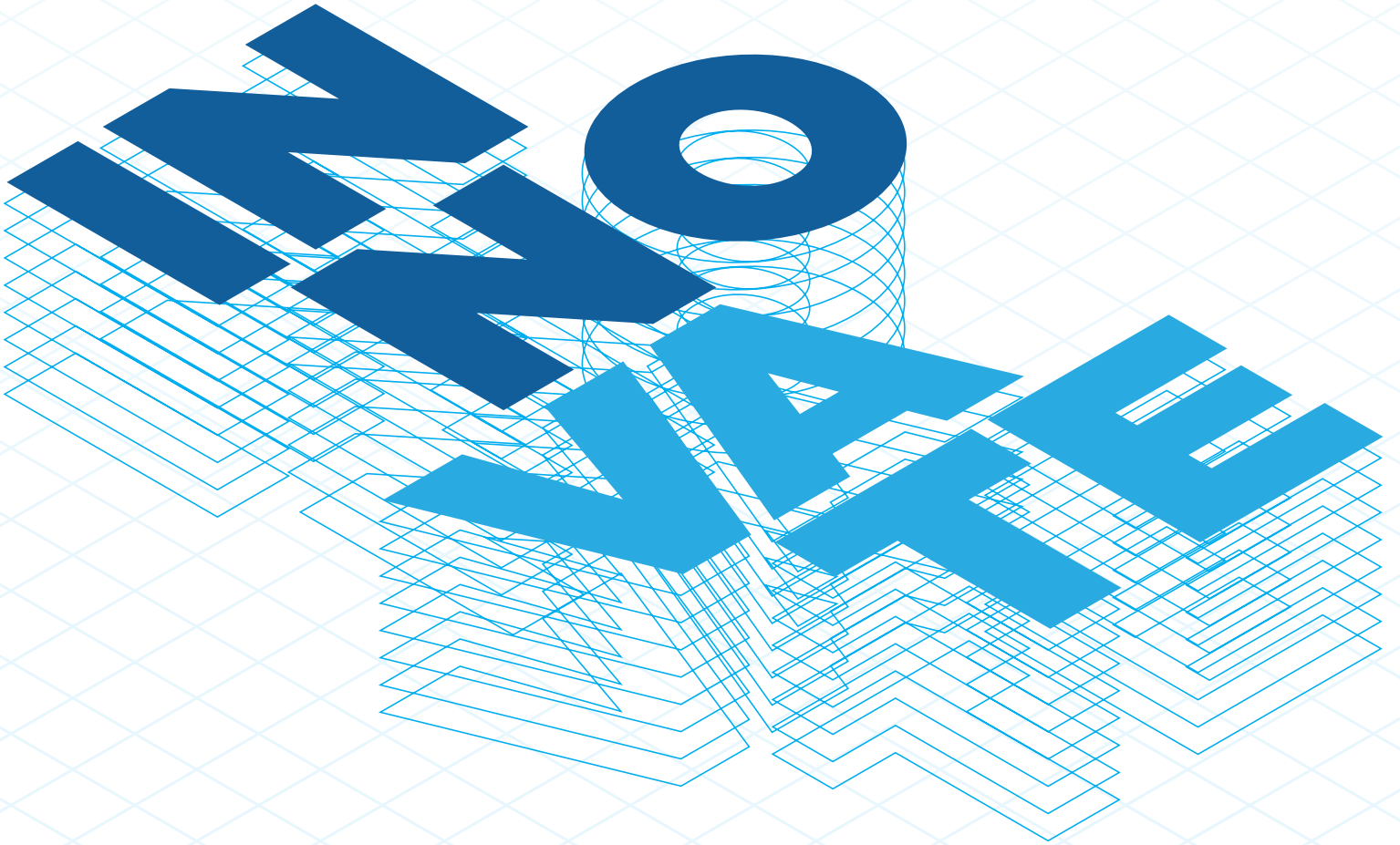


2020-2021 CHARTER SCHOOLS OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT



Joining together practitioners, professors, policymakers, and communities in new ways to solve problems in education.

78  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



35,949  
NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED

302  
NUMBER OF  
BOARD  
MEMBERS

3211  
NUMBER OF  
TEACHERS AND  
STAFF WORKING  
IN GVSU CHARTER  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

15  
NUMBER OF  
COMMUNITIES  
SERVED



4

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OUR STAFF

Some of the photos  
shown in this report  
were taken prior to the  
COVID-19 pandemic.



**Philomena V. Mantella, Ph.D.**  
*President*

Dear friends,

When the Grand Valley Board of Trustees first made the bold decision to authorize charter public schools in 1995, they did so because they listened to families. They responded to families wanting different and better educational opportunities. Grand Valley understood that chartering public schools was a pathway for finding and replicating ideas that would allow all kids to thrive.

For more than 25 years, that learner-centered innovation has been the foundation for our work. It was also our guide throughout the recent pandemic.

This report details how the Charter Schools Office rapidly transformed its work during the pandemic to ensure quality support continued for K-12 educators, students, and families.

You'll read about how professional education was adjusted to give teachers answers to their most pressing questions. Virtual resource hubs were constructed so students could access supplemental learning tools from home. Community partners and networks were unified in order to assist thousands of families at a time. A new tutoring service — K-12 Connect — was launched to further support our students and teachers.

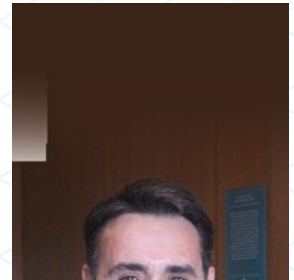
Through this work and so much more, the Charter Schools Office exemplifies the university's proactive commitment to develop bold solutions for today and beyond.

At Grand Valley, we uncover innovations through our capacity to create ground-breaking growth. We embrace the findings because we believe they will lead to improvements for every learner and educator. It's what pushes GVSU and the Charter Schools Office to be leaders in designing what comes next in public education.

With best wishes,

**Philomena Mantella, Ph.D.**  
President  
Grand Valley State University

**Robert T. Kimball, Ed.D.**  
Associate Vice President and  
Executive Associate to the  
President



**Robert T. Kimball, Ed.D.**  
*Associate Vice President and  
Executive Associate to  
the President*



# READY FOR WHATEVER IS NEXT

At Grand Valley, next is opportunity and innovation. Next is global, connecting and uniting us. It's local, shaping the spaces in which we work and live. It's a commitment to progress. Next is where minds are free to imagine what could be. At GVSU, next is now. And whatever's next, we will help our students, our communities, and our partners get there.



**23,350**

STUDENTS

**300+**

AREAS OF  
STUDY

**4**

CAMPUSES

[gvsu.edu/next](https://gvsu.edu/next)



GRAND VALLEY  
STATE UNIVERSITY



## MISSION

Grand Valley State University authorizes charter schools to join together professors, practitioners, policymakers, and communities (3P+C) in new ways to solve problems in education.

## VISION

We strive to be the model university authorizer by accessing the university's collective resources and diversity to contribute to the enrichment and constant improvement of all Grand Valley State University-authorized schools.

## VALUES

At Grand Valley State University's Charter Schools Office, the primary focus is understanding complex problems in the GVSU network of schools, facilitating the design of solutions, and advancing remarkable change in teaching and learning. Our mission, vision, and strategic outcomes reflect the seven core values. These core values provide a foundation and framework for all of the Charter Schools Office's decision-making processes:

- Excellence
- Integrity
- Inquiry
- Inclusiveness
- Community
- Sustainability
- Innovation



## MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES – GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

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Former Member, GVSU Board of Trustees

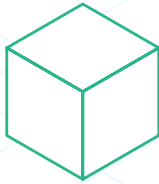
### **Sherril Soman, Ph.D.**

GVSU College of Community and Public Service

### **Punita Dani Thurman**

The Skillman Foundation





# PRACTITIONERS

Grand Valley State University continuously develops opportunities that connect the teachers and administrators working in its charter schools to innovative solutions.

Educators attend virtual webinar





## EASING THE TRANSITION TO VIRTUAL LEARNING



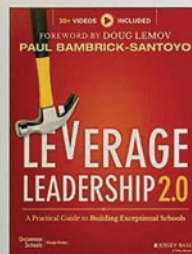
Developing and delivering professional education programs and growth opportunities for teachers and administrators across the state is a hallmark of the GVSU Charter Schools Office. Our commitment to helping educators solve problems does not waiver and was even more important during unprecedented situations.

As remote instruction became a capacity that all public schools needed to develop, the GVSU Charter Schools Office rapidly recalibrated its professional education offerings to meet the immediate needs of educators. Within days, all in-person workshops were turned into webinars. New webinars were also added to tackle big questions surrounding topics like education technology, special education, and virtual literacy instruction. Even day-long conferences that would typically attract hundreds of attendees were redesigned to be held online, ensuring teachers still received the enrichment they desired.

From the spring of 2020 and through the entire 2020-2021 school year, the GVSU Charter Schools Office hosted more than 80 webinar sessions for nearly 4,500 session attendees. Some even attracted participants from afar, including educators from New York, Colorado, Indiana, and Washington, D.C.

By remaining focused on our goal to advance learning, educators knew they could turn to Grand Valley for a sense of security and solutions in the midst of a tumultuous environment.

### About this Book...



Leverage Leadership 2.0 highlights **HOW** exceptional leaderships use their time: what they do and how and when they do it.

The book is a tremendous reference and field guide containing a plethora of resources, videos, and best practices that help leaders to create climate and culture that promotes transformative educational results for students.



The CSO's Jeff Maxwell leads virtual training for a school leadership cohort.

*“With the grant, we were able to purchase power adapters for 216 students to have Dell touchscreen laptops to use remotely. Initially the laptops were purchased for use with charging carts. The use of the GVSU grant enabled FCCA to send a laptop with charging cable to all students who selected virtual learning during the pandemic.”*

– Todd Slisher, Flint Cultural Center Academy Board President

## SUSTAINING SUPPORT DURING THE PANDEMIC

Grand Valley embraces the unique capacity it has to connect our charter public schools with sustainable solutions. Finding or creating impactful school support allows schools to navigate the issues they face in the moment, while also offering a sense of security for the future.

With schools working to meet a wave of new needs caused by the pandemic, the GVSU Charter Schools Office created a Learning Continuity and Innovation Grant. The new, one-time grant supplied Grand Valley’s charter public school boards with additional funds to support learning continuity and innovative programming. Funds that each school was awarded matched the amount they received as part of their 2018-2019 Academic Grant. Schools used the grant funds to purchase devices for students, enhance their meal distribution plans, and install structures to meet heightened health and safety protocols, among other actions.

Helping schools remain in a position to succeed is a promise Grand Valley has with each of its charter public schools. By keeping that promise, GVSU’s support further allows teachers and students to grow, excel, and continue forward, even in the most challenging times.

**\$661,490**  
AWARDED TO  
SCHOOLS THROUGH  
LEARNING CONTINUITY  
AND INNOVATION GRANT

## LAUNCHING NEW ON-DEMAND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Higher education institutions like Grand Valley that also authorize charter public schools have the capacity to tap into the institution's collective resources to further K-12 education. During the 2020-2021 school year, with instruction schedules varying from school to school, the GVSU Charter Schools Office reimagined how professional education could be delivered with the help of one of the university's most unique resources: a television station.

The GVSU Charter Schools Office partnered with WGTV Public Media to create content called Laker Lessons. Laker Lessons are short instructional videos that teachers can access any time they need quick support on topics like literacy instruction or education technology. Laker Lessons also include two elements that countless other online videos don't have: certified veteran educators leading the lesson and the professional look of broadcast television.

The positive response educators have had to Laker Lessons indicates that this is the perfect time to deconstruct old professional education tactics. Content like Laker Lessons, that can be viewed at an individual's choosing, grants teachers — and eventually maybe, K-12 learners — more access to the information they want in any particular moment. Ultimately, it can put the wealth of expertise at a university just a click away.



Former Deputy Superintendent of the Michigan Department of Education Venessa Keelesler, Ph.D., records a Laker Lesson on student assessment.





## DISRUPTING CULTURALLY EMBEDDED ASSUMPTIONS IN EDUCATION

Grand Valley values the identities of all the learners, educators, and support staff who are part of the university and throughout its charter public schools. Understanding and embracing the diversity of perspectives within these communities can be an asset that strengthens the learning and working environment.

The events of the 2020-2021 school year underscored the urgent need to transform our public education system into one that is more equitable and just. As schools faced difficult questions, the GVSU Charter Schools Office worked with partners to create a space where educators could better address sources of inequity in classrooms and adopt practices that promoted equity in learning. Over the course of six months, hundreds of teachers engaged in facilitated reflection and hard conversations, becoming better equipped to take brave actions on behalf of others.

Opportunity in education is part of the foundational vision behind charter public schools. That vision is furthered every time educators ask themselves and their colleagues what more they can do to make sure all their kids have an equal chance at success.



Richard Lemons, Ed.D., facilitates a webinar on equity in teaching and learning. Lemons is the executive director at the Connecticut Center for School Change.





## GIVING EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS THE TOOLS TO THRIVE

Advancing ideas through innovation and adopting leading-edge practices are at the core of what we do at Grand Valley. Fast adaptation of new solutions can lead to positive long-term results for kids. The GVSU Charter Schools Office creates opportunities for beginning teachers to help them become more confident as they hone their craft from the start of their careers. This confidence will help them navigate diverse instructional environments and help more kids succeed.

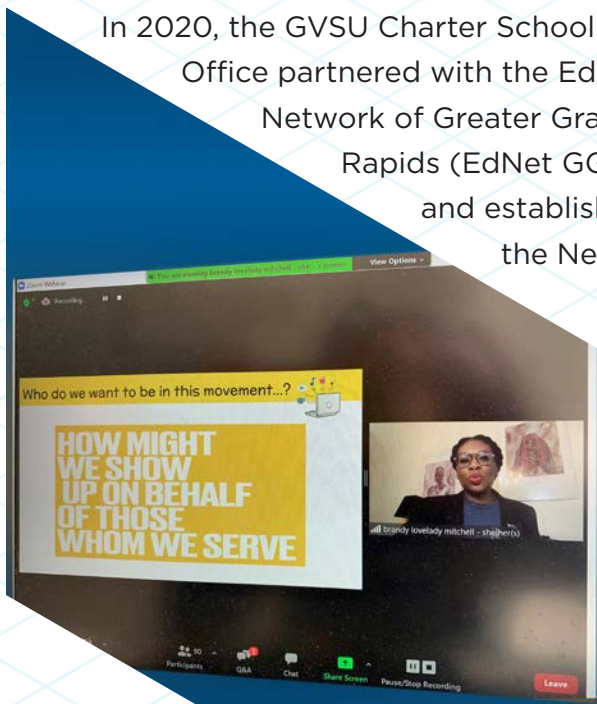
In 2020, the GVSU Charter Schools Office partnered with the Education Network of Greater Grand Rapids (EdNet GGR) and established the New



Ashley Johnson, Ph.D.,  
program officer  
for education,  
Educational Network of  
Greater Grand Rapids

Teacher Virtual Huddle (NTVH). The NTVH is a learning cohort designed primarily for educators who have only a few years of teaching experience. Veteran teachers are invited to present during NTVH events, sharing tips and insight that allow the cohort to improve their own instructional toolkit.

Having a network of colleagues and mentors gives new teachers the additional support they may need to feel confident navigating instructional environments. It also fuels a passion to find the best methods for molding kids into lifelong learners.



Brandy Lovelady-Mitchell, Ed.D.,  
of Kent ISD leads a  
session during a New  
Teacher Virtual Huddle event.



*Grand Valley is proud to walk side-by-side with its charter public schools and pleased that educators in our buildings know they can always turn to the university to find solutions for K-12 learners and families.*



## **REINFORCING OUR BELIEF IN PROACTIVE AUTHORIZATION**

Grand Valley steadfastly believes that the charter public schools it authorizes are partners in education, rather than just entities it must oversee. This long-held, innovative stance remains the catalyst to the unified front Grand Valley and its schools create when tackling the biggest challenges in education.

With the pandemic pushing schools into a state of uncertainty, Grand Valley stepped even closer to its charter public school leaders to understand what they were experiencing each day. Weekly meetings with principals, deans, and other building or district leaders allowed Grand Valley to identify trends growing across its portfolio. This qualitative data was instrumental as Grand Valley redirected its personnel and resources to amplify school leaders' work, furthering positive trends and combating potential downturns.

Grand Valley is proud to walk side-by-side with its charter public schools and pleased that educators in our buildings know they can always turn to the university to find solutions for K-12 learners and families.

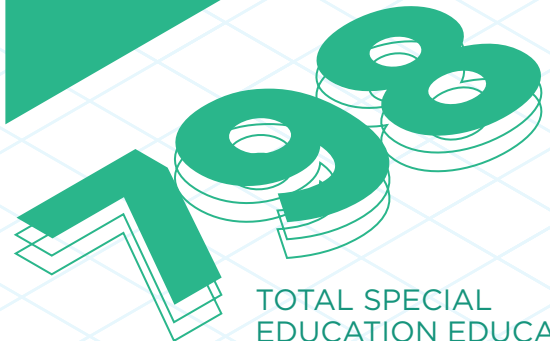
## CONNECTING SCHOOLS TO STATE LEADERS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION GUIDANCE

One of the reasons families choose Grand Valley-authorized charter public schools is the confidence parents have in the schools to support the specific needs of every child. In a year when keeping that promise became even more crucial, Grand Valley worked alongside Michigan Department of Education (MDE) leaders to ensure teachers had the right resources to support kids learning at home.

A significant portion of this collaboration focused on how to help K-12 learners who require special education services. To answer questions surrounding this goal, the GVSU Charter Schools Office hosted guidance sessions led by Teri Rink, the director of the MDE's Office of Special Education (OSE). These sessions were some of the most highly sought learning opportunities offered by the Charter Schools Office, attracting as many as 600 participants for a single session.

Closing the communication gap between those who develop guidelines and those who must implement them helps everyone move forward together. By prioritizing message clarity, teachers were better prepared to overcome some of the toughest hurdles in education that COVID-19 created.

*One of the reasons families choose Grand Valley-authorized charter public schools is the confidence parents have in the schools to support the specific needs of every child.*



TOTAL SPECIAL  
EDUCATION EDUCATORS  
ATTENDED MDE-OSE  
GUIDANCE SESSIONS



# PROFESSORS

The Grand Valley Charter Schools Office is the nexus where K-12 education and higher education professionals unite.



GVSU professor Felix Ngassa, Ph.D., teaches class.





## ANSWERING KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL NUTRITION

At Grand Valley, faculty and staff are constantly looking for solutions that work now and for whatever comes next. That sense of inquiry motivates the Grand Valley community to dive into the questions that others have yet to ask or answer.

As schools closed in response to the pandemic, many wondered how schools would still provide food to the students who depended upon school lunches. While researchers across the nation were tracking the quantity of food being distributed, the GVSU CSO teamed up with faculty member Jody Vogelzang and graduate-level learners from Grand Valley's clinical dietetics program to look at the quality of the lunch menus during the pandemic.

With schools exploring new methods to provide meals to families during school closures, the researchers examined if the dietary quality of food the students were now receiving had significantly changed. They found that, while some individual nutrition indicators may have shifted, schools were still able to give students meals with strong overall nutritional value. The researchers concluded that the shift in menus may have uncovered new ways for schools to sustainably maintain and advance the quality of school lunches.

Helping our colleagues explore their curiosities alongside our charter public schools strengthens the bond between the university and the schools, and it can uncover new data to lead to wide-scale positive changes within K-12 education.



Food distribution at Crossroads Charter Academy



Allied Health Science faculty member Jody Vogelzang, Ph.D.



## CREATING COLLEGE CONNECTIONS FROM HOME

One of the best ways for K-12 learners to see higher education as an achievable reality is to design moments for them to interact with the people who are on campus. Grand Valley's Charter Schools Office has often found that even a single personal conversation with a professor or staff member can inspire prospective learners to join the university.

In a year impacted by a pandemic, the GVSU Charter Schools Office remained committed to providing that exposure by transitioning its most comprehensive program for high school students — College Prep Week — into a weeklong virtual experience. Even though they were at home, high school learners participated in mock college courses and admissions sessions led by Grand Valley faculty and staff. This allowed them to converse with members of the GVSU community just as they would if the program was being held in person.

Young learners start to see themselves as part of a university community when they're given the space to form a bond with faculty or staff members. They find security knowing how much their ideas and open communication are valued, and they lean in to the endless possibilities the university can offer.



GVSU learner leads college mentorship session.

College preparation kits were assembled by GVSU learners and mailed to high school students.



## ADVANCING SCHOLARSHIP THROUGH SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

The GVSU Charter Schools Office is a nexus between the campus community and the communities served by Grand Valley's charter public schools. It creates opportunities not only for K-12 learners but also for Grand Valley faculty, staff, and learners to connect directly to communities across the state to advance their learning and work.

During the 2020-2021 school year, the GVSU Charter Schools Office broadened that connectivity by helping more university departments partner with K-12 schools. One major partnership was with the Criminal Justice department, where undergraduate criminal justice learners were able to complete internship hours as they supported the unique student population of Covenant House Academy Grand Rapids. The hands-on experience gave students a deeper understanding of the community they would be serving once they started their careers.

Immersive, collaborative efforts like these create educational experiences that supplement faculty instruction, putting learners in real situations for them to hone what's being taught in the classroom.



GVSU criminal justice interns with Covenant House Academy Grand Rapids school leaders



## DESIGNING INNOVATIVE LITERACY INTERVENTIONS

Grand Valley's primary focus is to help all learners perform to the highest of their capabilities. That focus is also woven into the fabric of every GVSU-authorized charter public school, and the GVSU Charter Schools Office diligently seeks groundbreaking ideas that guide K-12 learners toward excellence.

To tackle some of the challenges created by COVID-19, Grand Valley's Charter Schools Office and College of Education (COE) piloted a virtual, targeted literacy program. The program, led by Wendy Miller and Elizabeth Stolle, simultaneously elevated the reading competency of struggling learners in kindergarten through fifth grade while supplementing COE coursework through a structured tutoring methodology. GVSU undergraduate and graduate learners were trained by professors and school support specialists on how to remotely assess elementary learner reading abilities. GVSU learners would then use guided intervention strategies to help the young learners get back on track.

Whether out of habit or happenstance, continually rethinking how teaching and learning takes place can open unforeseen doors to progress. Grand Valley has embedded this quality within its work as it strives to solve problems for Michigan families.



Wendy  
Miller, GVSU  
CSO



Elizabeth  
Stolle, Ph.D.,  
GVSU College  
of Education





## PUTTING RESEARCH INTO ACTION

Sustainable solutions in education are born from a data-driven understanding of the realities and possibilities of the current learning environment. To keep kids moving forward, the GVSU Charter Schools Office is constantly looking for new ways to use research findings as tools for wide-scale growth.

That desire is also what prompted the office to become a partner in the High Impact Leadership (HIL) Project. The HIL Project is a six-year initiative blanketing 150 schools that examines how literacy achievement can unlock success in all areas of learning. The project is grounded in vast academic research, and GVSU School Support Specialist Jill Weber joined the project to help schools understand and implement the research-based literacy strategies. Jill also guided school leaders in building the infrastructure needed to add proven strategies like literacy support teams and more reading-friendly spaces for learners.

By participating in statewide exploratory initiatives like the HIL Project, the GVSU Charter Schools Office positions itself on the front lines of discovery and advancement, ultimately acquiring more strategies to move educators and learners closer to excellence.



Jill  
Weber,  
GVSU CSO



Elementary  
learner prepares  
to read.



# POLICYMAKERS

For schools to get results, the policy environment must be in alignment. Everyone — teachers, school leaders, board members, and public officials — must have shared expectations. The Grand Valley State University Charter Schools Office works to align policies among all stakeholders.



## FINDING ANSWERS AMIDST UNCERTAINTY

Strong policy is created through a blend of experience and data-driven insight. The world learned, however, that even the strongest of policies can be rendered mute in moments never experienced previously. To rapidly address such moments created by COVID-19, Grand Valley strove to capture data that could help school leaders make decisions that would spark impactful outcomes.

At end of the 2019-2020 school year and throughout the 2020-2021 school year, the GVSU Charter Schools Office partnered with Basis Policy Research to explore the effects COVID-19 was having on schools in real time. Over the course of a year, Basis and Grand Valley examined district continuity of learning plans, the impact teachers felt while working through a pandemic, and common perceptions of the school environment. These independent research projects gave school leaders, school boards, and Grand Valley high-level data that could inform the recalibration of joint work.

In a time of uncertainty, Grand Valley created actionable information to take on some of the most important and challenging questions ever faced in education. Our dedication to inquiry is unwavering, as it is often the catalyst behind widely adopted innovations.



Please visit  
[gvsu.edu/cso/research](https://gvsu.edu/cso/research)  
to read the latest  
research reports.

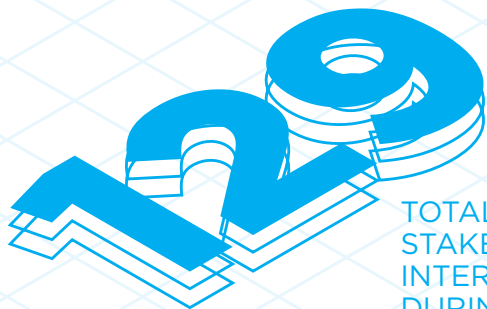


basis  
policy  
research

The framework of high standards that is woven into the charter contract evaluation process ensures Grand Valley and each of its schools are collectively taking actions that put families first and K-12 learners in a place to thrive.



CHARTER  
RENEWAL REVIEWS  
CONDUCTED IN  
2020-2021



TOTAL  
STAKEHOLDERS  
INTERVIEWED  
DURING RENEWAL  
REVIEWS

## ASSURING SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH AN ENHANCED CHARTER RENEWAL REVIEW

One of the core functions of Grand Valley's role as a charter public school authorizer is to evaluate how well each school is meeting the academic, fiscal, and organizational expectations in its charter contract. Along with meeting all state requirements, Grand Valley holds schools accountable to the impact they have on their learning community.

When a school is scheduled to have its charter renewal review, Grand Valley uses a comprehensive analysis that incorporates a significant amount of quantitative and qualitative data. The GVSU Charter Schools Office uses that data to get a thorough view of the school environment. Interviews with school community stakeholders give further clarity around certain items when more information is needed for explanation. Grand Valley then uses its findings in totality to evaluate if the school is fueling academic success, fiscally sound, promoting a safe learning environment, and is an effective viable organization.

The framework of high standards that is woven into the charter contract evaluation process ensures Grand Valley and each of its schools are collectively taking actions that put families first and K-12 learners in a place to thrive.



## MODELING HIGH-QUALITY POLICIES THROUGH ACCREDITATION

Grand Valley strongly encourages the lifelong pursuit of knowledge in the effort to improve conditions for others. The GVSU Charter Schools Office embraces that value in every aspect of its own work. We consistently reaffirm our commitment to continuous growth by having internal policies and practices deeply assessed.

One way we do this is through accreditation. In the fall of 2020, the GVSU Charter Schools Office once again earned full accreditation as recognized by Cognia, an independent organization focused on education improvement. The Cognia review team is comprised of leaders from other higher education institution authorizers of charter public schools, both in Michigan and around the country.

Since becoming the first higher education institute in the nation to earn accreditation as an authorizer in 2015, Grand Valley has cherished the opportunity to remain a leader on this front for other charter public school authorizers. Taking the time to reflect inward often leads to new discoveries and ideas for development. It can also, in turn, lead to changes that make a much bigger impact on the stakeholders being served, moving them ahead in ways they could not imagine.



Grand Valley strongly encourages the lifelong pursuit of knowledge in the effort to improve conditions for others.



## POSITIONING GOVERNANCE TRAINING TO MEET SCHOOL BOARD NEEDS

It's important that every school board member understands the complexities of the decisions they make for the school they serve. Each governing action should move the school community forward while operating with integrity toward their legal and fiduciary responsibilities—and always keeping academic results as the top priority.

The GVSU Charter Schools Office builds the leadership capacity of boards governing Grand Valley's charter public schools through annual training sessions. During the 2020-2021 school year, Grand Valley turned to the Charter Board President's Advisory Committee — a committee comprised of a dozen veteran board presidents — to better understand the training topics that would be the most impactful for board members. Stemming from those conversations came the Virtual Board Training Series, a monthly governance growth opportunity for board members. The series included sessions for dealing with topical COVID-related issues, as well as evergreen subject matter like fiscal sustainability and board member recruitment.

When a school board is comprised of caring and knowledgeable individuals, it is better able to mitigate any risk the school faces and remain focused on long-term success for learners.



State Rep. Brad Paquette discusses school aid budget with charter board presidents.





# COMMUNITY

The Grand Valley State University Charter Schools Office is dedicated to strengthening and expanding relationships between the university, its charter public schools, and the communities they serve.



## HARNESSING THE LAKER COMMUNITY TO FURTHER LEARNING

Grand Valley is committed to equipping all students with the tools and resources they need to positively shape their academic journey. With many students unable to attend school in person during the 2020-2021 school year, the GVSU Charter Schools Office helped launch a new gateway of engagement called K-12 Connect.

K-12 Connect allows Michigan students and families to partner with members of the Grand Valley community to receive tutoring or college preparation support. The support is free, conducted virtually, and in most instances each K-12 student works directly with a current GVSU learner or faculty member. The program also allows K-12 students to receive assistance from the same person to foster a meaningful connection that fuels deeper engagement.

Innovative ideas like K-12 Connect further bridge the gap between the university's collective wealth of resources and younger generations of students who are learning in a new variety of ways. By opening more doors to knowledge, Grand Valley is ensuring success throughout this school year and beyond.



*“K-12 Connect has been a huge help for my fully online kids. I would love to see this continue even when my kids go back full-time into the school system. The 1:1 connection makes a huge difference for their education and I am grateful!”*

- K-12 Connect parent

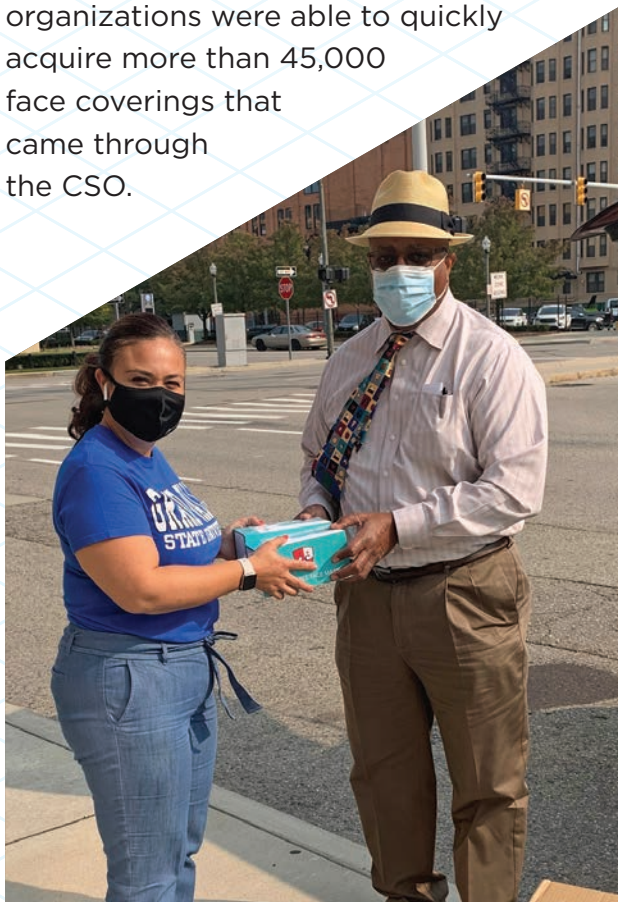


## DISTRIBUTING FACE MASKS TO SCHOOLS

GVSU-issued  
face mask

As schools continued to navigate the pandemic, the GVSU Charter Schools Office collaborated with statewide education partners to supply schools with the items they needed to keep students, staff, and families safe.

Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, the GVSU Charter Schools Office frequently turned its physical office locations in Grand Rapids and Detroit into distribution hubs where school leaders and community organizations could collect personal protective equipment. Over the course of the year, schools and organizations were able to quickly acquire more than 45,000 face coverings that came through the CSO.



45,000  
THE NUMBER OF FACE COVERINGS ACQUIRED THROUGH THE CSO

Every teacher, parent, and child should always be able to see their school as a safe place, no matter what circumstances a community is facing. Grand Valley has helped schools maintain that secure feeling in the most stressful times by creating additional avenues to access vital resources. With stakeholders not needing to worry about finding supplies, more time and energy can be dedicated to supporting student achievement.

GVSU CSO's Christina Mireles distributes face masks to Detroit educators.



Shelby Powell



Collin Louis



Ana Smith

GVSU learners from the Charter through College Scholars Alumni Program

## CULTIVATING CHARTER STUDENT SUPPORT NETWORKS

Similar to any type of significant change, students transitioning from high school to college face new unknowns that can be understood best through experience. To help ease their assimilation to college life, the GVSU Charter Schools Office created a support network dedicated to alumni of Grand Valley’s charter public schools.

The Charter Through College Scholars Alumni Program was designed to help its members grow through symbiotic relationships. Incoming students get to immediately learn about their new surroundings from Grand Valley upperclassmen who may have graduated from the same high school. At the same time, the older students hone their leadership qualities through their mentorships. Collectively, the group explores how to succeed in college by tackling topics like personal finance and proper exam preparation.

Every student deserves to thrive in higher education. Thanks to the Charter Through College Scholars Alumni Program, learners will have the additional guidance they need to flourish. By guiding them to the answers to their unknown questions, Grand Valley is giving students reinforcements to excel.



Barry Hall, Ed.D., assistant director of charter through college programs





## COMBINING FORCES TO ADDRESS A CRISIS

Grand Valley understands that overcoming obstacles can be done best when utilizing the collective knowledge and resources at hand. To help schools work through issues created by COVID-19, the GVSU Charter Schools Office worked with networks around the state to find the best solutions for each community.

One example can be found in our participation in the COVID313 Community Coalition, a partnership between community organizations, service providers, and the City of Detroit that was designed to support Detroit families through COVID-19. As a major education partner in the city, it was imperative for Grand Valley to be a part of the coalition to provide insight from the prospective of GVSU's charter public schools, as well as to share key information with thousands of families.

Having a unified front that included leaders from various sectors and backgrounds allowed the coalition to comprehensively address community needs. It provided a forum where families could come to have questions answered and concerns addressed. It also was a place where charter public schools would know their voice would be represented.



GVSU CSO's Rajeshri Gandhi Bhatia is a leading member of the COVID313 Community Coalition.



## RESPONDING TO PARENT CONCERNS THROUGH INNOVATION

Schools that embrace new pathways for learning get a better sense for how they already serve kids well and discover what actions they can take to do even more. Amidst a pandemic, the need for quick discovery was vital and prompted schools to explore pathways they may not have previously considered.

In the 2020-2021 school year, Grand Valley authorized PrepNet Virtual Academy, a fully online public school that is part of the PrepNet network of public high schools for parents who were concerned with having their student participate in face-to-face instruction. The opportunity allowed families to keep their children within a school network they trusted without having to sacrifice safety. In short, students using the virtual option would still be part of their brick-and-mortar school while receiving instruction through a new method.

Grand Valley also authorized Fostering Leadership Academy (FLA), a new public school that operates in partnership with one of the state's leading social services agencies to educate students in the foster care system. Working in partnership, they are able to increase the capacity to deliver their unique trauma-informed instruction to more students who needed emotional support.

Communities significantly benefit from such partnerships because they create worthwhile solutions that families seek for their children's education.

*“Our school is a great alternative for families and kids getting through a tough time, and it provides a unique experience that really helps them learn.”*

- Dan West, Fostering Leadership Academy board member



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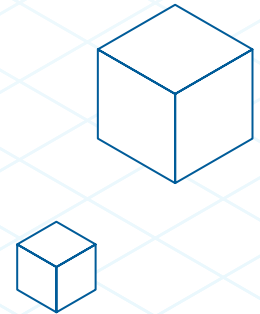


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