

To: Council About Parochiaid  
From: Cara Marie Dobie  
Date: September 11, 2015  
Re: Legislative Update

### **Snyder Signs Early Warning Package**

On July 7, Governor Snyder signed a package of bills (HB 4325, HB 4331, and HB 4332) into law which will “enable school districts to resolve potential financial issues before they become unmanageable.” The package allows the state treasurer to determine which school districts are financially stressed and to mandate periodic reporting if a school district doesn’t voluntarily adopt the recommendations of the intermediate district. The bills also require school districts with a fund balance of less than 5% for two consecutive years to send their budget assumptions to the Treasury Department when setting their annual budget.

Supporters of the package argue that it will help financially distressed districts find solutions to their problems without forcing the state to dissolve the district. Opponents hold that the bills give too much power to the Treasury and take away power from local units.

### **Third Grade Reading Plan Sees Committee Hearing**

HB 4822, sponsored by Rep. Amanda Price (R-Park Township) would add a new section to the Revised School Code to require, beginning in the 2016-2017 school year, a third grade student’s advancement to the fourth grade to be based on reading proficiency. While cautious without knowing the details of the plan, Education groups are supportive of reading intervention for early grades.

The committee hearing, with testimony only, took place on September 10<sup>th</sup>. Gary Naeyaert, Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), testified in favor of the bill as well as John Kennedy, chair of Governor Snyder’s 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading workgroup. There were questions on where funding for the enhanced reading program would come from. Kennedy suggested that funding could come from the At-Risk fund, but there were no explanations on how this would affect other At-Risk funded programs.

The bill includes reading assistance programs that public schools must implement to ensure student success, including ongoing professional development for early elementary school teachers provided by skilled reading/literacy coaches.

### **School Choice Draws At-Risk Students**

Michigan State University released a study on July 28 that showed from the 2005-2006 school year to the 2012-2013 school year, although total student enrollment declined from 1.8 million to 1.6 million students, the number of students participating in school of choice rose from 66,560 students (3.7% of total students) to 115,209 students (7.1% of total students). The study also showed that the percentage of black school of choice students (27.3%) was much greater than the percentage of black students remaining at their traditional school. (16.5%).

The study also found that more students were enrolled in charter schools than schools of choice; in 2005-2006 charter students were 5.3% of the population and in 2012-2013 they were 7.97% of the population. This study did not break down the data by school district, but the MSU professor who led the study said he is planning future studies to see how key districts are affected and what role school of choice plays in racial segregation and student performance.

### **Panel Stresses Authorizers' Duty to Close Failing Charters**

In August, education officials told state legislators across the country that charter school authorizers must close failing charter schools if those schools are not meeting acceptable standards. Robin Lake, of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, and Alex Medler, of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, argued that charter school authorizers need the ability to close charter schools that are not performing. Lake said the role of authorizers has changed over the last 20 years and that originally, accountability equaled financial compliance. But, accountability is no longer that narrowly viewed. "We didn't pay enough attention to authorizing and governance," she said.

Lake further emphasized that the best authorizers should monitor capacity and compliance, provide resources to allow schools to meet objectives, have a research and development component, and create infrastructure to give all students fair access.

### **Reform Office Pledges Further Work on State's Longest-Struggling Schools**

The State School Reform Office (SSRO) removed 16 schools from the "priority schools" list of the lowest 5% performing schools, which leaves 51 schools still on the list. The SSRO stated that the 16 schools have shown enough improvement to be removed and that they will continue to work with the other 51, (34 of which have been on the list since 2010, the other 17 since 2011).

Natasha Baker, School Reform Officer, has stated that she will be working with these schools until the end of the calendar year, but has not given details of what will be done if the schools do not show progress. She also hasn't discussed how her plans may connect with Governor Snyder's plans for the State School Reform District and the Educational Achievement Authority.

### **SBE Moving Again Toward Adopting Social Studies, Science Standards**

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) reports that the state is moving toward adopting new standards for social studies and science. MDE noted positive feedback has been received from the 40 plus lawmakers they have met with, including Representative Amanda Price, chair of the House Education Committee. Representative Tim Kelly (R-Saginaw Township), chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on School Aid, has suspicions that his colleagues will have issues with the updates once they have a chance to examine them.

MDE is projecting that the standards will be brought to the State Board of Education (SBE) in October and has stated that the sets of standards are Michigan-based, although some of the framework has come from multi-state consortiums that Michigan participated in.

### **Whiston: We'll Propose Teacher Eval Plan If Legislation Doesn't Pass**

State Superintendent Brian Whiston said he will work with the Legislature to pass a teacher evaluation bill, but if unsuccessful, he'll work with the State Board of Education (SBE) to develop a teacher evaluation plan. Last session's bills from Representative Adam Zemke (D-Ann Arbor) and Senator Margaret O'Brien (R-Portage) specify the evaluation models to be used by districts, while Senator Phil Pavlov's (R-St. Clair) bill allows districts to have a bit more local control over how they go about evaluating teachers. Whiston believes that the different philosophies can be fused together into the final package.

### **Groups Emphasize Poverty, At-Risk Funding for Ed Reform Ideas**

State Superintendent Brian Whiston, who has been promoting the goal of making Michigan a top 10 education state in 10 years, organized a pitch where nine advocacy groups spoke to the SBE for eight minutes each discussing how to achieve this goal. The Upjohn Institute, the Middle Cities Education Association (MCEA), and the Michigan League for Public Policy (MLPP) all advocated increasing or bolstering funding for at risk students while MCEA and MLPP specifically talked about how poverty affects education. The Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA) advocated learning standards and instructional practices, the Business Leaders for Michigan (BLM) focused on early childhood education and tough standards and assessments, and the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) and the Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP)

supporting improving and strengthening teacher quality. Whiston stated that there will be presentations from as many as 15 more groups at the next SBE meeting. Ideally, the discussions will end by October so that a draft report on recommendation could be created by November and the final report to be released in December.

### **Fed Waiver Would Allow State To Wait On Naming Struggling Schools**

On August 13, the state's proposal to designate its lowest-performing schools every three years instead of annually gained approval from the federal government. In March, the Department of Education (MDE) submitted a waiver request and now the MDE will label schools as "priority", in the bottom 5%, or "focus", where they have large achievement gaps between the top and bottom performing students. This will now be done every three years so that two years of data assessments can be used. "Reward" schools, which are the top category, will still be named annually. Congress may still reauthorize or replace the ESEA which could put the waiver in jeopardy.