

A Brief Overview of Activity to Date

What began 2 years ago as a vision to replicate the Kalamazoo Promise and further economic development in Muskegon County, has become an initiative with community-wide interest and support. The group is attempting to bring universal access and needed support to post-secondary education for all graduates from the 12 public, 2 parochial and 1 charter high school(s) within the MAISD boundaries.

In late summer of 2006, a small committee was formed to explore the idea of offering a scholarship program similar to the Kalamazoo Promise to Muskegon County high school graduates. In a knowledge based economy the need was obvious, as only **18%** of Muskegon County residents over the age of twenty-five hold bachelor degrees or higher. The state average is **25%** and the national average is **27%**. Even more alarming is the fact that Michigan's overall ranking is **35th** in the nation, as recently as **2003** Michigan ranked **29th** in the nation.

The committee members envisioned the Muskegon Opportunity as a program that offered our students the ability to attend the post-secondary institution of their choice, with the M.O. funding their education. It was not long before the M.O. committee realized that a program of such magnitude was financially impossible at the current time and began work to decipher what could be done to raise the level of education in our county.

Much hard work by many people representing business/industry, foundations, education, government and economic development interests has brought the M.O. to where it is today. The current program model has 3 parts.

1. First is a ***broad based student preparation program*** wherein we are joining with all high schools in an effort to build a culture of learning in the Muskegon County area; preparing ALL students for postsecondary education or formal training, academically and financially.
2. Second is the ***intensive support providing extra assistance for students most at risk of not completing high school, and proceeding into postsecondary education or formal training.***
3. Third is the ***Muskegon Opportunity safety net scholarship***: Financial assistance for a two-year degree or program at identified institutions. More specifically up to \$3,400.00 each year to attend either Muskegon Community College, Baker College of Muskegon, or one of several institutions recommended by the staff of the Muskegon Area Career Technology Center. In doing so M.O. will become a change agent for how post-secondary education information is delivered in our county.

As of April 2009, the M.O. committee and constituent k-12 superintendents unanimously endorsed a statement of intent that addresses the "nuts and bolts" of the process to launch the program. Final financial projections are being completed and efforts are underway to begin a fund raising campaign. The committee hopes to be able to make some type of formal announcement in the before the end of June 2009.