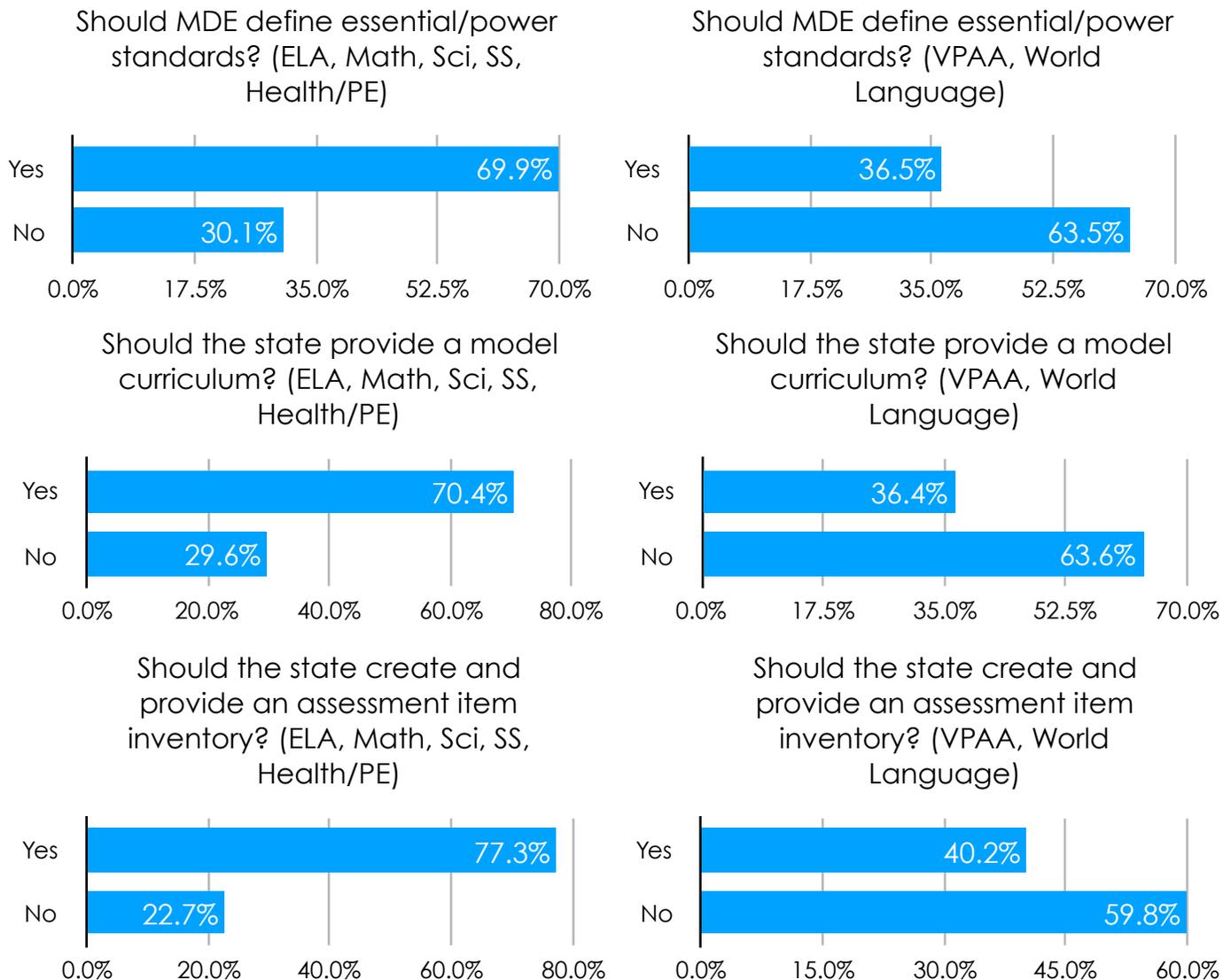
support the idea of rearranging content standards to align to courses or specific grades. These results held across all seven surveys, though the gap in social studies is notably smaller than any other discipline (Yes - 43.5%, No - 56.5%).

## Additional State Supports

Each survey asked three questions about what additional supports or information respondents would like to see the state provide to schools in support of MMC implementation:

- Should MDE define essential/power standards?
- Should the state provide a model curriculum?
- Should the state create and provide an assessment item inventory for standards/subject area content?

On these three questions, the responses broke sharply and consistently across the different disciplines. Respondents strongly felt that the the answer to all three questions was "yes" as it related to ELA, mathematics, science, social studies, and health and physical education. The responses were almost as strongly negative to the three questions when it came to VPAA and world language. Taken together, the responses seem to indicate a strong desire for the state to develop voluntary high-level instructional supports that schools can choose (but are not required) to adopt.



## MMC Modification

The combined results of all seven discipline area surveys offer some unambiguous opinions about the process for modifying the MMC:

- Schools should be permitted to modify credit or graduation requirements for individual students. (93.3%)
- Those modification should require the development of a PC. (66.2%)
- Schools should not be required to complete a formal PC process in addition to an EDP. (66.0%)
- The PC should allow additional flexibility beyond the current options. (65.2%)

These results held across all seven disciplines. The only noteworthy variation came in response to the question about whether MMC modification should require that a PC be developed. In that case, a somewhat smaller percentage of respondents felt that a PC should be required for modifying VPAA (59.2%) and world language (55.6%) than other disciplines, but this was counterbalanced by a stronger majority believing a PC should be required in other subjects, especially ELA (75.4%) and mathematics (70.3%).

## Methodology and Data Limitations

It is important to acknowledge some of the key limitations of these survey data, particularly when using them in decision making.

Most importantly, these survey responses represent a subset of Michigan's educators, districts, and buildings, all of whom self-selected to attend the conference. While the sample is reasonably diverse based on the available demographic information, that does not make it representative. Despite these limitations, though, the results cannot simply be dismissed, especially given that attendees represented 165 different buildings and at least 38 different ISDs with a wide variety of district locations, building sizes, and schedule structures..

More specific notes upon the methodology and limitations of each survey are noted below.

### Pre-Conference Survey

The information collected on courses with the highest failure rates required the most interpretation of any of the questions in either survey. Respondents were asked an open-ended question and entered their answers free-form rather than selecting from a prescribed list. Given the variation in course titles it was necessary to go further than correcting typos and standardizing spelling and course numbering. The following assumptions were used to standardize course names for the purpose of analysis:

- English 1-4, I-IV, and 101-104 were standardized to English 9-12, always in ascending order.
- When a respondent listed "algebra" it was standardized as "algebra I," but only when the respondent also listed "algebra II" as an answer.
- All world language courses (e.g. Spanish I) were standardized to "world language" regardless of language or course level.

While attendees were asked to submit only one pre-conference survey per building, the survey did not collect respondent or building names or similarly identifiable information. As such, the results may include some duplicate answers. Given the demographic data collected, though, we can compare survey responses and be reasonably certain that if duplicate answers do exist, they are few in number.

While the demographic data collected are helpful in disaggregating results, the usefulness of the disaggregation was frequently limited by sample size. For example, the vast majority (84.6%) of respondents said they awarded credit by semester rather than quarters (0.9%), or trimesters (14.5%). Similarly, very few respondents had fewer than five or more than seven course per term (4.3% each). So while some trends emerged based on these disaggregations, they should be used cautiously.

## Post-Conference Survey

While most responses on the post-conference survey can be taken at face value, the question of how many credits a student should be required to complete in order to graduate is the amalgamation of two questions: "Should the credit requirements [in a particular discipline] change?" and "If yes, how many credits?" Multiple respondents answered 'no' to the first question and also responded to the second question despite instructions. Moreover, the second question was ambiguous. Did respondents interpret it as asking how many credits should change or how many should be required? As such, the following methodology was used to generate the reported results:

- Respondents who answered that, no, the requirement should not change and who left the second question about the number of credits blank were reported as supporting the current credit requirement.
- Respondents who answered that, no, the current credit requirements should not change and who subsequently answered either a number equal to the current statutory requirement or who answered zero (interpreted as "zero credits should change") were likewise reported as supporting the current credit requirements.
- Respondents who answered that, yes, the current credit requirements should change had the answer to their second question about how many credits reported as entered in the survey. If the second question was left blank, the result was not counted.
- Because respondents selected their answers to the second question from a drop-down menu, this limited variation and all responses were able to be incorporated using these rules.