With the launch of TICAS’ org-wide 2023 strategic plan, TICAS is charting a path onward in our mission to advocate for every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, or family wealth, to have access to a quality higher education program without the need to incur debt. Our vision is to reimagine a national higher education system where students can successfully complete a college credential with confidence that their education will afford them a pathway toward economic mobility and financial sustainability. In service to this ambitious goal, each TICAS team has aligned its activities and strategies toward this shared goal.

In Michigan this included bringing on a new Director to build on the strong foundation laid in TICAS’ first two years working in the state by fully aligning the state level policy work to the organization’s new mission and vision and by elevating a student-centered approach to policy decision making at the state-level. TICAS’ primary focus is to center higher education policy discussions on the impacts that policies and investments will have on students. To do that effectively it’s critical to create systems and spaces to uplift community and student voice to state-level policy engagement.

As part of my strategy for taking on this task, I turned to you! I spent the first 100 days of my role listening to legislators, state departments, higher education policy stakeholders, funders, and community leaders across the state to identify the best ways to move forward in achieving this goal. The recurring themes of my conversations, which have guided all of our work this year, were...

- Equitable engagement of community across the state.
- Education and training on advocacy and policy engagement in MI.
- Easy to understand data, research, resources, and tools for MI higher ed policy.
- Elevation of student advocates and student engagement.
- Real-time issue resolution and uplift in policy priority focuses.

Dubbed our “Year of Outreach”, this has certainly been a year of learning and listening. As we work through our team’s three-year development strategy, guided by the advice of everyone across the state who is impacted by or implicated in our work, it goes without saying that we would not have been able to do a fraction of what we accomplished in this year without you!

So, venture through the 2022-23 TICAS MI policy impact outcomes and all the great things you helped us achieve this year.
The TICAS MI team, using preexisting regional maps, divided the state into 10 regions. We set forth to engage at least five (5) community stakeholders in each region to ensure equitable contribution and uplift of regional and community specific policy needs. We met this goal in all but two regions and will continue to engage stakeholders across the state with the hopes that each region continues to grow.

Community partners are organizations and high-level stakeholders providing direct service, support resources and/or strategy development for students and families "on the ground". These partners expressed an interest in increasing their knowledge and engagement in state-level policy discussions impacting students. This does not include higher education state-level organizations, state departments, institutions, or elected officials all of whom we also partner and work together with to achieve our goals. This group also does not include organizations that we've engaged with for the sole purpose of sharing information as part of outreach efforts, only those who proactively stated they wanted to be more involved. This category does, however, include engaged students.

If you want to find ways to continue to build your region, feel free to reach out to us to connect us with your regional stakeholders.
As part of our strategy, we wanted to ensure that we provided timely and informative ways to engage in policy that is consumable and attainable for the novice. We know that policy discussions and design can be complex and overwhelming. We work hard to demystify policy engagement, elevate the importance of community voice in policy decision making, and provide actionable steps at various levels to make this happen. To achieve this goal, we not only brought this content in training at conferences but offered training directly to organizations.

We heard you! Many people do not have the time to read through 30-page research pieces about the importance and/or recommendations on a particular issue. While TICAS, especially on federal issues, will still provide this level of research and analysis, the MI team has shifted gears to providing shorter and more concise publications that effectively position anyone to understand and follow the research and data efforts used to support and drive changes in policies.

**With the support of TICAS leadership and our communications team, we were able to make significant changes to our products and engage a wider array of stakeholders. Examples include:**

- **Interactive Map and webpage with access and success data by county and region**
  - 82 county level one page fact sheets are available upon request

- **16 Policy Publications including**
  - Bimonthly newsletter
  - Community Insight Blogs on pressing topics
  - Research Data Fact sheets and Briefs
  - Statement responses to relevant MI policy issues

- **Quoted across four (4) media outlets in Michigan**

After making these changes we increased our material open rates by over 20%, averaging 55%, since the implementation of our new approach. This tells us loud and clear that more people are finding the value of materials shared, thanks to your input and advice for improvements.
Student Advocates and Student Voice

We took a double pronged approach to addressing this priority. We wanted to be intentional and inclusive in creating safe spaces for policy engagement no matter the policy expertise and/or previous experience. We have long recognized that a person’s experience level in policy does not and should not negate their expertise in contributing to the work, including sharing the insights gained through lived experiences. So, we set forth to create a community-based student-centered policy coalition as well as created a MI student advocacy program to underscore the need and provide the opportunity to be inclusive in policy discussions.

Community-Based Coalition

We expanded our existing TICAS coalition comprised of policy stakeholders to include community leaders who had interest, expertise and/or relevant experience in the priority focus areas identified by existing coalition members. The expansion resulted in the creation of the Student-Centered Policy Advocacy Collective (SC-PAC). The SC-PAC is a group of student-centered community leaders working either for policy organizations in MI or on the ground service providers working to affect change in the trajectory of student’s ability to navigate the education pipeline to viable careers.

This group is comprised of over 20+ members representing 17 student focus areas:

- Student Advocacy
- Workforce Development
- Business
- Policy
- College Access Service Providers
- Adult Support
- Foster/Displaced Youth
- Teachers
- DACA/Hispanic
- Out of School Partners
- Basic Needs
- MI Dept of Education
- On Campus Supports
- College Success Service Providers
- Promise Zones
- Student Scholarship Providers
- Equity for Young Black Men

MI Student Advocacy Program

We are piloting our first statewide higher ed student advocacy fellowship program. This program is a grant program for students to not only learn about MI policy but identify a policy issue to research, generate policy or practice improvements to address it, and conduct the necessary advocacy to move their selected issue forward.

With outreach help from community partners, we had over 50 student applicants representing 8 of the 10 regions, and currently enrolled across all school types (public, private, community college) and various backgrounds (e.g., Grad/Undergrad/Prospective, traditional/adult, urban/rural, Low/High SES, transfer, etc.).

We wanted to be sure to engage students and experiences that are rarely heard by making this program open to students despite experience levels. The selected students for the inaugural 2023-24 Cohort of ten TICAS MI Student Fellows are currently undergoing their policy training and will be formally announced at the top of our advocacy season in September.
The community stated that while they understand policy investments and efforts are happening at the state-level, it is rare that these things are “felt” on the ground level. Stakeholders are navigating so many complexities of the systems developed, that by the time they recognize any benefit to be gained, they are completely wiped out by the amount of work it takes to actualize the benefits of new changes and policies.

In response to this concern, we as an organization continued to work with key higher ed stakeholders focused on long-term system level changes that center the needs of students, while also uplifting specific changes to address concrete barriers and supports faced by students and those working with students on the ground. This was our first year taking the approach of listening to community and building our fiscal year advocacy agenda on their direct needs and it was an eye-opening and gratifying experience.

As a result, we uplifted and advocated for eight (8) policy priorities aligned with our team's focuses of affordability, access, and success. Six of the eight priorities were represented in part or fully in the final budget or addressed by managing state departments. Check out our Fiscal Year 2023 Policy Priority outcome fact sheet. Please disregard the typo in the title of “FY2”, it is in fact FY23.

Given this success, we plan to continue this approach to policy advocacy by having the leaders that are members of our SC-PAC and our Student Fellows select our upcoming 2024 priorities. At the same time, our work with higher education stakeholders on system-level policy change efforts continues unabated.

While this is only a snapshot of TICAS MI highlights in 2022-23, we are excited about the continual growth of our community and the effect of our efforts with your support. We thank you for your constant engagement, feedback, and continual presence that actualizes a much-needed new approach to policy in MI. Your voice and your presence matter and decision makers value the ability to better understand how they can best support those they serve.

Let’s continue onward!

For more information on how to get involved, please complete our “How to Get Involved” survey. We will meet you where you are, there is a seat at the table for everyone no matter your background.