



**PROFESSIONAL
INNOVATORS**
in education

2026 Impact Report

PROFESSIONAL INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION
Impact in Action

266 teachers leading Michigan classrooms — prepared, supported, and staying.

A Letter from Melissa

When Professional Innovators was founded, there was a goal to develop a pathway for future teachers—one that honored the realities of today's workforce while never compromising on quality.

We envisioned a human-centered pathway where aspiring educators could learn, grow, and immediately apply their learning in the classroom, supported EVERY step of the way.

What began as one small program determined to advocate for meaningful, practice-based teacher preparation has grown into a thriving community of educators, school leaders, coaches, and partners working toward a shared purpose. At a time when too many teachers were leaving the profession, and schools were searching for sustainable solutions, we chose to think differently. We believe teachers deserve preparation that is relevant, personalized, and deeply connected to the work they do every day. More importantly, we believe Michigan students deserve highly successful, joyful teachers who continue learning, growing, and refining their practice throughout their careers.

Today, hundreds of educators across Michigan are living that vision through individualized coaching, relevant coursework, and a level of support that many believed wasn't possible. None of this would be possible without you. Thank you for trusting us with something so important: the preparation of the educators who will shape the future of our students and communities. Your partnership, encouragement, and belief in our mission have allowed us to continue challenging assumptions, elevating educator preparation, and advocating for the highest standards of quality and support. As you read this year's report, I hope you see more than numbers and milestones. I hope you see the collective impact of a community that refuses to settle for the status quo. For that, I am deeply grateful.

With sincere appreciation,
Melissa MacLaren
Director of Professional Innovators in Education



We believe
teachers deserve
preparation that
is relevant,
personalized,
and deeply
connected to
the work they
do every day.

Our Impact, At a Glance

355

active candidates with
110 new this year!

266

teachers serving on Interim
Certificates

209

Michigan schools have
positions filled

102

Special Education Pathway
candidates (up from 68)

96

Standard Certification
recommendations to date
(up from 67)

94%

of candidates who receive
financial support
(up from 84%)

98%

of candidates report being
satisfied with their coaching

59

endorsement areas offered

A new name for a bigger mission:
Professional Innovators in Teaching is now Professional Innovators in Education.

Answering Michigan's Greatest Classroom Need

In fall 2024, more than 5% of Michigan's special education teaching positions sat vacant — nearly double the statewide average for other positions (EPIC, 2026). Professional Innovators is working to meet that need, with 102 candidates now in our Special Education Pathway — a 50% increase in one year — and we're grateful for legislative support, protecting this pathway for the future.

102

Special Education Pathway
candidates — up 50% in one year



Spotlight: Sonya Lewis

After nearly two decades in education, school leader Sonya Lewis joined our Special Education Pathway to pursue an Emotional Impairment endorsement — and is bringing an individualized, inclusive approach back to her whole school.

“This job is not easy, but when I feel confident, I can advocate effectively for my students.”



Teachers Who Stay

25%

of new Michigan teachers report staying in education for five years (MiData)

96%

three-year retention rate for Professional Innovators teachers*



Spotlight: Ashley Duby

First-year art teacher Ashley Duby is building a classroom where every student belongs — reaching them through what they already love, from fishing poles to pop culture. She credits the program with helping her lead with purpose.



“My biggest area of growth has been learning to meet students where they are.”

Filling Michigan's Classrooms

Even at record-high certification rates, Michigan's teacher supply is barely keeping pace with exits — 2.8% of teaching positions sat vacant in fall 2024 (EPIC, 2026). Our answer:

33

completers this year

110

completers to date

266

teachers leading classrooms
on Interim Certificates



Spotlight: Tara Reger

Tara Reger completed the program and earned her Michigan Standard Teaching Certificate in January 2025. Now she's paying it forward — tutoring future candidates preparing for their MTTC exams.

Her advice to future teachers considering certification through Professional Innovators:

"I'd say go for it, you won't regret it. It's a chance to shake things up, try out new ideas, and connect with other teachers who get it."

Support at Every Step

One teacher, many classrooms. 49 candidates are pursuing multiple endorsements, and 21% of completers have earned more than one — flexibility that lets schools place great teachers exactly where students need them.



Spotlight: Ahmed Bitar

At Escuela Avancemos!, where about 90% of students are English Language Learners, Ahmed Bitar teaches middle school Spanish Language Arts while pursuing certification in both Spanish and Bilingual Education.

“Working toward these endorsements has pushed me to think about teaching in a broader way. It has encouraged me to think more intentionally about leadership, collaboration, and how educators can influence positive change.”

Free, individualized MTTC support. More than 100 candidates join MTTC study sessions each year, at no cost to anyone enrolled in the program.

Spotlight: Natasha Doughton

100+

MTTC study session participants yearly

“When I faced challenges passing my MTTC subtests multiple times, their team refused to let me give up. The entire team was completely hands-on, providing unlimited resources, quick follow-ups, and incredible one-on-one study sessions. I finally passed all four subtests.”



Coaching That Changes Practice

98%

of candidates report satisfaction with their coaching. Every candidate is matched 1:1 with one of our more than 20 experienced coaches for their entire journey.



Kenis Wallevand — coach since 2019

Her favorite moment is when a new educator's confidence clicks into place — when observation and adjustment turn into ownership.

“It's powerful watching someone move from 'Am I doing the right thing?' to 'I can see the difference I'm making.’”



Sarah Vander Baan — 23 years in special education

She focuses on Individualized, data-driven coaching built on celebrating small wins.

“In Special Education, you learn quickly that success comes from understanding where a student is, identifying what they need most, and designing supports that are both targeted and practical. I bring that same mindset to coaching adults.”

Partners Across Michigan

Professional Innovators candidates serve in 209 schools across Michigan — and an average of 417 educators connect monthly in our private learning network.



209

schools are hosting a teaching candidate

417

active monthly network members



Spotlight: Countryside Academy



K-12 public charter school Countryside Academy has 10 candidates in current cohorts and 4 program completers teaching today — with the school covering tuition, MTTC costs, and flex time for coursework.



“Professional Innovators has kept us afloat with certified teachers. Some of our strongest classroom teachers are graduates of the program.”

— Sarah Brookshire, Lead Administrator

Powered by Our Supporters

Thank You, Detroit Children's Fund



Professional Innovators in Education is deeply grateful to the Detroit Children's Fund for its unwavering commitment to Detroit's students and educators. DCF's investment in tuition assistance, MTTC preparation, and individualized coaching has helped hundreds of aspiring teachers become confident, highly qualified educators making a lasting difference in classrooms across Detroit.

94%

of candidates receive financial support — up from 84%

Thank you to our scholarship funding partners

- Bay Mills Community College Charter School Office
- GVSU, Division of K-12 Education Innovation and Scholar Success
- Grow Your Own Funds (State of Michigan)
- Michigan Future Educator Fellowship with MiLEAP
- School and management-company funded scholarships

Thank You!

Our team is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to partner with you as we grow the next generation of Michigan Teachers!

Be part of what's next!
Teach. Host a candidate. Invest in Michigan's educators. bit.ly/innovators-in-education



Melissa MacLaren-Director, Grace Moore-Program Coordinator, Kim Rowland-Assistant Director