



OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT

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Special Message and Request for Action from Superintendent Doug Newcombe

Dear Parents, Families and Citizens:

Many of those who know me are aware that I am always open to ideas and want what is best for our students, our schools and our community. I rarely provide information to our community members on legislative matters. But I believe we are at a crossroads in the direction of public education in Michigan. And it is important that everyone fully understands what that means and how they feel about it.

We live in a great democracy. Unfortunately in Michigan right now, I am concerned that some of our State leaders and those who support them are working on very important education legislation very quickly that will have a long-term impact on what parents, grandparents, students, teachers, and citizens call "their school." And these bills could end up in place before many people even realize what is going on. There are some parts of these bills that may have merit and we do not want to be afraid of change if it is change for the right reasons.

While I may not always agree with our legislators, I would like to think that most really want to do what is best. When it comes to education, there are legislators who understandably believe they need to do something for schools that are failing in various parts of the State and to help students and parents have more choices and opportunities.

However there are some who appear to want to use that argument as a reason to completely change what most people see as public schools. And there is no evidence these changes will actually work. What I do know is that these intended reforms and past reforms and mandates are making it more difficult for teachers and principals to carry out their mission of improving student learning and knowledge.

With the current bills, there are few or no examples of other states or countries even using some of the ideas and bills proposed by the legislature or Governor. As a result there is little or no evidence any of these measures will work. If these bills go through, the children in Michigan become subjects of an educational experiment with no guarantee it will work.

Let me give you a couple of examples in what are some very lengthy legislative bills and reports. Right now, the State can take over the lowest 5% of schools in what is known as an Education Authority. The idea is to provide assistance of some kind to help those schools improve. Under the new bills, this Authority would answer only to the Governor and would not have to follow any of the same standards as public schools. Further, each succeeding year an additional 5% of schools could be absorbed into this Authority, meaning that over the next 10-20 years, all schools could end up in the Authority.

In addition, school districts which have closed buildings because of the lack of State funding, would be forced to invest dollars to maintain these closed buildings so these school buildings could be taken over by the State to use as charter schools or within the Education Authority. Private entities or for-profit corporations could use these buildings to set up their version of public schools using taxpayer dollars.

There is also a study underway linked to these bills that will allow the State to make significant changes to school funding. And the changes are significant and will allow for private companies and others to have more access to taxpayer funds for education.

Some of the proponents of these changes suggest that educators are afraid of change. That may be true for some on any issue. But the larger concern is that the "afraid of change" phrase is also used to silence people who express legitimate concerns.

I support making thoughtful changes in education that include the voices of teachers, principals, parents, and citizens in the discussions and not just those in Lansing who are listening to a select few individuals and groups.

I invite you to review the bills listed below and would really appreciate that, if you share my concerns, please contact your representatives and other State leaders.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Doug Newcombe, Superintendent

Bills Being Considered:

House Bill 6004 and Senate Bill 1358- Would expand a separate and statewide school district (the EAA) overseen by a governor-appointed chancellor and functioning outside the authority of the State Board of Education or state school superintendent. These schools are exempt from the same laws and quality measures of community-governed public schools. The EAA can seize unused school buildings (built and financed by local taxpayers) and force sale or lease to charter, non-public or EAA schools.

House Bill 5923- Creates several new forms of charter and online schools with no limit on the number. Bundled with HB 6004/SB1358, many of these schools could be created by the EAA. Public schools are not allowed to create these new schools unless they charter them. Selective enrollment/dis-enrollment policies will likely lead to greater segregation in our public schools. This bill creates new schools without changing the overall funding available, further diluting resources for community-governed public schools.

Senate Bill 620- Known as the 'Parent Trigger' bill, this would allow the lowest achieving 5% of schools to be converted to a charter school while allowing parents or teachers to petition for the desired reform model. This bill will not directly affect our district, but disenfranchises voters, ends their local control, and unconstitutionally hands taxpayer-owned property over to for-profit companies. Characterized as parent-empowerment, this bill does little to develop deep, community-wide parent engagement and organization.

Legislative Contact information:

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