



PREVENTION EDUCATION IN MICHIGAN SCHOOLS: HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION RESEARCH REPORT

An innovative approach to prevention

ABSTRACT

Human Trafficking Education in schools is about child safety. It is about protecting and equipping students and the school personnel in their lives to safely and appropriately respond to exploitation and human trafficking. The research in this report creates a foundation for a robust human trafficking and exploitation prevention plan in Michigan schools.

This report is authored by the Michigan Human Trafficking Education in Schools Task Force, Michigan Anti-Trafficking Project and the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission.

July 2026

This report is authored by the Michigan Human Trafficking Education in Schools Task Force, Michigan Anti-Trafficking Project and the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission.



With special thanks to:

Subcommittee One leaders

Holly Hale, Ph.D. L.P., Turn the Corner Counseling

Rita O'Brien, MSW, Michigan Youth Challenge Academy

Subcommittee Two leaders

Angela Dudley, Founder of Millstone Ministry and Co-Chair of the Genesee County Human Trafficking Task Force

Mark Moody, Central Michigan University Faculty Member and Co-Owner of S&P 360

Subcommittee Three leaders

Becky Holm, Michigan State Police, Crime Victim Advocate, Office of Behavioral Science Division

Ben Pineda, Teacher-Haslett Middle School, MSU-College of Education Mentor Teacher, Governor's Educators Advisory Council-Appointee

Subcommittee Four leaders

Hannah McPeak, MA, A Courageous Voice

Stacey Sills, M. Ed., Regional Health Consultant, Ottawa Area ISD

Subcommittee Five leaders

Dawn Connors, Executive Director, Michigan Anti-Trafficking Project

Maria Rockafellow, MPH, MLS(ASCP)^{CM}, Community Health Supervisor, MyMichigan Health

Project Coordinators

Dawn Connors, Executive Director, Michigan Anti-Trafficking Project

Heather McGannon, Program Coordinator, Michigan Anti-Trafficking Project

Katie Green, LMSW, CAADC, CCHTVSP, Life Support LLC and Co-Chair of the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission

Thank you also to every subcommittee member who volunteered their time to this research.

This report is made freely available to the public, if you plan to use the findings in this report, please credit the Task Force, Michigan Anti-Trafficking Project and the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission. Contact Heather McGannon at heather@map-mi.org with questions.

Introduction

This Task Force exists for child safety through the perspective of Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention. We care about our Michigan youth, and we see their vulnerability as well as their resilience. We want Michigan to be a state where no trafficker or exploiter is welcome. A state that is equipped with tools to prevent exploitation and human trafficking from happening in the first place.

It is our belief that students and the school personnel in their lives should understand what human trafficking and exploitation is, how it happens, how to recognize the signs and how to safely get help. When they have this knowledge, youth at risk for being trafficked or exploited, and the school personnel in their lives, will be equipped to recognize what is happening and do something about it before a trafficker or exploiter can get to them. Early education is vital to a robust anti-trafficking and anti-exploitation plan in Michigan.

It is our overall recommendation, based on our research, that a comprehensive plan to address Human Trafficking and Exploitation Education in Michigan schools will include:

- 1) Training for school personnel
 - a) We recommend annual training that must be reported to a governing body such as: Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services or the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission; as well as the responsibility of tracking to be outside of the individual school or district so that proper follow-up will be implemented
 - b) It is recommended to have in-person training with a virtual option available that follows mandated guidelines
- 2) Age-appropriate, research informed education for students preK-12
 - a) We recommend mandated guidelines with suggested curriculums from the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission. When curriculum is completed it must be reported to a governing body such as: Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services or the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission; as well as the responsibility of tracking to be outside of the individual school or district so that proper follow-up will be implemented
 - b) Training for students should be done in person
- 3) School protocol for human trafficking
 - a) We recommend that this must include a governing body that serves as a central database for reporting such as the Michigan Department of Education or Child Protective Services
 - b) We recommend that this must include a list of resources and organizations that staff and students can be referred to for help

Subcommittee One: Research on Curriculum in States outside of Michigan

The subcommittee looked at all known states that require Human Trafficking Education in schools. They looked for what curriculums are being used, how the curriculum is administered and how it is funded. They also researched in-depth what laws were passed, which lawmakers were a part of helping to move the legislation along and any other legislatively useful information. In this report the focus is on curriculum and funding, however, the legislative research will be used in Phase Two for the drafting of Michigan bills.

Curriculum:

We have observed that most states do not have a single required curriculum to educate students about human trafficking and exploitation. The states instead require guidelines and mandate a governing body to recommend certain curriculums. Curriculums recommended by multiple states include:

- Monique Burr
- 3 Strands Global
- Not a Number
- A21

Curriculum Administration:

Administration of the curriculum varies depending on the state and curriculum. K-5 is typically administered in the individual classroom setting. Middle and High schools vary with many opting for administration through Health and Physical Education, Sexual Health Education, or Social Studies classes.

Funding:

Funding is *largely* through federal grants (Department of Justice, Office of Victims of Crime, Administration for Children and Families) with some states allocating funds through: the Attorney General's office, Governor appointed funds, State Department of Education, Local School Districts, Non-profits and other Community Based Organizations.

Other Observations:

Many States follow the Health Education Standards of the State (this seems to be an avenue for mandating Human Trafficking Education). These are available in Michigan and could be used as a guide for the state.

Recommendations for Michigan:

We recommend that the mandate for Human Trafficking Education in Schools for Michigan be clearly communicated and allow for parents to opt their children out of the education. Curriculum must be evidence-informed and developmentally appropriate.

Guideline Framework for Curriculum:

- Recognition of signs of exploitation, human trafficking, familial trafficking, and grooming tactics
- Information on the prevalence, nature, and strategies to reduce the risk of human trafficking and exploitation
- The influence of culture and mass media on perceptions of sexual abuse and sex trafficking, including stereotypes and myths about victims and abusers, victim blaming, and the role of language
- Digital safety including how social media and mobile device applications are used for exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking and sextortion
- Awareness of resources, including national, state and local resources and how to safely seek assistance

We would highlight these states: Georgia (TARG), Texas (Health TEKS), California (HEF) and Florida

Subcommittee Two: Research on Curriculum in Michigan

Michigan has 57 Intermediate Schools Districts with around 3000 public schools. The Subcommittee tasked with researching what curriculums are currently being used in Michigan received feedback from 56 different schools, about 2% of the total number of schools. The group encountered many hurdles in their research, mainly with the lack of response from ISD's and school districts, though not from lack of effort from the subcommittee. We commend their diligence in seeking creative avenues for reaching schools and organizations. One main observation from this subcommittee is that the difficulty in data collection speaks to the need for protocols and accountability in Michigan schools.

Curriculum:

- Monique Burr
- A21
- My Voice Matters
- PROTECT
- Non-profit created curriculum

Curriculum Administration:

The majority of curriculums are administered to Middle and High school students through a Health class or Large Group Assembly. The prevalence of education to older grades is most likely due to Erin's Law in Michigan that mandates child sexual abuse education in grades preK-5. Most of the education in the state is done through an outside agency, typically a local Task Force or non-profit. Some schools have counselors and resource officers who teach the curriculum.

Subcommittee Three: Research on School Protocol for Human Trafficking

Review of research and data shows that most states rely on Mandated Reporter Guidelines for School Personnel to follow when trafficking is suspected, which ultimately directs the reporter to local Child Protective Services. While this is commendable and helps to move a case of human trafficking forward, it is insufficient and does not equip school personnel with the tools needed to best support a student who is a suspected victim of trafficking. When considering a protocol for Human Trafficking in schools we would encourage school districts to ensure that staff are trained on how to interact with a student who discloses or is suspected of being a victim, what services are available, and how students can access the resources.

Students will most likely continue to be involved in the school when a report is made, investigation conducted and following that. It is important that a clear protocol is in place for staff to feel equipped to respond in a trauma-informed way and with the end goal of supporting the student as best they can.

We would also encourage a way to track whether a school is using the Human Trafficking Protocol. This ensures accountability and serves as a reminder to schools that a protocol is in place to help them best support a student who is a suspected victim of human trafficking.

Lastly, we recommend that the protocol be placed in the student handbook along with a definition of what human trafficking is and common signs.

The subcommittee would direct Michigan schools to follow the clear and comprehensive School Safety Protocol used by the Kent Intermediate School District. This Protocol clearly lays out how to report, who should report, requires a District Trafficking Liaison and identifies a Student Support Team. We would recommend these additions to the Protocol:

- Require centralized data collection through either Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Child Protective Services or the Michigan Department of Education to ensure accountability within schools
- Require schools to track that they used the Protocol when reporting to the centralized data agency
- Require the protocol to be placed in the student handbook

Subcommittee Four: Research on Training for School Personnel

“Teachers are secret warriors in this fight,” commented Human Trafficking Survivor Leader Zoe Bellatorre in a discussion about human trafficking. Teachers, as well as all school personnel play a critical role in the detection of child trafficking and exploitation. For some child victims of trafficking, school might be the only place where they have consistent interactions with safe adults. It is important for school personnel to be trained about what Human Trafficking is, how to recognize if a student at their school is a victim of trafficking, and how to respond appropriately.

Below are observations and recommendations made by the subcommittee from their research:

“School Personnel” description:

“School Personnel” is defined as any certified instructional staff, school administrators, support staff and specialized service providers.

Current US trainings:

Most states use a training curriculum created in-state by a non-profit or governmental organization. Some states, including Kent County Intermediate School District in Michigan, use PROTECT.

State laws that mandate training:

There are 10 states that mandate training for school personnel and their specific laws can be found in the attached spreadsheet.

Michigan laws that could be amended:

It is recommended to investigate the potential of amending Erin’s Law in Michigan.

Record Keeping:

Some states require training records to be held within the individual schools. When the training is conducted through a virtual training then records are kept within the system. We recommend that records be kept with a governing body such as the Michigan Department of Education or the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission so that there is a centralized system which will ensure accountability and ease of tracking.

Funding:

Programs are funded through federal, state and local grants. Funding may be available through state or federal funds allocated for staff training. Due to funding cuts, it is advised to look for local or statewide private foundations and nonprofits with an interest in education and/or student safety.

Other Observations:

- Training varies with some states requiring it as part of licensure, some requiring all new hires to complete training, while other states utilize teacher in-service days
- Renewal: Most states require renewal annually or every 3 or 5 years, while 3 states require only a one-time training

- Trainings are done in-person or virtually and there are positives and negatives to both:
 - In-Person-Positives: Participants are more likely to be engaged and must be physically present in the room, there is opportunity for dialogue and question/answer with trainer.
 - In-Person-Negatives: Difficulty for schools/districts to find the time and funding for in-person training, training is subjective to the trainers and quality can differ, tracking is more difficult
 - Virtual-Positives: Easy access for school personnel, easy tracking embedded within the system, easier to ensure quality of training (especially if recommended trainings are available, or the state has created their own training)
 - Virtual-Negatives: Personnel can “click through” the training and do other activities while still “participating” in the training, inability to dialogue with others and have questions answered

Recommendation for Michigan

The subcommittee tasked with researching Training for School Personnel has these recommendations for Michigan:

- Establish a comprehensive statewide definition of "school personnel" to ensure all relevant staff members are included in training and prevention efforts.
- Examine and build upon successful legislation, training models, and implementation strategies from other states.
- Explore the use of Title II funding to support human trafficking training for educators and school staff across Michigan, as well as Michigan Foundations with interest in education and student safety.
- It is recommended that a training include:
 - Human Trafficking definition and types
 - Who are the perpetrators
 - What makes a child vulnerable to trafficking
 - Red Flags and Indicators
 - Role of Technology in Exploitation
 - Trauma-Informed Responses for school personnel
 - Reporting Protocols for schools
 - How to make safe referrals for students in need

Subcommittee Five: Research on Grants and Funding

Appropriate funding will be needed to implement a comprehensive and effective Human Trafficking and Exploitation response in Michigan schools. This subcommittee will be ongoing throughout the duration of the Task Force. Their current research in Phase One allowed for research into different grants available through federal and state funding with timelines and what is needed to apply. The committee applied for one state grant and plans to continue applications for further grant funding in the next Phase. They will specifically investigate federal grants through the Department of Justice, Office of Victims of Crimes and Department of Children and Families. They will also further research funding from Foundations with interest in Education and Student Safety.

Current Recommendation for Michigan:

It is recommended that the State set aside funding for a Human Trafficking Coordinator for Michigan. We noticed that many states with mandated Human Trafficking education in the schools also had a coordinator that oversaw implementation of the project, as well as aided in other statewide anti-trafficking efforts. Also, we recommend that the State set aside funding for the initial startup of Human Trafficking and Exploitation Education in Schools which could include funding for school personnel training and funding for student education curriculum.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is the recommendation of the Michigan Human Trafficking Education in Schools Task Force that a comprehensive and robust Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention Plan be implemented in Michigan. This plan should include three specific approaches to ensure support for staff and students. The three recommended approaches are:

1. **Training for School Personnel:** School personnel need to be equipped and trained in what to look for and how to respond to a student who discloses that they are a victim of exploitation and/or human trafficking. When we equip school personnel they can confidently respond in a trauma-informed way.
2. **Human Trafficking and Exploitation Education for preK-12 Michigan students:** The education should be developmentally appropriate and research informed. Guidelines should be mandated with recommended curriculum made available.
3. **Human Trafficking Protocol:** A student will be most supported by a school that knows how to respond quickly and in a trauma-informed way. School protocols help school personnel to know what appropriate action steps should be taken in response to a human trafficking suspicion or disclosure.

With this plan in place Michigan will become a leader in the United States for Human Trafficking Prevention Response. Our well-documented process will help inform other states interested in bringing Human Trafficking Education to their schools.

And finally, *we wholeheartedly believe that Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention education in Michigan schools will decrease trafficking and increase support to child victims of trafficking.* When school personnel and students know how to recognize the signs and are equipped with how to respond, the number of youths who would be exploited will decrease. Also, when school personnel know how to respond appropriately to a suspicion or disclosure, Michigan youth will be better supported and have greater access to resources. We want Michigan to be a state where no trafficker is welcome and all children are safe. Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention education in schools is vital to this goal.

Feedback Form

Please scan this QR code to provide feedback to the Task Force.

Thank you.

