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To: Council about Parochiaid
From: Cara Marie Dobie
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Re: Legislative Update

New Color-Coded Accountability Reports Causing Confusion

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has released school accountability reports including the new Scorecards for districts and schools and its “Top to Bottom” ranking list, as well as the list of Reward, Focus, and Priority Schools. The School Accountability Scorecard replaces the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reports. The Scorecard uses a five color system—ranging from green (good) to red (poor)—based on goals met or improvement made. Around three percent of schools received a green scorecard and fifteen percent red, with 82 percent receiving yellow, orange, or lime green.

The new scorecard is already very controversial because poor performance of a single subgroup within a school can—as one observer put it—“tank” an otherwise good scorecard.

Further, students in the state’s Education Achievement Authority (EAA) are basically meeting their proficiency targets, according to MDE data released two weeks ago. But, the new color-coded scorecard automatically had all 15 EAA schools at the lowest rating of red. In a recent Michigan Information & Research Service, Inc. (MIRS) article, this is possible because of something called “audit checks.” After MDE has rated each subgroup for a school, they go through and change the overall color based on a few checks. One is being a “priority school,” which is to say the bottom five percent of schools in the top-to-bottom ranking.

So, even though EAA schools are meeting their targets, they will be red because of their ranking on a separate MDE scoring system. This is necessary, because to be in the EAA they have to be in the bottom 5 percent of districts and being in the bottom five percent gets you red. The top-to-bottom ranking gives a little clearer picture of where the schools are in relation to others. High schools in the EAA showed slight improvement in the ranking and four of the five high schools showed improvement in their overall ranking; the remaining school saw no change.

Consolidating School Districts

On June 7, two bills (HB 4813 & 4815) were introduced with bi-partisan House sponsors, Rep. Bill Rogers (R-Brighton) and Rep. David Rutledge (D-Ypsilanti) to respond to the problems of school districts financially unable to provide education in the next year. Inkster and Buena Vista were the two districts of most immediate concern, and the legislation would create a mechanism under which such districts would be consolidated into one or more other public school districts.

Both bills (HB 4813 & 4815), tie-barred to each other, were signed by Governor Snyder on July 2, 2013. They were assigned PA 96 '13 and PA 97 '13 with immediate effect.

Legislators Announce Upcoming Education Priorities

Representative Lisa Posthumus Lyons (R-Alto) and Senator Phil Pavlov (R-St. Clair), chairs of the House and Senate Education committees, stated that working toward a solution for the 55 school districts operating with a deficit is a priority for the fall. Other fall priorities include the teacher evaluation report from the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, the Education Achievement Authority and the Michigan Merit Curriculum changes. Sen. Pavlov says the EAA bill (HB 4369) restricts the EAA's ability to help failing schools. He also said his committee is committed to the rigor of the Michigan Merit Curriculum but is looking at providing some flexibility.

State Board of Ed Will Push Common Core

At a special subcommittee hearing the week of August 12, State Board of Education President John Austin said that if the Legislature doesn't approve the funding for Common Core, the State Board of Education will promote the standards anyway. It will be up to the decision of local districts whether to continue the standards. Austin also testified to the subcommittee that the state can and will change the standards if they are not working. Professor Diane Ravitch, who served as assistant secretary of education for former President George H.W. Bush, urged state lawmakers to approach the Common Core standards with caution and go slow with implementation.

Two Upcoming Meetings of Interest to CAP

On September 11, the House and Senate committees on education will have a joint hearing on teacher evaluation. Presentations at this hearing are Dr. Deborah Ball, who will outline the recommendations of the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness. Also speaking at the hearing is Sandi Jacobs, National Council on Teacher Quality.

On September 12, the House and Senate appropriations subcommittees on school aid will also hold a hearing. At this hearing, State Superintendent Mike Flanagan will review the most recent quarterly report on deficit districts. Needless to say, the state's underfunding of K-12 education is the principal reason for the rise in deficit districts, to the detriment of Michigan's children.

Bills of Interest to CAP

SB 423 School Instruction-Sen. Patrick Colbeck (R-Canton Township) requires instruction in certain United States historical information. Introduced on 6/11/13 and referred to the Committee on Education.

HB 4797 Financially Insolvent Schools-Rep. David Rutledge (D-Ypsilanti) provides for criteria and procedures for providing education to residents of a financially insolvent school district. Introduced on 5/30/13 and referred to the Committee on Education.

HB 4798 Financially Insolvent Schools-Rep. Bill Rogers (R-Brighton) considers pupils residing in district that is not financially able to provide education to residents of educating district for school aid purposes. Introduced on 5/30/13 and referred to the Committee on Education.

HB 4625 School Districts-Rep. Pete Lund (R-Shelby Township) modifies criteria for establishment of compensation levels or adjustments. Reported in the House on 5/22/13; Substitute H-1 adopted and referred to a second reading on 5/22/13.

SJR R For-Profit Public Schools-Sen. Rebekah Warren (D-Ann Arbor) would prohibit operation of public school on for-profit basis in state constitution. Introduced on 4/10/13 and referred to the Committee on Education.

HB 4369 Education Achievement Authority-Rep. Lisa Lyons (R-Alto) establishes the Education Achievement Authority as part of public education system and provide for its power and duties. Received in the Senate on 4/09/13 and referred to the Committee on Education.

SB 83 Conversion Schools-Sen. Dave Robertson (R-Grand Blanc) provides for conversion schools for public school academies. Introduced on 1/29/13 and referred to the Committee on Education.

HB 4032 Cyber Schools-Rep. Doug Geiss (D-Taylor) requires cyber schools post materials on website and submit to Department of Education. Introduced on 1/22/13 and referred to the Committee on Education.