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The Education Achievement Authority *Plans for Helping Failing Schools and Things Left Undone*

Michigan's economic recovery is predicated on young people being ready for post-secondary, work and life. This fact is seen acutely by community members, and many Legislators are feeling particular pressure from their constituents, consistent with their own beliefs, to work for changes that move more young people into educational success. In addition, there is added pressure by the Federal Government to reduce gaps in academic achievement.

Previous Governors, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) have suggested, required and supported new strategies to serve young people who are not succeeding through high school. Many communities around the state have tried new strategies to improve high school graduation rates. Much attention has been paid to the concentration of student failure – those students, schools and communities who have not succeeded in their educational outcomes for some time.

In 2009, P.A. 204 instructed the MDE to identify the lowest achieving five percent of schools in Michigan, and requires those schools to submit a redesign plan to the state. Governor Snyder took this one step further in his initial education reform efforts by requiring redesign plans for the lowest performing five percent of schools and assuming operation of those schools not improving under those plans. In 2011, the Education Achievement System (EAS) that's led by a free-standing Education Achievement Authority (EAA) was created to do just this. The EAA was intended to be a statewide school district serving the lowest performing five percent of schools. However, the initial schools that are currently being evaluated under the EAA are only those within the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) that have been identified as low performers in the 2010-11 school year.

The EAA is currently operated as an inter-local agreement governed by a board of directors appointed by DPS, Eastern Michigan University and the Governor and led by the DPS Emergency Manager (appointed by the Governor). The EAA currently serves about 10,000 students in 15 schools that were previously under DPS – 12 schools are directly managed by the EAA and three are charter schools. As part of school redesign efforts, the EAA currently works to do the following:

- Empower principals to hire and fire staff. Contract negotiations are overseen by the EAA.
- Require continuous improvement models for each member of the staff and education plans for all students.
- Provide intensive training and professional coaching for teachers and administrators.
- Offer the potential for a longer school day and school year.
- Form and utilize Parent Advisory Councils at each school with increased decision-making authority, more information sharing with parents, and operating written parent agreements.

Recently, failed attempts were made in 2012 to codify the EAS in state law to allow for expansion beyond low performing schools in DPS. In the current legislative session, House Bill 4369 (H.B. 4369) was introduced and has been approved by the House of Representatives. This bill moves next to the Senate Education Committee. If codified, the statewide EAA district would operate the lowest achieving five percent of public schools for a maximum of up to 50 schools through a phased-in approach such that the EAA would oversee 15 schools through June 2013, 27 schools through June 2014, 39 schools through June 2015, and 50 schools after that. Schools could leave the EAA when their students' test scores improved enough to lift the school out of the bottom five percent for four consecutive years. In addition to what the EAA currently does, H.B. 4369 specifies the following:

- Each school operated by the EAA could establish a School Reinvention and Transformation Team made up of parents/guardians of EAA students, other residents in the school district, teachers, principals, and other EAA employees to advise the EAA on school goals, performance metrics, and effectiveness. If a School Reinvention and Transformation Team was not appointed, 25 or more parents/guardians of school district residents could request in writing that one be established.
- A school in the bottom five percent may *not* be shifted to the EAS if it is determined that there is greater likelihood for improvement if the school remained under the control of its own board. Further, it allows the school board that oversees a school in the bottom five percent to instead put that school under the oversight of its regional intermediate school district to handle the responsibility and functions the EAA otherwise would have. Depending on the circumstances, the school could still wind up under the EAA if insufficient progress occurs under the ISD.

H.B. 4369 also shifts the governance of the EAS to a seven member authority board all appointed by the Governor: five members needing consent from the Senate; one member chosen from nominations by the Senate Majority Leader, and one from nominations by the Speaker of the House. All members serve four-year terms. That governing body would appoint the chief executive of the EAA (currently the DPS Emergency Financial Manager).

In addition, H.B. 4369 would expand the school intervention models available to the EAA schools beyond the four currently in use to include "any other intervention model not prohibited by federal law with a greater likelihood of improving educational outcomes for the public school." However, it also eliminates certain protections for staff when using the "turnaround" model and allows broader use of the "transformation" model that is limited in current law and specifically prohibits existing school boards from "interfering" with the work of the EAA.

Michigan's Children applauds the Governor and Legislature's efforts to continue to tackle the challenge of improving the educational success of Michigan's young people. This need goes well beyond the boundaries of the Detroit Public Schools, so a statewide approach to Michigan's educational challenges is preferred. The addition of flexibility to utilize different intervention models tailored to each community's individual needs is also a positive step.

It is important to note that despite this pressure for improved outcomes for young people, educational support programs have been cut over the last several fiscal years, including in recently signed budgets. Uncertainty in the federal budget, which provides resource specifically targeted toward the most challenged young people and challenged schools in Michigan, creates additional barriers to meaningful reform. Further cuts in funding for educational options and support programs will leave thousands of young people less likely to graduate. In addition, cuts in early childhood services, health promotions

services, child abuse and neglect prevention services, and family support services leave children unprepared to succeed in school, and make it more difficult to implement any restructuring efforts.

WHAT DOES MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN THINK WAS LEFT UNDONE?

Any school restructuring is unlikely to see intended results without a specific focus on building community partnership and connecting community, higher education and workforce development resources to reform efforts. We are glad that there has been an emphasis on community involvement in its schools under redesign efforts, but there remains a lack of incentive for schools to leverage partners. Legislative activity is needed to establish incentives for schools to create community links aimed at strengthening schools, increasing parent involvement, and meeting children's needs. Reform needs to include specific technical assistance to schools to help with the ties to community resources. Tying school-based approaches to reform with local or intermediate school districts can ease community partnership efforts, as most community agencies, workforce and higher education providers serve the catchment areas of many individual schools.

The students, schools and communities targeted by this and other reform efforts often face layers of challenge and will need a coordinated approach that is likely to need more targeted resources. We know that young people face barriers to educational success that one system alone can't solve – not the education system alone, not communities alone, and certainly not individual school buildings alone. Legislative activity is needed that includes more detail about how a myriad of necessary resources that could include school-based health, positive behavior supports, and other services, would be targeted toward all schools facing restructuring demands.

If we are serious about serving all young people, we need to remove barriers to graduation. We know that when kids get behind in school, it's too hard to catch up; when they leave before getting that diploma, it's too hard to find a path back. Specifically:

- We need to revise Michigan's "Zero Tolerance" suspension and expulsion policies that disproportionately affect youth of color and are much stricter than federal law, and create incentives for schools to establish effective discipline alternatives; and
- We need to focus on supporting alternative pathways: better support to those that we have, like alternative and community education options, community college and workforce development partnerships; and create other pathways that we need to consistently serve young people throughout the state.

The disparity in educational success in Michigan and the subsequent economic, social and fiscal consequences of that disparity are profound and unacceptable. These gaps can be traced to the earliest years of a child's life and continue to grow during their educational careers. To shrink them, investments are needed not only in the quality of the traditional K-12 system, but rather from cradle to career. These include parent support, high quality early learning experiences through child care and preschool, coordinated efforts to seamlessly connect early education experiences to K-12 education, expanded learning programs, physical and mental health services, and efforts to take advantage of the 5th and 6th year of high school.

Current actions that have diminished services for at-risk young people through cuts in the state budget are counter-productive to meaningful reform. Cuts to the current K-12 system are counter-productive to innovation, partnership and reform, and support programs will likely need to be expanded

in order to see real improvement in school success for those most challenged schools, communities and young people.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR THE LEGISLATURE AND FOR ADVOCATES?

Many legislative activities are taking place concurrently at the state and federal levels that can profoundly impact education reform efforts in Michigan. Specifically:

- The House Education Policy Committee has recommended passage of House Bill 4369 to codify the EAA into state law, and the bill will next go to the full House of Representatives for a vote.
- At the same time, the Legislature is debating the state budget for fiscal year 2013-2014 that includes funding Michigan's public education system.
- Extensive cuts to the federal budget are in place through sequester inaction, and discussions on levels of funding for critical education programs in the current federal fiscal year and the next are underway.
- Finally, the Governor has commissioned the Oxford Foundation to operationalize his concept of education at "any time, any place, any way, any pace", which the legislature is expected to take up sometime this session.

Now is the perfect time to talk with your state legislators about what you expect in school reform efforts – what is positive about current discussions, and how you would like them to focus their attention this year and next. Let them know that you are there to help them succeed in moving Michigan to an "any time, any place, any way, any pace" system that reduces disparities in student achievement, and talk with them about successful efforts to keep young people connected to college and career paths in your community. Also talk with them about those young people who didn't have access to those efforts.

It is also a good time to remind our Congressional Delegation about the impact that their actions have on education reform in Michigan, no matter how well conceived it may be.

You can find who represents you on our website at www.michiganschildren.org. Whether or not your legislators are part of the committees debating these issues, let them know that you expect that they will actively participate in these discussions with their colleagues and make clear their constituents' positions on the issue.

To access other information about school reform efforts and to help get engaged in the legislative process, see Michigan's Children's website at www.michiganschildren.org