

November 27, 2012

Testimony for Senate Education Committee on HB 5659 (introduced May 22, 2012)

Tracy Peters

I oppose the bill as written because in striking language of § 1280(2) and proposing alternative language for this same subsection, the bill removes standards that the state superintendent of public instruction uses for granting accreditation and have allowed him/her to grant accreditation as long as the school “demonstrates educational excellence.” The bill, however, provides no definition for educational excellence.

My concern is that as superintendents change, so will the standards for educational excellence – leaving the parents who make decisions about their children’s attendance at these schools lacking the tools they need to make an informed choice.

The November 11, 2012 Senate Journal will reflect that a similar concern was expressed by this committee over the definition of “failing schools.” The changes you are considering in this package of bills are comprehensive and intricate. Thus, any terms so germane to their existence should be defined clearly.

For these reasons, I recommend that you retain the original language of § 1280(2) defining “accredited” as meaning certified by the superintendent of public instruction as having met or exceeded standards established under this section for 6 areas of school operation.

Second, I oppose SB 1358 as written because this bill seeks to codify two principles that were lacking in the original EAA. There’s a better way to meet your goal of keeping such a reform that really leads to student achievement and that is by reestablishing the EAA in the 2013-2014 school year to fairly represent school districts from around the state. This, to me is the most important point in all of this education reform bills.

#### **Transparency 771(1)(A)**

#### **Lack of a Conflict of Interest 773(6)**

I am here because I am very concerned that the US DOE, OCR division held an August 30, 2012 hearing in Detroit to take testimony on Michigan’s education reform policies and their disproportionate effects on communities of color. Today, I fear that we are considering codifying one of these reforms for I feel that will be the collective effect of HBs 6004 and SB 1538 – education reform that will drive Michigan to be a voucher state with one separate and unequal school district that will serve only minority students in the DPS.

##### **a. Transparency**

The EAA’s 2011-2012 formative year lacked transparency because criteria for the two most essential components of the EAA were not made known to Detroit students and their families. Although the 15 DPS schools comprising this statewide school district were on the MDE’s TTB (Top to Bottom) list, so were schools from thirty-two other school districts in Michigan – several districts with multiple schools. As a school district that in reality could impact any public school district in the state, the processes taken by the Governor and the DPS’ EM used for selecting only DPS schools for the EAA at the exclusion of 31 other districts should have been publicized statewide. The only argument advanced by an EAA official at their public June 2012 budget hearing was that this decision was “geographically feasible.” Geography may be provide a rational basis for

this decision but certainly not a compelling one when you consider the EAA only affects children in Detroit.

Transparency was also lacking for the process used by the Governor and DPS' EM for determining precisely which buildings within the Detroit Public Schools were to be placed into the EAA. This transparency was necessary to show that no conflict of interest existed for DPS' EM in his dual role working for DPS and the EAA.

- b. No Conflicts of Interest DPS' EM served dually as EM and Chairman of the competing EAA school district's Executive Committee when he and the Governor determined the precise admission criteria for schools that would leave DPS to become part of the EAA. Because the EM was in a position to know pertinent information about specific DPS buildings, he could select schools for the EAA while simultaneously serving DPS as its financial and academic leader. This may have created a conflict of interest as both buildings and students from the Detroit Public Schools were selected to populate a competing statewide school district. In my opinion, it appears that DPS was harmed and the EAA (a statewide district) benefitted from newly constructed or rehabilitated buildings with thriving student populations.

Respectfully submitted by Tracy Peters to the Senate Education Committee on November 27, 2012.k