



College Spotlight

Success Strategies from Michigan Community Colleges

Student Success

Talent Development

Community Vitality

Expanding Access Through Michigan Reconnect

Michigan Reconnect is a program designed to make community college affordable for Michigan residents who have not yet earned their college degrees, providing last-dollar, tuition-free access for in-district students and substantial tuition support for out-of-district students. In fall 2023, the Michigan Legislature temporarily expanded Michigan Reconnect to include students ages 21 to 24. To maximize the impact of this expansion, the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential invested in a variety of interventions across campus offices to enhance direct outreach to eligible students.

At Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College (KBOCC), administrators seized this opportunity to implement **IT, marketing, and financial aid** strategies, driving enrollment growth and increasing student engagement.

Reconnect-Driven Institutional Redesign

With support from Reconnect intervention funding, KBOCC strengthened outreach efforts, deepened community engagement, and enhanced staff training to ensure every eligible student had access to the program.

- **IT enhancements.** KBOCC advanced its student outreach strategy with targeted, personalized messaging. The college introduced weekly text message campaigns for students ages 21 to 24 and expanded the use of pop-up notifications in their learning management system. While website pop-ups had been used previously, the texting initiative was new and highly effective. Building on this success, KBOCC plans to implement texting campaigns across the college, especially to inform students of time-sensitive events. Additionally, KBOCC prominently displayed Reconnect information on the college website, ensuring all students had easy access to details about tuition-free opportunities.
- **Marketing expansion.** To increase engagement with eligible students, KBOCC expanded its Reconnect marketing campaign, incorporating billboards, television commercials, radio ads, website promotions, and outreach at campus events. Administrators also hosted a Reconnect picnic to engage the college's predominantly older student population, many of whom are considered nontraditional students. The picnic was a carnival-style event aimed at engaging students with children with a bounce house, a fish display from the Natural Resources Department, and faculty showcases of academic programs. The event promoted both Reconnect and general course enrollment, providing support for students supporting dependents and aligning with fall recruitment efforts.
- **Financial aid optimization.** Recognizing that financial aid can be a barrier to access, KBOCC leveraged Reconnect funding to host financial aid workshops, guiding students through the application process for Reconnect and other forms of financial assistance. To further strengthen support, the college is planning on investing in additional training for financial aid leadership and staff, ensuring that students receive expert guidance in navigating their education funding options.

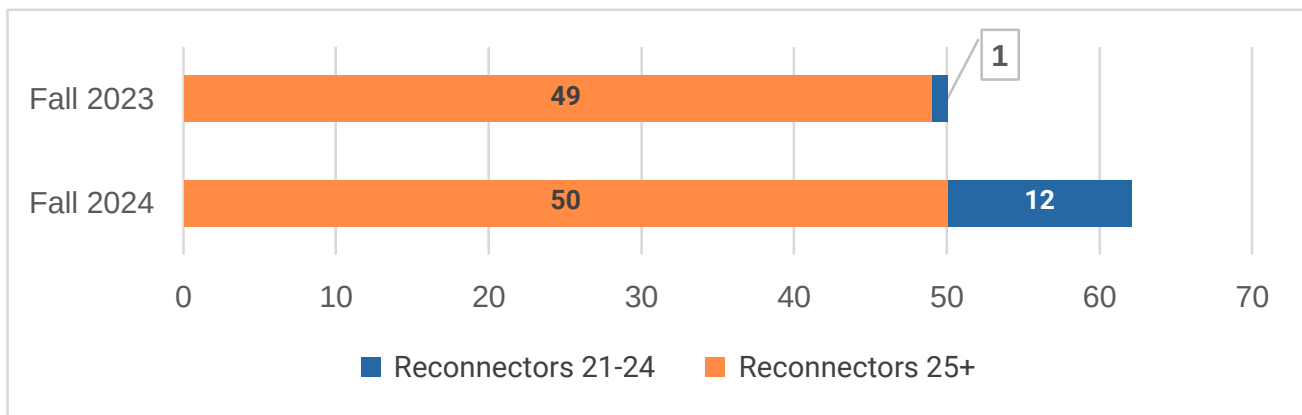
Michigan Community College Association

Outreach and Enrollment Success

In addition to KBOCC’s strategic messaging and marketing, a key factor in Reconnect’s expansion has been community-driven promotion. Awareness of the program has spread organically through conversations among students, faculty, and the broader community, encouraging more people to explore the opportunity. This natural engagement, combined with the college’s targeted marketing efforts, has driven a significant increase in enrollment from fall 2023 to 2024.

- Total Reconnect enrollment increased **24 percent**.
- Enrollment was driven almost entirely by Reconnectors age 21–24, growing from just one to 12 students.

Reconnectors Enrollment by Age, Fall 2023 and 2024



Beyond increasing enrollment, the Reconnect program also supports student success. All KBOCC 2022-2023 Reconnect students persisted from one year to the next, which is an encouraging sign of student retention and success. Administrators are eager to assess future data, particularly to track outcomes for students in the newly expanded 21 to 24 age range.

A Sustainable Model for Future Success

KBOCC serves a small community with a significant nontraditional student population. For this population, the Reconnect program has been transformative. Administrators describe the response to the program as “almost overwhelming,” underscoring its critical role in making higher education accessible.

Moving forward, KBOCC remains committed to maximizing Reconnect’s reach. The college is maintaining a strong push for eligible students to apply, reinforcing its efforts with consistent outreach. Recognizing that personal connections are key, administrators plan to continue leveraging word-of-mouth promotion alongside traditional advertising. By staying persistent, the college aims to ensure that every student who can benefit from Reconnect has the support they need to succeed.

“The Reconnect scholarship has been huge for our college.” – KBOCC Bursar