



# Finding Common Ground: Advancing Higher Education in a Divided Policy Landscape

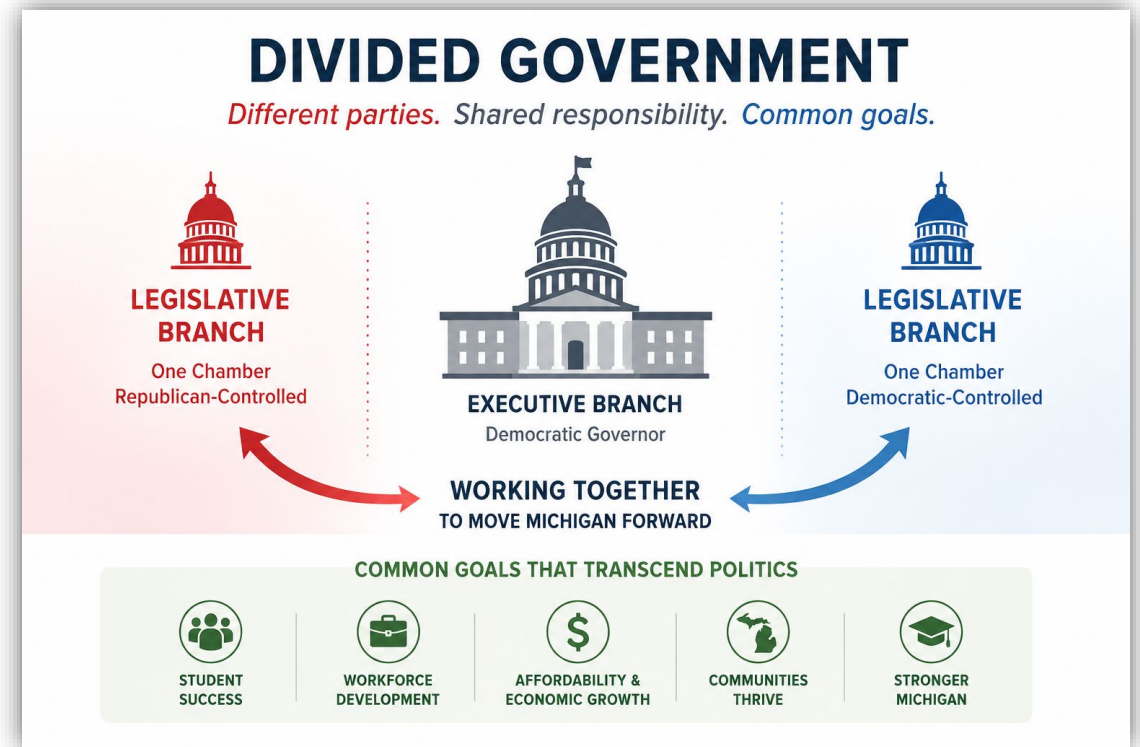
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# The Reality of Today's Policy Environment



- Higher education increasingly intersects with political polarization
- Budget pressures create competition among priorities
- Policymakers want workforce outcomes and measurable return on investment
- Trust is built through relationships, consistency, and shared goals
- Progress often requires coalition-building across sectors and parties

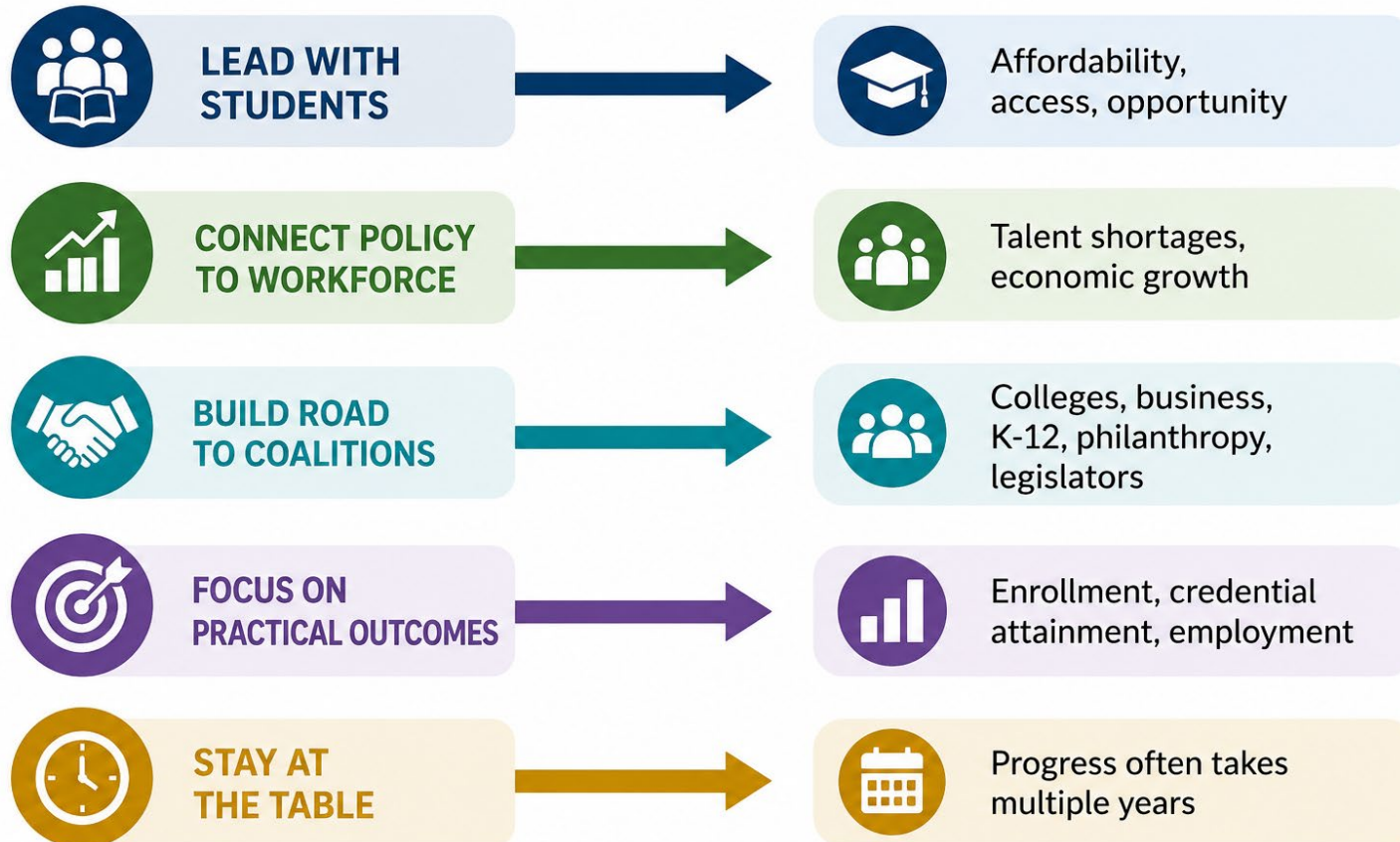


# What Creates Common Ground?



## STRATEGY

## WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE



# Divided Government Case Studies



## CASE STUDY #1

### MICHIGAN RECONNECT

*Bipartisan policy focused on adult talent attainment*



DEMOCRATIC GOVERNOR



BIPARTISAN LEGISLATIVE SPONSORS  
(1 REPUBLICAN, 1 DEMOCRAT)



BROAD EMPLOYER & WORKFORCE SUPPORT



Tuition-free pathway for adult learners



Re-engaged adults with some college, no credential



Connected talent shortages to higher education investment



Created momentum around college affordability

“ The conversation shifted from politics to workforce participation.

## CASE STUDY #2

### MICHIGAN ACHIEVEMENT SCHOLARSHIP

*Advancing affordability during divided government*



DEMOCRATIC GOVERNOR



REPUBLICAN-CONTROLLED HOUSE & SENATE



SHARED FOCUS ON AFFORDABILITY & WORKFORCE RETENTION



Largest state financial aid investment in decades



Pre-cursor to community college guarantee



Expanded pathways for recent high school graduates



Required compromise and alignment across branches

“ Different perspectives arrived at the same conclusion: Michigan needed to make college more affordable.

## CASE STUDY #3

### DUAL ENROLLMENT MODERNIZATION

*An example of coalition-building still in progress*



DEMOCRATIC GOVERNOR



DIVIDED LEGISLATURE



INCLUDED IN ALL FY27 BUDGET PROPOSALS



K-12 + higher education collaboration



Workforce alignment



Rural and equity considerations



Funding modernization conversations



Moving beyond outdated funding structures

“ Not every success is immediate — maintaining momentum is part of the work.



REAL PROGRESS HAPPENS WHEN WE FOCUS ON STUDENTS, TALENT, AND MICHIGAN'S FUTURE.

# Lessons for Higher Education Leaders



- Start with shared outcomes, not political labels
- Workforce and student success can unite unlikely partners
- Relationships matter before legislation moves
- Clear, consistent messaging builds trust
- Incremental progress still matters
- Institutions and associations must stay solutions-oriented



“  
**Common ground**  
doesn't require  
**uniform agreement** —  
it requires  
**enough shared purpose**  
to move **students**  
and **states** forward.  
”



# Discussion



- **What higher education issues in Michigan have bipartisan potential?**
- **How are you framing higher education conversations?**
- **What partnerships have moved policy forward in your work?**