



To: Members of the Michigan Senate Education Committee

From: Chris Glass, Director of Legislative Affairs, West Michigan Talent Triangle

Date: March 8, 2016

RE: House Bill 4822 (S-2) Testimony

The West Michigan Talent Triangle is comprised of 40 school districts from Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa Counties. We utilize four student centered goals – kindergarten readiness, third grade reading, eighth grade math and college/career readiness – as the foundation for our work to improve student achievement. We have been engaged in the early literacy policy conversation since it began back in October of 2013. As it pertains to the (S-2) substitute before you, I wanted to bring to your attention two specific areas in the legislation.

If we were to use the results from the M-STEP exam administered last year, the bill as written would require 50 percent of Michigan’s third grade students to either be retained or receive a good cause exemption from the policy. The reason this is the case is the bill calls for the Michigan Department of Education to set a “grade 3 level reading score” and any student that fails to meet that score must not be promoted until they achieve an equivalent score on an alternative assessment or receive a good cause exemption. This is a much higher threshold than what was passed out of the House of Representatives where it called for students “more than a grade level behind” to be candidates for mandated retention or need a good cause exemption to be promoted. This threshold would be higher than any other state who has an early literacy policy with a retention component.

We would ask for a return of the House passed language or a reworking of the section so it more closely aligns with what other states have done in this area. As an example:

- Florida’s state assessment ranks kids on a scale of 1-5 based on their performance. The early literacy policy in Florida calls for children who score at a Level 1 (the lowest level) to be candidates for retention. This is the equivalent of a non-proficient ranking in Michigan’s state examination.
- Ohio’s state assessment also ranks students on a scale of 1-5 based on their performance. Their policy requires that the state Board of Education to set the threshold no lower than a Level 1 (lowest level). It also requires the state board to review and adjust upward this level each year until the level is the equivalent of a Level 3 (proficiency).

The legislation also calls for the Department of Education to develop an “early literacy coach model” with an extensive list of requirements that must be included. We feel this list is too prescriptive – especially given our concerns located in subsection (2)(E) and (F). Subsection (2) requires the school board to carry out a number of functions, among them it requires the district to utilize the coaching model developed by the Department of Education. It also requires districts to monitor the implementation of the reading coach model. We believe this is an unfunded mandate and it goes well beyond the support provided in the budget for early literacy coaches.

We would ask for removing or reworking these provisions so they're not an unfunded mandate. Reading coaches can be an important part of improving early literacy, but it isn't the only means. We would request flexibility from the early literacy coach model unless the requirements are fully funded by the state. The Fiscal Year 2016 budget allocated \$3 million for ISD's in a matching grant format to hire 80 literacy coaches across the state. To put this in perspective we have more than 2,000 elementary buildings in Michigan. The support provided in the budget is not enough to meet the requirements of the literacy coach model the Department must create.

Thank you for your consideration of these two concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.